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The complexity of three primary teachers' professional lives in England: Examining how identities form and morph through early motivations and the highs and lows of teaching.

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Abstract

Ten per cent of the teaching workforce leave the profession annually and retention is affected by accountability pressures. Early Career Teachers (ECTs) need support to overcome professional challenges. Intrinsic factors that keep teachers motivated during challenges include altruistic reasons such as working with children, contributing to communities, and cognitive fulfilment. Extrinsic factors include motivators such as pay and conditions, job security and career status, which are important to teachers.

My research listened to the perceptions and experiences of three primary classroom teachers in England, working in different primary schools during their early careers. I aimed to understand what motivated the ECTs to go into teaching, to appreciate their experiences, and to examine what challenges they encountered in their school context, and what had supported them in overcoming professional challenges.

The methodological framework used interviewing, a Life-History (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) and a semi-structured approach, to gather ECTs' first-hand narratives. The narratives enabled me to appreciate ECTs' experiences and understand how their identities changed over time. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987) structured the analysis of the narratives and revealed complex social, political, historical and cultural lives rooted in their sense of self and personal value. Sense of self was impacted by multiple aspects including organisational factors.

The findings show that teachers' lives are complex; tensions play out differently for individuals in different primary school contexts. Despite the challenges, teachers hold onto their early professional aspirations. The relationships with more knowledgeable others, the mentors, were crucial to support the teacher's different needs and helped in navigating the formal and informal rules of school life. Tensions occurred because of fractious relationships with a range of education stakeholders. During the interviews, the ECTs described hierarchies of power and recognised a gap between their aspirations and expectations of others amidst social, cultural, historical, political, personal, and organisational aspects.

The research furthers the debate about supporting ECTs' aspirations and ongoing professional development to keep them motivated and satisfied in their careers. I discovered that ECTs have multiple identities that morph throughout their early careers and support them in dealing with the challenges within the dynamic environment of a primary school. Researchers who have used linear or two-dimensional frameworks have difficulty adequately demonstrating the complexities of teachers' lives. I offer a three-dimensional visualisation that demonstrates how social, cultural, historical, political, personal, and organisational aspects interact dynamically with ECTs' identities that morph under the influence of these aspects.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

This thesis explores the motivations, perceptions, and experiences of three primary classroom teachers in England working in three different primary schools during the early stages of their careers. The aim is to understand what motivated these early career teachers (ECTs) to go into teaching, to appreciate their experiences thus far, and to examine what challenges they encounter in their school context and how they perceive they are supported to overcome the challenges. The rationale for the study and the identified gap in the literature I hope this research will address are discussed later in this chapter. The teachers' perceptions and experiences will be compared with the existing literature to understand how challenges have changed over the last three decades and what implications the challenges might have for current teacher recruitment and retention.

Context:

Education reform has been relentless over the last three decades; the publication of the Education Reform Act (1988) marked the start of policy implementation with significant leverage of the government's market-driven ideology centred on accountability. The current curriculum framework, which forms the National Curriculum for England (Department for Education, 2014a), sets the outcome-driven quality markers for both primary and secondary education. One factor contributing to teachers' attrition is the long-standing impact of accountability and quality measures on the teaching workforce. According to the Department for Education (2021), of the 37,069 total entrants to Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in 2021-22, 5,836 were undergraduate ITT entrants down 2% from 2020/21. Only 3,057 new teachers from undergraduate pathways will have entered the primary teacher recruitment pool in

2022, the lowest figure in eight years, meaning 43% of entrants did not complete their undergraduate ITT studies. The census does not state if they were retained in undergraduate (UG) study (i.e., on another programme) or left UG study altogether. The *School Workforce in England 2020* says that ~10% of the teaching workforce leaves annually (Department for Education, 2021).

Teacher recruitment and support policies for ECTs have been reformed persistently over decades (Gove, 2014). Between 2015 and 2018, there was a drive to train new teachers and develop educational excellence with key publications from the National Audit Office (Parliament, 2015), National Teaching Service and the Department for Education (Department for Education, 2016a). However, the National Teaching Service was abandoned in 2016, followed by the cessation of the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL, 2013-2018). The quality functions were moved back to Department for Education control in April 2018. These two agencies, according to the Department for Education (2016a), had failed to achieve policy pledges to recruit teachers that would contribute to the quality metrics encapsulated in the publication of the White Paper *Educational Excellence Everywhere* (Department for Education, 2016a) as defined by the Department for Education.

The government has published the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d) and *Early Careers Framework* (ECF) (Department for Education, 2019a). The authoring of these policies was triggered by the then government recognised two primary concerns as part of the ITT and teacher education landscape. Firstly, the number of individuals in the teacher recruitment pool continued to shrink, and poor retention rates compound this shrinking of the recruitment pool. The Department for Education's official statistics for *Initial teacher*

training: trainee number census – 2018 to 2019 (Department for Education, 2018a) reported a 36% attrition rate in the number of undergraduate ITT trainees (the graduates of 2021) who left before completing their training.

Secondly, it is acknowledged by the government that ECTs require much support concurred by mentors who support teachers to maintain their confidence and competence in the face of contextual professional challenges (Fives, Hamman, and Olivarez, 2007, Department for Education, 2016d). What they experience as part of their daily working lives in the infancy of a teaching career can determine if they stay in the profession or leave. Therefore, support from experienced colleagues like a mentor seems crucial. Mentor training and time allocated for mentors to conduct their roles and support ECTs is being invested as part of the ECF.

My positionality as the Researcher:

I am dyslexic. As a reader, you might notice that the thesis does not necessarily have traditional chapter titles and that the contents of each chapter may be organised in ways one did not expect. This is my thesis, and I had to write the content in a way that I understood; my ownership of this substantial piece of work has led to me writing in a specific way as my way to understand better. I appreciate this thesis will be read and interpreted by others and taking this into consideration, I have signposted throughout the thesis to help the reader to navigate my writing and provide clarity.

My curiosity in this field of research has been significantly magnified by my experiences as a primary school teacher, as Director of Education and Student Experience and provider of ITT in a School of Education in a Higher Education (HE) institution.

My motivations and beliefs about how teachers are trained are not always aligned with government ideologies, and I acknowledge those tensions between policy and my practice. I understand that primary school teachers work in a socio-political context and must implement government policy as prescribed. But education policy tells educators what to teach, not how to teach (pedagogy); therefore, through personal pedagogic approaches, educators can be creative. This ability to be creative and autonomous when I teach focused on what I want to achieve, keeps me motivated in the profession. I have reflexively drawn upon my own experiences throughout this thesis. I have been honest about my reflections and positionality as the researcher, acknowledging that I am connected to my participants through professional histories.

My Professional History:

In 2002 when I embarked on my teacher training, I was motivated to join the profession by a desire to work with children, driven to encourage them to follow their desires and aspirations and to support their success. I then taught in a primary school in a socio-economically deprived area of Northern England before moving into primary ITT in 2009. The move into ITT was instigated by hosting trainee teachers in my primary classroom and delivering science professional development regionally to qualified teachers. This led me to want to engage the next generation of teachers to be confident and make a difference in children's primary education.

As I have had a role as an Admissions Tutor in ITT for the last thirteen years, the first question I ask prospective trainees at an interview for a place in the programme is, 'Tell me why you want to become a primary school teacher'. I recognise a pattern in the responses, and most reasons for individuals being motivated to teach are

altruistic and like those stated in the existing body of literature (Sinclair, 2008; Perryman and Calvert, 2019).

I have always tried to co-design ITT programmes with Programme Directors and modules to support trainee teachers to be competent in subject knowledge and confidence in the pedagogies they use in the classroom. I also recognise that I want trainees to remain enthusiastic about teaching. Therefore, I aim to provide the best student experience to ensure trainees complete their teacher training programme.

As a Director of Education and Student Experience, I listen carefully with my colleagues to the students' voices and make in-year adaptations to programme content and pedagogy to maintain high satisfaction levels. This is balanced against professional judgment during design about how to deliver the statutory requirements of the Core Content Framework (CCF) (Department for Education, 2019b). This government policy dictates the breadth of the ITT curriculum that trainees should experience.

However, I acknowledge that I have no control over the ECF (Department for Education, 2019a) and the support graduates receive as ECTs. I do my part at the recruitment and initial training stage and then pass on the responsibility to school leaders to keep the graduates retained in the teaching profession by providing adequate support to satisfy their aspirations as part of their ongoing professional development.

A brief synopsis of the existing literature:

The existing body of research from the last three decades has informed teacher educators, policymakers, employing schools, and mentors about what motivates individuals to teach. Being motivated has been described as having expectancies or value(s) that are intrinsic, extrinsic, and altruistic (Brookhart and Freeman, 1992). Researchers have tried to develop an empirically validated framework to evaluate motivations for those who choose to teach as a career based on value-expectancy theory, which argues that individual choice and behaviour are influenced by different values and shaped by their expectations of practice (Eccles *et al.*, 1983 and Eccles, 2005; Richardson and Watt, 2006 and Watt and Richardson, 2007). Most studies into teachers' motivations have been conducted in America using surveys. These studies have been reviewed up to "the early 1990s and suggested that altruistic, service-oriented goals and other intrinsic motivations are the sources of the primary reasons entering teacher candidates report for why they chose to teach as a career'' (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992, p. 46).

One study, "Factors Influencing Teaching Choice" (FIT-Choice) (Richardson and Watt, 2006), systematically investigated responses from 1653 Australian trainee teachers who expressed their motivations to teach. The prospective teachers cited altruistic reasons for going into teaching, such as wanting to work with children, cognitive fulfilment, and contributing to society (Alexander, Chant, and Cox, 1994; Richardson and Watt, 2006). More extrinsic reasons cited for teaching included pay and conditions, perceived job security, and career status (Crow, Levine, and Nager, 1990; Mayotte, 2003; Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant, 2003; Richardson and Watt, 2005). Some research states that knowing prospective trainees' motives to teach can support adapting teacher training (Kyriacou and Coulthard, 2000), and

retention will improve if their altruistic and intrinsic motivators are supported (Moran, Kilpatrick, Abbott, Dallatt, and McClune, 2001). It would be pertinent to consider if these motivations have changed over the decades.

Perryman and Calvert's study (2019) suggests that the motivations of the younger generation of teachers have not changed. They established that the main motivators to teach were (from most to least cited) "to make a difference, work with young people, love for the subject, been inspired by own teachers, to have an intellectual challenge, to be creative, and the variety of work" (p.11). These are aligned with the historical findings that altruistic and intrinsic motivations were the main reasons individuals went into teaching.

When asked directly what they expected as the most enjoyable aspects of teaching, the respondents (n=1200) said, "working with children/pastoral, students learning and loving the subject, and helping students achieve" (Perryman and Calvert, 2019, p.11). The expected rewards, therefore, also seem to be more altruistically aligned.

In the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d), the government has identified four main challenges that they perceive are impacting teacher recruitment and retention. These are a long and complicated application process; ECTs do not always receive the support they need to construct successful careers and remain in the profession; school accountability is perceived as confusing, leading to extra pressure and unnecessary workload for teachers and finally, inflexible working patterns that do not flex enough to support changes in life-circumstances or provide adaptable career pathways.

Perryman and Calvert's study predicted that the most frequently perceived challenge was "pupil/student behaviour closely followed by fears over workload, planning and marking, time management and organisation" (Perryman and Calvert, 2019, p.14). The actual challenges teachers cited as a reason for leaving the profession (ordered from most to least cited) were "improving work-life balance, workload, target driven culture, teaching making me ill, government initiatives and lack of support from management (Perryman and Calvert, 2019, pp.14-15).

Not all teachers experience the same challenges, and there appears to be a tension between the motivations that draw individuals into teaching and the perceived and actual realities of teaching. There is some agreement with the four challenges identified by the government in the existing literature and amongst the current teachers. The types of challenges are more associated with extrinsic factors. The existing literature on teachers' challenges (Capel, 1991; Department for Education, 2016d; DfE, 2019d) suggests that extrinsic factors present the most significant pressures on teachers and are cited as why teachers consider leaving the profession. Therein lies a gap in the existing knowledge and a lack of understanding about the current range of challenges, how they are mitigated in different school contexts by individuals, and how these challenges influence decisions on whether to stay or leave the teaching profession.

The gap in the existing knowledge:

Whilst the recruitment and retention of teachers in England are widely reported, more is explicitly needed about what currently motivates individuals to enter and stay (or leave) the profession. In my experience interviewing hundreds of prospective trainees who wanted to join ITT over the last thirteen years in Higher Education (HE),

they present with enthusiasm and appear intrinsically motivated to be primary teachers with primarily altruistic tendencies. This enthusiastic starting position of those entering the teaching profession is set against the data demonstrating high rates of attrition and a steady proportion of teachers leaving the profession annually (Department for Education, 2021).

One could consider how individuals' aspirational and idealistic beliefs about being a teacher change when faced with their actual experiences of teaching. I can identify individual differences between teachers' motivations and challenges in their unique school contexts. The existing literature reports on the reason(s) teachers leave the profession. Still, the evidence stops short of identifying individual differences in motivations, experiences, and challenges embedded in the dynamics of school cultures in which individual teachers work, which is a significant gap in the existing literature. My research aims to support the understanding of some current teachers' motivators, experiences and challenges to fill the gap in the existing literature.

Aim of the research:

This research aims to understand what motivated three primary school teachers who are ECTs, to go into teaching, stay in the profession and persevere through challenges. I want to find out what these teachers have experienced in their professional life context and understand how they are supported to overcome challenges. I might also gain insights about teacher identity and how identities develop during teachers' early careers. If I understand the teachers' motivations, challenges, and the quality of support they receive, I can make recommendations to support teachers' professional practice.

Research questions:

RQ1 - What do three individual teachers perceive has motivated them to go into primary teaching in England, and what have they experienced in their professional lives thus far?

RQ2 - How do the three teachers perceive they are supported to achieve their goals as teachers between one-, two-, and three- years post-qualification, respectively?

RQ3 - What are the three teachers' opinions on the challenges and solutions proposed in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy?

Methodological approach:

This research will use interviews (Life-History and semi-structured) and discussions to gather narratives of teachers' lives. A Life-History approach (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) will be used to gather the narrative about each teacher's life, which the literature describes as "an analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story" (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995, p.125). My decision to use this method is justified in Chapter 3. The two methods will provide teachers with the opportunity to tell their professional life stories and for me to understand their early motivations to teach and their experiences and challenges experienced as teachers.

A discussion about the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (TRRS) (Department for Education, 2019d) will enable me to seek the teachers' opinions on the four challenges presented in the TRRS and whether they identify with the challenges in their school context. I can also ascertain from their responses whether they feel the government's proposed solutions will work in their school contexts.

My decision to use Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987) as part of this research is because, as an analytical frame, CHAT will enable me to explore the complex activity systems associated with the interactions, tensions and challenges that teachers experience as part of pedagogical practices in primary

school education (Leontev,1978, 1981 and Engeström, 1987). According to Wilson (2014), curiosity in teacher education research that uses CHAT (Engeström, 1987) is increasing. Previous research in this area has informed my research and methodological choices. CHAT will provide a theoretical and analytical frame for the research and can be used to examine the tensions and motivators pertinent to teachers' lives. It will be valuable to analyse whether the challenges distract the teachers from their drive towards their aspirations and what impact they might have on them as individuals and professionals.

How I plan to apply CHAT is unique and different from the six previous studies referenced below. The very few studies in ITT that have used CHAT have focused on pre-service teachers, teacher educators, and
mentor perspectives (Anagnostopoulos, Smith and Basmadjian, 2007; Dang, 2013; Stillman and Anderson, 2011; Tsui and Law, 2007; Valencia *et al.*, 2009; Waitoller and Kozleski, 2013). CHAT will support me to try and understand the intricacy of professional activity systems at play in teachers' lives because, as a theoretical and analytical framework, CHAT can facilitate the detailed examination of the social, cultural and historical aspects of teachers' lives.

Significance of the study:

This research will hear and present the reflections of three individual teachers working in three different primary schools. It will examine the current professional activity systems they operate in as part of complex social educational communities. The research can provide insights into the individual teachers' lives and the differences in the motivators and professional experiences as they try to function effectively in a challenging policy context. The research will examine the impact of

the professional challenge on the teacher's aspirations and progression during the early years of their career whilst comparing the similarities and differences to the existing literature and the possible implications in practice.

After three decades of educational reform and government policy pledges to support teacher recruitment and retention, the existing data does not reflect a positive upturn in recruitment and retention (Department for Education, 2019d): this is impacted by a range of complex factors. The research will consider from the teachers' perspective whether the educational policies are fit for purpose to achieve the government's intended outcomes in the context of individual primary schools. Reflection on the findings will support stakeholders to consider to a greater extent, what support teachers need to implement the policies effectively in varied contexts. This may support recommendations for designing school (local) policies that flex to aid implementation in individual primary schools. The flexibility afforded during policy implementation could provide teachers with autonomy and the authority to use their professional judgments to make the policy work most effectively when operationalised in their unique classroom contexts.

This research will be of significance to those academics, practitioners, and policymakers involved in the lives of teachers. It will inform the political and ITT dialogue on recruitment and retention and provide a context of the individual challenges to provide the support teachers might require in meeting their aspirations and reduce attrition rates. This research may guide the mentors who support trainees and ECTs, and the school leaders and policymakers who try to develop effective support mechanisms as part of complex school cultures.

Structure of the thesis:

Chapter 2 reviews the literature focused on informing the three research questions. The review considers what policy is and how policy discourse perpetuates specific terms like accountability and quality. Consideration is given to why it is essential to maintain the teaching workforce and what the government believes are the four main challenges to teacher recruitment and retention through its strategy (Department for Education, 2019d). The focus then shifts to the literature on teachers' professional work and lives. I examine teacher identity, conceptions of a 'good' teacher, what it means to be a 'professional', teachers' early motivations versus professional reality, perceived and actual challenges for teachers and support available to Early Career Teachers (ECTs).

Chapter 3 presents the participants and the methodological framework: I present my proposed methods and justification for selecting these. I examine the research's philosophical concerns, considering my positionality as the researcher. I justify the methodological approach and review each of the two methods. I offer Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987) as an analytical tool that I suggest frames the participants' perceptions and experiences as primary school teachers in the context of primary schools. I detail the ethical concerns specific to my research and how I propose to address these before concluding the chapter.

Chapter 4, the findings, thematically presents the narrative findings. The findings are organised into six aspects: the personal, organisational, social, cultural, political and historical aspects of the three teachers' lives to examine the developing identities of teachers during their early careers. The findings are compared to previous studies in

ITT (Valencia et al., 2009; Dang, 2013; Williams, 2014) that have used CHAT to conceptualise findings.

Chapter 5 discusses what motivated the three participants to teach in primary schools in England and what they perceive they have experienced in their professional lives thus far. I interpret the teachers' perceptions about what has supported them in achieving their professional goals between one-, two-, and three years post-qualification. I analyse the complex activity systems teachers describe they operate within through the lens of CHAT theory. I present the teachers' opinions on the government's perceived challenges and proposed solutions in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d).

In the final chapter, I conclude and make tentative recommendations to inform local school policies and practices aimed at supporting ECTs during their early careers. I also discuss my recommendations and original contributions to the existing knowledge and what this research brings to the contemporary debate to support teachers' lives.

Chapter 2 – A critical analysis of the literature on the lives of teachers from a personal, practice, and policy perspective.

The literature critique in this chapter focuses on aspects of teachers' professional

lives that enable me to understand better teachers' motivations, experiences and

challenges, and how identities form and change during a teacher's early career in

the context of primary schools. The literature I will examine is focused on informing

the three research questions (RQs) below.

RQ1 - What do three individual teachers perceive has motivated them to go into
primary teaching in England, and what have they experienced in their professional
lives thus far?

RQ2 - How do the three teachers perceive they are supported to achieve their goals
as teachers between one-, two-, and three-years post-qualification, respectively?

RQ3 - What are the three teachers' opinions on the challenges and solutions
proposed in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy?

Because the research questions focus on motivations, perceptions of support and

opinions on challenges and solutions, I will analyse academic and professional

literature that aims to define teacher identity as a concept and demonstrate that

identities might change under the influence of motivations, perceptions, drivers, and

challenges. One of the main difficulties will be identifying and describing identities

which are complex manifestations of self. According to previous research, teachers

constantly reinvent themselves throughout a career (Mitchell and Weber, 1999) thus;

their identities are dynamic.

I will analyse the authors' positions in the existing literature on notions of 'self' as

ECTs begin to identify with themselves in a professional role, and how that might

have changed from whom they thought they might 'be' as a teacher. Consider how

contextual drivers might influence teacher agency and feelings about self-efficacy

(Day *et al.*, 2006), alternatively, how teachers are driven emotively to teach and meet

their ambitions. I will consider how narratives about teachers in practice, and political discourse, may affect how personal and professional identities morph. Seeking whether the role of reflection might support finding 'self' and generate solutions through discussions with more knowledgeable others to try and overcome some of the challenges teachers face in their professional development.

My thesis is focused on teachers' lives therefore, the examination of literature is purposefully structured from a person-centred [teacher] perspective (the personal and professional view) to a practice-centred focus on the work of teachers to achieve their goals (a social, cultural and historical view), ending with how teachers are portrayed through the professional literature like policy (the political view).

I used Google Scholar © and Sheffield University Library Catalogue to search the literature using key terms identified from the research questions. I started with an open search across all years and then progressively reduced this to the last thirty years. I initially read the abstracts of articles, forewords of policy documents and book blurbs to check the publication's relevance to my research. This enabled me to select or de-select pieces of literature and progressively funnel the literature type and volume, as illustrated visually below.

Figure 1. Illustration of how the professional and academic literature was progressively funnelled.

Person Focus – Professional and academic literature focused on teachers' lives.

Practice Focus – Academic literature on the work of teachers, their goals and challenges.

Policy Focus – Professional literature including key government policy associated with the recruitment, professional lives, and retention of teachers.
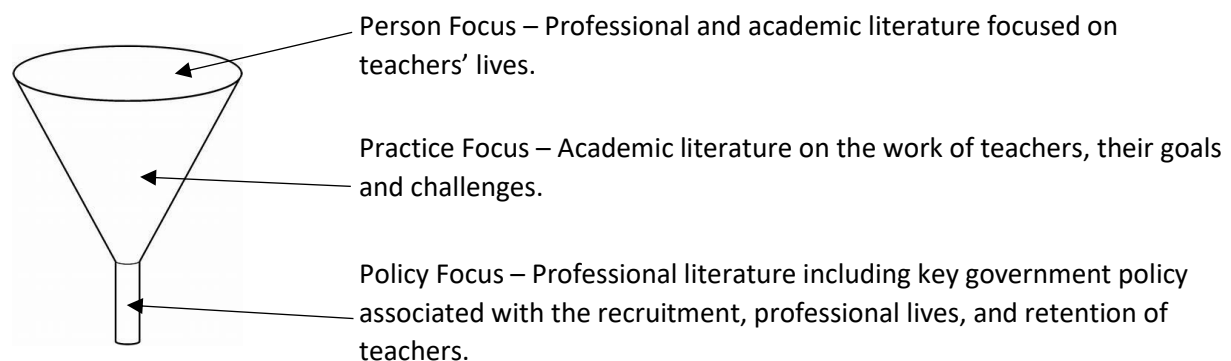
Once I had identified publications associated with the research questions, I read these in detail and tabulated the source into three columns; first the publications citation, next ideas or themes, and thirdly my meta-analysis, where I documented further questions that arose to examine later through my data collection methods and other publications to enable me to draw hypotheses about what I thought the literature was telling me.

I intend to examine teachers' early motivations versus professional reality, how teacher identity forms during early career and morphs under the influence of context in a primary school, to ascertain whether researchers and indeed teachers themselves, feel that identity is moulded by experience and the expectations of others bolstered by conceptions of a 'good' teacher. Examining and critiquing the professional and academic literature will further my understanding of what it means to be a 'professional', the perceived and actual challenge for teachers, and what support is available to ECTs. Examination of the literature will end by considering what policy is and how policy discourse perpetuates specific terms like teacher 'accountability' and 'quality'. I will consider why it is essential to maintain the teaching workforce and what the government believes are the four main challenges to teacher recruitment and retention through its strategy (Department for Education, 2019d).

Moving on now to consider teachers' lives including teacher identity, and how teachers are conceived as 'good and 'professional'. Whether the role of professional standards supports early motivations when ECTs become engaged in professional reality and what support is available for ECTs to overcome challenges they might face.

Teachers' Lives

Teacher Identity:

Identity construction in teaching has been well-researched (Ball, 2003; Day, 2002; Day and Sachs, 2004; Goffman, 1959; Pennington, 2015; Richards, 2015; Richardson and Watt, 2018, Wenger, 1998; Williams, 2014; Zimmerman, 1998). Characteristics of a particular identity can be defined by the individual or be relative according to the perception and defined attributes of others (Pennington, 2015, p.16). Identity is also bound to the individual sense of self (Ball, 2003). In seeking 'self' within a teaching role, teachers are reported in previous research as experiencing feelings of inadequacy and so shift identities to familiar conceptions of self to feel secure (Williams, 2014). Concepts of self can be storied (Rice, 2003); an individual may talk about their projected self-image and awareness, which is left open to interpretation by others (Richards, 2015, pp.117-119). They are reported to strive to remain true to themselves and committed to their motivations of supporting children to make progress (Stronach *et al., 2002).*

It is considered that persistent educational reform in England has impacted teachers' identities and is viewed by critics as eroding professional autonomy and personal identity (Day, 2002). Ongoing reform and teachers' subsequent doubt in their personal and professional selves has led to uncertainty about what it means to 'be' a teacher, which is inextricably linked to personal and professional aspects of identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). It is stated that teachers may feel that their duty to others is at the expense of their commitment to 'self' (Ball, 2003). Polar identities (explicitly personal and professional, without excluding others) cause conflict between performing as a teacher (laden with economic, governmental, and societal values) and practice (laden with economies of a teacher's values, drive, and

ambition). Conflicting identities and values lead to tensions as teachers as individuals strive to achieve their professional ambitions, remain true to themselves on a personal level, and remain committed to children's progress (Stronach *et al.*, 2002).

An assumption in the professional literature, including the Teachers' Standards Part Two (Department for Education, 2011), is that the person who teaches and the professional who performs the role of a teacher projects a particular professional identity that is the same as the person. The standards state, "A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct" (Department for Education, 2011, p. 14). What then follows this statement is a tick-list of attributes that define the behaviour and attitudes that set the expected standard for conduct throughout teachers' careers. The government describes Teachers' conduct in the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011) as a dichotomy, but I would question how separate these identities can be (if identities are indeed dichotomous or multiple). No consideration is given to whether individual morals and values are compromised as they are reconstructed through social processes, leading to teachers projecting multiple identities. There is little consideration of how and for what purpose a teacher's personal and professional identity morphs, assuming they perceive they have various identities that engage in different lived experiences.

Teachers will assess and reassess their role against personal and societal values, perhaps identifying themselves as constantly professionally developing [being a learner], not just as a professional. Teachers often struggle with this dichotomous identity experienced through personal and professional growth (Lieberman, 1996)

and is a necessary part of embracing new pedagogies and adopting new and stronger identities.

The dipolar identities are defined as a "situated identity" (Zimmerman, 1998, p.90) that morphs to conform to a social situation which is different to the "default identity" (Richards, 2006, p.60) adopted in the classroom that reflects the institutional identity. However, these assumed identities must not be confused with who the person is, whose intimate identity might be in tension with the identity they are expected to portray as a professional. Therefore, a teacher's identity may be more complex than dichotomous; it adopts a triadic association with the individual that morphs into 1. situated in a social context, 2. default as a professional in the classroom or 3. personal and intimate to the individual.

The importance of the teacher as a person is recognised (Day and Sachs, 2004), and the intimate identity is described as 'knowledge of self'. It is supposedly supported by engaging in notions of reflection from different perspectives, personally, professionally, emotionally, consciously and unconsciously, in terms of implementing values as part of professional practice. Reflexivity as a process is much deeper, and teachers may realise the impact professional development has on them and their practice and how that influences the very construct of the social and intellectual fabric in the world around them.

Dynamic models of identity are based on the work of Wenger (1998, p.11), who has modelled the five dimensions of identity. The dimensions are related to 1. the teacher having a voice (expressed through narratives and represented artistically), 2. viewing themselves as a professional, 3. as a person and 4. having knowledge that is all part of their dynamic and multifaceted multiple identities. This central idea

projected from these dynamic models suggests that 5. identity is formed as part of a negotiated experience and part of many communities' complex membership.

One of these communities, for example, might be the school community. The residential area the school resides in represents the familial community, and these school and familial communities are local to the teacher's place of work. The global community of teachers, families and other stakeholders in education may be connected to the school community via face-to-face contact, social networking and other communication media, including online. Alternatively, communities may reside as part of formal and informal CPD or networking opportunities where teachers come together with other professionals to learn and support one another. This might encompass the dynamic mentoring partnership that supports challenges between the local and global context.

Previous studies with pre-service teachers (Valencia *et al.*, 2009; Dang, 2013; Williams, 2014) have used Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT, Engeström, 1978) to try and examine the complexities of teachers' lives. I have proposed in the methodology that I will use CHAT both as a theoretical and analytical framework for my study to remain consistent with previous studies. Previous analysis has demonstrated that individual identities develop and morph in the social context (Goffman, 1959) and that CHAT by exploring social, cultural and historical contexts may shed light on features of identity formation.

If, as the research I have examined thus far has established, the individual cannot be separated from the professional, then considering the impact that motivations, experiences, and challenges might have on the individual life of a teacher will be necessary. Teaching should be an opportunity for teachers and students to thrive,

and there is observed resistance to the deficit models projected through the research (Evans, 2011). Many teachers perceive they perform in a survival mode to overcome the challenges they experience as part of their working lives. The existing research has shown that teachers are not protected from the stress or threat of burnout by years of experience (Abel and Sewell, 1999).

Identities are relevant to all of my research questions because identity is viewed as a unique social construction that responds dynamically to social expectations. In learning about teachers' professional lives, I am also learning about them as a person (their personal or intimate identity) and how they perform as professionals in a socio-political context (professional or institutional identity).

The current research on teacher lives has moved away from trying to identify specific factors of identity such as competencies of good teachers. Instead, researchers examine how positive outcomes and work satisfaction can be achieved and how personal and professional factors can contribute to teachers' success. Gu and Day stated, "Positive emotions such as joy, interest, contentment and love, promote resilience" (2007, p.1304). According to Rice (2003), enabling teachers to tell their stories about teaching in practice has positive effects, supporting a better understanding of their context and reducing anxiety associated with the professional role. Therefore, I use the work of Rice (2003) to further support a rationale for a narrative approach as a method in Chapter 3 to enable teachers to share their professional stories and provide a glimpse of how their identity forms and is dynamic to the context the individual finds themselves in.

I will now move on to consider the academic literature focusing on specific aspects that might indicate types of identity (both personal and professional but not restricted

to these two distinctions) and how identity forms over time in socio-political contexts that are primary schools.

The conception of a 'good' teacher:

The conception of a *good teacher* is portrayed in the existing academic literature as a firmly held cultural and social formation of what is held vehemently, and changes to this cultural and social conception are strongly resisted (Cameron & Baker, 2004; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Kagan, 1992; Nuthall, 2002; Webster-Wright, 2009). However, it cannot be assumed that a particular person will be competent as a teacher.

This presents a polar model of teachers as professionals to further perpetuate identity in two forms, personal and professional with 'good' and the alternative perhaps 'poor' as quality markers in the academic literature and through government policy. This sort of polarisation might be problematic for the status of the teacher as part of the teaching profession. The literature highlights that the characteristics or competencies of teachers are usually positioned as part of a deficit model. To counter this, there are discussions about the deformity of policy that misshapes practice: teaching does not just happen in schools and classrooms but is part of complex social goings-on between communities (social), homes (individual), and school (environmental) (Ouellette *et al.*, 2018; Gorski, 2021).

Preparing pre-service teachers in education seems to focus on developing effective partnerships between schools, families, and communities through educational programmes (Epstein, 2010). There is some agreement with Epstein that involving parents, carers, and a range of other interested stakeholders creates cohesive communities that all have their interests in the education and development of the

next generation. How effective these engagements are, depends (according to the literature) on the competency of the teacher, a significant responsibility. Successful relationships and partnerships support the social aspect of teachers' lives and professional communities.

Deficit models are problematic around competency-based training models that are often perpetuated in the academic literature, policy, and media (Evans, 2011). Two models are well documented in the academic literature (Ball and Goodson, 1985; Danielson, 1996). The latter states that roles and competency are "socially constructed and experienced individually over time" (1996, p.11). The former model (Ball and Goodson) infers that teachers grow into their roles with experience and embedded professional practice over time.

Department for Education policy in the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011, p.2) has tried to profile a teacher based on a competency framework where teachers in England are assessed against competency statements such as:

> Demonstrating consistently positive attitudes and values; being accountable for pupil progress; planning to teach and build on pupils' capabilities; guiding pupils to reflect on progress; demonstrating secure knowledge and understanding; having a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas; reflecting systematically; contributing to the design and provision and managing classes effectively.

The competencies described above could be compiled into a simple checklist that teachers either meet and are rewarded for or do not meet. Once gaps in competencies are identified, they must feed into action planning to *fill in the gaps* in knowledge and skills, perpetuating the deficit model. This type of teacher development is relatively superficial and happens continually as part of professional development and through embedded professional practice. The development of

these qualities needs to be revisited formally to contribute to teachers' ongoing and meaningful action. The current English government hopes that the ECF (Department for Education, 2019a) will remedy this and will lead to a continual revisiting of the Standards through the early years of teaching and beyond as part of a teaching career.

These competency-based frameworks have arisen from a series of quality statements, like a tick-list, to attribute value to the competencies. Indicative word markers such as 'consistency', 'progress', 'secure' [knowledge], 'critical' [understanding], 'systematic' [planning, analysis, or reflection], 'positive contribution', and 'management' are cited in the current Teachers' Standards as an example of profiling teacher competency based on superficial word markers. Literature such as Lieberman and Wilkins (2006) provide further evidence of how teachers feel about their development and professional pathways, which moves away from this view of the *competent teacher* to affirm that teacher development is more complex. In Lieberman and Wilkin's report '*The Professional Development Pathways Model: From Policy to Practice*', teachers stated that professional development frameworks should be "flexible and meaningful for faculty and staff" (2006, p.128).

Defining a teacher as a 'professional' and personifying the standards:
The role of a teacher as a *professional* is multifaceted due to the structures and associated factors that dictate teachers' work. Evans (2011) described three components to teacher professionalism, namely 1. behavioural, associated with what teachers do; 2. attitudinal, associated with teachers' personal and professional values and motivations and 3. intellectual components associated with the subject and pedagogical knowledge. It is considered that persistent educational reform in

England has impacted teachers' identities; critics view this reform period as eroding professional autonomy and personal identity (Day, 2002).

The subsequent doubt in personal and professional judgment has led to uncertainty within the teaching profession about what it means to be a teacher. The literature examined thus far has established that teachers may feel they must fulfil the expectation of others as a sense of duty, perhaps forfeiting their personal ambitions (Ball, 2003). That there is a conflict between polar identities (personal and professional) driven by performativity pressures (laden with economic, governmental, and societal values contiguous with personal values), which might lead to teachers feeling disempowered and torn between dichotomous or multiple identities. Professional practice benefits from economies of a teacher's value, drive, and ambition to commit to the pupils' progress and remain faithful to the teacher's person (Stronach *et al*., 2002).

The concept of professionalism is ill-defined in the literature; this is not necessarily problematic but can make it hard for researchers when trying to define aspects of professionalism. Having been a teacher myself, I believe that being a professional in the context of teaching means following a set of explicit standards and implied competencies whilst working as a teacher. It involves interacting with many stakeholders including pupils, colleagues, administrators, parents, healthcare professionals and other community members with the utmost integrity that promotes a conducive learning environment of the highest quality. The debate over teacher professionalism has developed from being a social classification to a political situation and a device of control. Professionalism has been defined as both 'old' and 'new' forms, and it has been claimed that there has been a change in perspectives

about what this term means. Sachs insists "that when new forms of professionalism are analysed, they are viewed to be more positive, principled and postmodern" (Sachs, 2003, p.7). The idea of classifying groups as professionals is contested; there are multiple definitions of professionalism, and they differ between disciplines and job roles, with no single professional definition being agreed upon.

Downie (1990) attempted to list the characteristics of professionals as those that belong to a particular group of professionals trying to claim professional status, like teachers. The key aspects included 1. having specialist knowledge, 2. accepting a degree of responsibility and 3. being productive in autonomous working conditions (Hoyle and John, 1995). Professionalism is usually assessed by observing such characteristics as part of an individual's work to determine their knowledge and ability to be responsible and proactive about their development. It is also assumed that individuals when trained, will embrace and embody the role of a professional teacher, a judgment required by the government in Part Two of the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011) regarding their personal and professional conduct for a teacher to be awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

The boundary between the person and the professional is not distinct in teaching (or in other professions if at all) i.e., they are described as the same when the person is acting in the professional's job and *being the teacher*. Part Two of the Teachers' Standards articulates the following three expectations: 1. a teacher must uphold public trust; 2. they must have exacting standards of ethics, and 3. they must not undermine fundamental British Values. To qualify and be deemed through training to attain these professional characteristics brings a position and status. According to

Downie (1990), the concept of a professional teacher is personally and socially constructed as part of complex systems.

Early motivations versus the reality of teaching:

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) believes that motivating people to join education and teaching has an influence that is significantly important for learners' development and society in general (Heinz, 2015). Some researchers have noticed that teaching seems less appealing than back in the early 2000s compared with other careers that offer precise and more efficient progression routes, better salaries, and a professional status that seems less criticised by society (Watt and Richardson, 2008).

Motivation for the teaching profession is becoming increasingly attractive to educational researchers and policymakers (Ivanec, 2022, p.2). Gaining a better understanding of the motivators for those wanting to teach will support recruitment and planning for ITT (Heinz, 2015). Teacher identity and personal preference of motivators implicate the complexity and broader construct of identity as a social formation (Richardson and Watt, 2018). If teachers are motivated and satisfied in their professional roles, this positively predicts their well-being (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018). If teachers are, as indicated in the policy, crucial for the quality of education, then the state should ensure they are motivated and cared for.

