

Juggling and struggling - walking the teaching tightrope: a constructivist grounded theory study.

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Abstract

Teacher attrition is a worrying concern for parents, teachers, and national governments around the world. Teacher attrition brings a multitude of financial, educational and societal costs, among others. In the United Kingdom, teacher attrition has been a concern for over two decades and the rate of attrition shows no sign of slowing down. As a result, the government have introduced policies such as the Recruitment and Retention policy in attempts to stem teacher attrition, and although these have had some effect, there is more that can be done.

This study explored teacher attrition in primary settings in England, from the perspective of nine long-serving teachers (five of whom had left the profession at the time of data collection). The study aimed to gain insight into the world of teachers to provide a more holistic view of teachers' experiences that lead to attrition. A constructivist grounded theory methodology was employed to answer the research questions, primarily, *What are primary teachers' perspectives about why primary teachers in England leave the profession?* Two data generation methods were used: participant-elicited visual representations and online synchronous semi-structured interviews.

Findings demonstrated that teacher attrition is an emotive subject, grounded in the use of figurative and emotional language used by participants as they shared their understanding and experiences. The 'constructed theory' revealed a deeper understanding of the nature of the juggling of workload that teachers suffer and the struggles that they endure in teaching. In addition, stressors and mitigators were seen to act upon this juggling and struggling. Implications of the study include recommendations for school leadership and initial teacher education providers among others.

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Authors Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work, and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as references.

1. Introduction

1.1 The current situation with teacher retention and attrition

Teacher attrition can be defined as 'leaving teaching altogether' (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006, p. 18) and this attrition is a component of teacher turnover (Boe et al., 1993). High rates of teacher attrition are a prevailing and paramount concern in many countries worldwide.

Research indicates that up to 50% of teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Di Carlo, 2011; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003) in the United States. In the UK, research shows that approximately 40% of teachers leave the profession within three years (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006). Foster (2017) explains that approximately 60% of trainees on the 'Teach First' route (a classroom based teacher training programme where most trainees time is spent in class, on an 80% teaching timetable) into the profession leave within five years and that students on an undergraduate with Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) programme are more likely to leave the profession compared with trainees on other routes, such as a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). This indicates that a particular pathway into the profession could impact on the longevity of a teaching career.

Though there are slight differences in the rates of attrition across developed countries, there seems to be some consensus that between 30-40% of teachers leave the profession at some point within the first five years of teaching. Cooper and Alvarado (2006) explain that, in the United States, 40% of trainees fail to join the profession after qualifying; that is, those teachers leave before entering their initial year of teaching. The issue of teacher attrition does not appear to be contracting over time. In fact, many recent reports indicate that the problem is worsening. See and Gorard (2019) assert that the situation could worsen in the UK because government data shows that teacher vacancies tripled between 2011 and 2016. More recently, in a House of Commons briefing paper, Foster (2017) states "20% of newly qualified entrants to the sector in 2013 were not

recorded as working in the sector two years later. The five year out of service rate for 2010 entrants was 30%, the ten-year rate for 2006 entrants was 39%. Neither rate has shown change over time.” (p. 10) This shows that teacher attrition rates appear to be remaining at, or around, the same level over time.

Di Carlo (2011) makes an important point about the need to not dwell on precise rates of attrition as they can become a distraction; they instead assert that a focus on solving the problem itself is required. High rates of teacher attrition pose many problems. It is widely acknowledged that high rates of teacher attrition have adverse consequences for society. Di Carlo (2011) depicts the process of teacher attrition as a continuous cyclical one through a ‘revolving door’ metaphor; as part of this description, they indicate that the process of attrition is financially costly, but that it also has cost in terms of the teacher being lost before they reach their potential capacity. Barnes et al. (2007) assert that effort expended in the constant replacement of staff and in the continual rebuilding of teams in educational settings often means that the focus deviates away from the quality of teaching and learning. They make the case that in low performing schools, where attrition is most acute, the teacher quality gap rarely narrows due to the perpetual focus on teacher recruitment rather than achievement. In a study in the United States, Guarino et al. (2006) found that teachers with higher academic ability were more likely to leave the profession. Though higher academic ability does not necessarily mean better quality of teaching, it still remains a negative consequence of attrition. Ronfeldt et al. (2013) also make the same claim stating that, on average, teacher turnover is harmful to learners. Garcia and Weiss (2019) go further, strongly asserting that severe damage can result from high levels of attrition:

A shortage of teachers harms students, teachers and the public education system as a whole. Lack of sufficient, quality teachers and staff instability threaten students’ ability to learn and reduce teachers’ effectiveness and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere. (p. 1)

High rates of attrition fuel instability and inadequacy in educational settings (Di Carlo, 2011). Ultimately, it is imperative that this potential harm to students, teachers and the public education system is avoided.

The bucket analogy was used by Ingersoll (2007) to define the teacher attrition issue. They advocate that the perpetual recruitment of teachers, without a focus on retaining teachers already in post, proves unsuccessful. Ingersoll (2007) states that the recruitment of more teachers is not enough as a standalone strategy – something needs to be done to ‘stop the leaks’, or, in other words, something must be done to prevent teachers leaving the profession. This is an understandable strategy; it is helpful to retain teachers that are already in the profession – they have invested time and energy into the process of teaching and, due to their experience, are likely to be more advanced in terms of their knowledge about teaching and learning. Retaining these teachers would help to stave off some of the problems outlined above which are associated with high teacher attrition rates.

This introduction and the subsequent literature review highlight the current and historical literature around the reasons for teacher attrition and some of the strategies that have already been employed for ‘plugging the gaps in the bucket’: the retention strategies. This research project aims to explore the thoughts, experiences and feelings of both long serving teachers currently in the profession and long serving teachers who chose to leave the profession. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) make an important distinction between attrition and migration; and, for the purposes of this research, teacher participants leaving one primary setting to move to another (migrating rather than leaving the profession) will be omitted. This research study aims to explore teacher’s ‘hearts and minds’ through deeper narratives from two groups of teachers - those who have stayed in the profession long term, and those who left the profession (for reasons other than migration, retirement or raising children). Distinct attention will be afforded to discovering the perspectives of teachers; their reasons for remaining in the profession, or alternatively for leaving the profession.

1.2 Origin of the research idea

It is from spending twelve years as a full-time key stage two class teacher in various primary settings, both in England and internationally, and being a passionate educator who cares about the educational offering that children receive, that the idea for this research came about. After working with long-serving teachers, noticing some leave the profession and realising the impact of this for the learners and wider setting, I felt it was important to examine attrition from a teacher perspective. Through observing professionals that had completed initial teacher training alongside myself, and others I met along my teaching journey leaving their teaching careers behind, I was keen to explore at a deeper level the meaning that they individually attributed to leaving the profession in terms of their reflections on the profession and underlying feelings. The research focuses on attrition specifically in primary settings in England.

The literature review chapter of the thesis offers a detailed exploration of the current and recent literature on teacher retention and attrition, including the reasons provided by a range of studies and reports for attrition from teaching. For a more succinct setting of the scene for the research, and to provide an initial overview of the research landscape, some background information on the reasons for attrition outlined briefly in sections 1.3 - 1.5.

1.3 Job related, contextual and environmental reasons for attrition in teaching

Some of the main reasons provided in the background literature for teacher attrition were context or job specific, the most prevalent of these being high levels of workload (Barmby, 2006; Linqvist et al., 2014; Smithers & Robinson, 2003). High levels of workload often led to other negative outcomes, such as teachers struggling to navigate a lack of work-life balance. Smithers and Robinson (2001) stated that many teachers were 'leaving for a life' indicating that the high workload prevented them having a life outside of work or indeed any level of work life balance. Lynch et al. (2016) found that high workload was a factor in two negative outcomes for teachers: poor health and feeling undervalued, which led to a

movement away from the profession for those teachers. This body of research demonstrates that a high workload contributes to attrition in direct but also indirect ways, through adversely affecting work life balance or contributing to ill health.

Within school settings, poor student discipline or poor pupil behaviour was also cited in the literature as a reason for attrition from teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Barmby, 2006; Clandinin et al., 2015). It should, however, be noted that Clandinin et al. (2015) stated 'student issues' – this wider label potentially included additional student related reasons than purely behavioural reasons, such as absenteeism, for example. Menzies et al. (2015) found that 27% of the population in their study cited poor behaviour as a reason for considering leaving the profession; though this does not directly relate to attrition figures, it demonstrates that the issue impacts on teacher thoughts about leaving, which could prelude attrition. Interestingly, Smithers and Robinson (2003) identified that poor pupil behaviour was more frequently cited as a reason for attrition by secondary school than primary school teacher leavers. In this research project, it will be interesting to discover whether class behaviour is a prominent issue related to high attrition for primary teacher in the participants' settings in England. As mentioned above, this might be an issue more directly associated with secondary school settings. Stress due to a combination of the two factors stated above (high workload and poor behaviour) was also provided as a reason for attrition (Smithers & Robinson, 2001).

External to the setting, salary was a commonly cited reason for teacher attrition (Clandinin et al., 2015; Menzies et al., 2015; Smithers & Robinson, 2003). Notably, Menzies et al. (2015) cited insufficient pay as a reason for considering leaving the profession for 43% of their participants. Some studies also indicated that attrition is linked with the position of teacher pay within the presiding employment landscape. For example, at times of wider higher unemployment, attrition from teaching for salary reasons may be less prevalent. Again, it will be interesting to discover whether participants in this study mention financial reasons (such as salary) as contributing to thoughts of, or the action of, attrition.

Nature of context, school culture and/or collegial relationships could also encompass the nature and provision of professional development in the educational setting; teacher support; teacher autonomy/decision making power; and collaboration between teachers, as reasons for attrition. Nature of context, school culture and/or collegial relationships were listed as factors influencing attrition in many papers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Menzies et al., 2015; Clandinin et al., 2015). A tension between ideals of self and ideals of the context teachers work within can also lead to attrition (Pillen, 2013). Cochran-Smith (2006) found that teacher socialisation into the learning environment and teaching being regarded as an intellectual undertaking can lead to reduced attrition. Ingersoll & Smith (2003) note that both lack of support from school administration (leadership in settings in England) and a lack of teacher influence over (at a macro level) 'whole-school' or (at a micro level) 'in-class' decision making can influence levels of attrition. It seems therefore that the level of autonomy that teachers have within the setting and the level of support from peers are both important factors that influence teacher attrition. This seems to point to level of 'fit' a teacher feels between themselves and the role and setting. This 'fit' is discussed further in section 2.3.

Leadership was another largely cited reason for attrition. Menzies et al. (2015) explain that 43% of their participants were unhappy with the quality of leadership in school and cited this as a reason for *considering* leaving. Again, this does not suggest that the thoughts of leaving turned into actions, though it could be a possibility. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) found that instructional leadership styles increased turnover. Communicating a strong vision was stated as an important facet of leadership in avoiding teacher turnover by Player et al. (2017). To avoid high levels of attrition, Evans (2001) found leadership required three important dimensions: realistic expectations, realistic perspectives, and a professionalism orientation. There appears to be a large body of literature on leadership and attrition, though this is less commonly related to the teaching profession specifically.

The perusal of teacher attrition literature also uncovered other factors driving high levels of attrition such as unrealistic expectations of the profession driven by

advertisements (Carr, 2020), changing government initiatives, and the quest for new challenges (Smithers & Robinson, 2001). Linqvist et al. (2014) and Menzies et al. (2015) also indicate that the existence of a feasible alternative profession for a teacher to move into can provide a reason for attrition. This demonstrates that there is a diversity in terms of reasons provided for teacher attrition in the general literature.

The Department for Education (DfE) in England recognises that the above factors are driving teachers away from the profession - to address these would have positive impact on teacher attrition levels; to acknowledge this and try to address some of the aforementioned challenges that teachers face, they founded the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2019).

The interaction between a person and their role as a teacher is also important in considering reasons for attrition. Person-job fit, or suitability of self to the profession (or lack of) was identified by Player et al. (2017) as a reason for teacher attrition and this will be discussed further in section 2.3. The importance of a cohesive person-job fit is paramount to morale, job satisfaction, motivation and outcomes in a profession. This creates a bridge between the aforementioned job, contextual and environmental reasons for attrition and individual factors outlined below.

[1.4 Individual factors as reasons for attrition from teaching](#)

Away from the aforementioned environmental, contextual or job-related factors, some of the main individual reasons for teacher attrition are explored in this section. Some of these individual factors are brought about by the interaction between person and the role of teacher and setting, so there is some overlap between the preceding section and this one.

Pillen (2013) listed personal characteristics, professional identity issues and perfectionism as reasons for attrition, in addition to individuals placing greater importance on 'curriculum' than 'helping'. This indicated that teachers who have a natural affinity for helping may survive longer in the profession, than those who

concentrate on the delivery of content. This suggests that some intrinsic personal characteristics have greater alignment than others with the competencies required for teaching. Klassen and Chiu (2011) found that stress can influence teachers' commitment and, in turn, their intention to leave the profession. As mentioned in section 1.3, stress can be added to by high workload - which seems to be the largest factor influencing attrition. Lantieri et al. (2011) further acknowledges the variety of stresses faced by teachers, with little support. They suggest that this leads to teachers responding in maladaptive ways, such as leaving the profession or by fostering a climate of stress in the classroom which can inadvertently impact on students too.

Literature states that resilience can be a protective factor for stress, which has been mentioned several times in this introduction so far. There are different measures of resilience and different ways of making links between resilience and attrition in the literature. Teacher retention information can be found amongst resilience literature, where resilience has been researched in school settings (Beltman et al., 2015; Arnup & Bowles, 2016). It is important to state though that care should be taken not to assume that teachers leaving the profession have lower levels of resilience than those who remain in the profession long term (Mansfield et al., 2016). Nonetheless, the current literature on this requires attention and it is explored further in section 1.5.

[1.5 Resilience and personal factors](#)

Chang (2009) suggests a model in which both personality and resilience are listed as 'individual factors', interacting with 'transactional factors' - such as perceptions of support and perceptions of leadership. Given that stress results from high workload, resilience seems to be an important concept that requires attention because it can help protect teachers from stress. There is debate among researchers about how far resilience is mediated by contextual factors, though it is generally accepted that resilience lies at the confluence of both internal and external influences. This is explored by Beltman et al. (2015): "As resilience is a contextually embedded construct, school ecologies play an important role in the resilience process." (p. 173) In addition, "manifestations of resilience are variable

from person-to -person and fluctuate over time, according to the scenarios which they meet and their capacities to manage these.” (Gu & Day, 2007, p. 1314) It seems, therefore, that resilience is an unstable construct which is dependent on many external and internal influences (Oswald et al., 2003). Influences on resilience are suggested by Sumsion (2004):

personal qualities and characteristics (e.g. motivation, interpersonal awareness); contextual factors (e.g. caring others, effective support systems); and person-context interactional processes (e.g. the contribution by individuals to the creation of supportive communities that in turn sustain them). (p. 287)

Due to the nature of resilience outlined above, measures of resilience will always be ‘snapshots’ and will therefore only be generalisable only to the context, time and personal competencies of the participants. This raises the question about how useful measures of resilience are, and whether they can be used in the recruitment and retention of teachers in a helpful way or not. In fact, teachers leaving teaching need resilience to take care of themselves and families, for example.

Most resilience literature is consistent with Arnup & Bowles’ (2016) findings that resilience can be a protective factor against stress, and, moreover, attrition from the teaching profession. However, there are protective factors for resilience, such as personal traits. In fact, some studies have found that resilience and personal traits are inextricably linked. This relationship has been explored in the many studies (Campbell Sills et al., 2006; Friberg et al., 2005; Robertson et al., 2018).

Hong (2012) found that teacher leavers were likely to attribute personality as a reason for leaving the profession if they believed that their personality was not a good match for the job. Klassen et al. (2018) explored teaching behaviours and approaches; they provide a useful model which demonstrates that non-cognitive attributes, such as personality and motivation, are influenced by context and environment; these non-cognitive attributes influence teaching behaviours and approaches, though that study did not look specifically at teacher attrition. In the

studies consulted for this introduction and subsequent background literature review, it seemed that non-cognitive attributes have been looked at particularly from the perspective of teacher effectiveness, though not from the perspective of teacher attrition.

Clandinin et al. (2015) carried out a study on early career attrition and considered it as an identity making process involving complex negotiation between the individual and their context.

In the research focused on individual factors we identified four themes: burnout, resilience, demographic features and family characteristics...in the literature that focused on contextual factors, we identified seven overarching factors; teacher support, salary, professional development, collaboration, nature of context, student issues, and teacher education...categorizing them as individual and contextual factors can artificially divide beginning teachers' lives into professional and personal ones, making it difficult to achieve a holistic view of the lives of beginning teachers. (p. 2)

The statement above is an important one, bringing together much of what has already been touched upon – in terms of the complex combination of job related, contextual and environmental reasons for attrition and individual factors. Following from this, it seems important to gain a holistic understanding of teachers lives, or in this research, teacher participants - who may or may not still be in the profession.

Crucially, Barmby (2006) indicates the personal, individual nature of research in this area: "Issues that bring about a resignation for one teacher could be minor issues for another." (p. 252) Phenomenology is the belief that each person has their own, subjective and unique experience of how they view the world. Janetius (2017) explains it: "instead of intellectual speculations about reality, phenomenology advocates a pure description of 'what is'. In short, phenomenology turns away from a priori assumptions and theories to describe subjective experiences without hypothesising or imposing itself onto another

person's understanding." (p. 42-43) In order to understand the unique views of each individual teacher participant, and achieve a holistic view of their lives, the goals of the research are explored in section 1.6.

1.6 Research Goals

Through this research study with long serving primary teachers, it is hoped that subjective experiences, thoughts and underlying feelings about teaching and teachers' reasons for attrition can be explored. Research in this field from a teacher's perspective is important (Lindquist & Forsberg, 2022). A qualitative approach will be utilised to 'get underneath' the personal reasons for attrition (for teacher leavers), or to explore reasons for contemplating attrition (for those remaining in the profession). The use of constructivist grounded theory (explained in chapters 3 and 4) advocates that researcher prior knowledge should be acknowledged but that the constructed meaning between researcher and participant is critical. As such, constructivist grounded theory (CGT), one of the family of variants of grounded theory, will be the 'umbrella' under which the research methods will be deployed. Through the CGT methodology, two methods will be employed: online synchronous interviews and a participant elicited visual method (their visual depictions of 'life as a teacher') in order to gain fresh insights.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to the field of teacher attrition literature. It is anticipated that the research will be an authentic addition to literature in the field as, firstly, in terms of methodological contribution; there are few studies using a CGT methodology to focus on teacher lives, though such studies could provide useful insights (Lindquist & Forsberg, 2022). Even fewer studies use visual methods within a CGT study in the educational field. Secondly, this research intends to examine the reasons for attrition through qualitative means, particularly in primary settings in England, with long-serving teachers. The research aspires to have implications for practice; it endeavours to provide useful insights for headteachers and principals, schools leaders, teachers, initial teacher education providers. It may be useful for government teams and other researchers in the fields of teacher retention and attrition and may lead to policy changes in this substantive area.

2. Literature Review

This literature review aims to gather together and present current and recent research in the area of teacher attrition, with particular reference to teacher attrition in primary settings in England. Considering this examination of literature, the research aims, goals and questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

2.1 The current situation with teacher retention and attrition

2.1.1 What is the current teacher attrition data in England?

Teacher attrition continues to be a cause for concern for governments in many countries. There is consequently a dearth of literature on attrition and retention of teachers, namely from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and other countries worldwide. An examination of the data available around teacher attrition is explored below, to provide rationale for further study in this area.

There is variance in attrition data dependent on country and nature of research carried out (such as research with trainee teachers vs longer-serving teachers) and the nature of the sample informing the research data (such as number of years in the profession prior to attrition). Cooper and Alvarado (2006) studied teacher retention in Western countries, discovering that in the United States only 60% of teachers who prepared for teaching chose to enter the profession after graduation. In the United Kingdom, Cooper and Alvarado (2006) found that 40% of teachers leave the profession after the first three years. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) estimated the cumulative attrition of teachers in their first years of teaching using SASS/TFS data. Their data indicated that in the United States, after five years, 40-50% of beginning teachers had left the profession. The situation had not changed when Di Carlo (2011) used the same data set and subsequently found that between 40 and 50% of new teachers left the profession within five years in the United States. Di Carlo (2011) acknowledged a caveat to this data - teachers returning to the profession later; they make the important point that as many as 20-25% of leavers could return to the profession later.

In the United Kingdom, teacher attrition and retention have been high on the government agenda for the last two decades. Despite this, See and Gorard (2019) state: “Teacher vacancies tripled between 2011 and 2016, and more people are leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement.” (p. 2)

Lightfoot (2016) states:

In England 43% of the state schoolteachers polled said they were planning to leave the profession in the next five years. The survey shows that the staff recruitment and retention crisis, described by ministers as “scaremongering”, is a reality: 79% of schools say they are struggling to recruit or retain teachers and 88% predict things are going to get worse and that this will severely affect students. (p. 1)

It should be noted, however, that not all teachers will act upon these intentions to leave. Nonetheless, these figures indicate a high level of disharmony with the profession which could lead to attrition. The ‘School Workforce in England’ document (DfE, 2016) outlined data on actual teacher attrition:

the percentage of teachers that were still in post three years after qualifying and entering service was 75 per cent, a small decrease on the previous year’s figure of 77 per cent. The percentage of teachers that were still in post five and ten years after qualifying and entering service was 70 per cent and 61 per cent respectively. (p. 6-7)

This DfE data (2016) indicated that 25% of the new teachers surveyed had left within three years of beginning their teaching journey. This grew to 30% after 5 years and 39% after ten years.

Four years later, the more recent version of The School Workforce publication (DfE, 2020) stated “of the teachers who qualified in 2014, 67.4% are still in service after 5 years. This is lower than the five-year retention rate seen in the previous

year, when the figure was 68.0%.” This indicates that the five-year attrition rate for 2014 entrants stands at 32.6% in England, an increase of 0.6% on the figure for leavers in 2018. Attrition has also increased when comparing the 2019 five-year attrition rate with the 2015 five-year attrition rate which was around 30%. The ten-year attrition rate for 2009 entrants was 39% - that being the highest rate since 1997. It is important to note that these data sets are based on the census for English school workforce, not inclusive of Northern Ireland, Scotland or Wales. In light of these data snapshots, it would be fair to say that the five-year attrition rate for England fluctuates, but is currently marginally increasing, and in the previous decade has generally been between 30 and 40%.

UK parliament (2021) state that pupil numbers have increased in recent years. As a result of this increase in children on school roll, the pupil-teacher ratio has also increased resulting in a rise in teacher vacancies, compounding the issue of lack of qualified teachers in England. Given that teacher places on Initial Teacher Training/Education (ITT/ITE) courses in England are generally government funded and that teacher effectiveness increases after spending time in a teaching post and engaging with CPD, attrition at such levels outlined in the previous paragraph is costly both in terms of finance and the detriment to children’s learning experiences.

Similarly to Ingersoll (2007), The House of Commons Education Committee (2017) acknowledged that teacher retention, not just teacher recruitment, is an area deserving of more attention.

While recruiting sufficient new teachers is, of course, necessary, the Government should place greater emphasis on improving teacher retention. Not only is this a more cost-effective way to tackle some of the issues, but more teachers staying in the profession for longer would strengthen the pool of leadership positions. (p. 2)

It is important to note, however, that the above report by the House of Commons Education Committee examines teacher attrition data across educational settings, (including secondary and special school settings); it does not purely

focus on attrition figures in primary settings. Nevertheless, this report from five years ago from the House of Commons Education Committee demonstrates that retaining teachers is incredibly important and the focus should not lie solely on recruitment.

In addition to stating that retention rates differ dependent on the route taken into the profession (see chapter 1), the House of Commons report (2017) indicates that retention is dependent on the supply and demand of new trainees in the local area. They therefore recommend that ITE allocations consider the current and forecasted local demand for teachers, to avoid teachers being out of the profession in later academic years due to oversupply. Though, as mentioned earlier, there has been an increase in number of children on roll in school across the last decade, this indicates that particular attention must be paid to local trends as these may not reflect the overall pattern of greater pupil: teacher ratio. Some areas may be particularly burdened with additional children on roll, whilst others less so. Resulting large class sizes could also contribute to increasing teacher workload, one of the aforementioned reasons for attrition.

The Department for Education's Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2019) is the most recent drive by the UK government to improve teacher retention rates by implementing several new initiatives aimed at retaining newly qualified/early career teachers. The document acknowledges that retention poses continuing challenges "Even small increases in the rate of teachers leaving the profession creates significant, additional pressures on recruitment. The small decline in teacher retention rates in recent years has created challenges." (p. 10) The strategy recognises the importance of retention as a means of helping to increase teacher numbers, in addition to recruitment of new teachers. It suggests profession wide initiatives (not specific to either primary or secondary settings), though these different types of educational setting may pose different challenges for teachers at work within them. It is important then, that teacher attrition is researched through discrete primary or secondary specific studies, so that retention and attrition is understood not simply understood from a frequently mentioned 'subject shortage in the secondary sector' standpoint, but also as a phenomenon that occurs in the primary setting potentially for both overlapping

and different reasons. Levels of attrition from teaching such as those suggested above have consequences and costs, both financial and those to the detriment of the educational offering for the children. These are examined in section 2.1.2.

2.1.2 Costs of teacher attrition

Garcia and Weiss (2019) sum up the array of dominant and prevalent costs of high levels of teacher attrition in the United States, though these could be equally applicable in the United Kingdom and England:

A shortage of teachers harms students, teachers and the public education system as a whole. Lack of sufficient, quality teachers and staff instability threaten students' ability to learn and reduce teachers' effectiveness and high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better deployed elsewhere. The teacher shortage makes it more difficult to build a solid reputation for teaching and to professionalize it, which further contributes to perpetuating the shortage. In addition, the fact that the shortage is distributed so unevenly among students of different socioeconomic backgrounds challenges the U.S. education system's goal of providing a sound education equitably to all children. (p. 1)

Garcia and Weiss (2019) point to the diverse range of negative consequences that teacher attrition creates. The above quote highlights the negative impact on student learning, which is also added to by other literature. For example, it is widely accepted that student achievement is impacted by high levels of teacher attrition (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ronfeldt, 2013). Guarino et al., (2006), Ingersoll (2003) and Ronfeldt (2013) consider that schools tend to lose their more able teachers, resulting in a loss of valuable intellectual capital. This can have implications not only for the achievement of learners, but also for the reputation of the setting, development of the school and the effectiveness of future school leadership. Though teacher attrition usually has negative consequences, Dworkin (1986) also acknowledge that replacing experienced teachers with neophytes has immediate financial benefits as the

more costly, experienced teachers are replaced with cheaper counterparts. They recognise though, that the financial benefits can be short lived as overall teacher attrition has costly financial implications in terms of training new teachers.

Garcia and Weiss (2019) also highlight the impact on the perception of the profession and the economic resources that are expended on continual recruitment which could be better utilised elsewhere. Other contributors to the field of literature on attrition from the teaching profession make similar points. Barnes et al. (2007) and Di Carlo (2011) also discuss the financial costs of teacher attrition recognising that capital is lost through investment in the continuous cycle of recruitment and training. In addition, Di Carlo (2011) states that teacher attrition undermines the stability of settings, especially those serving the less privileged, which relates to the above quote. This unequal spread of high teacher attrition, means that some areas (especially the more socio-economically deprived) are more heavily impacted by the consequences of teacher attrition than affluent areas.

In the context of the United Kingdom, the highest rates of attrition are for recently qualified teachers, which suggests that teachers are lost before they reach levels of mastery within the profession. This indicates that recently acquired skills and knowledge (albeit underdeveloped) and future capacity are lost. Losing new teachers after investment in training is also incredibly financially costly, both to the government (given that most teacher training places are government funded) and individual. The array of reasons for teacher attrition, considered above by Garcia and Weiss (2019), were suggested in other literature. These are examined below and organised into two main sections: 1) job, contextual, and environmental reasons, and 2) individual factors.

2.2 Reasons for teacher attrition

2.2.1 Job-related, contextual, and environmental reasons for attrition

Many research findings place context and job-specific reasons as the main motivation behind teacher attrition. Mainly, these include high workload,

classroom and school conditions, school culture and leadership, lack of work-life balance and salary, among others. These factors are discussed below in more detail, starting with high workload, as there are multiple reasons suggested in literature for this phenomenon.

High workload is overwhelmingly cited in literature as the most prominent reason for attrition. Smithers and Robinson (2001, 2003) found five main factors influencing attrition, workload being the most prominent of the five in their interviews with participants. It was especially regretful for them to discover that, for those interviewed, there was a wish to 'escape from' teaching.

They nearly all came with high ideals wanting to work with children and pass on their understanding. But they are going, with potentially many more years of useful service in them, mainly because of: Workload; Pupil Behaviour; Government Initiatives. (2001, p. 11)

Smithers and Robinson (2001) go on to state that much of the increased workload was a result of government reform. Their participants reflected on the fact that they felt too much had been attempted at once, and that the profession was subject to persistent change. From interviews with participants, Lynch et al. (2016) similarly identified that the increased workload was a result of policy changes and inspection - these constant changes led to poor health and feeling undervalued, which in turn led to attrition. Interestingly, Lindqvist et al. (2014) cites both work overload and increased documentation as reasons for attrition, yet also reference that having alternative possibilities for employment due to the recreation of goals over time could play a part in attrition. Barmby (2006) also identified workload as one of two principal contributing factors to attrition. Menzies et al. (2015) found that almost 60% of teachers considered leaving in the previous six months and for those 60% of teachers, over three quarters said that high workload was the prominent reason for their thoughts of attrition. Cochran-Smith (2006) identified that the burdensome workload that teachers work with involves multiple competing demands.

Given that high workload seems to be such as prevalent reason for attrition, it will be critical, through this research with primary teachers, to explore the notion of high levels of workload with participants to see what the nature of the workload means for them. The hours worked by teachers are difficult to uncover since teachers have difficulty in counting hours of work over the course of a week because there is often a blurring of work and home life. However, surveys such as the one described below do shed some light on the hours of work carried out by teachers.

In 2017, the Department for Education, through its Teacher Workload Survey (2016), found that primary classroom teachers and middle leaders worked on average 55.5 hours per week; this constituted a greater number of hours than their secondary counterparts. It stated:

The largest source of variation in workload was attributable to factors which acted on individual teachers (for example, their level of experience or how their performance is evaluated) rather than those that impacted on the school. The implication is that effective interventions to reduce workload would need to target teachers across the population of schools. (p. 4)

Interestingly, the DfE stated that classroom teachers spent on average 18 hours per week on non-teaching tasks. This time does not contribute to the direct facilitation of learning, though it is needed to prepare for that facilitation (for example, marking, for marking or the preparation of resources). Workload was named as a 'very serious issue' by 52% of respondents in the Teacher Workload Study. In addition, teachers felt their work-life balance was negatively impacted by their role as a teacher:

Over three-quarters of staff were dissatisfied with the number of hours they usually worked. Most staff disagreed that they can complete their workload in their contracted hours, have an acceptable workload and that they can achieve a good balance between their work and private life. (p. 4)

This further supports the work highlighted in section 1.4 – there is a tension at play between the home lives and work lives of teachers. In the Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2019), the Department for Education recognise that efforts must be made to redress the balance and make workload for teachers manageable again. Similarly, Clandinin et al. (2015) explain:

Listening to participants, we were struck by the discontinuities and disconnects between their lives in and out of school. Participants told us about how difficult for them to compose and live a sustainable life both in and out of school contexts. (p. 13)

It will be interesting to uncover with primary teachers in this research, what their perceptions of work life balance are and how these impact on their thoughts or intention to leave the profession. Surveys, such as the Teacher Workload Survey, provide some insight, though there is a lack of detail in the responses. Taking an in-depth approach to interviewing to uncover rich data, through the constructivist grounded theory process should provide further insights on high workload and work-life balance. It is evident though, through the reports and papers examined for this background literature review, that the relationship between high workload and work-life balance are strongly linked to one another. This provides one focus for the research, particularly in terms of the nature of that high workload, which is so frequently cited as a reason for attrition. Moving through to more contextual reasons for attrition, the next section examines student behaviour as a driver for attrition.

Poor discipline or poor student behaviour was a reason provided for attrition from the profession (Barmby, 2006; Smithers & Robinson, 2001, 2003; Menzies et al., 2015; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). In the study by Menzies et al. (2015), 27% of those teachers expressing an intention to leave the profession stated that poor pupil behaviour was a contributing issue. Player et al. (2017) makes the argument that a leadership focus on enforcing rules related to student behaviour and discipline leaves teachers feeling supported in this area - giving rise to retention. This links two different potential contextual contributors for teacher attrition: leadership and student behaviour. Interestingly though, Smithers and

Robinson (2003) explain that poor pupil behaviour is more likely to be a factor for attrition in secondary school settings than primary settings. They found, through interviews with teacher participants, that teachers were faced with a sustained low-level struggle with poor behaviour rather than specific violent incidents. They explain that teachers felt that the government policy of social inclusion was a contributing factor to their experiences of poor pupil conduct. One teacher explained that several seriously disruptive children were in the same class which posed difficulties for them.

Day and Gu (2009) and Evans (2001) do not directly attribute poor behaviour of students to teacher attrition. However, this issue is indirectly mentioned in those studies. Evans (2001) suggests that the immediate context teachers work within (i.e., the classroom environment) can impact on their morale, motivation and job satisfaction. Student behaviour sits within the context of the classroom and could therefore impact on morale, motivation and job satisfaction. Over time, this could lead to teachers considering leaving the profession. Day and Gu (2009) similarly mention the 'dynamics of the classroom' which are influenced, in part, by student behaviour. They explain that this could result in an erosion of teacher commitment. Neither study make assumptions that the reduction of morale, motivation, job satisfaction and erosion of commitment will lead to attrition but suggest that this connection is plausible. This highlights a further connection between individual and context: an interaction between personal characteristics (such as commitment) and contextual factors (such as student behaviour). The wider economic environment can play a role in influencing teacher attrition. Some studies demonstrating this link are outlined below, starting with literature on teacher attrition and salary.

Salary and financial incentives formed another area which appeared in the literature on numerous occasions as a predictor for attrition. Though much research has found that salary is mentioned as a reason for attrition, it seems, for the most part, to be a secondary factor - not as prominent as immediate contextual or job specific factors (Evans, 2001; Smithers & Robinson, 2001, 2003; Clandinin et al., 2015). Menzies et al. (2015) discovered that 43% of teachers expressing an intention to leave the profession were dissatisfied with pay. It is

important to appreciate though that intention to leave differs from the act of leaving the profession. Conversely, Lynch et al. (2015) notes that appropriate pay, among other factors, is a predictor for retention. Cochran-Smith (2006) state the importance of teacher pay (in addition to other factors) in retention:

In order to stay in teaching, today's (and tomorrow's) teachers need: school conditions where they are successful and supported, opportunities to work with other educators in professional learning communities rather than in isolation, differentiated leadership and advancement prospects over the course of the career, and good pay for what they do. (p. 20)

Cochran-Smith (2006) mention that salary should be commensurate with the work carried out, though this is mentioned alongside a raft of other suggestions, so it is difficult to distinguish how important an issue salary is for teachers in relation to other issues they faced. Worth et al. (2015) go some way to explore this, stating that pay and/or the offer of higher paid jobs is not the reason that teachers leave the profession. They mention that, in fact, other things are motivating for teachers than simply pay.