The types of motivators range among individuals. Findings from existing studies can be challenging to examine because of a need for more clarity about the theoretical underpinnings and methodological frameworks used to gather and analyse the data (Ivanec, 2022). Findings of a study including student teachers from two Australian

universities found that largely intrinsic motivators were cited, including "working with children, intellectual stimulation, altruism, authority and leadership, self-evaluation and personal and professional development" (Sinclair, 2008, p.87). Extrinsic motivators cited were "career change, job conditions, life fit, the influence of others, and the nature of teaching work" (Sinclair, 2008, p.87). This data is based on what participants said, which should be treated as valid data. However, I noted the subjectivity of such data and the lack of research instruments to assess the motivations towards teaching, which could lead to validity and reliability challenges.

The FIT-Choice Model (Watt and Richardson, 2012, p.187) was created and validated by being tried and tested in numerous countries and provided contextual insights into teachers' motivations to teach.

Figure 2. FIT-Choice empirically validated theoretical model (Watt and Richardson, 2012, p.187)
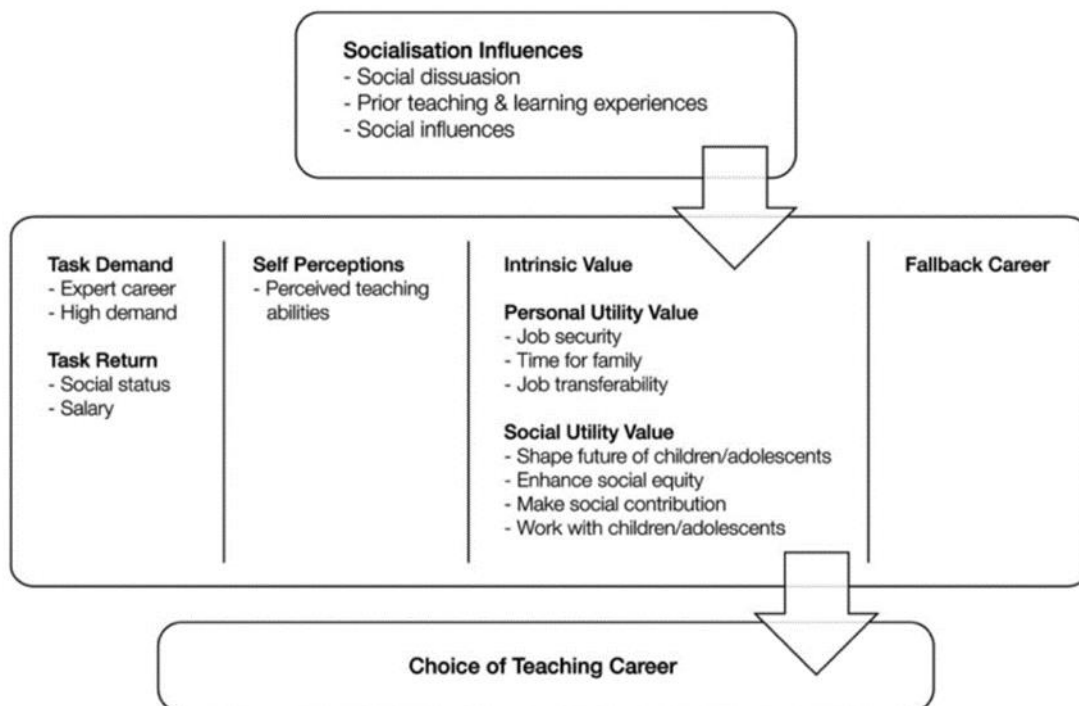
The Expectancy-Value Motivational Theory informed the FIT-Choice model (Eccles *et al.*, 1983 and Eccles, 2005), which argues that individual choice and behaviour are influenced by different values and shaped by their expectations of practice. Using the FIT-Choice model was an attempt to systematically investigate why people were changing careers and joining the teaching profession and why they were choosing to teach. (Watt and Richardson, 2012). The subsequent research examined whether career changes who became teachers held common expectations of a teaching career and more finitely common values and beliefs.

As I interpret it, the FIT-Choice model shows that society influences (or dissuades) individuals about their motivations to teach (whether their reasons are validated or not). Those motivators' intrinsic or extrinsic roots determine how strongly they are held onto (dis-influenced by others), dissuaded, and then attracted, perhaps by an extrinsic motivator, e.g., pay. Internally there is a vying space filled with beliefs and values that is at tension with the task demand and return, and their values. What mitigates these tensions is a view of a 'fallback' option that acts as a safety net for career changes, and teaching is the fallback. Teachers may not necessarily view this as the 'better' choice, but a more satisfying career choice aligned with beliefs and values and the security of a fallback, justifying why career changes in Eccles research choose to teach.

But what about those entering teaching as a first chosen career, not a fallback? Findings from 1200 participants (Perryman and Calvert, 2019) cited that "the main reasons for becoming a teacher were,

> ➢ Make a difference (69%)
> ➢ Working with young people (64%)
> ➢ Love of subject (50%)
> ➢ Inspired by own teachers (38%)

- ➤ To have an intellectual challenge (36%)
- ➤ To be creative (35%)
- ➤ Variety of work (33%)

When asked what they expected the rewards of teaching to be and what they enjoyed (or had enjoyed) about teaching, respondents said, working with children/pastoral, students learning and loving the subject and helping students achieve" (Perryman and Calvert, 2019, p.11).

Existing literature states that teachers can experience dips in confidence as the *reality* of teaching sets in through entrenched professional practice (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Huberman, 1995; Jones, 2003; Ovens and Tinning, 2009). This might be when the tensions between personal beliefs and values and those values and beliefs of others become *real,* and at this point of realisation, teachers are said to experience "practice shock" (McCormack, Gore, and Thomas, 2006, p.103). This is shock at the point of realising their professional ambitions underpinned by their values and beliefs cannot be accomplished quickly (if at all).

Teacher motivations, therefore, matter because if individuals' fundamental values and beliefs are not supported during a teaching career, this has been shown to lead to dissatisfaction amongst the teaching workforce, leading to teachers leaving the profession at a high rate in the first three years of teaching. Understanding the contextual and demographic factors that lead to dissatisfaction will help devise an efficient support mechanism. Training the ECT mentors that sustain job satisfaction and teacher well-being during their early career and will support retention of the teaching workforce into the future.

I will now consider the work teachers do in classroom practice as illustrated in the second part of the literature funnelling (Figure 1, p.22). This section will support me in understanding how the perceived and actual challenges are presented in the existing literature and how the current support for ECTs has tried to address these challenges in practice.

The practice of teachers

The perceived and actual challenges and support for ECTs:

In Perryman and Calvert's study, the most predicted perceived challenge was "pupil/student behaviour closely followed by fears over workload, planning and marking and time management and organisation" (Perryman and Calvert, 2019, p.14).

The actual challenges teachers cited as a reason for leaving the profession were, "Improving work-life balance (75%), workload (71%), target-driven culture (57%), teaching making me ill (51%), government initiatives (43%), and lack of support from management (38%)" (Perryman and Calvert, 2019, pp.14-15).

Regarding the literature on work-life balance and workload, the Department for Education's *Teacher Workload Survey* (Department for Education, 2016d) showed that, on average, teachers worked 55.4 hours on teaching and other teaching-related work including 37% of teachers working at home for 16 hours or more on an evening and weekend. The *Teacher Workload Survey* was repeated in 2019 (Department for Education, 2019f), and 52% of Primary Teacher respondents still felt workload was a severe problem, with 70% disagreeing that they have a manageable workload within contracted hours, which indicated they are still working a lot from home on the

evenings and weekends, and that the problem might be getting worse rather than better. Workload drivers (summarised in Table 1, p.60) related to factors pressuring teachers to prove their effectiveness in their roles, with six of the drivers focused on performativity, three specifically on support, and others related to contextual and demographic pressures.

Table 1. Summary of the drivers contributing to workload as cited in *Teachers, and workload*. (National Education Union, 2018).

Percentage of the total survey population	Drivers cited by teachers that contribute to their workload
74%	Pressure to increase pupils' test scores
52%	Changes to curriculum or assessment
46%	Ofsted, mock or other inspections
41%	Lack of money and resources in school
33%	Reduction of support staff
33%	Demands from school leaders and governors
27%	Increased class sizes
25%	Changes to systems and structures
21%	Expectation to teach outside the timetable, e.g., lunchtime, holidays and after school.
18%	Lack of consultation with staff in the workplace
17%	Parental expectations, e.g., reports, meetings and emails
10%	Lack of support from outside agencies
8%	Having to teach outside specialism
6%	Reduction in funding for extracurricular activities, meaning the teacher is asked to run more clubs.

The highest score of 74% was attributed to pressures to increase pupil scores. This driver is perceived to measure the quality of teaching, which is a direct assessment of teachers' performance and a part of their role. When the children do well achieving positive assessment scores, teachers feel job satisfaction because their teaching has had a positive outcome for the children. However, achieving this positive outcome results from hours of work and pressure to teach the content-heavy curriculum and ensure that children understand it. If the test score is not as good as expected, it can create feelings of personal failure. Performativity measures can have positive and negative consequences on teachers' workload, but most teachers in this survey experienced the negative impacts of workload.

The two drivers that impacted teachers' workload were changes to assessment and Ofsted preparation 52% and 46%, respectively. These two drivers are again focused on performance in teaching and quality measures by independent regulatory bodies like Ofsted. This survey has demonstrated that many factors impact teachers' workload pressures. Because of this and the contextual complexity of teachers' roles, developing solutions that work for all teachers will be challenging. It will require a combined approach of solutions deployed incrementally to try and support teachers in managing their workload.

Positive teacher experiences are also correlated in the existing literature to school culture characteristics, demographic pressures, and support mechanisms during teachers' careers. Those who manage and support teachers aim to provide adequate working conditions where there are challenges to providing practical support mechanisms (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008). Despite disparate findings on individual factors such as age and amount of teaching experience on emotional exhaustion and performance, studies have found that younger and less experienced colleagues reported higher levels of burnout than older, more experienced colleagues. Student behaviour and discipline problems also negatively impacted teachers' stress and burnout but might have been exacerbated by individual factors such as negative feelings towards students through poor student-teacher relationships. Developing reflective practice to reframe critical incidences as part of working conditions can support teachers to feel more positive about challenges. Providing them with coaching methods to improve working relationships with students can mitigate the negative consequences of poor experiences where the teachers' expectations are not met (Capel, 1991).

Teachers feeling optimistic about their self-efficacy can support a positive outlook on job satisfaction despite challenges in the work environment [the school or classroom]. Previous research has also acknowledged the connection between agency and constructs of self-efficacy and self-concept (Day *et al.*, 2006). Self-efficacy is predictive of positive behaviour management and good academic outcomes. However, no standard agreement exists about how self-efficacy should be conceptualised and measured (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010). But perhaps identifying agentic concepts, e.g., teachers feeling empowered by a sense of agency to do something physical as part of their role, perhaps supporting children's achievement, which moves them forward to reach academic ambitions, may support a greater awareness of one's identity.

As self-efficacy is founded on social cognitive theory and the conception in this context that teachers are self-organised, self-regulating, proactive, and self-reflective (Bandura, 2006), what is it that threatens this in the social working environment of a school? Collie, Shapka, and Perry's study (2012) demonstrated that "perceived stress related to teachers' perceptions of student behaviour was negatively associated with a sense of teacher efficacy" (p.1189). They concluded that the efficacy of teachers was directly associated with job satisfaction.

Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt (2012) state that professional and school-level factors affect levels of burnout and efficacy. They found that teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach and affiliation with school leaders were significantly associated with teacher efficacy and burnout but that school-level factors were unrelated. They concluded that interventions to support teachers should focus on increasing teacher efficacy's growth rate whilst decreasing burnout's growth rate but

stop short of saying how. I think if school leaders focus on reducing performativity measures and help teachers to decrease and manage their workload (whilst working with an influential mentor to develop a reflective practice to support reframing work-related challenges), then both positive self-efficacy and job satisfaction could be observed.

To support the consideration of school cultures, evidence suggests that support such as mentoring for ECTs and fostering a collaborative work ethos can result in positive mental health among teachers early in their careers. ECTs have high expectations and a keen desire to meet the needs of their pupils. Teachers can view some or all their roles as testing their teaching abilities and occasionally personally. Cooperating with more experienced teachers and influential mentors can mitigate stress and enhance personal and professional efficacy (Fives, Hamman, & Olivarez, 2007).

Support for ECTs as a statutory requirement is stipulated in the *Early Career Framework* (Department for Education, 2019a) and combined with non-statutory guidance for mentors through the *National Standards for School-Based ITT Mentors* (Department for Education, 2016c). Support can make the early career less challenging (or more) depending on the context. The collaboration of other stakeholders in the school community can help make the teachers feel competent, reducing attrition-contributing factors and increasing the likelihood of retaining the teaching workforce.

Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) reflect that ECTs work in a contextual and very dynamic educational environment, which influences their ongoing professional development (of both knowledge and pedagogy) whilst dictating personal and professional

expectations as stated in the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011). The ECF (Department for Education, 2019a) notes the minimum entitlement as part of a two-year state-funded induction package. Effective mentorship is portrayed as a crucial support mechanism to aid individual ECTs' needs during practice and bolsters professional confidence.

When conducting their systematic literature review Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) concluded that four main factors influence the ECTs; 1. Social contextual factors, 2. Political contextual factors 3. Cultural contextual factors, and 4. Personal and individual contextual factors. I will briefly examine each of these, in turn, to reflect on how they impact the lives of ECTs.

Social contextual factors:
Social contextual factors are founded on two types of relationships for ECTs peer-peer relationships and external community relationships. Peer support could be categorised as professional, emotional, or social (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2019).

Professional peer relationships were those between the mentor and the ECT. These were described as reciprocal, formal, or informal and enthused the ECTs to form relationships with more experienced others in the school community. The ECTs appreciated maintaining some freedom and flexibility as part of the mentoring relationship. They could choose which information was helpful to support their individual needs and begin autonomously developing (with support) their teaching style (Davis and Higdon, 2008).

Emotional peer relationships rely on building trust where ECTs become confident to ask peers anything without negative consequences (Gardiner, 2012). Building

respect and friendships with peers help ECTs through challenging times as part of their new roles (Clark and Byrnes, 2012).

Social peer relationships are founded on integrating into the school community and navigating the school dynamics. Peers can help socialise with new entrants to the profession, teach them the inner workings of the school, and role-model the expectations as part of a developmental culture in the school community (Haigh and Anthony, 2012).

Where peer support is absent, ECTs describe a lack of mutual respect, which makes navigating the school dynamics challenging and the ethos somewhat intimidating and judgmental. With peer support, ECTs find it easier to grow into a teacher and nurture their teaching style because they are *prevented* from becoming an active member of the school community because of inadequate peer relationships and support. This lack of community integration and status prevents ECTs from feeling emotionally comfortable in their new role (Bieler and Burns Thomas, 2009).

External community relationships can therefore be formal, non-formal, and non-professional. Formal community relationships are formed with those who work in education and a positively connected to ECTs. These individuals often support teachers' ongoing professional development and may provide coaching and feedback to help ECTs develop their careers. They can often support and advise about the challenges of teaching and pool ideas about how these might be overcome (Gardiner, 2012).

Informal community relationships might be created with online communities and social media networking. The support from an external network creates non-affiliated

safe spaces to share some of the contextual challenges of the teaching profession and be supported to know that individuals are not alone in dealing with challenges in education (Brock and Chatlain, 2008). There is an element of choice when to join, engage and leave these informal networks or even when to observe online discussions to glean advice without visible engagement (Donne and Lin, 2013).

Non-professional relationships might be those teachers form with the parents of the children they teach, and these relationships focus on earning the communities' trust (Brindley and Parker, 2010). ECTs (or anyone new to a profession) might navigate outsider-insider relationships that traverse different communities to gain support. These personal networks might also include friends and relatives as sources of positive reinforcement (Abbott, Moran, and Clarke, 2009).

Political contextual factors:
Teachers must navigate an ever-changing political landscape that impacts educational policy. ECTs are inducted, whether they realise it or not, into the dynamics of orders and behaviours of local government, where stakeholders interact with the leadership of management in schools to order the implementation of educational policy from the national- to the local- level. These political-school stakeholder interactions are governed by distributions of power and the application of the rules, often in hierarchical management structures with political leaders closely followed by school leaders near the top. Teachers perceive their position as lower order in the hierarchical distribution (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2019).

Cultural contextual factors:

These factors include aspects of school demographics and cultural aspects of school life. The findings of Achinstein and Aguirre's (2008) study noted that ECTs needed to develop their multi- and socio-cultural capital to engage meaningfully with students about socio-cultural issues rooted in the complexities of their classrooms.

Most new teachers believed mentors helped them navigate the challenges of working with students from diverse backgrounds. Mentors felt that ECTs' understanding of socio-cultural complexities supported them in helping their students learn the curriculum, i.e., keeping their pedagogical effectiveness in practice (Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2019).

ECTs support their understanding of cultural diversity through their ongoing professional development, which helps their cultural confidence and competence in classroom practice. Hagger *et al.* (2011) anticipate that in one English study, teachers were not prepared and underestimated the importance of understanding their pupils' family and cultural backgrounds and were surprised by how much the experienced colleagues knew about individual pupils; experience teaches the ECTs many things that *initial* training does not have time to provide, which could disadvantage ECTs in the early terms of their careers.

Personal and individual contextual factors:

Personal and individual factors affect the teachers most profoundly regarding how they view their success as teachers. Feelings of positive personal efficacy keep individuals satisfied in their roles. Taking the initiative, being proactive in developing

their competence, and getting positive feedback from their mentoring experience support ECT's personal and professional confidence.

ECTs often feel they must prove their competence to peers and administrators by growing their professional identity and emotional intelligence. ECTs have reported they feel a tension between what they think they should do as teachers and the practical decisions they must make during the moment daily (Black *et al.*, 2008). Peer mentoring was a confidence-builder in these circumstances and provided emotional support so that the ECT began to feel more confident (Grudnoff, 2012).

When Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) mapped the four main factors influencing the ECTs, they created '*A heuristic framework of contextual factors' impact on ECTs and programs'* Figure 3.

Figure 3 - *'A heuristic framework of contextual factors' impact on ECTs and programs'*
(Kutsyuruba et al., 2019, p. 116).
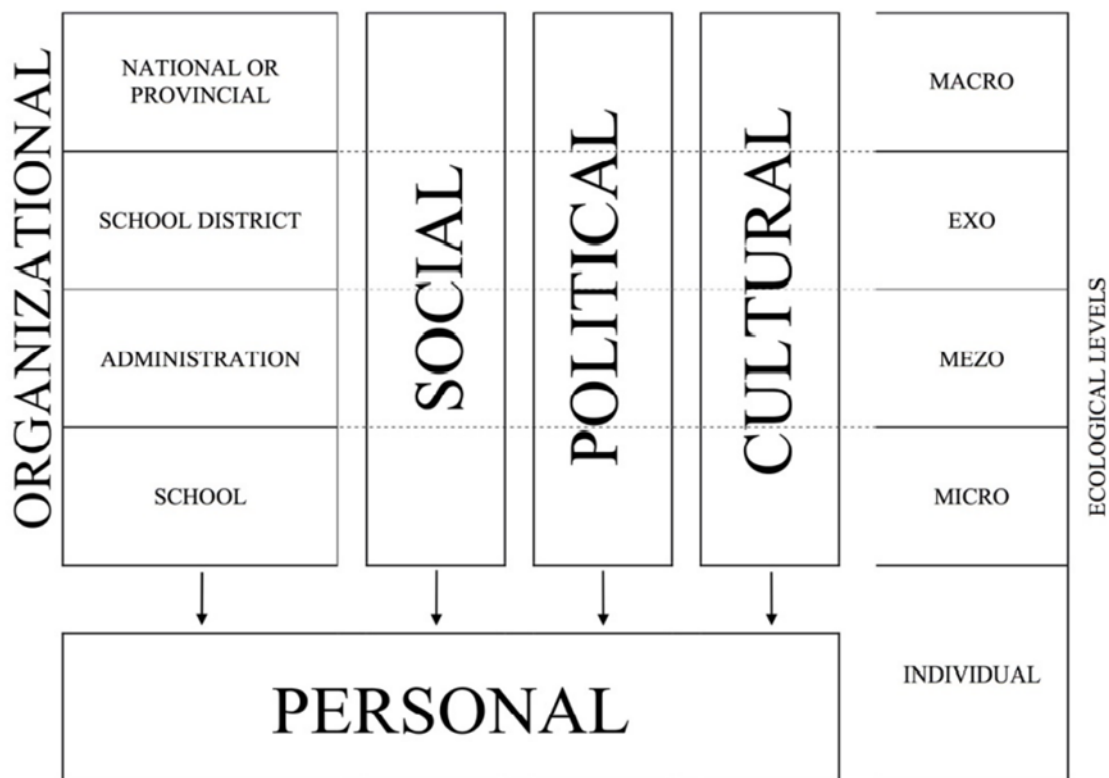
This framework combines the organisational elements viewed from different ecological levels as experienced by the individual with the personal, social, political, and cultural perspectives dynamically interwoven in complex educational systems in school. Heuristics was developed in the field of cognitive psychology in the 1950s by Herbert Simon and further modified in the 1970s by Tversky and Kahneman. Kahneman (2012) stated that "The affect heuristic simplifies our lives by creating a world that is much tidier than reality" (p. 77). I am concerned about the explanation of the effect of heuristics stated by Kahneman; the simplicity parallels the Kutsyuruba *et al.* heuristic framework (2019). The literature already has demonstrated the complexity of teachers' identity: a heuristic framework might oversimplify the complexity of teachers' lives by trying to reduce the amount of information researchers have to process which risks losing sight of the bigger picture. Representing a framework in two dimensions like Kutsyuruba *et al.* when presenting contextual factors that impact ECTs, might also compound oversimplification when the detail underneath this picture is far more complex and at the very least would be modelled in three dimensions.

I have proposed as part of my research in Chapter 3, that CHAT (Engeström, 1987) can be used as a theoretical and analytical frame to remain consistent with previous studies in education that used CHAT methodologically as a frame (Anagnostopoulos, Smith and Basmadjian, 2007; Dang, 2013; Stillman and Anderson, 2011; Tsui and Law, 2007; Valencia et al., 2009 and Kozleski, 2013). CHAT will support me in examining the complexity of teachers' lives because it can demonstrate how different combinations of three aspects (triads) of a teacher's life interact dynamically in a primary school context, compared to Kutsyuruba *et al.* heuristic framework which is meant to illustrate simple factors rather than analyse the interactions. Because I am

cautious about oversimplification of a teacher's life, which has been established is complex, I can compare how effective CHAT is, along with research of other critics, to help me to understand whether my research concurs or discovers something different about the lives of today's teachers and whether another framework to analyse teachers' lives, that I can perhaps recommend from my research, might be more suitable as a contribution to this type of educational research.

I will now move on to examine the policy landscape integral to teachers' lives and the impacts of educational reform on the professional work teachers conduct.

The policy landscape of Teachers' Lives

Educational reform:

The Education Reform Act (1988) marked the start of a significant policy implementation arguably driven by the then government's market-driven ideology (Leys, 2001). Educational policy often presents the government's ideals for school education in England, specifically from the Department for Education. The Department for Education's policies, like the statutory curriculum framework (Department for Education, 2014a), are interpreted and put into practice by state school staff to, as idealised, meet the pupils' needs.

The success of implementation is, therefore, dependent upon the dissemination of policy ideals and the influence of school leaders in the information cascade (Foskett *et al.*, 2004). Bowe *et al.* have stated that those implementing policies interpret them between themselves, "texts have to be read with and against one another – intertextuality is important" (Bowe *et al.*, 1992, p.21). Policy texts are read in context with various stakeholders and other policies like those produced locally in and for schools. Now I will examine what policy is and what it is not.

What is policy?

Ball and Bowe assert that there are different notions of what policy is and that there needs to be a success by policy writers to conceptually define policy. Policies are more than just words on a page; they can be a set of ideals that supposedly represent the views of government, teachers, and other stakeholders in education that may or may not understand the contextuality of policy, which can be subsequently read and enacted in different ways (Bowe *et al.*, 1992; Foskett *et al.*, 2004; Gillies *et al.*, 2010 & Department for Education, 2014a). Ball asserts that the definition of policy "is taken for granted and consequently leads to flaws in the analytical structure of [policy] research" (Ball, 1994, p.15). Ball states that policy is just read and perpetuates the constructions of policy as a process and, more commonly, a linear process, particularly as part of educational reform (with a beginning and an end to the reform process). But some scholars like Bowe *et al.* assert that policy is dynamic and "is not done and finished at the legislative moment; it evolves in and through the texts that represent it" (Bowe *et al.*, 1992, p.21). Bowe *et al.* report that when the policy is analysed for implementation socially as part of a community, like in a school community, policy enactment in a school context involves more complex and cyclic processes than linear ones. The procedures are informed by professional practice at the point that policy statements are contextualised in the *actual* happenings in education by the teachers and other stakeholders.

The implementation schedule for educational policy is often determined by leaders in school in conjunction with implementing local policy. Policy implementation is often described as "done to" teachers rather than "done with" teachers. Meaningful consultation should hear teachers' voices to inform decisions about their teaching

and students' learning (Weingarten, 2015). Policy as text is a directive for implementation in practice. To keep teachers encouraged in their roles, it could be argued that they should be involved in all policy decisions about teaching and learning because education needs teachers, and schools need a workforce that is encouraged by what they are expected to do and who are motivated to stay in the profession.

Policy manifestations can be viewed in three forms text, discourse, or positioned as a set of values. Ball states that if a policy is perceived as text, it consists of,

> Representations which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors, interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context). (Ball, 1994, p.16).

It is not clear to me from the quote from Ball's work how much of the struggles, interpretations, histories, or experiences are those of teachers or the opinions of the policy writers and other stakeholders in society being projected as representative of teachers' opinions. Teachers are usually consulted to gather their opinions about policy reform but might be excluded from writing legislation pertinent to their professional roles according to Trowler (1998). Trowler talks about policy discourse denying alternatives and that "they [policy writers, particularly the government] work to exclude other possible ways of conceptualising the nature of education" (Trowler, 1998, p.133).

Policy is value-laden, and the policy discourse emphasises political agendas (Taylor, 1997, p.27). The previous sentence highlights tensions between the government at the centre of producing and driving the reform through these educational policies in England. Policy reform agendas and policies themselves seemingly marginalise other stakeholders (including teachers) responsible for implementing the policy

procedurally in the classroom. There are questions in the literature about how much teachers have agency over decision-making at the micro-level in classrooms and schools (Priestley, 2015).

What key terms are perpetuated through policy discourse?

If a policy is viewed as a discourse, it is not just text. Still, as a policy in a discursive space, the text acknowledges the holistic view of what policymakers think and how it incorporates policy agendas in practice, but also decisions are also made about what discourse(s) might be purposefully omitted from the text. Ball views these choices of policymakers about what to include in policy as a use of power (or misuse, dependent on one's perspective). Relentless educational reform in England (Gove, 2014) and a drive for quick implementation in practice position policy writing and performance as a linear, often top-down process that privileges the power of the State (Bowe *et al.*, 1992). The intention of the policy could be to lever certain types of action (or reaction), which creates "a production of truth and knowledge as discourse" (Ball, 1994, p.21). These truths are controlled by those who write and make decisions about what goes into the policy but equally, what does not.

The government's market-driven ideology centres on 'accountability'. Some researchers have considered how high-stakes accountability policies are far from teachers' lived experiences, working language, and social cultures (Stillman and Anderson, 2011). Consideration of how accountability manifests itself in teachers' lives will be necessary. The focus on accountability is intended to deliver the statutory frameworks in education by giving responsibility to teachers, exerting pressure through the policy directives, and forcing compliance (as the frameworks are statutory). Directives complied with the policy aim to increase the government's

desired 'quality' of education (Department for Education, 2016a, 2022), a term I seek to understand better below.

This power of the State has perpetuated an outcome-based accountability system that teachers feel the pressure of frequently (Sikes, Nixon, and Carr, 2003). The contextuality of policy is considered essential to enact policy in practice, i.e., stakeholders interpret linear policy manifestations, which de-linearises the process. Delinearisation supports the effective enactment and implementation of the policy in terms of achieving the aim(s) of the policy, which in schools is often measured by the 'quality' of pupil outcomes (which compounds the accountability pressures teachers feel to perform) as a marker of success. A lack of success might be attributed to a strictly linear process where professional autonomy cannot be exercised by the teachers who know the pupils' education best.

According to Head Teachers and Teaching Union reports (Department for Education, 2019e; NEU, 2018), education in England is an organised and strictly managed practice that prioritises creating quality education with inadequate budgets. The *quality* debate is not a new one, and it is supported by the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), particularly SDG four, "*Quality Education,* to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning" (UN, 2017, Goal 4: Quality Education Infographic). Quality is accepted as part of the normative critical discourse (Kumar and Sarangapani 2004, p.31). The purpose of education is at tension with the perspectives of multiple educational stakeholders at the local, regional and national levels focused on democracy (Moss, 2007).

Educational discourse refers to specific terms that describe quality, "such as reform; relevance; mastery learning; teaching to objectives; improvement; effectiveness and

innovation" (p.31), which help justify quality as an educational concept. Terms like these are often found in English educational policies and statutory curriculum frameworks. The existing discourse around quality provides a pre-accepted notion of *quality* in the academic and professional literature; the policy text can lever educational aims as *necessary,* exerting a perceived power over those [teachers] who implement the policies in practice in schools. Therefore, as the literature reports, accountability pressures and a drive for quality represent a power imbalance between the government (policy writers) and teachers (the policy implementers), with the government holding most of the power which perhaps demoralises the teaching workforce.

Stevenson (2011) proposed that policy and implementation of this kind threaten the democracy of educational systems by positioning them in a "state-subsidised free market" (p.179), which he viewed as a neoliberal movement that marked a change in educational policy trajectory. This politicisation of education and embrace of market-driven ideology is apparent from the start of compulsory education through top-down standardisation of state school curricula (Leys, 2001). Cochran-Smith asserts that "teaching and teacher education are inherently and unavoidably political" (2005, p.3). This control is perceived by Stevenson (2011) as reducing the focus on institutional democratic educational processes. There is a perceived gap between policy and practice (Birzea *et al.*, 2005). To be explicit, the gap I evidence through my research is between teachers' ideological beliefs and values in classroom practice and the government's focus on achieving a 'quality' education through statutory frameworks like the National Curriculum in England that lever certain types of action to achieve quality in primary classrooms. The outcome of a variable, ever-changing policy landscape is constant pressure on teachers. This variability in policy through reform

and the outcome of the market-driven focus on quality, results in accountability systems increasing the pressures on teachers during their professional working lives.

As examined above, the lack of classroom agency and focus on performativity exerts pressures on the teaching workforce and leads to some of them leaving early on in their career. According to McGill (2018), "The system of accountability related to performance should be transparent with clear responsibilities and performance assessment criteria". At this time, the Department for Education only reported on the annual rate of teachers leaving, not the attrition rates, reflecting a much bigger retention issue.

Listening to and examining the stories of teachers can reveal the "inter-relatedness" (Clandinin *et al.*, 2009, p.141) between those involved in teachers' lives, including teacher educators and mentors and the spaces in which educational communities collaborate to overcome challenges (such as pressure exerted from educational processes perpetuating accountability) and support sustaining their professional lives and staying in the profession as part of an ever-shifting landscape.

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) reports (2016, 2018) focused on evidence relating to the attrition of teachers in primary schools. Still, they did not present robust data and evidence detailing the reasons for teachers leaving but concluded that ~10% of teachers left the profession to obtain other jobs in education and not to gain higher-paid employment, which is linked to extrinsic monetary motivations. The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) did not achieve its policy pledges and was abandoned in December 2016 after eleven months, with the legislative power moving back to the Department for Education. The teacher workload challenge (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2016)

was minimally acknowledged, and subsequent policy maintained the focus on support to achieve quality expectations, which is potentially the reason the rate of teachers leaving annually has remained constant.

Solutions that move away from a "static focus on quality and accountability to learners...a more dynamic formulation which takes account of context, environment and social interactions" (Gillies *et al.*, 2010, p.21) would support the dynamism of policy. This sets a challenge to the policymakers to redistribute some of the power back to the policy implementers and to view policy manifestations processes holistically as a cyclic system that is both preceded by and creates context (Ball *et al.*, 2012). It is considered "that nuances of local context cumulatively make a considerable difference to school processes and student achievement" (Thrupp and Lupton, 2006, p.309) and perhaps teacher satisfaction at work.

The above sections sought to understand policy and policy discourse better because, for my research, policy sets the context of the landscape in which teachers work. Appreciating the landscape's challenges is essential to offer practical and proportionate support that can be implemented effectively within this context. Now turning to consider the four main challenges that the English Government, specifically the Department for Education, has identified for teacher recruitment and retention. The training and retention of teachers is crucial to maintain teacher supply and the professional literature including the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy aims to deconstruct the four perceived challenges and suggest solutions to those challenges to solve the problems in practice and keep teachers in the profession.

The four main challenges as identified in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (Department for Education, 2019d)

The *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (TRRS) (Department for Education, 2019d) intended audience is government, those in the teaching profession, educational stakeholders, and the inspectorate. This policy is meant to project a shared stakeholder view of the four challenges the English government identified that threaten to impact the recruitment and retention of teachers.

In summary the four challenges presented by the government are,

- ➢ Attracting people to teaching and then recruiting them
- ➢ Supporting Early Career Teachers
- ➢ Reducing teacher accountability and managing workload
- ➢ Creating flexible and adaptable working conditions to ensure teaching remains an attractive career.

Each of these challenges has been examined in detail to understand stakeholder opinions on the challenges and the vision for the four proposed solutions for improving the recruitment and retention of teachers in England. To critique whether the existing consensus in the literature is projecting the opinion of the stakeholders and whether they think the solutions will work in practice.

Challenge one - Attracting people to teaching and recruiting them:
The process begins with recruitment drives by the Department for Education and HE institutions across England. Typically, recruitment processes begin when young people are starting to consider their options for a career involving choosing subjects to study for examination at secondary school between the ages of fourteen to sixteen (through General Certificates in Secondary Education, GCSEs) or equivalent qualifications such as General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQs), and 'A' Levels or equivalent.

The lever to deliver the solution is attracting and recruiting teachers through a one-stop application portal to make it easier for people to get into teaching. As a solution, the English government propose to launch a "discover teaching" (Department for Education, 2019e, p.32) initiative with a *try-before-you-apply* approach. The English government will work on digitising the application process to simplify it and shorten the time it takes to process applications.

The training of teachers is crucial to maintain teacher supply. The Core Content Framework (CCF) (Department for Education, 2019b) sets the national benchmark for training teachers in England and underwrites the ITT Curriculum. The CCF was published to ensure that providers of ITT enabled trainee teachers to master the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011). According to the government, the Standards contribute to *effective* teaching. Part One of the Standards details eight areas in that teachers must demonstrate competence, including,

1. To inspire, motivate and challenge pupils by setting elevated expectations.
2. Focusing on continuous progress and good outcomes.
3. Demonstrating good knowledge of both subject and curriculum.
4. Planning and teaching coherent lessons.
5. Being adaptable and responding to all pupil's individual needs.
6. Being productive and using assessment accurately.
7. To manage behaviour conducive to a safe learning environment, and
8. Taking responsibility for broader professional duties.

Teachers' moral and ethical responsibility is embodied in Part Two of the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011) and dictates how teachers should conduct themselves personally and professionally. The CCF acknowledges that training is *initial* and that schools must have an ongoing system of high-quality PD to improve teacher retention over the longer term. The English government states in the framework, "teaching should be firmly located within the moral and ethical

framework of education" (Department for Education, 2019b, p.9). This reminds stakeholders that education is value-laden, and part of a complex system influenced by society and cultures.

The government is currently reviewing the ITT market with the hope of having greater control over the quality of ITT. This process may exacerbate the challenge of teacher recruitment as providers withdraw from the ITT market or are unsuccessful in accreditation, further contributing to the teacher deficit. A complete examination of the impact of the ITT Market Review (Department for Education, 2022) is beyond the scope of my research. Future researchers may analyse the opinion across the sector about this market review strategy to establish if the sector-wide opinion is in line with the government regarding recruitment and retention and how to achieve quality education, or if opinions are opposing one another. The government may have to rethink its strategy if teacher recruitment is adversely affected due to the ITT Market Review.

According to Inside Government Interactive Forum and Conferences, the government's central belief is that the "recruitment crisis is exacerbated by a correlating retention crisis" (Inside Government, 2019). The Government forum proposes that schools and ITT providers utilise the opportunities the TRRS presents (Department for Education, 2019d). Inside Government asserted that an "urgent drive across the sector is required to tackle the teacher recruitment crisis" (Inside Government, 2019).

This examination of the current opinion across the ITT sector includes interested stakeholders from the government sector, including ITT training support organisations like the National Association of School-Based Teacher Trainers

(NASBTT) and the Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), teachers and their unions, who are beginning to signal that retention is one barrier but many others complicate matters further like pay, workload, and challenges to teacher professionalism that also further problematise the four contemporary challenges identified by the government in the TRRS.

Teaching Unions like the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT, 2020) states that "a crushing workload, low pay and attacks on professionalism are behind the low uptake" (Bushby, 2019). These factors are perceived as preventing prospective teaching candidates from applying to teach. Research contributing to the government's *Get into Teaching Campaign* (Department for Education, 2020a) suggested that two in five say they would be successful teachers. In the *Teacher Recruitment Bulletin* (Department for Education, 2019e), the government announced workshops and national marketing activities to inspire, support, and attract teachers.

Pay and reward will become crucial to analysing transforming support for ECTs and maintaining teaching as an attractive career choice. Workload and perceived attacks on professionalism dominate the narrative examining school cultures and workload (NASUWT, 2020).

Challenge Two - Supporting Early Career Teachers (ECTs):
The government's lever to action is to transform the support for ECTs. The proposed solution was the implementation of the *Early Career Framework* (ECF) piloted September 2020-July 2021 and rolled-out nationally September 2021. The framework provides a two-year funded support package with a dedicated mentor, time off timetable, and professional development. The ECF reinforces the main

areas of support required for ECTs supported by a mentor. The ECF ensures that the teachers are being assessed against the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011) and progress is monitored by the Mentors, whose quality of mentoring is assured by the non-compulsory Mentor's Standards (Department for Education, 2016c).

Consistency of mentoring during teachers' early career is problematic because no two schools function in the same way or have the same level of human resources [number of mentors]. Therefore, the linear policy intended to support ECTs may not be implemented as consistently as the government plans. This may lead to differences in teachers' experience and access to ongoing professional development (PD) and may lead to dissatisfaction and ECTs considering leaving the profession.

A good mentor can dramatically impact teachers' early careers and success; by maintaining elevated expectations and upholding professionalism by "inducting the trainee [or ECT] into professional norms and values, helping them to understand the importance of the role and responsibilities of teachers in society" (Department for Education, 2016c, p.10).

There are some significant assumptions in the Mentor Standards that I believe this research can explore from the teacher's perspective. These assumptions allude to the norms, values, and teachers' roles in society, which seem significant according to the Mentor Standards. However, readers of the policy are not provided with any elaboration on what significance these norms and values have on the lives of teachers or what impact is perceived by upholding these values in practice.

That leaves questions to be explored around 'normal' expectations of primary school teachers and whether individual teacher value positions are supported. By examining the roles and values that are represented in policy and whether they are concurrent with the individual and personal values held by teachers in practice, this research intends to ask teachers directly whether the perceived norms, roles, and values in the profession have changed over time (since they have entered teaching). My research will ask teachers to consider whether they feel the levers and drivers for these policy changes are realistic in their school context. Critique will also compare current teachers' views to the existing literature.

The ECF also includes provision for phased financial incentives to progress with retention payments to encourage teachers to stay in the profession. Stakeholders across the sector have opinions about the proposed ECF and whether financial payments will support teachers' careers and incentivise them to stay. Some educational stakeholders believe it is money that is deterring people from entering the teaching profession and a lack of pay raises and other financial incentives which make retention of teachers problematic. The English government agrees that "all teachers should be fairly remunerated for the work that they do" (Department for Education, 2019d, p.16). Phased financial retention payments are one thing proposed by the government, and this phased payment can occur during training or once in post. The North-East of England Council reports relying on supply teachers to educate children amidst the teacher shortage. According to a report by the Evening Express (Peterkin, 2019), A Scottish Council has spent over £6.2 million pounds bringing supply teachers to the area, the highest total in the England. Scottish Councillors feel that the money would be better-used recruiting and valuing teachers once in post.

Universities' Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET) reported from a National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) study, *Diagnostic Analysis of the Effect of Retention and Turnover on the Teaching Workforce 2018* (National Foundation for Education Research, 2018) that teachers are not primarily motivated to leave teaching because of pay and that financial incentives to retain teachers will only work on those individuals responsive to pay. Recommendations from UCET (2022) based on this report included considering the impact of concurrent changes on pay and paying attention to differentiation of salaries at different teacher pay scale points. UCET (2022) suggest that research opportunities should focus on influencing teachers' pay to reduce attrition rates.

The NFER (2019) has welcomed the TRRS (Department for Education, 2019d) but issued a note of caution as to whether the pace of implementation would be quick enough to deliver the number of teachers required to plug the shortfall and build capacity. There is mixed opinion across the sector about how successful financial incentives might be for the recruitment and retention of teachers. The published data and interim government reports released over the next two years will report on the success of boosting the teacher workforce using money as an incentive. According to various stakeholders, this may only be beneficial to those individuals who are motivated by pay.

There needs to be more scepticism about the financial strategy and its ability to top up the deficit in teacher numbers. Motivators can be intrinsic or extrinsic: the government's teacher-focused incentives target extrinsic factors. Factors like increasing pay through incremental scale rise, financial incentives like retention and TLR payments whilst trying to promote flexible working patterns and career

progression routes, "increasingly, research evidence points to powerful factors that may be more intrinsic in nature and those that increase teachers' feelings of efficacy and satisfaction with their practice" (Edge *et al.*, 2017, p.14).

Challenge Three - Teacher accountability and managing workload:
School accountability is perceived as confusing leading to extra pressure and unnecessary teacher workload. The lever to action is to create more supportive working cultures whilst reducing teacher workload, which is described as "excessive" (Department for Education, 2019f, p.7). The proposed solution is for government to work with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted); Ofsted is supposed to be an independent regulatory inspectorate (independent from the government). There is an intention to introduce a new *Education Inspection Framework* (EIF) to decrease pressure, simplify the accountability system and remove any "floor or coasting" standards (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, 2019a, p.14).

In March 2019, the then Education Secretary, Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP, announced added support for the well-being of teachers in schools and colleges. The government launched the first-ever integrated strategy proposing a detailed plan to support the status of the teaching profession and design more opportunities for teachers to progress in their careers. When I considered why this integration plan to support teachers' workload and mental health is so important, I examined the research literature to find out what teachers and researchers say about the impact of poor mental health on teachers.

It is already widely documented in the literature what factors negatively correlate to mental health issues, including components of burnout such as anxiety and

depression, and how chronic stress contributes to low job satisfaction, motivation levels, self-image, and ability to be efficient. Burnout results from feelings associated with a lack of accomplishment because of being overworked, negatively associated with poor working conditions and resourcing, student characteristics and disruptive behaviours.

Six studies involving 1134 participants, including social workers (n=328) and French-Canadian teachers (n=806), concluded that an ability to reflect and depersonalise by observing actions, feelings, and thoughts were associated with positive emotions of accomplishment in work and may mediate aspects of burnout (Maslach *et al*., 1981; Kokkinos, 2007; and Fernet *et al*., 2012).

Demographic versus occupational factors contributed to anxiety, depression, and stress with classroom and working conditions negatively predicting low student achievement and a decrease in job satisfaction which were among the main predictors that influenced high turnover rates in the teaching workforce (Loeb *et al*., 2005; Ferguson *et al*., 2012; McLean and Connor, 2015). Educational reform and classroom environment also contributed to teacher stress by creating excessive workload demands. This stress was somewhat mediated by career reappraisal and positive teacher-pupil interaction, which bolstered a positive self-image and commitment to work. This highlights the importance of ensuring policy directives have positive impacts in practice to support teachers' mental health (Kyriacou, 2001).

The literature supports that teachers' well-being and job satisfaction can be affected by four factors 1. Individual; 2. Classroom; 3. Organisational, and 4. Societal

(Ouellette *et al.*, 2018).   This happens as part of a wider community; thus, society can pressure the teaching profession (Ouellette *et al.*, 2018).

Individual factors include teachers having poor coping strategies, low perceived self-efficacy and low personal satisfaction related negatively to student success. Intervention strategies such as improving teachers' professional development to support their knowledge and skills, like behaviour management and decision-making skills, positively support pupil achievement and job satisfaction (Seibert, 2002; Turner, 2007; Vannest *et al.*, 2019). Building positive teacher-pupil relationships and improving the classroom climate supports teachers' ability to cope and positively reduces teachers' stress (Kyriacou, 2001).

Another study of 1430 teaching staff found that teachers' years of experience had a non-linear relationship with stress. Still, managing student behaviours and good classroom management improved feelings of self-efficacy. Developing a greater range of classroom strategies increased job satisfaction and supported better workload management (Klassen and Chiu, 2010). Occupational self-compassion and good classroom management decreased occupational stress and burnout and had tangible implications for teaching and learning. This helped relieve symptoms of anxiety and depression, particularly among female teachers (Roeser *et al.*, 2013; Flower *et al.*, 2014).

Classroom factors can contribute to work-related stress, including large class sizes; disruptive student behaviour; poor teacher-student relationships and poor communication of expectations which all contribute negatively to emotional exhaustion, stress, and, eventually, teacher burnout. Significant work-related stresses impact personal relationships and physical health (Shernoff *et al.*, 2011).

Poor working conditions and poor staff relations result in poor mental health through being immersed in an adverse classroom climate which leads to the perception of poor social and emotional competence and increased stress (Abel and Sewell, 1999; Cappella *et al.*, 2008; Jennings and Greenberg, 2009). Developing positive pupil-teacher relationships and parent-teacher relationships supports managing pupil behaviour and student success which positively impacts feelings of personal accomplishment which in turn reduces anxiety and increases job satisfaction (Atkins *et al.*, 2003; Kokkinos, 2007; Veldman *et al.*, 2013).

According to the literature, organisational factors that impact a low sense of collegiately and lack of autonomy include limited resources, school effectiveness, and poor classroom organisation (Kyriacou, 2001). This results in excessive personal and professional demands leading to teacher stress, impacting their commitment to work and damaging their positive self-image. A lack of support compounds this decreased motivation and lowered self-esteem in the teaching workforce, high-pressure accountability systems and poor communication (Dorman, 2003; Shernoff et al., 2011). Teachers can be supported to feel more autonomous and part of the school team by increasing access to PD opportunities, increasing school effectiveness and collaboration to distribute the labour through more effective leadership (Hung, 2012; Duyar *et al.*, 2013; Ghavifekr and Pillai, 2016).

Finally, societal factors cited in the literature that impacted negatively on teachers' well-being and job satisfaction include excessive workload demands; mismatched parental expectations; student-student and student-teacher relationships; competitive comparison through league tables, and the marketisation of education (Markow e*t al.*, 2006; von der Embse *et al.*, 2016). Factors that mitigated the

negative impacts included positive socio-cultural factors, including feeling 'connected' to the school community and supporting teachers' beliefs about how to influence students' learning with integrity (Hoy and Woolfolk, 1993).

Policies can apply the performativity pressures teachers experience when working with their pupils. Teachers may be judged regarding pupil progression in education, a responsibility the teacher feels quite strongly as part of their role. Job satisfaction and decreased stress levels can arise from autonomy and control over organising one's work schedule (Pearson and Hall, 1993). The examination of teacher's perceptions of the factors which most affect them (using the four factors above as a guide) will support me in understanding their perception of the level of control they have over their work, environment [the classrooms], and themselves (Johanim *et al.*, 2018).

ITT providers are trying to be mindful of the contextual challenges trainees and ECTs face in schools. They aim to support trainees in developing strategies to manage their workload and safeguard their mental health and well-being. The Department for Education stated that providers should consult teacher workload research to inform trainees' discussions. The Department for Education has provided materials such as a *Workload Reduction Toolkit* (Department for Education, 2019h) and s*upporting early career teachers: reducing teacher workload* guidance (Department for Education, 2019g). These are documents targeted at ITT providers to promote action, shifting direct responsibility for support for workload management and retention from the government directly to ITT providers and schools.

Challenge Four - Flexible and adaptable working to ensure teaching remains an attractive career:

The government has asserted that teachers require more flexible working patterns to support changes in life circumstances and provide more adaptable career pathways. The policy lever is that teaching will remain an attractive career as lifestyles and aspirations change. The proposed solution is to extend flexible working with a new job-share service to support workforce flexibility and to provide non-traditional specialist routes to school leadership roles. This perceived maladaptation of working practices is portrayed as a barrier to retaining good teachers.

The Strategy proposes support for teachers to pursue career opportunities by providing investment in existing and new qualifications, support for those teaching in challenging schools, and for Headteachers to adapt with autonomy to changing demands and enable flexibility in working approaches. The government proposes that this can be achieved with three approaches.

The first approach is examining teaching career pathways and developing progression opportunities. The Department for Education defines career progression in five stages, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Illustration of the progression of teachers' careers in England as described in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d)

The second approach is a pledge to provide a £42 million Teacher Development Premium to schools during stages three to five, progressing from fully qualified teacher to school leader. This is to encourage teachers to take up leadership National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) as well as to introduce specialist qualifications like Chartered Teacher (CTeach), Chartered College Fellowships, traditional leadership NPQs like NPQ Middle Leader (NPQML); NPQ Senior Leader (NPQSL); NPQ Headteacher (NPQH) and NPQ Executive Leadership (NPQEL).

The third approach is supporting schools to implement flexible working patterns. The government cites that not being able to access part-time or flexible work causes teachers to leave or choose not to return to work. Considering what stakeholders feel about these three approaches and whether they will be effective will aid in positive implementation. Stakeholders across the sector, including school leaders, mentors, and teaching unions, have concerns over the evidence underpinning the three approaches and whether they would work. The Department for Education, in

response to the consultation *Strengthening QTS and improving career progression for teachers* (Department for Education, 2018b), admitted they would have to work with schools to develop resources for professional development and build evidence of what is successful in different schools.

Time is a concern amongst school leaders expressing that the management of the additional timetable reductions (5%) for ECTs to engage in PD would have financial and workload implications for schools. Training providers are concerned that oversaturating the market with training options is a risk and needs to be clarified about PD efficiency and dilution of quality. Others expressed that despite timetable reductions and the possible repercussion of further increasing workloads, there still needs to be more time to engage in such leadership qualifications.

There are questions about how to develop coherent approaches to educational development from teachers and school leaders (Birzea *et al.*, 2005). According to Birzea *et al.* the rise of Quality Assurance (QA) mechanisms since the early 1990s has been described as allowing "new forms of empowerment and accountability" (2005, p.34), which has been shown "to add value to policy implementation and is proving effective in enhancing school and classroom practice" (2005, p.34). From a critical perspective, it is perhaps questionable who benefits from enhanced empowerment, whether it is school leaders or classroom teachers. Likewise, it seems that teachers are feeling the pressure of accountability, but it is not clear who else may experience the pressures e.g., the leaders or pupils. Being a leader and having additional qualifications like NPQs does not necessarily guarantee good teaching practices, and it is questioned whether capability improves the perception of the professionalism of teaching. One study found that having a higher qualification,

like a PhD, did provide higher knowledge and pedagogical competence in HE institutions in a Nigerian context (Okolie *et al.*, 2020). The National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL, 2016) created a ten-year plan to spread educational excellence by matching the best teachers and middle leaders to underperforming schools to boost academic quality. However, this is flawed as a methodology. To lead policy implementation well, there needs to be knowledge of the social context of the school and build positive working relationships; knowledge and competence alone does not lead to successful reform. Respondents to the consultation (Department for Education, 2018b) also referred to consideration given to mental health, well-being, and resilience amidst changes to quality assurance procedures.

Consideration as part of this research will be given to what the individual teachers feel they need to progress in the profession, allowing teachers to express who they are as individuals and their professional aspirations. The Department for Education model (Figure 4, p.70) provides a progression plan for all as a standard pathway. Still, teachers' career pathways are far from ordinary, and one wonders whether the model will be adaptive enough to flex and allow these individual aspirations and career progression pathways.

This section has reviewed the four challenges the government have identified pertinent to teachers' lives. The literature has helped to highlight the scepticism around how the proposed solutions will be implemented in practice. The government has responded to critiques by saying, "cultural change cannot be dictated by the government: it must be led by the profession to be sustainable, but with the government committing to support any changes" (Department for Education, 2018b,

p.12). This could be viewed as passing responsibility to school leaders and teachers themselves, increasing teacher accountability. My position on this based on my experience as a teacher and currently as a HE ITT Senior Lecturer is that not enough support is available from the government to support cultures in education and that responsibility for implementation should be fairly distributed, as the workload as a result of policy implementation seems to fall to the teachers and Lecturers with management not really involved in the work to deliver policies in practice. If the government genuinely want to reduce accountability, they need to work close with practitioners to understand the contextual challenges to more effectively tackle the retention crisis.

To conclude this chapter, the literature has conceptualised the dynamic political and social complexity of education and teaching. From a personal perspective, I have begun to understand who teachers believe they are, what motivates them to teach, the conditions under which they work and how they perceive they are supported (or not) to overcome their daily contextual challenges in schools.

The critique of literature has demonstrated that different conceptions of what makes a 'good' teacher and how multiple identities might be formed as teachers try to maintain the expected professional status. It has been explained that tensions between personal ideals and ambition and others' expectations of the professional potentially lead to stress and decreased motivation. The reality of teaching competing with individual motivations contributed to a consistent proportion of the workforce leaving annually.

The literature has tried to define what policy is and how policy discourse perpetuates notions of quality and professionalism. The implication of these two aspects was teachers experiencing accountability pressures that result in teachers needing support regardless of career stage. The government has identified four main challenges and possible solutions, but the literature has shown a conflict between the perceived and actual challenges in practice and that teachers require more support in the early years of their careers.

Examining six previous studies that used Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 1987) has helped me understand the messiness of teachers' lives who are teaching in a complex social system filled with tensions. Social influence can obstruct teachers from meeting their idealistic goals and ambitions. It will be interesting to use a narrative approach to hear about three teachers' lives and compare how they are presented in the professional and academic literature to analyse if the challenges and possible solutions are comparable.

The next chapter presents the methodological approach, methods and analytical framework used to gather and analyse the research findings.

Chapter 3 – My approach to method and methodology

My research aims to talk to and examine the perceptions and experiences of three primary classroom teachers in England working in three different primary schools during the early stages of their careers.

This chapter comprises four main sections, each with a bold sub-heading. First, I consider the participants and the methodological framework: I present my proposed methods and justification for selecting these. Second, I examine the researcher's philosophical concerns, including considering my positionality as the researcher. Third, I present my methodological approach and review each of the two methods I propose to use. I offer Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987) as an analytical tool that I suggest frames the participants' perceptions and experiences as primary school teachers in a cultural, historical and social context in primary schools. Fourth, I detail the ethical concerns specific to my research and how I propose to address these before concluding the chapter.

My research aims to understand what motivated the participants to go into teaching, to appreciate their experiences as early career teachers (ECTs), and to examine what challenges they encounter in their school context and how they perceive they are supported to overcome the challenges.

To support me in understanding teachers' motivations, experiences and challenges, the research is guided by the following three research questions:

RQ1 - What do three individual teachers perceive has motivated them to go into primary teaching in England, and what have they experienced in their professional lives thus far?

RQ2 - How do the three teachers perceive they are supported to achieve their goals as teachers between one-, two-, and three- years post-qualification, respectively?

RQ3 - What are the three teachers' opinions on the challenges and solutions proposed in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy?

My position philosophically influences what is questioned, how it is researched and how the data is analysed, interpreted, and presented. I aim at every stage to explain my position and decisions about how I did things during this research. I remain mindful of the participants in the study, who are people and teachers, and I want to lead my research with respect and honesty.

As my professional history involves being a teacher, there is a common interest between myself and the participants in the educational subject matter. It will be helpful for me to reflect on the range of interpretations presented about methods and methodologies in academic research, including my interest, viewpoints, and assumptions. In my opinion and supported by other researchers, research cannot be value-free (Macdonald, 1984; May 2001; and Schostak, 2002), and therefore I have, throughout this thesis, acknowledged the context of the research, mainly when drawing on my own professional experiences. I will now introduce the research participants and how they were selected.

Participants and methodological framework:

Before I approached any participants, ethical clearance was sought from the University of Sheffield School of Education. Ethical approval was granted on 21st March 2019 after completing a robust ethical procedure that included submitting my Ethics Form, Participant Information Sheet and Participant Consent Form on the 21st of February 2019. A copy of the project approval letter can be found in Appendix One. I discuss any ethical concerns and how I intend to address these at the end of this chapter.

I propose to use two methods as part of the research: I propose to use interviewing (Life-History and semi-structured) to support gaining insights from teachers about what motivated them to teach, what they have experienced professionally, and utilise a professional discussion about a specific government policy, the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d), to understand what challenges they face and how they are helped to overcome challenges.

I have decided to analyse the findings from the two methods using CHAT (Engeström, 1987) as a theoretical, analytical framework. The following table (Table 2) maps how the methods and analytical tools are aligned with the research questions.

Table 2. Data Collection Methods and Analytical Tools

Main research question	Methods	Aspect analysed and analytical tool	Justification of the method and analytical tool
RQ1. What do three individual teachers perceive has motivated them to go into primary teaching in England, and what have they experienced in their professional lives thus far?	Life-History Interview	The interview narratives will be analysed using CHAT to understand teachers' motivations and experiences.	CHAT enables the detail of the narrative to be analysed as part of the complex social system in which teachers work rather than viewing the narrative in isolation of the context. CHAT enables the examination of the social, cultural and historical aspects of teachers' lives.

RQ2. How do the three teachers perceive they are supported to achieve their goals as teachers between one- two- and three- years post-qualification, respectively?	Semi-structured Interview	The interview narratives will be analysed using CHAT to understand the support teachers receive.	As above.
RQ3. What are the three teachers' opinions on the challenges and solutions proposed in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy?	Professional Discussion	Reflection on the discussion to understand teachers' opinions and report directly what the teachers said.	The discussion will be reported using direct quotes to accurately represent teachers' opinions within their work context.

The methods used were focused on gathering discursive narratives together with perceptions and opinions of teachers about their motivations, experiences and challenges.

Research Participants:

The number of participants is small and involves three qualified primary school teachers in their first, second and third year of teaching. A small number of participants is congruent with existing practice in Life-History research due to the time involved in interviewing, transcribing, and analysing narrative data (Goodson *et al.*, 2017). Larger numbers are unnecessary and inappropriate because the method's purpose is not to make objective generalisations which means recommendations made from this type of research are likely to support local school decisions and teachers' practice. The depth of the study is not based on the number of participants involved but on the richness of what is explored discursively using a Life-History approach (which I examine in detail later in this chapter). This methodological approach will enable me to reflect on specific aspects of the teachers' lives.

Participant selection:

I used a purposive and convenient approach to selecting the teachers who participated in this study. Because I am focusing on teachers in their early careers, the sampling is also purposive because it concerns teachers at specific stages of their careers who will have characteristics or experiences in their professional roles as teachers.

I selected these teachers using a purposive rather than an opportunistic or random approach because I had easy access to them. The teachers were students at the HE institution (pseudonym Newlands University), where I worked as a Senior Lecturer in Education and supported their pre-service training. Conveniently, I could contact these qualified teachers as Newland's University had asked for permission from them when they graduated to stay connected with them as Alumni to keep them informed about postgraduate research opportunities. This was in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (Data Protection Act, 2018). An established professional familiarity and a professional working relationship might make access to participants easier.

I was privileged, in my position, to still be in contact with teachers who are one-, two- or three years post-qualification. In this instance, the teachers are being *selected* because they meet the selection criteria. I know that being engaged with research with my former students may have implications beyond data collection and analysis. The teachers may be cautious about what they tell me because I am known and have a professional relationship with them and with the schools in which they are employed, which are part of Newlands University ITT partnership.

A possible negative of this convenient approach to selecting participants is that teachers within the schools, as part of the partnership, may want to keep their

narratives private from me. Schools often look to Newlands University for advice on teacher training matters and, in some respects, view the institution as an *authority*. Therefore, teachers may not want to divulge professional reflections to an employee of Newlands University where their stories or thoughts may seem inferior. This power imbalance has been considered even if it does not exist.

The power dynamics are more significant if the research elicits information that is personal in nature. It is noted "that telling a story to a friend is a risky business; the better the friend, the riskier the business" (Grumet,1991, p.69). Although I would not consider the teachers to be friends, I formed a professional relationship over three years (the duration of their training) and got to know them well. However, I know of them as a *student* and on a need-to-know basis rather than understanding them personally.

This research may elicit information that was unknown to me and may be surprising. Maintaining respect and confidentiality with these life stories was paramount. In stating the nature of my relationships with the teachers participating in this research, I am being reflexive about my position and the power dynamics between myself and the participants. Trying to identify biases in a reflexive and enquiring way, to pre-empt and identify where power struggles may occur, and to try to remain transparent to both the participants and the reader.

Informed consent:

I needed to gain informed consent from the individual teachers. They were told what the title and aim of the research were, the research questions, and how the data was to be gathered, analysed, and stored (Data Protection Act, 2018).

The findings were anonymised so that no individual was identifiable, and participants were informed that they were free to withdraw from the research at any time.

This information was provided in a written format with a verbal explanation if required to ensure that they understood fully to be able to give full informed consent, which was signed and dated by the participant. The report was made available to participants who requested it; interviews were transcribed, and member checked for accuracy by the individual participants and confirmed as a true and accurate narrative record. Once I have graduated, findings no longer required will be shredded and electronic data destroyed following the GDPR protocol. If data is needed for data mining, consent for extended data storage and encryption will be sought from the individual participant.

I will now move on to philosophical concerns associated with research.

The philosophical concerns of research

My position as the researcher:

The research I have engaged in thus far in my career is positioned within an interpretive paradigm. Some of the teachers in this research may describe and reflect upon things I may have experienced personally as part of my professional experience as a primary school teacher. I cannot assume or generalise that my experiences, views and values represent the teachers in this research or that findings are generalisable to all teachers in primary schools in England. I aim to be very explicit about my opinions and values in educational research and express my positionality throughout the study to maintain a reflexive approach. As a researcher, when interpreting the findings as *an insider* to primary teaching and

education, I cannot assume the data, the causation of events or the workings of the teacher's activity systems are happening in isolation.

I will use an interpretive lens to reflect on my epistemological and ontological positions concerning the research. There is an ethical requirement for researchers to examine and address their fundamental ontological assumptions. Epistemology and ontology are connected. I view educational happenings and question them to gather evidence supporting me in making sense of the professional world I am connected to. Being in the world and reflecting on one's position and how that transects with other's positions represents the complexity and potential messiness of research reflected in Newby's methodological research (2014, p.36).

The nature of knowledge has been considered in the epistemological concerns of the research. As a researcher, I plan to ask questions to examine what I want to know more about and to gain insights from teachers' narratives about their lived professional experiences. I want to represent the voices of teachers as authentically as possible using direct quotations. Still, when examining and presenting the findings, I decide what constitutes knowledge and which knowledge is represented.

The different methodological approaches are often represented as a binary when comparing the philosophies represented in social research, including educational research. For example, a positivistic/ objectivist/quantitative scientific approach versus the interpretive/ subjective/ qualitative approach (Wellington and Szczerbinski 2007, p.19 and Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011, p.8). When research dichotomies are presented in this polarised way, some researchers would argue that this is a mistaken view and that when described in terms of these dichotomies, they are "both and neither" (Pring, 2000, p.33). This is considered an

"oversimplified" view when comparing the research paradigms (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007, p.19).

Trustworthiness:

Different types of research use other terms to reflect ways of assuring the quality of the study, as summarised below,

Table 3. Dimensions of quality assurance (Newby, 2014, p.129)

Quantitative approaches	Qualitative approaches
Validity	Credibility
Reliability	Dependability
Objectivity	Confirmability

As my research is qualitative, I will explore the three terms in the right-hand column and how these dimensions relate to my research.

For the findings and interpretations to be 'credible', the participants need to believe that the performance of the findings is credible from their perspective. An example of how I will ensure the credibility of the conclusions of my research I will ensure the interview transcripts are member checked by each participant to ensure that they are an accurate record of the discussion, which adds to the finding's credibility.

Newby states, "The only real test for dependability is whether the researcher explains the context for the research sufficiently for the audience to agree with the conclusions." (2014, p. 129). One way to support dependability might be to share the final thesis with the participants and see if they agree with my conclusions about their lives and to receive feedback from readers once the thesis is published in the White Rose e-theses repository and are in the public domain.

My research is rooted in an interpretive paradigm. The methods I have chosen will enable me to hear, analyse and present the participants' views and better understand motivations, experiences and perceptions of the challenge and support the teachers have received as part of their complex lives. To be dependable, I must quote and represent the teachers' views and experiences as authentically as possible.

I am aware that the respondents to my research might supply answers to questions interpreted to be the answers I want rather than their free perceptions. The Halo Effect (Thorndike, 1920) was first described over a century ago. Social events are complex, and the teacher's narrative is entirely objective to everyone, but that does not make the findings invalid. I will treat the teachers' responses and perceptions as valid data from a "humanistic perspective" (Newby, 2014, p.39). The words quoted and represented in this research are the teacher's own, and their perceptions are valid. I acknowledge the potential impact of my values in education when interpreting the participant's narratives and that I will have to challenge perhaps and change my viewpoint to maintain a reflexive approach to the research (Bold, 2012).

The confirmability of research assumes that others will reach the same conclusion. As my research is interpretive, I must be honest and say others may interpret my findings differently and contest conclusions and recommendations. I must be truthful and lead my research with integrity; the audience must believe the results based on my honesty. By being reflexive about my positionality, I am reflecting on the honesty of my position to the participants and how my own experiences might influence my interpretation and presentation of the findings in the world.

I will consider how I and others might view the world and then decide (subjectively, as an individual researcher) what I will accept as evidence. The concept of epistemological influence on qualitative research and methodological choices is described by Newby (2014, p.36). Because individuals such as myself have a humanistic concern with research, this provokes the need to acknowledge my role and positionality within the context of the research and the need to be explicit and transparent about my epistemological assumptions. Because I am examining actual events, I have tried to use quotes to represent the words of the participants as authentically as I can. However, as I interpret the narratives, I allow my personal, values-driven and ethical response to reflect reality through my words, an "experiential truth" (Bold, 2012, p.144).

Methodological approach:

I used two main methods employed across three data collection phases. The methods were interviewing (Life-History and semi-structured) and discussion. This section examines the two interviewing approaches and the purpose of professional discussion as a method. The Life-History interview was structured by the participant. It began with the question, 'Tell me why you wanted to become a primary school teacher and what you have experienced in your professional life thus far?' the participant provided a narrative answer to the question. The participant drove the direction of the interview. The second interview was semi-structured, and the questions asked arose from the analysis of the Life-History narrative. The discussion was between me and each participant about the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d) to understand the teacher's perceptions of challenges and how solutions might work when implemented in their school context. I will now proceed to examine the approach to interviewing and discussion.

Interviewing - the Life-History approach: what is Life-History?

Life-History is not a new method. In the late '60s and early '70s, it was overshadowed by social theory and scientific observation of participants. There were concerns at this time with the robustness of the method (not viewed as scientific) and researchers' attitudes towards such method as being wasteful of time, stating, "nothing was gained by far more lengthy and laborious process of writing and judging a life history" (Faris, 1967, pp.114-115). Becker (1970) stated that methods like Life-History had supported sociology to grow as a discipline.

There is no single definition of what Life-History is in the literature; sharing more prescriptive detail about this method in the literature is required to support researchers. This method is described by some as "an analysis of the social, historical, political and economic contexts of a life story" (Hatch and Wisniewski, 1995, p.125). When *Life histories and the study of schooling* (1981) was published, Goodson explored how Life-History was a very personal process. It was a jigsaw process exploring interactions between parts to discover how the pieces fit together as part of complex social structures. The method is often used as a combined methodology that provides another perspective to the narrative of a particular study.

The Life-History approach Goodson and Sikes (2001) used was an interview that was perceived as unstructured: however, the structure was determined by the participant's narrative and not the interviewer. It is usually a one-to-one interview conversation and "the most commonly used strategy for collecting life history data" (Goodson *et al.*, 2017, p.79). This interview style should allow the narrative to flow and meander in a storied-like process. Clough (2002) describes a "storying methodology" (cited in Bold, 2012, p.60) appropriate to researching people's social

lives. Clough's stories are created from the narratives of interviews, and these narratives are authentic to the people they portray.

Why is this method right for my research?

Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) influenced my thinking about using a Life-History approach. I found perspectives in this book about the positives of using narratives in social research aligned with my methodological principles that were developing as part of my doctoral study and my interest in this specific research. My past experiences as a primary school teacher, and currently, as a Director of Education and Student Experience who supports trainee teachers through their training, have led me to have an ethical concern for the teaching profession and children's primary education. I recognise that teachers are uniquely placed to share their perspectives about what is happening in the teaching profession and that their voice represented as narrative data is a unique contribution to current educational research and will enable the audience of the research to reflect on what is reported and to appreciate teachers' current challenges and support needs.

My methodological approach to the research aims to enable participants to recall where they have been, what they have done, and what has happened to them. Using this method allows for "understanding something so intensely personal as teaching it is critical, we know about the person the teacher is" (Goodson, 1981, p.69). Life-History will provide a means for me as the researcher to try to make sense of the teachers' lives, their role and personal values. Life-History will enable me to capture the narratives that explain the social, political, cultural and historical aspects of teachers' lives where personal and organisational aspects might be at tension.

One-to-one Life-History interviews allow teachers to tell their professional life stories and be listened to. Careful active listening will enable follow-up questions (guided by what the participants say) to allow me to deeply understand what the early motivators were that encouraged the teachers to pursue a career in primary teaching.

The method limitations:

Goodson and Sikes (2001) asserted that this method provides a messy confrontation often bypassed by others using social scientific approaches. Life-History examines personal truths and realities, meaning the findings are not generalisable to a larger population. This leaves the research unable to attain insights into larger universal societal truths, but with the ability to make local recommendations to support teachers in their professional practice. Life-History is argued to disrupt truths of what is known and to challenge fundamental assumptions presented in the literature. Becker (1970) criticised this creation of abstract compositions and said, "formulate data in abstract categories of their theories rather than in the categories that seemed most relevant to the people they studied" (p.72). With Life-History interviewing, the narratives can be long, and the social involvement is high; researchers might ask, "what have you got when you've got a life story?" (Goodson *et al.*, 2017, p.61). I need to be reflexive about my own experiences that may impact when interpreting others' narratives.

The method positives:

Life-History narratives and philosophical questions are relational to epistemology, methodology and the knowledge of *truths*. Clough (2002) reflected on *Narratives and*

Fictions in Educational Research and tried to portray authentic narratives to the people they represented. Bold (2012) stated,

> 'truths' are measured in narratives by the comparisons the readers make with the lived stories they know, how the readers relate to the experiences in the stories in their own minds, thus they are reliable as the stories are common in many ways to others (p.145).

The power in this method is that people in education listen to teachers, which transects the boundary of political control over teachers through educational policy and legislation. This research approach puts teachers as people at the centre of the narrative, recounting their lives in education (Bullough, 1981). Publications have underlined the significant strengths of this approach as "providing this kind of voice from a culture and situation that are ordinarily not known to intellectuals generally and to sociologists in particular" (Becker, 1970, p.71). The research can highlight aspects that affect individuals in a specific context that enable and support, despite tensions during change at a local level. Analysing teachers' lives and making recommendations to inform localised policy can be implemented quickly compared to the time required to impact government policy. Cumulatively, where schools work in partnership (e.g., in the case of multi-academy trusts, MATs), the impact can have greater reach to the regional level and beyond.

Interviewing – the semi-structured approach:

A semi-structured interview was used as a follow-up to the first Life-History interview. The questions were generated from analysing the Life-History interview narrative and identifying possible new lines of enquiry that would enable me to gain a deeper insight into what the teacher had recounted about their professional life. This approach can support an understanding of the complexities of teachers' lives and the

activity systems in the social contexts of classrooms and school communities that help teachers achieve their early career ambitions.

Semi-structured interviews can be valuable in qualitative research (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007) as they have a flexible structure and support active dialogue between the interviewer and participants. They are flexible because the data is not gathered by asking many predetermined questions. Questions in this type of interview are determined by the participant during the discussion and followed up with questions from the researcher. The interviewer may have the overarching research questions in mind and may or may not ask these depending on the direction of the narrative. Equally, other spontaneous questions may be asked to gain more detail about what the participant says. A personal bond may be formed with the teachers who share similar perceptions, perspectives, and experiences as mine. This can create a cooperative and interactive dimension to the research and further enables me to be explicit about my positionality and interest in this type of research.

Recording of the interviews and note-taking also adds to the narrative; the written notes that accompany the recording add secondary footnotes to what is spoken and can capture non-verbal cues, gestures and body language that inform the context of the narratives that the audio recording cannot capture. I transcribed the whole interview in preparation for analysis by typing from an audio recording into a word document to form a complete transcript. The transcription process was time-consuming but enabled me to familiarise myself with the narrative.

An extract from the transcription with my meta-analysis is provided in Appendix Two. This Appendix demonstrates how I counter-question the narratives during analysis,

where my own experiences and values interact during the interpretation and generate further questions that could have been used in the semi-structured interview.

Findings can be interpreted by grouping ideas together to gain an account of the more extensive research picture, making the process more holistic in understanding what happened in a context to produce the findings. This examination of causal relationships supports the researcher to iteratively and progressively analyse from the surface, funnelling to the detail and complexities which are exposed and can be reported (Bogden and Knopp Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Presenting findings from narrative data focuses on representing what participants said as accurately as possible, so using direct quotations is predominant. What surrounds the quotes is often an interpretive narrative from the researcher, who is trying to make sense of what was said in the conversation context. Because of the lack of structure in the interviews, it is important to make connections in the narrative throughout the analysis of findings to identify relationships that emerge from the qualitative process (Goodson and Sikes, 2017; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; West, 1996).

There are some problems with interviewing and complications associated with philosophy and values with this method that can prevent achieving the aims of the analysis (Fadyl and Nicholls (2013, p.23). I work in a context that cannot be separated from oneself or society (Macdonald, 1984; May, 2001; and Schostak, 2002). Values are embedded in every research stage: from my interest in the subject being researched, to the aims, to analysing the data and presenting conclusions and recommendations. Subjective values also impact the use of and dissemination of the results. I acknowledge that ITT and teacher education are my fields of expertise, so I

must be mindful of my values, experiences, and potential bias that I bring to the research (due to my values and lived experiences) possibly reflected through my interpretation. I need to be honest when there are tensions.

I will now consider how discussions might support me in understanding teachers' experiences and perceptions of challenges and levels of support in greater detail.

Discussion with teachers about the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (TRRS, DfE, 2019):

Professional discussions with teachers will enable me to develop a shared narrative about the complex political landscape into which teachers are recruited and supported by ongoing professional development. As policy implementation happens in a context within primary schools, appreciating the teachers' understanding of the policy frameworks will help me understand aspects of their lived experience and appreciate whether they feel the government's proposed solutions will work in their specific school and primary classroom context when the policy directives are implemented. As detailed in chapter 2, the government has identified four main challenges for teachers. The TRRS has suggested possible solutions to support teachers to be recruited, supported, and develop professionally and manage their work-life balance.