Worth et al. (2015) predict that pay could be a condition leading to teacher attrition, though they state that, in the short term, teacher leavers could earn less following attrition. Instead, they believe that motivation is driven by prospects of higher pay in an alternative profession in the long term. Though salary and financial incentives have not been shown to be dominant factors in attrition, most of the historical strategies used in recruitment and retention of teachers are based on financial reward or incentive. For example, Barmby (2006) references the 'repayment of teachers' loans scheme' intended to improve teacher retention, which had little impact on retention overall. As this scheme was applicable solely for Language and Science teachers in challenging areas it would have had no bearing on retention in primary school settings. The recent Department for Education's Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2019) states that much financial support has previously been invested in recruitment rather than retention and it refers to changes that can be made to address this issue:

adjusting our financial incentives to better balance the need to retain teachers as well as to recruit them...we will now reform bursaries more widely to follow this phased, retention payment approach... Importantly, in making this change, we will also ensure that retention payments for all phased bursaries are weighted such that they are higher for teachers working in more challenging schools. (p. 24)

The DfE Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2019) acknowledges that teacher attrition disproportionately impacts socio-economically deprived areas. It will be interesting to discover, through this research project, whether salary or financial incentives were drivers for attrition in the primary setting and whether salary and financial incentives are suggested by interview participants as ideas they have for improving retention. The literature, though, indicates that working conditions need to be looked at more generally as salary is not the main factor in attrition. Moving to contextual factors for attrition, further reasons to those suggested in section 1.3 are explored below.

Ingersoll and Smith (2003) explain that attrition itself can harm the cohesion within the environment. The nature of context, school culture and/or collegial relationships were regularly cited as reasons for attrition or as protective factors. In particular, greater literature exists on leadership and school culture with reference to attrition, which are examined further below.

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) suggest the nature of context and school culture as highly influential factors for retention, particularly with reference to continuing professional development; availability of teaching resources; autonomy; and teamwork opportunities. Professional development opportunities are referenced considerably as areas of importance for teacher retention. The Department for Education (2019) in the Early Career Framework recognise that school culture is important for retention and state that one of their aims is to: "Invest in and embed school cultures that create a sense of value through ongoing professional development." (p. 6) Allen et al. (2019) and the OECD

(2018) note that high performing education systems can provide bespoke opportunities for professional development and that continuing professional development is highly valued and promoted. In addition, the House of Commons Education Committee (2017) states: “All teachers should have access to high-level CPD in order to improve professionalism and enhance teacher retention.” (p. 24) Interestingly, a dislike of school culture accounted for around a quarter of reasons provided for reasons for considering leaving the profession (Menzies et al., 2015). However, it should be noted that for those teachers, a change of setting may help to alleviate the issue. Cochran Smith (2006) points out that nurturing an effective school culture means that teachers should, in practice, work in conditions which allow them to achieve success and feel supported, while providing the opportunity to work collegiately. In this research study, it will be interesting to find whether, in the primary setting, long serving teachers have had access to and found value in a supportive culture or professional development and, to contrast, whether teacher leavers found that this was a neglected area and one which they mention led them to leave the profession.

Leadership was cited in the retention and attrition literature, often as an indirect reason for attrition. For example, Evans (2001) position leadership as a factor for retention, advocating that leaders need to be realistic in expectations and perspective, whilst remaining professional, as this influences teachers’ morale, satisfaction, and motivation. Day and Gu (2009) suggested that leadership was a factor for attrition, amongst others. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) recognise that school leadership is a workplace condition important for retention. Leadership in an educational setting can directly affect the school culture, collaboration and planning opportunities and teacher involvement in decision making. Interestingly, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) note that a lack of teacher involvement and autonomy in school decision making can lead to attrition. This indicates that leadership style might directly impact attrition – that an autocratic leadership style with centralised decision making may be detrimental to attrition levels.

The research above demonstrates that leadership is often one of many reasons stated for attrition, though Menzies et al. (2015) found that 43% of those

expressing an intention to leave asserted leadership as a reason for those thoughts; in their study it was one of two dominant reasons for attrition, alongside workload. Player et al. (2017) found that leadership can have a powerful impact, positively or negatively on teachers. It showed that recognition by leadership for exemplary performance, supportive leaders, and leaders able to clearly communicate a vision were all important in improving retention. They discovered that leadership was an important factor influencing retention in a specific setting, but not overall in the profession i.e., teachers may leave a setting because of poor leadership but not necessarily leave the profession.

Other contextual and environmental factors for attrition identified in the literature included unrealistic expectations of the profession driven by advertisements (Carr, 2020), changing government initiatives and the quest for new challenges (Smithers & Robinson, 2001). Linqvist et al. (2014) and Menzies et al. (2015) also indicate that the prevalence of a feasible alternative profession for a teacher to move into could help to facilitate attrition.

2.2.2 Individual factors as reasons for attrition from teaching

Self-efficacy was mentioned in the literature as one individual factor influencing attrition. In Chile, Avalos and Valenzuela (2016) discovered that teachers' perception of self-efficacy was one of the reasons for attrition. They state that beliefs about capacity to teach (self-efficacy) are personal and subject to change over time. For some teachers, their perceptions about teaching did not match the reality they faced and, in their study, Clandinin et al. (2015) suggested, considering Dewey's (1938) literature, that relational spaces might help new teachers to make sense of themselves as they become teachers. This could be fruitful since Avalos and Valenzuela (2016) point out that self-efficacy changes over time – navigating this change through talk could be helpful. Interestingly, Carr (2020) explored the influence that advertisements may have over the perceptions of pre-service teachers, as advertisements for teaching have a role to play in setting expectations. The OECD (2005) mentions recruitment drives and how these need to be carefully considered due to their implications:

The reasons that people give for deciding to become a teacher are important considerations in designing recruitment strategies, and in identifying the sources of job satisfaction that influence whether people are likely to stay in the career. It is also important to analyse the reasons people give for not becoming teachers, and the reasons why existing teachers leave. (p. 68)

Similarly, Pillen (2013) discusses a tension between professional and personal identity for those new to the profession and the internal struggles of teachers that come to the fore through gaps between the way they want to teach vs the ideals of the setting or profession. This tension develops over time and leads to a dissatisfaction in teaching. However, Lynch et al. (2015) suggest that as new trainees enter teaching, some come into the profession with the notion that they will remain long-term, whilst others may enter the profession knowing that it may only be a short-term career choice: “There seems to be a division among the teachers of those who view and live teaching as a long term profession and those who see it and live it in a more exploratory manner.” (p. 9) This indicates that for some, attrition may have been an expected reality at some point in the future of their careers and one that may have planned or prepared for.

Chiong et al. (2017) identify perceived professional mastery as a reason for retention: “two prominent retention factors are identified: teachers’ perceived professional mastery and altruistic reasons. Perceived professional mastery is particularly important due to its mutually reinforcing analytic relationships with other reasons.” (p. 1083) This has some link with the previously stated literature in section 2.2.1 which indicates that continuing professional development (CPD) is important for retention. Without it, professional teaching skills may not reach professional mastery level and teachers may not develop the understanding of themselves that they are operating at such level. This perception of self in the role links to the work by Avalos and Valenzuela (2016) on self-efficacy. They stated that low self-efficacy leads to attrition.

Job dissatisfaction, low morale, declining health, and stress are all individual reasons that contribute to attrition, though these individual factors are usually caused by contextual or environmental factors as discussed in section 2.2.1.

Ball (2003) found the alienation of self to be a contributing factor to attrition. They suggest that this can arise because of a 'quest for performativity' which leads to a divide between meaningful, intrinsically valued work and 'measured output', inevitably resulting in job dissatisfaction and low morale. Ball (2003) goes on to state: "There are other 'costs', as indicated already - personal and psychological. A kind of values schizophrenia is experienced by individual teachers where commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice are sacrificed for impression and performance." (p. 221)

Day and Gu (2009) found that resilience was a key factor in remaining committed to the profession, and this could impact on them remaining in the profession. Interestingly, Chapman (1982) found that those remaining in the profession were more susceptible to seeking approval and recognition of those around them, including leaders and family members, which hints that those remaining have this need for external validation in common.

Clandinin et al. (2015) point to the fact that individual factors for attrition are often looked at separately to job, context and environment specific reasons and states that there are consequences to this:

Early career attrition has most often been conceptualised as either a problem associated with individual factors (e.g., burnout) or a problem associated with contextual factors (e.g. support and salary). This study considered early career attrition as an identity making process that involves the complex negotiation between individual and contextual factors ... categorizing them as individual and contextual factors can artificially divide beginning teachers' lives into professional and personal ones, making it difficult to achieve a holistic view of the lives of beginning teachers. (p.2.)

As can be seen from the literature reviewed on the reasons for attrition, a greater wealth of literature exists for both secondary and primary teacher retention, though not for primary settings specifically. In addition, many more points are raised, and found to repeat across literature for role, context and environmentally specific reasons for attrition or retention, than for individual factors. This research aims to look at individual experience in greater detail, whilst retaining a holistic overview, as literature suggests that this could be meaningful.

Klassen et al. (2018) define teacher non-cognitive attributes as: “‘soft’ personal characteristics such as beliefs, interpersonal skills, motivation, self-efficacy, attitudes, dispositions, and personality to influence teachers’ professional practices and subsequent student outcomes.” (p. 65) In their cross-cultural study, they grouped non-cognitive attributes into three clusters: “empathy and communication; organisation and planning; and, resilience and adaptability, in the English setting.” (p. 68) They stated that, in other countries worldwide, there are other non-cognitive attributes at play for teachers such as fostering community, creativity, professional ethics and motivation and commitment. Their research was primarily focused on which non-cognitive attributes educators felt were critically important for effective teaching, with a view to including an assessment of these non-cognitive attributes in initial teacher education selection procedures. The research, therefore, did not look at non-cognitive attributes and the impact of these on teacher attrition or retention specifically.

Klassen et al. (2020) explain that non-cognitive attributes include conscientiousness, self-regulation, adaptability, and empathy but acknowledge that these interact with environmental factors. In fact, in Klassen et al. (2018) propose a model which suggests that non-cognitive attributes are influenced by cultural context and environmental factors, and that, in turn, the non-cognitive attributes of a teacher will influence their teaching behaviours (though leaving the profession was not looked at in this study).

Most of the research encompassing non-cognitive attributes in teaching relates to, or is with respect to teacher selection, effectiveness, professionalism or competence rather than teacher attrition - the focus of this study. It will be

interesting to see whether participants in this study mention any of their own personal characteristics that they feel serve them well in the profession, or whether any of these they found to 'work against' their teaching role.

2.2.3 The role of resilience in attrition

Oswald (2003) define resilience as the "capacity to overcome personal vulnerabilities and environmental stressors, to be able to 'bounce back' in the face of potential risks, and to maintain well-being." (p. 50) Specifically in the context of teaching, Patterson et al. (2004) define resilience as: "using energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions." (p. 3) It seems to therefore relate to a 'continuing' despite working within challenging conditions.

Day and Gu (2009) declare:

Teachers need resilience if they are to sustain their commitment and effectiveness and if their pupils are to receive their best teaching. The research found that teachers' capacities to sustain their commitment and resilience were influenced by their professional life phases and their identities, and that these were mediated by the contexts in which they lived and worked. (p. 444)

In this case, resilience is viewed as an attribute that is influenced by contextual factors. For example, in the teaching profession, contextual factors may include leadership, peer support, pupil behaviour and decision-making power. Since contextual factors have already been identified as contributing factors to attrition (section 2.2.1), it will be interesting to understand participants views on resilience playing a part in their roles in school contexts to keep them going. Beltman et al. (2015) also put forward the case that the school environment (contextual factor) can play a part in developing or hindering resilience, interesting suggesting the role a school psychologist may have in supporting teacher resilience within the school context:

School ecologies can enable the resilience of teachers, with prior research illustrating the importance of supportive colleagues, strong leadership, and positive school culture. There is limited research, however, exploring the role of school psychologists in supporting or enabling teacher resilience...Findings show that school psychologists directly and indirectly support teacher resilience, although teachers perceive school psychologists' main role as work with individual students." (p. 172)

In interviews with twelve young adults in the United States who had experienced adversity but gone on to study in college, Bobek (2022) found that the following were important in the development of resilience, which were applied to the teaching profession: "significant adult relationships, a sense of personal responsibility, social and problem-solving skills, a sense of competence, expectations and goals, confidence, a sense of humor, and a sense of accomplishment." (pp. 202-203)

Mansfield et al. (2012) devised four main dimensions of a resilient teacher: a profession related dimension (the teacher reflects on practice and is flexible and adaptable); an emotional dimension (the teacher bounces back, copes with job demands/stress, looks after own wellbeing); social dimension (the teacher solves problems and seeks help/takes advice); motivational dimension (the teacher is positive and optimistic in face of adversity, persists, focuses on learning and improvement and has self-confidence/self-belief).

Gu & Day (2007) suggest one of the key proponents of resilience to be self-efficacy:

... a strong sense of self-efficacy is another essential component of teacher resilience. To rebound from setbacks and adversity, teachers need the strength of self-efficacy beliefs; and conversely, their sustained effort and perseverance in the face of difficulty will strengthen their sense of efficacy and result in a stronger sense of

resilience. In other words, the development of teachers' self-efficacy consistently interacts with the growth of their resilient qualities. It is by nature a dynamic, developmental process—the key characteristic of resilience. (p. 1312)

Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) discuss the move away from resilience as an interaction between internal and external risk and protective factors - these may be individually or environmentally borne. In fact, there is a great deal of literature which comments on the relationship and interaction between the environmental context and individual resilience, which points to the fact that resilience is mitigated by external factors and can be learnt or supported (Oswald et al., 2003; Ungar, 2011; Beltman et al., 2011; Schaefer, 2013; Hong, 2012; Masten et al., 1990; Calderhead, 1991; Sumsion, 2004; Mansfield et al., 2016; Castro et al., 2010; Howard & Johnson, 2004). Mansfield et al. (2016) suggest fourteen contextual resources that should be mobilised to aid resilience, such as engaging with supportive networks and utilising relationships. While Masten et al. (1990) argues that resilience can only be a product of a relationship between two or more people. Similarly, Beltman et al. (2011) acknowledges the importance of others to personal resilience, suggesting that mentoring is crucial in the development of resilience.

A summary of the importance of resilience and its relevance in the teaching profession is provided below by Bobek (2002):

Throughout their careers, teachers encounter many situations that generate conflict and stress. If not managed productively, conflict and stress can affect physical health and psychological well-being, possibly leading to changes in self-esteem, altered patterns of sleeping and eating, depression, declining job satisfaction, and increased vulnerability to illness (Linville 1987; Brooks 1994). Therefore, teacher resiliency - the ability to adjust to varied situations and increase one's competence in the face of adverse conditions (Gordon & Coscarelli 1996; Masten, Best, & Garmezzy

1990) is a critical element in classroom success and teacher retention. (p.202)

Arnup and Bowles (2016) used the resilience scale for adults (RSA) in the absence of a teacher specific resilience scale, with teachers currently in the profession. The results of their study found that resilience was highly related to intention to leave teaching, with less resilient teachers more likely to express intention to leave teaching. Lantieri et al. (2011) used a transformational professional development programme to increase teachers' resilience to ongoing stressors which in turn could prevent them leaving the profession entirely.

Linking to the above points about environmental context and the role this must play in building resilience it is important to note that resilience, or lack of, is not a 'deficiency' and should not be viewed in this way. Mansfield et al (2016) states: "Although resilience tends to be mentioned in the literature regarding teacher attrition, it would be remiss to associate attrition with low levels of professional resilience or to assume that teachers leaving the profession lack resilience." (p. 85)

There appears to be a greater amount of literature on resilience in relation to attrition from teaching, in comparison with other individual factors. Unsurprisingly, some researchers in the field of education have been eager to measure teacher resilience. Most resilience research in the teaching profession utilises the Resilience Scale for Adults (Friborg, Hjermol, Martinussen & Rosenvinge, 2001) as a method of measurement - this instrument consists of a thirty-seven item five-point scale. This scale was not specifically created to measure resilience in teachers, but it was utilised in 2005 with applicants for military college.

Interestingly it was compared with measures of personality (the Big Five). It was found that the personality trait 'conscientiousness' correlated strongly with resilience. Friborg et al. (2005) assert:

"It is thus incorrect to view the RSA-measure as independent of personality. Rather, the current results speak for the resilience

factors as variants of personality factors not accounted for in the current Big Five model. A positive score on the Big Five factors has been associated with a well-adjusted personality profile (Asendorpf *et al*, 2001; Rammstedt *et al*, 2004) and resilience (Riulli *et al*, 2002; Davey *et al*, 2003), so these associations were expected.” (p. 39)

Similarly, Campbell Sills *et al*. (2006) related resilience to personality in their study with young adults (not teachers), though to measure resilience they used the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale not the RSA. They found a strong negative relationship between resilience and the personality trait: neuroticism, and a positive correlation between resilience and both extraversion and conscientiousness.

Due to the qualitative, phenomenological nature of this research, measures of resilience will not be used, though links have been established between resilience and personality for other similar research purposes. It will be interesting to comprehend whether participants, in this research, identify resilience as a key individual factor in relation to themselves or the profession and whether other individual factors or skills or abilities are mentioned by participants as being key in helping them remain in the profession.

2.2.4 The role of personality in attrition

Personality is directly referenced in the non-cognitive literature as being a non-cognitive attribute; personality itself though, is an extensive area. When consulting literature on personality, it is clearly an extremely complex area to capture. It is important to briefly explore and define personality since it is commonly cited as one of the key non-cognitive attributes. Personality psychology is defined by Asendorpf (2009):

Personality psychology attempts to describe, predict, and explain those recurrent behaviours that set an individual apart from some or all other agemates. In other words, personality psychology is

concerned with those temporally stable tendencies of behaviour in which persons of a similar age differ from one another. (p. 43)

Personality then should be considered as an element of self which is relatively unchanging over time. Chammoro-Premuzic (2015) explains that most researchers conceptualize individual differences of personality using the term 'traits. There has been much debate around the use of 'personality traits' yet Deary (2009) explains that trait theory is now well established, and their constraints should not curtail their achievements. Traits (such as open mindedness) can be defined as relatively stable units of personality. They can influence behaviour and can be predictive of outcomes (Robinson & Sedikides, 2009; Maltby et al., 2013; Matthew et al., 2009). Though the above statement makes clear that personality encompasses stable tendencies of behaviour, these can be malleable over long periods of time through experiences and external factors (Funder, 1991).

Ordinary language choices (such as calm, cooperative and trusting) and their relation to the five distinct personality traits is important to understand, as participants in this research are more likely to use these straightforward, uncomplicated terms when making references to personality and talking about themselves and how they perceive themselves as teachers.

Though personality measures specifically will not be used in this qualitative research, it remains important to bear in mind the above cautions and warnings for conversations around the topic of personality and non-cognitive attributes when in interview situations with participants, especially where they are free to reflect on themselves and their interaction with the role of teacher.

Hong (2012) found that teacher stayers and leavers perceived and interpreted challenges differently and in the face of challenging classroom management they often experienced diminished self-efficacy beliefs which they attributed to their personality. "Leavers showed different attribution beliefs compared to stayers' beliefs. Unlike stayers, leavers tended to believe that their personality was not really fitting to the job." (p. 429) For example, one participant perceived that their

classroom management was substandard due to their 'impatient personality' and ultimately, they left the profession.

Research has been conducted into job satisfaction and retention, in contexts other than teaching, demonstrating that personality traits are predictors of both satisfaction and/or retention (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Zimmerman, 2008; Tokar et al. 1998); it will be interesting to see whether teacher participants in this research attribute leaving the primary profession in any way to their personality.

2.3 Person-Environment Fit

2.3.1 General literature on fit

Non-cognitive attributes such as resilience, adaptability and perception or expectation of the profession are important, as they are often referenced in person-job fit literature. Person-job and person-environment fit refers to the 'hidden' relationship between those role/job and contextual/environmental factors and personal characteristics (non-cognitive attributes included). Kristof-Brown et al. (2005) define fit succinctly: "the compatibility that results from personal and environmental characteristics being well matched." (p. 285) There are different types of fit: person - job/role fit (PJ fit); person-environment fit (PE fit), person-organisation fit (PO fit); person-supervisor fit (PS fit).

Ehrhart and Makransky (2007) assert that a person's degree of fit with different levels of the environment can determine their response to the setting. In this way, teachers' perceptions of fit may heavily influence their responses in the teaching environment to stress, high workload and the other factors influencing attrition, mentioned in sections 2.2 and 2.4.

Chuang et al. (2016) suggest that managers should utilise different measures (such as the PSFS scale or PGFS scale) for the various types of fit as managerial tools to help meet employee needs. They argue that understanding employee fit and measuring this can help to: "recognise specific areas for improvement and training, identify areas of role conflict, and reassign and redesign jobs and job

tasks". (pp. 91-92) It is thought that by applying these actions, employees will gain a greater sense of fit, generating greater levels of motivation and commitment to the organisation and role.

Darrow and Behrend (2017) explain that fit should be considered holistically as there are various aspects. De Beer et al. (2016) found that if the subjective perception of employees could be influenced positively, perception of person-job fit could be improved. Interestingly, their study showed that work engagement is a positive predictor for person-job fit, than vice versa. In this way, they advocate that action can be taken to improve employee work engagement which would in turn influence employee fit with their role. In the teaching profession, this would raise the question – could teachers lose perception or reality of their person-job fit due to the demands of their work? Much has been stated earlier about high workload in teaching and its links to attrition - does this in turn, over time, erode teacher engagement with their role and in turn lead to a reduction in their person-job fit?

Importantly, De Beer et al. (2016) suggest that strategies can be implemented to improve employee work engagement which would positively impact on P-J fit. They suggest both carrying out employee surveys and paying attention to supporting resources for employees as two possible strategies.

organizations should foster job resources that match employees' needs. Organizations could consider running yearly climate surveys in order to identify job demands and job resources that are associated with work engagement in the specific organization, and attempt to intervene in those variables to ensure work engagement.
(p. 12)

Participants in this research may reveal that they have experienced attention to the resources they need and use, and there could be discussion about whether employee surveys within the teaching profession are regularly used as tools which could positively benefit work engagement and therefore have a positive impact on P-J fit.

Van Iddekinge et al. (2011) maintain that personal interests, and their congruence with the job role, play an important part in their ability to acquire knowledge and skills in training, and, later, perform and even remain in the role. They advocate taking extra steps during the job analysis in order “to determine the range of interests prospective applicants may possess and which interests the job does and does not support.” (p. 1183)

Interestingly, Van Vianen (2018) asserts that though individuals value person-job fit, it is not always within reach or required. Instead, Van Vianen places focus on attributes individuals find important and asserts that the presence of such attributes in the environment is crucial. “Individuals flourish particularly when experiencing fit on attributes they find important and suffer most when these attributes are not afforded in the work environment”. (p. 96) Discovering what teachers find important in the school culture they intend to work within could therefore be key in either their attrition, or retention later.

Westerman and Cyr (2004) define three person-organisation fit measures: values congruence; work environment congruence; and personality congruence. They argue that the initial two are significant factors for an individual’s commitment and satisfaction. It appears that the congruence between personal values and those held by an employer/organisation is an incredibly important factor. This could influence an individual’s perception of fit and their contentment in the school setting.

There is a good deal of literature available particularly on both person-job and person-environment fit, but little within that on these areas within the teaching profession particularly. This research could inadvertently add to the literature on PE/PO fit in school settings.

2.3.2 The role of person-job and person-environment fit in attrition

De Cooman et al. (2009) found that person-organisation fit (PO fit) was crucial in retention - though their study did not include the teaching profession. Those that

felt their personal values were aligned with the organisations were more likely to remain.

...we confirmed the attrition effect as described in the ASA literature. Individuals who felt congruent with the organization remained, while those who felt they did not fit left Kristof-Brown et al., 2005. Results indicated that the lower the perceived subjective match between own and organizational values at entry, the more likely it was that someone left the organization over time, making P–O fit a good predictor of turnover. (p. 106)

Interestingly, some explain that once employed in the profession, they discover that teachers must be concerned with the assessment of progress made of groups of learners, and this can contribute to conflict felt by teachers with regards to why they entered the profession in the first place. This stance on ‘adding value’ does not always fit with their own personal feelings about what teaching should be about. De Cooman et al. (2009) also comment on socialisation of new starters to assimilate their personal values with those of the organisation as a way of improving fit and, in turn, retention: “Putting more effort into socialization tactics is necessary. It can help organizations to retain valuable employees” (p. 106)

Often, in the teaching profession, it is left to teacher peers and colleagues to socialise new starters into the profession. If the afore-mentioned high workload is impacting already on them, it is understandable that this could impact on the socialisation of new teachers - time pressures may lead to insufficient resources for socialisation. Mentoring has been one specifically mentioned tool in the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (2019) as a means of supporting early career teachers and enabling retention in the profession. It will be interesting to discover participant views on mentoring as means of socialisation or as a factor they believe may improve retention.

Vogel and Felman (2009) discuss how person-group fit can interact with person-job fit, but that person-group fit does not moderate career success or turnover intentions. If application of this are made to the teaching profession, teachers with

a perceived fit within the group of staff in their setting may bring about an improved person-job fit. However, this would have little effect on their future success or attrition from the setting in the future.

However, Westerman and Cyr (2004) state:

Employee satisfaction and commitment were found to mediate the relationship between work environment congruence and turnover intentions, however, personality congruence and values congruence had direct effects on intention to remain (although values congruence was partially mediated by employee attitudes).
(p. 258)

It appears that congruence between personal values and the organisation are important in impacting on retention. Individuals, such as teachers, may have selected the profession based on the perceived congruence between themselves and the profession in terms of values, but do these perceived values materialise once in the profession? This will be an interesting area to uncover more about with participants. When an individual's perceived fit is low on entering an organisation, De Cooman et al. (2009) suggest a susceptibility to leaving that organisation.

Player et al. (2017) is the main contributor in the field of fit related to the teaching profession and particularly with reference to attrition or retention, though their research was carried out in the United States. Nevertheless, their findings are crucial - they discovered a strong association between high person-job fit and reduced likelihood of attrition.

“Teachers will be more likely to continue in their schools and in the teaching profession when they feel that their needs and abilities match the requirements of the profession.” (p. 338)

To sum up, they state that strong person-job fit can reduce teacher attrition and increase commitment between teachers and the setting in which they are employed.

As mentioned above, much is written about person-job fit and person-environment fit - some even relates to attrition, but little is known about these themes with reference to the teaching profession. In the context of the United States, Player et al. (2017) claims a lack of research exists in this area in explaining teacher turnover.

2.4 Burnout, stress, and teacher attrition

Many different definitions exist for burnout. Dworkin (1986) states that burnout is an extreme case of role-specific alienation, primarily characterised by a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness, but also exacerbated by normlessness and isolation. Demerouti et al. (2003) state that burnout is a multidimensional concept defined by exhaustion (physically, emotionally, and cognitively) and disengagement from work and people. While Gold and Roth (1993) advocate that burnout consists of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. In a study with five foreign language teachers, Acheson et al. (2016) discovered that teachers experience a disproportionate burden for motivation and unsustainable emotional labour. They state that this can lead to emotional exhaustion, lack of self-efficacy and job burnout. This can, in turn, lead to the possibility of attrition. Though this research was conducted in the United States, with foreign language teachers, it is worthwhile noting that burnout could be a construct mentioned by participants in this research. Madigan and Kim (2021) found, through their meta-analysis, that burnout has a positive relationship with teachers' intentions to quit and that attention should be paid to reducing burnout as the risk of attrition from burnout is increasing over time. Gold and Roth (1993) suggest that a multitude of factors, such as stress, and reality shock in the profession, lead to disillusionment and burnout; three decades ago, they suggested that psychological support for teachers should be provided as part of their recommended Professional Health Solution to help alleviate this issue.

2.5 The impact of expectations on attrition in the teaching profession

Having a realistic view of teaching prior to entering the profession can be seen as a protective factor for attrition.

“beginning teachers should understand the dramatic range of intense emotions they will experience so they may enter the profession with a realistic view instead of an overoptimistic view of teaching.” (Chang, 2009 p. 212.)

Chang (2009) makes the important point that teaching is an emotional profession. Are new starters aware of this? Do they perceive this before entering the profession? If they enter the profession with a misguided perception, might this impact on whether they leave or stay once they experience reality? These are all important questions which are worthy of uncovering more about, though knowing this might influence potential teachers to move away from the profession.

Away from the context of teaching, Überschaer et al. (2016) explain that correct perceptions of fit should be nurtured from an early stage. Many question whether this is possible, given that teaching is a somewhat indirectly ‘visible’ profession that the wider general population might believe they understand due to the portrayal of the profession via media outlets, advertisements, social media, recruitment advertisements and parental voice. Direct visibility such as through teacher voice or access to the classroom, is somewhat hidden, other than through personal connections to those in the profession, or once a career in teaching has already been embarked upon.

Überschaer et al. (2016) state, from an organisational (not a teaching perspective), that values of organisations need to be clearly communicated from the outset so that applicants can assess their suitability to the context. Teacher recruitment initiatives/drives such as 2020’s ‘Get into teaching’ campaign advertise teaching and attempt to provide insight into what ‘a day in the life of a teacher’ involves. Carr (2020) examined contrasting views about the advertisement. Some praised it, whilst others criticised it for failing to present the

true realities of teaching. In addition, experiences in teaching are mediated by the precise context, or school setting, as discussed earlier in section 2.2.1., therefore realities in the profession can be vastly opposed and unconnected.

Überschaer et al. (2016), rightly point to a responsibility to those informing the general population about a profession to provoke accurate perceptions by “highlighting information which is fit and relevant.” (p. 1034) When individual schools advertise teaching positions, particularly for experienced teachers, it is often possible for potential candidates to gain some, albeit limited, insight to a school's values and contextual information through a planned visit to the setting or by browsing the available online information about the context. This promotion of a particular setting's values can also be achieved through means such as realistic job previews (Uggerslev et al., 2012; Kristof, 1996; Rynes, 1991), though this is not offered in teaching roles. At most, one trial lesson may be carried out in the setting, and not always with the class that the applicant would be teaching if successful in gaining the role.

2.6 Research gaps, research aims and research questions

Reviewing the literature on teacher attrition provided a valuable opportunity to consider the range of research methodologies and methods previously employed to gain insight into the field of teacher attrition. Most of the research papers consulted on teacher attrition in the United States were based on secondary data (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Garcia & Weiss, 2019; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Player et al., 2017; Worth et al., 2015). The secondary data sources commonly employed and analysed for use in these studies included the NTPS (National Teacher and Principal Survey), its predecessor the SASS (Schools and Staffing Survey), or the TFS (Teacher Follow Up Survey).

Interviews were used as the sole method of data generation in a study in Alberta, Canada (Clandinin et al., 2015) and in the Netherlands (Pillen, 2013). One study in Chile employed a mixed methods research design (incorporating interviews, narratives, and surveys) and involved three different data collection points over

the course of two years (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016). The studies and research papers consulted from the context of English school settings typically employed surveys or questionnaires as their primary method of data collection (Barmby, 2006), though some employed mixed method approaches. The mixed method studies commonly used surveys as the initial source of data gathering, but these were frequently pursued by a smaller number of follow up interviews with a sample of the original survey or questionnaire respondents (Chiong et al, 2017, Lynch et al, 2016; Lindqvist, 2014; Menzies et al, 2015; Smithers & Robinson; 2001, 2003).

Most studies consulted as part of this literature review included a combination of both primary, secondary and further education teachers as their sample. The data from this consolidated group was generally analysed as a whole, providing insights into attrition from a general teacher perspective, though not specifically a primary teacher perspective. In this research, I hope to specifically look at perspectives of primary teachers because the context primary teachers work within, and the nature of their role (not generally confined to teaching one subject as a specialism like in secondary education), is different to that of their secondary counterparts.

Most literature pointed to high workload as the main factor for teacher attrition, but more information on the current specificities of this workload in primary settings in England would prove to be useful. In addition, Chang (2009) points to the role that emotions play in teachers work and it will be important to see if this plays a role in attrition. Most research into teacher attrition focuses on the impact of one specific area on attrition, such as resilience, or workload. Instead, this research aims to explore teachers' thoughts on attrition without the use of any preconceived categories, codes or a preconceived focus. For the purposes of this research, the focus is firmly on participant voice; a phenomenological viewpoint will be maintained to see the issue through each participant's individual 'lens'.

Research with teachers frequently focuses on either insight from teachers who have already left the profession, or teachers at the start of their teaching journey. Samples rarely include both groups. In addition, the background literature review

showed that populations sampled in attrition or retention studies tend to be early career teachers or those on ITT/ITE courses - as they are generally more accessible to researchers who have links with academic institutions. This research aims to seek insights from both primary teacher leavers and stayers simultaneously. It employs a sample of long-serving teachers or those who served in the profession for several years before leaving (this is discussed further in chapters 3 and 4).

To the best of my knowledge, from the review of literature on teacher attrition for this study, it appears that analysis of secondary data, and the surveys and questionnaires have been favoured methods of data collection for conducting research into teacher attrition in England. These often fail to provide a holistic picture of a teacher 'leaver' and lack in depth of understanding around the subjective reasons for attrition. This means of data generation makes it difficult to access the thoughts, inner beliefs, values, perceptions, and feelings of teachers in the primary setting, or those who have since left the profession. It also makes it difficult to collect fresh insights grounded in participant data. Employing questionnaires or surveys can lead to research in the area appearing fragmented, out of context, and it often fails to show the complexities that teachers face when leaving the profession. A richer qualitative approach can lead to more detailed insights into the world of participants and their reasons for attrition. It was therefore important for this research to provide an alternative means of generating data with teachers around the topic of teacher attrition. To explore teacher meanings around attrition in a more phenomenological way, I decided to use constructivist grounded theory (CGT) as the methodology and guiding framework for research. This specific form of grounded theory was established for use in the field of healthcare and nursing and has proved incredibly useful at generating new theory in this field (Charmaz, 2000). At present, the use of constructivist grounded theory is becoming increasingly popular and growing in a multitude of fields other than nursing, especially education (Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006) and constructivism is currently the preferred qualitative paradigm in such qualitative research (Stough & Lee, 2021). Using this version of grounded theory to focus in on teacher concerns can help spark insightful, valuable new understandings (Linqvist & Forsberg, 2022). Within this methodology, I decided

to use a combination of data generation methods which have not, to the best of my knowledge, been used in a constructivist grounded theory or grounded theory study on teacher attrition: visual representations and semi-structured interviews. Through use of this unique combination of methods within a constructivist grounded theory framework, it was hoped that the research would provide fresh insights into the reasons for teacher attrition in primary schools in England.