Teachers are expected to be reflective practitioners; but they are guided to reflect about specific aspects of their role according to the Teachers' Standards (2011). Holding a discussion as part of a reflective process will not be a new concept to the participants of this research, but the reflection will be open to the participants interpretations. Ways to avoid the problems associated with treating discussion like a method is not to break down reflection into measurable steps (like the Teachers'

Standards, 2011). De La Croix and Veen (2018) suggest that the debate and reflection that arises from it should be spontaneous. They state that discussion leads to reflection and that "reflection is an ambiguous and profoundly complex human activity" (p. 394). The data in the form of narrative provided through discussion is rich in perceptions and values as individuals detail their lived experiences. I will try to analyse whose values are represented in educational policies and make them explicit.

Because teachers learn to teach through ongoing professional development and professional practice, discussion can enable them to reflect on problems with peers, including more experienced colleagues like a mentor. Maslow (1966) states that "reflection involves (at least) cognition, emotions, the body, language, consciousness and experience" (cited in Croix and Veen, 2018, p.397) and should be woven into the educational culture rather than a method that can be prescribed to achieve reflection. Teachers develop their daily teaching practices by discussing challenges and trying out new ideas in the classroom (Swennen, Shagrir and Cooper, 2009) through a practical and contextual reflection. This demonstrates that discussion can be a valuable tool to reflect on practice and will provide me with insights into teachers' lived experiences, perhaps enabling them to reflect on events in the classroom, think through their ideas, and perhaps by having a reflective opportunity through discussion will support teachers to try other ideas to overcome challenges in the future classroom as part of their professional lives.

Ethical concerns:

In writings about empowering relationships, where there is "equality, caring and mutual purpose and intention" (Hogan, 1988, p.12), there are notions of empowering

the teachers to tell their stories, to make a connection and allow them to have a voice. When examining the literature on researcher-practitioner relationships, attention is drawn to how researchers situate themselves around people with whom they work; that practice in the teaching profession is collaborative and modelled in approach, valuing and confirming the practices of each other (Noddings,1986).

I should listen to the teacher's story; this gives the teacher time, space, and authority to tell their story and validate it. The story might be re-told as the research progresses, leading to the second ethical dilemma of whether the narrative process will be helpful to the teachers. For example, to help them to view professional challenges and workable solutions or whether actions may exacerbate the situation(s) as they present themselves and over-problematise them. It is beyond the scope of this research to review whether storytelling enabled professional happenings to be viewed differently compared to the actual event. Still, this outcome cannot be overlooked and is acknowledged.

I must be open about my positionality and intentions of the research, where it will be published, and how. The findings and discussion were shared with the participants so they could see how their data was to be represented in the thesis to ensure it was described in the true form as was intended. As the researcher, I am conscious during all stages of potential bias (due to my values in education and lived experiences) that may lead to the misrepresentation of the narratives. It will be essential to be honest and responsible for how the data is represented and how others interpret it. Purposeful sampling can also be an ethical concern as it relies on my judgement and a presumption on my part that the participants will participate. To mitigate this, I will not pursue those approached to participate. Acknowledging one's position to the

participants and interest (professional or personal) in the research topic is declared to remain transparent.

There are some specific ethical concerns with a narrative approach, where participants are making aspects of their lives visible for the scrutiny of others. There are four types of ethics which, according to Bold (2012, p.52) are, 1. moral ethics which implies researchers observe a duty of care to others and respect for each participant. I gained written informed consent, maintained confidentiality by using pseudonyms and upheld the right of participants to withdraw at any time. I will lead my research with dignity and respect for the individual and will not pursue lines of questioning that may lead to emotional upset. 2. Social ethics contribute to knowledge through inclusive and participatory practices that improve social life. The stories belong to the teachers and reflect their experiences and histories. While I may have experienced similar things to the participants, I will be reflexive to ensure that my values and lived experience do not influence how the participants' lives are portrayed in the thesis. 3. Political ethics upholds democratic values and enables academic freedoms that resist withholding information or manipulating findings. The teachers will have access to all the policies we discuss, and I will not reflect my political views or opinions during discussions. Finally, 4. cultural ethics that respect different cultures and might apply other codes of ethics to various groups. The main aim of my ethics is to manage risk, reduce harm and identify benefits or areas that require support to produce possible recommendations for the participants and perhaps the wider society.

I will now move on and consider how CHAT as a theoretical framework can be used to analyse narratives and frame the participant's perceptions and experiences as teachers from a cultural and historical perspective as part of a social school context.

What is CHAT?

CHAT is a theoretical and analytical framework I propose can help me to visualise interactions and tensions between parts of a whole social system. For example, people, artefacts, and frameworks such as policy, interact as part of complex social activity systems (Leontev,1978, 1981 and Engeström, 1987). The simplified version of CHAT explores seven components of the CHAT system, and Engeström referred to these components as Nodes. I decided to use this second generation of the activity theory model (Engeström, 1987) because my research is focused on individual teachers and their system, not multiple or overlapping systems which the third generation model focuses on. Whilst Engeström's work was focused on using this model to analyse business and change management, it has been used in at least six previous studies in education (Anagnostopoulos, Smith, and Basmadjian, 2007; Dang, 2013; Stillman and Anderson, 2011; Tsui and Law, 2007; Valencia *et al.*, 2009; Waitoller and Kozleski, 2013), which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter.

To remain consistent with Engeström's original nomenclature, I shall also refer to these seven components as Nodes. The simple CHAT system and seven Nodes are represented diagrammatically in Figure 5.

Figure 5 – The diagrammatic representation of the seven CHAT Nodes

Mediating Artefacts: Tools and Signs

Subject

Object

Sense

Meaning

Outcome

Rules

Division of labour

Community
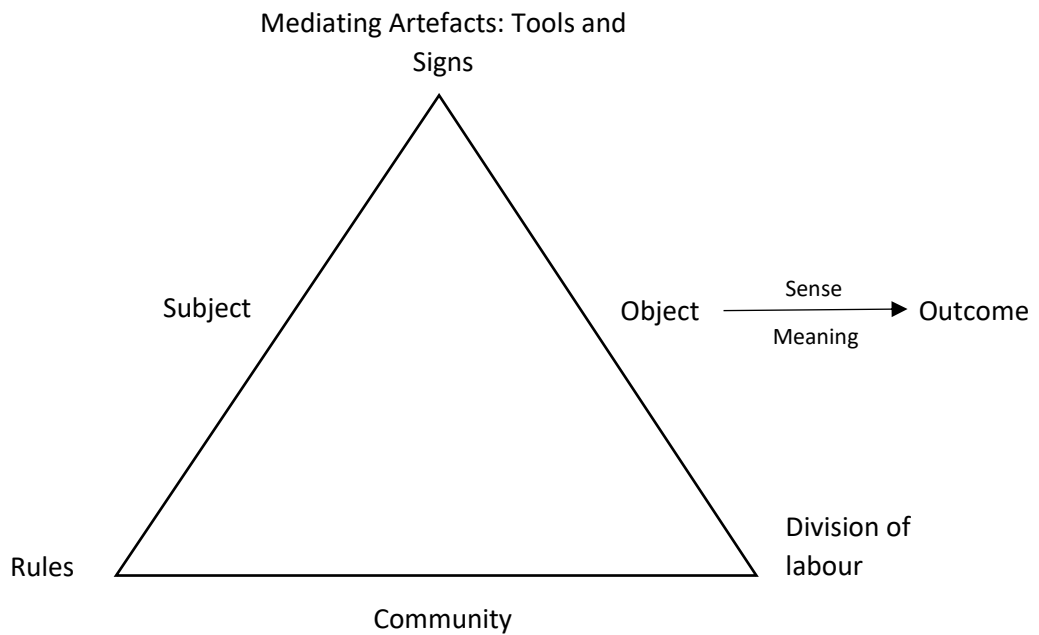
I understand Node as the intersections where different components of the whole activity system interact. Engeström (1987) theorised that the seven Nodes interact as part of the four core triadic associations. The diagrammatic representation of the four central triadic relationships, as depicted by Engeström, is shown in Figure 6 (Engeström,1987, p.67). The interplay between the Nodes of complex activity systems supports the analysis of the relationships between what people think and feel whilst engaging in their personal and professional activities individually or collaboratively (both consciously and unconsciously).

Figure 6. A diagrammatic representation of the four core triadic associations
of Engeström's human activity system (Engeström, 1987, p.78)
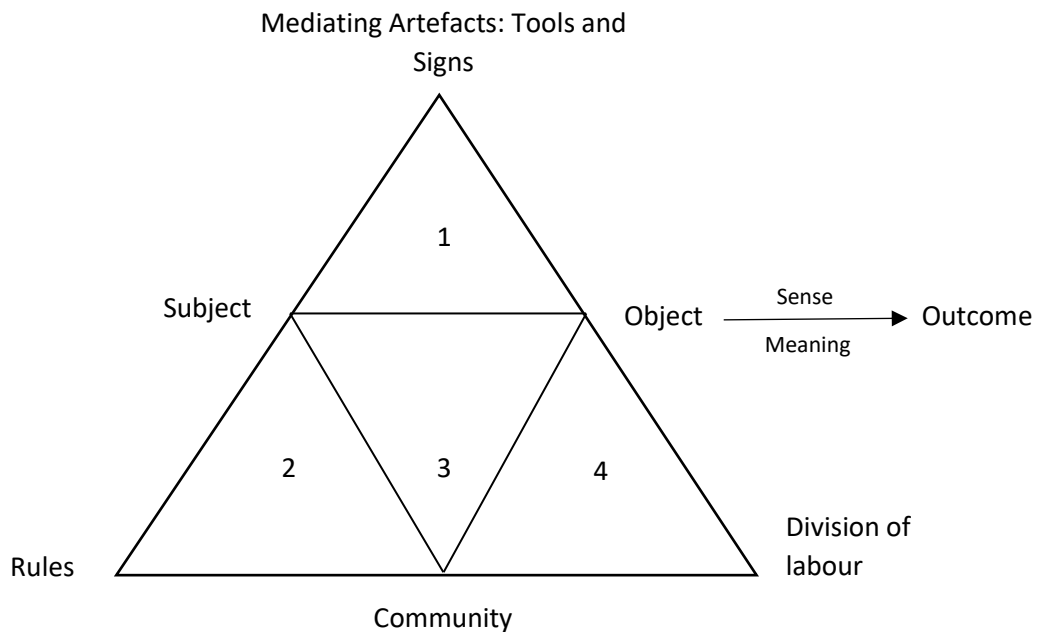
In the context of education and primary schools within my research, the Nodes can be named as descriptors summarised in Table 4 below.

Table 4 - The seven nodes and associated descriptors

Nodes	Descriptors
Subject	A teacher.
Rules	Social norms and policy frameworks.
Mediating Artefacts: Tools and Signs	Support mechanisms that mediate challenges, e.g., discussions with mentors and professional development.
Community	Stakeholders in the teachers' schools and community with interest in the education it provides.
Division of labour	How the work of the community is distributed (linear flat organisational structures of hierarchal).
Objects	The teacher's aspirations to achieve their objectives.
Outcome	The goal that the teacher wants to achieve e.g., secure pupil progress of promotion.

Core triadic association 1: Interactions between the teacher, and support mechanisms (e.g., working with a mentor or accessing PD) enable the teacher to aim for their career aspirations. Working cooperatively as part of a productive triadic association between the teacher and support to try and accomplish their ultimate objectives maintains their motivation. The support provided by mentors or more experienced others who are conversant with the modes of support within and outside of the school's social context aids access to development opportunities. This support aims to help the teacher to achieve their goals.

Core triadic association 2: Exchanges between the teacher and stakeholders working within the policy frameworks can be examined and the rules of perceived 'normal' expectations for a teacher. This association illustrates the interactions and perhaps tensions (or contradictions as Engeström termed them) between a range of stakeholders within the school community. Tensions arise when expectations are not met during policy implementation or once the policy frameworks have been embedded in professional practice. The exchange of information happens during implementation processes where policy is enacted in practice.

Core triadic association 3: demonstrates how the teacher works with the school community collaboratively to achieve a common goal, e.g., that the children are happy and complete a high-quality education. As many of the stakeholders will be parents and carers of the learners, there are high expectations that consume many resources available to the community. There is a reliance on the teacher and their effectiveness in practice to achieve the goal.

Core triadic association 4: involves the community and distribution of the labour as perceived as required to achieve the overall educational goals of the school.

Stakeholders draw on the expertise within the community to achieve the object and outcome as efficiently as possible. Different community members drive the organisation of the whole professional activity system in different ways.

What makes a CHAT system complex is what happens at the interface of the exchanges between the four triadic associations and how the system works effectively or ineffectively as a whole. This goes beyond what Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) model enables me to analyse. Still, CHAT is a two-dimensional system and I do wonder if the theoretical frame will enable me to analyse the whole complexity of an individual teacher's system. I will consider this in greater depth in my analysis of the findings and when reporting my conclusions and recommendations. How social happenings play out in practice within schools might be harmonious, at tension, or both across different triadic associations at any time. It will be essential to examine each of the four triadic associations separately in the discussion (Chapter 5), and then understand how they work together as a complex activity system.

Locating my research in the epistemological stance of CHAT:
Curiosity in teacher education research and using CHAT is increasing, but very few studies in ITT have used CHAT (Wilson, 2014, p.21). Six previous studies have focused on pre-service, teacher-educator, and mentor perspectives. CHAT is a useful theoretical lens that frames the analysis of social aspects of teachers' complex lives as practised through their professional lived experiences. I will also acknowledge the limitations of the method and contradictions provided through insights from the six previous studies and the broader methodological literature discussed below (Anagnostopoulos, Smith, and Basmadjian, 2007; Dang, 2013; Stillman and Anderson, 2011; Tsui and Law, 2007; Valencia *et al.*, 2009; Waitoller and Kozleski, 2013).

I chose to adopt CHAT as a theoretical, analytical framework based on its benefits to this type of study. I propose to use CHAT with a selection of participants (three ECTs), which is different to previous studies. I will ask them to talk about their lived professional experiences and ask the teachers to reflect retrospectively on their motivations before and during teacher training (pre-service). To support locating my research in the existing field of research, I will acknowledge previous research in this area and how that has informed my research and methodological choices.

Anagnostopoulos, Smith and Basmadjian (2007) found that there needed to be more teacher preparation at university and practice in a school context. They concluded that exchanging tools as part of the Tools and Signs Node, supported teaching and enabled student teachers to learn contextual practices and to be successful in a specific school context. Discussion with peers at network meetings further supported exchanges to help develop practice in schools, which involved negotiating a social language associated with a professional approach.

Anagnostopoulos *et al.* research highlighted tensions between the abstract vocabulary associated with training at university and the experiential and situated language used in schools. Ideological verbal systems described by Bakhtin (1981, p.300) stated that language supported "forms of conceptualising the world of words, specific world views, each characterised by its object, meanings, and value". Through articulating competing views, Anagnostopoulos *et al.* found that student teachers could use questioning as part of argumentation to refine their understanding of theories of teaching taught at universities and develop their practice in school contexts.

Other academics have interpreted tensions and conflicts in personal and professional activities, as manifestations of contradictions within such systems, without being contradictory themselves. Stillman and Anderson (2011) found a considerable distance between earlier lived experiences, languages, cultures, and practices in schools, concluding that pre-service training did not appear to prepare student teachers for practice. They reflected that CHAT enabled them to analyse how participants in their study,

> Navigated educational activity that was impacted upon by internal and external factors whilst reconciling discrepancies in mandated policy and pedagogical processes which contributed to their success and struggles (2011, p. 23).

Pressures from policies with high levels of personal accountability for aspects of the seventh Outcome Node, left participants negotiating the distribution of powers and responsibility. Support came in the form of building upon students' resources (cultural and linguistic) that enabled them to be successful, despite policies or local directives. CHAT enabled the recognition of strengths and limitations of the activity system in which the student teacher was operating and helped them to learn and adapt to cultural approaches with sensitivity.

Some studies have focused on post-graduate masters' programmes as opposed to undergraduate degree programmes and found that the participants simultaneously operated in multiple settings with competing demands which moulded their actions in practice. Valencia *et al.* (2009) found that triadic relationships were dynamic but were often challenging and acted with dominant stakeholders more like a dyad plus one. This led to disappointing professional development outcomes for the pre-service teachers. Recommendations from this study suggested having clear roles aligned with individuals' intended outcomes and aspirations and not just redefined to

meet others' purposes. Appropriating tools and engaging in reflective practice also enhanced the culturally mediated experience.

Each role within a complex system and the person that fulfils the role comes to a particular working context with a range of past experiences, beliefs, knowledge, and understanding. These varied experiences converge at junctions of histories (where Nodes cluster) and meet local expectations (implicitly and explicitly). Understanding these interactions at Node junctions is essential to understand the challenges for teachers. Understanding how identity develops amongst power relations leads to problem-solving with peers, often mediated by those more experienced others that support student teachers who are often perceived as having power over them (Britzman, 1991). This leads to the formation of performance identities (Goffman, 1959), where individuals create identities to meet the expectations and needs of others.

Two previous studies have used teachers as subjects in a programme for UG pre-service teachers and analysed contradictions in the activity system (Tsui and Law, 2007; Dang, 2013). Tsui and Law focused on pairs of participants representing three roles - mentor, programme instructor, and teaching candidates. The study found that as a contradiction, opposing views at system boundaries where activity systems overlapped led to an increased need to simultaneously support the teaching candidate to enhance learning whilst developing their capability in tackling poorly defined goals at boundary zones between one activity system and another. Building positive relationships conducive to the school's working environment was key to student-teacher success.

Dang's (2013) study focused on developing the professional identity of two teaching candidates in England and Vietnam collaborating during a paired placement. This study examined the pair's training journey and how early conflicts manifested when negotiating multiple and changing identities. Developing collaborative opportunities to support and mediate the conflict process was crucial to meaning-making and pedagogical practice as part of complex social interactions. Dang mapped the trajectory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978) and contradictions as part of a paired intersectional system.

Waitoller and Kozleski's study (2013) also focused on the art of negotiation and the shared responsibility for teacher training between universities and schools, where dialogue and engagement were critical aspects of successful training. Merging tensions existed where different activity systems collided and individuals with other goals engaged in a common activity to draw out mutual benefits. Waitoller & Kozleski theorised partnerships to engage schools, universities, and government through competing activity systems where synergies or tensions in common practice were not the exceptions but commonplace. They found that participants had to attend to problem-solving in politically charged contexts where the distribution of expertise was hierarchal, often arranged in top-down systems. Knowing these organisational structures and how workload might be distributed in schools will help me appreciate this in the context of what the participants describe.

CHAT as a theoretical and analytical framework:

Whilst I acknowledge the possible limits in the application of the second-generation CHAT model (Engeström, 1987) the analysis will be adhering to the examination of the four core triadic associations identified by Engeström (1987) and is aligned with

the six previous studies in education that have used CHAT. Another limitation is that

using CHAT as an analytical frame restricts the examination of findings to the social,

cultural and historical aspects of individual teacher's professional activity systems as

I will not be examining overlapping systems.

The existing literature, summarised in chapters two and three, including the six

previous studies, provides the following information in Table 5 below to support

summarising the current knowledge of teachers' professional activity systems.

Table 5 - The seven nodes, features, and existing knowledge

CHAT Node	Specific Features	Existing Knowledge
Subject	The individual teacher whose part in the activity system is taken as a perspective of their professional life.	Performance identities and how they develop among power relations (Goffman, 1959; Pennington, 2015; Richards, 2015; Zimmerman, 1998). Negotiating multiple and changing identities (Valencia et al., 2009; Dang, 2013; Williams, 2014). Notions of professionalism (Downie, 1990; Day, 2002; Sachs, 2003; Evans, 2011).
Rules	The expectations or norms of a qualified teacher are regulated by policies implemented within the activity system.	Policy Frameworks apply high levels of personal accountability, which involves negotiating the distribution of powers and responsibility (Stillman and Anderson, 2011). Policy discourse perpetuates some social norms (Ball, 1994; Bowe et al., 1992; Trowler, 1998; Taylor, 1997). The policy can misshape professional practice (Ouellette et al., 2018; Gorski, 2021).
Tools and signs	The support mechanisms mediate the challenges presented when trying to accomplish some professional activities as part of the parts of the system.	Support learning standard practices and enable successful teaching in a specific school context (Anagnostopoulos, Smith & Basmadjian, 2007). Discussion with peers and developing a social language to support developing professional practice (Bakhtin, 1981).

Community	Stakeholders in the activity that may act independently or cooperatively with a shared interest in the object and purpose of school education	Some stakeholders are dominant. To support the activity system, roles must be negotiated, clear, and aligned with the aspirations and goals of individuals. Appropriating tools and engaging in reflective practice enhance the culturally mediated experience. (Valencia et al., 2005). Some stakeholders are perceived as having power over the teachers (Britzman, 1991). Developing effective partnerships between schools, families, and communities through educational programmes (Epstein, 2010). Hierarchies exist within the systems (Waitoller and Kozleski, 2013).
Division of labour	How the professional activity is divided between stakeholders in the community.	Defining roles and goals and forming positive relationships conducive to the school working environment aids teacher success (Tsui and Law, 2007).
Object	The objectives are to support individuals or groups to achieve their outcomes cooperatively.	Drawing out multiple benefits where different activity systems collide. Where the challenge interfaces meet, and individuals with other goals engage in a common activity. Activity within the system is directed amongst the individuals within the community (Waitoller and Kozleski, 2013).
Outcome	The professional goal	The outcome of a professional career is often preconceived through early aspirations and motivations to join the teaching profession (Eccles et al., 1983, 2005; Sinclair, 2008; Watt and Richardson, 2012; Perryman and Calvert, 2019).

Visualising a professional activity system in the CHAT analytical frame might support

reimagining the system to re-frame and think through solutions to some of the

struggles teachers are currently facing. The narratives will inform what aspects

contribute to each Node within an individual activity system. Then I will be able to analyse how the system interacts with the individual teacher in a specific school context.

I do not want to presume that this research lens to examine teachers' professional lives would transform teachers' lives and working practices. I will not be explicitly asking as part of this study during discussion and reflection with teachers on practice, about the potential transformative effects reflection might have on aspects of teachers' lives, but I will report findings such as transformation if they become apparent through teachers' reflections as captured in their Life-Histories.

How CHAT applies in the pedagogical practice of primary schools:

The practice of teachers and the activity systems they operate in are localised in my study to primary schools, which I acknowledge are part of larger educational systems set in socio-political contexts under the influence of directive policies issued by the English Government (Wilson, 2014). Teachers support learning in schools as part of a developmental process. Learning originates from a social level external to a person or group before it is internalised and operationalised at a personal level (Vygotsky, 1978). Boag-Munro (2010, p.121) states that CHAT enables analysis of educational teaching and learning in a context within schools to support identifying alternative or new practices and to see social situations in a new light perhaps.

> Who (subject) does what to whom/what (object), in what circumstances (rules, community, division of labour, where and when) (p.121).

The quote above illustrates that learning as a process involves people (subjects), artefacts (objects) and the particulars of how the activity occurs (when and where). CHAT advances Vygotskian concept of mediation and social-level ideas reflecting the complexities of internal and external processes. As a theoretical lens CHAT

theory frames the complex systems visually to enable the complex messiness of such systems to be analysed and to consider how these processes manifest themselves continuously in teachers' lives.

There is a belief that teachers could, as a network of people with transecting activity systems, be working towards a common goal, being creative and visioning something for education that is not yet available as an innovative solution to educational challenges (Engeström and Sannino, 2010). How these professionals cooperate in the context of this research will be unique, and there is an opportunity to use the CHAT's triadic frame to examine the positive associations and disconnects between the seven Nodes as part of a teacher's professional activity system. Social events and critical professional happenings are perhaps given meaning and value when enacted in a social context; this happens in schools and classrooms where the teachers' professional lives play out. This leads to meaning-making within complex social interactions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p.12).

It is appropriate here to explain each of the seven CHAT Nodes. During analysis, the researcher could annotate specific observations about each teacher's Nodes on the analytical CHAT frame that is specific to the professional activity of each primary school teacher. This can support determining how activity systems like these might function to support, or conversely create barriers, to a primary teacher's career within a particular school context as part of the current education system in England.

The Subject:

The subject will be primary school teachers. For my study, this will be those teachers who have taught for one-, two-, and three-years respectively (ECTs). The aim of examining the impacts of policy and practice on different teachers at different points

in their careers is intended to understand teacher perceptions of the support, disconnects, and barriers for them at these specific points in time. The literature stated that the highest exit rate from the profession (attrition rate) is between 20% and 36% at 2 and 5 years, respectively.

The Rules:

The rules are the expectations or *norms* of a qualified teacher. For teachers, their role is that they teach children and support their educational progression, and the scope of the role is narrowed by following the National Curriculum and other policies set out by the DfE. However, implementation of those rules and the mechanisms that help teachers to do this effectively, differ from school to school and depend upon local arrangements and contexts that precede the decisions of school leadership teams or Executives of Multi Academy Trusts. Exploring how the rules and expectations of the policy implementation affect teachers' professional lives might expose where disconnects arise and where further support is required to solve the barriers presented to teachers' experience and to support giving teachers further autonomy over their roles.

Community:

The community for teachers would typically comprise the teachers, peers, mentors, university-based ITT staff, education establishment partners, pupils, parents, outside agencies, and virtual communities. By talking to teachers throughout this research, other key players in the communities of teacher activity systems may be identified.

Object:

The object of a system leads to an outcome and for primary teachers (or teachers generally) the main objectives are being confident and competent teaching professionals and supporting their pupils. I have kept an open mind as the teachers may have other objectives, such as gaining a higher social position or status,

achieving financial security, impacting pupils' lives, or gratifying others. The research findings will determine the essential objectives of teachers in this study, which will be discussed and examined following the presentation of findings.

Outcomes:

In this context, an outcome can be viewed as the ultimate or long-term aspirational goal. In the context of teachers, this could be their pathway of progression to leadership roles within teaching, and it could be focused on the pupils rather than themselves in a role of caring and wanting to make a difference.

Making a difference is a complex concept; difference means different things to different people and what an adult feel should be different might not be what the child wants to change. Making a difference for another reflects a power imbalance between the teacher controlling 'making the difference' and the learner receiving what is different, there is no nuance when difference is stated as to who it is intended for or whether the consequence is positive (or negative). There might be an assumption that making a difference is good; this would be a generalisation and gives the teacher power and agency, not necessarily the child.

Some of the literature reviewed on caring (Zygmunt, 2018) argued that caring could be a powerful and disruptive force changing how education is *done* (Rivera-McCutchen, 2012; Rolón-Dow, 2005; Valenzuela, 2005). The aspect of caring and the politics of it in this context remain under-analysed in teacher education (Pennington, Brock, & Ndura, 2012). It will be essential to analyse this aspect in detail in this study's context to avoid being complicit if the element of *care* arises in the findings from the participants in this study. The danger is not acknowledging this powerful aspect of a teacher's life and falling into the trap of portraying teachers as

educational heroes or framing all pupils as needing *care* (Toshalis, 2012). An alternative conception to be considered here is the one of empowerment; how policy supports (or not) the teachers' ability to empower learners and whether the policy has a transformative effect when implemented in practice (Struthers, 2017).

Tools and signs:

Mechanisms that support the teachers (subject) to achieve their object and outcome. For a teacher, the tools and signs can be many and will differ depending on the teachers' needs and local arrangements within schools. Tools may include experience in schools; observations; evaluations of learning and teaching; assessments of professional competencies against the Teachers' Standards; appraisal discussions; professional development plans, and frameworks such as the Early Career Framework.

Divisions of Labour:

Division of labour considers how a teacher's role and the activities required to deliver education manifest in the social, environmental, personal, and political context on multiple levels. The decision about this division of labour in English schools might come from the DfE, Universities, MATs, or Local Education Authorities (where they still exist) or locally from school leaders. Labours may be divided whilst implementing statutory frameworks such as the Teachers' Standards, ITT Core Content Framework, or ECF. This may be impacted by decisions made by school management as part of hierarchal structures or imposed by external regulatory bodies such as Ofsted. Labour division lends itself to analysing appropriate policy that impacts the four core triadic associations and seven Nodes as part of the CHAT analysis.

Using CHAT as an analytical frame to examine the seven Nodes as theorised by Engeström (1987) will be a methodological contribution to the teacher education literature and a unique contribution to the existing field of research on teachers' lives and early careers. I might by listening to the three teachers original Life-History narratives and subsequent analysis of the findings, better understand how the social context and demography of situated practice associated with teachers' lives supports or creates barriers to their early career aspirations. This may support recommendations for the implementation of local policy and practical solutions to maintain ECTs satisfaction during early career, provide support in the form of a mentor and retain them in the profession. Teachers' lives play out as part of the complex educational processes, and they work hard despite many challenges whilst trying to satisfy their motivations to achieve their early career aspirations (Bullough, Draper, Smith, and Birrell, 2004: Valencia, Martin, Place, and Grossman, 2009; Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Zeichner, 2010).

I do not presume that this is a method that is an intended intervention for teachers to keep them moving positively along their career pathway to achieve their ambitions; it is an assumption that this is what teachers need. I am curious if this research process will become an intervention, and I will not be following up with participants to find out if these reflections supported them; this is scope for future study. It is hoped that this process of recounting a professional life will provide teachers with a safe space to undertake those reflections and engage with their thoughts to plan forward if they wish. The narrative data is intended to capture teachers' motivations, experiences and challenges, and their voices and perceptions will be treated as valid and unique to the individual. I have detailed the implications of my ethical concerns

and how I have planned to manage these concerns through reflexive practices as part of the research process.

The three chapters that follow comprise the findings, discussion, and conclusions & recommendations. In the next chapter, I present details of how the data analysis was conducted and explain the narrative findings that emerged from the interview narratives and discussions.

Chapter 4 – Making sense of complex narrative findings.

In this chapter, I thematically present the narrative findings. The findings are
organised into four aspects,

- the social aspects of the three teachers' lives,
- the political aspects
- the cultural aspects, and finally,
- the historical aspects

The first three of these four aspects discuss the findings from the perspective of "*A
heuristic framework of contextual factors' impact on ECTs and programs*"
(Kutsyuruba *et al.*, 2019, p.116) reviewed in Chapter 2, p.47. The fourth aspect
arises from my findings and is part of my original contribution to the existing
knowledge. Personal and organisational aspects are woven through the findings but
are less explicit and these aspects will be drawn out and analysed in chapter 5.

The two methods used to gather the narratives were interviewing (Life-History and
semi-structured) and discussion. I approached interviewing like a conversation
between myself and each teacher (participant) to generate original narrative data
contributing to teacher education research. The participants were given a
pseudonym to maintain their anonymity: Martha was the least experienced teacher
and had been working for one year post-qualification. Gina had been working for two
years post-qualification. Ricky was the most experienced teacher and had been
working for three years post-qualification. The data-gathering process mapped
below.

Table 6 – The whole research process

Participant	Initial contact date	Life-History Interview		Semi-Structured Interview		Discussion	
		Date	Duration	Date	Duration	Date	Duration
Martha	22 April 2019	06.05.19	27m29s	20.08.19	44m35s	01.09.19	1h05m29s
Ricky	16 January 2020	26.01.20	53m01s	27.01.20	1h05m55s	10.02.20	1h17m43s
Gina	16 April 2020	24.04.20	34m12s	24.04.20	1h00m55s	08.05.20	1h19m19s

As soon as possible after the interviews were completed, they were transcribed. The transcripts were returned to the Martha, Ricky and Gina to be member checked and agreed as an accurate record of the discussion. Member checking helped to support the validity of the findings and to ensure that the three teachers were happy with how the discussion had been transcribed, with an opportunity to edit or omit data. Martha, Ricky and Gina were pleased with the transcripts, and no edits were made.

It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic did impact the data collection process. The interviews and discussions with Martha were all conducted face-to-face. I sought permission from Ricky and Gina to change the mode of the interviews to online to gather the data and audio record the discussions remotely. With participant agreement, the interviews and discussions for Ricky and Gina were conducted online via Microsoft Teams © due to the national lockdown. This mode of interviewing enabled us to see and hear each other and share documents we discussed, such as the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d). I appreciate that this change in the data collection mode could have altered how we communicated. I do not feel it affected our conversation or trust regarding our researcher-participant relationship. The discussions seemed to flow as they had done with Martha face-to-face.

Data analysis strategy:

The analytical approach I used as a *first pass* attempted to make sense of the narrative data and was rooted in an interpretive paradigm reflecting my epistemological and ontological positioning to the research. This involved repeatedly listening to the narrative recordings from the two interviews (Life-History and semi-

structured) to try and identify emerging themes focused on the qualitative analysis of social narrative data. The analysis adopted a humanistic approach (Newby, 2014) and detailed the teachers' narratives regarding their professional lives and their practice in primary schools in England. Because it is hard to present narrative without some analysis of the discourse, Chapter 4 is a combination of findings and discussion.

The data collected as part of the discussion about the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d) is presented in the next chapter, Chapter 5, and considers the possible evidence supporting each research question. The discussion chapter contextualises the whole narrative and the complex systems the teachers operated in as part of their school, and how personal, organisational, social, cultural, political, historical aspects impact on teachers' lives.

Data analysis:
The initial analysis phase involved repetitively listening to the recordings and transcribing the data for each participant gathered from the two methods, interviewing (Life-History interview, semi-structured interview) and discussion about the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d). The iterative process supported me to visualise the relationships emerging from the narrative data revisiting the theory and literature to understand the evidence and what the three teachers have experienced in the early part of their professional lives from social, political, cultural, and historical aspects. The narrative data was so rich that it was overwhelming at first. The first pass supported me in listening and identifying emerging themes actively, some aligned with existing literature themes. This was useful to begin understanding the volume of data the narrative provided.

The initial analytical process was focused on individual words or descriptive discursive phrases as part of the whole narrative that could be aligned with the four main aspects. I acknowledge that how frequently a word appeared did not necessarily mean that the frequency alone denoted the importance or relevance of a word. I realised that the significance of that word could only be judged when analysed in the context of the whole narrative, which gave that word true meaning (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000; Merrill and West, 2009). The reading of Fairclough (2003) reminded me that the analysis of narrative discourse,

> Is based on the assumption that language is an irreducible part of social life, dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life, so that social analysis and research always has to take account of language (p.2).

I understand that words are essential and should be read as part of the whole discussion, which is situated in a particular social context. I understand descriptive discursive phrases as groups of words used to describe happenings as part of a professional life shared during discussion.

Polkinghorne (1988) considered narrative to be a story, and someone researching narrative must be interested in both the process of storying and the final narrative. He observed that the narrative is tentative rather than assertive and does not provide certainties due to the subjectivity of the data told from an individual's perspective. I was interested in the research because I was curious to find out if current teachers' experiences were like my own experiences as a primary school teacher and what might have been different. I was very clear about my position in the methodology, and I believe my curiosity extended to the teacher's version of their professional life as they told it.

Bold (2012) adopted a similar curious approach to her research and reflected that,

> Educationalists may be interested in analysing conversation and dialogue for the ways in which participants understand each other and develop shared meaning…the dialogue is real and tells part of a story without any explanation (p.27).

I valued gathering the data using interviews (Life-History and semi-structured) and discussion. The narrative was rich; the initial thematic analysis and meta-analysis of the narrative brought together the different parts of the whole narrative. My meta-analysis added a personal interpretation and questioning of the complexity of the relationships and emerging themes in the narratives. An example of Martha's transcribed Life-History interview with my meta-analysis is in Appendix Two, enabling the reader to see how my thoughts, interpretations and questions were reflected in the analysis. I was drawn to the socio-political, cultural, and historical context, complicated by organisational and personal aspects which were integral to the teachers' lives. I will now move on to present and examine the findings using the four aspects as the sub-headings.

The social aspects of the three teachers' lives

The teachers involved in my research described many aspects of their professional lives that were social in nature. They talked about relationships with peers that worked in the school, with the children whom they taught, with members of the broader community, including parents and carers and other stakeholders in the community, including those from local organisations that were invested in some way in supporting education within the teacher's school context.

Motivations and relationships:

Teachers also talked about their identity within this social community and how they felt about their efficacy and ability to perform well as a teacher when supported by effective relationships. The teachers talked about relationships differently; they

named people vital to them as part of the school community. The more experienced

teachers (Ricky and Gina) mentioned their families as necessary in supportive

relationships. They all expressed when relationships were positive and equally when

there were tensions. As part of the Life-History interview transcripts, the first

relationships that the teachers reflected upon were relationships with those who had

supported their career aspirations and motivations to enter a career in teaching.

Martha stated,

> I think through all my life I've had teachers that have influenced me to be a
> better student to push myself to do things that maybe I didn't want to do, to
> begin with, and I think having role models like that in your life kind of, makes
> you then want to be that for other people (Martha, Life-History Interview).

Reflecting on what Martha said, I realised that the teacher-pupil relationship was

strong enough for the teacher to want to be a role model and encouraged Martha to

aim for their ambitions. It was evident that Martha respected the teacher because

they wanted to achieve the outcome and use that influence to please and achieve

what the teacher desired. Therefore, relationships were influential: Martha evidenced

this relationship as a motivator to work hard and meet ambitions to satisfy the

desires of those they respect and have a strong relationship with.

I did wonder if Martha realised that building positive relationships with the pupils to

inspire and motivate them was something they perceived as a responsibility in their

current role. I asked Martha (as I did Ricky and Gina), 'what did you aspire to be as a

teacher?' and Martha replied,

> I kinda wanted to be the teacher that you could come to about anything. It didn't
> matter if it was a silly comment or something that upset you or that made you
> really happy. I just wanted to be that teacher you wanted to tell everything to
> (Martha, Life-History Interview).

This informed me that Martha felt their relationship with the pupils was important.

Building a trusting relationship was critical; if a pupil was going to confide in a

teacher to get support, they must have formed a strong relationship. Pupils must trust the teacher when divulging things that are important to them. Building positive teacher-pupil relationships improve the classroom environment and positively supports teachers' coping ability, reducing teacher stress (Kyriacou, 2001). This reinforces the need to ensure teacher-pupil relationships are positive.

For Ricky, the most experienced teacher who had been teaching for three years cited relationships with their family and a desire to have a stable job as necessary. They came to teaching as a career change stating, "I just wanted to do something that wasn't the same every day (Ricky, Life-History Interview), aiming to provide stability for their family. Nurturing those close relationships was important as an initial motivator to join the teaching profession. A family member encouraged Ricky to pursue a career in teaching, and they stated,

> It was my Father-In-Law, who was a retired secondary school teacher at that time, that said, 'no, I think you'd be good as a teacher and capable of it [name],' and so actually he kind of led me into it (Ricky, Life-History Interview).

Ricky admitted they needed to be more confident about whether it was the right choice as part of a career change. Still, the faith of a close member of the family and some classroom experience encouraged Ricky to go into teaching. A few months later, they embarked on initial teacher training. When I asked Ricky, 'what did you aspire to be as a teacher?' they responded,

> Early on, I thought I would be a teacher that would be respected and listened to. When I started training, I had a preconceived idea of what a primary school teacher should be based on my experience of primary school twenty years beforehand. That isn't the person I am, so I am already moulded and changed to be a different teacher than what I set out and thought I would be. But I always wanted to be open and approachable for the children, but just friendly enough, so they knew the boundaries. I think I treat them more respectfully now if I am honest" (Ricky, Life-History Interview).

Ricky based their perception of a teacher on their own lived experiences as a child at school. Their identity seemed to be at the tension between what they thought 'being' a teacher was and whom they wanted to be (open and approachable for the children). They reflected that they wanted positive relationships with the pupils and that perhaps their own lived experiences included negative relationships with teachers, where maybe they could not approach them in the way that they want their pupils to be able to engage with them. The idea of 'being' a teacher can therefore be threatened by inadequate peer relationships (Bieler and Burns Thomas, 2009). The idea of being moulded was interesting, and I prompted Ricky to tell me a bit more about that. They said,

> I suppose I was under no illusion that children can be challenging and that you don't automatically get their respect because you're the teacher. Those days are long, long gone. I suppose the point I am making is that I started out I was quite black and white. For example, if I said, 'I want you to sit down now so we can get on with this learning', I just expected that to be done. Now I look far more, I reflect on the reasons why behaviour might not be what I expect and what we can do to make that happen. I am a lot softer. I have an 18-month-old boy, and I think since he's been born, I've changed. I look at every child as if they are somebody's baby…The school ethos affects relationships I think there are teachers of varying experience, and they model and I think I won't be like that or I aspire to be like that (Ricky, Life-History Interview).

Because of previous experiences, Ricky thought being a teacher was about being strict. He realised early on in his career that gaining respect comes from building positive relationships, and reminded himself that pupils usually exhibit behaviours for a reason. They talked about being reflective and less bipolar between right and wrong, instead trying to see things from the pupil's perspective. Capel (1991) stated that developing reflective practice can reframe classroom incidents which can support favourable working conditions and for teachers to feel more positive about challenges, mitigating the negative consequences of teachers' expectations not being met.

Ricky feels that having their own child supports them to better understand children and their development, and sees the child from a parent's perspective, which is reflected in them placing high importance on developing close professional relationships. They talked of observing what other teachers modelled and that they made choices about whom to aspire to be. I have learned from Ricky that at this stage of their career, relationships were essential to their motives to teach and how to be a teacher with children equally how critical positive relationships were with the pupils. It seemed their identity morphed or was "moulded" (Ricky, Life-History Interview) by experience in the school context and from watching more experienced teachers. This is described in the literature as the "situated identity" (p. 90, Zimmerman, 1998), which morphs to conform to the social situation. Ricky felt confident enough to make choices about their behaviours, which reflected a strong sense of 'self' but was aware that they were being interpreted by others (Pennington, 2015). I viewed the shift in identity as a positive thing, and I think Ricky felt this moulding was also positive. It seemed that any negative feelings of inadequacy early on in their career shifted to feeling more secure (Williams, 2014).

Gina was motivated to teach as their sister had been a teacher for thirteen years, and she inspired Gina. Gina stated,

> She was sort of my inspiration when I looked at careers and what I wanted to do. I looked at teaching and volunteered at a local school, and I really enjoyed it, so I discussed it with her and thought and discussed what she thought, you know if I would be able to do it, you know, if it was for me, and it sort of went from there. I applied for my university degree and thoroughly enjoyed my placement. Yes, I mean, it had its challenges, and now it does have its challenges. Looking back to when I started, you see the teacher I wanted to be and what your mentor wants you to be (Gina, Life-History Interview).

Gina, like Ricky, was inspired by a family member who was a teacher and enjoyed experiences in school. They needed encouragement, and they sought it from their

sister to establish whether they felt a career in teaching was right for them, and they respected their opinion. They mentioned challenges and wanting to be a particular type of teacher and indicated the differences in what they wanted to be and what their mentor thought being a teacher was. They were trying to define their own identity, but that was relative to the perceptions of others [the mentor] (Pennington, 2015). I asked Gina to expand on the description of "the teacher they wanted to be", and they said,

> I think I look at experienced teachers, and I think they are perfect, and they've got everything spot on. Whereas with me, I think you know, it's a work in progress. When I was at university, I thought I was going to be that perfect teacher, and to me, the perfect teacher is one that doesn't ever worry; maybe that's not a real thing. But I soon realised that it comes with time and there is no such thing as a perfect teacher. And even a teacher that has been working for ten years they are still learning, and I think only recently [two years into the career] I started to accept that (Gina, Life-History Interview).

Gina aspired to be like her preconceived idea of a perfect teacher. Reflecting on this part of the conversation, I wondered if Gina felt insecure about their self-efficacy and whether they perceived that everything was going right if they were not worrying. They had realised more recently that 'perfect' did not exist and that practical experience as a teacher helped them to realise what a teacher was and that a teacher does not stop learning. This reflects a difference in the teacher's personal and situated identity and that it changed based on experience in a social context. Building positive working relationships with pupils and more experienced others, like a mentor, positively increases feelings of personal accomplishment, reduces anxiety and increases job satisfaction (Atkins *et al.*, 2003; Kokkinos, 2007; Veldman *et al.*, 2013).

All three teachers reflected on their motivations to teach, and which relationships were important to them when making career choices. They also reflected on the

teacher they aspired to be and how their situated identity changed with practice to 'fit' the social context and expectations of others. Martha, Ricky and Gina shared similar views that positive relationships with the pupils were essential to managing behaviours, supporting learning, and increasing their pupils' confidence in their accomplishments, bolstering their feelings of self-efficacy.

Support:

During the interviews, they also expressed times when relationships were tense and how this made them feel personally and professionally. They reflected on support from more experienced colleagues and how that helped them manage the challenges of being a teacher. Martha used specific terms related to the reality of teaching, like coping and conflict related to workload and stated,

> training should reflect the reality of teaching to support teachers to cope with the reality of the job and,

> the workload just gets heavier and heavier and heavier, and then you become this mess where I feel you just like can't cope (Martha, Life-History Interview).

Martha reflected that teaching was different to what they expected or imagined before teaching. It seemed like their prior expectations were not being met or were conflicting with the expectations of others. Martha asserted that teacher training did not reflect the reality of teaching. I acknowledge that reality is an interpretive state and is not objective. Multiple realities develop as a result of experiencing *struggle* over time in a social context. The literature asserts that this struggle strengthens people (Lieberman, 1996). Realities are multifaceted and reflect different perspectives (Wenger, 1998). Feeling like they are not coping indicated that they possibly did need further support to help them manage. Positive teacher-pupil and peer-peer relationships reduce emotional exhaustion and stress and prevent eventual burnout (Shernoff *et al.*, 2011).

Ricky and Gina did not explicitly use *coping* and *conflict* in their interview narrative; they described specific feelings associated with managing. For example, Ricky used words like "very difficult" and "survival" when discussing coping with workload and work-life balance. For conflict, Ricky cited "fight" and "battles" and feeling "panic" and "fear". Within their context, Ricky said when recounting discussions over workload in early career,

> I pick my battles [about saying no to work tasks] depending on who it is, and,

> The daily routine was about survival as NQT learning to be a teacher, and routines, meeting expectations. I am calmer with myself as a teacher [now in year 3 of career] part of that learning curve from being an NQT, I feel less panic (Ricky, Life-History Interview).

Ricky reflected on battles with the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) over work allocation from subject leads and observations for professional development. They also talked about shifting expectations and recalled that once one professional development target was met, they were issued more. In their third year of teaching, I interpreted from the narrative that Ricky felt much calmer and less panicked by the performance-related expectations; that experience supported them to panic less.

Gina talked about struggling, feeling alone and, at times, desperate during their early career. When Gina described coping, they mentioned words such as feeling "alone", "desperate", or "struggle" with words such as "confrontational", "intimidation", "fear", "scared", or "daunted". They said that when reflecting on their context,

> Getting used to being on my own, struggling to manage those little things.

> In the beginning, I struggled with leading staff [teaching assistants] that had been teaching longer than me, …relationships changed.

> I wear my heart on my sleeve; it's difficult for me to have a game face if I am having a bad day, everyone knows I am (Gina, Life-History Interview).

Gina felt that moving from the first year into their second year of teaching was challenging because of the sudden changes and lack of in-class support as an ECT with increasing expectations of professional autonomy. The offer of support from the mentor was always there, but it was not immediate, and they had no teaching assistant, which took some adjusting too.

Frustrations and support as a mitigation:

Two unanimously mentioned words across Martha, Gina and Ricky's narratives about working conditions were "frustration" and "motivation". They all talked about their context and being motivated to teach and do their jobs well for the benefit of the pupils. All three teachers felt the pupils came first, even at times I interpreted before their own needs. This is reflected in the expectations of *Part Two of the Professional Teachers' Standards (2011),* which states, "teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities" (Department for Education. 2011, p.14). This need to be professional and always on duty added pressure on these three teachers.

They often expressed frustration at barriers that got in the way of how they perceived they should be doing the job correctly. These barriers often were attributed to a lack of support from SLTs, aspects of behaviour management and low-level disruption hindering learning, and expectations of sometimes confrontational parents. Most of all, this frustration was attributed to relationships and experiences the teachers had contended with that left them often feeling personally and professionally challenged. This made me reflect again on the conflicting identities and how all three teachers seemed to adopt a "default" (p.60, Richards, 2006) institutional identity in the

classroom to meet the expectations of others and perhaps some of the frustration was borne from not being themselves and adopting their intimate identities. They reflected that training could have prepared them for personal and professional challenges. They acknowledged that training is complex, given how different each school context is. They felt that having a good mentor was crucial as part of the support mechanisms to enable them to cope with professional life within their schools. This might indicate that a robust support package like the Early Careers Framework (Department for Education, 2019a) is crucial to support teachers during their early careers. I will now examine what the three teachers said about mentor support.

Mentoring in the social context was integrated into the school community. A dynamic mentoring partnership supported dealing with challenges between the local and community context. Martha, at the end of the first year of teaching, reflected that they had no consistent support. They had four mentors across the year due to illness, staff turnover, and changes in senior leadership. They had asked for help when required, but the support quality was "dependent on whom it was coming from" (Martha, Semi-Structured Interview). They reflected further that they hated asking for help and felt like a burden, and perceived themselves as, "Being a pain" (Martha, Semi-Structured Interview).

Martha felt there was a consequence of not asking for help and of not knowing and that this would let the whole team down. The support of an influential mentor reduces stress and personal and professional efficacy (Fives, Hamman & Olvarez, 2007). The collective seemed important not only for support but to show solidarity when

there were challenges. They stated, "We [the staff team] are only as strong as the weakest link" (Martha, Semi-Structured Interview).

They reflected that the weakest link was them; they felt inadequate, and further support would have remedied that feeling. This teacher did have a positive outlook and was still ambitious, aspiring to meet their career aspirations. However, they needed to rely on themselves rather than the collective or a mentor for support. This individual endeavour to succeed seemed exhausting for Martha. Less success is observed when teacher-mentor values are not aligned, emotional support is important (Grudnoff, 2012).

Ricky and Gina's situation was quite different to Martha's. They felt they had good support from their respective mentors. Ricky said,

> My mentor had been really influential without being dominating or oppressive. I picked things up from them about how to deal with children. I magpie ideas but am confident enough now to put my own spin on them (Ricky, Semi-Structured Interview).

Ricky felt that support and understanding from the school and colleagues were bolstered by support from family because the job was so time-consuming. They stated that family support was crucial to a successful career as a teacher. They were self-assured about who within the school community they could ask for help. But acknowledged it was good to get out of the school to engage in professional development to support their knowledge and practice and consider different perspectives outside the immediate school community.

Gina reflected that their mentor in the first year was supportive, but they over-relied on them early in their career. They have now transitioned into their second year of teaching and do not have a mentor or teaching assistant. The withdrawal of that

support was challenging. Positively, they realised how much they relied on that support even for "the small things" and are now at the end of the second year, becoming more autonomous and knowing they can cope and deal with things themselves without asking for help. Gina feels this is a comfortable position.

Relationships with the mentor need to be positive, and the literature supports the view that the teacher and mentor should share values as educators (Davies and Higdon, 2008). When mentoring relationships are less successful, the mentor and mentee's values must be aligned. Support is usually extended to include implementing policies and frameworks pertinent to the context in which teachers work. They were expected to perform with increasing competency as they moved through their career in teaching.

The theoretical perspective states that teachers may feel their duty to others is at the expense of their commitment to 'self.' The conflict arises because of tensions between performativity (laden with economic, governmental, and societal values) and practice (laden with economies of a teacher's values, drive, and ambition) - of commitment to the children as well as remaining true to who the teacher is on a personal level (Stronach *et al.*, 2002).

Ricky and Gina have found a way to support themselves now with experience. They know whom to ask for help but are confident enough to adapt advice so that they can teach in a manner aligned with their values, ambitions, and sense of self. Martha needed to be at that level of confidence to ask for help, perhaps because of an inconsistency in support during their first year of teaching; however, they looked to themselves and their motivation to get by. They stated,

> To be myself…my own grit and determination to be successful and progress" but also stated,

> I know I am not the teacher I want to be! (Martha, Life-History Interview).

This reaffirms that Martha in year one of teaching feels less confident due to variable support but is still determined to be successful.

Ricky and Gina valued the support of more experienced colleagues and often cited their early career mentor as the most supportive of them. In Martha's case, this expectation of support was an ideology, and they expressed that consent was not always there as expected or promised as part of early career support.

Now that I have examined the social aspects of teachers' lives as recounted by the Martha, Ricky and Gina, I will examine the political aspects of their professional lives.

Political aspects of the three teachers' lives

The three teachers in this study mentioned various political aspects that impacted their professional lives across the interviews (Life-History and semi-structured) and discussion about the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d). The teachers' narratives cited aspects of legislation like the statutory curriculum and standards, namely, the *National Curriculum* (Department for Education, 2014a) and *Teachers' Standards* (Department for Education, 2011). Quality assurance via regulation from the *Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills* (Ofsted, 2019a, 2022), support for early career teachers regulated by the *National Standards for School-Based ITT Mentors* (Department for Education, 2016c) and *Early Career Framework* (Department for

Education, 2019a) as well as feelings of duty and compliance and notions of power and responsibility.

The teachers referred to curriculum and standards as part of their expectations and responsibility. Martha reflected on the burden of the workload that planning, marking, and assessment created for them in their school context.

Martha stated,

> Senior leaders expect us to do everything as the framework says. Schools need guidance from the government that supports us in managing workload. There needs to be consistency, like a consistent framework that we are judged against (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

Martha felt frustrated by the constant responsibility, described as borne from expectations of planning and an "onerous marking policy" (Martha, Life-History Interview). With planning Martha described,

> Sometimes I think it can be too much and repetitive cutting and pasting from weekly to lesson plan etc. I think that supports my job because I can look at what children do through reflection, and that informs my next plan. I don't think it is useful to anyone else, only me and the children. No one ever looks at it. I spend about six hours a day after school marking and planning from when I get home until I go to bed. I don't think it ever stops. It's like a vicious cycle (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

They implied an expectation about the level of planning that they felt was helpful to them and the children but that no one ever looked at it. They described it as a "vicious cycle", which could be interpreted as having negative connotations, and Martha felt it negatively impacted workload and work-life balance. They stated,

> It's the time that it takes that is affecting my work-life balance. I can't leave work at work. There is always something I need to do. I could be sitting down watching TV, and I am thinking in the back of my mind, I need to be doing this. Even if it's not due to be done for a week, I feel I need to do it now so I can sit and watch TV, but it never happens (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

Asking Martha how this affects you. They replied,

I get stressed all the time. It's always the devil on your shoulder where it is eating away at you (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

This reply confirms the negative impact of planning on workload and work-life balance and that it is hard for Martha to switch off and have a break to support their well-being.

Ricky, the most experienced teacher and in post for three years, recounted similar challenges. They stated,

Middle leaders are projecting the values and expectations of policy, driving an agenda and putting the pressure on me; the more mature me can learn from it, but the younger me, it really would have affected me; I can say it is their issue and not mine. We are not driving the agenda (Ricky, Semi-Structured Interview).

Ricky talked about leadership structures in their sizeable primary school (~600 pupils), where a Head Teacher had Deputies, Phase Leaders and Subject Leaders who seemed to work in a hierarchal structure. Delegation exerted more pressure on classroom teachers and reflected why this might be the case; they said,

Subject leaders get a bit intense at times when they say we want these three times a week, and these four times a week, and you're not showing enough evidence there. Quite frankly, I have felt that more the last six months because I feel now we are in the Ofsted window; it is coming; that is the way I perceive it. In the three years I have been at the school, the closer we have got to Ofsted, the more certain subject leaders have started to be a bit more pedantic about how they want things done. But it doesn't overly worry me. I suppose on a bad week, I work fifty-five to sixty hours, including the direct teaching. If I get on with planning and work well with my team, which is key, I think, in my year group, then it is quite manageable. Nevertheless, I still manage to do something on a weekend. Out of five evenings a week, I end up doing some work at home, at least three of them definitely (Ricky, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

From Ricky's perspective, policy pressures and regulation by an independent regulatory body (Ofsted) exert pressure on schools, which is disseminated to class teachers and negatively impacts their workload. The framework does not dictate teachers working 50-60-hour weeks, but the pressure and increased workload are

causing this impact on this class teacher as they described it. They almost personify

Ofsted and say, "It is coming". Ricky views the time spent on such work as an enemy

describing,

> I think time is everyone's enemy. We have staff meetings where some of the time is given over to certain subject leaders, and they clarify for us. It is a reasonably open forum, but nevertheless, things do creep in where you think I am not sure of that; inconsistencies can happen and that in itself can be stressful. There are so many things to think about on a daily basis, and it does feel like everybody wants a piece of you, sometimes (Ricky, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

It sounds like the pressure is relentless (like Martha's experience) and as if Ricky

feels attacked "like everyone wants a piece of you sometimes" (Ricky, Teacher

Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion). This type of description is vivid and

indicates the experience has a long-lasting impact on this teacher's life as they

describe it. I think this evokes feelings of duty and someone having power over the

teachers, which could be viewed as threatening.

Ricky's summarising comment in the Life-History interview on this matter indicated

the profession complying and not being able to fight, expressing feelings of a power

differential between teachers and the government, and even society more widely.

> I think we are a profession that is oppressed, and it is scary how we just comply and don't push for serious issues. Workload and work-life balance is one of those issues, and I think it is about public perception; politicians have the upper hand because public perception is not realistic. It's well 'you get twelve weeks off a year, you get paid well, and you get a decent pension', well that's not wrong, but you do the math on it, you balance forty hours a week that average forty-five weeks a year other people work over the weeks that teachers work about forty weeks and you end up doing fifty-five to sixty hours a week which is far more than an average worker. But we don't do it for the money. They do it for the love of the job and the children and making a difference (Ricky, Life History Interview).

Ricky uses some powerful words to describe their feelings: "oppressed", "scary",

"serious", "comply", "perceptions", and "not realistic" to try and convey the strength of

feeling and personally how it feels to them. They are trying to express how bound they feel to do a job despite the pressures because they care and want to make a difference, taking the pressure to go on and do what they feel is right. This made me feel a little sad.

One of the challenging aspects for me as a researcher was dealing with my feelings when examining the narrative of others. To remain reflexive, I acknowledge that listening to and analysing some of these narratives resonated with my own professional experiences and feelings that I had felt in the past as a teacher. I had to acknowledge my emotions and separate them from Martha, Gina and Ricky's feelings so that I could analyse the findings objectively whilst remaining open to my feelings and the subjectivity of my thoughts compared to other teachers' experiences. A lot of the time, I found myself empathising with the experiences that Martha, Gina and Ricky were recounting. At first, I was unsure whether to display agreement or any emotion, even to nod as Martha, Ricky and Gina spoke, for fear of negatively impacting the findings and the authenticity. As time progressed, I realised that Martha, Ricky and Gina who were aware of my background, wanted me to share my human emotions to acknowledge that they had been heard (as described by the "humanistic perspective" Newby 2014, p.39). This is hard to evidence because I was not asked explicitly how I felt, and it was not verbalised. But the eye contact and relationships built between Martha, Ricky, Gina and I were genuine and trusting enough for them to share their experiences with me, which warranted natural human and emotional interaction. As time went on, it became easier to nod, smile, mmm and say 'yes' in the right places without feeling that I was influencing the authenticity of the findings or disrupting the flow of the narrative. It also made me feel at ease with the research process because I could be myself, and I am sure this helped

Martha, Ricky and Gina to be themselves, increasing the authenticity of the

research findings.

Gina openly shared their pressures, how aspects of their roles contribute to workload

and how that makes them feel.

> Our Head is really good regarding workload, and he is managing our processes, e.g., report writing to reduce our workload. I don't always feel that some of the leadership team understands workload because they are so busy in their own stuff, I have become more independent to manage my own workload. Our assessment has been formative rather than summative because of the pandemic, and we have had limited support because all schools do things different. With summative assessment SATs for year two, it's finding the time to fill in the gaps in knowledge when you have a mixed class and six pieces of evidence for each objective. It's a lot. I felt accountable for what the children achieved in the tests. It was a lot of pressure. Ofsted is not a nice experience from what other people have said, I have not experienced it personally. Schools are driven by data; I started to get obsessed with children meeting their targets and going beyond…I do feel that it is my responsibility to get them up there this year. As a teacher, I don't want to be scared when Ofsted coming in; I want to experience it as them coming in to see what we can do. Teachers do have a negative idea of Ofsted that doesn't support less experienced teachers that haven't been through it yet (Gina, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

Gina felt that their school leader was supportive and tried to manage the staff

workload, which I viewed as a favourable support mechanism. Gina referred to

distributed leadership and that the level below the head teacher, the "leadership

team", was less supportive of reducing workload because of their pressures. Gina

felt pressures of Statutory Attainment Tests (SATs), which provide national

standards and benchmark children's progress across England. Gina expressed the

burden of supporting those children to perform at the nationally expected level or

beyond. Although Gina has not experienced an Ofsted inspection personally, they

expressed fear and being "scared" by others' recollections of inspections and that

perpetuated Gina's "obsession" about the level of children's achievement.

Gina discussed the impact of different pressures and finding a work-life balance

seems complicated, like Ricky. They stated when asked what they found difficult

about workload,

> Juggling everything, all of that takes time. This year I feel I cannot take everything on this year, and that is ok. The first time ever I said no to manage my own workload, I felt bad after because I don't like to say no, but I had to, to help me juggle everything. I am better at it now, but when I first started, I used to work every night and ask myself is this teaching? But actually, it's not. It's Friday night, and it's ok. I don't have to do work tonight. And maybe not tomorrow, either. I will have to catch up and do it on Sunday. Last year I was finding my feet and did not know how I wanted to do it, and I plan a week ahead, but now I can do a topic and get a bit ahead because I can now (Gina, Life-History Interview).

I wanted to find out about their entitlement to support through government policy

implemented at the local level and to reflect on these findings with a balanced view.

The teachers did experience the pressures as recounted above but also had support

as early career teachers provided by a mentor. They had varied experiences of

support in their school contexts, and their narratives indicated how those support

mechanisms worked during their early professional lives.

We have already learnt in the social context that Martha's support was inconsistent

staff turnaround impacted the availability of support and I wondered how local policy

responded to this. I asked Martha if they felt empowered to ask for help, and they

stated that asking for help made them worry and quoted,

> If I ask for help, I don't want that to reflect bad for everyone. If I don't ask, then I feel like I am letting everyone down. When I was asked to do something, and I asked for help because I didn't understand it, and they looked so disappointed in me. You must be very gutsy to do it (Martha, Semi-Structured Interview).

This is Martha's personal experience and will not reflect all ECT's experiences. I feel

what they conveyed says something about the school ethos and the expectations in

local policy and that there were high expectations of everyone, regardless of how

experienced they were. Something Martha said when discussing the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (Department for Education, 2019d) affirmed this for me about the school policy and ethos; they stated,

> Planning is always checked. I have to hand it in, and they expect to see it on a system by a certain time. It's part of a process and routine (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

Martha's view about asking for help reflects Martha's lower personal and professional confidence. Perhaps they felt asking for support was a weakness rather than something they were entitled to as part of transitioning from ITT into an early career. I did sense that Martha had professional resilience because, despite the challenges they were describing persistence, they stated,

> I still have that drive to aspire to be higher up, but then I think you need to be in the right school, the right place, whether you have got that support. I don't think staying where I am is what I want for the rest of my teaching career (Martha, Life-History Interview)

They held on tightly to their ambitions and accepted that they might have to move schools to get the support to achieve their ambitions. This insight so early on in a career in teaching is commendable, I sensed this individual's strength, and they were clear about their sense of self.

Ricky felt well supported and cited some of this support throughout the whole data collection process. They acknowledge positivity for the government's priority in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d) to extend ECT support. Ricky was interested in the government strategy because they were at a point in their career where they were aspiring to leadership and had enrolled on a middle leaders' programme. They were also acting professionally as a mentor for a PGCE student (one registered on a 9-month graduate route into teaching). With this context in mind, they stated,

I had a good mentor in my first year. I was dead against extending the induction period to two years; however, I have changed my viewpoint in recent months because it appears to me that people are coming into the profession much quicker through other routes, which is not a bad thing. The route I took three-year undergraduate, and I had time to learn and digest them and have a rest from it. I had time to know what was coming, the expectations and workload, how to support children and experiencing that isn't enough, in my opinion. Therefore, two-year window for support after a year of training is much better, and the starting wage is better. I like the idea of the additional support. They don't allow for small rewards here and there. The government takes advantage of our goodwill, and we just do it, and it takes advantage of mentors and students to need support for additional time (Ricky, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

Ricky agreed that support is required for ECTs, and the renewed government priority in policy was welcome. They indicated that ECTs might need the help of a mentor beyond the first-year post-qualification determined on an individual need basis. Ricky expressed that mentoring takes up a lot of their time, is necessary, and requires more time to be allocated. Policy on replacing mentors when one is absent and contextual school arrangements impact mentor availability and time allocation. The "taking advantage" is not always the government's fault, but that is how Ricky describes it.

Similarly, Gina felt well supported; they felt overwhelmed and doubted their ability in the second year when the formal support of a mentor was withdrawn. They stated,

When you are newly qualified, you have got that mentor, and they will go through everything with you. My mentor was very supportive, and any questions I had, I could go to her. And I know if I ask, I still have that support now, but in your NQT year, you are heavily scaffolded. It's almost like you're on placement, but you are Full-time at class. Whereas going into my second year, I feel like there is different pressures because I am not newly qualified, I don't have that title of a newly qualified teacher… I had a conversation with a teacher today, and said I felt like I was going backwards instead of forwards. Talking to other colleagues is obviously very helpful because they said to me you know; you get a new class and face new challenges each year. This is my first year having a new set of children, and I am questioning why they are different to last year; it is accepting that if something doesn't get done or not to your best, then that is fine (Gina, Life-History Interview).

Gina felt the support in the first year of teaching was very useful and consistent. They described a change as they moved into their second year; they experienced different pressures when working independently, and it was hard when the entitlement to support was removed. Gina's induction was before the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2019d); therefore, they were only entitled to one year of support. The government proposal as part of the Strategy will support early career teachers for a further year, and that from Ricky and Gina's perspective would be welcomed.

Gina indicated that peer support was valued and talking about challenges with more experience others was important. They acknowledged the challenges as part of the profession and accepted that this was ok when support was available. They were still developing their reflective practice and concluded,

> Whilst you are training, I have changed, and I haven't. I always want to please and never let anyone down, but that's just the sort of person I have been. I still think that I am finding the teacher that I am. When you are training, you have an idea of a teacher, and everyone is listening, the children are doing their work, and it is fantastic, and that's great. But in reality, it is not always like that; you have lessons where you think gosh, I shouldn't have done that. But I think now the type of teacher I am, I don't worry as much if it's not perfect. I have taken a little bit of pressure off, you know, I have spoken to other teachers, and they say I am very hard on myself (Gina, Life-History Interview).

They expressed how they have high expectations of themselves and want to please those around them, so they inadvertently pressure themselves. They refer to their preconceived ideas of a teacher and how they feel in real life, comparing their intimate and situated identity (Zimmerman, 1998; Pennington, 2015; and Richards, 2015b). They admitted to taking pressure off themselves in their second year of teaching and beginning to accept they are not perfect [which was their idealisation]. Conversations with more experienced colleagues have bolstered that self-confidence, and they agreed they do apply too much pressure on themselves.

This sub-section has demonstrated that the teachers must abide by the standards and curriculum with an element of compliance. They feel a sense of duty to the children as a priority rather than to themselves. They think that Ofsted regulates their responsibility and that this applies pressures that negatively affect their workload. They feel support is crucial and welcome extending formal support for ECTs to two years. The supportive relationship with mentors and more experienced others' bolsters their self-confidence as they progress in their careers and gain more professional autonomy. They feel a power differential as part of school management structures that they described as hierarchal but appreciate that the pressure is coming top-down from the government. This top-down dissemination of workload continues in schools and applies disproportionate pressure to classroom teachers.

I will now examine the cultural aspects that the three teachers described as part of their narratives of their professional lives.

Cultural aspects of the three teachers' lives

This sub-section will consider how ongoing professional development (PD) works for teachers as part of cultural aspects in the contextual settings in primary schools. PD is an essential part of continuing support to ECTs. The processes that govern PD as part of established school cultures are grounded in the school's ethos as part of norms, beliefs, and values that people experience and are encouraged to engage with when working in a complex social context. Some of the culture is grounded in policy (Department for Education, 2014b) that states,

> Maintained schools have obligations under section 78 of the Education Act (2002) which requires schools, as part of a broad and balanced curriculum, to promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society. This guidance relates specifically to the requirements to actively promote fundamental British values in schools and

explains how this can be met through the general requirement in the 2002 Act. (Department for Education, 2014b, p. 3)

Positive relationships are built during group CPD with opportunities for networking. School cultures foster a collaborative working ethos where more experienced support less experienced colleagues and they share perspectives about the 'norms' within the workplace. I am interested in understanding how the teachers perceived school leaders govern and support PD processes and how teachers might work together to achieve individual and shared goals.

The teachers commented very little on PD during the data collection, even though it was an explicit part of the discussion about the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d). When I reflected on why that might be the case, I realised that all three teachers were so busy and caught up in the current challenges that they struggled to stop and think about what they needed and how it would benefit them. I asked each participant explicitly, "what do you need to be successful and meet your ambitions?". I briefly reflect below on how each responded to that question.

Martha referred to the lack of consistency in opportunities and stated,

> There is no consistency with PD opportunities. I want to progress to leadership up the ladder, but there is so much competition with everything that we hear such as teachers leaving after one year because of workload, and they are so stressed because they are not getting the support for them to succeed and carry on (Martha, Life-History Interview).

Martha talked about the competitiveness of securing a leadership role they aspired to. In their context, workload and stress made people leave before achieving their ambitions. As stark as this was, they did indicate a glimmer of hope from their determination and, at the end of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy discussion, said,

> But I am ambitious and want to go through the ranks to leadership, and if my workload and support don't change I, am still going to teach whether the strategy works or not, I am going to teach anyway (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

This quote strongly reflects Martha's ambition to meet their goals, whether supported or not, despite a heavy workload. This shows resilience and a real strength of character in a teacher that seems undeterred by challenges.

Ricky was focused on opportunities to develop reflective practice and valued time away from the classroom and school context to enable honest reflection in a safe space. However, they acknowledge the cost to the school associated with cover for the class. They stated,

> I think teachers need support through PD, and they need to be on another site so that you get time away, so you are not worrying about children in school. To see a different setting and way of working and having time to reflect on that is valuable for me as an aspiring middle leader. That type of time away is not available for everyone but is for middle leaders, but it costs the school (Ricky, Semi-Structured Interview).

They felt PD accompanies aspects of professionalism and compared the profession's status to what they perceived were other top professions (like nursing). They acknowledged that ITT was intensive and insisted further training was necessary, that the government's suggested solution in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (2019d) could be perceived as insulting and that more ongoing PD was required to maintain the profession's quality. They said,

> I think increasing pay is a good thing; having a graduate profession is good a minimum expectation joining other top professions like Drs, vets, police, and nurses giving more training could be perceived as insulting 'professional' they need more training to increase the quality, how can we fit in more training? Longer initial teacher training required as limited time for PD (Ricky, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion).

Gina reflected that teachers required ongoing PD to overcome professional challenges. They felt time and experience in the profession did not guard teachers

against challenges associated with changes in the profession experienced by ongoing reform. They stated,

> Challenges don't stop because you go in your second or third year of teaching. I feel like it's ok to change the style that you teach. I don't get support to be released for PD because of funding, and I am in a small school, and they can't cover me. I had to research it and do it myself. My argument was you can't expect me to implement something if you don't send me on some additional training (Gina, Semi-Structured Interview)

Funding seemed to be the barrier to accessing PD, and they indicated that more experienced colleagues who were going for promotion were favoured for PD, which they felt disadvantaged them.

Martha, Ricky and Gina recognised PD was essential but had mixed experiences of accessing PD because of high staff turnover, the cost of covering their teaching when released, and the cost directly related to funding the PD. They all felt they would need some form of development to meet their ambitions, but they did not view that as a reason for them not to attain their career ambitions; they were determined to self-develop and succeed.

The final aspect of the analysis will examine the historical aspect the three teachers described as part of their professional lives.

Historical aspects of the three teachers' lives

The three teachers described historical aspects. These aspects are attributed to traditions or established working methods the way "things are always done here". These ways of working were perceived as being in place to preserve tried and tested processes in education that are perceived to achieve quality outcomes for children. These traditions were often described as being underpinned by both formal and informal rules that were internal, external or both. The traditions were underpinned

by a working philosophy that extended from and to the unique stakeholders in their school settings, encompassing the school community. Examination of these aspects of part of the data was nuanced and sometimes hard to clarify because these aspects were often implied rather than overtly stated.

Relationships with parents and peers were aspects of teachers' lives that were described as set in the histories of the school and rooted within the community, the locality the school served. Whilst each of the participant's schools was very different in terms of demographic and location, having positive relationships with parents to support the children and the educational aims for their achievement were cited as necessary by the teachers. They also talked about tensions in relationships with parents and how that challenged them. Peer relationships were valued for supporting the teachers during the challenge, providing encouragement, and reminding them what they were good at if they suffered a confidence crisis in professional competence.

Martha talked about maintaining a professional relationship with parents and referred to their image; they said,

> I have to have a professional stance and be a role model. I distance myself from things that happen at school and home. You put walls up when I go out, and I check if there are pupils or parents out that I know. It makes me think about how I dress to accommodate expectations. I should not have to think about that, I think. I think it is about the environment and the place you are in and how the school works (Martha, Semi-Structured Interview).

They believed they were a professional role model to parents and were concerned about accommodating their expectations. This is a perception of the Teachers' Standards Part Two, (Department for Education, 2011) regarding personal and professional conduct projected to society. Martha felt strongly that this public perception was misinformed, and they wanted to be themselves (e.g., identify with

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their personal identity). They referred to personal and professional identity as being two different things. They said context dictated identity formation in a social space, and they tried to resist the public image.

Ricky viewed parents and the school as being part of a close-knit community. They drew on support for their work ethic from their family to help them be prepared to teach, which involved working nights and weekends.

> It is necessary to talk to parents and type up safeguarding issues without it would grind to a halt. Trying to do things they think are expected puts lots of pressure on teachers…I care for the children, but it doesn't affect me, and I can switch it off when I get home, so it does not affect me (Ricky, Life-History Interview).

Some aspects of teachers' lives were accepted and could not be controlled, like happenings beyond the school gates. But they were responsible for safeguarding children, and aspects of care seem deep-seated for Ricky. They repeated twice that these aspects of care for those in the community "does not affect them" and that they can distance themselves from what is happening. I wondered if this was true or if it used to affect them and does not now, but I did not probe further as I did not want to cause any upset by probing about how dealing with safeguarding might mentally impact Ricky, as it was sensitive.

Gina described their relationship with their parents as positive; they said,

> I have got a great relationship with parents. In my first year, I used to feel a bit intimidated by them. When I first qualified, I was 2; I thought they couldn't take me seriously because I was young. Sought to look and feel; how does she know what she's doing 'cause she's been teaching for five weeks? Whereas now, I am confident, and I know, I know (Gina, Semi-Structured Interview).

They admitted feeling intimidated by the children's parents when they first qualified, as if parents were judging them. Still, they seem self-assured and would approach a parent to discuss concerns because they felt knowledgeable and competent.

The next aspect the teachers described was the public persona of teachers and their

expectations of teachers as citizens, which seemed seated in history. This controlled

their behaviours as an expected norm, underpinned by their knowledge of the

Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011). Martha talked about being a

part of the community but maintaining their distance and raising citizens, e.g., the

perceived expectation of what they should be working towards with the pupils. They

stated,

> But in reality, you want to make well-rounded, well-adjusted children that can take criticism, that can lead a happy life, that is a citizen that upholds British Values. When we look at the bigger picture, we are pushing this ideal of we are making citizens just as much as you want educational Einstein's (Martha, Semi-Structured Interview)

They projected idealistic views without being explicit about who held those views.

Upholding British Values are integral to the Teachers' Standards. Martha asserted

that teachers were ensuring these values were adhered to but also mentioned the

highest standards of education for the children, which inadvertently put pressure on

the teaching profession. Fundamental British Values are a contested concept

debated in the Commons and written into Department for Education policy

(Department for Education, 2014b). Schools are held accountable by Ofsted for

aspects of "Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development" (Department

for Education, 2014b, p.7).