The research aimed to generate an understanding of the reasons for teacher attrition, from teacher perspectives, specifically in English primary school settings. Research frequently examines either individual, or contextual, or environmental reasons for attrition but fails to recognise the interconnectedness of these reasons (Clandinin et al., 2015). It is hoped that the unique combination of data generation methods, within a CGT methodology, will allow each participant space to provide their own holistic perspectives on the issue. Further information on the research methodology (constructivist grounded theory) and the data generation methods used within the methodology used can be found in chapter 3 (grounded theory methodology).

Research Questions:

Main research question

What are primary teachers' perspectives about why primary teachers in England leave the profession?

Sub research questions

To ensure that teachers are provided with space to discuss their own thoughts about how and why attrition occurs in primary settings and uncover new insights, the following open-ended research question was decided upon:

What factors lead to primary teachers leaving the profession?

Given that teacher workload was cited as the main contributing factor to attrition for teachers, exploring more about the nature of the work undertaken by teachers was an area that deserved further exploration. This led to the following sub question being decided upon:

How does the nature of the primary teaching role contribute to attrition?

It was important to remain open minded about how primary teachers might express their thoughts and feelings about teacher attrition. The way they chose to express themselves through their visual representations and visuals could provide further insights into the issue of attrition, thus the following sub question was created:

How do primary teachers express their thoughts and feelings about teacher attrition?

3. Grounded Theory Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the historical development of grounded theory methodology, before exploring the epistemology and ontology of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) – the chosen form of grounded theory for this research. Background literature is then presented on the two data generation methods employed within this CGT study: visual methods and synchronous online interviews. The chapter examines how both data generation methods fit within a CGT study. Finally, an overview on the nature of sampling within CGT is provided. Detailed information about the practicalities of the data generation methods and the process of analysing the interview data within the CGT methodological framework are explained in the subsequent chapter (chapter 4).

3.2 Grounded theory

To answer the research questions, grounded theory (GT) was the chosen methodological framework or research design within which the research was carried out. GT is a complex yet flexible methodology which aims to discover theory inductively through systematic data collection and comparative analysis (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Many versions of grounded theory exist. Bryant (2019) uses the metaphor ‘family of variants’ to describe the different generations of GT. The first generation of GT was established by Glaser, Strauss, and Quint-Benoliel. This led to the publication of ‘The Discovery of Grounded Theory’ in 1967 (Glaser & Strauss).

Subsequently, different versions of GT emerged under the same ‘umbrella’. The three most widely used approaches include: classical GT which remains inductively oriented (generating theory from the data without preconceived hypotheses), positivistic (belief that only knowledge that is gained from measurement or observation is trustworthy) and objectivist (knowledge is an object to be discovered), with a theoretical coding requirement. Straussian GT (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) is positivistic, pragmatic and includes a coding

paradigm (a three-stage coding process including axial coding); and constructivist grounded theory (CGT) had its beginnings in the 1990's and is discussed in further detail below (Charmaz, 2014; Bryant, 2019; Reiger, 2018; Kelle, 2007). Other forms of GT exist such as feminist grounded theory (Kusher and Marrow, 2003; Wuest, 1995; Keddy et al., 1996) and postmodern situative grounded theory (Clarke, 2005; Clarke & Keller, 2014).

When GT emerged in the 1960's, the prevailing attitude was that qualitative research lacked diligence and thoroughness. Glaser and Strauss aimed to confront and subsequently change this view. However, after publication of 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), divergence in Glaser and Strauss' viewpoints emerged. Dey (1999) outlines the intensity of disagreement between Glaser & Strauss explaining that, over time, the original authors disagreed on what GT was about; subsequently, Glaser (1992) produced a harsh review of Strauss & Corbin's (1990) updated version of GT. Another divergent viewpoint involved the coding of the data, whereby Glaser integrated categories through 'theoretical coding' and Strauss and Corbin utilised 'axial' coding (Dey, 1999). Another area for which there was disagreement was that Glaser believed that reviewing literature prior to research may inadvertently influence the research by imposing preconceived categories, whereas Strauss believed that reviewing literature prior to the research process could strengthen a researcher's theoretical sensitivity.

In the interests of this research project, it was important to conduct a prior review of literature to gain an understanding of the diverse areas which have relevance for the topic (Clarke, 2005; Charmaz et al., 2018). Researchers frequently approach and cannot help but approach a research project 'already knowing' therefore conducting a background literature review is permissible (Charmaz, 2014). Clarke (2005) explains that this 'knowing' can be valuable rather than a hindrance and notes that a researcher's prior knowledge cannot be removed from their consciousness.

3.3. Constructivist grounded theory

As already discussed, since the beginnings of GT, different forms of grounded theory have emerged, mainly in response to the surfacing of different philosophical perspectives. Chun Tie et al. (2019) assert “Grounded theory has since seen the emergence of additional philosophical perspectives that have influenced a change in methodological development over time.” (p. 2) One such emergent philosophical perspective is Charmaz’ (2000, 2004, 2014, 2018) constructivist foundation for grounded theory. A succinct description of the nature of this paradigm is provided by Coe (2012): “Social phenomena are always perceived in a particular way; they have no reality independent of perception; all knowledge is subjective and socially constructed; individual social contexts are unique; generalisation is neither desirable nor possible; research is inductive.” (p. 7)

This research sat within a constructivist ontology, taking the philosophical view that knowledge is socially constructed and that multiple realities exist (Mills et al., 2006). CGT is in fact an interpretive response to positivism (Charmaz, 2014); it acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher and assumes multiple, emergent realities. Waring (2012) explains more about the assumptions framing a CGT position, in contrast with the realist, positivist classical grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967):

Charmaz and Bryant propose constructivist grounded theory, an interpretation of grounded theory that offers a moderate constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology. This means that both data and analyses are seen as social constructions reflecting their process of production, and each analysis is specific to time, space, culture, and situation. (p. 298)

The interpretivist epistemological foundation used in this research is akin to a phenomenological perspective – it ensured that each individual reality was explored (idiographic). Using interpretivist, constructivist GT ensured that meanings and experiences were co-constructed between researcher and

participant. It also acknowledged that the researcher maintained an active role in shaping the data analysis (Charmaz et al., 2018).

Charmaz (2014) reaffirms the distinction between CGT and the original objectivist philosophical standpoint of traditional grounded theory, which assumes external reality and neutrality, passivity and authority of the observer, the prioritisation of researcher voice and the plight for context free generalisations. In contrast to classical grounded theory, CGT assumes multiple realities, mutual construction of data and it aims to represent participant voice. It acknowledges the problematic, relativistic, situational, and partial representation of data. CGT views generalisations as partial and conditional - situated in time, space, position, actions and interactions. Importantly, as with other varieties of grounded theory, it should be noted that CGT is not only a philosophical viewpoint, but also a set of guiding principles that influence the complete research process.

Charmaz et al. (2018) suggest that in a CGT study, the preconceptions and influence of the researcher should be acknowledged from the outset. As such, to provide transparency of positionality, congruence and authenticity (Keane, 2015), a brief researcher's autobiography (Lather, 1991) was provided to all participants (see [Appendix 1](#)). The intention behind this was to provide participants with some insight into my life (I was a teacher prior to entering research). It was thought that this would encourage openness and reciprocity in turn from the participants. "Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world" (Charmaz 2014, p. 27). The writing of the researcher autobiography helped me to acknowledge how I had come to the research as an 'insider' and therefore 'already knowing' in some ways (Clarke 2005). I was conscious of my own influence over the research process and therefore sought to employ a method which would allow the participants perspectives to be prized from the outset of the data generation process, but that also would allow us to work together in co-constructing the data. CGT is rooted in the assumption that the researcher is an active agent in the construction (O'Connor et al, 2018); therefore, the researcher's position and perspectives impact the construction of knowledge in the research process. Nevertheless, bringing an open mind to the research (Dey, 1999) is crucial and is also a researcher attitude advocated by Charmaz (2018).

As mentioned earlier, CGT is a comprehensive methodology including a set of guiding principles for qualitative research. Charmaz et al. (2015) state the main processes underpinning a CGT methodology:

It begins with inductive data, involves simultaneous data collection and analysis, relies on comparative methods, explicitly focuses on analysis and theory construction, provides tools to study action and process, and contains strategies for developing, checking, and strengthening an original analysis. (p. 721)

Going further, with reference to the constructivist elements of the GT methodology, Charmaz et al. (2018) calls for greater attention to:

data collection; examination of research relationships, situations, and representation of research participants; and reflexivity about the researchers about researchers' standpoints, starting points, evolving viewpoints, and decisions throughout the research process. (p. 725)

As a novice researcher working with CGT, difficulties can arise when faced with a lack of expertise and support for this methodology at institutions in environments often dominated by post-positivist methodologies (Nagel et al., 2015). During the research process, I compiled a researcher's vignette for a key grounded theory textbook outlining my journey with CGT. The vignette can be found in [Appendix 2](#). The account discussed difficulties encountered in the early stages of the research process and the strategies employed to overcome challenges experienced whilst working within the boundaries of this methodology.

[3.4 Methods within CGT](#)

In this research, qualitative methods were employed within the methodological framework of CGT. The two methods used included interviewing and elicited visual representations – created by the research participants.

Dey (1999) asserts the historical dependence on an often-narrow range of methods when using GT generally “observation and unstructured interviews.” (p. 80) In practice though, a multitude of qualitative methods can be utilised within the theoretical framework provided by CGT. Many qualitative methods can explore the ‘messiness’ (in terms of complexity, contradiction, and richness) of the educational world (Cohen et al., 2011). In this research, I was keen to employ a method rarely used in educational research, and particularly rare within grounded theory studies in education: visual methods (section 3.4.1). For the purposes of the research, both semi structured interviews and visual methods were employed as these fit particularly well within the above research framework; they lend value to each other and they describe lived experience from the participants’ perspective (Meinefeld, 2004). These methods are described further in sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2.

Employing qualitative methods helps us understand meaning, the context in which participants act and they enable new theory generation; in particular, they help get at processes which lead to outcomes (Maxwell, 2005). In this way, given that the background literature pointed to a range of potential reasons for attrition, often overlapping and sometimes messy qualitative methods appeared to be the perfect tools to explore more about the complexities of this issue in England. It was imperative that the research explored the processes by which attrition or retention took place, including any unanticipated influences, to generate a grounded theory (Maxwell, 2005). CGT, and semi-structured interviews and elicited visual representations within CGT, would allow for new insights to be made around teacher attrition in primary settings in England.

3.4.1 Visual Methods in CGT

Charmaz (2014) advocates that grounded theories can be created through use of diverse kinds of data. However, Moss and Pini (2016) state “Overall, there is very little academic literature on the subject of visual research methods in education”. (p. 1) Though this is certainly the case, there is even less literature on the use of visual methods within CGT, or GT methodology - this area is lacking in terms of guidance for novice researchers. Nevertheless, some limited literature

was uncovered for the use of visual methods within CGT in fields other than education. This limited literature, outlined below, provided some guidance as I embarked on planning the data generation process.

In the context of Library and Information Services, Hicks (2018) described connections between GT and visual methods. This contribution goes some way to explore how visual methods can enhance and contribute to the CGT approach. Furthermore, Mey and Dietrich (2017) used the term visual grounded theory methods (VGTM) within their literature. They placed a strong focus on how visual data can be processed/handled in accordance with a GT (though not CGT) methodology. They suggested eight elements of this: contextualisation; description (inventory); segmentation; memo writing and coding (as an interwoven interpretation process); interpretation and integration of forms of knowledge; formation of categories; continuation and integration of image/text categories.

Visual methods were not the sole methods employed in this research; a combination of visual methods and interviewing were employed. Visuals can work well in relation with other representations, such as interviews, but it is also acknowledged that they can be viewed as data in their own right, or they can work as prompts, supporting other methods. Karlsson (2012) states how using visual methods alongside others in the research process can enable complex educational issues to be recognised: “It is not easy, nor necessarily desirable, to fence off visual, spatial and arts-based methodologies; indeed, their overlapping and integrated aspects point to the creativity of education researchers and their effort to understand complex educational issues.” (p. 95)

As the visual methods played a central role in the interviewing process, they were not interpreted alone, (other than through researcher memoing about the initial reactions to the visuals produced by participants) - thus the processes advocated above by Mey and Dietrich (2017) (analysing the visual itself through coding) was not employed in this instance. Hicks (2018) makes an important point relevant to the role those visual methods played in this research, which confirms why the visual documents were not analysed alone:

the use of participatory visual methods, which integrates participants' interpretations of their images into the emerging theory rather than seeing these pictures as independent documents to be analysed, refocuses attention on participant rather than researcher-driven constructions of a situation. (pp. 197-198)

It was important that the researcher talked with participants about their visuals, as part of interviewing, so that the researcher was not solely responsible for attributing meaning to the visuals, especially given their aforementioned 'insider' It was important that the co-construction of data involving both researcher and participant was at work in the data generation process, thereby keeping the data generation process closely in line with the philosophy of CGT.

Visual methods fit well within CGT methodology. Mey and Dietrich (2017) shine a light on "all is data" - one of the defining attributes of GT. "All is data", first proposed by Glaser (1967), brings attention to the fact that data exists in a multitude of diverse places, including the visual. "From its beginnings, grounded theory has offered explicit guidelines that promise flexibility and encourage innovation" (Charmaz, 2008, p. 398). This demonstrates the flexibility that grounded theory affords towards choice of research method/s. Visual methods are clearly welcome for use within a CGT methodology and philosophically aligned with CGT research as evidenced by Hicks (2018) "the integration of visual methods into a grounded theory approach is both appropriate and in keeping with its openness to change." (p. 197) Numerous positive connections between the principles of GT and visual methods are suggested: they allow for a reflexive, decentred approach; they foster and provide rich insights; they are consistent with an emic approach; they construct more detailed analytical accounts of empirical events; they integrate participants multimodal representations, and they allow the participant ownership and control in leading depiction (Hicks, 2018; Charmaz, 2014). Hicks (2018) advocates that they can also extend the methodology by broadening the way that the researcher poses questions.

Whether used alone, or in conjunction with interviews, visual methods have a multitude of advantages such as: capturing complex experiences in a single

snapshot and the elicitation of often unanticipated responses (Hall & Wall, 2016); the ability to 'facilitate communication, enable emotions and tacit knowledge and encourage reflection' (Salmons, 2014); they explore phenomena that 'extends the reach' of interviews alone (Karlsson, 2012); and, they can assist in rapport building and focusing meaning (Hurworth, 2012). Other benefits include: the prompting of memory in interviews; their use as an aid to break the ice; the ability to allow participants time to reflect on the topic prior to the interview leading to a more informed discussion; an increase in control over the interview with the participant - which can prove fruitful when discussing experienced emotional details; a reduction of misunderstanding; higher quality discourse and more comprehensive interviews (Bagnoli, 2009; Frith et al., 2005; Rouse, 2020; Harper, 2002). The use of visual methods "provides a means of 'getting inside' a context; bridges psychological and physical realities; produces unpredictable information and promotes longer and more detailed interviews" (Hurworth, 2012, p. 183).

Use of a combination of visual methods and interviews enabled reciprocity and balance of power - both of which are crucial to constructivist grounded theory (Mills et al., 2006; Hurworth, 2012). These, and many other advantages of employing visual methods are outlined in the researcher's chapter for an edited textbook on CGT (see [Appendix 3](#)).

Should visual methods form some part of interviewing, Bagnoli (2009) discusses how they might be beneficial in an interview context:

Focusing on the visual level allows people to go beyond a verbal mode of thinking, and this may help include wider dimensions of experience, which one would perhaps neglect otherwise... In this way, an arts-based method or graphic elicitation tool may encourage a holistic narration of self, and help overcoming silences, including those aspects of one's life that might for some reason be sensitive and difficult to be related in words. (pp. 565-566)

In this research, each participant was provided with time prior to the interview to produce their visuals. Discussion of the visual that the participant had created formed the initial part of the interview with the hope that this would prompt easy discussion and evade silence from the outset. Such elicited materials (those produced by participants) are particularly valuable when used in combination with interviews (Charmaz, 2014; Birks & Mills, 2015) as they allow time prior to interview for consideration of all issues relevant to the participant.

Visual methods were invited as a precursor to the interview and reference to those visual elicited materials formed an intrinsic part of the interview for each participant. Mitchell et al. (2011) advocates the usefulness of complementing drawing as a visual research tool with a verbal one to allow for collaborative meaning making. In this research, the visual images were a lens through which the participants shared their experiences.

visual processes are the lenses through which one can see the socio-psychological phenomena, it seems necessary to understand how these lenses are constructed, and by what means and with what kind of motivations such a construction was made. (Konecki, 2019, p. 368.)

For the purposes of this research, images created by participants were discussed at the outset of the interview and the guidance provided by Konecki (2019) was used in the creation of the interview schedule to discuss the 'lens' itself - the visual. Through interviewing, the following were useful discussion points with participants, though the visuals alone were not analysed and coded.

- a. The context of creation - how it was created, motives for creating in this way and how the participant believed it would be perceived.
- b. What are the important parts of the visual from the participants perspective and how are these described by the participant?

It was recognised that some participants might be uncomfortable with creating a visual representation, such as a drawing (Bagnoli, 2009; Rouse, 2020; Galman,

2009; Hurworth, 2012). Therefore, to increase inclusivity and participation, the visual representation task was as open ended as possible - allowing for participants to employ their own preferences in terms of the medium/s chosen. It was also important to bear in mind the possibility that participant conceived visual representations could include visual metaphors which are a powerful tool to examine (Bessette & Paris, 2020; Gillis & Johnson, 2002; Saban et al., 2007; Shaw & Malios, 2011; Forceville, 2008; Yob, 2003). Shuell (1990) describes the effectiveness of metaphor: "If a picture is worth 1000 words, a metaphor is worth 1000 pictures." (p. 102)

To sum up, visual data was participant produced; created specifically for the purposes of the research; and open-ended guidelines (as opposed to strict instruction) were provided for participants - such as size and time allocation for the visual representation – this is explored further in chapter 4. Each participant's visual representation was prepared prior to the interview then used as an intrinsic part of the interview. Attention and time in the interview were afforded to establishing joint meaning about the visual representation.

In summary, Salmons (2010) explains that the image or visual becomes a common frame of reference which can enrich the word-intensive process of interviewing and Banks (2007) asserts:

visual research methodologies are distinctive, are valuable, and should be considered by the social researcher whatever their project. It is not an attempt to claim that these methodologies supplant all others. Visual research should be seen as only one methodological technique among many to be employed by social researchers. (p. 4)

3.4.2 Synchronous Online Interviews within CGT

Interviews are a tried, tested and relied upon approach to data collection with many distinct advantages over other methods. In this research, they helped the researcher to understand the complex experiences of participants. "If you want

to learn from the qualities of experience and the significance of events or situations, your methodology will probably involve interviewing.” (Mears, 2012, p. 170) Brinkmann (2018) cautions against taking interviews for granted since they are popular methods and have become somewhat ‘naturalised’. Certainly, in this research, they were a prized, valuable method. In fact, the semi-structured interviews had a valuable, significant role in knowledge production. Silverman (1993) explains that interviews are not only useful for gathering facts, but also “accessing beliefs; identifying feelings and motives; commenting on standards of action and eliciting reasons and explanations” (Silverman, 1993, pp. 92-93). Interviewing was therefore an ideal method to accompany and complement the visual method, in order to meet the aims of the research and answer the research questions.

Interviewing was a useful qualitative research method, sitting within the CGT methodology, for the purposes of addressing the research questions in this research, especially when used alongside visual methods. Semi-structured interviews allow for a knowledge producing dialogue between interviewer and interviewee; within this, they allow for the interviewee to take the interview in their direction by allowing them some focus on what is important (Brinkmann, 2018). Salmons (2010) adds that they “balance the organisation and framework of the structured approach with the spontaneity and flexibility of the unstructured interview.” (p. 51) Rapley (2007) explains that thick descriptions allow for ‘elaborate and detailed answers’ and that within an interview, such thick descriptions can be encouraged through both verbal and non-verbal methods. In this research, thick description was enabled through the questions used in the flexible interview guide, alongside visual methods.

It was important to acknowledge that the interviewer was implicated in the knowledge production process (Brinkmann, 2018; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). Consistent with the philosophy of CGT: “Interviewer and, ultimately, researcher contributions to the information produced in interviews are not viewed as incidental or immaterial. Nor is interviewer participation considered in terms of contamination” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002, p. 15). It is accepted, therefore, that the interviewer is unavoidably ‘engaged in the interactional co-construction’ of the

content as the interviewee's counterpart. Rapley (2007) offers many useful practical suggestions for interviewing such as 'just getting on and interacting' and not being concerned about 'asking the same question in the same way in each interaction'.

For the purposes of this research, interviews were conducted synchronously online. This modality has its own, unique, practical implications, in addition to its own advantages and drawbacks. O'Connor & Madge (2017) assert that online synchronous interviewing is a relatively uncommon approach. At the time of research, however, it seemed that online synchronous interviews were more commonplace – they had been adopted as methods to fit during the Covid 19 pandemic by numerous researchers in the department and the uptake and familiarity with online, virtual conferencing software had quickly become popular as a means of meeting with others in workplace situations.

Synchronous online interviews allow for sharing of experience and, alike in face-to-face interviews, they can bring about spontaneous interactions between participant and researcher (James & Busher, 2012). One of the main advantages of online interviewing is that it enables wider access to participants from diverse locations and a favourable cost benefit when compared to face-to-face interviewing (Brinkmann, 2018; Salmons, 2010; Birks & Mills, 2015). In addition, the participant may be more comfortable, relaxed and able to share when conversing in a familiar environment (Salmons, 2010). Being in a familiar environment can also be a beneficial aid to memory when recalling events, situations, thoughts, and feelings. As online synchronous interviews bear a resemblance to face to face interviews, they overcome some of the limitations of an online asynchronous exchange (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). O'Connor and Madge (2017) state that such exchanges are immediate and spontaneous, providing both verbal and non-verbal cues. James and Busher (2009) state: "researchers can acquire, explain, and understand their participants' online experiences through a dialogic and reflexive encounter. This can become part of the interpretive act itself and the ongoing development of participants' viewpoints during the telling of experience." (p. 10) During interviewing with participants this rang true as the conversations felt like natural to-ing and-fro-ing of thoughts. The

interview guide did not need to be constantly referred to as reflexivity enabled questions to be answered but often in a different order than initially expected. Some were answered coincidentally within responses to different questions, for example.

Concerns regarding the use of online synchronous interviewing are diverse in nature. When comparing online interviews to face to face, Deakin & Wakefield (2014) declare them as a second-best option. James and Busher (2009) explore the fact that frames of reference can become lost online. It was important, in this case, to record the interviews - the ethical considerations regarding this are discussed in chapter 4. Temporal cues can be misinterpreted, for example if a participant provides a slower response due to being distracted by an incoming email (Salmons, 2010). However, it could be noted that distractions for a participant could come from a variety of contextual circumstances such as a noisy immediate environment. Jowett et al. (2011) state the apparent 'lack of reflection and reflexivity' that can occur in online interviewing, though this did not appear to be the case in these interviews, and finally "Intercepting internet activity or suspicion of it ... makes people cautious about engaging in online communication, whether or not for research purposes" (James & Busher, 2012, p. 178). Had the data that participants were sharing been more sensitive in nature, or had participants not had experience with video conferencing prior to the interview, this may have been the case, though participants felt familiar with the software agreeing to be interviewed in this way in prior informal discussions.

James and Busher (2009) describe the presence of verbal and non-verbal cues evident in face-to-face interviews such as: "facial expressions, gestures, postures, and emotional mannerisms all add a further layer to social presence" (p. 12). Salmons (2010), however, asserts that these cues are not forfeited when using the online approach "the researcher is able to approximate aspects of the in-person interviews, including verbal and non-verbal cues, while utilising unique aspects of the internet" (p. 28). Knowing this heightened the researcher's awareness of use of their own, and each participant's verbal and non-verbal cues in the interviews. Sometimes, the interviewer reflected a non-verbal cue they

noticed in the form of body language such as a sigh, a shrug of the shoulders or a deep inhale, for example which often prompted further discussion.

There are numerous practicalities to be mindful of when planning to use online synchronous interviewing as a research method. First and foremost, it is important for the researcher to have prior contact with each participant to introduce the research project and aims and make appropriate arrangements (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). These initial interactions help with rapport building and in answering any participant queries about data protection and storage. Practicalities that were considered prior to the online synchronous interviews included communicating practicalities such as eye contact and camera position. In addition, attention should be afforded to other practical considerations included deciding ahead of the interview how visuals should be shared and preparing for the interview by becoming attuned to the interview guide (Salmons, 2010).

Another consideration was epoche. 'Epoche' is preparing for new knowledge by setting aside preconceptions (Moustakas, 1994). This has important implications for the way each interview is conducted and considers conditions prior to each interview. For example, Moustakas (1994) suggests allowing a gap of time and space between each interview to enable a 'fresh approach' from the researcher towards each separate interview, and to ensure researcher fatigue is minimised. All interviews in this research were conducted on different days, and mostly across different weeks which helped the interviewer approach each new interview with heightened attention.

With online synchronous interviews, an obvious but important consideration involves ensuring that participants all have access to the required software and hardware they will require for the interview (O'Connor & Madge, 2017) and that there is opportunity to test this prior to interview, perhaps, for example, in a more informal 'initial meeting' scenario where the above practicalities can be discussed, and rapport can be established. In this research, all participants were offered the opportunity to meet online prior to the interview, though most preparatory work was communicated via email as per participant preference. Well

in advance of interviewing, participants confirmed their familiarity with the chosen video conferencing software; they also confirmed that they had the required hardware needed (e.g., a laptop or desktop and microphone) and that they would be in a suitable, comfortable location, in readiness for their online interview.

Going further, any initial meetings or correspondence between researcher and participant should allow the participant information about the socio-demographics of the researcher (O'Connor & Madge, 2017); this could even take the form of a short, autobiography (Keane, 2015). In this research, each participant was provided with a short researcher autobiography (see [Appendix 1](#)). As discovered by O'Connor & Madge (2001), this can lead to participants mirroring that breadth and depth of information in their responses. It can also help to establish equal power relations and common ground - both useful in rapport building and establishing trust prior to meeting face to face on an online video conferencing platform.

Interviewing is highly favoured in GT research: "The value of interviewing in grounded theory research is evidenced by the extensive number of studies that rely on it as the principal mechanism for the generation of data (Birks and Mills, 2015, p.72). CGT interviews have specific characteristics: "constructivist grounded theorists attend to the construction of the interview, the construction of the research participant's story, and silences, as well as the explicit content of the interview (Charmaz, 2009d)" (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 350). Constructivist grounded theorists should frame questions to study "processes in individual experiences, thoughts, feelings, and actions" (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 351). Charmaz and Belgrave (2012) suggest interview questions that could be asked, and state that though an interview guide is not essential, it can be used to good effect; Charmaz (2015) concurs that interview guides are useful for novice researchers. Interview guides can help prevent novice researchers asking loaded questions; and the process of creating an interview guide allows for revisiting and fine-tuning questions prior to interview. In turn, this provides insight on how and when to propose questions. Planning questions in advance allows them to be asked in a smoother, less confrontational way as the interviewer is prepared and can focus on nurturing the interview environment and considering the interview

flow rather than overthinking the question content. By thoughtfully planning the questions, the researcher will become aware of their own interests, assumptions, and language use, adding to researcher reflexivity (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 32-64).

Many of the question stems provided by Charmaz & Belgrave (2012) were adopted in the interview guide created for this research. A high prevalence of 'what' and 'how' questions brought 'an analytic edge to the data collection' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 94). Further detailed information on the interview guide is provided in chapter 4.

Birks and Mills (2015) offer some useful guidance for the CGT researcher in terms of interviewer sensitivity and skill, and the level of exacting conscientiousness placed on the researcher:

What you ask a participant and how you ask it, will vary both between and within interviews. Remaining attuned to what each participant is saying, being theoretically sensitive to what this means for your developing theory and directing or following the interview accordingly can be very demanding (p.73).

The tone of the research interviews was empathetic; each interview was carried out in a non-directive manner; aiming to nurture equal power relations, for the interviewee to feel free to respond in any way they felt appropriate. The interviews involved co-construction; were carried out online and were one off events (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Salmons (2010) poses the question: "is it worth possibly sacrificing breadth and leaving some questions unasked if the interviewee wants to keep talking on one topic?" (p. 122). In this research this was deemed acceptable as it allowed the participant to construct their own meaning and focus on what was important to them. Further information on the interview guide used from all semi-structured online interviews is provided in chapter 4.

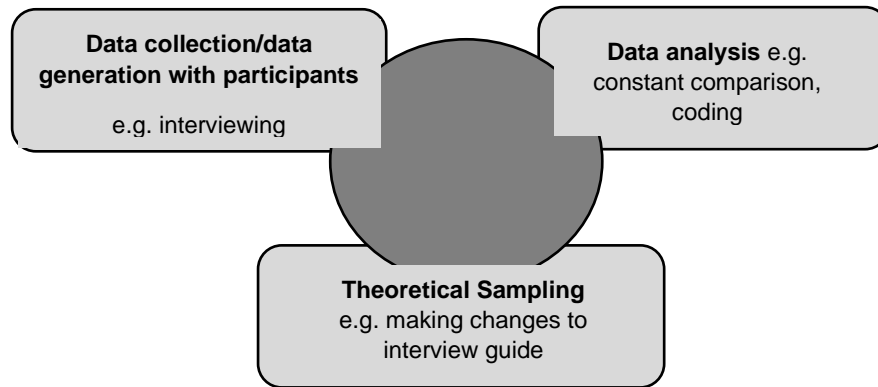
3.5 Sampling, data generation, coding and memoing in CGT

Many of the distinguishing features of GT lie in the data analysis process: from memo-making to coding (Charmaz, 2015). Following coding, further samples are sought to construct theory and refine conceptual categories. The principles by which data is treated in the CGT approach, are outlined below:

collecting and analysing data simultaneously; developing analytics codes and categories from the data, not from preconceived hypotheses; memo writing; making comparisons between data and data, data and concept, and concept and concept; theoretical sampling - that is, sampling for theory construction to check and refine conceptual categories not for representativeness of a given population (Charmaz, 2015, p. 54).

Theoretical sampling is not for the purposes of population representation, but for development of theoretical categories (Chun Tie et al., 2019). Dey (2007) states “grounded theory involves a process of ‘theoretical sampling’ of successive sites and sources, selected to test or refine new ideas as these emerge from the data.” (Dey, 1999, p. 80.) Charmaz (2018) advocates some of the advantages of theoretical sampling: it can elaborate the properties of theoretical categories as well as defining variation in them. It is also helpful in ensuring the researcher does not become overwhelmed with data. Additionally, it allows for refining codes and categories through constant comparison.

For the purposes of this research, theoretical sampling was therefore employed, consistent with CGT methodology and this guided where the research went (Charmaz, 2014). New samples were chosen considering analysis of previous samples. In CGT, theoretical sampling, and analysis (through theoretical coding) are inextricably linked, as shown in Figure 1. Charmaz (2014) goes further and explains that theoretical sampling is the mechanism by which categories can be elaborated on or refined.

Figure 1.*Theoretical Sampling as part of the Collection-Analysis Cycle*

Note. The central circle represents the cyclical nature of the collection-analysis process fundamental to CGT. Concurrent analysis and data collection/generation is a tenet of grounded theory – for this reason, these two pillars are placed next to each other at the top of the figure.

Figure 1 demonstrates the process that the researcher employed – a cycle of interviewing, analysis then back to interviewing using theoretical sampling to guide this iterative process. Following the coding of initial data (gained via purposive sampling), further samples were selected using the theoretical sampling method. Theoretical sampling results in many possibilities for the research direction such as lengthening of interview guides; re-interviewing; retracing steps; taking a new path (where there are tentative categories but incomplete ideas (Charmaz, 2014). In this research, the interview guides were changed considering analysis, prior to interviewing further participants in order to discover more about emerging concepts and to aid the filling out of categories. Chun Tie et al. (2019) sums up this approach to sampling:

Purposeful sampling provides the initial data that the researcher analyses ... theoretical sampling then commences from the codes and categories developed from the first data set. Theoretical sampling is used to identify and follow clues from the analysis, fill

gaps, clarify uncertainties, check hunches and test interpretations as the study progresses. (p. 3)

For the purposes of this study, it was important to set parameters in terms of what constitutes 'long serving' as the sample was to include teachers who were or had been long serving in the profession. What constitutes 'long serving' or 'veteran' is subjective in the literature (Houston, 2016). It was important to take time to define this, as this impacted on the sampling frame. Given that many studies focus on early career teachers, having insight from long serving teachers seemed important. Consulting literature helped to establish how many years could be defined as long serving.

At the lower end, research classifies anyone with 7 or more years of service as being 'experienced' (Rich & Almozlino, 1999); or 8 or more years' experience in the case of Teitelbaum (2008). In other studies, long serving teachers have been selected if they have 10 or more years' experience (Chiong et al., 2017) and fifteen years or more in the study by Brundage (1996). At the far end of the spectrum, some studies have classified long serving teachers as those with 24 or more years of practice (Day and Gu, 2009).

As can be seen above, it remains difficult to gain consensus as to how long teachers should have served in the profession to be classified as 'long serving' - research is disparate as outlined above, and there is little agreement on this, especially specifically in the context of the teaching profession. For the purposes of this study, teachers were approached for inclusion if they had six or more years' experience in primary classroom teaching. This decision was influenced by the research outlined above (particularly the research by Rich and Almozlino, 1999) and the career stages of a teacher outlined by Huberman (1989). In this way, long serving teachers included in the study were either nearing the end of the 'diversification and classification' stage or positioned within the 'stocktaking and interrogation stage' of their professional career (Huberman, 1989).

Sample size is another issue to contend with. When considering sample size, Emmel (2013) states: "thrift in planning and implementing a sample must always be tempered, however, with an overarching concern to ensure enough data is

collected to gain insight into the complexity of the social processes under investigation.” (p. 140-141) For this research, it was important to ensure there was sufficient data to bring about a grounded theory, but not so much that the data analysis process would be overwhelming given the detailed analysis procedures with CGT. Again, guidance from the literature was sought to consider what the sample size might look like.

Research suggested that a grounded theory sample can be between six and eight (Engel & Kuzel, 1992) and twelve (Guest et al., 2006). Linking both suggestions, Thomas and Pollio (2002) suggested that the sample could be in the range of between six and twelve. In their grounded theory study, Guest et al. (2006) found that after twelve interviews 100 (out of 107) codes had been discovered and 97% of changes were made to those existing codes; they therefore questioned whether additional expenditure of time and resources in interviewing more than twelve participants would be worth the investment. It was also worth bearing in mind that a large amount of data can still fail to guarantee an original contribution whilst just a few interviews may not be sufficient (Charmaz, 2014, p. 107). For the purposes of this research, it was useful to have the above figures in mind, though theoretical sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved through coding. Theoretical saturation is explained by Dey (1999): “once the data no longer offer any new distinctions of conceptual import, categories could be described as ‘saturated’” (p. 8).