Ricky talked about public perception controlling their behaviours, particularly the

community connected to the school who would have been educated at the school

themselves. They said the public perception was strong and usually based on their

individual experiences of school, which could be a positive or negative perception.

> You must behave as in part two of the Teachers' Standards. We are part of a community reaching six hundred pupils and their families. So, you meet parents, grandparents and ex-pupils when you are out and about, but that

doesn't bother me. But the perception is there you are expected to behave in a certain way. I still like to be friendly. Some parents are wary of teachers, and others aren't bothered and will try to bulldoze any of us. But previous job roles [in the police] set me up quite well for that. Parents will tackle me when they think I have got something wrong; sometimes, that is justified, and sometimes it's not. My perception of what a teacher is like is based on my school experience, and society base their perceptions on their own experience, which is not always positive. I feel that society does not lift us high enough up on that pedestal as a profession. It seems easy to talk down to a teacher or criticise them, which is unjustified sometimes. Them that know you say, 'I couldn't do your job', but often for the wrong reasons they are thinking of behaviour usually (Ricky, Semi-Structured Interview).

Ricky felt that teachers were criticised and that this was not justified and underpinned by the wrong reasons, e.g., they perceived they could not teach due to managing poor behaviour. A lack of understanding by the public about the whole teacher's role leads to society having these misconceptions. Ricky felt that they were distanced from the citizens of the school and that their role was misunderstood by society.

Gina felt part of citizenship was having the children at the centre of everything and broadening the horizons of children achieved by showing them what citizens in their community do and how they can aspire to be like them. Gina stated,

As a school, we like to bring people in to show the children the possibilities for the future and widen their horizons and let them see the possibilities because we care about them now and their futures (Gina, Semi-structured Interview).

They also talked about trying to meet others' expectations during challenges and said,

People say to me, put your game face on. For me, it's hard. I wear my heart on my sleeve, and if I am having a bad day, everyone knows that. Maybe I have not been through enough challenges to need a game face. I am finding my okay and feel confident to try something that a more experienced teacher suggests, but if it does not work for me, I am ok to say no, it doesn't work for me (Gina, Semi-Structured Interview)

They were trying and "finding their way", gaining confidence and did not feel obliged to fit in with what the community expected. They were beginning to realise what

worked for them, and they felt comfortable being themselves, which was nice to hear.

Summary:

The findings in this chapter have summarised the social, political, cultural and historical aspects of the three teachers' lives and how the organisation (e.g., the school) and other local organisational elements supporting the implementation of policy in a school impact them as a person and developing professional. This has led to the description of multiple identities that are dynamic and morph according to the social, political, cultural and historical aspects that are influencing their lives at any one time. Identity e.g., personal and professional are not fixed but the teachers hold on tightly to their sense of self and their personal values; conflict occurs when the person feels challenged to conform to others' expectations. The teachers reflected through personal and organisational lenses at the classroom level, school and community level and the national policy landscape level. I have tried to draw what I visualise from these findings see Figure 7 below; my representation is a visualisation in three-dimensions that moves away from two-dimensional theoretical models (FIT Choice Model (Watt and Richardson, 2012, p.187) and two-dimensional heuristic frameworks (Kutsyuruba et al., 2019, p.116). My 3-D visualisation of aspects that impact the person who is a teacher which moulds multiple identities of teachers is one of my original contributions to research knowledge.

Figure 7 – 3-D sketch that is my visualisation of how a teacher is impacted by six main aspects.
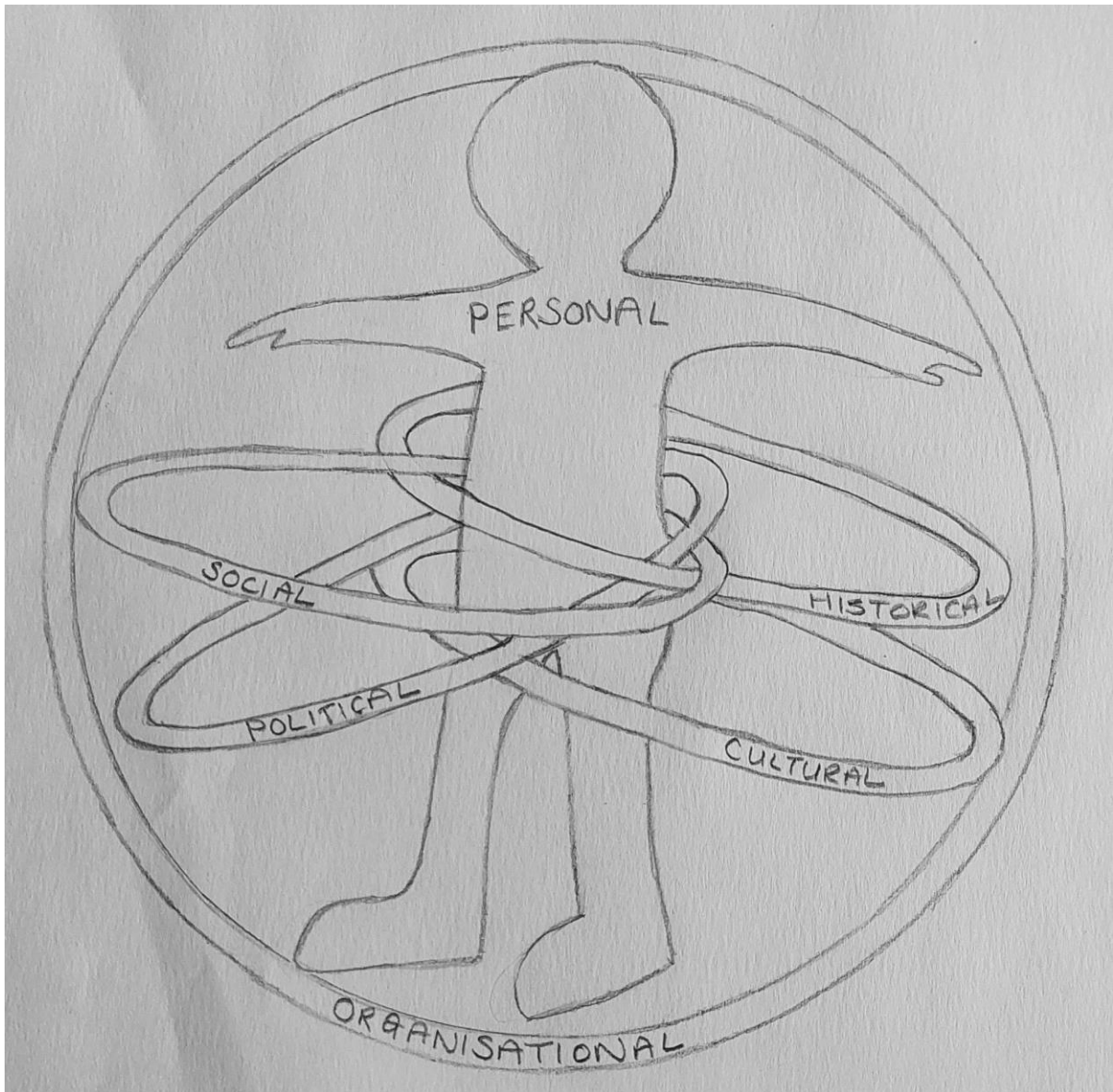
I acknowledge the literature I reviewed in chapter two that teachers' lives exist in a socio-political context. Martha, Ricky and Gina throughout my study have reflected on their motivations, experiences and challenges (as I have interpreted them) from six perspectives; personal, social, political, cultural, and historical encompassed in a continuum of influence by organisational aspects. Multiple dynamic identities form influenced by the six aspects simultaneously that I have discovered as part of three

teachers' professional narratives. I will examine this visualisation and its implications in Chapter 5.

I acknowledge that the analysis of my findings was supported by Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) findings in the four aspects they theorised. However, my findings differ in two ways; first, Martha, Ricky and Gina described aspects of their lives that were very complex, and I could not represent that in two dimensions effectively (like Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) did in their heuristic framework). I feel justified to have drawn what I visualised the findings were demonstrating to me in a three-dimensional representation which I will narrate the complexity of in Chapter 5. Secondly, Martha, Ricky and Gina reflected a historical perspective on their professional lives as ECTs which Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) framework did not. The historical aspect is my new contribution to the literature pertinent to teachers' lives.

The description of historical happenings by Martha, Ricky and Gina involved sentences, words, and phrases describing contextual traditions, established ways of working, togetherness in established teams to achieve goals, curriculum frameworks within a historic educational landscape of reform, community expectations, and formal and informal rules.

My 3-D visualisation allows me to make sense of the complex narrative and to reflect personal, social, political, historical and cultural aspects and how they are influenced by school's organisational aspects which leads to multiple dynamic identities forming as part of teachers' complex lives. I revisit this visualisation in more detail in the conclusions where I also suggest there is future scope to complete post-doctoral research to examine the six aspects and teacher identities further.

The next chapter will discuss in detail how aspects impacting on teachers personally

manifest themselves as multiple identities as part of the whole complex activity

system which is modelled using CHAT as an analytical and theoretical framework for

Martha, Ricky and Gina to support answering the three research questions,

RQ1 - What do three individual teachers perceive has motivated them to go into primary teaching in England, and what have they experienced in their professional lives thus far?

RQ2 - How do the three teachers perceive they are supported to achieve their goals as teachers between one-, two-, and three- years post-qualification, respectively?

RQ3 - What are the three teachers' opinions on the challenges and solutions proposed in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy?

Chapter 5 – Consideration of aspects of Martha, Ricky and Gina's professional lives from their perspectives.

This chapter presents the discussion in three parts of aspects of Martha, Ricky and Gina's professional lives from their perspective. Each part is focused on one of the three research questions. The first part examines what motivated the three individuals to teach in primary schools in England and what they perceive they have experienced in their professional lives thus far. Secondly, I interpret their perceptions about what has supported them in achieving their professional goals between one-, two-, and three-years post-qualification. I aim to analyse the complex activity systems that Martha, Ricky and Gina described they operate within through the lens of CHAT theory, to understand the complexity of their lives better. The final part analyses Martha, Ricky and Gina's opinions on the government's perceived challenges and proposed solutions in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d). Understanding their' perceptions and the challenges they face in practice will support drawing conclusions and making recommendations in the final chapter to support primary teachers' lives and careers.

Individual motivations to teach and teachers' experiences:

All three participants were inspired to *make a difference* for children and described a desire to care for and nurture them. Each participant conveyed a strong sense of whom they wanted to be but found professional barriers at times prevented them from achieving these aspirations. They made personal choices about how to deal with challenging circumstances based on experiences, and professional development (PD) supported their confidence (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Huberman, 1995; Jones, 2003; Ovens and Tinning, 2009). Some authors theories (Zimmerman, 1998; Richards, 2006; Pennington, 2015; Richards, 2015) articulate

that contextual challenges are affected by the social context. This is important because of how the participants felt their professional identities were constructed and how they perceived they were depicted as professionals.

During their early career, all participants reflected their doubts, tensions and frustrations borne from a tangle of personal (individual) expectations and aspirations before entering the profession, the organisational (schools' or institutional) expectations and social expectations (societal). The participants mostly felt ready for a career in teaching following their training and qualification. However, once in school, the feeling of readiness was squashed by the reality of teaching and others' expectations. They felt they were not prepared to deal with others' expectations; they described experiencing doubts, tensions, frustrations, and even fear – predominantly a fear of failing.

Challenges and coping with teaching can be actualised through the reality rooted in professional practice in a social context (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Huberman, 1995; Jones, 2003; Ovens and Tinning, 2009). Martha, Ricky and Gina felt they had comprehended the reality of teaching very early in their teaching careers, between one- and three- years post-qualification. This reality was different from what they had pre-conceived teaching to be prior to beginning training. Their pre-conceived ideas of teaching were based on historical, social and political idealisation of what teaching and being a teacher was. They reflected on how they increasingly learned to cope and adapt to professional challenges with the main aim of continuing to do their jobs well for the benefit of the children.

The growing awareness of the reality of teaching was described by Martha, Ricky and Gina as an attack on the individual and their sense of professionalism as

qualified teachers. Training has provided them with much knowledge and some practice in schools to support their career readiness. The theory states that these kinds of realisations regarding professional challenges can be experienced in educational settings when teachers have a large amount of knowledge compromised by a lack of professional practice, which can lead to tensions (Bainbridge, 2012). Based on these teachers' accounts, they would have preferred teaching experience to reflect *actual* practice in today's primary classrooms to feel fully prepared and able to cope. Whether that is possible during training I am not sure; the experience of trainees is variable as each school is unique, training is not (or is it meant to be) the same as that is not reality.

When I compared these realities to the three teachers' early aspirations, I appreciated why they must have been frustrated by this professional challenge. Inspired to teach by their own experience of schooling and inspiration from other teachers, they wanted to be there for children and support them to feel happy and safe, ensuring they became "well-rounded, well-adjusted children" (Martha, Life-History Interview). They described their top priority as a teacher as "Getting the children to where they need to be in life, developing the person" (Martha, Life-History Interview). There was a predominant focus on care and nurture rather than academic progress. I felt that in the context of the whole narrative, the achievement was essential, but caring for and supporting the child was Martha's top priority.

There was a desire "to do something that was not the same every day" (Ricky, Life-History Interview). Entering teaching as a career change and mature student they wanted "some security, a routine, and a challenge". The first year of teaching was described as "survival mode", and year three of their career as the "ideal learning

zone". They reflected that year one of teaching was "a very steep learning curve". In year two, they experienced dips in confidence as they continued to learn how to apply theory into practice; presently, they were professionally confident. Ricky expressed that confidence enabled them to move into middle leadership and coordinate a subject, but acknowledged they were still learning, stating, "I am not arrogant and will still accept advice; I know whom I can ask for help" (Ricky, Semi-structured Interview).

There was a drive to follow in the footsteps of a family member who inspired and motivated Gina, underpinned by their own positive schooling experiences. Gina had volunteered in schools and was sure about a career in teaching from an early age. *Making a difference* in children's lives (like Martha) was Gina's priority: Gina focused on making children feel happy and safe and helping them achieve the best academic outcomes. Ambition put much pressure on themselves to be, as they described, "perfect". Academic achievement and progress were important, but supporting children to perform at their best, and to be happy, was a top priority.

The narrative analysed above provides authentic insights into what motivated individuals to teach and what they have experienced thus far. I have learnt that the three participant's experience of primary school education and inspirational teachers supported their enjoyment of school and, to some extent, influenced their choice of career. Their motivations were derived from the inspiration of others who influenced their own education and desires to make a difference. They were value driven and had a strong sense of self. This sense of self was wrapped in histories borne out of community and traditions of people being educated at the school for generations, and values within the community had to be aligned with the teachers for them to

become a part of the school community. These histories led to notions of what it meant to be a professional (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Huberman, 1995; Jones, 2003; Ovens and Tinning, 2009) in the school context and how their identities morphed to fit circumstances in a dynamic social context Zimmerman, 1998; Richards, 2006; Pennington, 2015; Richards, 2015).

I will now move on to analyse the findings to consider the evidence that informs about how the participants were supported to achieve their goals in their early careers.

Support to achieve professional goals during early career:

Teachers' lives are complex, and all three participants reflected in their interviews that support aided their professional success. I used Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) as a frame to analyse the teacher's activity systems. This helped me in analysing, critiquing and describing the complexity of Martha, Ricky and Gina's professional lives and presenting these systems visually to the reader. The discussion presented in this section explains the individual's professional activity system and draws out relationships to the six aspects (personal, organisational, societal, cultural, political and historical) I analysed and presented towards the end of Chapter 4, (Figure 7, p.149) *3-D sketch this is my visualisation* is my visualisation of how a teacher is impacted by six main aspects.

I created my representation of the CHAT frame (Figure 6, p.98) to analyse the four core triadic associations (numbered 1 to 4), personal to the teachers and integral to CHAT theory. I have identified each of the Nodes (in full and abbreviated [bracketed] form) on the simplified CHAT frame below.

Figure 8 – Representation of Engeström's CHAT Frame

Mediating Artefacts: Tools and
Signs **(TS)**

```
                          TS
                         /  \
                        /    \
                       /      \
                      /   1    \
                     /          \
        Subject (S) /_____\ Object  --Sense--> Outcome (OO)
                   /\            /\         Meaning
                  /  \    3     /  \
                 /  2 \        / 4  \
                /      \      /      \
     Rules (R) /_____/_____\ Division of
                                         labour (DoL)
                    Community (C)
```
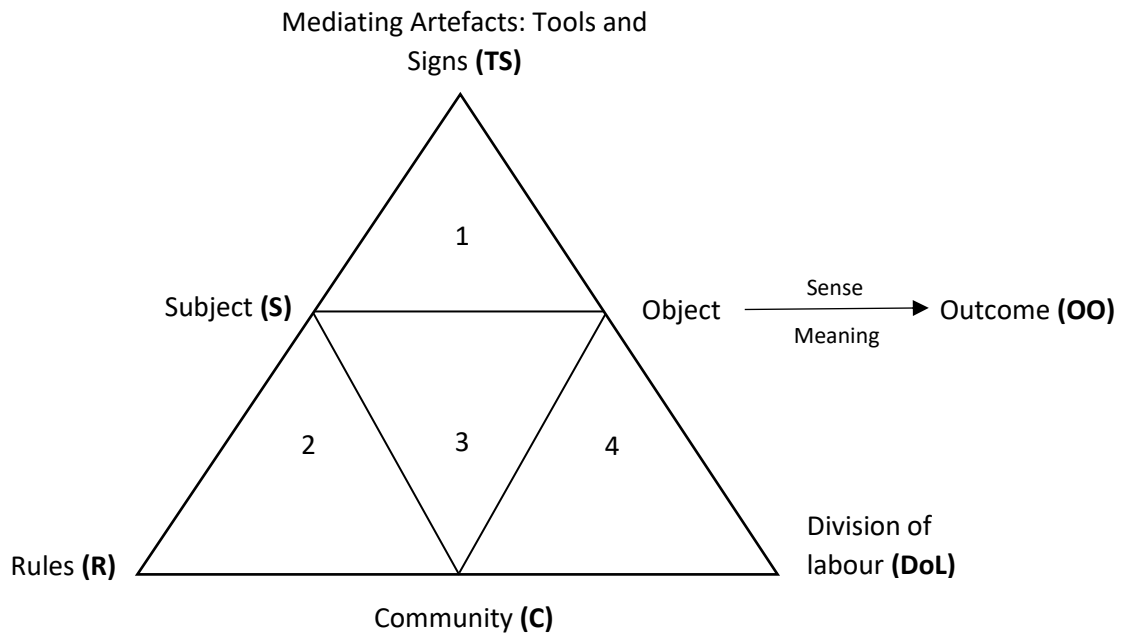
I will now draw on those separate parts together as a whole for each participant. I do this using CHAT as a theoretical visual analytical frame to appreciate the complex activity system in each teacher's professional life. I then discuss this system in detail, citing aspects of the literature examined in chapter two to support my critique. I have also, where appropriate, referred to the six aspects (social, political, cultural, historical, personal, and organisational) according to the 3-D sketch that is my visualisation of how a teacher is impacted by six main aspects (Figure 7, p.149) in the context of the whole activity system.

The Whole Professional Activity System for Martha:

The activity system for Martha uses the symbols from the CHAT representation in Figure 8, annotated briefly with personal aspects from the interview and discussion transcripts.

Figure 9 –Whole Activity System for Martha

Professional Development, mentoring discussions, and support.
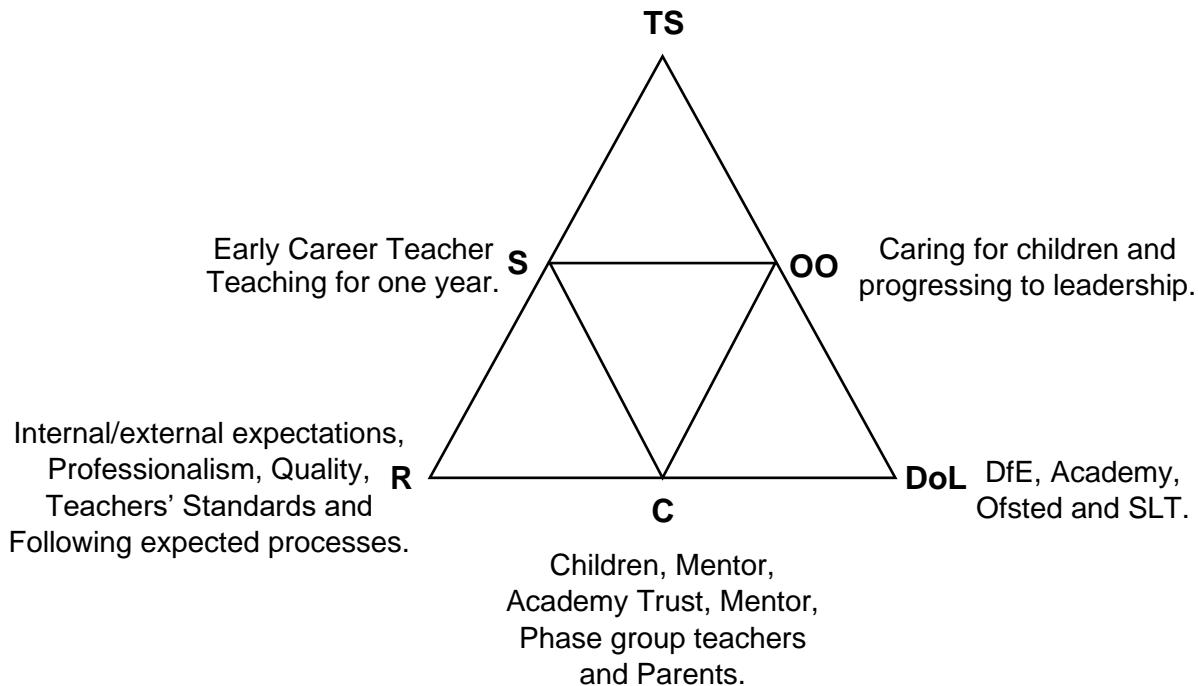
1. The Tools and Signs (TS) essential for Martha were professional development, mentoring discussions, and support.

2. The Subject (S) was Martha who was an Early Career Teacher (ECT) in the first year of teaching.

3. The Rules (R) that Martha felt she had to abide by were the internal and external expectations, being a professional, aspects of quality about Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011), and following due process (dictated by policy) such as local school policy and national government policy in the form of the statutory National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014a).

4. The people associated with the Community (C) that Martha referred to as the Academy Trust; mentors; children; phase group teachers, and parents.

5. The Division of Labour (DoL) was viewed as hierarchical and was dictated by the DfE, focused on implementing Standards through policy disseminated via the Academy Trust to teachers. This was regulated by Ofsted and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

6. The Object (O) to Martha was caring for the children to "make well-adjusted, well-rounded children" (Martha, semi-structured interview), and the Outcome (O) was to progress to a leadership role (Object and Outcome - OO).

Various triadic relationships were identified that were essential to Martha. Examining each of these will support me in understanding how the whole activity system impacts and supports Martha as part of her professional life.

The first triadic relationship I will examine is between the Tools and Signs, Subjects, Objects and Outcomes, as depicted below,

Figure 10 – The first triadic relationship between the TS, S, and OO

Professional Development, mentoring discussions, and support.
TS

Early Career Teacher
Teaching for one year. S

OO Caring for children and
progressing to leadership.
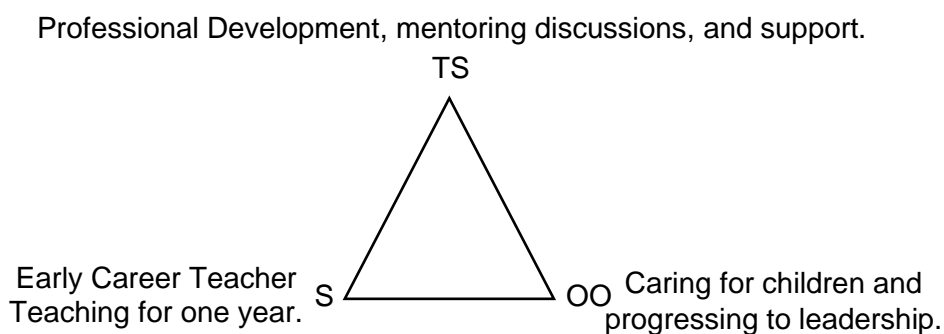
This triad was rooted in the social and cultural aspects of professional life. Martha, as a newly qualified teacher (the Subject, S) embarking on their early career, felt that professional development (TS) was significant to them to enable them to meet their ambitions. Professional development (PD) was discussed by Martha as being distributed to all schools via the Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) and was administered internally to try and attain a consistent approach to working and educating children across all schools in the MAT. The reality was very different, leading to tensions for Martha between themselves and senior school leaders (the community). They explained a perception that more senior colleagues were being favoured for PD; there is no local policy governing this it seems to be an unwritten rule grounded in a historical process that long-service colleagues are prioritised for opportunities which Martha viewed as a barrier to their progression and to attain their career goals.

A mentor could have supported them in understanding the dynamics of PD within the school context, but they needed more support from a mentor in the first year and had multiple mentors due to high staff turnover. This lack of consistent support left Martha feeling like a failure in their role and a burden if they asked for help. They did reflect resilience and were determined to succeed and achieve their goals despite the challenges.

Care for the children (Object, O) was prioritised and this was rooted in the social aspects of the school and developing positive teacher-pupil relationships. Martha felt relationships were vital to achieving the caring aspect they prided themselves on delivering.

They wanted to progress professionally and become a leader in a school, initially as a subject leader and eventually as a member of the SLT (Outcome O; object and outcome together, OO). They felt that the lack of consistent support and opportunity to develop professionally slowed their progression and ability to meet their ambitions to become a leader. There was a tension between ambition and reality which became frustrating in their first year of teaching. They had to rely on their own "grit and determination" (Martha, semi-structured interview) to reach their ambitions and make a difference and care for the children.

The second triadic relationship was between the Subject (S, the NQT), Rules (R) and Community (C).

Figure 11 – The second triadic relationship between the S, R, and C

Early Career Teacher
Teaching for one year.
S

Internal/external expectations,
Professionalism, Quality,
Teachers' Standards and
Following expected processes.
R

Children, Mentor,
Academy Trust, Mentor,
Phase group teachers
and Parents.
C
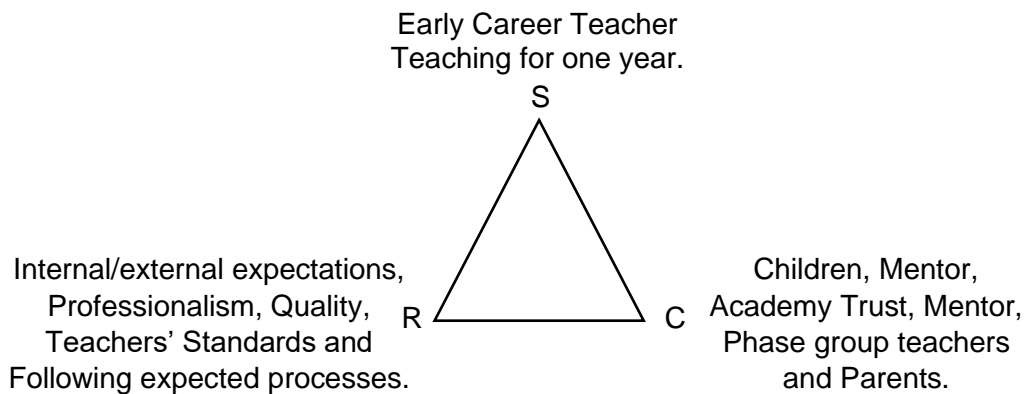
This triadic relationship involved all aspects of a complex activity system, personal, organisational, social, political, cultural and historical. Martha reflected the internal and external expectations, and adhering to professional standards and expectations of a quality performance could have been more manageable. The quality aspect impacted on workload and affected them personally. They felt this quality aspect was monitored via internal observation (organisational) during the first year by a mentor and by Ofsted (the government's independent regulatory body). This very political regulation added pressure to Martha, and they felt this pressure all the time.

Historical aspects, such as established working methods rooted in local-level policies, added to the workload as well. The assessment and the onerous marking policy were cited as being implemented via established and expected school processes.

The Community (C) included the Academy Trust; mentor; children; phase group leaders, and parents. Relationships between the stakeholders in the community were instrumental in the success of the school, and their role within it was rooted in the social aspects of the school. Culturally there were norms described by Martha

about ways of working, and school cultures seemed to perpetuate beliefs and values embedded in policy and disseminated by senior leaders as expectations when working in their school context as part of a MAT.

The Academy Trust tried to support Martha as an ECT and was the leading provider of ongoing professional development. The theme of inconsistency had arisen in the interview narrative because all professional development was provided in-house, drawing on the expertise of staff within the Academy. Organisationally, no one school within the Academy did things the same which meant that the training provided was often inward-looking from the Academy's perspective and did not always work when applied in an individual school setting because the context of teaching and learning was often different from one school to another. This left Martha feeling that training was not the best use of their time. As time was precious, they wanted to spend it caring for the children, they resented spending time on training that did not seem purposeful to their professional role and context.

The third triadic relationship (Figure 12) was between the Subject (S), Object and Outcomes (OO) and Community (C).

Figure 12 – The third triadic relationship between the S, OO, and C

Early Career Teacher Teaching for one year. S — OO Caring for children and progressing to leadership.

C
Children, Mentor, Academy Trust, Mentor, Phase group teachers and Parents.
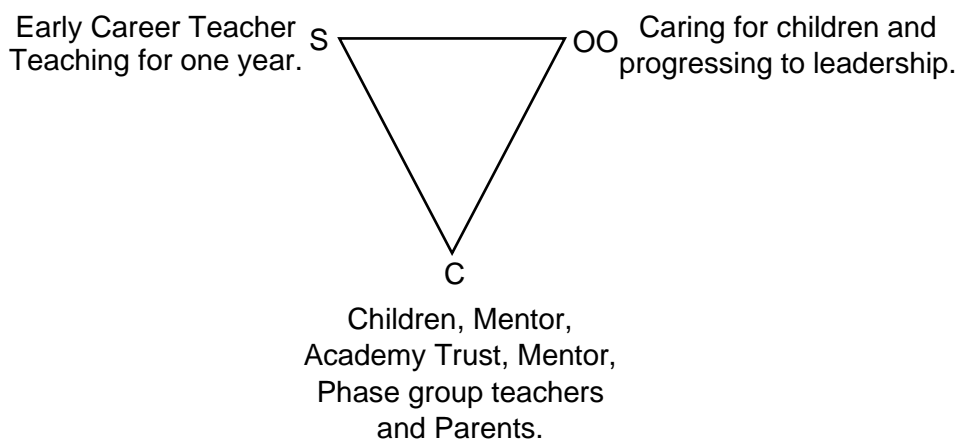
This triadic relationship reflected personal, social, cultural and historical aspects. When I asked Martha directly about the role of the Academy Trust and why they felt their PD needed to have a gaze beyond the Academy Trust, e.g., trying to focus on an outward and progressive gaze beyond the first year of teaching, they replied,

> Not every school does everything the same; one way does not prepare you for what you might face in your career. I might not stay in this Academy Trust, in this school forever…I feel I am being prevented from having a wider experience and training (Martha, semi-structured interview).

This reflected cultural aspects of the school context and cultures that govern how things are done in this school and MAT. The collective shared certain beliefs about the value of PD and the standard procedures for disseminating PD.

The mentor was instrumental in support during training, and Martha was willing to ask for help. However, they expressed that the support's usefulness depended on its origin (I have already established that Martha had several mentors in the first year). They also stated,

> I hate asking; I feel like I am being a pain, feel like a burden (Martha, semi-structured interview).

There was a fragility here and this impacted Martha personally and made her feel insecure about their ability, and they were perhaps concerned about their self-efficacy. This might not be surprising as it is their first year of teaching, but it also reaffirms why the support of a mentor is so crucial at the early stages of a teacher's career.

Regarding the children, they wanted to be there for them, to sort out their problems and make them feel happy and safe. Martha stated,

> I love the light bulb moments, the smile and fist pump victory when they have it; that keeps me going. It's a real achievement when they overcome barriers,

particularly in low-confidence, and I will do what I can to support them to achieve (Martha, semi-structured interview one).

Job satisfaction was achieved by supporting the children to overcome their barriers and low self-esteem and be successful. They reflected that they acted in a certain way to maintain their professional stance with the children but wanted to be caring and nurturing role-model. They recalled that parents and society expect them to be a certain way in their role, stating,

> Society expects me to be a certain way because of the job title *teacher*. I have a certain persona separate from how I am at home. I dress a certain way, and If I see a parent, I act and dress a certain way when out…I shouldn't have to think that way (Martha, semi-structured interview).

There was an acknowledgement that parents are so important as part of the school community but that many parents stayed away from the school mainly due to negative perceptions of school during their education. These perceptions are perhaps rooted in personal histories that people might have shared alongside individual experiences that shape their perception of today's education in this school context. Martha did not apportion fault to the parents but reflected that school had changed so much that the real issue was that parents were not sure how to support their children. It seemed essential to involve the parents in their children's education, but teachers like Martha felt they had the ultimate responsibility to provide the children's education.

The fourth and final triadic relationship for Martha was between the Object and Outcome (OO), Community (C) and how the labour was divided (DoL).

Figure 13 – The fourth triadic relationship between the OO, C and DoL

Caring for children and
progressing to leadership.

OO

Children, Mentor,
Academy Trust, Mentor,   C   DoL   DfE, Academy,
Phase group teachers   Ofsted and SLT.
and Parents.
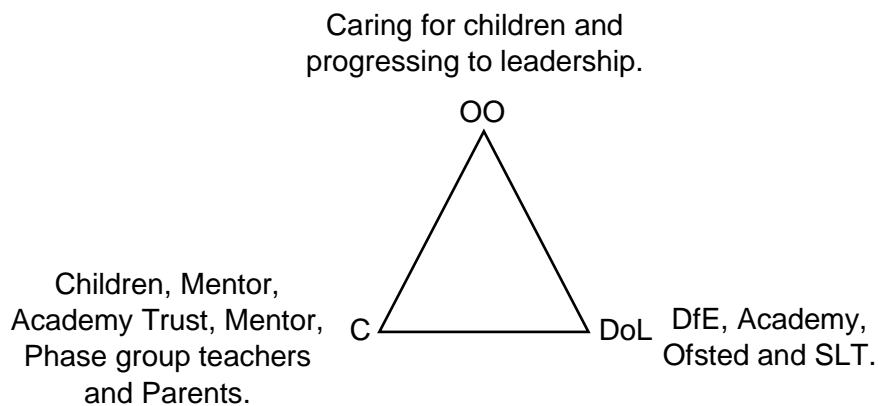
This triadic relationship is rooted in political and cultural aspects between the government, regulatory bodies and senior school leaders. There are aspects of duty and power entangled in expectations of compliance. I have already examined the community (C), Object and Outcome (OO) in previous triadic relationships; therefore, I will focus on the analysis of the Division of Labour (DoL).

The DoL seemed hierarchical, with the Department of Education dictating the Standards to be implemented through policy. The Department for Education was at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the Academy Trust, Senior Leadership Team, and Ofsted (the independent regulatory body). At the bottom of the hierarchy, Martha perceived were the teachers. This reflected a perceived power imbalance and the Department for Education seemed to hold much of the power, and dictated through policy how teachers should conduct themselves professionally (Part Two of the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011).

When talking about the government, Martha stated that they,

> Would like a change to government policy, particularly a change on the emphasis of planning and assessment and for these processes to be streamlined and consistent within schools, to give teachers more time to focus on progress and professional development (Martha, Semi-structured interview).

The time issue is raised here and about how that is prioritised towards assessment and marking to ensure quality pupil outcomes, as opposed to prioritising teachers' PD.

Reflecting on financial incentives such as pay and reward this seemed disproportionate to the workload. There was a reference to the level of professional stress from others' expectations that led to high levels of personal dissatisfaction. This was perceived to result in teachers leaving the profession. In their Academy, teachers were leaving in large numbers. The attrition rate in England is high, which is acknowledged in the literature in Chapter 2. The literature demonstrated that the transition from pre-service training to the first year was described as "practice shock" (McCormack, Gore & Thomas, 2006, p.103). This shock occurs because of the difference between the new teacher's idealist values and the reality of practice in the classroom. Some education research postulated that teachers are leaving due to stress as a dominant factor, with teacher morale and well-being remaining high in responses to surveys nationally (Day and Gu, 2014, p.xvi). Therefore, I can conclude that what Martha described is in line with the evidence in the educational research literature that is adding pressure on teachers.

SLT was seen to have the power to dictate who had access to PD and the priority for PD distribution. There was a need to be more consistent and supportive of the early career teachers in the Academy. PD seemed to be prioritised for those in middle leadership roles. Martha stated,

> How do I prioritise what I want or need within this Academy with those restrictions? I don't know how to do that now with gaps in my own experience and professional development (Martha, *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* discussion).

Martha perceived a disadvantage in their progression due to gaps in their knowledge from inadequate opportunities to engage in professional development. Other pressures, like those from independent regulatory bodies such as Ofsted, also seemed to contribute to the workload and subsequent stress for Martha. I will now summarise the whole activity system for Martha.

Summary:

As an ECT, Martha understood how rules played out as part of the school community. They felt the government, specifically the Department for Education, had control of the educational policy that the school enforced. They understood the hierarchy in the division of labour and how internal and external expectations often fought with high levels of tension to try and ensure that everyone followed due process to maintain the *quality* of education for children (Kumar and Sarangapani, 2004; UN, 2017; Department for Education, 2016a, 2022) and with the highest regard for *professionalism* (Hoyle and John, 1995; Sachs, 2003; Department for Education, 2011; Evans, 2011; Department for Education, 2016a) Quality and professionalism are two of the social aspects I examined in Chapter 2 and are perpetuated terms in the literature.

Martha held on tight to her early career aspirations to care for and make a difference in children's lives, and despite barriers, they still aspired at this early stage of their career to progress into leadership. Martha reflected that PD, mentors and adequate support were helping them to achieve their ambitions, and regardless of the challenge, they were willing to succeed using their *grit and determination.* This activity system seemed to work for Martha; despite the barriers, these were often mitigated creatively. The system described seemed efficient at this stage of this

teacher's career. If Martha could have modified the activity system, they would have wished for more efficient PD to support them in achieving their career goals. They wanted the hierarchy, particularly those at the top (the Department for Education), to recognise teachers' pressures and do something tangible about them.

Next, I examined the whole professional activity system for Ricky to compare directly different teachers' activity systems.

The Whole Professional Activity System for Ricky:

Figure 14 – Whole Activity System for Ricky.

PD for middle leadership, school policy and frameworks and reflective dialogue.

TS

Recently Qualified Teacher Teaching for three years. **S**

OO To care for and support children's progress with outcome to ensure children are happy and successful.

Compliance with professional expectations, adherence to frameworks and sticking to the agenda. **R**

C
School, children, parents, teachers, subject leaders, middle management and senior leaders.

DoL Society, Government, DfE, Ofsted, Headteachers.

1. The Tools and Signs (TS) most important to Ricky were support for professional development to middle leadership, local policy development to support government policy implementation at a local level, observations of others to keep developing their practice, and reflective dialogue with colleagues mainly from outside of their school.

2. The Subject (S) was Ricky a recently qualified teacher who had been teaching for three years.

3. The Rules (R) that Ricky felt he had to abide by were compliance with professional expectations and frameworks, which they described as "driving an agenda" (Ricky, semi-structured interview).

4. The people associated with the community (C) that Ricky referred to in the interview narrative were the school; children; parents; teachers; subject leaders; middle management, and senior leaders.

5. The Division of Labour (DoL) was viewed as hierarchical. It was shared between society and expectations on the profession, the government pushing the policy mainly from the Department for Education, and quality assurance regulated by Ofsted. The DoL was viewed to be disseminated at the school level by the Headteacher.

6. The Object for Ricky was caring for and supporting the children's progress. The Outcome was to ensure that children were happy and successful (OO).

The first triadic relationship I examined was between TS, S and OO. Ricky, in his third year of teaching, felt that ongoing professional development focusing on the central leadership pathway and coordination of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) was very important to them at this career stage. They had already secured funding from the school to pursue the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML) course to support them in meeting their professional career ambitions.

There was a strong desire to make a difference through education and care for the children (Object, O). They wanted to progress to a leadership role and reflected in the narrative that support from colleagues was influential in the absence of a formal mentor at this stage of their career.

The second triadic relationship was between the teacher, rules and community. The rules like compliance with professional expectations as dictated by the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011) and adherence with school and curriculum frameworks like the National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014a) felt like a dictum to Ricky. They had almost normalised the cultural and

political aspects of their professional life that they often described as adding to the workload and pressures they felt.

The community included those whom Ricky felt were instrumental in the success of the school and their role and named colleagues in school; the children; parents; subject leaders; middle managers (that they were aspiring to become), and senior leaders like the Headteacher as part of this triadic relationship. The school colleagues, including the Headteacher, seemed instrumental in the support provided to an aspiring middle leader. Release time was available to engage in training and equated to about 10 per cent of the week. The Headteacher was fully supportive of aspirations, and Ricky valued meeting with teachers from other schools and having reflective conversations about the practice where ideas could be shared to support embedding practice in their school context.

The time away from school engaging in PD was perceived to enable reflection to happen in a safe space. Ricky stated,

> The ethos of the school has implications. Being around that varied experiences and attitude towards learning affects the way you think; that's how I want to be or don't want to be, and I think that all has an impact over time…modelled school experience, and honest reflection is positive; I was worried about expectations of subject and phase leaders that I might not have time to do it (Ricky, Life-History Interview).

Ricky had insecurities about their abilities when comparing themselves to others as part of the social aspects of the school. For them, time away from the school where experiences could be shared and compared with experiences of other teachers from other contexts alleviated some of their fears. This mutual support from peers encouraged them to follow a programme of middle leadership, and they began coordinating the school's ICT subject. It was difficult for me to assume that Ricky

would not have progressed without the support of colleagues, but they did imply that this support was crucial to their progress.

The third triadic relationship was between the Subject (S), Object and Outcomes (OO) and Community (C). Ricky was ambitious to achieve his outcome to progress to leadership within the school. The school community and support from colleagues were important to that ambition. It was essential to be supported to enable him to reach their outcome and progress to leadership. He said,

> The change to my identity has been progressive…I have been moulded. I have perceptions about what a teacher should and should not be doing. I am confident to go to the deputy or Headteacher for support, but other staff like SLT have other priorities (Ricky, Life-History Interview).

When I asked about the interaction with parents as part of the school community, Ricky replied,

> I believe they are the way to our success with their children; parents trust us to deal with them. They have minimal knowledge of what teachers' behaviours should be like; there is almost a disconnect between modern teaching and their primary school experience (Ricky, semi-structured interview).

Parents were necessary as part of the school community, and the teacher-parent relationship was meaningful when supporting the children to be happy and achieve. They reflected that the relationship with parents was fractured due to what they perceived as parents' own negative school experiences during their education. Ricky reflected that school and schooling had changed so much from when parents were at school that they felt unsure about how to support their children. This was very similar to what Martha reported, so this appeared to be a reoccurring theme between the findings from Martha and Ricky's narrative.

The fourth triadic relationship examined for Ricky was between the Object and Outcome (OO), Community (C) and the Division of Labour (DoL). The Division of

Labour (DoL) seemed hierarchical (the same as Martha), with society and its expectations at the top of the hierarchy. Societal values, parental choice and opinion were strong, and government rhetoric often informed opinions through policy. The way that teachers' roles were projected through policy was problematic, and the Department for Education seemed to hold a lot of the power in how the teacher and their roles are perceived publicly. When talking about the government, Ricky stated that,

> The framework the government are proposing to decrease teacher's workload will be better, but in reality, leaders are still sensitive about the expectations and are trying to cover all bases. The policy is impacting teachers negatively even if it isn't meant to (Ricky, semi-structured interview).

Ricky tried to manage their workload and not to work at weekends but did work two to three hours in the evening to mark and prepare for the next day. Contrary to Martha, Ricky thought their school's marking policy was not onerous. The middle leaders' course was delivered in twilight sessions and conducted independently. They were willing to give up their time for PD as they viewed it as an investment in their future career.

Ricky's relationship with some members of the SLT seemed to be strained due to an impending Ofsted inspection. The pressures within the school meant they felt under scrutiny as a subject leader, and they were responsible for monitoring progress data and reporting it during an Ofsted inspection. They appeared to reflect that this pressure had caused a change in relationships, as teachers scrutinised each other's work during subject teaching observations. The dialogue and critique around these observations made Ricky feel uneasy. Similarly, Martha also reflected on pressures around anticipated Ofsted inspections. Performativity expectations during anticipated regulatory inspections, along with heavy workloads associated with data harvesting

and monitoring progress, caused negative changes to the ethos and practices of staff/colleagues. This is another identified similarity in the narratives between Martha and Ricky when examining and reporting on the findings. I will now summarise the whole activity system for Ricky.

Summary:

As a recently qualified teacher in their third year of teaching, Ricky understands government policy, how it is implemented in school, and whose responsibility it was to implement certain aspects of the policy. They had experienced responsibility first-hand as they were on a middle leader development pathway and coordinated ICT in school as a subject leader. They understood the hierarchy and how labour was divided in school and realised how important it was to comply with professional expectations and educational frameworks like the Teachers' Standards and National Curriculum. They were aware of the need to *stick to the agenda,* and there was no indication from Ricky's whole narrative that they would rebel against these expectations; instead, they understood the expectations and chose to comply.

Ricky was ambitious and on track to meet their expectations of middle leadership and did express that they wanted to progress further to a Headship. This activity system seemed to work for Ricky, and despite the tensions and described barriers, these were often resolved efficiently by Ricky with support from colleagues. The conflict did not compromise their personal and professional values. Support also came from professional conversations with colleagues outside of school; this system seemed efficient and flexible enough to enable Ricky to perform well at this career stage.

I have examined and will now summarise the whole professional activity system for Gina.

The Whole Professional Activity System for Gina:

Gina's whole professional activity system was routed predominantly in their teaching life's social, political and cultural aspects. It is represented visually below on the CHAT frame (Figure 8, p.157).

Figure 15 – Whole Activity System for Gina.

Support for PD and reflective time to modify and improve teaching practice.

TS

Early Career Teacher Teaching for two years. **S**

OO Making a difference and inspiring and engaging the children to achieve their ambitions with a personal ambition to leadership.

Expectations and cultures in schools, competitiveness to achieve leadership roles, ad quality linked to professional qualification and status. **R**

C

DoL Ofsted, Senior Leadership Team and Headteacher.

Colleagues (teachers), mentor, children, parents, school and family

1. The Tools and Signs (TS) essential to Gina were professional development, support, and time to reflect and modify professional practice.

2. The Subject (S), Gina, has been qualified and teaching for two years.

3. The Rules (R) that Gina felt was a part of school life were the cultures embedded by school leadership with certain expectations of individual teachers. They described competitiveness when it came to progression between newer staff and those that had worked at the school for a long time. The quality of the professionals' work was attributed to qualification and time in practice.

4. The people associated with the community (C) that Gina referred to as contributing to the school ethos and values were colleagues (teachers); Gina's mentor; the children; the parents; the school, and Gina's family.

5. The Division of Labour (DoL) within the school community was viewed as hierarchal and was maintained by Ofsted (an independent regulatory body) that inspected schools; the SLT and the Headteacher of the school oversaw policy implementation at the school level.

6. The Object of their role was making a difference and engaging and inspiring children to learn. The professional Outcome Gina aspired to achieve was to progress to a leadership role, specifically Deputy, then a school headship (OO).

The first triadic relationship I examined was between the Tools and Signs, Subjects, Objects and Outcomes. Gina (the Subject, S) was in their second year of teaching. They felt that support for ongoing professional development (TS) with time to reflect and modify to improve professional classroom practice was necessary at this stage of their early career. Gina had a focus on their progression within a career in teaching and wanted to progress to become a leader in a school, initially in the SLT team (Gina already coordinated science as a subject within the school), then eventually go to Deputy and then Headship of a school (Outcome O; OO). They held onto their ambitions firmly and seemed motivated by professional challenges.

The second triadic relationship was between the Subject (S), Rules (R) and Community (C). The community was viewed as helping to maintain the ethos and values of the school within the contextual cultures of the school. They acknowledged working in a competitive environment where leadership roles were usually given to those who had worked in the school the longest rather than those who might have the necessary skills to fulfil that role regardless of how long they had worked there. This competition was viewed as a disadvantage to the less experienced staff members (including Gina) when competing to secure a more senior role within the school.

The Community (C), including those whom Gina felt were essential to creating and maintaining the ethos and values of the school, were colleagues (other teachers) and the mentor was cited a lot for providing support and encouragement. The children were important people in the community and were the core focus of Gina's professional work. Making a difference and inspiring the children to engage in learning and meet their aspirations in life was important. Parents were cited as an essential part of the school community, and Gina acknowledged that having a good relationship with parents was necessary to support the children. The school was part of a holistic community, including those working in the school, those as part of the extended community, including other agencies and extended family members to the children. Because Gina worked in a small village school, they described the community as very close-knit and took a vested interest in the school and its contribution to the community.

The Headteacher was fully supportive of their aspirations. Still, they found that the competitive nature of securing roles in such a small school, where more experienced colleagues were favoured, required clarifying how they could navigate this competitive environment to secure the position they aspired to. Gina's notion of reflection was embedded in Gina's reflective practice routine when reliving learning and teaching to support innovating or changing classroom practices to respond to the children's or school's needs. Certain cultures were fostered in the school, linked to working as part of the close-knit community that shared and supported the school's vision and values.

Gina did have insecurities during their early career about their abilities when comparing themselves to more experienced others in the school. They reflected that

they compared themselves to others, but the more experienced they became, they began to have faith in their abilities. In year two of teaching, they did not have a teaching assistant, which made them nervous, and they had to get on and do the job dealing with things themselves.

They described "feeling comfortable in my own skin" (Gina, Semi-structured interview). They were becoming more confident in their own identity as a teacher and professional, but 'own skin' also refers to the person with a *dual* identity. The literature stated that identity is a cultural and social formation (Zimmerman, 1998) and that changes to these cultural and social conceptions in society are strongly resisted (Richards, 2006, Richards, 2015; Pennington, 2015). During their early career, there seemed to be a battle, fighting to find themselves and their way of being a teacher. Initially, they started by modelling themselves on others, they soon realised that they could not maintain this pseudo-identity and eventually began to find themselves.

The third triadic relationship was between the Subject (S), Object and Outcomes (OO) and Community (C). It was essential to be supported and to be able to reach their outcome, which was an aspiration to progress to leadership. Gina said,

> Since September [2019] and becoming an RQT, I feel like I have taken on things and challenged myself; it's made me stronger as a teacher. Little things I would have depended on others for I can now deal with that myself…I don't know if it comes with experience or confidence, but yes, I am there…I plan and want to progress (Gina, semi-structured interview).

They acknowledged a growing strength in their professional role and cited growing confidence and competence with increasing experience. When I asked Gina about their interaction as part of the school community with children and parents, they replied that parents have high expectations of staff and, sometimes, relationships

with parents can be tense. It is important to note that contact with parents differed when the data was gathered and reported because schools were closed or partially due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. All interaction with parents and children was online initially then hybrid (online and/or face-to-face) when relaxation of restrictions allowed. However, the parents had high expectations of the teachers supporting and educating their children, regardless of the pandemic and national educational context. Fractious relationships with parents as part of the community were very similar to what Martha and Ricky reported, so this is a reoccurring theme across all three participants. I interpret it as important.

The fourth triadic relationship I examined was between the Object and Outcome (OO), Community (C) and the Division of Labour (DoL). The Division of Labour (DoL) described by P3 seemed hierarchical, with Ofsted, the independent regulatory body that inspected schools, at the top of the hierarchy. This was followed by the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Gina felt accountable for preparing the year two children for Statutory Attainment Tests (SATs) and achieving positive data they felt responsible for. Martha and Ricky also reflected this feeling of negativity about Ofsted and the pressures inspections caused in terms of workload and 'fear' of inspection. This has been identified as a common theme across all three participants' interview narratives whilst examining and reporting the findings.

Gina positioned children within the community as their highest priority for them and said,

> If I do not do a good job, I am going to be that teacher that failed the children, and I don't want to be that (Gina, semi-structured interview).

Gina is objectifying the role, distinguishing themselves as professionals, and being of exceptional quality for the children and not someone else. They are not willing to adopt a different identity; this re-affirms their confidence in themselves and their ability. Relationships with more experienced colleagues seemed strained due to the competitiveness they described when trying to secure more senior roles. Gina stated,

> I feel where I am now; there are not many opportunities. I know where I am, the staff they have those roles [Gina aspires to these leadership roles], and I know with the size of the school I am not going to get those opportunities…I would have to move, and I know that will be the case in a few years (Gina, semi-structured interview).

Gina was aspiring to leadership but realised they would have to move schools to gain the opportunities required to advance to leadership. This must have been a tension and conflict between being happy where they were and knowing that they must move to achieve their professional ambitions. This must have been unsettling to be so early in a career and happy, but to know already they must move to realise their professional aspirations.

Summary:

Gina is aware of how the school functions within the community, and they understand the hierarchy of the division of labour and how the profession is regulated, and performance driven. The expectations conveyed by the policy were often implemented from the top by the SLT, which in this context was dominated by more experienced teachers. Gina aspired to locate themselves in this space within a leadership position.

Gina was ambitious to become a leader, but more experienced staff presented a significant barrier to these ambitions. Gina perceived more senior staff members as

either favoured for PD opportunities or dictated how those opportunities were disseminated, which seemed to disadvantage Gina. This activity system seemed to function well for Gina but required modification to continue to meet Gina's professional needs in the future. They acknowledged they would have to move schools in the next few years and enter a new activity system to realise their professional ambitions.

Final summation for RQ2:

When I examine Martha, Ricky and Gina's professional activity systems, there are common reoccurring themes that are either important to all participants or cause tensions and barriers for the participants.

Martha, Ricky and Gina agreed that their main objective was supporting children and making a difference. This outcome seemed central to all participant activity systems; most narrative threads led back to trying to maintain a focus on supporting the children. In all three participant's circumstances, helping children seemed to emphasise progress instead of focusing on an accountability-driven education system that decentralises care and prioritises achievement when implementing policy.

Martha, Ricky and Gina wanted to make sure that the children were happy. Children being happy was a central measure of the teachers' professional success. They agreed that the principles of caring are present in the government's educational agenda. Martha, Ricky and Gina felt care should be explicit in the frameworks and curriculum documents that dictate what and how the frameworks are taught, with some acknowledgement that for children to reach their potential, they need to be happy and well cared for. I examined the interpretations of care in Chapter 2 and

acknowledged different interpretations of care and whether it is linked to empowering children to succeed rather than 'care' as to save children or make things better. Regardless of those interpretations Martha, Ricky and Gina take *care* seriously without being asked, and recognise this as a personal duty, rating care more important than progress as part of educational agendas driven by performativity. Performativity and workload pressures associated with performance were more readily resisted by the more experienced teachers (Ricky and Gina).

Relationships with the community and parents were strongly associated with the care of pupils as part of the teachers' activity systems. All participants described fractured relationships with parents that directly affected the children. The teachers valued the parents, understood the importance of positive relationships, and invested much time in those relationships. They talked of parents 'buying in' to education and developing the parents' understanding and support of what the teachers were trying to achieve. This sense of school and community was powerful, and whilst teachers wanted to nurture this, I did sense that teachers did not feel part of this community. They described remaining separate and occupying an uncomfortable space between their role, sense of self, and personal values separated from the community.

Martha, Ricky and Gina in their narratives talked of multiple identities between of *self* and *professional* that were impacted upon by personal, organisational, social, political, cultural and historical aspects in a dynamic way. Combinations of different identities might have been employed at any one time to satisfy others' expectations whilst trying to remain true to 'self'. They felt that the community, who comprised of different stakeholders according to each individual CHAT frame, only saw the teacher, not the person. Sometimes Martha, Ricky and Gina reflected hostility was

shown towards them without regard for the person doing the job. The mentor seemed central as part of the support for each teacher, and integral to their activity systems. The more experienced teachers (Ricky and Gina) positioned themselves further away from the mentor's direct support, whilst Martha wished she had more consistent support. I observed dips in all three's confidence until they found a way to be more autonomous and trust their own professional decisions. For Ricky, the most experienced teacher, this was from the mid-point in the second year of teaching. The mentors supported reflective dialogue that enabled each teacher to reflect on and modify professional classroom practice. To overcome the barriers presented, Martha, Ricky and Gina faced challenges directly to find solutions that worked for them rather than those modelled by more experienced others.

Ricky and Gina recognised the power imbalances and the role of SLT within the school's hierarchy and felt at times disadvantaged by decisions made by SLT in favour of more experienced colleagues. Perceived inconsistencies, for example, in the distribution or access to professional development opportunities, were often mitigated within the complex activity systems by the teacher's resolve and creativity to get on with the job rather than through direct support mechanisms. This showed natural resilience to do the job to the best of their ability, even with limited support and resources (such as money to engage in PD).

The most prominent tension woven throughout the narrative was between the personal ambition of these teachers and the professional realities they described. They reflected that their professional status seemed threatened by deficit models of teachers' competence and professional status projected in the literature and policy documentation, which will be explored in much more detail in the next section as I

analyse Martha, Ricky and Gina's perceptions of the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (2019d) and the overall discussion for RQ3.

Three teachers' opinions on the challenges and solutions proposed in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d).

Operationalising government policy relies on navigating the socio-political context of the school and the cultures and histories of the wider community. Martha, Ricky and Gina's narratives showed that teachers face barriers to engaging with ongoing professional development, which they perceived impacted their working lives. This sub-section of Chapter 5 will analyse the broader implications of the findings and how the activity systems function in practice within the policy landscape in England, with specific reference to the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d) and the other policies that teachers cited in their narratives.

Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy:

The discussion conducted with each of the teachers on the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department for Education, 2019d) allowed me to ask Martha, Ricky and Gina directly if they perceived that the four challenges the government had identified in the strategy accurately reflected the current challenges in the teaching profession. I simultaneously analysed their perceptions of whether the government's proposed solutions to those challenges would work in practice in their schools.

Challenge 1 was focused on accountability in current school systems and asserted that this added extra pressure and workload to teachers. Martha, Ricky and Gina agreed with the challenge presented by the current government and evidenced that

accountability caused tensions in their working practices. Scepticism was expressed as to whether the proposed solution, of the government working with the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted, 2019b) a supposed independent regulatory body, could make a difference in reducing accountability in practice in all school contexts. The literature concurred with the Martha, Ricky and Gina's perceptions that outcome-based policies increase accountability (Sikes, Nixon & Carr, 2003). There was a focus on problems associated with workload and work-life balance and reflections that planning and marking to meet others' expectations had the most significant impact on their workload. Evidence in the literature asserts that increased pressure decreases motivation and teachers' self-esteem (Dorman, 2003; Shernoff *et al.*, 2011).

Local policy impacting on workload:

School policies, such as marking policy were described particularly by Martha as onerous and the hours worked associated with planning impacted work-life balance. Rules associated with local policy frameworks negotiated power distribution and uneven responsibility for workload (Stillman and Anderson, 2011). Martha called for planning and marking to be more purposeful; they began to question who planning was for. Despite describing it as taking six hours a day to complete planning and marking, they continued to do this and "get on with their job" (Martha, semi-structured interview). This showed a high level of professionalism and commitment: they admitted that no one ever looked at the planning, but they did it anyway because that is what they perceived they were expected to do.

Martha, Ricky and Gina felt that pay was not high enough for the hours worked and reward financially was not actualised. They felt that an increased salary might bolster

the current workload. Analysis of the findings showed that teachers would work regardless of the workload size to avoid being a disappointment to the managers delegating the work to them. This demonstrates the highest commitment teachers feel bound to deliver in the profession. They each concluded that planning was important and were unsure that there was any consequence of planning and marking not being completed. The literature I examined in Chapter 2 demonstrated teachers being compliant and following the professional expectations of others, particularly those more senior to them. These aspects of professionalism are driven by what the teachers perceive are elements of the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011), which I have examined in more depth later in this chapter.

Power imbalances:

Martha perceived that by not doing what was asked (or what they perceived was expected), they were viewed as rebelling against 'the rules', which made them a disappointment to senior leaders and managers. This reflected a perceived power imbalance between the teachers and leaders. Evidence demonstrates a gap between policy and practice (Birzea *et al.*, 2005). Martha described being "gutsy" (Martha, semi-structured interview) fighting against the power imbalances and saying 'no' to activities associated with planning and marking. Workload pressures were associated with school cultures and local expectations rather than with direct expectations of the government. This does lead to questions about how leadership teams in the schools interpret government policy wording and how school leaders disseminated the implementation plan, perhaps applying inadvertent a perceived excessive pressure on teachers who enact the policy directives in practice. Power imbalances between policy writers (government) and policy implementers (teachers)

exist (Stevenson, 2011) and perpetuate notions of accountability and quality, increasing the feeling of control.

It was clear from all three participants' narratives that they received little guidance on how to adapt the policy directive to local contextual practice. Martha, Ricky and Gina felt answerable to the school's hierarchical management structure, and the analysis of the narrative implied that someone (or something like a policy) had power over the teacher and forced their compliance to react, e.g., to plan or to mark. The consequence of not doing as expected [non-compliance] left all three teachers experiencing a negative feeling about the person who did not comply and cited a sense of disappointment in themselves.

Headteachers' autonomy and notions of control:
There was a sense that policy had changed the autonomy of Headteachers and that the policyholders [the government] had all the power. Martha, Ricky and Gina acknowledged that Headteachers delegated some of the policy implementations to the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), which was then cascaded to the subject or middle leaders in the school. Control (someone having power over another, Stevenson, 2011) and a desire for professional autonomy created barriers and possibly impacted professional relationships. Often Martha, Ricky and Gina reflected that they needed more time to dedicate to policy implementation, which led to inconsistent approaches within and between schools. At the school level, an approach described as "covering all bases" (Ricky, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy discussion), which disproportionately increased the workload for full-time classroom teachers.

There was a feeling that the pressure of workload increased the further away from the top of the hierarchy individuals got. In one system, the Headteacher was at the bottom of the hierarchy, and society including the government was at the top. This inferred an imbalance in the power of those key stakeholders in the school community. The delegation and distribution of tasks in this school context increased workload expectations, and pressures were usually tied up in focus on data as part of the increasing accountability system, which was perceived as exacerbating the workload issue when individuals were trying to gain a proportionate work-life balance.

The need to reform aspects of performativity and accountability:

The main driver for the government reform is to balance accountability and workload (Department for Education, 2019d) so that more teachers would be willing to stay in the profession for longer. Martha, Ricky and Gina were pessimistic that this would work because of the refusal to meaningfully reduce the overreliance on progress data and performativity amid a teacher shortage and rising attrition rate. Teachers in this study felt that accountability was a lever to achieving the government policy pledges (rather than balancing accountability). They reflected that accountability was sometimes a bad thing to implement and manage to ensure people were doing the job they were paid for (which implied that accountability was a lever to control teachers).

The proposed solution to work with Ofsted (2019b) to balance accountability and workload was viewed favourably. Still, participants wanted clarification about what that would look like in practice when implemented in their school context because of how labour was divided and cascaded in the hierarchal school structures. The

phrase "rhetoric" (Ricky, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy discussion) was used, inferring that the government dictated school and staff performance without individual contextual circumstances being considered. This is linked to the perceived imbalances in power distribution amongst the school staff.

A sensible way forward might be for more consultation of teachers by the government, with teachers being encouraged to engage in consultation opportunities to enable the government to ascertain the real contextual pressures schools face and how suggested solutions will impact schools when implemented in practice. This will support the government in opening a meaningful dialogue about reform and establish how much autonomy school staff feel they have, enabling them to problem-solve effectively during policy implementation at the local level.

ITT Core Content Framework and Teachers' Standards:

The *Core Content Framework* (CCF) (Department for Education, 2019b) and the *Teachers' Standards* (Department for Education, 2011) are inextricably linked. When the government wrote the CCF, they had the Teachers' Standards interwoven through the document as markers of the professional requirements of teachers that underpin the curriculum for Initial Teacher Training (ITT). The Teachers' Standards comprise eight standards in Part One. They outline the knowledge, skills and professional expertise at the heart of training and school experience required by the government to qualify as a teacher. The personal and professional conduct requirements are stated in Part Two.

Professional duty:

The CCF attempts to group the Standards under three main expectations. First, having high expectations of children and managing behaviour (Standard one and seven); second, pedagogy (how children learn), classroom practice and adaptive teaching (Standard two, four and five); third, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours (Standard three, six, eight and part two).

Teachers in this study felt the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011), bound them in professional duty. They felt the Teachers' Standards bound teacher quality, and quality was determined through progression data and outcomes of the pupils. The participants constantly referred to working hard and teaching being hard work. They felt they needed to demonstrate that they always worked hard, and they always needed to justify their time working on school or other educational activities. All three participants reported heavy workloads, working late nights and weekends, and that a complementary work-life balance was hard to maintain. It was not expressed that workload was prescribed explicitly but inferred implicitly or personally in how Martha, Ricky and Gina felt.

Feelings of guilt, fear, and oppression:

The feeling of guilt appeared to arise from taking time off from work or focusing on their work-life balance. Lack of time and guilt about not always working because of the high professional expectations and the need to demonstrate or even quantify in units of time how hard they worked. One participant expressed being "scared" (Gina, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy discussion) and being fearful of the consequences of not meeting expectations of regulatory inspection (by Ofsted, 2021) overseen by the government. The feeling of fear reflected a power imbalance

between themselves and the government. This fear manifested itself in the pressure they put on themselves constantly to be working and accessible via email. Gina stated that they felt that they must always justify their use of time spent on professional activity. Accountability and the need to demonstrate children's progress were engrained in the primary education system at one school. This pressure to perform was enhanced by perpetuating accountability through publishing national league tables and assessments against inspection frameworks that measure a school's effectiveness based on children's progress. Meeting the expectations through Ofsted's benchmarks was cited by all three participants.

Martha, Ricky and Gina reflected that they felt their teacher autonomy as a professional was oppressed, and the closer towards leadership they progressed, professionalism was rewarded with reduced teaching schedules and increasing independence. But increased autonomy in leadership was often cited by the Ricky to be at the expense of other classroom teachers (whose workload kept increasing). Martha, Ricky and Gina were trying to express that the Standards and the CCF were heavily reliant on performativity and quality discourses. The current strategy could have been more purposeful. What the government wanted to achieve in reducing workload, the opposite might be true. This solution may further burden the teachers.

Reducing children's positive educational experiences:
The way teachers were expected to follow policies was, in the participants' opinion reducing the positive educational experiences of the children. Teachers feel committed to children and remain true to their professional objectives to support children (Stronach *et al.*, 2002) The National Curriculum (Department for Education, 2014a) is content-heavy and leaves little time to respond to children's individual

needs. Martha expressed concern that the school's system was almost at breaking point by using the phrase "something has to give in the end" (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy discussion). I would question what was meant here; what is the 'something' that must give; the teachers, the policymakers, or the school leaders responsible for implementing policy? This was not made explicit to me, but I inferred that the teachers had to give, and they deemed themselves as having the least power.

Being critical, policy implementation relies on all stakeholders, not just one role holder. The detriment of someone or something is not a positive aspect of professionalism, whoever or whatever it affects. The policy reflects a narrow view of what needs to be achieved in education and should appreciate the whole school context. Ricky referred to their role as becoming a normative state and called this a "sad reality" (Ricky, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy discussion). Hearing this was not easy, and I could see the concern on the participant's face; they reflected a helpless state and conveyed the expectation to comply and implement policy under such pressured conditions. Often, Ricky reflected that this went against their desires. I acknowledge this is based on limited opinions reflecting in their context. I would question if the 'Standards' intend to drive compliance amongst the teaching workforce rather than promote progress in the best interests of the teachers and pupils.

Driving compliance:
Contextual factors impacted progress, determined by what was best for the children (rather than the teachers) in a particular school context. I would speculate that progress (and compliance) is levered by government policy and framed by the

Teachers' Standards, which is perpetuated by the discourse around professionalism through conformity. Based on the teachers' narratives, I would say the latter is accurate as it appears to be a *one size fits all* policy and does not consider the school, teachers' or children's contextual challenges.

Implementing such a policy effectively depended on the leaders and how they deployed the workforce during implementation; the responsibility was cascaded to the class teachers. Their effectiveness was measured by how well the policy was implemented, indicated by pupil progress. Martha. Ricky and Gina appeared to have some autonomy about how policy was implemented in classrooms, but this has led to inconsistencies in policy implementation in individual schools and across the profession. Inconsistency is not always bad, but of ECTs are to learn ways of doing things and then want to move schools some consistency in professional development would help them learn the 'craft' of teaching. This was corroborated in the narratives of Martha, Ricky and Gina in this study: the feeling of compliance and a lack of power on the teacher's part is a reoccurring theme.

Early Career Framework and National Standards for School-Based ITT Mentors: The Early Career Framework (Department for Education, 2019b) was rolled out as a regional opt-in pilot in September 2020 and fully implemented in schools in England in September 2021. The framework invests in support for early career teachers (ECTs) including access to up-to-date research and links with mentors. The heart of the English government's proposals includes extra time off timetable for teachers to engage in professional development and phased financial incentives to progress, with retention payments to stay in the profession.

The benefits of a two-year funded support package:

The quality and consistency of mentor support are essential to teachers and the professional recommendations of the role of a mentor as advised by the *National Standards for School-Based ITT Mentors.* These standards are non-statutory and only act as a recommendation of the practice of the mentors to support ITT trainees and Newly Qualified Teachers. A mentor is defined in the policy as,

> A mentor is a suitably experienced teacher who has a formal responsibility to work collaboratively within the ITT partnership to help ensure the trainee receives the highest-quality training (p.7).

The Mentor Standards are underpinned by the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011). The Standards support quality by fostering a consistent approach to practice, identifying effective characteristics of mentoring to ensure a more coherent experience for trainees, which, the government foresees leads to more effective teachers. Having an influential mentor reduces stress and increases personal and professional efficacy (Fives, Hamman & Olvarez, 2007). The government views the Standards as raising mentors' profiles in a PD framework for current and aspiring mentors. Most importantly, the advice embedded in the Standards aimed to promote an ethos of coaching and mentoring in schools. Mentoring is a 'formal' responsibility; therefore, I am surprised that the Mentor Standards are not statutory.

The importance of the mentor role:

Martha, Ricky and Gina shared mixed feelings about the ECF, especially about the role of mentors. Ricky was initially opposed to making the funded period two years for ECTs because schools lack funding to support such a package. However, he had changed their minds after recently supporting an ECT and reflected that because

routes into teaching were much condensed (with some PG routes being just nine months of training for a typical PGCE), additional time for induction and *on-the-job training* would be beneficial. Ricky questioned whether their school could afford an ECT and release of the mentor's time over two years and said the school would need additional funding in their context. There was some agreement in the responses from Martha and Gina who thought it would be helpful because "eight standards [Teachers' Standards] to meet and show all you have to offer in a year [the current duration of the NQT year up to September 2021] is a challenge" (Martha, semi-structured interview).

There was another perception in the academic literature that fragmentation of support had occurred over decades of shifting responsibility from Local Authority support, which recently moved to Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). Martha, Gina and Ricky perceived that all schools were doing things differently, and what one school might suggest as supportive, might not be able to be implemented in practice in another school. There was concern from Ricky and Gina that this would lead to a poor-quality experience for an ECT in the context of specific schools. The honesty in the discussion was valued, but I could appreciate that not giving a quality experience to an ECT in positions as aspiring middle leaders was troubling to the more experienced teachers. Still, a shrug of the shoulders by Ricky told me there was nothing he felt personally that he could do; they felt powerless. Developing strong peer-peer relationships has been shown to decrease emotional exhaustion, stress and eventual burnout (Shernoff *et al.,* 2011), therefore, having a consistent and supportive other could aid retention of the teaching workforce.

Making the mentor standards statutory would ensure that quality is maintained and that the role of the mentor and the formality of the relationship with ECTs are protected. The 4 standards are focused on personal qualities: setting high expectations in teaching and inducting teachers into professional norms and values. Value positions are an interesting concept that the research has demonstrated can be under tension as teachers try to hold onto their values and aspirations while being challenged by the values of more experienced others. Finally, Standard 4 is focused on self-development and working in partnership.

Working collaboratively and valuing partnership for support:

Martha, Ricky and Gina referred to the holistic sense of high expectations and professionalism and some of the pressure they put on themselves to support others. They described pressure coming from the government through policy, implemented according to the school's leadership directive and within contextual pressures. The same policy was not implemented consistently within the three teachers' schools. The responsibility for this implementation relied on school leaders, who could have been the ones exerting pressure on the class teachers. Without talking to all Headteachers in the country, it is not for me to assume that this is the case; a larger-scale consensus would need to be drawn from further research or new studies to understand the sources of the pressure on all primary school teachers in England.

I reflected that middle leaders could have some power and leverage to drive the support for ECTs within school structures. They could convey their opinion by sharing ideas with colleagues at middle-leader meetings about what works or not during the implementation phase of the ECF Framework. There was the consideration of "whether this reflection was helpful to establish whether they could

implement the policy effectively in their schools" (Ricky, semi-structured interview). This shows professional confidence at this stage in their career (three years post-qualification), but this is my opinion, based on the whole narrative and was not confirmed explicitly.

Gina reflected that she had a great mentor who supported them during the first year but struggled as they moved into year two post-qualification. In the second year of teaching, Gina was expected to be more autonomous without the immediate support of a mentor. Being more autonomous in year two of teaching was complex, "in your second year, you do need to be let go [of support]" (Gina, semi-structured interview). She described an overreliance on the mentor's support in their first year of teaching. Suddenly having to "learn my ways and know it's ok to make mistakes in the second year. I can deal with things on my own now" [at the end of the second year] (Gina, semi-structured interview).

What I found interesting about Gina's narrative was how she described hierarchy and power distribution without being explicit, I am not sure Gina was aware that they were doing this. Gina used language to describe people, i.e., the mentor as "above me" (Gina, semi-structured interview). As I tried to unravel this, I pondered does Gina mean more experienced or almost like a higher being, more knowledgeable and *better* than them, as a quality indicator. Gina respected and valued the support from the mentor, but the support created a change and developed their teacher identity. They viewed it as positive and stated, "I had great support, and I feel that is what made me the teacher I am now" (Gina, semi-structured interview). Gina described an apparent difference in their identity as an ECT and how they currently perceive themselves, and how '*self*' was interpreted by others (Pennington, 2015).

This indicates a change in professional or default institutional identity (Richards, 2006), a shift in the type of teacher they are over time, past and present, perhaps feeling inadequate early career (Williams, 2014) and secure with experience and time to develop classroom practice.

Flexible working and fragmentation of support for ECTs:
Part-time and flexible working patterns might disrupt support consistency for ECTs. Martha's mentor only worked part-time (three days a week), and they felt they relied more on the parallel year group teacher for daily support than the mentor. The support helped them cope and decreased stress (Kyriacou, 2001). Martha said another person provided "a shoulder to cry on, offer advice and give me information; I felt like a burden to the mentor" (Martha, semi-structured interview). She described a pressure "to be the best and do everything right" (Martha, semi-structured interview) but was not explicit about where this pressure came from. I wondered whether it was from themselves, the mentor, school-level policy, or senior leaders, but Martha did not elaborate. I do not have enough evidence to make any assumptions about the source of the pressure. Still, Martha stated that it caused them anxiety, and they were worried about wanting support or asking for help.

The mentor role is a vital position that all three teachers value if the relationship works well. Martha, Ricky and Gina felt support made a difference to their practice and whom they thought they were as professionals. The mentor in all three instances was also embedded in the practices of the school, so their *insider* expertise was viewed as particularly supportive by Ricky and as the best person to support an ECT. MAT systems were perceived not to maintain effective PD by Martha because all schools did things differently. The different support mechanisms and people

conducting different roles in schools, meant to Martha that what worked positively in one school might work differently in their school context.