Coding means labelling segments of data to account for them (Charmaz, 2014). Coding helps to make sense of data; it occurs in the process, moving towards an emergent theory. Through scrutiny and interaction with the data, the researcher can create codes and categories grounded in the data. (Thornberg, 2012). The coding process relies on the researcher defining significance in the data. It is recommended that the researcher stays as close to the data as possible initially so that the codes are as authentic to the participant and researcher exchanges or constructions as possible. A way of aiding this process is to code with processes or actions wherever possible in each segment of data - using gerunds for coding, such as ‘Reflecting...’, ‘Burdening...’ ‘Being...’, ‘Judging...’. Doing this

helps to avoid making conceptual leaps too early (Charmaz, 2014, p.116). Charmaz (2014) also recommends using 'in vivo' codes where appropriate which is the process of labelling a code using the participants' own words. Both techniques (using gerunds and in-vivo codes) within the analysis process were frequently employed throughout all three phases of the coding process within this research.

In CGT, coding involves three phases commonly known as initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding (Charmaz, 2014; Thornberg, 2012). Traditional grounded theory uses different variations of terms to describe their coding techniques. Thornberg (2012) outlines the fact that researchers move flexibly between these three phases, though it is generally accepted that most of the initial coding is conducted towards the beginning of the research while most theoretical coding is carried out in the latter stages of the research. The three stages of CGT coding are outlined below.

1. Initial coding allowed the researcher to remain open to all theoretical possibilities, through use of provisional, comparative codes. It involved interrogating the data and making decisions about what each segment of data means, before assigning codes. At this phase, or stage, Charmaz (2014) advocates moving quickly through the data.
2. The focused coding stage involves subsuming initial codes within focused codes or elevating an initial code to focused code level. Focused codes allow for larger amounts of data to be examined. Charmaz (2014) states that this stage "condenses and sharpens what you have already done as it highlights what you find to be important" (p. 138). Birks and Mills (2015) explain that grouping initial codes under a focused code or 'higher level concept' forms a 'category'. Thornberg (2012) describes this phase as deciding which codes best capture what they see happening in the data, and raising to tentative conceptual categories. At this point, codes were being compared with other codes and this enabled theoretical centrality of certain concepts, thereby achieving greater theoretical reach. Questioning the data was crucial at this stage, as was identifying any gaps which

informed the interviewing process. It was important to remember that that a code could become a focused one, even if it only appears once in initial coding. If a code is telling, it can be elevated to a focused code. In addition, participant words and phrases can be adopted as codes (those in-vivo codes).

3. Theoretical coding is the most sophisticated phase of coding. It involves considering how the focused codes relate to each other. The main intention of theoretical codes is to help theorise the focused codes and clearly conclude what is happening in the data. Theoretical codes are meant to be integrative; they lend form to the focused codes you have collected. "These codes may help tell an analytic story that has coherence ... theoretical codes underlie your substantive codes and show relationships between them." (Charmaz, 2014, p. 150)

To sum up, Charmaz (2014; 2015; 2018) provided guidance for coding which was followed in this research. This included: keeping codes provisional and open to changes; following three stages of coding (initial, focused, and theoretical); keeping initial codes short, simple and precise - using gerunds were possible or in vivo codes; constant comparison between data and codes and codes with codes; memo making through the coding process (to record researcher's conversation with self, regarding the data and its analysis). A definition of researcher memoing is outlined below:

During data gathering, coding or analysing, the researchers will likely come up with ideas and thoughts about their codes and relationships between codes, as well as questions they want to get answers to in further investigation. To remember these thoughts and questions, researchers write them down as memos (Thornberg, 2012, p. 89).

Memos are informal, interactive, analytic notes about researcher ideas, questions, interesting points, connections and codes and can be written at any point during the research process. Andrews (2021) describes them as moment

captures. They form an “intermediate step between data collection and writing drafts” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 162). They are also useful in forming theory. In addition, they can be useful places to revert to in order to reflect on self-insight and philosophical preferences - all of which will be influencing the treatment or manipulation of methods. Memos are central to the process of defining, then comparing data with data, codes, and categories. They can also be used to help identify gaps in analysis (Charmaz, 2014). Birks and Mills (2015) add to this and advocate some further topics that could be form the focus for memos such as feelings and assumptions, musings, problems, and reflections on the research process.

Providing a sensible system to label and organise memos was required. Taking small steps such as: dating the memos; providing short titles for each and sorting them under category headings, can prove to be successful techniques in ensuring memos can be located with ease later to be added to, or in order to be used within the write up (Charmaz, 2014; Birks and Mills, 2015).

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided background information around the methodology within which the research took place – constructivist grounded theory. It set out the overlapping principles between CGT and other forms of grounded theory and also the differences between CGT and other varieties of grounded theory. It also examined the literature on the data generation methods (elicited visual representations and semi-structured online synchronous interviews) that took place within the framework of constructivist grounded theory. It also outlined the suitability for use of the chosen data generation methods within the constructivist grounded theory approach. The chapter provided detail on sampling, coding and memo making with an examination of how literature suggests that these are approached when using a CGT methodology specifically. The subsequent chapter (chapter 4) provides detail about how the data generation methods were implemented in practice during the research process. It provides examples from the research data on coding and memo making. Finally, it examined the validity, reliability, and ethics of the research process.

4. Methods

4.1. Introduction

This chapter provides detail around the practicalities experienced using the specific data generation methods employed within the CGT methodology described in chapter 3. For example, interview schedules are provided, as is a copy of the visual representation information provided to participants. The chapter discusses detail around the nature of the sample employed and provides examples from the research on the analysis process. Excerpts of the coding and memo making that took place within the research process are included. In addition, the reliability and validity of the research data are explored. Finally, the chapter ends with the ethical considerations taken by the researcher to ensure that data was managed in a sensitive way, all the while maintaining its confidentiality. Throughout, the chapter aims to demonstrate how the data generation methods were carried out in practice and how they aligned with the CGT research methodology through a detailed exploration of the way the research was conducted.

4.2 Research data

As outlined in chapter 3, data was generated through two methods, a visual representation created by each participant, which was subject to memo making by the researcher, followed by individual, semi-structured interviews with each of the nine participants in online synchronous interviews. The nine semi-structured interviews began with an exploration of the participant's visual representation, before asking open questions.

A flexible approach to interviewing allowed for each participant to provide their own narratives, keeping the interview conversational, while the interview guide was available for the researcher in case it was needed. For the purposes of this research, the interview guide included open-ended 'initial, intermediate, and ending questions' (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012, p. 352). The full interview guides (one for teacher leavers and one for teacher stayers) can be found in [Appendix](#)

4. Each interview began with the participant sharing their visual representation (see [Appendix 5](#)) they had created prior to interview. More about the use of visual methods within constructivist grounded theory research can be found in [Appendix 3](#) - the researcher's chapter for an edited grounded theory textbook. Visual task guidance was provided to participants (outlined below) as part of the introductory information so they could assess whether being part of the research was something they remained interested in. In this research, all participants wanted to take part after receiving this information, though one participant was uncomfortable with engaging with the visual task, therefore the interview took place without this element. However, this participant did reflect on the topic prior to interview through creating informal written jottings instead. The guidance for the visual task provided to participants is outlined below but can also be found in [Appendix 6](#).

Visual Task: Produce a visual representation that captures the essence of your thoughts, feelings, and motivations about 'life as a teacher'.

Task Guidance: The visual representation need be no larger than A4 (so that it can be readily scanned and shared between participant and researcher). It can be created in any medium: paint, pencil, collage, for example. You can structure the visual in any way you wish - for example it could be a collection of independent drawings, interconnected drawings or shapes or one large image focusing on one object. It would be helpful to think about the meanings you attribute to each part of the visual in preparation for our discussion. We will be able to discuss the visual representation you have created when we 'meet' online.

During the online interviews, unanticipated questions were constructed and added during the interview considering participants' previous responses (in line with CGT theoretical sampling – with the aim of filling out tentative categories). In addition, the interview guide was used as a guide to possible questions which may be asked in a variety of orders, or not at all, depending on whether the participant answered some questions within their responses to others, or whether a particular path was taken by the participant, which meant that, at times, some questions were redundant. Nevertheless, questions were planned considering the research focus and these were clearly stated on the interview schedule,

though the interview schedule was used loosely. Following each interview, any new questions were added to the interview guide to be used in subsequent interviews in line with the CGT approach which prizes concurrent data collection and analysis and a modification of interview questions as concepts develop - a form of theoretical sampling (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Brief notes were taken during each interview - this was helpful in forming new questions quickly considering participant responses. It was, however, important that notetaking by the researcher was discrete and did not distract the participant nor create unequal power relations – this was something that I paid close attention to. In addition, researcher memos were made after interviews to keep a track of the researcher's thoughts and feelings amidst the data generation process (practical examples of memos are shown in section 4.2.3).

4.2.1 Sampling

The sample included long serving teachers, whether they had left the profession recently, or were still teaching, as this sample was not often found to have been used in the studies explored as part of the background literature review. The inclusion criteria are outlined below:

The inclusion criteria for the sample:

Qualified primary school teachers...

WITH 6 or more years of experience as a primary teacher in England

WHO were currently teaching in the primary setting OR who had left teaching in the primary setting within the last three years.

At the outset, purposive initial sampling helped select two initial participants (one who had left teaching and one who was still teaching), to commence the process. This initial 'purposive sampling' is defined by Cohen et al. (2011): "researchers hand-pick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement or typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought." (p. 156) These initial participants were selected due to both their accessibility to the

researcher and the fact that they fitted the sampling frame. This first part of the process - initial purposive sampling - gets the researcher started in the research process (Charmaz, 2014). A process of theoretical sampling followed (see section 3.5).

In this research, the eventual sample size was nine. The initial purposive sample of two participants were approached by email to take part in the study – there was an element of convenience to this as these participants were known to the researcher. Following the initial interviews, further participants were emailed to take part, some of these participants were suggested by prior participants, others were known to the researcher or were indirect contacts of the researcher, or the settings the researcher has worked within. Nonetheless, they met the sample frame and were able to provide further insights. The second round of five interviews contributed just 26% of the total focused codes and no further categories were added by this second round of five interviews, though a small number of new focused codes were added to the categories. This indicated that the tentative categories initially developed in the first round of interviewing were being added to and some variance was being achieved within these categories, though overall saturation had been reached by the end of the second round. Table 1 provides more detail about the sample of 9 participants, particularly with reference to their current situation and their experience, in addition to basic demographic information.

Table 1*Summary of Participant Information*

Participant Identifier	Age	Gender	Length of time in primary teaching profession (years)	Still teaching?
KE	35 < 40	F	13	N
EP	40 < 45	F	14	N
CS*	35 < 40	F	15	N
CM	35 < 40	F	13	N
PR	35 < 40	M	10	N
ASu**	45 < 50	F	13	Y
AS	25 < 30	F	6	Y
NH**	35 < 40	F	12	Y
TB	35 < 40	F	9	Y

Note. First and surname initials were used by the researcher to identify each participant but also to retain some level of anonymity for participants – this means of identification was consented to by participants and checked again at the point of interview. Participants at the top of the table (identified in the area with the grey background) were participants who had left the primary teaching profession by the time of interview. The average number of years in the teaching profession for the participants was 12 years. The range of years in the teaching profession was between 6 and 15 years.

*CS was on maternity leave at the time of interview and though they felt they might return to teaching; they had not yet made a definitive decision about this.

** These participants had changed their contracts from full time to part time during their teaching careers for the purpose of childcare commitments.

Throughout the data generation process, notes were made around the details of interviews, and these are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of Interview Details

Participant Identifier	Date of online interview	Participant visual produced in advance of interview	Participant took part in a follow up member-checking interview	Length of interview (minutes)	Length of interview transcript (pages formatted in font 10.5)
KE	March 21	Y	Y	68	19
EP	April 21	Y	Y	97	26
CS	April 21	Y	Y	68	19
PR	June 21	N*	N**	38	11
CM	July 21	Y	Y	37	10
AS	April 21	Y	Y	29	9
ASu	June 21	Y	Y	72	18
NH	July 21	Y	Y	39	10
TB	July 21	Y	Y	67	17

Note. First and surname initials are used to identify each participant but also to retain a level of anonymity for participants - this means of identification was consented to by participants and checked again at the point of interview. Participants at the top of the table (identified in the area with the grey background) were participants who had left the primary teaching profession by the time of interview. For information, the average length of interview (time) was 57 minutes, and the average length of transcript was 15 pages (formatted in font size 10.5).

*This participant was reluctant to create a visual representation prior to the interview due to their lack of confidence with this task. An alternative was discussed which involved informal jottings in advance of the interview.

**This participant did not respond to the request for member-checking.

4.2.2 Working with the data – coding in practice

Regarding the practicalities of coding, it should be noted that technology is an “adjunct tool rather than an analytical solution in itself” (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 98). Birks and Mills (2015) advocate that novice researchers use both software and engage with manual coding in a hybrid approach. It was initially expected that NVivo would be employed as the primary coding software tool - the most widely used software in social science research (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Gibbs (2012) states that the use of software can create a crisis whereby researchers end up with disorganised or unmanageable amounts of codes. Though they advocate that this can be a positive part of the process as it may reflect the “heterogeneity of the data you are analysing and the complexity of the analysis” (Gibbs, 2012, p. 255). After using NVivo to code the initial four interview transcripts, I felt that I wanted a way to compare codes visually and kinaesthetically. I decided to write out each initial code on a post-it, before placing them onto a working wall to move, compare, group and engage in a physical process of constant comparison (see [Appendix 7](#) for evidence of this process).

Using this approach, I was able to move codes around and form groups or tentative categories. However, as the transcript excerpts (quotes) that the codes

had been assigned to were not present alongside the initial codes, it became difficult to begin to elevate initial codes to focused codes or to compare initial codes accurately as the context (the quote or part of transcript they were assigned to) was missing. In addition, NVivo is often used by qualitative researchers who have already set up a codebook, for which they are assigning parts of the interview transcripts to. However, in CGT analysis, the codes come inductively from the data itself, so I found that using NVivo was a difficult way to generate and assign new codes, as I was not imposing pre-formed codes on the data. In addition, my peer checker for the coding of my transcripts had struggled to consider the codes I had assigned on NVivo because when downloading transcripts with visible codes, the codes appear in positions which are not in alignment with the transcript excerpts. This made it onerous for the peer checker to read and check the codes. Given that the researcher had discovered their preference to work with the codes by hand and visually after initial coding, in order to compare code with code, codes with categories and categories with categories, a suggestion from the peer checker was to use the tracking feature in Microsoft Word for coding. After being shown an example of this in practice, I began coding in this way. I re-coded the initial four transcripts as I felt that the codes originally produced when working in NVivo were not detailed enough or close enough to the original transcripts in places. It was reassuring to read that coding is a cyclical process and that coding is strengthened as further cycles are undertaken as the codes become more refined and focused (Saldana, 2016).

Following the second attempt at coding using the tracking feature in Microsoft Word, a total of 984 initial codes had been generated. Tables including details of the numbers of codes generated from each transcript (an audit trail of data analysis) can be found in [Appendix 8](#). The initial codes (complete with transcript quote on the reverse) were printed and individually cut out before being organised and moved around into 49 tentative categories. Each category was represented by a plastic wallet into which the initial codes were placed. Categories (plastic wallets) could be moved around, laid over other similar categories which shared the same characteristics, or grouped together within one wallet easily (Saldana, 2016). Photographs of the tentative manual grouping of initial codes in plastic wallets and formation of early focused codes can be found in [Appendix 9](#).

Following the initial coding phase, it was imperative to begin elevating some of the initial codes within each wallet into focused codes or to create new focused codes under which to subsume groups of initial codes. This meant taking the time to read each initial code in a few different wallets, at or around the same time; this enabled attention to be focussed on comparison of the codes (an essential part of CGT analysis). It allowed a further opportunity to review the initial code labels and their suitability. By taking a few related categories (plastic wallets) with codes in at a time, I was able to scrutinise the contents in small chunks. This allowed for links and comparisons between initial codes to be made and the opportunity to create focused codes to subsume some initial codes under, or it allowed for the elevation of initial codes to focused codes. It also allowed me to compare initial and focused codes across a few categories at the same time to see links between focused codes in different categories. An example of focused code formation can be found in [Appendix 10](#).

Subsequently, initial coding of further transcripts took place in the same way. A table showing the transcript origin of each code was generated (see [Appendix 11](#)) and then added to, to reflect the coding from the second round of interviews. In this second round, 840 initial codes and 75 additional focused codes were created and added to the original tentative code list. 26% of the total focused codes had been added by the second round. No new categories were added by this round, but the diversity of the focused codes within each category had expanded.

This iterative process of constant comparison provided opportunity to re-read all the initial codes and emerging focused codes multiple times. The only issue that arose through this process was that the strips of paper (initial codes) attached to post-it notes (focused codes) were sometimes becoming tatty, delicate to handle and fiddly to locate within plastic wallets. In addition, the process of comparing initial codes subsumed under different focused codes was problematic as it involved emptying out the plastic wallets each time.

I decided that a further stage of sorting was required - one that would make the initial and focused codes highly visible and easily comparable, without needing

to work through different wallets. To achieve this, I decided to bring the initial and focused codes out of the wallets and stick them onto boards instead. This further stage of sifting, filtering and comparison was an important stage and allowed multiple plastic wallets (groups of focused codes within a category) to be compared. In addition, they were made more visible once displayed on the large boards; it meant looking at four boards at most to find codes rather than trying to locate codes within many plastic wallets. It also meant that as codes were being stuck down, decisions could be made about placing focused codes within one category near each other on the board making any duplications easy to spot. It also helped to quickly identify any 'outlier' focused codes as these tended to be placed on the outside of the board. Connections between focused codes could be identified more easily too. Images of the four resulting boards can be found in [Appendix 12](#). For transparency, a table of categories and focused codes was created, which maps each transcript to focused codes that were generated from it. This table can be found in [Appendix 11](#).

4.2.3 Working with the data – memoing in practice

Researcher memo making took place throughout the process of data generation, from memoing on receipt of the visual representations to memo making directly after interviewing and memo making through the data analysis process. This process of informal jotting by the researcher was an important part of the data analysis process – it helped to inform theoretical coding. In addition, it provided a way of recording key information along the way (a little like an audit trail) for the researcher to look back on later. I found this process incredibly useful. Many of the details outlined above – such as the number of new focused codes after analysis of each new transcript – were important details, required later to inform further data generation and were recorded on memos during the data generation process. Examples of the memoing that took place with reference to the visual representations are illustrated below.

4.2.3.1 Memoing with reference to visual representations

Figure 2 shows the range of creative responses employed by participants in their participant elicited visual representations sent to the researcher prior to interview,

Figure 2

Participant Visual Representations of 'Life as a Teacher'

<p>KE</p>	<p>AS</p>
<p>EP</p>	<p>CS</p>

<p>ASu</p>	<p>CM</p>
<p>NH</p>	<p>TB</p>

Note. These visual representations of ‘life as a teacher’ were created by participants prior to their interviews. Each visual representation has been made smaller for the purposes of this figure; the originals were A4 in size. Larger size representations (scanned versions) can be found in [Appendix 5](#). The visual representations are arranged in chronological order; the visuals in the top row being from participants partaking in the first interviews, through to the most recent in the final row of the table.

The visuals provided a way for the interview to be participant led from the outset; they also provided time for participants to reflect on the subject prior to the interviews. Eight out of nine participants (89%) felt comfortable producing and

sharing a visual, though one participant declined, feeling that visually representing their thinking was not something they were comfortable with, though they jotted down some thoughts prior to their interview. Figure 3 shows a process memo which recorded the researcher's reflections about using the visuals as a research method after the initial three interviews had taken place.

Figure 3

Process Memo: the use of Participant Visual Representations

(After creation of a simple flow chart with tentative categories) Perhaps the visuals that participants prepared allowed for much greater balance in terms of power dynamic. They seemed also to provide rich conversations - perhaps the addition of the visual expedited the journey towards theoretical insight? Or perhaps the participants' responses and discussions were less 'knee jerk' or reactionary as they had time to process their own thoughts and emotions as part of the visual creation process prior to the interview?

Figure 3 demonstrates the reflection that was taking place with reference to the length of interviews and the richness of participant accounts. I felt that participant sharing of a pre-prepared visual representation at the outset of the interview was a valuable and beneficial part of the data collection and sharing process.

The nature of the visual representations was varied, as shown in Figure 2. All participants chose to use words within their visuals, some preferred a brainstorming approach, others used their creative expression, some used colour and others used mainly ink colours black/blue and white.

To reflect the participants' process, I created a visual representation of findings to share back with participants at the member checking stage in multiple small group online video conferencing sessions. These visuals acted as a memory

prompt for the main categories and subcategories. They also mirrored the participants' process. The member checking process is discussed further in chapter 5.

4.2.3.2 Memoing with reference to interviews

The researcher made various initial jottings and pencil drawings, bringing together categories from their analysis, and combining this with memos to put together a visual representation of the findings (primarily for member checking), in a less formal way than through use of diagramming. The researcher was keen to use the metaphor 'teacher as a juggler' as an acknowledgement of the commonly used figurative language (such as metaphors and similes) used by participants throughout their visuals and interviews to make meaning of teaching and teacher retention/attrition. The post-interview memo below (Figure 4) demonstrates the early recognition of the figurative language use by participants:

Figure 4

Post Interview Memo – Focus on Figurative Language Identified in Interview

There were lots of emotions shared in this zoom conversation. In particular, a real feeling of overwhelm. Words that come to mind: all consuming, exhaustion, frustration, burn out, worries, autopilot, recovery. There were frustrations about trying to do things perfectly/really well but feeling like this was never achieved. This participant used similes and metaphors to share her experiences: weight of world on shoulders; like a juggler; spread too thinly; dragged down, like a puppet. Again, I need to look at the participants use of figurative language in interviews to see what research says about this - seems to be participants' preferred tool for communicating their experiences. Seems to be a way for participants to manifest their thoughts and feelings. This participant was grateful for the experience of the conversation - at the

end she shared "It's almost been a bit like... almost like closure." Seems that the process of the conversation is being received well.

Figure 4 demonstrates that after the second interview, a pattern was emerging to the researcher around how participants chose to describe their experiences using figurative language. Earlier in the data analysis process, an analogy of teacher as a 'train' was considered, though later this was dismissed in favour of teacher as 'juggler' as this was an in-vivo code from participant transcripts (see Figure 3). An early visual representation of the researcher's jottings about this can be found in [Appendix 13](#) and [Appendix 14](#). The memo in Figure 5 illustrates this early thinking around using figurative language to help form a visual representation of the findings for member checking purposes.

Figure 5

Process Memo: Exploring the Fit for an Analogy

I have been diagramming to try to find links between concepts. I feel that comparing the experiences of teachers with a train seems to work to some extent. For example, the engine room with various moving parts would represent the complex tasks that the teacher completes - this is the most important part of teaching - and also the most vital part of the train. The ability to multitask keeps the train (teaching) moving forward. The steam almost represents the teacher's release of negative emotion. I almost see the leadership as a hammer striking the engine, making it difficult to complete its already demanding tasks. There is a break in the track ahead and it almost seems that the engine will need to come to a halt or take a diversion to overcome this - this could represent attrition or adapting and using new skills to work around the issues and become a longer serving teacher. All the while, debris (representing external factors such as parental perception, government agendas) litters the tracks making it difficult for the engine (teacher) to power through.

Figure 5 is evidence of the researcher's process in thinking about the figurative language participants were using and trying to find an analogy to fit with the processes the participants described and explained. Thinking about the emergent data in this way helped the researcher to make links between categories. It also helped the researcher to make sense of the data, just as participants had made sense of their experiences through the creation of their visuals.

It is through memoing (such as the one shown in Figure 5) and creating visual representations of the data (Figure 6) and the diagramming that came before this ([Appendix 13](#) and [Appendix 14](#) – also forms of memo), that categories emerged and developed. Memoing certainly provided the link between the research and the theory – the memos began to form the emergent theory - ensuring that the emergent theory was as close to research findings as possible. The categories pertinent to the constructivist grounded theory are shown in chapter 5. These categories formed the basis of the theory: Juggling and Struggling: walking the teaching tightrope. Ceaseless juggling of workload became a central category for the theory, which is discussed in section 5.2. Most of the information shared by participants concerned workload, but other key categories also emerged, such as 'struggling', 'making realisations' and 'being consumed', all of which are discussed in this findings chapter. Many of the categories included gerunds or in-vivo codes which can be tracked back to the initial coding stage of data analysis.

[4.3 Validity and Reliability](#)

[4.3.1 Validity and validity threats](#)

Validity is important in all research. Dey (1999) defines validity as being: “well-grounded conceptually and empirically” (p. 268). External validity will always be problematic to achieve in CGT due to the preference of sampling situations and processes rather than cases and the question of the representativeness of a theoretical sample (Dey, 2007, pp. 246-247.) GT, by its nature, produces data grounded in the context it was produced. However, this is a strength, not a weakness (Charmaz, 2018; Greyson, 2015; Dey, 1999). This generalizability to “identifiable, specific subjects and settings” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 220) purports

that external validity - the ability to apply the findings to a broader context - is not the objective of GT, rather its nature is to produce data which promotes understanding, grounded in context is the priority.

Greyson (2015) sums this up:

traditional scientific measures of internal and external validity have a limited applicability in this type of inquiry as the aim is understanding rather than generalizability, and credibility is seen to vary depending on one's perspective. Yet, thorough description of the research context and acknowledgement of a social constructivist perspective can offer insight into when and how results may be transferable to other settings. (p. 36)

Maxwell (2005) refers to 'validity threats' as: "particular events or processes that could lead to invalid conclusions, rather than 'variables' that need to be controlled." (p. 108) The two main validity threats are bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2005). In this research, it was to maintain the integrity of the research process by examining biases before commencing the research, making note of these and communicating my own background through a short autobiography for participants, to aid transparency. With respect to reactivity or reflexivity though, this cannot be avoided - the researcher and participants are jointly involved in the research process (Dey, 1999), but leading questions can be avoided and understanding the researcher's potential influence over what the participant may contribute is important (Maxwell, 2005). I did feel that the research was 'methodologically congruent' (Chun Tie et al., 2019) – that the "philosophical position of the researcher is congruent with the research question and the methodological approach" (p. 7).

Many ways to improve validity are suggested (Cohen, 2011; Maxwell, 2005; Yardley, 2015). This research aimed to increase validity and dependability with three overarching processes: procedural precision, rich and thick descriptions, respondent validation and triangulation (sections 3.6.2 - 3.6.5).

4.3.2 Reliability and procedural precision

Using a methodology which also provides guidance on the process of data generation and analysis added procedural precision to this research.

“Grounded theory, which through its emphasis on explicit coding and systematic comparison has been responsible in part for the shift towards greater reflexivity and rigor in qualitative research.”
(Dey, 1999, p. 247.)

Glaser (1978) warns against trying to ‘force’ data into preconceived categories. Open coding (the classical GT approach) was not utilized in this research, instead initial coding was used after the first two interviews were complete. The research needed to be carried out consistently within the principles set out by the methodology, without deviation (Yardley, 2015). In this case, the approach to research and the treatment of the data via coding followed the guidelines for CGT set out by Charmaz (2015). One such principle is memoing. Note making (or an audit trail - Cohen et al., 2011; Flick, 1998) in the form of memos or a journal (Greyson, 2015), which documented the decisions taken, processed and thoughts, was a key part of the research process. This can add rigour to the research, as suggested by Chun Tie et al. (2019): “An audit trail of decision making, changes in research direction and rationale for decisions made are essential to ensure rigour in final grounded theory.” (p. 7)

The reflexive process of memo writing allows the researcher to recall and make meaning of time spent with participants. It allows for both participants’ stories to be rewritten and the researchers’ own meaning to be made with a constant reflection by the researchers on their beliefs and values (Mills et al., 2006). This procedural precision is key to aiding transparency and, to add to the transparency, all audit trails were retained and (as far as possible) made evident in the main body (findings chapter), or the appendices of this theses. Chun Tie et al. (2019) assert that procedural precision will bring rigour to the research and this process can be supported using software, though in this research, coding took place by hand. Though it took place by hand, photos and evidence were

collected at each iteration of the coding process, aiming to demonstrate transparency and a replicability of the process, should it be sought.

4.3.3 The reliability of rich data

Rich data is often promoted as a way of generating some transferability (Cohen et al., 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2005). “Intensive interviews enable you to collect ‘rich’ data, data that are detailed and varied enough that they provide a full and revealing picture of what is going on” (Becker, 1970, pp. 51-62). Rich data (Charmaz, 2015) was collected as part of the visual representation by participants and the subsequent interviewing. Charmaz (2015) advocates that rich data can be obtained by:

describing participants' views and actions in detail; recording observations that reveal ‘unstated intentions’; constructing interview questions that allow for participants to reflect anew on the research topic and to look for and explore taken for granted meanings and actions. (p. 62)

Rich data formed detailed grounding for the conclusions made in this research (Maxwell, 2005). In this research, this can be evidenced by the length of interviews and the high number of initial codes applied to the data. Greyson (2015) advocates that such rich data can promote dependability in the research.

4.3.4 Reliability of respondent validation

Participant feedback or participant/respondent validation or ‘member checks’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Cohen et al., 2011) refer to a means of ensuring there is no misrepresentation in the data (Yardley, 2015). In this research, participants were encouraged to check their interview transcript (Greyson, 2015; Bloor, 1978) and comment on the analysis made (Silverman, 1993) to ensure that the data had been accurately recorded and presented. Maxwell (2005) advocates that

member checking is the most important way to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting participant meaning and identifying bias.

Silverman (1993) and Cohen et al. (2011) assert caution that participant validation may not, in all cases, be feasible or appropriate - it is important to assess whether participants, as lay people, will be able to relate to the analysis. However, at the very least, participants should be entitled to qualify the transcripts for their own interviews. They can, at the least, provide evidence regarding the validity of the researcher's account (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). In this research, not only did participants check their transcripts and initial codes, eight of the nine original participants took part in a member-checking process whereby visual findings were shared with them before they commented on whether they felt these findings represented their experiences, thoughts and feelings. In addition, initial coding of transcripts from both the first and second round of interviewing were subject to a peer check by a post-doctoral researcher in the field of emotional intelligence. In addition, the analysis process was modified as outlined previously as a result of discussion with this peer around coding.

4.3.5 Triangulation

Cohen et al. (2011) defines triangulation as: "the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour." (p. 195)

Triangulation can take place using different methods (Maxwell, 2005; Cohen et al., 2011) to ensure that the data collected are not just artefacts of either the visual or the interview method (Lin, 1976; Charmaz, 2015; Greyson, 2015). In this way, it reduces the "risk of chance associations of systematic biases due to a specific method." (Maxwell, 2005, p. 112) In this research, two research methods were employed, one before the other, with space and time between each. This data triangulation approach (Flick, 2022) however was limited as one method was used as a basis for the second and built upon by the second method. Fielding and Fielding (1986), however, caution that triangulation may not automatically increase validity as both methods employed may encounter the very same biases

and sources of invalidity. Instead, they advocate triangulation in terms of validity threats: bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2005).

4.4 Ethical considerations

Protecting participants from harm was at the forefront of my mind throughout the forward planning and the research process itself. I intended for the research process to be helpful for participants as well as for the research purpose. It was incredibly important that I ensured that participants were treated with respect and in accordance with the virtue ethics approach that I employed for this research. Riele & Baker (2016) assert: "Online research projects are no different from face-to-face ones in seeking to protect participants from harm." (Riele & Baker, 2016. p. 183) In order to protect participants from harm and promote beneficence, this research was consistent with the principles of the 'virtue ethics' approach (Salmons, 2010).

Virtue ethics emphasises the qualities of respectfulness and benevolence, which again argue for the recognition of and respect for an individual's freely made choice and informed consent (Loue, 2000). Using virtue ethics, a researcher relies on his or her personal value system and moral code and character to make the right decisions and to treat the research subject with fairness and integrity. (Salmons, 2010, pp. 80-81)

The research was conducted within the ethical principles specified by the University of York, having been approved by the ethics committee.

4.4.1 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is one of the main areas of concern for participants in any research study. It was important that participants were aware of any limitations on confidentiality. In this research, confidentiality was maintained through the use of private online exchange through zoom, followed by the use of a pseudonym (identifying letters) through the transcript and write up. General crude report

categories were employed instead of specific ones – for example, instead of name of school, the name of the county the school setting the participants worked within was in was requested. Each participant was made aware that the raw data would be recorded so they were aware in advance that they would be visible on the recording. However, their consent was checked again at time of interview. Following interview, this data was protected using password protection. However, with reference to the visual method, confidentiality is more problematic.

Participants may expect to be given artistic recognition as the creators of photos, videos and other images. The British Educational Research Association (BERA 2011, p. 7) suggests that participants have ‘rights to be identified with any publication of their original works or other inputs, if they so wish’. (Riele & Baker, 2016, p. 238.)

An outline of the outcome of negotiations around confidentiality between researcher and participant were recorded on the informed consent form. Participants, where they created a visual representation, were happy for them to be used in this thesis, so long as their pseudonyms were assigned to them, rather than their full names. Permission for the use of participant visuals in separate publications such as the chapter in [Appendix 3](#), was sought separately.

4.4.2 Protecting the data

It is important that the raw data held by the researcher about the participant is available to the participant. ‘Principles of Fair Information Processing Online’ (Mann & Stewart, 2000) propose the following considerations: personal data being held for one specific purpose (and that same purpose communicated to participants); permissibility of participants to access to the data held about themselves; personal data being guarded against risks of unauthorised access (password protection of raw data); personal data not being communicated externally without consent of participants; when working to transcribe, for example, integrity of verbatim raw data should be maintained at all times. It was established with participants that the data would be held solely for the purposes of this research, and linked chapter publication, and would be accessible to

participants. In addition, verbatim transcripts were produced to maintain the integrity of the interviews. These were subject to member-checking with participants. Agreement around the protection of data also involved discussion around the amount of time the raw data would be stored for and the storage of the raw data – this adheres to the ethical guidance provided by the University of York. Similarly, with reference to visual data produced by participants, Salmons (2010) explains that permission to publish these items should form part of the informed consent, which was the case for this research.

4.4.3 Information sharing with participants in advance of consent

It was crucial that participants were provided with a thorough outline of the research and its implications for participants before gaining their consent to participate. Consent is informed through this information sharing process. Salmons (2010) provides some key points that should be factored into this shared information. These were adapted for the purposes of this research. The information sheet for participants included: purpose and nature of study; general description of the participant group; expected nature of, and duration of, involvement for participants; description of procedures for visual methods and online interviews (such as software required and visual methods guidance); description of confidentiality for both visual method and interview and how this will be maintained (may involve negotiation); description of who will have access to raw data and final published data; information on how data will be protected; ownership of participant created visuals; a statement about voluntary participation and the ability to withdraw; information about self as researcher (to avoid deception and aid transparency and rapport building). This research information document was shared with participants prior to their completion of the informed consent form, providing opportunity for participants to ask questions or make comment prior to consenting to take part. The researcher was available for an online video call or available by email where participants had any queries.