Martha, Ricky and Gina's experiences with their mentors were mixed, and they were cautiously optimistic about whether the solutions proposed in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (Department of Education, 2019d) would work in practice. Therefore, I think it would be sensible of the government to review the Mentor Standards concurrently with the Teachers' Standards because, the Teachers' Standards were published in 2011, the mentor standards in 2016, and the most recent policies were created in 2019 so updating these policies now to align to the most recent policies will support teachers experiences as reflected upon by Martha, Ricky and Gina. The three teachers valued partnership and working collaboratively as part of their mentoring relationships in complex professional systems and found the mentor relationship particularly supportive when experiencing challenge.

Martha, Ricky and Gina were generally in agreement with the challenges identified by the government and that they were accurately reflected in their professional lives. They all had reservations about the implementation of the proposed solutions in practice. Workload and compliance had led to fractured relationships with mentors, power imbalances in workload distribution, and limited access to professional development. This left the three teachers feeling controlled and fearful of underachievement and becoming a disappointment to their school leaders.

They were working hard to fulfil the expected standards; they experienced feelings of guilt and Gina and Martha felt the need to justify every working hour. The relentless drive for *quality* standards had left all three feeling teaching was firefighting and forfeiting, at times, their values. Interpretation and implementation of policy and

delegation of workload through the hierarchy of school staff seemed crucial to success from a leader's perspective. Martha, Ricky and Gina were focused on being happy, supporting children and being autonomous in their workload.

Unanimously, they felt the mentors and mentoring relationships were vital in supporting their PD and success. There were concerns from Ricky about schools financing a two-year ECT induction package. Martha, Ricky and Gina concluded that an extended induction package would support ECTs to deal with the school's contextual pressures and professional challenges.

To conclude this chapter, the activity systems of teachers are complex but very important in supporting teachers in achieving their goals. However, many tensions and problem-solving must occur within those systems to mitigate how the systems work to benefit the teacher.

Gina openly acknowledged that they would have to enter another system if they were going to realise their ambitions. Central to the success of their professional activity system was the support of more experienced others, like teachers and mentors. Martha, Gina and Ricky were overcoming professional challenges drawing on resources of a cultural context and the insider knowledge of more experienced others about the school's cultures, ethos and values. They drew on the established routines for support in the historical context of schools, including from mentors and colleagues in the classroom, to work with change and challenges associated with prolonged educational reform. They also drew on support from their families.

Martha, Gina and Ricky navigated the social context and contextual challenges unique to schools. Martha tried to justify that standardised professional development

processes seemed problematic based on her own experience and did not support the teachers to achieve their best. This standardisation was governed in the political context through government policy and the National Curriculum Framework (Department for Education, 2014a). A shared ethos amongst the school community perpetuated government values that extended to parents and seemed to impact the teachers' identity formation, e.g., teachers' values often did not resonate with society and government values. Personal values and drive supported their ultimate object of helping the children and outcome of eventually making career progression to leadership. Values in the community must be aligned; Martha, Ricky and Gina tried to share the educational vision, even if they had to compromise their values, and all stakeholders appeared invested in achieving ambitions.

Workload and developing a work-life balance significantly impacted the lives of Martha, Ricky and Gina. These aspects were commonly cited as both tensions and barriers to teaching effectively and achieving the care they wanted for the children. This study was never planned as an intervention to provide direct support for teachers. Still, by reflecting on the activity systems at play, I see how a process like this has provided space and time for professional reflection, which could have positive effects. There was some agreement with this in the literature, as examined in Chapter 2, when teachers are allowed to tell their stories in a safe space, anxiety is reduced as they can view situations in a different light which can lead to positive effects (Rice, 2003). The teachers' professional systems have shown they have ups and downs, but as they strive for their professional goals, Martha, Ricky and Gina can see the positive impacts of their work in the classroom in keeping children happy and supporting their progress; however, this is not realised until teachers have time

to reflect. This reflective space in the future will support teachers in maintaining a positive professional experience.

I present conclusions and recommendations in the final chapter, Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and Recommendations

This study examined teachers' lives through three research questions,

RQ1 - What do three individual teachers perceive has motivated them to go into primary teaching in England, and what have they experienced in their professional lives thus far?

RQ2 - How do the three teachers perceive they are supported to achieve their goals as teachers between one-, two-, and three- years post-qualification, respectively?

RQ3 - What are the three teachers' opinions on the challenges and solutions proposed in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy?

I will conclude what I have learnt from the findings in six main sections. Firstly, I summarise the main research findings relating to the three research questions. Second, I present the implications of the research in supporting early career teachers, which were the focus of this study. I can make tentative recommendations to support early career teachers' practices in primary schools between one-, and three-years post qualification. Thirdly, I concluded the implications of the research for local school policies to support implementation of directives from government to support early career teachers' confidence in their self-efficacy in the classroom. Fourthly, I detail how this research contributes to the body of knowledge in the context of teachers' lives and careers in England. Fifth, I have acknowledged the limitations of my research and detail the scope in which this research can be further developed. Finally, I conclude the thesis with my final reflections describing how the research impacted my thinking and professional practice.

The summary of the main findings:

Martha, Ricky and Gina each reflected on aspects of their early motivations to teach, experiences thus far in their careers and how they felt they were supported to overcome challenges. They each reflected on six aspects of their lives; 1. Personal, 2. Organisational, 3. Social, 4. Political, 5. Cultural, and 6. Historical that contributed to the formation of multiple identities. These six aspects and identities are summarised in Figure 16 below.

Figure 16 – The six aspects that contribute to multiple identities to form.

Personal	Organisational	Social
'Self' Individual Identity	'Teacher' Instituitional Identity	Martha, Ricky, Gina Hybrid identity
Names used to describe 'self' [Me, I, Mother, Father, Brother, Sister, Partner]	Names used to describe 'teacher' [Professional, teacher, leader]	Mix of individual, organisational, social and cultural aspects. Names used to describe hybrid self [Friend, aquaintence, teacher, peer]

Political	Cultural	Historical
'Teacher' Professional identity	Worldview identity, a piece of personal identity	Elder identity, concept of identity based on historical views. Changes over time, establishing a new concept of identity based on social and cultural experiences.
Names used to describe the oneself [Teacher, professional]	How people identify in terms of ethnicity, gender, language, religion and sexual orientation (Office for National Statistics, 2021)	

The descriptors in each of the blue boxes are my descriptions of the six aspects and identities based on how Martha, Ricky and Gina described aspects of their lives and identities as part of this research. The Worldview Identity is defined by the Office for National Statistics (2021) and I describe how Martha, Ricky and Gina discussed culture in their narratives later in this chapter.

I have previously acknowledged in Chapter 2, the way identities are described in the existing literature; the language used in the literature reflects individual, intimate and personal identities (Goffman, 1959; Day, 2002; Stronach et al., 2003; Day and

Sachs, 2004; Richards, 2006). I have understood better how, knowledge of 'self' develops amongst teachers and that polar or conflicting identities (individual and professional) cause tensions and teachers try to remain true to self (Stronach et al., 2003). That teachers may feel a duty to others, often at expense of self (Ball, 2003). Intimate identity is built on knowledge of self (Day and Sachs, 2004) and that the concept of self can be storied projecting a self-image that is open to interpretation by others (Richards, 2015). Identities are described as being constructed or morphing to a social situation creating situated, institutional, or default identities (Goffman, 1959; Zimmerman, 2006; Richardson and Watt, 2018). That the characteristics of identity are defined relative to others' perceptions (Pennington, 2015) and are dynamic and include dimensions of voice, profession, person, knowledge and complex membership to multiple communities (Wenger, 1998). I will now consider what aspects and forms of identity Martha, Ricky and Gina described, and how they manifested personally and through professional practice.

Personal aspects:

When discussing personal aspects Martha, Ricky and Gina referred to concepts of 'self' and their individual identity. Ricky for example talked about himself as a father and felt that once he became a father, he understood child development better and could empathise with families about the challenges of supporting children's learning and managing behaviour. Gina talked about being a sister and looking up to her own sister who was a Deputy Headteacher; prior to training Gina moulded her likeness to being a professional teacher to being like her sister. Martha talked about herself in terms of values and the notion of 'care' she held onto her values vehemently and felt that professional challenges were a challenge to 'self', and she tried to resist those aspects of her role that Martha felt compromised self, such as the expectations of

others. For Martha, Ricky and Gina 'self' was driven by their motivations to join the profession and aspirations to attain the outcome of progressing to leadership roles in the future. When challenges all three described fragilities particularly doubting their self-efficacy but their motivations, aspirations and "grit and determination" as Martha described her resolute determination (Martha, Life-History Interview) kept them motivated to continue at their jobs and in the profession.

Organisational aspects:

When reflecting on organisational aspects Martha, Gina and Ricky defaulted to working as 'teacher' their institutional identity, and what was expected of them locally e.g., in the primary school. They all felt the local focus was on progress and that this pressure to ensure all children made progress was coming down for a hierarchical system with the government specifically the Department for Education at the top. This reflected the notions of power that Martha, Ricky and Gina described in their narratives, and they felt they as 'teacher' were at the bottom of the hierarchy with least power. It seemed to me from what Martha, Ricky and Gina described that there were lots of formal and informal rules implemented within schools and that as *teacher* when assuming their institutional identity they conformed to the rules. The organisational aspect as described by Martha, Ricky and Gina seemed to encompass and influence the other five aspects (Personal, Social, Political, cultural, and Historical) and the identities that form as a result of the five influences and reflected in my 3-D sketch and visualisation below that shows the organisational aspect forming a halo around the whole person and the other five aspects.

Figure 7 – 3-D sketch that is my visualisation of how a teacher is impacted by six main aspects.
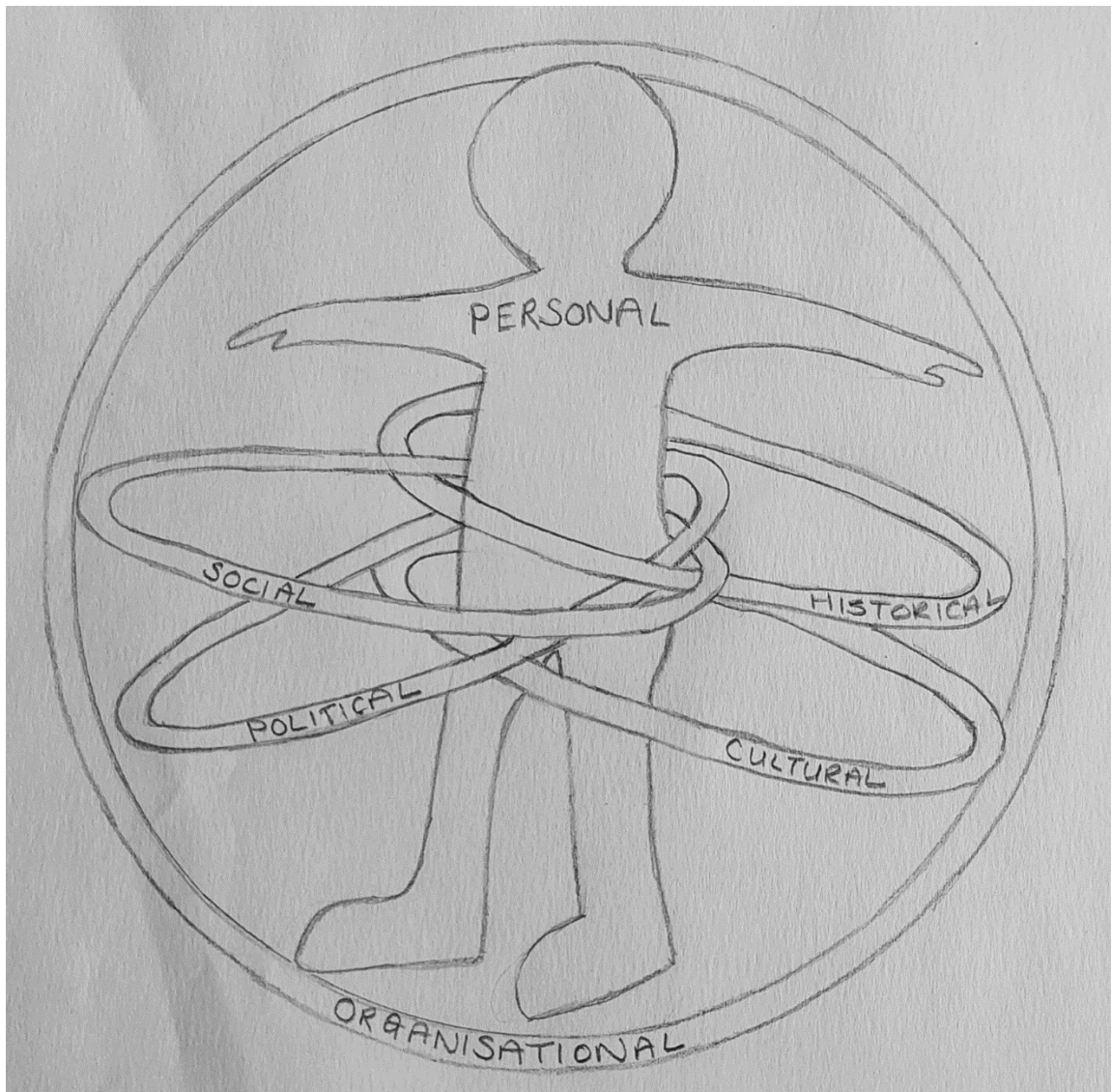
Martha, Ricky and Gina felt that the result of the organisational aspect was demonstrated by them 'being' the teacher, as this was their job. They endeavoured to conform and perform their roles as expected, it seemed all consuming and Martha discussed the infringement this had on her as a person, even controlling what she wore and how she acted out in public (Martha, Life-History Interview). Sometimes this all-consuming 'being' the teacher was at the expense of 'self' including compromising personal values and well-being, as they all reflected how pressures affected their work-life balance and constant feeling of pressure.

Social aspects:

When discussing social aspects, Martha, Ricky and Gina referred to relationships they formed with peers that worked in the school and how they felt about their efficacy and ability to perform well as a teacher when supported by effective relationships. They talked about how their identity shifted between personal, social and professional (encompassing organisational and political) identities to meet the expectations of those stakeholders involved in the school's community. The recalled aspects of the relationships with the children they taught, with members of the broader community, including parents and carers and other stakeholders in the community, including those from local organisations and the Department for Education, that they felt were invested, in supporting education within each teacher's school context. Martha reflected that socially she felt she was expected "to be a certain way" (Martha, Life-History Interview), a persona she reflected was different to 'self'.

Relationships described by Martha, Ricky and Gina were mostly positive, but they were honest about when there were tensions. Developing reflective practice and talking to more experienced peers both within and outside of the school community supported mitigating feelings of low self-esteem and the negative consequences of the teacher's aspirations and hopes in being a teacher were perceived as not being met. The mentor-mentee relationship was significant as part of the early stage of their careers, when they perceived they were confronted with the *reality* of teaching. When working well, the mentor-mentee relationship was founded on shared values and support for the teachers to navigate the school's vision, the ethos of the school community, and how to access professional development. The mentor support was described as increasing the teachers' confidence in their accomplishments and

bolstered their self-efficacy. These peer relationships supported positively reducing emotional exhaustion and stress and helped Martha, Ricky and Gina feel less panicked about performance-related expectations. Unanimously, the most important relationships were those with the children. All three teachers prioritised caring and being in the classroom with the children, often over their professional development and well-being. This selfless act of each teacher was rooted in their ambition to make a difference, a feeling they held on to vehemently even during times of personal and professional challenge.

Political aspects:

Politically, Martha, Ricky and Gina were conversant with the statutory frameworks that dictated their roles and responsibilities as primary teachers. Equally, they all felt the burden of the expectations and commitment to perform and produce quality outcomes for children. This "vicious cycle" (Martha, Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy Discussion) negatively impacted the teachers' workload and work-life balance. They all reflected on the impact of hierarchical management structures, which led to uneven distributions of power; they felt the government as policy writers and Ofsted had all the power. The dissemination of workload which was distributed by school leaders during Department for Education policy implementation, placed most of the pressure on the classroom teachers. Martha, Ricky and Gina reflected that they could work more than fifty hours a week, including evenings and weekends, and the feeling of duty was strong. Still, this feeling of policy [and their writers] having power over them as class teachers felt threatening. They felt disempowered to ask for help regarding workload as they thought it was just something they had to get on with to meet others' expectations. They were unwilling to compromise the impact their performance might have on children's

learning if they did not put in the hours, despite the negative consequences on their mental health and levels of burnout they experienced as early as year one in their careers.

Cultural aspects:

Integrating the cultural aspects of school life was very important to Martha, Ricky and Gina. Understanding the values, beliefs, and norms of the working environment helped them feel comfortable at work and understand how the school community might work together to achieve individual and shared goals. They felt honest reflection supported by more experienced others, and continuous professional development helped them to navigate the complexity of school life and their professional role as a primary teacher. They all felt professionalism was essential but hard to maintain under ongoing reform. That constant change left them feeling de-professionalised and just working to conform to others' expectations. There seemed in Martha and Gina's school contexts to be a culture of rewarding the more experienced teachers with PD opportunities and promotion, which left them both as ECTs feeling undervalued and unable to attain their career ambitions. Gina thought they would have to leave the school after only two years on the job to achieve their goal of moving into a leadership role.

Historical aspects:

Finally, Martha, Ricky and Gina recounted that traditions were associated with each of their roles and were routed in histories. Traditions in the school described as ways of working were perceived to preserve the tried and tested processes in the school; these ways of working were perceived to achieve quality educational outcomes for children. These traditions were underpinned by both formal and informal rules that

were internal, external or both. The traditions underpinned a working philosophy that extended dynamically both from, and to, the stakeholders in their school settings and the broader school community. Professional relationships with parents seemed important to all three teachers. At times the relationships with parents were fractious based on the parent's social and cultural perceptions of teachers as professionals and what parents viewed as the purpose of education, which Ricky in particular felt at times were misguided. All three felt that developing a sense of citizenship and working together to promote good outcomes for children with parents, and maintaining positive teacher-parent relationships was crucial, even if the parent's own experience of education was projected as negative.

The summary of the main findings has shown that teachers develop multiple identities (individual, institutional, hybrid, professional, worldview, and elder) that are impacted dynamically by six main aspects namely personal, organisational, social, political, cultural, and historical aspects. These are not siloed into discrete boxes as represented in Figure 16 (p.203), but instead act dynamically as I tried to draw and visualise in 3-D in Figure 7 (p.206). I will now try to describe what I think is happening in words in Figure 7 (p.206); The person e.g., Martha, Ricky and Gina are central to their lives of which 'being' a teacher is a part of. The organisation in which they work (a primary school) has a big influence on them as a professional and influences the other aspects and the formation of multiple identities. Organisational aspects form a halo around the whole and drive identities to conform to the social and school community expectations. The social, political, cultural, and historical aspects are pushed and pulled like spinning hoops and change in level of influence, and proximity to the personal identity at any one time, which causes impacts (positive and negative) and changes in the type of identity(ies) that are projected and

dominant at any one time. There appears to be no pattern to how identities form, but they are complex and dynamic according to the aspects at play and the personal resolve to employ a particular identity or hybrid (an identity made up of multiple identities, particularly in social aspects) at any given moment in practice. As I stated in Chapter 4, this research has confirmed for me that it is hard to analyse teachers' professional lives using two-dimensional heuristic frames as theorised by Kutsyuruba *et al.* (2019) because life and identities that form during a professional life like Martha, Ricky and Gina's are so much more complex. Representing three dimensions on a page (which is two-dimensional) presented me with a challenge. In the future when I present my findings to audiences, I would like to reflect Figure 7 (p.206) as a 3-D model using audience participation and hula hoops. This will support bringing the six aspects to life in three dimensions to depict what Martha, Ricky and Gina narrated about their professional lives when juggling the six aspects that allowed different identities to form and morph.

Implications of this research for supporting early career teachers:

The findings revealed differences in the professional experiences of Martha, Ricky and Gina and differences in the challenges they face as part of *realities* of teaching. I interpreted from the findings that these differences were borne out of a tangle of expectations and the influence of six main aspects personal, organisational, social, political, cultural and historical. Martha, Ricky and Gina project different identities in different situations to try and preserve integrity to self. I interpreted from the interview narratives that the aspirations and motivations to teach, along with the three teachers' feelings about their *readiness to teach* were dashed by teaching practicum rooted in the reality of teaching. The feeling of inadequacy was compounded by expectations of themselves and expectations of others and the realisation of what

they described as the *reality* of teaching. The described reality made Martha, Ricky, and Gina feel insecure about their competence and question how *good* they were at their jobs as teachers. Support helped to mitigate feelings of inadequacy and their personal motivations kept them striving towards their ambitions with a desire to support the children.

They often described the exhaustion of striving to be a 'good' teacher for the benefit of the children, to please management, or to demonstrate professional competence to the government or independent regulatory bodies like Ofsted. This selfless attribute was a common feature of all the participants' narratives, who often described forfeiting their desires and values and adopting the values of others (like those of the government or more senior professionals). I felt this was discussed openly and honestly with Martha, Ricky and Gina; that having the space to discuss aspects of their professional lives helped them see the positives in their self-efficacy and resolve to succeed.

The critical working relationship described in the practicum by all three teachers was between themselves and the mentor. The support from a mentor helps to mediate challenges; mentors have knowledge of the inner workings of the school, informal and formal rules and access to mediating tools. Mentors understand the organisational, social, political, cultural and historical aspects and by sharing that understanding the person can perform with clarity about expectations and mould who they want to be. When this relationship was fractured or under tension, it caused dips in personal confidence. This was mainly observed in their career at the end of year one; this was at a point when leaders expected Martha, Ricky and Gina to be more autonomous and mentoring support was being reduced or withdrawn. All

three recounted feeling insecure at this point as they had to rely on confidence in their ability to deliver daily teaching without prompts or direct support from a more experienced other, like the mentor, whom they deemed to be more knowledgeable.

Rising confidence was attributed to embedding teaching theory into practice shortly after qualification, whilst having the mentor's support, or engaging with professional development that informed their independent practice. Frequent changes in expectations contributed to the see-saw effect of increasing and decreasing the teachers' confidence. The impact of challenges that affect teacher confidence would have to be examined with a much larger teaching population before conclusions about the effect on teachers' lives could be conclusively made. Recommendation one seeks to support professional practice within existing school provision for ECTs with a particular focus on supporting confidence.

Recommendation One – Mentors seek to support early career teachers (ECTs) to embed teaching competently within the context of a primary school and to independently build strategies to maintain confidence in self-efficacy and to work as autonomous professionals at the end of the ECT period.

This recommendation aligns with the purpose of the Early Career Framework (Department for Education, 2019a), which underpins teachers' entitlement to a two-year fully funded support package. The ECF stops short of directing the specific activities and length of time mentors should be assigned to support ECTs, so the period could be flexible to meet individual teacher's needs.

My first recommendation seeks to suggest the type of support to scaffold confidence, positive feelings about self-efficacy and build towards autonomous working based on ECTs individual and contextual needs. To specifically scaffold confidence and competence to a point where ECTs can rely less on mentor support and be

autonomous. This would ensure that confidence is quickly established and maintained in their early years of teaching. I acknowledge that mentor support is most beneficial during early career, but mentors are likely to be trusted advisors at points during later career. As teachers experience challenges at any point, the help of a mentor should be continually reviewed as part of a personalised system of support, rather than something that is provided and removed after a set period. The findings have shown that ECTs can with support, eventually move to work more autonomously when confident enough to realise their professional ambitions. One would hope this will also support the retention of teachers (a strong focus of the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy). Consistent support mentor and self-directed should reduce the rate of ECTs leaving the profession within the first three years post-qualification.

Implications of the research for the implementation of education policy at school level:

This study's findings showed that teachers' professional activity systems are complex and unique based on their school context. However, in Martha, Ricky and Gina's case, even though they were all at different stages in their careers, there was some commonality within their professional activity systems.

A common thread in the narrative focused on the Tools and Signs, with support and professional development cited as mediating artefacts that supported Martha, Ricky and Gina to realise their ambitions. It was paramount to all three that they were considered professional, and professionalism was considered one of the fundamental rules of teaching and *being a good teacher*. They described acting with compliance to the rules, which seemed to intimate that there was a *consequence* to

non-compliance. Martha, Ricky and Gina could not articulate what they thought the result of rebelling against the rules would be.

The division of labour was seen by all participants as hierarchical, from policy writers (government) at the top level, down to themselves (teachers) or policy implementers at the bottom. They felt that government and influence government had on society resulted in more power and influence over education at classroom level than the teachers. This imbalance in power led to a range of consequences, including a feeling of insecurity in conducting their roles in the manner expected of them as dictated by the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011). This appeared to leave Martha, Ricky and Gina feeling compromised and at odds with their values, and the values of other in education. The object and outcome of teaching were similar for all teachers and focused on aspiring to progress to leadership with an overwhelming desire reflected about supporting the children.

The community was the main difference in the activity systems as described by the three teachers. Martha and Ricky named individuals or groups of people, even organisations, that were important to their community. Gina expressed that she felt an essential aspect of the community was the ethos and values, and the importance of the school's vision being shared amongst the community. Professional development and being part of a supportive community were fundamental to all three activity systems that supported their professional lives. They reflected that common or generic systems of professional development, like those provided by Multi-Academy Trusts, did not always support individual teachers in their context because of differences in the school demography, values, and challenges. This provides the scope for my second recommendation.

Recommendation Two – planned and personalised sequences of professional development that nurture the ethos and values of the school community but provide a breadth of experience to enable teachers to realise their long-term professional ambitions and ability to be effective in other school or educational settings.

Professional development opportunities should be planned and carefully sequenced to match the stage of the teachers' careers but flexible enough to adapt to their career pathways. The teacher's needs should be discussed, and the type of ongoing professional training required should be negotiated to support their practice, prioritising progression towards their professional ambitions. The school community must have a shared understanding of the importance of ongoing professional development for teachers. Time for professional development is protected as part of the Early Career Framework (Department for Education 2019a) but it is the view of Martha, Ricky and Gina that professional development should be available for all teachers to engage with regardless of how long they have been in the profession. Professional development should not be prioritised based on a hierarchical system or length of service; instead, it should be available to all and beyond the ECT years for those who aspire to progress or wish to change direction in their careers. All teachers be supported to realise their professional ambitions.

My contributions to knowledge:

The research I have conducted and presented as part of this thesis contributes to the existing knowledge in several ways.

Firstly, the narratives of Martha, Ricky and Gina, who are primary school teachers, contribute original insights into three teachers' motivations to teach, their experiences during early careers and how they are supported (or not) to deal with the challenges they faced in a complex educational landscape. Their experiences

have shown how they are impacted by six main aspects encompassing formal and informal rules borne from histories associated with unique primary school contexts. Examining these aspects has enabled me to present similarities and differences in the complex systems that teachers' daily lives function in.

This leads to the second contribution which is one of two theoretical contributions. The first theoretical contribution is how I have used the CHAT frame (Engeström, 1987) in its entirety to examine the seven Nodes of teachers' lives (subject, tools & signs, community, rules, division of labour, object and outcome) through four main triadic associations. Previous studies have only partially used the CHAT frame therefore, my analysis of teachers' lives as described by Martha, Ricky and Gina is another original contribution to knowledge.

The third contribution, and the second theoretical contribution, is my 3-D sketch (Figure 7) that visualises how the six aspects lead to multiple identities to be formed during a teacher's early career and the table and narration of the specific identities (Figure 16) both of which are my original contributions to the theoretical educational knowledge in the English context of primary teachers' lives and careers.

I acknowledge that Kutsyuruba *et al.'s* (2019) findings have supported the analysis of my data but that I created my own visualisation in three dimensions that I feels better represents the complexity of the findings, that multiple aspects affect teachers resulting in multiple identities to form that are dynamic in nature. My findings differed in two ways. First, they aimed to show the complexity and dynamism of identity formation and how Martha, Ricky and Gina projected different identities to overcome challenge. Secondly, my participants reflected a historical perspective to the aspect in schools that affected their professional lives as ECTs which Kutsyuruba *et al.*

(2019) framework did not. The description of historical happenings by participants as part of their narratives involved sentences, words, and phrases describing contextual traditions, established ways of working, togetherness in established teams to achieve goals, curriculum frameworks within a historic educational landscape of reform, community expectations, and formal and informal rules. My visualisation of the aspects and resultant identities that formed, enabled me to make sense of the complex narrative findings associated with the professional lives of these three teachers who participated in my research. My contributions to knowledge led me to make my third and final recommendation,

Recommendation Three – I recommend that the six aspects (personal, organisational, social, political, cultural, and historical) as well as the awareness that ECTs develop multiple identities, be considered a framework of support to scaffold teacher-mentor reflective discussions to mitigating challenge and maintain confidence.

I propose tentatively that the six aspects (the personal, organisational, social, political, historical and cultural aspects) can be used to reflect on teachers' lives and ECTs professional pathways to support identifying areas of strength and development. Coaching techniques can be used by mentors to reflect on each aspect to help to prioritise individual professional development needs. The six aspects and resultant identities that form would need further research on a larger scale with a much larger number of ECTs to see if the findings represent a larger population of ECTs and reflect these six aspects.

As a potential guide drawing on my findings, the reflective discussions can take place with another qualified teacher, ideally a mentor, but also as part of a peer-to-peer support network that can aid the identification and development from all six aspects (or a combination) as part of collaborative or individual reflections to develop teachers' professional practice. The framework can support identifying strengths that

can be nurtured to fast-track progress in learning, teaching, and routes to leadership. This would help the English government's ambitions to support progress to National Professional Qualification to Middle Leadership (NPQML) or Headship (NPQH). The discussions from the framework can perhaps provide a way to identify levers and barriers to teachers' progress and might support teachers in overcoming the barriers with support. These scaffolded and reflective opportunities can hopefully further support teachers to continue making satisfactory progress towards meeting their professional ambitions and being retained in a profession.

The findings of this research support the rationale for this recommendation, as Martha, Ricky and Gina reflected that further training through professional development supports their classroom success and nurtures their sense of self-efficacy and professionalism. Conversely, excessive workload and lack of support is a barrier to teachers' effectiveness and wears down their sense of professionalism.

Next, I have considered the limitations of this research and the scope for further development.

Scope for developing this research further:

This research has been limited or is limiting in the following ways. I have only examined the lives of three teachers. I cannot, therefore, suggest that my findings are accurate for all primary teachers in England. I can say that even though this research provides a snapshot of three teachers' lives, there are similarities in their professional desires and barriers they face despite teaching in three different schools and being in the career for different periods (one-, two-, and three years). These similarities may be projected or negated by a more significant number of primary

teachers in England, but further research would need to determine if this is the case.

There is room for this research to be developed further in two ways. The first is to test whether the six aspects and formation of multiple identities are identified and reflected in a more extensive research population of primary school teachers. The six aspects only reflect three specific teachers' lived experiences; for these six aspects to have credibility, they need to be evident in the lives of a much larger population of primary school teachers. This is a real opportunity to add to and develop educators understanding of the aspects that impact teachers' lives and further appreciate the complexity of identity formation amongst teachers. I feel that using mentor-teacher discussion to create reflective opportunities to support early career teachers would be a positive way forward. Further post-doctoral research or co-research with the author is one way to morph or remodel the findings based on broader research.

Secondly, the analysis of and reflection regarding the four main challenges and proposed solutions in the *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy* (2019d) needs to be reflected upon by different stakeholders in Primary Education, such as policy writers, policy implementers, school leaders and a much larger working group of primary teachers. I cannot assume or extrapolate the challenges as significant, as I have only spoken to three teachers. Involving a wider group of stakeholders in examining this Strategy might reveal that the consensus is that the proposed solutions will work in practice.

Now that I have stated how this research can be further developed. I will end the thesis with my final reflections to articulate the impact the research has had on my thinking and practice.

My final reflections:

I have thoroughly enjoyed my doctoral journey. Completing the research through the pandemic and writing the thesis has been challenging as we recover in these tough economic times. Despite the personal and professional challenges, I have grown as an individual and academic in higher education; I feel more adept. I have respected the guidance from other professionals, discussions with fellow doctoral students and the complete immersion in the educational and methodological literature that has opened my eyes to theoretical and methodological developments in academic research.

Having the time to conduct a deep analysis of literature and teachers' narratives has supported my critical understanding of the current challenges that some primary teachers face. Reflecting and being reflexive about things that impacted both myself and others in our daily professional lives supported me in observing a holistic view of education and the teaching profession, a luxury not often afforded during my busy personal and professional life.

I have engaged with the multifaceted nature of research through different theoretical and conceptual lenses, which have ignited a passion for progressively discovering more. I have reflected on my current role as a Director of Education and Student Experience and how I can positively work within policy boundaries to develop ITT curricula and support the next generation of teachers to get the most out of their

training and early career. To promote determination despite the challenges to meet their professional ambitions with support.

Teachers in this study perceived teaching to happen in an incredibly challenging demographic. I hope this research supports informing others of teachers' challenges and that my recommendations lead to action in local policy and practice, however small, to support early career teachers so that they continue confidently in their careers and flourish to achieve their aspirations. As a result of my research, I fully appreciate the complexity of implementing generic government policy in extraordinarily complex systems, often as part of unique educational settings. I am confident now in my ability as a researcher; I know I have contributed positively to the body of knowledge with some existing authority in ITT and feel that the research summarised in this thesis can impact in a small yet positive way to local policy implementation in practice.

I am proud to be a part of Sheffield's Higher Education Doctoral Research Community. I will continue to engage in post-doctoral research to plan further studies to support educational professionals, using this research as precursory evidence for the need for further ITT research.

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Appendices

Appendix One – ethics confirmation

Kelly Dockerty
Registration number: 160223002
School of Education
Programme: Doctor of Education

Dear Kelly

PROJECT TITLE: Why teach? Listening to primary teachers stories of self: Exploring what makes them stay, understanding what makes them want to leave.
APPLICATION: Reference Number 024996

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 21/03/2019 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 research ethics application form 024996 (dated 24/02/2019).
- Participant information sheet 1056674 version 1 (24/02/2019).
- Participant consent form 1056676 version 1 (24/02/2019).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

Note that caution is needed in reassuring participants when they reflect on school policy. Given the study is with Primary school teachers, the risk of identification is greater and they maybe reluctant to critique their own school policy. They will need reassurance of the anonymity afforded them, and respected if they choose not to engage in this, obviously. Proof read the information sheet Consider deleting audio recordings as soon as possible after transcription as audio recordings are, by their very nature, personally identifiable.

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 Hyatt
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Appendix Two – exert from my meta-analysis of an interview transcript

Speaker	Transcript	My description	Active interpretation of meaning and feelings etc.	Further analysis
Interviewer	ok so interview 1, participant 1, 6th May at 4:30pm. Ok just for the purposes of the interview could you just confirm please that you have read the participant information sheet and signed the consent form and that you are still happy to proceed?	Confirming Participant 1 has read the participant information sheet and is still happy to proceed.		
Participant 1	I have and I am	Participant confirms they have read the documents and signed the consent and is happy to proceed.		
Interviewer	That's great thank you. Ok, so what we are going to do is start the life history interviewed obviously that was described on the participant information sheet. I will ask you the first question then obviously allow you to answer that, then the others will follow depending on what you say, is that ok?	Confirming the focus and methodological process (Life History Interview).		
Participant 1	That's fine.	Confirming they are ok with the process.		
Interviewer	That's great. So the first question then is- can you tell me the story about why you wanted to become a teacher?	Question 1 asked		
Participant 1	I think through all my life I've had teachers that have influenced me to be a better student to push myself to do things that maybe i didn't want to do to begin with, and I think having role models like that in your life kind of, makes you then want to be that for other people. So it was especially like one of my year 6 teachers, called herself the old dragon, and yes it was one of those	* Influenced by teachers * Improved as a student and pushed themselves to do things they wouldn't normally do * She wants to be a role model for children like her teachers were for her. * A year 6 teacher was particularly influential being ruthless but approachable and supportive but was firm and authoritative with those children who disrupted learning. * Having responsibility is important acting like a role model	* Grateful for teachers for influence and pushing her. * I get the sense she is modelling herself as a teacher on those role models from her childhood. * Responsibility is really important.	If participant 1 could meet the teachers that had influenced her what would she say to them? What personal/professional characteristics are important to her as a role model? What responsibility as a teacher does Participant 1 think she has?

	where you kind of thought, I can see why you call yourself that because she was she was quite ruthless in the way that she was with certain children but if you behaved, if you did what she asked shows, like one of the best teachers you could ever ask for and she would help you through anything if you were upset about something or if you wasn't 100% on something she would sit and do it with you. Whereas if you were one of the children that maybe didn't behave very well or you know, started to mess about and, you know, interrupt others learning time then sh[e], you'd know about it lets [laughing] yes [interviewer laughing] let's put it that way but, yes dead cert, definitely. Having that responsibility and having what other people have brought to me I want to do that for others.		
Interviewer	Ok, that's nice, that's nice to hear. So just drawing on what you said there around [erm], you know things that have influenced you in terms of teachers, if I can just take you back to your training [erm] and early kind of career - what teacher did you aspire to be? [pause] How did you see yourself what did you aspire to be as a teacher?	Drawing on what she had said but asking my next question rather than one that arose out of her response.	
Participant 1	[pause] I kinda wanted to be the teacher that you could come to about anything it didn't matter if it was like a silly, a silly comment or something that's upset you or that's	Participant 1 wants to be approachable She does not want to be angry She wants to be open	Idealising She is sure about what she does and does not want to be. Under pressure	What makes her angry at work?

	made you really happy, I just wanted to be that teacher that you wanted to tell everything to. I didn't want to be, you know, the screaming my head off, you know, I, the thing of anger lands you when I don't want to know anything about you. I wanted to be that open, like friendly teacher, that goes, you know, you can come and talk to me about anything I aren't gonna send you away, I aren't gonna be, you know, I don't care I don't wanna know 'cause I know some- I know some of the pressures of the job and things can make you kinda go, I, I don't wanna know about that right now I can't do that right now. But I didn't wanna be that, you know my doors always open if you want to speak to me.	She feels pressures of the job makes her turn children away, she can't be open. Tension- she wants to be open but she doesn't feel she can be.	Torn, tensions between the ideal and the perceived or expected.	What pressures in the job make her less open? How does she deal with the tensions in her role?