4.4.4 Informed Consent

To define informed consent, Cohen et al. (2018) state: “the principle of informed consent concerns autonomy, and it arises from the participant’s right to freedom and self-determination.” (p. 122) This principle protects and respects their right to self-determination. James and Busher (2012) states that participant involvement in research is voluntary and they can therefore withdraw from the study. Outlining parameters for withdrawal (in terms of time after participation that they are able to feasibly withdraw and how to inform the researcher of an intention to withdraw) was important and formed a key section within the consent form.

Informed consent is an ongoing process and can be withdrawn at any time (Riele & Baker, 2016; James & Busher, 2012; Salmons, 2012). It was important that all above information was provided at the outset and any unexpected or unanticipated changes to this were communicated with the participants in a timely way. In addition, it was important to set out in the preliminary stages of providing information to participants the expectations regarding communication of withdrawal from the process - in this case it was communicated in a simple but clear email.

Further documentation evidencing the ethics procedure is provided in [Appendix 15](#). Documents provided include ethical approval documentation from the University of York, the information shared with participants about the study and a copy of the informed consent form.

[4.5 Conclusion](#)

This chapter describes the processes that the researcher embarked upon within this research study, to seek, generate and analyse the data. Examples from the research study in practice are provided within the chapter to illustrate the memo making, coding and analysis which took place. In addition, the chapter outlines the specific guidance provided to participants in terms of their visual representation and the interview guide used by the researcher. To conclude, it illustrates the validity and reliability of the research, as well as its ethical considerations.

5. Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter consolidates the research data from nine participant interviews which took place with a view to answering the research questions listed below:

Main research question

What are primary teachers' perspectives about why primary teachers in England leave the profession?

Sub research questions

- What factors lead to primary teachers leaving the profession?
- How does the nature of the primary teaching role contribute to attrition?
- How do primary teachers express their thoughts and feelings about teacher attrition?

A total of nine participants provided visual representations of 'life as a teacher' as a precursor to their interviews. All interviews took place online via video conferencing software. This findings chapter provides excerpts and quotations from interview transcripts to ground and contextualise the substantive theory which emerged from the research findings. Most quotations were selected for relevance and significance, some for frequency and others to demonstrate any variation in the data.

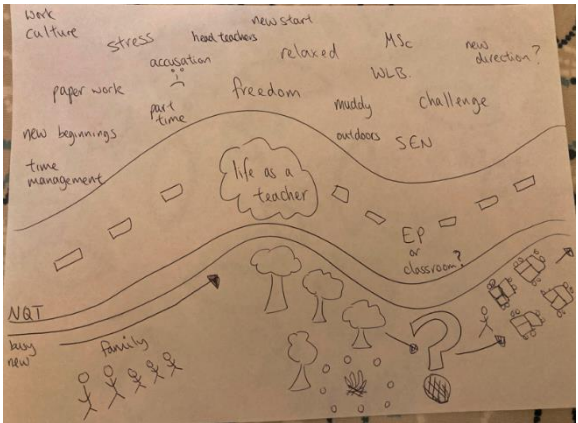
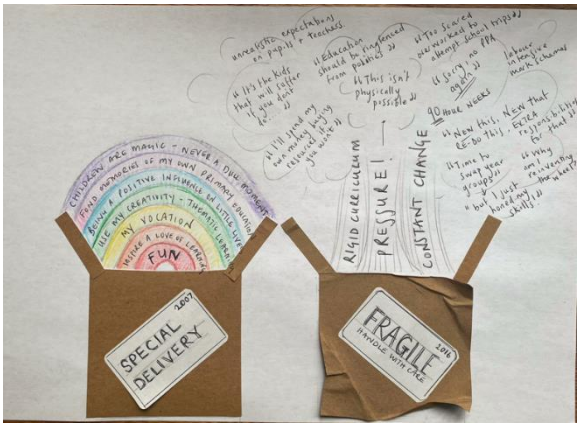
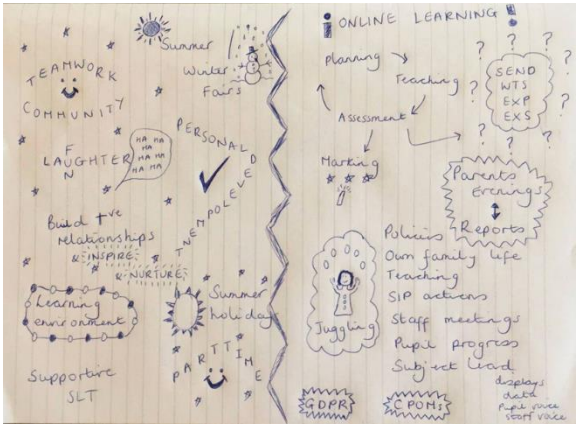

Within this chapter, verbatim text is provided, except for minor edits to remove any 'filler' words such as 'um', 'er' or 'you know'. Where a phrase or sentence was removed, ellipses indicate this. Researcher memos were also a form of data recorded during the data collection and analysis process. Where appropriate, memos are included in this chapter to illustrate the research process. The chapter is organised according to the substantive emergent theory, with the categories as subheadings throughout.

Participant visual representations are provided in Figure 2 to demonstrate the participants' process prior to their interviews. The participants' discussion of their visuals created a participant-led opening to each interview. A visual representation of the findings was created by the researcher (in collaboration with an illustrator) and used for the member checking of findings with participants. The aim of this was to sensitively echo the process that participants originally went through, using a process they would resonate with; but it also provided the researcher with an anchor when discussing the findings with participants.

Figure 2

Participant Visual Representations of 'Life as a Teacher'



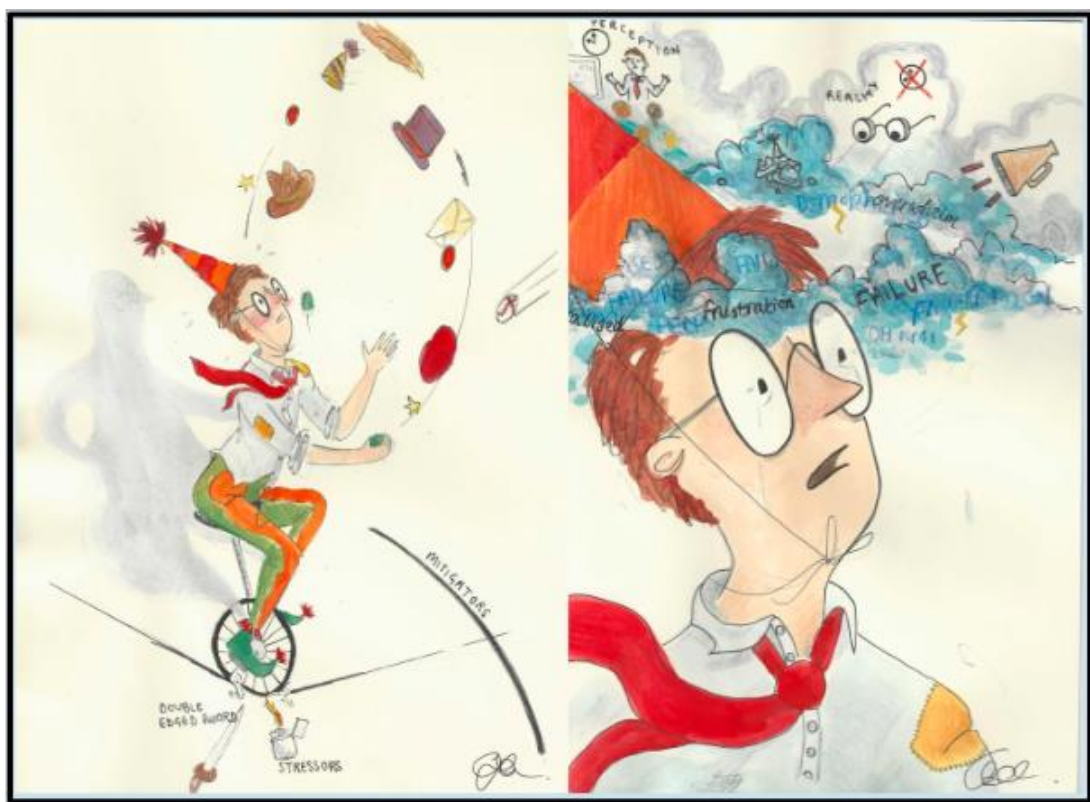
<p>EP</p>	<p>CS</p>
 <p>A hand-drawn map on brown paper titled "Life as a teacher". The map shows a winding path through various aspects of teaching. Key elements include: "work culture", "stress", "accusation", "new start", "relaxed", "MSc", "new direction?", "paper work", "part time", "freedom", "muddy outdoors", "challenge", "WLB", "SEN", "time management", "NQT", "family", "new", "trees", "a question mark", and "EP or classroom?".</p>	 <p>Two cardboard boxes representing "Special Delivery" and "Fragile". The "Special Delivery" box has a rainbow and the text: "CONFIDENCE ARE MAGIC - NEVER A DIME WITHOUT A FEW MOMENTS OF MY OWN PRIDE", "FIND A POSITIVE INSPIRATION OF YOUR OWN", "BE MY CREATIVITY - THE ONLY ILLUSTRATION WITH A LOVE OF LEARNING", and "FUN". The "Fragile" box has the text: "RIGID CURRICULUM", "PRESSURE!", "CONSTANT CHANGE", and "I just had my hand on the wheel". Handwritten notes around the boxes discuss expectations, education, and pressure.</p>
<p>ASu</p>	<p>CM</p>
 <p>A hand-drawn mind map on brown paper titled "Life as a teacher". It details various aspects of teaching: "ONLINE LEARNING" (planning, teaching, assessment, marking), "TEAMWORK COMMUNITY" (laughter, relationships, supportive SLT), "PERSONAL" (Summer, Winter, Fairs, Summer holiday, PART TIME), "Juggling" (Policy & Reports, Own family life, Teaching, SIP actions, Staff meetings, Pupil progress, Subject lead), and "SEND WTS EXP EXS". It also includes "GDPR" and "CPOMIS".</p>	 <p>A hand-drawn mind map on white paper titled "TEACHING". It shows "RESPONSIBILITIES" (NURSE, COUNSELLOR, CLEANER, SECRETARY, ARTIST, AUTHOR, EVENT ORGANISER, SERVICE, BEHAVIOURIST), "TEAM" (CLASS SIZES, REWARDING, BEING CREATIVE), "PERSONAL GROWTH" (LONG DAYS, PAPER WORK, EVERY DAY IS DIFFERENT), and "CHILDREN". It also includes "SUMMER HOLIDAYS" and "GPM".</p>
<p>NH</p>	<p>TB</p>

Note. These visual representations of 'life as a teacher' were created by participants prior to their interviews. Each visual representation has been made smaller for the purposes of this figure; the originals were A4 in size. The larger size representations (scanned versions) can be found in [Appendix 5](#). The visual representations are arranged in chronological order; the visuals in the top row being from participants partaking in the first interviews, through to the most recent in the final row of the table.

To mirror the participants' process, the researcher created a visual representation of the findings after the coding of all interview transcripts. Earlier forms of the visual had been in progress during the data analysis process, as categories were emerging. These early jottings that preceded the resulting Figure 6 visual can be seen in [Appendices 12 and 13](#).

Figure 6

The Researcher's Visual Representation of Findings



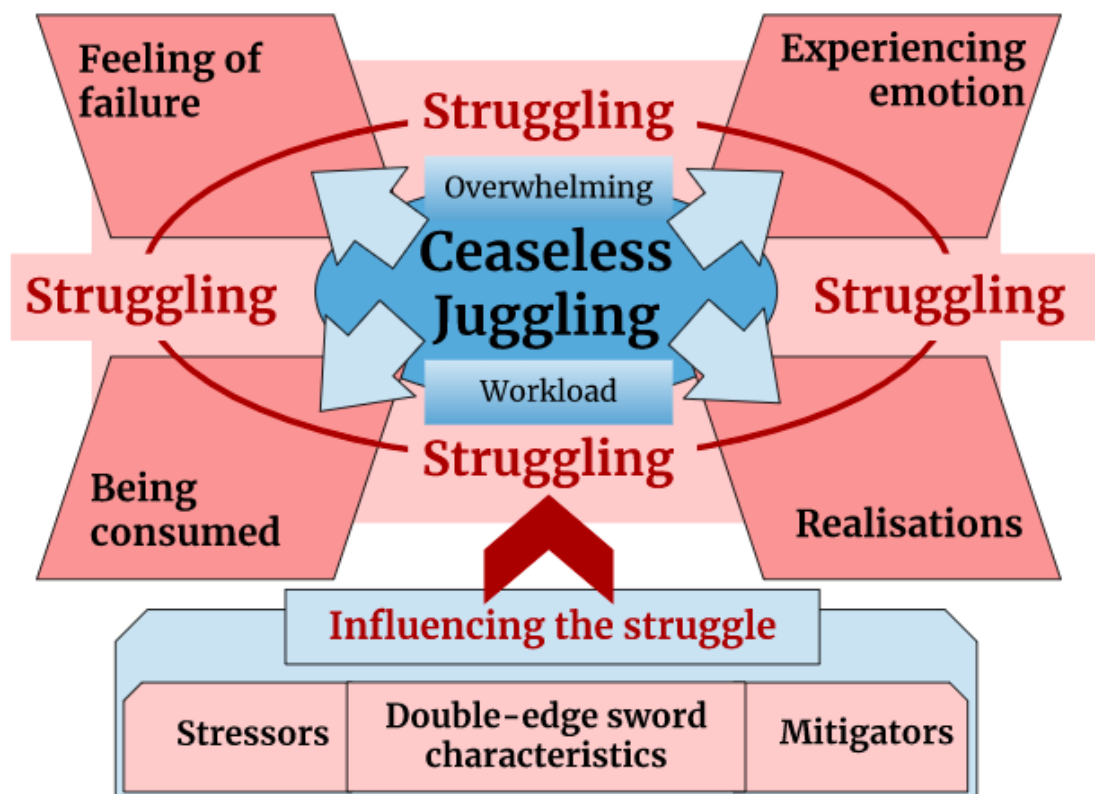
Note. Both images in Figure 6 have been made smaller for the purposes of this chapter. The fuller size visuals can be found in [Appendix 16](#). The visual on the left depicts the teacher as a 'juggler' and represents the category of 'juggling'. It shows the teacher managing to juggle multiple demands and even 'curve balls' being thrown in. The shadow to the left of the juggler represents the teacher being consumed by work. The balance pole, double-edge sword and lighter represent the mitigators, characteristics and stressors that influence the juggling and struggling experienced by the teacher. The visual on the right depicts the struggle

that ensues for teachers and demonstrates the different range of negative emotions experienced - represented by the cloud around the head of the teacher. The researcher's initial jottings (see [Appendices 12 and 13](#)) which developed into this visual were provided by the researcher when they worked with an illustrator to produce the visuals. Credit to Erica Finlayson for illustration. Permission granted for the use of these visuals in this work.

Both Figure 6 and Figure 7 present the findings from the research in different ways. Figure 6 provided an ideal means to which to refer to when the findings could be discussed with participants and Figure 7 structures the findings into a theoretical diagram showing the main categories in a clearer way.

Figure 7

Main categories central to the theory: ceaseless juggling, struggling and influences on the struggle



Note. Ceaseless Juggling is the main category and is shown centrally for this reason. It contributes to the struggling felt by participants, hence the blue arrows move in an outward direction from Juggling to the circle of struggle, which encompasses four different elements (shown in the red quadrilateral shapes). Influences acting on the struggle are shown by the blue box at the bottom of the figure.

As mentioned previously, the theoretical model (Figure 7) was created at a similar time to Figure 6. It presents the main categories: juggling and struggling, along with the other categories that interact with them, such as ‘influencing the struggle’. These categories provide the framework for the contents of this chapter. Briefly, the categories discussed which make up the theory are outlined below:

Category - Ceaseless Juggling

This is the central category to the theory. It concerns the ceaseless process of managing a diverse workload made up from different domains. The domains of workload form the subcategories for ceaseless juggling and are: nature of being a teacher; demanding administration; facilitating learning; being a team member; wearing other hats; less visible tasks, duties and demands and a widening of the role. This central category also acknowledges the impact of ceaseless juggling: overwhelm.

Category – Struggling

This important category outlines how teachers begin to struggle when engaged with ceaseless juggling. The struggle is characterised by four principal areas (subcategories) which are: being consumed; making realisations; experiencing negative emotion and feeling like a failure. These subcategories demonstrate the personal difficulties and tensions experienced because of the diverse, never-ending workload.

Category – Influencing the struggle

This important category is made up from the following three subcategories which influence the struggle felt by participants: stressors, mitigators and double-edge sword characteristics. These subcategories can help to either alleviate some of

the struggle felt by teachers, or alternatively they contribute to, and therefore compound, the struggle felt by participants by acting on the ceaseless juggling, or on elements of the struggle outlined in the category above.

Though the above three categories are the main categories that make up the theory: 'Juggling and struggling – walking the teaching tightrope', other categories are peripheral to the theory. These are also included in the chapter and are: **relieving the juggle and struggle** (participant recommendations) – this includes two subcategories: leadership desirables and improving classroom reality; **post attrition reflections**: a combination of thoughts and reflections on teaching from those participants who left the teaching profession; and **figurative language use for participant meaning making**: this explores the reliance on figurative language by participants in their visual representations and interviews.

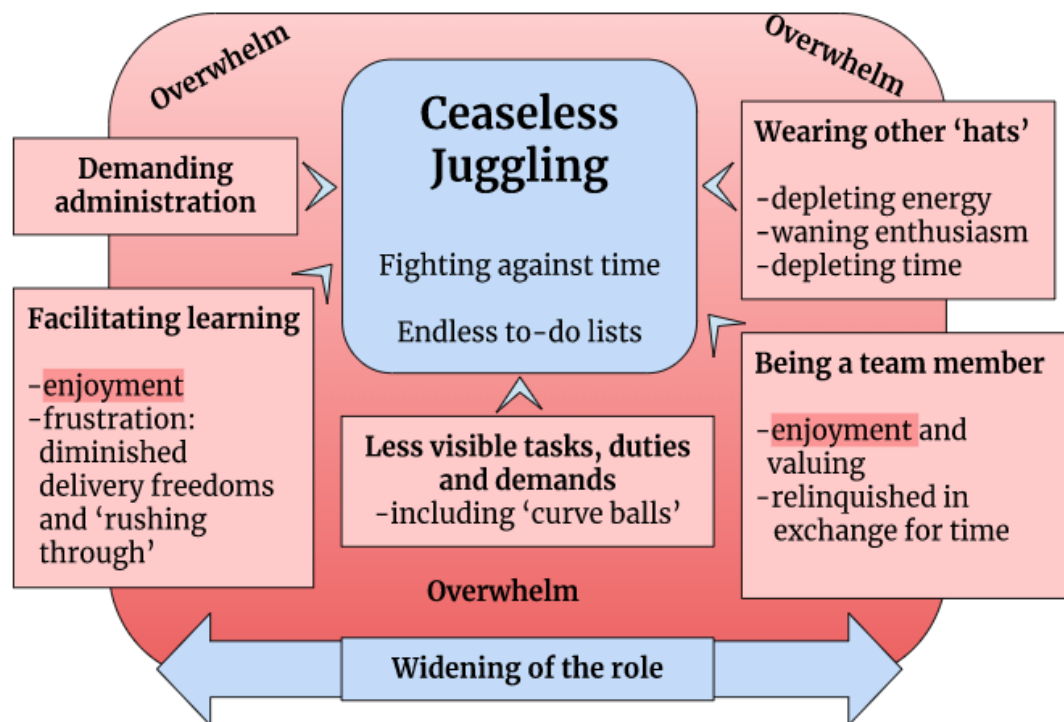
The remainder of this chapter explores the findings in detail. The findings are structured under subheadings reflective of the categories listed above and explore the subcategories within each, starting with ceaseless juggling.

[5.2 Ceaseless Juggling](#)

Figure 8 explores the main category 'Juggling' in detail, demonstrating the different elements that are at play in this process. Ceaseless juggling was the largest category; it was a big focus for participants in data generation. As a result, this category includes several subcategories; these subcategories can be found in Figure 8, they include: demanding administration, and facilitating learning, to name two. Each of these subcategories was made up from focused codes, within which there were initial codes.

Figure 8

Theoretical diagram showing subcategories within 'ceaseless juggling'



Note. Five elements of the juggling process are shown contributing to the ceaseless juggling that teachers engage with (in light red quadrilaterals). The nature of each of the five elements are explored a little within the diagram (see bullet points underneath each subcategory heading). The ceaseless juggling leads to feelings of overwhelm, and a fighting against time. The blue double-sided arrow at the bottom of the figure demonstrates that the role widens over time, thus further elements or domains could be added in the future. Each subcategory in Figure 8 will be explored in sections 5.2.1- 5.2.8.

5.2.1 Nature of being a teacher

Ceaseless juggling refers to the never-ending process of moving between tasks; decision making about tasks; thinking about tasks and duties; and, carrying out varying and diverse tasks, duties and roles as a teacher. The following transcript excerpts demonstrate the juggling experienced by participants.

"I think it needs to be made more apparent how much juggling you have to do in this job... these days you're not just a teacher, you're like a social worker, a first aider, a doctor...there's lots of elements involved." NH

"You know, you're juggling so many different areas...even as a teacher you'd have quite a few balls to juggle... then you come away from those sort of meetings and you have to put your next hat on." EP

"You're a teacher, you know, assessments, you're a subject leader, there's all that side...so yeah having all those roles going on in your head...you're constantly juggling lots of juggling balls." KE

Participants described juggling demands within diverse, wide-ranging roles. The complex process of navigating such all-encompassing demands led to never ending to do lists and a feeling that work is never complete.

"That's another frustration about being a teacher, it's never ending, there's always more work to do."

"And you go to bed at night thinking 'ah but my to do list is endless.'" EP

"Obviously you'd have your jobs list. It was never-ending really, wasn't it." PR

"As you cross something off, you add something else." TB

With never-ending to do lists came a feeling of fighting against time.

"It's like a swan isn't it? Where you're gliding along on the surface thinking it's fine and paddling like mad underneath." CM

"It was quite hectic really." PR

"You have to speak to a parent, the photocopier will jam, you know, all that and then before you know it, you're running around like a headless chicken." CM

"It was always horrendous in the mornings, to be honest, really, really busy." CS

"I just felt like I was going at 100mph all day." CM

Because of the hectic nature of juggling teachers often felt that their opportunities for a break were diminished, as evidenced by the following transcript excerpts:

"You don't get much of a break like...if you're not on duty I might get some stuff done and a quick drink - or not. Or you're just tidying up from one lesson and setting up for the next." KE

"I never had a break; I used to eat my sandwiches whilst marking." CM

"Sometimes you can go all day without a break." NH

The demands faced by participants (sitting within each domain within Figure 8) are a disparate picture, some being anticipated, some unanticipated, some highly visible, others less visible, some enforced or controlled by others, some teacher owned, some being time intensive, others quick to complete, some with slower long-term impact, others with immediate effect, some critical, others less important. Furthermore, participants shared a view of their role as a teacher being 'widened' over time to include the handling of additional tasks and duties. The main roles participants discussed are organised into the following subcategories or workload domains: demanding administration; facilitating learning; being a team member; wearing other hats and widening teacher expectations. Facilitating

learning and being a team member were the parts of the role which were particularly enjoyed by teachers. Each of these workload domains will be explored further in sections 5.2.2 – 5.2.6.

5.2.2 Demanding administration

For participants, this represented paper-based communication or telephone/computer-based tasks, which aid the teaching and learning process such as marking, planning, report writing, communication with stakeholders and booking school visits. These were discussed either in a neutral way, or in a negative light as additional burdens.

“Photocopying, planning, doing something - or just debriefing with someone, you know, if you’re working within a team...replying to emails, doing a bit of paperwork if you have a coordinator role, a display maybe that you need to finish off or trimming of paper.”

ASu

“All the paperwork you’ve got to do, all the resources and everything you know - parents.” KE

“Marking books, prepping for the next day...Yeah, it’s the bit that people don’t see, ...on the negative side I realise I’ve been a little bit repetitive in stressing paperwork.” TB

5.2.3 Facilitating learning

Being with the children and facilitating their learning was one of the areas that participants suggested was the most enjoyable part of the profession.

“Your priorities between the school hours are obviously teaching the children, being present, dealing with anything the children bring.” AS

“It wasn’t the teaching - I just loved the teaching.” CM

“Teaching is great ... if it was just the teaching part, then I would have the best job ever.” TB

Some frustrations with facilitating learning were raised by teachers, mainly because of time demands. Participants listed frustrations such as having to ‘rush through’ delivery of sessions, knowing that the children may not have grasped concepts properly to fit everything in over the course of the academic year. Managing behaviour within teaching time was also a common frustration, as was dealing with social problems such as fall outs in the playground that take away from facilitation time. In addition, one participant raised the important point that sometimes, when feeling a little low or lacking in enthusiasm, facilitation involves surface acting, or put by one participant: “pretending to be chirpy” when in the classroom. Alongside enjoying facilitating learning and being with the children, participants enjoyed the fact that every day is different; this was a welcome part of the role: *“There’s always stuff going on in school ... like different people coming in, so yeah that’s another bonus to the job.” TB*

5.2.4 Being a team member

Being a member of the school team was an enjoyable, important part of the teaching role for participants. It was frequently talked about in a positive light by participants.

“I think that your colleagues are a big pull to stay and help you feel part of a team.” CM

“There’s always people around which is really nice ... I like being part of the team and sharing ideas.” NH

Time spent forging personal relationships wherever possible, in aid of being a team member, was seen as worthwhile. Participants recognised the value of being part of a wider team and appreciated knowing others personally.

“It’s one of the most important things in keeping you buoyant, I think ... just chatting to people ... you always have a bit of a laugh and actually I think that’s really important.” CS

“The little moments in the staff room - getting to know people personally, not just in the job, but getting to know their families, their backgrounds, getting to know their strengths that they bring to the team too.” EP

Being part of a team seems to be a valued part of the role and it represents a source of togetherness, being part of something bigger than themselves, and a source of support for participants. Participants felt that being part of the team involved working together, trying to support one another.

“I really like that we’ve got teamwork going on, it really feels like you are part of the community.” NH

As a result, being a team member was an area to which teachers attributed precious time and energy. When time was scant for teachers, due to ceaseless juggling, their personal values around helping colleagues were tested and this led to a low feeling for participants, especially when they were not able to offer the level of support they would like.

“You know, people would come into my office and I’d feel awful having to say ‘I’m sorry, I don’t have the time now,’ but it’s because I’d have so many other things to do.” EP

In addition, though being part of a team is a part of the job which is valued by teachers, it often became part of the juggling puzzle to be relinquished in favour of getting on with other duties when time was short, leading to dissatisfaction.

“It’s the thing that kind of slips sometimes, you don’t go into the staffroom and chat to people because you’re so busy.” CS

5.2.5 Wearing other hats

Other overt or covert roles that participants felt were designated to them included: subject/area leadership, club leader, advisor/counsellor, cleaner and nurse. Most of these additional, peripheral roles added to the expectations of and demand placed on the teachers.

“Add on another responsibility, add on leadership, add on leading a team and doing review and development for the team and making sure you’re on top of all that.” EP

“You get told, after your first year, you’ve got to take on a subject leadership role. And then you’ve got your school improvement plans and everyone’s got certain actions.” NH

Some participants felt that the expectation of leading a subject was somewhat hidden whilst training; subject leadership crept up on them when they expected things might begin to become easier after their initial year of teaching. The same applied for extra-curricular activities. Though in their initial year teachers felt this was a choice, in subsequent years this felt like an expectation.

“There’s an expectation of doing an afterschool club as well - it’s almost if you’re committed to the school, you do an after-school club. So there’s that pressure - you’re not told to do it, but there’s pressure.” TB

Participants felt that running clubs was ‘one more thing to think about’. One participant described their love of arts and explained they were interested in running an art club when they set out teaching. Once teaching though, they described running the club as ‘unenjoyable’ as they felt they had no time for it.

This links somewhat to section 5.3.2, where the realisations made by teachers as they continue in the profession are explored. Generally, participants felt that extra ‘hats’, such as subject leadership and club leader, presented additional demands on their time, those pressures leaving them depleted of time, enthusiasm, and energy.

“There will be clubs going on. And I’ve got a list of stuff to do with my co-ordinator role that I haven’t really- I don’t have the energy to do at the moment, but those are the things you end up having to do.” ASu

One participant explained their experiences of subject leadership - much of the role was done in their own time and involved an element of ‘getting others on board’ which was a tough task as there was a lot of grumbling and push back from staff.

5.2.6 Less visible tasks, duties and demands

Participants described readiness to anticipate ‘curve balls’, managing changes and being observed as significant parts of the role. Navigating the emotional challenge of unexpected additional jobs emerging during the school day was something encountered regularly by participants. Being expected to have ideas ‘up sleeves’ to cover a lesson at the last minute due to unexpected absence was one example given by participants, as well as being asked to take assembly for the school; both involve an element of ‘thinking on their feet’ and could be quite stressful and panic inducing in the moment.

Managing changes of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment were commonly experienced by participants on a constant basis. Participants described assessment as ‘being subject to constant change’. They explained a feeling of continuously moving goalposts in terms of expectations. This impacted on their sense of stability and feeling of not being good enough as a teacher. They discussed planning being ‘thrown out’ because of the changes to curriculum which represented to them a waste of valuable time and energy. The

management of change seems to be a key component of the role of a teacher. Despite change often being disruptive and wasteful for participants, it was also seen by participants as being expected yet sometimes unnecessary; something some teachers protected themselves from the idea of, seeing the change as being separate to them.

“Children have changed, the way they learn, the way society is, and what they have to deal with...but I think that teachers have to adapt to these changes.” KE.

“When you’re in school for a long time, things will change around you.” KE

5.2.7 Widening of the teacher role

Teachers felt that their role had widened to involve different duties more in line with those expected in other professions, such as being counsellor to parents and children, a cleaner, nurse and social worker.

“Now there’s social problems that we have to deal with ... parents will come to you with problems that probably should be dealt with at home, or problems they might be having with another child playing on the street. That’s not, that’s not our issue as a teacher necessarily, but we’re expected to deal with all those social issues as well now.” KE

Such duties fall to teachers to manage and juggle alongside work within the other domains. This leads to a further compounding of available time.

5.2.8 Overwhelming and demanding workload

All participants acknowledged that the combined workload was overwhelming, especially when working with enforced competing deadlines and managing unforeseen demands.

“I’m quite good at managing my time, but you know, that’s when the overwhelming bit comes in - when things you didn’t realise were going to happen...” EP

“As well as sort of keeping on top of your daily juggling, it’s all the other things that you’ve got to do and the deadlines you’ve got to meet and it can make you think ‘oh gosh, this is a lot’.” AS

There were many indications, such as those above that the ceaseless juggling of a diverse and demanding workload, with many domains, led to a sense of overwhelm for participants.

5.3 Struggling

When participants work under the incessant pressure of ‘ceaseless juggling’, they begin to feel overwhelmed with workload. This leads them to question areas of their role and how the role interacts with their life. They begin to realise gaps between their initial perceptions of the role and the realities they face daily whilst juggling. This leads to a constant struggle for participants, who feel that the job they are doing is not good enough and many negative emotions surface. The elements of the struggle teachers faced (subcategories) are outlined in Figure 9: being consumed; making realisations and surviving as a new teacher.

Like ceaseless juggling, struggling forms a main category for the research. It is a large category. Each of the subcategories contain multiple focused codes, some of which were initial codes originally at the start of the process but became increasingly significant as further data generation took place.

Figure 9

Theoretical Diagram Showing Components of ‘Struggling’



Note. The process of Juggling contributes to the category – the blue box with downward arrow at the top of the diagram represents this. The category 'Struggling' is made up from three main subcategories: being consumed; making realisations and surviving as a new teacher. Some of the focused codes contributing to these subcategories are presented as bullet points within the blue quadrilaterals. Emerging from this struggle are negative emotions and thoughts around self-efficacy – these are outlined in the red boxes at the bottom of the figure. Elements of the theoretical diagram (the subcategories in the blue quadrilaterals within Figure 9) are explored in detail in sections 5.3.1 – 5.3.2.

5.3.1 Being consumed

Participants shared that the interaction between their home life and work life was heavily unbalanced, in favour of work. Work became the main source of focus for participants, leaving their personal lives neglected and tension arose around this.

“...work life balance is obviously weighed down heavily with work...” EP

‘Being consumed’ happens as a result of the ‘ridiculous hours’ required to fulfil the juggling of their demands.

“I was working part time but felt like I was doing a full-time job.” KE

“I remember logging my hours because I was crumbling.” CM

It results in a stretching of the working day - longer hours spent working each day; the day being bookended with work, devouring what was once personal free time at the beginning and end of day.

“You’d get in as early as you could so you can set yourself up for the day.” KE

“I would be there until the caretaker kicked me out every night.” EP

“You’d be doing like a ten-hour day in school, never mind what you did when you got home.” ASu

Participants felt the need to arrive early, leave late, or both, and/or work would be taken home - either mentally or physically. Participants recounted times when their thoughts would circle on work, even when not physically there e.g., in the shower at the weekend. Participants seemed to be physically and mentally ‘consumed’ by the role, unable to switch off from the demands it places on them.

“It just consumed me.” CM

Usually this consumption by work was in the awareness of participants. They understood that elements of their personal life were neglected or forgotten in favour of completing work and some tried to navigate family life alongside 'being consumed'.

"It just dragged you down [you realised] there's more to life than working." PR

"...I just need to change something because that situation I was in was just not liveable." EP

"I suddenly got to the point, about four or five years into teaching, where I thought 'if I want to meet someone I need to have a personal life' ... I'm sure lots of teachers have that problem, when they get to their late 20's, early 30's, or whenever, and think 'oh actually I haven't got a social life' and that's really not fair is it?" CS

"It was always okay when I didn't have a family, but once I had children, I went part time and that became more of a pressure to get in at a certain time. Then I had conflicts at home - nursery drop offs and this, that and the other." KE

Participants often made attempts, sometimes successfully, sometimes unsuccessfully, to mediate the imbalance of work and life. For some, this was brought about by maintaining discipline and strong boundaries around the amount of time spent in school in their role as teacher and having clear separation between home and work life. Others decided to leave teaching or reduce their teaching commitment to part time hours; these strategies are evidenced by the participant quotes below:

"You have to be quite disciplined and think 'no I need to stop that - that's fine, I'm leaving now.'" KE

“From a personal point of view, being part time helps because I’ve got my family time and I’ve got my work time.” NH

“I think leaving teaching would be a personal time because now that I’ve got a baby I can’t actually picture how I can do the job well and have a family, which is a big deal for me.” CS

5.3.2 Making realisations

As teachers grew with experience in the profession, they realised that there were a multitude of emerging gaps between their initial perceptions or motivations for teaching and their actual experienced realities of the teaching profession. Participants recalled their initial motivations for teaching; these generally came from an altruistic place - participants enjoyed working with children and were keen to be in a helping role that would inspire children. Often, these initial motivations waned over time once the realities of teaching became evident.

Participants realised, over time, that some of their initial perceptions about teaching were incorrect, especially around areas of the amount of juggling involved, the nature of tasks, significance of behaviour management, the amount of time to integrate personal interests into the role, the level of support they would receive and a disparity between their ideal offering and the educational offering they were providing.

Many participants explained that they faced time pressure.

“I never felt that I had enough time to do everything I wanted to do. There was just never enough time in the day - time is very precious as a teacher.” KE

“There’s never enough time to do everything.” TB

Three participants felt that due to the increasing time pressure, the educational offering for the children was disappointing and their delivery freedoms (related to pedagogy) were restricted, which added to their dissatisfaction in the role and created an internal struggle. This also represented a clash with one of the key motivations to enter teaching - to inspire.

“The creativity is getting sucked out - there’s no time ... it’s missing so many opportunities for real communication, listening, teamwork, things like that.” CM

“There’s so much emphasis on assessments and data, data, data - it took the fun out of planning creative lessons ... it was drilling everything home constantly and the kids weren’t taking it on board.” PR

“It’s like: we’re going to do this, then this, then this, then this, but none of that knowledge is deepened.” TB.

Most participants also noted that many of the tasks seen as being within their remit, were reductive or pointless, again leading to an internal struggle and questioning of the value of their role.

“feedback...you were doing it for what it looked like rather than how much it helped the kids.” CM

“A lot of things in teaching are a tick box exercise... I just felt that it’s a constant tick box exercise and assessing children like they were a number not children sometimes.” KE

Challenging classroom conditions, such as large class sizes, managing difficult behaviour and little support from teaching assistants represented another area which was not considered to be an issue prior to teaching, but in reality became a noticeable element of their struggle.

“Those extra five [children] make a big difference - you’re squeezed in the classroom... and the additional work.” CM

“...since their original teacher had gone off on stress leave and so they were climbing the walls and I really needed a lot of support with behaviour management - that was something I didn’t expect.” EP

Two participants mentioned that parental attitudes can make or break the way that teachers feel in the classroom and add to the internal struggle.

“The way parents handled disputes between children on the playground was often to get aggressive and take it out on the teachers.” CM

“...parents as well. I never gave it a second thought before teaching and then, of course, you get in and realise that they can make or break a year ... a lot of parents do get away with being a bit bully ish.” CS

Many of these struggles were most acute for NQTs in their initial year of teaching. Participant recollections of their initial year of teaching included feeling overwhelmed, unsupported, and alone or isolated. Two participants outlined that, contrary to their expectations and what they had been told, over time things had not become easier. This was because they were subsequently given additional subject leadership roles and responsibilities – more was ‘lumped on’ - which represented even more ‘juggling’.

Most participants expressed that they were only just managing transcript excerpts such as “only just keeping my head above water” evidenced this. Despite trying their best in the role, they were left feeling that they hadn’t met the weight of their own expectations – they were left with an internal tension around feeling as though they could have done more.

"I try to be the best I can...and I want things to be done properly, but I'm only doing the job satisfactorily - well in my mind anyway."

EP

This perpetual state of wanting to do things better but instead feeling that they were 'just managing' contributed to the struggle and left participants feeling a range of negative emotions such as frustration, demotivation, and dissatisfaction.

Figure 10 presents a reflective memo from the data analysis stage around the concept of 'just managing'.

Figure 10

Content Memo: Just Managing

Whilst re-coding CS using MS word tracking, idioms and similes were used 'just keeping head above water' and 'like a swan but paddling like mad underneath'. These made me feel as though the participant was in a constant state of 'only just managing' and how damaging could this be over time? This seems to promote a thought of 'I can't do this forever' (p. 27 CS).

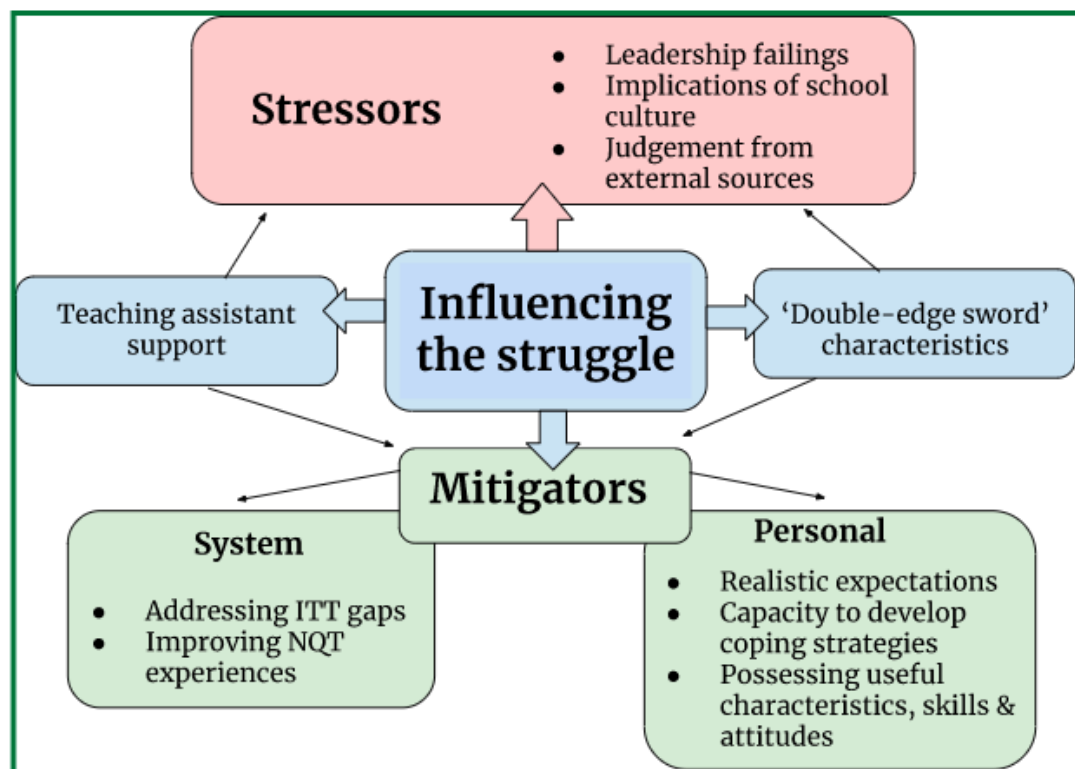
Figure 10 presents a memo of the reflective thought process following the re-coding an interview transcript. An idiom had been used 'just keeping my head above water' and a simile 'like a swan but paddling like mad underneath' to describe the participant's feelings in the role. It seemed to describe a state where the participant was 'only just managing' and the longevity of this was something the researcher considered upon reflection following the interview.

[5.4. Influencing the struggle](#)

Figure 11 takes a closer look at the elements of ‘Influencing the struggle’ from the theoretical diagram (Figure 7). Each of the overarching influences, both stressors and mitigators (the main subcategories within this category) are explored in figure 11 and explained in section 5.4. Other peripheral subcategories such as double-edge sword characteristics and teaching assistant support also influenced the struggle that teachers faced, but they could be either positive or negative influences, so these were placed in their own blue shapes as they did not fit as either stressors or mitigators.

Figure 11

Influencing the struggle: stressors and mitigating factors



Note. The main category represented by Figure 11 is ‘Influencing the struggle’. The sub-categories: stressors and mitigators, are depicted in the red and green shapes. The focused codes which made up these sub-categories are depicted by bullet points within the shapes. The stressors and mitigators are explored in detail in sections 5.4.1 – 5.4.2.

5.4.1 Stressors

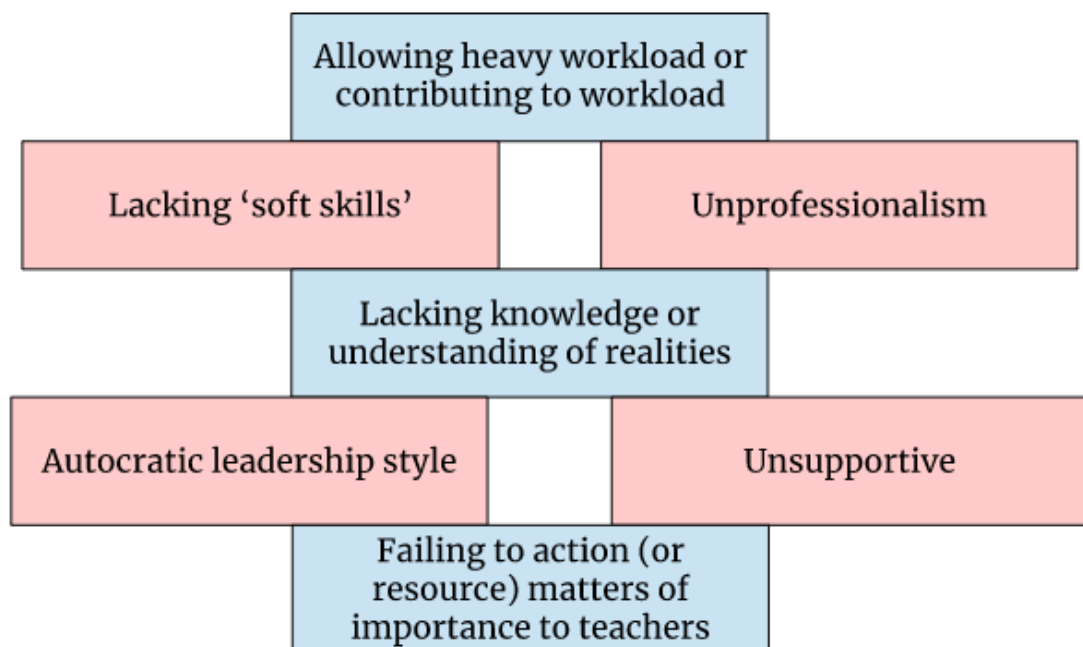
'Stressors' (see Figure 11) provides a label for the category that negatively acts upon elements of 'juggling' and/or 'struggling'. They worsen the conditions that the teacher works within and consequently increase their struggle. Each of the stressors (identified by bullet points in Figure 11) are explored under subheadings in this section.

5.4.1.1 Leadership impact

Leadership failings were mentioned by all participants and these failings added to the struggle that teachers felt. The failings could be categorised into seven main groups, which are listed in Figure 12.

Figure 12

Seven areas of leadership failure



Note. These are seven areas for which participants felt a shortfall in leadership. The red boxes in Figure 12 contain areas encompassing detrimental leadership

style or personal characteristics of leaders. The blue boxes indicate actions or lack of necessary action taken by leaders and an insufficiency in awareness, knowledge, understanding held by leaders. These are explored in further detail under the subheadings below.

Leadership style and characteristics (red boxes in Figure 12): Five participants indicated that soft skills such as communication skills and approachability that participants desired were lacking in some way.

“I mean, the three heads I’ve had, their people skills were horrendous.” ASu

“I wish they had listened a little more.” EP

“You get some that are bad at treating people or interacting with people.” PR

All participants had experienced some form of unprofessionalism from head teachers or leaders in their school settings. At one extreme, unprofessionalism was felt to extend to bullying - three participants had experienced this directly. A fourth participant explained how bullying from parents had been left unopposed or challenged by the head teacher. Five participants had experienced the head teacher ‘having favourites’ or feeling judgements were made about teachers according to whether their ‘face fit’.

“Some headteachers, they have their favourites ... it’s a bit unprofessional really.” KE

“It’s biased isn’t it? It’s like, some people could get away with murder - then the other ones - it’s kind of ‘your face fits’. If they liked you, you could do anything but if not, they came down on you like a ton of bricks.” PR

“Some of the staff had preferential treatment.” CM

Unfairness was noted by participants; sometimes, actions taken by leaders were visibly unfair and noted by others on the team. Examples of this unfairness included: being given the 'difficult class' repeatedly; seeing teaching assistants being treated with less respect than teachers; and observing leaders delegating work to others where it should have been their responsibility. The unprofessionalism extended to and included judgement and early labelling of teachers as 'failing' and brisk 'attacking' or 'pushing out' of staff where mistakes were made.

"That negative experience usually results in it being put on you as being a 'failing teacher'." ASu

"Luckily I've never been on the receiving end but I've seen people who have ... it's almost like a 'witch hunt' of the people who don't do very well." TB

"You can get attacked very quickly for a little mistake or something that you didn't think through properly...you can get jumped on very quickly that 'oh no you can't do that, quickly sack her'. It's like you're not allowed to make a mistake." KE

This increased pressure and the fear of making mistakes, on top of the intense juggling they were experiencing.

Participants expressed opposition to the dictatorial style of leadership that they often experienced, finding it stripped them of autonomy or ownership of their work.

"I felt that the senior management would be sitting in their office, dictating down to the staff what they wanted to happen...and like 'you get on with this work while I sit in my office and eat cake and tell you what to do...I'm not saying they did nothing, but a lot of it was dictated down." KE

“What do you need? Yes sir, no sir, three bags full sir!” EP

“Our head teacher, she’d walk around, she’d come into class and you’d say hello and she would ignore you and look around. It was like she was an authoritative figure.” TB

These excerpts from transcripts appear to indicate an egocentric bias in some of the leaders, a dictatorial, directive, and instructional style of leadership, which appeared to lead to a removal of participants control and ownership, as well as rejection or dismissal of their ideas and a feeling of being ‘untrusted’.

“...your personal target...what do you want out of your career at the moment, what do you want to see? I didn’t even get a choice in mine. I asked for something and they said no.” EP

“There’s no element of trust that you can do the job you’ve been trained to do...you weren’t trusted enough to kind of do your job.” PR

All participants felt that a supportive leadership was crucial, yet more than half of participants felt unsupported by their leadership.

“It was a combination of not feeling supported when I did flag up that my workload was getting ridiculously huge...” CM

“Leaders not being supportive was one of the reasons I suppose I actually left mainstream primary...an extreme lack of support from senior management in one of my schools.” KE

“I think the support’s not there.” ASu

Support in maintaining work life balance and in minimising an already difficult workload appeared to be one of the main functions of support from leadership

that was desirable for teachers but missing from participants experiences in the primary school settings they worked.

Lack of action and understanding/awareness: Six out of nine participants discussed frustrations and difficulties that arose from leaders' lack of understanding or awareness of the realities of teaching. In addition, a failure to resource adequately as gatekeepers of finance became another frustration held by teachers towards leadership.

Some participants felt that the holding of unnecessary meetings by leaders added to workload. Others felt that as subject leader, the nature and demands of their role, added to their teaching responsibility, were not acknowledged or understood. Others felt that the setting of unrealistic expectations in terms of pupil progress and assessment added to the pressure they felt. The most valuable resource mentioned by teachers was time and so when PPA time was taken and not given back at an alternative time during the week it was as if they had been 'robbed'. Others mentioned that resources such as glue sticks, whiteboard pens, paper trimmers, which they deemed to be relatively cheap to provide, were not purchased in sufficient quantities. Sharing of these limited items across classes led to frustration. One teacher explained that important policies such as a behaviour policy, had not been brought about by the head teacher as he had felt there were no behaviour issues across school, yet this left teachers lacking in support when they needed to tackle challenging behaviour in their classrooms.

Most importantly, one function of leadership that was seen as critical for teachers was the removal of, or help with, high levels of workload. One participant felt that their workload was negatively impacted by the head teacher's request for incredibly detailed planning and the impact of receiving this planning back once it had been commented on. Most teachers felt more could be done by leaders to share and shoulder the burdens of their heavy workload.

For all the leadership failings that participants noted, there were also examples of positive actions or behaviours by leaders that participants had directly or indirectly experienced or been made aware of, these are outlined below.

One participant shared that their headteacher was aware of crunch times such as report writing time. At these times, they would provide additional out of class time to help support teachers in their admin duties and reduce the impact of this task on their work-life balance. Another participant felt their head teacher was grounded in the realities that they faced as they still played a teaching role in the school which impacted their awareness and understanding of the issues faced by the teachers.

Participants described what they wanted from leaders and this included: supporting staff through change; valuing and appreciating everyone; being a source of inspiration; trusting staff to do their job well; helping to troubleshoot and solve problems; shaping workload positively; shielding and standing up for staff; shouldering the pressure from external sources; nurturing relationships; valuing time as a precious resource; listening and acknowledging ideas; being in tune with staff morale; a valuing of the role of 'teacher' alone; providing staff with ownership and control; actively teaching thus being aware of realities and the cultivation of a positive culture and professional environment by leaders. What emerged strongly from the research was that the nature of school leadership can heavily impact the amount and nature of the juggling and struggling that teachers experience.

5.4.1.2 Implications of school culture

As previously stated in section 5.2.4, being part of a team was one source of the 'juggling' process which provided satisfaction for teachers. Unfortunately, for some participants, the school culture they had experienced was disharmonious and therefore added to the felt struggle, perhaps as this usually important and enjoyable part of the role (interacting and working with others) became less enjoyable. Two participants mentioned that there was an expectation of high turnover in their settings. Two different participants discussed the high levels of competition between staff which made things difficult. Another two participants indicated that there had been some disgruntlement between early career and long serving teachers, partly as a result of promises made to early career teachers by leaders, whereby long serving teachers felt that the same

opportunities had not been afforded to them. Toxicity, such as finger pointing and blaming, in addition to low morale were also pointed to by two participants. This was either unnoticed, unchallenged, or failed to be addressed by leaders.

“I knew the morale was low and I voiced that so many times to leadership ... ‘you’re gonna lose teachers, good teachers’ and they did...I’d voiced that to them before, but again, they didn’t listen.” EP

The school culture is heavily influenced and shaped by school leadership and mentioned as a function of leadership that is desired by teachers. School culture therefore impacts on the landscape in which teachers juggle and struggle and it can make these processes more difficult to manage.

5.4.1.3 Judgement from external sources

External sources were an additional stressor on the struggle already experienced by teachers. One participant felt that the general public had a strong awareness of the difficulties faced by teachers and that the general perception of the public was that teaching is ‘hard work and not well paid’. This was not shared by other participants. Five participants felt that the long working hours of teachers was not acknowledged by the public at large and that parents often had misconceptions about what the role involved.

“I think people have this idea that teaching is easy. I think there’s still a massive perception that we work 9-3.” Asu

“You know, people who aren’t teachers think it’s a 9-3 role.” EP

“It’s not the 9-3 job that a lot of people think.” NH

Two participants felt that the government advertisements for teaching roles do not share the realities of teaching.

“It’s not that one child they show on the advert – it’s 30 kids every year ... it’s very difficult ... they never show the background work they do, they never show the teacher sat there until God knows what time marking 30 English books.” KE

*““Oh you can make a difference to a child’s life’ yeah, great well lets do all the other *hit aswell. It sugarcoats and none of those adverts are realistic.”Asu*

As a result, it seemed that participants felt that the adverts sugar-coated the role and helped perpetuate the myths around the role being ‘easy’ – views that participants felt were held by the general public.

Two participants noted that the only way to change the views of ‘outsiders’ to the role would be for them to spend time in the teaching context. They acknowledged that it would be difficult for members of the public or parents to understand the difficulties of the role as these only became apparent after spending time in the classroom and school setting. This is reflected in section 5.3.2 where teachers themselves held initial perceptions at the outset that changed significantly after experiencing the role.

Against this background, the struggle experienced by teachers is likely to be compounded if empathy is lacking towards teachers by society. For those with an external locus of evaluation, who enjoy receiving praise and recognition from others, this may be missing and, consequently, teachers may feel that their juggling and struggling is unnoticed and misunderstood.

5.4.2 Mitigators

The bullet points in Figure 11 within the ‘Mitigators’ shape are explored below, each under a different subheading.

5.4.2.1 *Entering the profession with realistic expectations*

Five participants recognised that entering the profession with some realistic expectation about what it would entail could help to mitigate the struggle they faced. Participants noted that where they had insights as an insider e.g., from a relative already in the profession, or through prolonged experience working in school settings, this had prepared them for realities of teaching, particularly in respect of taking work home and the overwhelming workload.

“I don’t think I ever had rose tinted spectacles or anything like that...my mum’s a teacher, so I was familiar with what maybe marking at night would be, and doing bit of work at home.” ASu

“From a younger age, I kind of saw how much time was put into the job outside the setting.” PR

“I saw then (through working as a TA)...that was quite eye-opening ‘my gosh there’s so much to do’ I was still quite keen to do it and get involved. So I feel I went into it knowing that there was a lot of work and being prepared to do the work as well, but I do feel that people can be quite blind to it until they get going they don’t realise how difficult it is.” TB

Two participants thought that the role of a teacher would be creative and they looked forward to every day being different; for them, this perception was an accurate representation of their reality in teaching.

5.4.2.2 *Developing coping strategies*

Seven participants talked through strategies that either helped them through the juggle and struggle, or that they had seen longer serving teachers employ as a means of coping. Most of these strategies were internal strategies coming from the participants themselves, rather than ones put in place by the setting or wider environment. Some of these strategies are outlined below.

Marking within lessons through a process called 'workshopping' had been introduced at one participant's school, which meant that they were able to mostly mark books or provide feedback within the lessons themselves, which reduced the need to mark after school or at weekends. Multi-tasking within lessons by some teachers had been seen in one participant's school, where organised teachers would facilitate the start of sessions and then provide time for children to work on their tasks, whilst they would tackle admin duties – one teacher felt this was an effective way to help manage their workload (especially the demanding administration dimension). One teacher commented that a teacher within their school without children appeared to be able to spend more time after work in the setting to complete tasks as they did not have childcare responsibilities. Another teacher felt that learning to adapt to sudden changes and having back up plans had been a useful strategy for them. Some participants commented that having children had been a turning point for them; it increased their awareness of available time and resources for the role and created greater time efficiency.

One participant commented that she had noted longer serving teachers seemed to 'pay lip service' to demands but not make changes if they felt they were not useful. In addition, they said that demanding to stay in the same year group by longer serving teachers was another strategy used. A different, long serving participant noted that longer-serving teachers appeared better at 'saying no' to additional demands, therefore keeping the juggle at a minimum.

All of these coping strategies, whether experienced directly or indirectly by participants became important mitigators in the battle with juggling a ceaseless workload or struggling with being consumed by work.

5.4.2.3 Addressing training shortfalls or gaps

Seven participants felt that their initial teacher training (ITE) experiences had left them unprepared for teaching in some way. They felt that longer time spent in school placements would have proved to be useful; they felt that their placements

in school settings had been limited in terms of time and experience. One participant felt that it was easier for teachers to hide the gripes and problems that they encountered in the role from student teachers if the placements were time constrained, thus the trainee was not exposed to the extent of the reality teachers faced. Another participant felt that the lack of time on placements meant that they were not fully involved with the wider elements of 'juggling' such as assessments and administrative tasks.

One participant expressed concern that they had experienced very limited ITE subject specialist training, particularly with regard to the teaching of music, so they were unprepared to teach this subject when they gained a full-time teaching role where the teaching of music was an expectation in that setting. More input from ITE on the teaching of the wider curriculum, areas such as Art, RE, Science, PSHCE, Music and PE would have proved useful for trainees, as the focus was heavily on Reading, Phonics, Writing, Mathematics and Science. In addition, participants felt that inclusion and SEN were areas of knowledge that were under-represented in training.

In addition, teachers felt that their training or placements had not informed them as much as they would have liked about certain realities; the voices of teachers themselves who were active in the profession were sometimes missing from training, such as the sharing of classroom management and behaviour management experiences – this, they said, would have been valuable.

5.4.2.4 Improving the NQT/ECT experience

Two participants felt that the ECT experience could be improved through examining and restructuring the initial year as a qualified teacher. One participant felt that the initial year following training could be used as a year to immerse into the school culture and become accustomed to the procedures and processes in place, without the burdens of a class responsibility. They felt that experiencing teaching in different classes during the first year, learning from experienced teachers, honing teaching skills and pedagogy, without the juggling involved with full class responsibility would be useful. Another participant felt that the initial year

in the profession could be a useful period in which the teacher could teach three terms, each in a different school setting, in order to gain an appreciation for the differences in culture between schools. At the end of the experience, they suggested that new starters may decide which setting they felt suited them most. The participant recognised the logistical issues this may present and appreciated that this had impact on the classes involved in terms of change and continuity but they felt that the classes could be supported in some way, for example through an experienced teacher overseeing the new teacher in the classroom during the term that they were in that setting.

Participants thought that new teachers should be supported by an external group or body. This would ideally be facilitated by individuals not in any way already linked to any of the settings; it could provide an external perspective and a place to go for ECTs feeling unsupported by the mentor in their setting, or the setting more generally.

Adequate training and induction by the setting or local authority was noted as something that had been useful to one participant. They had experienced a two-week Summer induction from the local authority which had proved insightful. Others noted that clear and thorough planning and policy guidance at induction was a crucial factor in ensuring demystification of internal processes and a clear, rather than confusing, start to life in school as a teacher.

Possessing useful characteristics, attitudes, and skills

Several personal characteristics were mentioned by participants as being useful. Adaptability and being supportive of others were two important characteristics that participants felt were useful to teachers, each of these was mentioned by four participants. They felt that adaptability helped teachers cope in times of sudden change or uncertainty. Resilience, having a sense of humour, patience, enthusiasm or passion, being hard working, being positive, being accepting of/accommodating change and having the ability to 'switch off' were each mentioned as valuable characteristics for teachers to possess by participants. Participants noted that being 'thick skinned' was useful to distance themselves

from difficult feedback or interactions, for example from parents. Open mindedness was seen as important to see things from different points of view and having a growth mindset as lifelong learning was a part of the role.

Five participants stated that organisation and time efficiency were incredibly important skills to possess, without them, one participant noted that the 'juggling' would be a 'nightmare'. Having 'people skills,' good levels of communication skills, creativity and technological skills were also noted to be useful skills to have which would aid the role of teacher. These insights help gain understanding around the personal characteristics and soft skills which might help teachers in their juggling and struggling.

5.4.2.5 Double edge sword characteristics

Three different participants explained that some characteristics, though at times were helpful, could also present challenges for teacher. Perfectionism was one such 'double edge sword' characteristics. Though participants felt that it helped in ensuring high quality of lessons, it could lead to the juggling and struggling being even more overwhelming as perfectionists put increasing pressure on themselves across the multitude of tasks they engaged with.

“She sees herself as a perfectionist and this hasn’t been helpful to her in the classroom as it left her feeling like things were never done properly.” CM

Approachability was another characteristic that was deemed to be useful yet could lead to additional time pressure and a further compounding of work consuming life. This was because participants felt that teachers could get drawn into additional tasks or conversations, which were not helpful in them tackling their own difficult workloads. People pleasing was the final characteristic names by participants that could be detrimental to teachers experiencing the struggle. They felt that teachers would be taken advantage of by leaders, for example additional demands might be placed on them due to their amiable nature and further elements of 'juggling' would added to their workload as a result.

5.5 Experiencing adverse emotion (a changing self)

All participants described experiencing negative emotions through the process of struggling that they had endured because of overwhelming workload. Four participants felt a burden of pressure as teachers – this came about because of being observed, though one participant described it ‘being tested’ over and over again. Some felt that the pressure came from all directions including from themselves.

Frustration was a commonly cited emotion arising for most participants in the teaching role. Frustrations came from a range of sources including trying to deliver the required curriculum in the time available; knowing that speeding through content would not provide children with a beneficial learning experience; being impacted by last minute demands, or changes to their routine; and a never-ending workload – never reaching the end of the to-do list. For some, this led to a feeling of ‘hate’ towards the role and small problems being compounded over time – such as sharing the use of a paper trimmer or photocopier. A whole raft of negative emotions that participants had felt in the role included: being anxious, being annoyed, feeling stuck, feeling demoralised, dissatisfied, let down, bored, depressed, scared, undervalued and flustered.

At an extreme, one participant talked about the experience of teaching leaving them feeling different to when they started.

“I wasn’t feeling like myself and I felt – I felt like I was a different person almost... I was going into work very negatively and I feel like I’m quite a positive person.” EP

Interestingly, when reflecting on creating their visuals, most participants mentioned that the negative aspects of teaching were at the forefront of their minds and had been quite vivid in mind when creating the visual, whereas it took more thought to recall the positive aspects of the job.

5.6. Feeling of failure

Mentioned by eight participants, a feeling of failure was the most frequently cited negative feeling experienced by participants. There was a sense from participants that they were 'just managing'. Figurative language was often used to describe this phenomenon, e.g., 'just keeping my head above water'. Just managing the struggle was difficult enough for participants, yet they were experiencing feelings that told them that they still were not doing enough or doing the job properly. There appeared to be a dissatisfaction and frustration for participants from being in-between 'just managing' and 'doing the job properly'. Most participants were striving to achieve the latter to feel that they were doing justice to their teaching and being of benefit to the children in their class.

"I've also learned - not that I'm a perfectionist - but I never wanted to feel like I'm doing the kids an injustice." TB

"I feel that in order to deliver a really good quality lesson you've gotta bend over backwards and work every hour of the day." NH

Sometimes, this feeling of failure came because of feeling they had not done the job as they would have wished to, which was compounded by the weight of their own expectations and perfectionism.

"You know, I try as best as I can not to be, but I am (a perfectionist) and I want things done properly, but I'm only doing the job satisfactorily - well in my mind - some people might say I'm doing a good job." EP

"It's going to be really unsatisfying if you've done something like half a job, you haven't done it as well as you could." CS

"You never clear the to-do-list so you'll always feel like you're meeting your high expectations in teaching." CM

This demonstrates a difficult internal tension at play where participants felt that they were not meeting their own expectations. Some participants felt that their feelings of worthlessness had been perpetuated by leadership attitudes:

“I think most people left en masse because of being made to feel worthless, like you weren’t good enough.” PR

One participant felt that participants needed to change their expectations about their teacher work. They advocated that the quest for perfectionism would lead to dissatisfaction and frustration. As a result, they advocate thinking about ways to change perceptions so that teachers become accepting of the work that they carry out.

“It’s this perpetual thing of trying to be perfect and trying to do everything right, which we kind of need to change, I think.” KE

This might be an important part of the puzzle – acknowledging that perfectionism is unattainable and accepting that if effort has been expended, that is good enough.

[5.7 Relieving the juggle and struggle: participant suggestions.](#)

Participants shared their ideas about improvements that could be made. These were setting/context specific in general and included desirables that they felt could be provided by leaders and improvements that could be made in the classroom environment. Making changes such as these, they thought, might help to alleviate some of the juggling and struggling and therefore avoid attrition as a result. Each of the suggestions is explored below.

5.7.1 Leadership desirables

Interestingly, two participants who had experienced what they expressed as ‘good’ leadership or leadership they ‘liked’ had felt they were ‘lucky’ to experience this, feeling that it is not the ‘norm’ to experience good leadership.

“I feel really lucky in our school that we’ve got a really good and supportive SLT.” NH

“My bosses, I’ve always really liked...I know I’ve been quite lucky in that really because it’s not always the case.” CS

It seemed that having a good, or supportive leadership team was not necessarily expected by teachers, something that they instead felt ‘lucky’ to have – it was the exception for the group of participants engaged in this research, rather than the norm.

Participants felt that leaders acknowledging the interest and passions of staff and nurturing these was useful. One participant explained that her leadership team allowed her to develop her interests in forest school activities and they had, as a result, moved on to lead this area across school. The participant commented that this had helped her to stay in teaching at a time that she had considered leaving. Another participant thought that if leaders noticed and supported teachers' interests, this would lead to teachers becoming more enthusiastic and passionate about teaching and less likely to leave. Four participants felt that being trusted to teach by leaders was important. Valuing and appreciating staff was something that participants recalled fondly where they had experience of this. Valuing the teaching role, without the need for additional leadership responsibilities was also seen as important by participants. Four participants also felt that it was important for leaders to stand up for and shield staff from external pressures or concerns. One participant explained that their leadership team were still actively teaching, and this had enabled them to remain grounded in the profession and, as a result, they were understanding and realistic about expectations.

Participants thought that leaders should help to shape the workload positively to keep work life balance in check. Valuing teachers' time as a precious resource, for example through having short briefings instead of long meetings was mentioned as a way for leaders to actively show commitment towards reducing time pressure. Especially when leaders had been in tune with the demands on

teachers at certain times of the academic year - e.g., report writing time, they had been able to support teachers through accommodating for additional 'out of class' time for teachers. Leaders who were supportive of staff, particularly through times of change were talked about positively and cultivating a professional, yet personable and supportive culture was seen as an important role of leaders.

Interestingly, though teachers could talk about these suggestions for better leadership that they felt would positively impact on attrition, very few had direct experience of such leadership actions. Sometimes, they had heard about these ideas from colleagues in other settings, for example. Interestingly, much of these suggestions contrast significantly with participants own experiences of leadership which were classified as a significant stressor in section 5.4.1.1.

5.7.2 Improving classroom reality

Challenging classroom management, mainly due navigating difficult behaviour in class, was something that participants struggled with.

“as soon as I got into the classroom behaviour management was a whole new ballgame. And actually I couldn't teach for about two months, like solidly teaching because they were- they couldn't even line up quietly and, you know, they couldn't even be quiet for a few minutes and I remember that being a huge learning curve.”

EP

“and it was a really badly behaved class erm because the deputy just needed time out of class, so I was used more as a supply and I think if that'd be my first placement I could have ended up leaving that course.” CS

“I just feel to do your job properly, the size of our classes is almost- you know, it's making it very difficult.” TB

It seems that behaviour from children in the classroom can impact on the struggle faced by participants. Having strong behaviour management policies and procedures that were followed through by all was an important point for participants.

“(Headteacher) didn’t want any behaviour systems in place. But of course for the odd characters that did have behavioural issues that wasn’t great so everybody kind of made up their own little system but then it needs to be consistent, I think, throughout the years and that’s when those kids I think get a little bit confused or push certain boundaries. you know when that’s not clear.” TB

In addition, other important factors suggested by participants which impact on classroom reality include having an appropriate physical classroom space for the size of class; having a manageable class size and the provision of basic planning resources within the setting was of importance to teachers too.

Together with the leadership desirables, participants thought that improving classroom reality would be beneficial to teachers. They felt that these factors could help to relieve the juggle and struggle experienced.

[5.8 Post attrition reflections](#)

Four participants had left primary teaching either temporarily or permanently at the time of data collection. These participants offered some insights into what life was like after teaching. They all felt that there had been a relief or reprieve from the intensity, stress, and pressure of teaching. For one participant, leaving had presented them with realisations about how stressed they had been - this had not been in their awareness whilst they were in the role.

“I haven’t got that extra layer of stress anymore.” CS

“I’m just generally less stressed.” EP

“I’m more relaxed. I have more time for myself and my wife...yeah it’s just really good (without) the constant pressure.” PR

All participants that had left the profession felt that their life had been improved or enhanced in some way since leaving. One participant did reflect on the fact though that when she first left, she missed the children. For another participant, reflecting on their process through teaching to leaving the mainstream primary classroom and beyond allowed them to come to the realisation that teaching had been ‘tough’.

“Time has been a healer and I’m still having to grumble about it (teaching) which means it was really tough.” CM

This is interesting as it demonstrates that whilst participants are engaged with juggling and struggling, they may not realise cognitively that they are immersed in a difficult process. However, as shown in sections 5.5 and 6.6, their emotions may be indicative of this struggle. Acknowledging internal tension and emotion whilst in teaching might help to unpick the tough parts of the role and this could prove to be validating for participants. It might help them to see themselves as doing the job to the best of their ability rather than feeling like a failure. This process might help teachers to remain in the profession, rather than leave.

[5.9 Figurative language use for participant meaning making](#)

Figurative language was used so frequently by participants across interviews that it was deemed to be important to research further. Understanding more about the reasons participants might consciously or subconsciously use of figurative language in their meaning making could provide further insights into the lives of teachers. An in depth look at this phenomenon is provided in section 6.8 of the discussion chapter where literature on figurative language use is employed. Across all interviews and visuals, examples of figurative language were commonly used by participants to describe their feelings and experiences. Generally, these were used to reflect experiences or feelings across five areas:

nature of teaching; leadership actions and behaviours; children's experiences; feelings at or following attrition and support. Altogether, there were 143 examples of figurative language across all nine interview transcripts. Table 3 provides a selection of these, but a complete list of all 143 examples of figurative language can be found in [Appendix 17](#).

Table 3

Examples of Participants' Figurative Language Choices

Context figurative language describes	Examples of figurative language
Nature of teaching	<p>'The weight of the world on your shoulders' EP</p> <p>'I think just people feel like they are drowning.' CS</p> <p>'If you're keeping your head above water.' ASu</p> <p>'You do feel like a general dogsbody.' CS</p> <p>Teacher as a battered box - visual - CM</p> <p>'It's like a swan where you're gliding along the surface, thinking it's fine and underneath you're paddling like this just to keep your head above water' KE</p> <p>'At the beginning I felt like I was drowning' NH</p> <p>'I remember logging my hours because I was crumbling.' CM</p> <p>'I'm spread too thinly' EP</p> <p>'...quite happy with her head under the parapet' ASu</p> <p>'You're both going like this (spinning plates) it's mad isn't it' CS</p> <p>'Running around like a headless chicken' CM</p>

	'Like a puppet on a string' EP
Leadership actions/behaviours	'Sat there in their ivory tower' KE '...if not, they came down on you like a ton of bricks' PR '..like a witch hunt of the people who don't do very well' TB
Children's experiences	'You never know what they're going to come out with, they're little sponges' TB 'I've not really drawn anything for that, maybe I could draw a picture of children jumping through hoops' TB 'Watching them grow from a little tree to a big tree' KE
Feelings at / following attrition	'Like a weight was lifted' EP 'I literally felt like a free spirit' EP
Support	'...not very good at catching people before they drown' ASu 'It was a bit sink or swim really' CS 'I think there's lots of throwing people in at the deep end in teaching' CS

Table 3 exemplifies the range of forms of figurative language use, such as metaphors, similes, hyperbole, symbolism, and personification. Such phrases were often used by participants when recounting meaningful, critical, or highly emotional experiences. Use of figurative language was an unanticipated, yet important tool which enabled participants to express their meaning. Its use is explored further in the following discussion chapter (section 6.8).

5.10 Member checking the findings

Eight of the nine original participants contributed to the member checking process. Member checking took place in three synchronous online group conversations which took place at times that were convenient to participants. These were recorded with participant consent. In preparation for the sharing of findings, Figure 6 (visual representation of findings) and Figure 7 (theoretical diagram showing the main categories which constitute the theory) were shared in advance and used to provide a structure for the order in which findings would be shared. The diagram and visual were displayed during the conversation. A loose crib sheet was prepared by the researcher to ensure that all parts of the findings would be shared.

Participants felt that the shared findings were highly representative of their thoughts, experiences, and feelings. Some additional insights and questions were also shared which fit within the existing theoretical framework. These included:

- Teaching assistants were viewed as either 'mitigators' or 'stressors' in the category: 'influencing the struggle'. Following the interview, this was added to the Figure 7 as a focused code within that category.
- 'Being a team member' was an important part of juggling, and one which every participant enjoyed. Some participants reflected that post covid, few teachers had returned to spending time in the staffroom. One participant shared that this seemed to particularly impact a new member of their team as they had not been able to build bonds prior to the covid pandemic.
- One participant raised a question that could be useful for future research – they asked whether there was a correlation between the school Ofsted graded status and the pressure staff felt that they experienced. This would prove to be an interesting further area for research which was added to section 6.6 'directions for future research'.

5.11 Summary

The findings chapter used participant dialogue and researcher memos to present data gathered from interviews with nine teacher leavers and stayers, all of whom had six or more years of experience in the primary teaching profession. The data revealed their thoughts about how and why teacher attrition occurs in the primary setting. It also revealed that for participants, teacher attrition is an emotive subject. This was evidenced by the language used by participants in their interviews – frequent use of figurative language was the hallmark of this (discussed further in the following discussion chapter – see section 6.8). Findings placed ‘juggling and struggling’ as the central processes involved in primary teacher attrition, though they also identified influencing factors on this process. Other, more peripheral categories also contributed to the theory. In keeping with CGT methods, the chapter grounded the theory in the data generated through interviewing, in addition to the sharing and discussion around visual representations produced by participants and the member checking process too.

6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter (5. Findings) presented the findings from interviews with participants about their perspectives on teacher attrition. Emerging from the data was a strong image of the juggling process that teachers interact with in their professional role. A struggle ensues where teachers become overwhelmed with workload, subsequently becoming consumed by the role, and making comparisons between their reality as a teacher and their initial perceptions of the role. Negative emotions were common across participants and a feeling of failure was at play. The research study demonstrated that participants used a diverse range of figurative language to express their feelings and experiences in the semi-structured online interviews.

The background literature review aimed to explore literature on the topic of teacher attrition to expose gaps in knowledge. This chapter continues to explore literature in the field, though in a more focused way, to situate the substantive theory within existing research. It aims to discuss and explore the theory, comparing it with existing theory, discovering along the way how this theory challenges, extends, and contributes to current knowledge. Unlike other chapters, due to its length, this chapter includes summary points, mostly at the end of subsections (6.2, 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8), in addition to a whole chapter summary in section 6.9.

Interestingly, when writing this chapter, much of the literature consulted was new and had not come up as part of the initial background literature search. This demonstrates that what emerged from the research with participants was different in some way to what was expected, and to previous literature in the field; it therefore demanded a different but sometimes overlapping set of literature to be consulted and reviewed in addition to the already familiar literature from the background literature review. For example, multitasking itself was not an area of the background literature review, but it constituted a significant part of the nature of the process of 'juggling' which emerged from the study. It therefore constituted

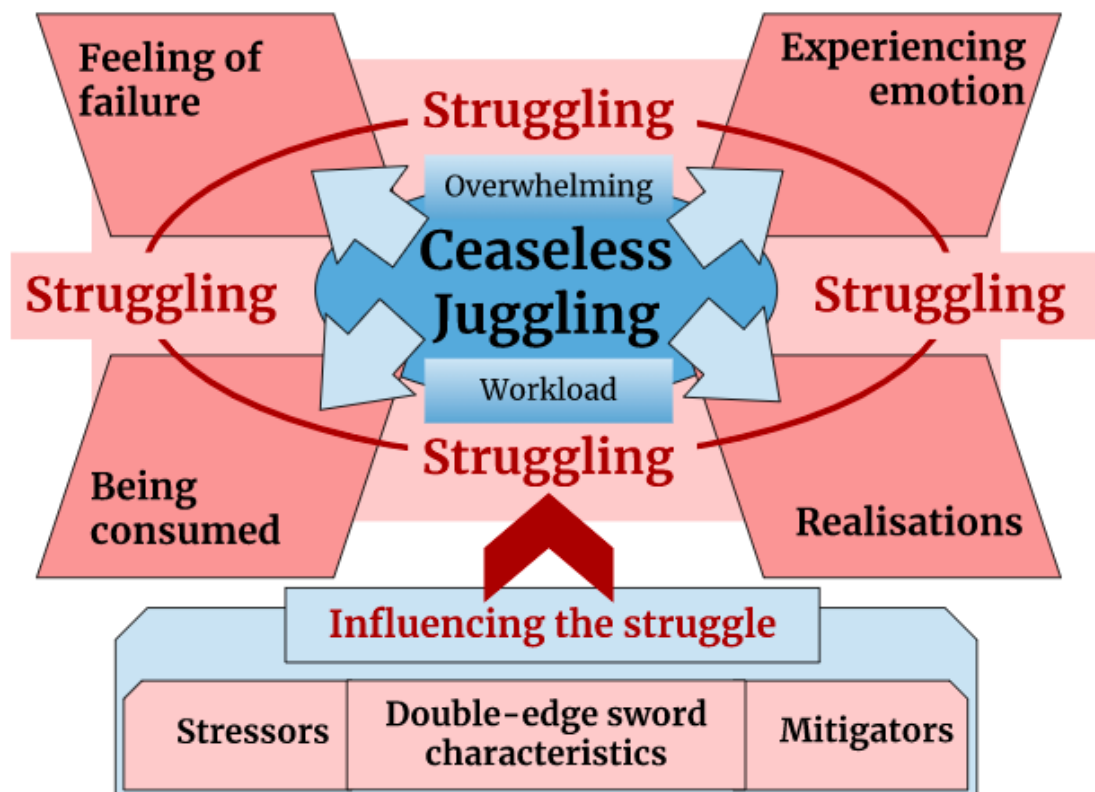
an additional literature search for the purposes of this discussion. The chapter begins with an exploration of the substantive theory from section 6.2 onwards. The chapter is brought to a close with an exploration of the participants' use of figurative language in interviews (section 6.8) as they made meaning of their experiences - this way of sharing was evident across all participant interviews and all categories. Finally, a conclusion (section 6.9) is provided.

6.2 The substantive theory

The theoretical diagram (Figure 7) is referred to throughout this section. It can be found below:

Figure 7

Main categories central to the theory: ceaseless juggling, struggling and influences on the struggle



Note. Ceaseless Juggling is the main category and is shown centrally for this reason. It contributes to the struggling felt by participants, hence the blue arrows move in an outward direction from Juggling to the circle of struggle, which encompasses four different elements (shown in the red quadrilateral shapes). Influences acting on the struggle are shown by the blue box at the bottom of the figure.

Figure 7 shows the processes leading to teacher attrition put forward by this research. The centre of the diagram (juggling – oval on blue background) is central to the theory and perhaps unsurprisingly relates to workload. Teachers face ‘ceaseless juggling’ of an overwhelming workload. Workload is already known to be a commonly cited reason for teacher attrition. This substantive theory examines in detail the nature of that high workload. [Figure 8](#) explores the domains of juggling (the areas of the workload). ‘Juggling’ is the term used in this research to encapsulate the nature of the teacher workload; it is an in-vivo code. Juggling is ceaseless and includes complex and intensive multitasking, task switching, widening of the role and the carrying out of diverse tasks within and across a variety of domains outlined in section 5.2. Juggling refers to the nature of the teacher's work and the reality of managing this complex reality, within and across domains over time. Overwhelm and negative emotions can emerge because of juggling, or due to the struggle that ensues. Importantly, attrition can take place purely because of this ‘juggling’.

The ceaseless juggling (central to the theory) can lead to a struggle on many fronts. The elements of the struggle outlined by this theory are shown in [Figure 9](#). One of such subcategories is ‘being consumed by work’. This is outlined in detail in section 6.5. Teachers felt an unsustainable work-life imbalance was at play. The nature of ‘being consumed’ was outlined by strategies such as stretching the working day and taking work home (two focused codes in this subcategory). Being consumed by work was a pervasive phenomenon though and this theory demonstrates that the thinking about work, when not at work exacerbates this. Other struggles (fully outlined in section 6.5) included making realisations - such as noticing that they had a reduced autonomy to teach in the way they had expected to be able to or having a larger class or more difficult

classroom management scenarios than expected. One struggle involved surviving the NQT (ECT) year of teaching, which came with its own challenges. The struggles experienced by teachers tended to come into play after experiencing the juggling. They also raised negative feelings and emotions for teachers and prompted attrition.

The theory also demonstrates that influencing factors act upon the juggling and struggling that teachers experience (see blue box at the bottom of [Figure 7](#)). They are discussed in detail in section 6.6 and each influencing factor is shown in [Figure 11](#). These influencing factors were categorised as either making the juggling and struggling easier (mitigators) or worse (stressors). Mitigators could be protective factors which eased the struggling or juggling. These were system based (such as addressing ITT shortfalls) or had a personal base (such as possessing useful characteristics, skills and attitudes). To contrast, stressors were aggravating factors which worsened the juggling and struggling. They included leadership and culture. For example, lack of leadership support and an autocratic leadership style negatively impacted on their juggling and struggling. Other leadership failures, less commonly cited in general attrition literature, were also identified in this research such as unprofessionalism, a lack of understanding of teaching realities and a failure to resource adequately. Interestingly, the theory notes 'double edge sword characteristics' as being either stressors or mitigators. These included personal characteristics such as perfectionism, approachability and people pleasing. They could make the processes of juggling and struggling easier at times or exacerbate it.

Amidst the juggling and struggling, negative emotion was commonplace. This was evidenced by the high frequency of figurative language use by participants and the high number and diverse range of negative feelings cited by participants. Accordingly, this theory places emphasis on negative emotion in the attrition process. Negative emotions arose from each part of the process: from the juggling, from the struggling, from experiencing stressors acting on the juggling and struggling. The theory firmly links negative emotions to attrition, often because of juggling and struggling. Many of the negative emotions cited were stress emotions (Lazarus, 1991, 1999) arising from the challenging person-

environment relationship, especially when goals incongruence was at play. The role of emotion in attrition is further discussed in section 6.7, with reference to the cognitive-emotional-relational theory of emotion (Lazarus, 1991). A feeling of failure or of not being good enough/not doing enough, even when satisfying the basic demands of juggling and struggling, led to attrition.

Negative emotion is the common thread at play in all parts of this substantive theory. The role of negative emotion is explored in section 6.7, though due to its pervasive nature, it is present in all parts of the discussion.

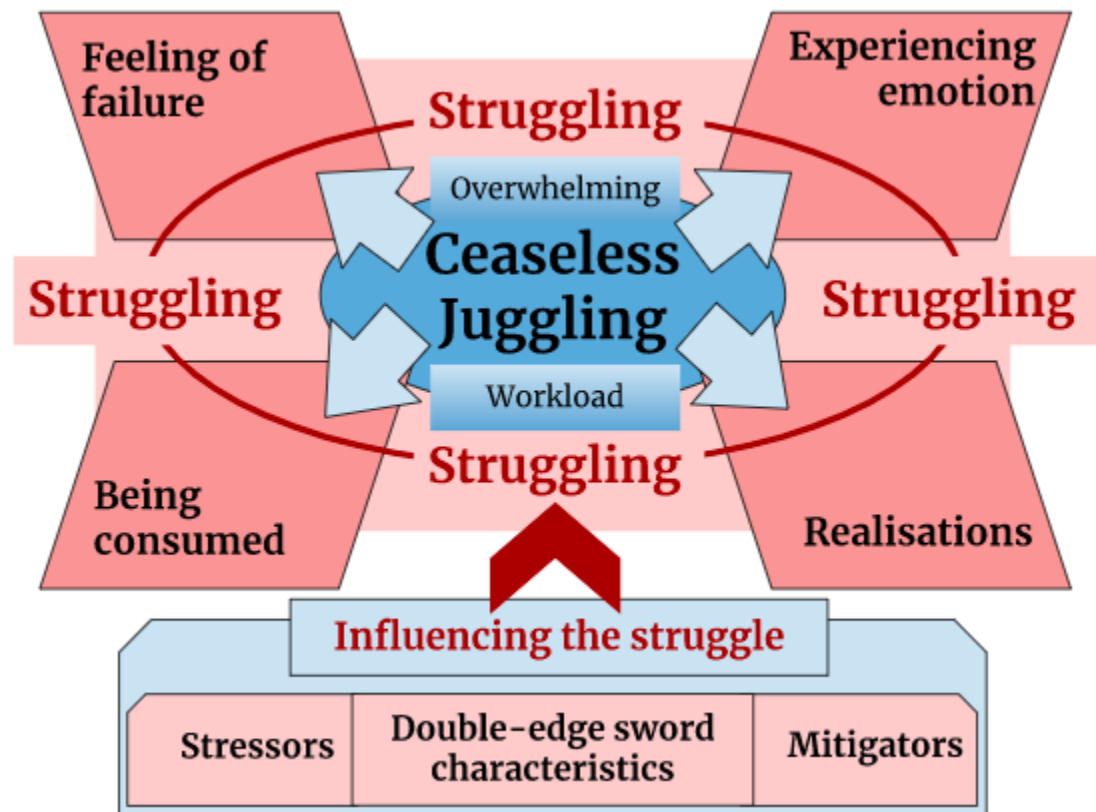
In this research, participants commonly used figurative language to express their feelings and experiences. Figurative language choices are often used to convey intensity of emotion and convey affect, as well as making sense of their thoughts. Metaphors are the most commanding form of figurative language for conveying emotion (Mahlios et al, 2010) and a variety of forms of metaphor were found in participant responses such as creative, conventional, straightforward, and idiomatic. Conceptual metaphors (metaphor umbrellas) could also be created from the variety of metaphors participants used. Though not central to the theory, participant use of figurative language is a noteworthy point because negative emotions were common across participants and the use of figurative language (especially metaphors) comes as no surprise and holds proof that high levels of emotions were felt, since one common purpose of metaphors is to express and convey emotion. This is discussed in detail in section 6.8.

[6.3. Theoretical diagram](#)

Figure 7 was referred to in the findings chapter and will be explored once again through this discussion chapter. Sections 6.4 – 6.7 take each category (juggling, struggling, influences on the struggle and experiencing negative emotion) in turn, situating it within existing literature.

Figure 7

Theoretical Model Showing the Core Category and Related Categories

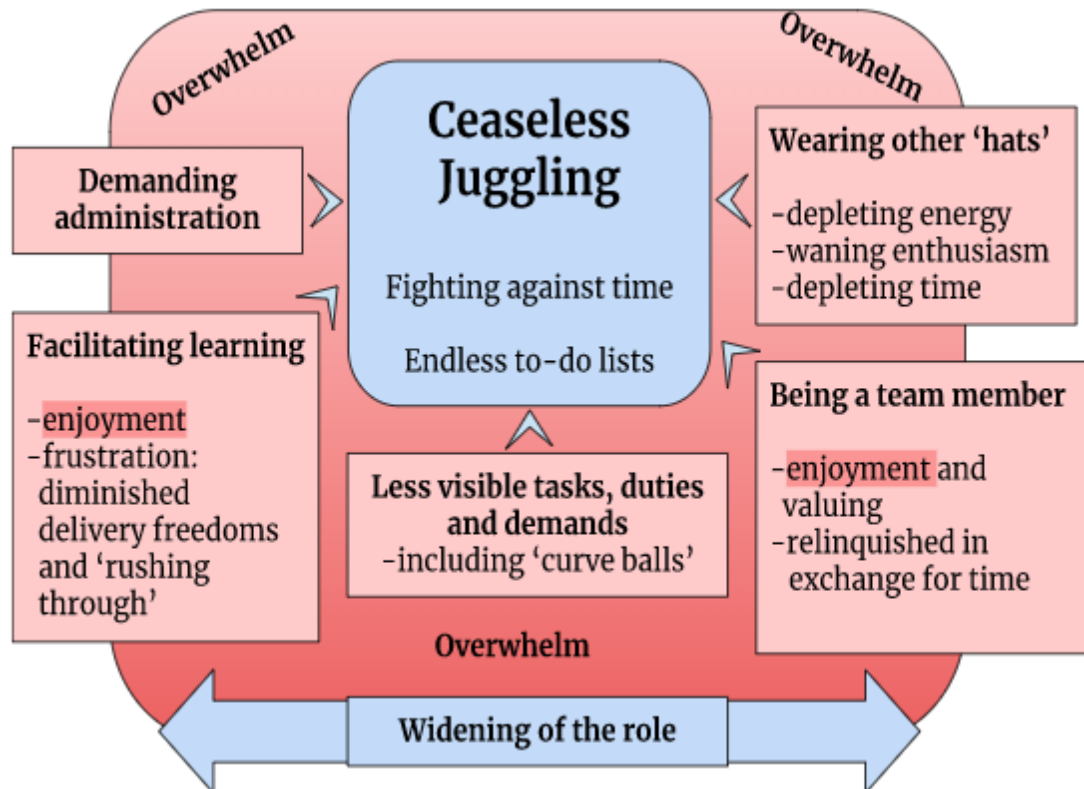


6.4 Situating the theory: Juggling

This section begins with a recap of Figure 8 (subcategories of Juggling) as shared in the findings chapter. It then proceeds to situate the elements of juggling within existing literature.

Figure 8

Theoretical Diagram Demonstrating the Contributors to 'Juggling' a Heavy Workload



'Juggling' was referred to many times by participants. It quickly became a label for initial codes, then focused code, then category - directly reflective of participants' language. When participants described their experiences, 'juggling' was frequently used to encapsulate teacher work. It comprises ceaseless work that feels 'never ending' to teachers, hence teachers have to-do lists which rarely, if ever, shorten; as one item is ticked off the list, another is usually added. The tasks and duties expected of teachers, from the research, fit within the domains in the diagram above.

6.4.1 What is juggling?

Juggling encompasses the carrying out of diverse tasks within the domains (Figure 8), the thinking about these tasks, the multitasking that teachers carry out within and across these domains, the task switching that is common (especially with the presence of curve balls and unanticipated demands) and the widening of the role that teachers are exposed to. It is a ceaseless, never-ending phenomenon which leaves participants feeling overwhelmed and time deficient.

Although this points to high workload, as suggested in the background literature (Smithers & Robinson, 2001, 2003; Barmby, 2006; Lindquist, 2014; Cochran & Smith, 2006), 'juggling' is both content and process based. It refers to both the nature of the heavy workload in the five domains identified in the research, *and* the process of managing work within and across the domains; juggling also has significant implications for time. It is more than the presence of and the working through heavy workload; juggling constitutes the process of managing the heavy and diverse workload over time, in addition to the juggling of personal ideals, values and narratives within the sociocultural context they work.

6.4.2 The classification of teacher work

Juggling involves moving between tasks in and across the domains in Figure 8: demanding administration; facilitating learning; being a team member; wearing other 'hats'; and completing less visible tasks, duties and demands. Classification of teacher work into domains or different areas has been carried out previously. Almost two decades ago, the STRB (2003) broke down the role of teaching into the following main areas: teaching; lesson preparation & marking; non-teaching contact with pupils and parents; school/staff management; administrative tasks; and Individual/professional development (Bubb & Earley, 2004). Comparisons can be made between the classification of teacher work in this research (Figure 8) and that of the STRB (2003).

To compare both classifications of teacher work, in this current study, lesson preparation and marking is subsumed under 'demanding administration'; teaching is named 'facilitating learning' to demonstrate that children take some responsibility for their learning and that learning is more than one directional (teacher directing children) and constitutes more than passing knowledge in one direction - knowledge is created and learning happens within the classroom between learners and teachers; 'non-teaching contact with pupils and parents' and 'individual/professional development' were mentioned by participants and these were subsumed within domains 'wearing other 'hats' and 'completing less visible tasks, duties and demands' but these domain headings provide for the wider range of activities mentioned by participants. School/staff management is

subsumed under 'wearing other hats' (e.g., subject leadership), but this also provides space for additional roles that were mentioned by participants such as after-school club leader or SENCO. There was no provision for this in the STRB (2003) report, perhaps because it was carried out two decades ago where the expectations of teachers with regards to these additional roles were far less common. This current research study demonstrates that each of the domains is constantly expanding and, as a result, teacher workload is growing. Not only is each of the domains growing, but there is also a 'widening of the role' over time to include more domains, and consequently, tasks within those too. In addition, it places 'being a team member' as an important process within the teaching role. Again, this was not declared in the STRB (2003) report.

6.4.3. Multitasking, task switching and intensification of work

One of the key components of Juggling involves multitasking and switching between tasks within one individual domain and across multiple domains in [Figure 8](#). This reflects the statement by Brante (2009) - that the teaching role is multifaceted. Arguably the most central of these tasks is facilitating learning or classroom teaching (Hargreaves, 1993). In this research, teachers suggested that it was the part of the role they enjoyed the most. However, Braak et al. (2022) suggests that "the teaching profession is characterised by increasingly complex job characteristics and a policy-driven focus away from core tasks to more peripheral tasks" (p. 13); this is reflective of the findings in this study.

Hargreaves (1993) acknowledges that the types of tasks undertaken by teachers can vary in nature and, as reflected in these research findings, states that some of the tasks are unnecessary. In this study, the participants described much of the administrative work as pointless. Hargreaves describes some tasks as 'invisible' which fits with the 'less visible' part of the juggling diagram above, listing marking books at home as one such task. Interestingly, Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) discuss teachers being asked to complete an increasing number of imposed tasks for which they have limited time and resources, due to societal changes, changes in expectations and with limited training. They believe this restricts the way teachers deliver lessons in the classroom and the time they have remaining to develop relationships with colleagues. The findings from this

research support this; teachers in the study felt that facilitating learning became less enjoyable when they had diminished delivery freedoms and were rushing through content. This research found that 'being a team member' was the one domain that was relinquished in exchange for time. Both facilitating learning and being a team member were the parts of the role that participants enjoyed the most and these parts kept them going. Schaefer (2021) states that teachers have a desire for connection and assistance in daily actions and this can be derived through the team and that student relationships sustain teachers. Given this, it is no wonder that facilitating learning was frequently mentioned at the most enjoyable part of the role for participants in this study. It is also, on paper, where teacher training programmes focus content, so being prepared to do this work is sustaining.

Both the data and the literature indicate that in recent years, parts of the role that extend beyond the classroom have grown and become more demanding (Hargreaves, 1993; Braak, 2022). This phenomenon can be described as 'intensification' (Apple, 1986). As illustrated in Figure 8, only one out of six domains' references classroom facilitation directly. The supplementary domains teachers are responsible to work within and across constitute significant work. Maclean (1992), Nias and Nias (1989), Snoek et al., (2019) note that a diversified role (horizontal promotion) can be helpful in retention, though this was not supported by the data in this research study.

Dealing with several things at the same time is the essence of teaching (Hargreaves, 1993). Even within the classroom when facilitating learning, Hargreaves explained how activities are 'juggled' by teachers' moment to moment depending on the changeability of the classroom. Brunce (2014) describes multitasking as brain-juggling. Seemingly, 'Juggling' was an apt language choice adopted by participants to reflect their experiences, not only in the classroom but far beyond. Teachers reported that they felt their role was much wider than might be expected of a teacher. They mentioned carrying out elements of roles of social worker and actor among others. Zivcakova (2014) suggests, for example, that teachers are expected to do work they would consider to be that of

a 'surrogate parent'. Brante (2009) references moral responsibility that teachers have towards the children in their care and the way in which they influence the children in terms of healthy life choices for example. More tasks are loaded onto the work of teachers over time reflecting societal shifts, but none is taken away, hence the widening of the role.

Stoneman (2007) explains that there can be difficulties distinguishing between tasks completed concurrently and those completed in immediate succession and concludes that it is difficult to distinguish between multitasking and busyness. However, Alquizar (2015) uses a wider definition of multitasking which includes completing two or more tasks in rapid succession or completed simultaneously. Multitasking is undoubtedly in place for teachers both within and across the domains in Figure 8. For teaching, Brante (2009) categorises multitasking in three ways: two actions at once; action whilst thinking of other actions; and work still in focus as work or as thinking in free time. The latter was certainly a finding in this research, for example, where a participant talked about thinking about the day ahead whilst in the shower at home. This brings in the first element of 'Struggling': 'being consumed by work', which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Summary point 1 (Juggling – classifying teacher work and multitasking 6.4.1 - 6.4.3)

Participants talked at length about the nature of their profession - it seems to be central to their thoughts about attrition and participants dedicated much of their interview time and visual representation space across to this. Juggling, therefore, became central to the substantive theory. Teachers commonly used the term 'juggling' when describing their work. Juggling is a complex process which is subject to intensification over time; it encapsulates the management of and working within (and across) five expanding domains, which widen over time in response to government or societal changes. It is a complex process and ceaseless phenomenon, at the mercy of unanticipated demands (curve balls). Time and attention appear to be driven away from the core, central task of facilitating learning, to more peripheral tasks, at the expense of teacher enthusiasm and enjoyment. Time pressure compounds the juggling process.

Some enjoyable aspects of the role, such as ‘being a team member’ or facilitating learning are relinquished when time is short. Emotions such as overwhelm and frustration result from the juggling process.

6.4.4 The complexities of multitasking and task switching in teaching

Brante (2009) acknowledges that multitasking in the teaching profession is complex. For a teacher, this may be demonstrated in the following example: a teacher supervises a class completing tasks, whilst thinking about what resources they will need to prepare for an after-school activity they are facilitating later that day and, at the same time, answering any questions from a group they are sitting with and supporting more closely in the classroom. This type of multitasking involves much more than the completion of a passive task (such as talking about their day) whilst concurrently completing a mechanical one (such as driving).

In this research, the high level of workload led to teachers struggling with ‘being consumed by work’ where work life balance was weighted heavily in favour of work. This is also suggested in literature as a problem emerging from the particular type of multitasking endured by teachers. Brante (2009) suggests a form of multitasking characterised by simultaneous phenomena that they call ‘synchronous work concept pairs’. They suggest that these concept pairs make teacher work more complicated and intense, though these may not be phenomena that teachers are overtly aware of. These concept pairs are significant though; they make choice, position and decision making more intense for teachers. One such concept pair is ‘governed and autonomous’; teachers are governed by the curriculum and leadership and governance of their school, yet at the same time autonomous to a degree within their own classrooms. ‘Knowledge and norms and values’ is another concept pair that they suggest teachers navigate on a regular basis; this relates strongly to the ‘widening of teacher role’ in [Figure 8](#), which was a key finding in this research. For example, this research showed that teachers need specialist curriculum knowledge to deliver all areas of the curriculum (from music to mathematics to PSHCE), yet they also may be called upon as a surrogate social worker where they are sharing

their own values and thoughts on a situation in the classroom or in a 'round the table' meeting with professionals.

The work by Brante (2009) on synchronous concept pairs further helps to demonstrate the nature of multitasking found in this study - which they describe as complex and intensive given that it influences teacher thinking and consciousness, within the juggling of domains that teachers are accustomed to.

6.4.5 The cost of multitasking in teacher work

Brante (2009) explains that the 'push and pull' of these concept pairs in action influences teachers' feelings of success or failure, stress levels and a consideration about whether their work is meaningful. This underlying tension around self-efficacy, besides the overt multitasking, was at play with participants in this research. It could undoubtedly have contributed to those feelings of overwhelm and feelings of failure (or never feeling that they had done enough) illustrated in this research, described in the findings chapter.

As shown in Figure 8, teachers experience curve balls or unanticipated interruptions to their schedules and plans. In this research, participants mentioned PPA time being cancelled at the last moment or needing to cover an assembly or playtime duty due to staff illness. This form of task switching is imposed on teachers. Task switching itself can be defined as 'moving quickly from one task to the next' and constitutes a form of multitasking. (Alquizar, 2015). Switching between tasks can be problematic as the human brain demonstrates resistance to adjust and attune to the new task and to stop processing the initial task. There is a 40% decline in productivity when switching tasks as opposed to continuing with the existing task. This cost increases as the complexity of the task increases according to Rogers and Monsell (1995). Given that teachers are carrying out complex tasks (Brante, 2009), it is highly likely that switching between tasks has a high cost to productivity, compounding those feelings of failure and contributing to the overwhelm associated with managing the diverse range of tasks which are 'never ending'. Further impacts of multitasking are

discussed later in this chapter, along with an exploration of the impacts of the widening of the role.

6.4.6 Time and multitasking in teacher work

In this research, juggling led to a feeling of fighting against time. Examining the relationship between time and multitasking/role widening is important. Teachers' work is made up of a multitude of competing tasks and responsibilities, limited by the time they have available (Braak et al., 2022). With intensified work (Apple, 1986), increased tasks, a widened role and heightened expectations, multitasking leads to loss of time due to constant thought-adjustment (Brante, 2009); with already insufficient time and resources (Hargreaves, 1993) this can prove difficult to manage.

In this research, teachers talked about never having enough time and these 'verbal gauntlets' (Hargreaves, 1993) related to time deficit were commonly repeated by teachers in this study. A conflict of time between teachers and administrators/leaders ensues, and in this research, certainly seemed to be present between teachers and leaders. Jackson (1968) explains that the feeling of a primary classroom is one of immediacy where teachers and children are operating in a densely packed world and turn their attention to many things simultaneously.

Bluedorn et al. (1992) and Hargreaves (1993) juxtapose two different time frames: monochrome and polychrome. A primary teacher's world is primarily polychrome in character - people responding to contexts and lots happening at the same time. Whereas administrators often work in a monochrome timeframe where one task is completed at a time, to a schedule with limited sensitivity to context. They state that problems can occur when administrators (or leaders) place monochronic time constraints on those working within a polychronic time frame. This can create misunderstanding, tension and conflict, especially when inflexible, unrealistic change plans are imposed. Hargreaves (1993) states that the self-defeating process of intensification is as a result of such discrepant time perspectives and widening divisions between those who teach and those who are

distanced from the classroom (such as administrators). Interestingly in this study, teachers valued leaders who were still close to teaching - they felt they better understood the realities they faced. Interestingly, in this research, leadership which was unsupportive (for example with regard to workload and time) was classed as a stressor worsening the struggling felt by teachers. When tasks were set from a monochronic perspective by leaders such as tick box exercises to be completed for a given deadline, these were seen as 'pointless' by teachers.

Braak et al. (2022) suggest that questionnaires to examine time spent on teacher workload can be flawed and advocate the use of time-diaries to map workload detail accurately and provide an accurate representation of the time spent on work, to avoid burnout and attrition. Workload influences how teachers spend their working time and is a factor in the attrition of novice teachers (Braak et al., 2022) and a factor influencing work-life imbalance.

6.4.7 The impact of juggling on teachers

When teachers are directed by external forces (such as leadership or administration) it leads them to feel a sense of accountability and a need to 'prove' themselves as a teacher; this can undermine their self-confidence (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). In this research, there was a strong sense from participants of feeling that their efforts to manage were not good enough and a sense of failure ensued (discussed later in the chapter). Perhaps this was partly due to being directed to tasks by leaders.

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) also describe how the 'intensification' of the teaching profession (due to increased imposed tasks with little time) leads to less creativity in the classroom, fewer opportunities to develop relationships with the team and a negative impact on their private lives. Their research mirrors the findings of this research where facilitating learning became less enjoyable when teachers felt they had to 'rush through' delivery of concepts or their delivery of sessions in a way that was not congruent with their ideals. In addition, this research found that 'being a team member' was one of their work domains which was relinquished to gain time back to spend on their to-do-lists. The juggling of

the role leads to overwhelm and struggle which is underlined by them being consumed by teaching. This can also lead to burn out (Brante, 2009). Charlton (2010) noted that teachers who systematically multitasked had weakened mental health. Multitasking itself can also lead to stress and lower quality of work (Brante, 2009). Though teachers enjoyed each day being different, juggling can lead to negative consequences over time.

In addition, multitasking can lead to feelings of under-accomplishment and fatigue (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009). No wonder then, the research findings showed that participants felt a strong sense that their work was never enough. Brante (2009) stated that the synchronous concept pairs related to multitasking lead to feelings about success with their work and a questioning and comparison as to whether their work was meaningful. This was reflected in this study too; teachers began to struggle with the overwhelm of the juggle and then through the consumption and making realisations about the meaningfulness of their role.

Summary point 2 (Juggling and its consequences)

The juggling process involves complex and intensive multitasking. The juggling process leads to work-life imbalance (teachers being consumed by work) as they attempt to work against time to sustain the level of juggling required to ensure all domains of the role are completed to their satisfaction. However, this is ceaseless and can therefore have negative consequences, particularly on emotion, such as feelings of failure, overwhelm, under-accomplishment and fatigue.

6.4.8 Summary of 'Situating the theory: Juggling'

Findings from this study showed that teacher work is incredibly diverse but can be classified as falling within five expanding domains (facilitating learning; demanding administration; wearing other 'hats'; being a team member and less visible tasks, duties and demands). A widening of the role is at play, further extending the work teachers are responsible for. Teachers split their time between tasks within and across these domains, feeling some tasks are unnecessary or pointless (especially within the 'demanding administration'

domain). The nature of the tasks and work is varied – for example, some is imposed by others, some is teacher initiated, some workload is viewed as unnecessary, some critical. In addition to carrying out the tasks themselves, teachers have further work in managing these demands, such as switching between tasks, multitasking and prioritising. This ceaseless juggling leads to teachers feeling that they are fighting against time, never having time to complete their list of work. In turn, teachers reported a feeling of overwhelm. Table 4 summarises existing literature about the nature of teacher work. In particular, this ceaseless juggling led to the first and second elements of the next section ‘struggling’: ‘being consumed’ and ‘making realisations’. It also directly leads to the ‘feeling of failure’ described later in this chapter and within the findings chapter.

Table 4

What Literature is Relevant to the Juggling’ Phenomenon?

Nature of teacher work - nature of ‘juggling’	Impact of ‘juggling’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is multifaceted (Brante, 2009) • Involves ‘brain juggling’ (Brunce, 2014) • Is complex (Braak et al, 2022) • Involves a widening of the role (Zivcakova, 2014) • Is subject to intensification over time (Apple, 1986) • Further extends work of Apple (1986) and state that teacher work is characterised by an ‘experience of intensification’ (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of creativity, team work and a work-life imbalance (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009) • Feelings of success or failure, stress, and a questioning of meaningfulness (Brante, 2009) • High productivity costs - from task switching (Rogers & Monsell, 1995; Alquizar, 2015) • Loss of time - from thought-adjustment (Brante, 2009) • Lower quality of work (Brante, 2009) • Time tension and conflict (Hargreaves, 1993)

-
- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Involves complex multitasking with synchronous concept pair and moral responsibility (Brante, 2009)• It involves task switching (Alquizar, 2015; Rogers & Monsell, 1995) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work-life imbalance (Braak et al, 2022)• Burnout (Brante, 2009)• A weakened mental health (Charlton, 2010)• Under accomplishment (Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009) |
|---|---|
-

Many of the impacts of teacher work (juggling) listed in Table 4 were findings of this research. Brante (2009) however, found that the quality of work was lower. Though this was not explicit in this study, it could be said that this was implied and teachers had a felt sense of this as they commonly shared that they felt as though they were failing or not good enough.

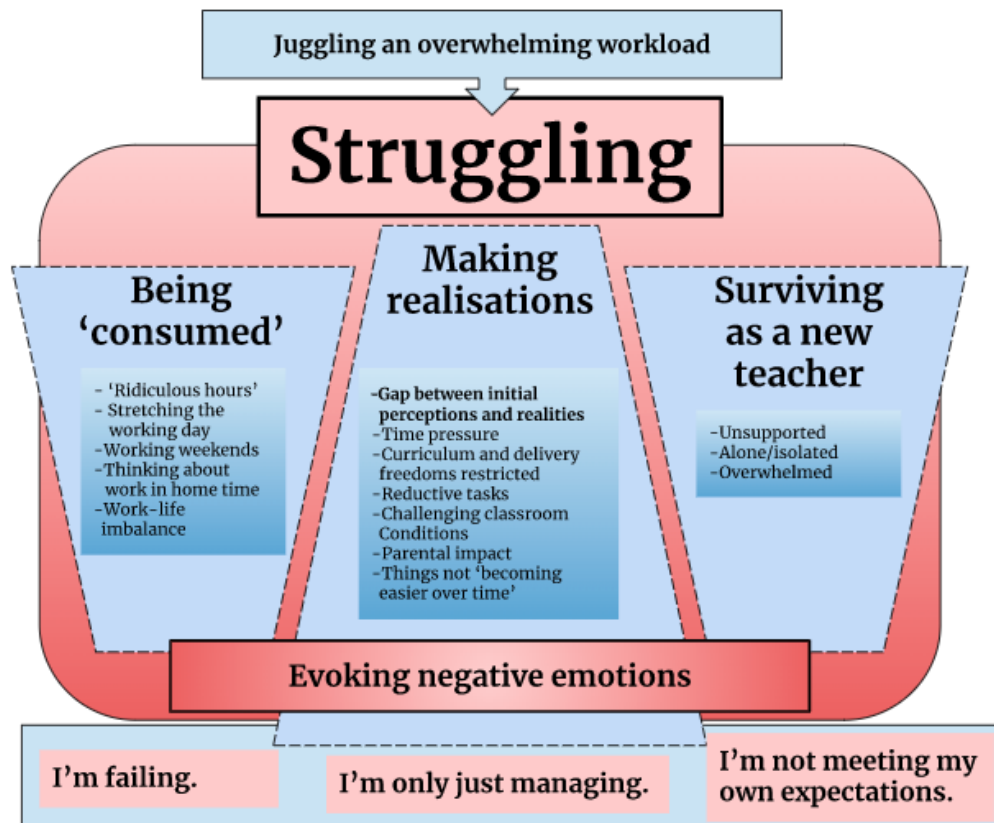
Work-life imbalance in this research was fuelled by the lack of available time teachers felt they needed for their 'juggling'. As stated above, work life imbalance was also stated as a consequence of teacher work by Ballet & Kelchtermans (2009) and Braak et al. (2022). 'Being consumed' sits within the category: struggling and is the next area of focus in this chapter and conceptualises the research findings around this work-life imbalance.

6.5 Situating the theory: Struggling

This section begins with a recap of Figure 9 (the components of struggling) as shared in the findings chapter. It then proceeds to situate the elements of struggling within existing literature; each element of the struggle (blue quadrilaterals) is explored under a separate subheading within section 6.5.

Figure 9

Theoretical Diagram Demonstrating the Elements of ‘Struggling’ that Teachers Faced



6.5.1 Teachers struggling as a result of being consumed (see Figure 9)

Being consumed represents the parts of the findings which showed that being a teacher led to a work-life balance heavy in favour of work. This was evidenced

by teachers working 'ridiculous hours', through a stretching of the working day and working at weekends, in addition to working already long hours. However, 'being consumed' represented even more than this, including teachers continually thinking about work in their personal time and them feeling that they miss out on having a social life because of work. Similarly, Clandinin et al. (2015) found that it was difficult for participants to compose and live a sustainable life both in school and out of school contexts.

Difficulties measuring teachers time in work

There are a multitude of surveys which aim to collect information about working hours of teachers; though they all ask similar questions, they do this in different ways, hence there is discrepancy between the reported hours worked across surveys. In addition, the nature of the surveys can differ in terms of the survey design, number and nature of participants and time of year conducted, all of which can impact the results. Zuccollo (2019) suggests some of the difficulties in measuring teacher working hours: "Not only do teachers work most of their hours outside the classroom, and often outside the school, but their tasks can be difficult to classify reliably. How many hours should they allocate for marking books while watching Poldark? Does a lunch club they started count as a break or work? The blurring of work and non-work time, along with most teachers working far more than their contracted hours, makes reliable measurement difficult." In addition, often what should be measured cannot be measured so teachers spend time on things that can be measured. Roughly speaking though, despite all the issues surrounding measuring teachers working hours, the consensus is that over the last eight years, teachers have been working on average 50 hours per week.

The data on teacher time

Almost two decades ago, Bubb & Earley (2004) recognised that over a quarter of teacher work gets carried out outside of 9-5 hours, with 7-9% being carried out at weekends. They also reported that 7-14% of work is carried out after 6pm or before school starts on weekdays. They state that 12% of working hours are

spent on admin tasks. Almost two thirds of this 'out of hours' work time is spent primarily on administrative tasks: planning and marking.

Over the last decade, changes have been made in attempts to reduce planning, marking and administration time (such as the introduction of the Department for Education School Workload Reduction Toolkit, 2018); this could be one of the factors resulting in a slightly lower number of weekly hours worked between the 2016 and 2019 teacher workload survey (TWS). Despite this, the TWS (2019) however found that 70% of primary teachers consider workload to be a serious problem - and this comes, one year after the School Workload Reduction Toolkit (2018) was published. The OECD (2018) also found that full time primary teachers in England work an average of 52.1 hours per week (more than every other country apart from Japan), with 53% of primary teachers stating their workload is unmanageable.

The Department for Education, in their 'factors affecting teacher retention' report (2018) found that two thirds of teachers found their level of workload was unsustainable and this negatively impacted their ability to uphold an appropriate work-life balance. The findings in this report mirrored the ones in the previous (Juggling) section where specific elements of their workload included marking, planning, 'duties beyond their teaching role' and an 'excessive number of hours spent working'. The latter heavily infringed on their work life balance. The Teacher Workload Survey (TWS) (2019) respondents reported "they could not complete their workload within their contracted hours, that they did not have an acceptable workload, and that they did not achieve a good work-life balance" (Department for Education, 2021). Despite government attempts to reduce workload, it remains a significant factor for teachers.

It seems, therefore, that workload (juggling), impinges heavily on work-life balance and this fits with the theory that teachers feel consumed by their working life. The TWS (2019) in particular demonstrates that the hours worked are still higher than those found in an average working week, and it identifies that though the exact number of hours worked per week is slightly lower than in 2016, the perception of heavy workload and little work-life balance rings true for teachers.

How does this research extend the existing literature base?

The TWS (2019) demonstrates that though working hours have reduced marginally since 2013, the average working week is still high at around 50 hours per week for primary teachers. This slim reduction has taken place since the School Workload Reduction Toolkit (2018) was published. Since then, the Teacher Workload and Wellbeing Charter was published and resulted in publication of the DfE Education Staff Wellbeing Charter. It is highly evident that the government acknowledges the high intensity workload faced by teachers and is attempting to make improvements. However, the issue remains - this research was conducted in 2021 when the School Workload Reduction Toolkit (2018) had already been in place for a number of years. The NFER states that “improving teachers’ perceptions of their workload involves more than reducing the number of hours worked” Department for Education (2019). In this research, teachers still reported working ‘ridiculous’ hours, though the reports show a marginal decrease in hours worked. What my research notably demonstrates is that teachers are ‘consumed by work’. This ‘being consumed by work’ phenomena is underlined by teachers using their own strategies (such as stretching the working day) in attempts to maximise their ability to meet the demands of the ‘juggling’ (high workload) they face. Not only does it involve working long hours, but also thinking about work when not at work and taking work home - lots of strategies that teachers have employed to attempt to navigate the high levels of workload they endure. Teachers’ perceptions held of their workload are therefore unsurprisingly high as they are thinking about work much of the time, even when not at work, or whilst completing other tasks at home. My research demonstrates that teacher work is pervasive and consumes the mind much of the time.

Attempts are being made by the government to introduce a wellbeing agenda for teachers and wider staff in school. This follows the results of a multitude of surveys showing that workload and number of hours worked by teachers in England is among the highest in the world. This new emphasis on teacher wellbeing is very much needed, as the findings from this research demonstrate that the juggling and struggling (including ‘being consumed’) experienced by teachers leads to negative emotions being evoked.

6.5.2 Teachers struggling as a result of making realisations (see Figure 9)

Participants entered the profession mainly for altruistic reasons; they were driven to make a difference to children's lives; they felt that work with children would be intrinsically rewarding. However, the nature of their 'Juggling' influenced how teachers felt about the role as time went on. Their initial perceptions of the role became removed from their reality (Clandinin et al., 2015). For example, time pressure that they were under became problematic as it meant that less time could be spent on facilitating lessons in the way that participants would have liked. They felt that their autonomy and creativity in facilitating learning was reduced and that they were not able to teach in the way they had imagined, or they were 'rushing through' content though they knew this would be defeating. This clashed with their initial reasons to enter teaching - to inspire and make a difference. Pillen (2013) discusses a similar phenomenon where there was a tension between participants personal and professional identity and an internal struggle between the way they were teaching vs their ideal.

Challenging classroom conditions such as difficult to manage behaviour had been an area that participants felt was neglected by training through their route into teaching, though in reality they realised that this was a significant part of their role. In addition, large class sizes and the implications of these for facilitating lessons further impinged on teachers' creativity and the thoughts about teaching in a different way than they would prefer. This further negatively impacted teachers internal struggle yet were areas teachers felt they could have been better prepared for.

As a result, over time, participants felt as though they were 'failing' in some way, or that their efforts were insufficient. Their thoughts about their capacity to teach changed (Avalos & Valenzuela, 2016). This was mainly due to the 'being consumed' by the juggling. Should teachers have had more time to focus on 'facilitating learning', as opposed to the other domains in the diagram, their reality may have felt different, a closer match for their expectations. Perhaps though,

participant expectations were impacted in some way by some unrealistic advertisements around teaching (Carr, 2020).

Struggling when making realisations about the profession or being consumed by teaching leads to the evoking of negative emotions such as a feeling of failure or negative thoughts around self-efficacy. Many struggles within teaching are discussed within literature, but the emotion and feeling behind the 'Struggle' is often unexplored in literature, though it is a significant factor for attrition. Another form of struggle identified by this research was the struggle to survive the initial year of teaching, which is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

6.5.3. Struggling to survive as new teachers

Many of the aforementioned struggles were most acute for newly qualified teachers or NQTs (now commonly referred to as ECTs) in their initial year of teaching. Both NQT and ECT will be used interchangeably in this section because participants often referred to their initial year of teaching as their NQT year (this was how it was referenced when they were new teachers some years ago). However, current, or recent literature refers to this period of teaching and the following year as ECT years.

In my research, participants recollected that during their initial year of teaching in particular, they felt overwhelmed, unsupported, and alone/isolated. These feelings are mirrored in earlier research focusing on NQT/ECT experiences. Williams, Morse and Yates (2005) found that NQTs describe the role as lonely and isolating and stated that physical proximity to support is important. Hopkins (1990) stated that teachers are better able to implement new ideas if working in relation to others within a supportive context. For some time, it has been identified that being a new teacher can be an isolating experience and a time when teachers feel most alone. The Department for Education's Early Career Framework (ECF) (2019) formed part of the government's recruitment and retention strategy. This document aims to help ECT's succeed in their initial two years of teaching and extended statutory induction to two years, in addition to providing an additional 5% non-contact time (PPA) for teachers in their second

year. It provides a framework of standards (such as 'manage behaviour effectively') to help guide the practice of ECTs to help them do the job well, with the support of a dedicated mentor. Prior to this, an NQT was provided with a mentor for their NQT year. Though the ECF initiative provides training, guidance and support for mentors so they can fulfil this role and guide and support ECTs in the best way, it does not acknowledge the isolation/aloneness felt by new teachers, nor make practical suggestions about how new teachers should be supported when feeling this way.

Bubb (2003) explains how NQTs can be most acutely impacted by stress, yet most teacher CPD courses aimed at this managing stress are directed at experienced teachers, despite there being a strong need for this form of support for ECTs too. Most support and guidance for ECTs comes formally from an induction tutor and mentor, and informally from their relationships with colleagues. My research found that it would also be beneficial for that network to widen to their peers in other settings too. Ultimately, collegial relationships, feeling a sense of belonging within the setting and having strong support can be protective factors in preventing attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) these may be acutely needed, especially in the beginning years.

Some participants felt that teachers leave directly because of juggling or struggling. Other research demonstrates that where participants' perception of what they would be able to achieve differed with the reality of their role, this part of the struggle is particularly influential in attrition. For example, Amitai and Houte (2022) reference 'conscientious objectors' who refuse to work in conditions that interfere or contrast with their core values and beliefs.

6.5.4 Summary of 'Situating the theory: Struggling

Teachers felt consumed by teaching. Participants reported that their work-life balance felt weighed down by work. Though studies mirror that teachers work long hours, what this study demonstrates is that teachers think about work when they are not present at work. They are emotionally and cognitively engaged in part of their work even when home. Being consumed by teaching is a pervasive

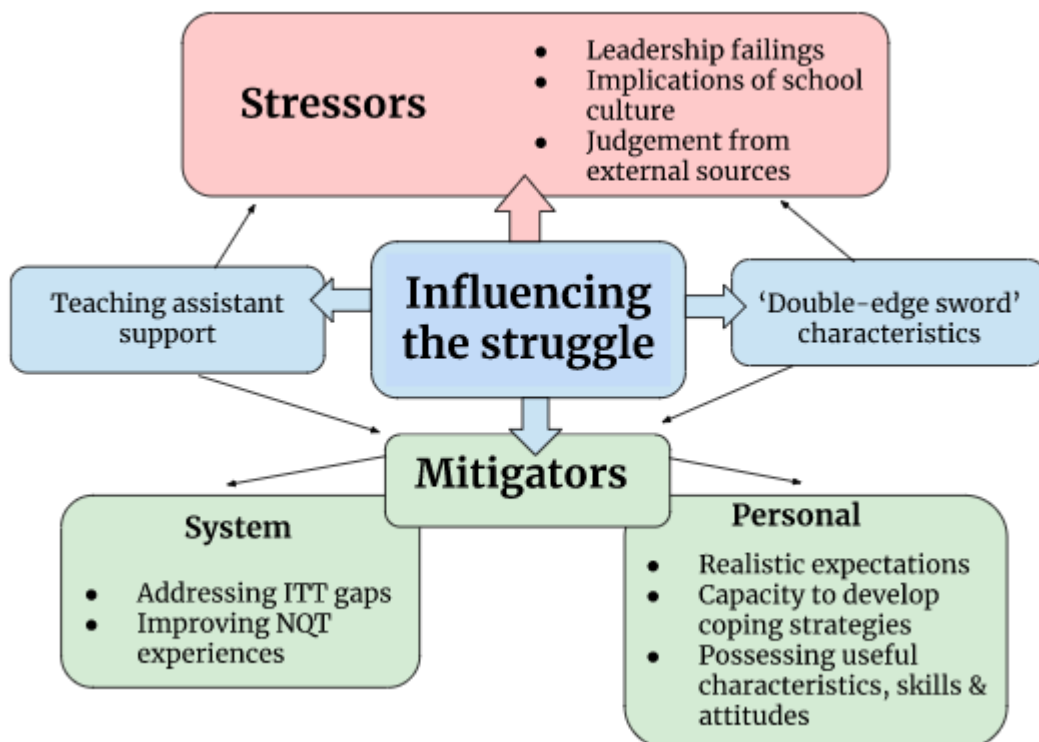
phenomenon. This adds to difficulties often experienced in ECT years such as isolation and lack of support (that can, at that time, lead directly to attrition). It combines also with the realisations that teachers are making about how teaching compares with the realities they face. This internal tension, where values fail to match the reality of the role, and the lack of work life balance combine, and a difficult struggle emerges for teachers.

6.6 Situating the theory: Influences on the struggle

This section begins with a recap of Figure 11 (components of Influences on the Struggle) as shared in the findings chapter. It then proceeds to situate the stressors and mitigators within existing literature; each sub-category of the struggle (e.g., stressors, mitigators and double edge sword characteristics) are explored through sections 6.6.1 - 6.6.3.

Figure 11

Influences on the Juggle and Struggle that Teachers Face



What are mitigators and stressors?

Research findings showed that the juggling and struggling faced by participants was made worse or better by several influencing factors (shown in Figure 11). Mitigators made the juggling or struggling easier, whereas stressors worsened the juggling or struggling faced by teachers. Other researchers in the field found similar phenomena, for example: Borman and Dowling (2008) called them 'factors that moderate attrition outcomes', Cha and Cohen-Vogel (2011) named them 'mediating variables' and Amitai and Houtte (2022) referenced 'push and pull' factors. They define push factors as work-related factors that push teachers away at a personal, school or career level. Pull factors, on the other hand, were factors that kept the teachers tied to their positions, such as the teaching itself, or being a team player. These could also be external 'magnets' which pull the teachers away to another profession. Interestingly, both the facilitating of learning and being a part of a team were domains that teachers enjoyed as part of their role, so in this research they could be defined as 'protective factors' to some extent. In fact, Carver-Thomas, and Darling-Hammond (2017) define collegial relationships as protective factors. Other 'protective factors' which can guard against attrition are school culture and nature of context (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In this research, school culture emerged as a 'stressor' rather than a 'mediator', due to the experiences participants shared. It should be noted, however, that stressors could be mitigators and vice versa, in different circumstances for different participants. The findings in this study matches the literature around teacher participants simultaneously mentioning 'push' and 'pull' factors (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). Whether an influencing factor was a stressor or mitigator in this research depended on the stories shared by participants about their experiences. This is affirmed by Keltchermans (2017). They state that attrition and retention are both sides of the same coin. Sometimes, knowing what stressors can be can lead to them becoming mitigators later, thereby potentially avoiding some attrition. Again, for example, Cochran-Smith (2006) advocates that supportive leadership can be a mitigator, though in this research leadership was identified by participants as being a stressor or negative influencing factor.

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2009) have a definition most similar to the one used in this research: 'stressors and mitigators influencing the struggle'. They explain that school factors and processes play a mediating role in the intensification of workload. These factors, they say, either decrease the compelling demands or reinforce the demands. Similarly, in this discussion, mitigating factors decrease the struggle associated with juggling and stressors reinforce or worsen the struggle.

6.6.1 Mitigators

6.6.1.1 System Mitigators

System mitigators are factors external to the teacher (though they may be external, they involve do interaction with the person) that eased the struggling that participants faced (or that participants felt would ease the struggling that they faced), either by easing the juggling which would in turn ease the struggle, or by easing one of the elements of the struggle, such as 'making realisations'.

One such system mitigator found in this study was to address initial teacher training (ITT) or initial teacher education (ITE) (as it is more recently known) shortfalls by plugging gaps in training which would increase participants' awareness of and preparedness for the role of teaching, such as providing classroom and behaviour management training and additional in-depth training for delivering specialist subjects such as music or PE. Harrell (2004) and Poznanski et al. (2018) found that there was a significant gap in teachers' knowledge about classroom management in their research, which further strengthens the importance of meeting this training need. Though not mentioned explicitly by participants in this research, perhaps providing support at this stage in developing relational agency which will be demanded by the role may also be incredibly helpful as students transition into teaching, given that feeling supported and being able to be part of a team are important protective factors (Schaefer et al., 2021). Kelchtermans (2017) also recognise that most teacher training/education programmes have a dyadic focus and pay little attention to the job which involves so much more (as has already been outlined in the 'juggling'

section). My research seems to highlight that, over time, the widening of the role and continued expansion of the current dimensions of the role (as described in the Juggling section) has been neglected in the initial teacher education received by participants.

A further system mitigator identified in this research was improving NQT (ECT) experiences. Participants felt that getting through the NQT year was challenging but that lots could be done to improve this experience. Their ideas included spending time in different school contexts to try out a term in each school, or having reduced responsibilities such as no full class teaching and pastoral responsibility for their initial year so that they could be oriented to the school procedures and processes first. Support was another important factor for participants; teachers felt that having the right support during this initial year was crucial as being an ECT can be a lonely and isolating experience. Similarly, Borman and Dowling (2008) found that the ECT process had been slow to develop a systematic way to induct beginners into such a complex job and the result of this is isolation and loneliness. Ensuring that new teachers are starting their career in satisfactory conditions is important because many new teachers find themselves in situations that experienced teachers would not want and can also feel like outsiders (Schaefer et al., 2013). Collaboration and mentoring should form integral parts of the NQT experience (Borman & Dowling, 2008; Harrell, 2004). Long et al. (2012) add that though induction and mentoring is usually put forward as a solution to attrition, they found no direct link between quality of induction/mentoring and attrition in their study (which utilised Wood & Stanulis' (2009) criteria for quality induction). They did find, however, that there can be differences between leaders and new teachers' perceptions of good support. Perhaps more needs to be done to seek out the opinions of teachers whilst they are within their ECT years to discover more about what they deem to be appropriate and useful support. In my research, participants felt that a better ECT experience would lessen the struggle that a teacher faces, though even in difficult circumstances it may not directly lead to retention (Long et al., 2012).

6.6.1.2 Personal Mitigators

Personal mitigators are factors that help to ease the impact of juggling and struggling experienced over time which are inherent to the individual teacher. Possessing useful characteristics, attitudes and skills was one of the personal mitigators that was evident in this research.

The substantive theory added to the growing body of literature on resilience and adaptability in teaching. These two characteristics were identified in the study as being incredibly useful characteristics for teachers to have at hand. Arnup and Bowles (2016) and Day and Gu (2009) similarly state that resilience is key to remaining committed to the profession and for warding off stress and exhaustion linked to the nature of the job. One notable difference between the findings in this study and the extant literature is that resilience and adaptability were just two of many characteristics, attitudes, and skills that they felt were important protective factors from attrition. Other characteristics identified as being useful included having a sense of humour, patience, enthusiasm, being hard working, accepting change and having the ability to switch off - which are not so frequently noted in the literature. Up to now, resilience and adaptability appear to have been the main focus of studies on teacher characteristics and attrition. Schaefer (2013), however, points out that supportive communities can develop resilience – perhaps, in light of this, resilience could move away from being an inherent trait to a system or contextual matter. Clandinin et al. (2015) state that the ability for teachers to change their story and no longer strive for perfectionism is useful too, and in this study, perfectionism was mentioned as a ‘double edge sword’ characteristic – though it can prove useful, over time, participants recognised that it could prove to be destructive.

This data from this study was different to others in that participants talked freely about attitudes that they felt were useful protective factors such as being ‘thick skinned’, open minded and having a love of learning (growth mindset). In addition, they had the space to discuss skills and abilities they felt were helpful for teachers such as organisational skills, time management skills, communication skills, creativity and technological skills. The data in this study brought a wider understanding of the personal resources that can aid teachers in their juggle (in meeting the demands of the job), thereby decreasing the impact of the juggling

itself and the struggling that often follows and leads to attrition. Being able to balance the demands of the job and personal resources to meet the demands can be important for job satisfaction (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, cited by Den Brok et al., 2017).

Findings noted that having the ability to develop coping strategies was important in order to cope with demands of the job over time. In particular, the data showed that participants picked up valuable, prized tips from colleagues which aided them in negotiating the day to day demands of juggling. Such tips included workshopping in lessons which reduced subsequent marking workload and completing administration tasks in class time once learners were engaged with their work. This demonstrates the importance of teachers being part of a collaborative team – not only is it an area of juggling that is enjoyed by teachers but it has useful implications too which can ease the struggle they face. The ability to develop relationships within the team is incredibly important in order to have access and share coping strategies (Clandinin et al., 2015). This study finding resonates with Schaefer's (2013) point; if the community is a supportive one, resilience will develop; the team is important and there lies a desire for connection and assistance in daily actions.

The substantive theory highlighted realistic expectations as a mitigating factor. The study found participants felt that having realistic expectations, grounded in understanding and experience of the role of teacher, from their own insights, were important in preparing teachers for the realities of the job - the juggling. Having realistic expectations could help to mitigate the struggle - especially 'making realisations', where teachers began to question the role and how their initial perceptions were different to the reality. This adds to the body of existing literature examining expectations and attrition. Realistic expectations prevent teachers becoming disillusioned and disappointed (Den Brok et al., 2017) and experience in similar contexts can help prevent 'practice shock' (Stokking et al., 2003). Schaefer (2013) outlines one expectation that teachers may have: to make connections with students - and states that challenges teachers face in their day-to-day role may make this expectation difficult to attain in reality; as a result, a moral dilemma can emerge. Such moral dilemmas could add to the ones in the

struggling section where, for example, where teachers struggle to grapple with the notion that the style and content of their teaching is constrained or conflicting with their values and intentions. Initial optimism can lead to disillusionment, then attrition if teachers experience 'arrested development' where their growth is restricted and there is a lack of emotional support in the school culture (Gallant & Riley, 2014). Kyriacov and Kunc (2007) created four categories (supportive school management, adequate time, attentive and cooperative students, and a happy personal life) and explained that if teachers experience disappointment between what they expected in those areas and the reality, they are more likely to express negative thoughts about teaching and reassess its suitability for themselves. The findings from this study depicted leadership as a stressor, and 'being consumed by work' as a way in which they began to struggle, meaning that three of those four categories were talked about negatively in some way. However, in my study, more often than not, participants had expected this, it came as no surprise, especially the need to take work home and how the role of teacher would impact on their personal life. Though they had realistic expectations about this, the day to day feeling of living this way led to strong negative emotions being evoked over time - not purely disappointment. Clandinin et al. (2015) discuss how there can be, for some, a 'temporal unfolding' - a changing of their story as they make realisations. For example, teachers may tell themselves that it will get easier after the initial year, to get by. The imagined story of teaching can be very different to real experience, leading to uncertainty. Having spaces to negotiate this change in expectation could be crucial in reducing attrition. One participant talked about a peer supervision session which allowed for a free-flowing discussion about the challenges faced and perhaps more spaces like this, or opportunities for teachers to talk about their feelings related to the role could be useful (a system like the one nurses have – where clinical supervision takes place separately to management supervision).

6.6.2 Double-edge sword characteristics

Uniquely, findings noted 'double-edge sword characteristics'. These are personal characteristics that can have both favourable and unfavourable outcomes or consequences. The substantive theory highlighted perfectionism, approachability

and people pleasing tendencies as double-edge sword characteristics. These characteristics could be beneficial characteristics for teachers to hold, or, at times, prove to worsen the struggle that the teachers faced, primarily adding to the juggling of an overwhelming workload pressure they already faced.

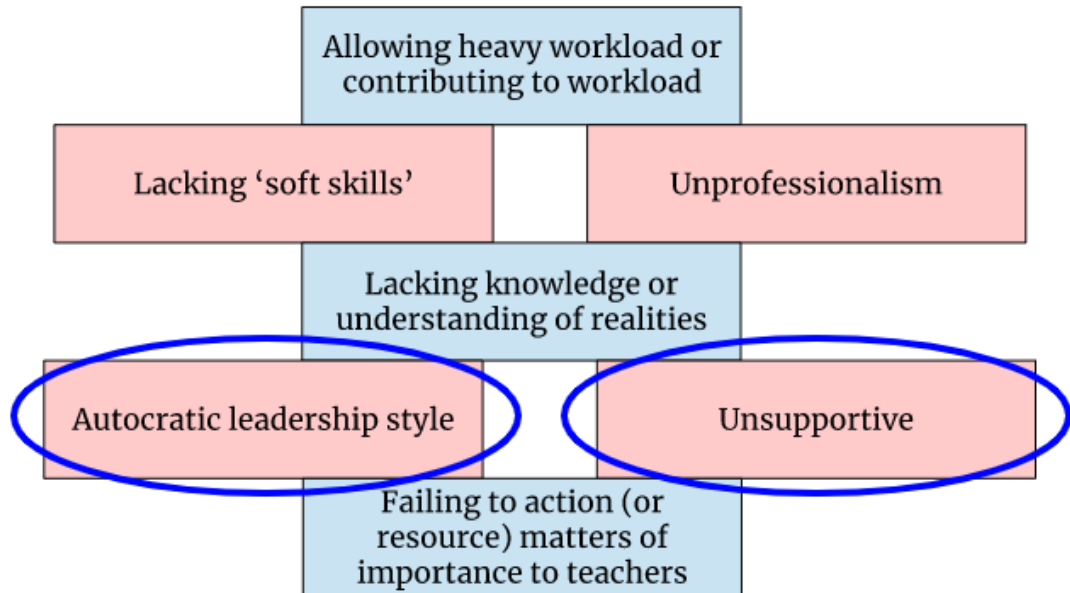
Perfectionism can be defined as ‘the tendency to hold and pursue idealised standards’ (Jones, 2016). Few researchers have specifically examined perfectionism among teachers (Shim et al., 2020). Jones (2016) split perfectionism into three component parts: standards, order and discrepancy and found that overall they were not predictors of retention, though there was a discrepancy between long term suburban teachers and long-term urban teachers in the ‘order’ dimension (e.g. tolerating things not going to plan). This study also does not make a direct link between perfectionism and attrition, it is simply stated in the findings that perfectionism has both good and bad consequences (can be a stressor or a mitigator). One negative consequence of perfectionism is overwhelm, as the goals and ambitions set are already considerably high, this on top of an overwhelming workload (Jones, 2016) and less job satisfaction (Shim et al., 2020) could prove detrimental. Positive consequences include motivational benefits for both teachers and students (Shim, 2020). Though there is minimal literature on perfectionism and teacher attrition, literature is even more scant for approachability and people pleasing. Simply put, my research showed that though approachability could be seen positively (children, parents and staff could approach and build rapport with teachers), it also meant that more time was often demanded of such teachers hence a compounding the ‘being consumed’ component of the struggle. People pleasing was seen as positive because teachers felt intrinsically motivated by helping others, yet more than necessary was often demanded of these teachers by peers and leaders, leading to an even greater level of overwhelm and pressure when engaged with juggling. Strikingly, most of the positive consequences were mainly of benefit to others, not the teacher themselves and most of the negative consequences only directly impacted the teacher.

6.6.3 Stressors

The substantive theory noted the presence of stressors which worsened the juggling and struggling that teacher encountered. These stressors were all external to the individual though interaction between teacher and stressor was present; some influence could be exerted over the stressors by teachers at times, though the influence was mainly in the direction of stressor to teacher. The study showed that stressors were impactful, difficult to manage or control, and had negative consequences for their juggling and struggling.

6.6.3.1 Leadership

The data from this study matched the literature's recognition that leadership can be a key aggravator for attrition, though it is just one piece of the attrition puzzle, among many others (Day & Gu, 2009; Pillen, 2013; Player et al., 2017). Menzies et al. (2015) place a greater emphasis on the role of leadership on attrition than this study, and others. This study found that leadership indirectly influenced attrition through impacting juggling and struggling; it seemed to influence the levels of workload teachers faced, the extent to which they became consumed by workload and how supported teachers felt. In addition, leadership strongly impacted the school culture, which in turn, was another stressor that participants noted. There is commonality between these findings and those in other research studies. Findings indicated seven areas in which participants felt that leaders failed them (Figure 12).

Figure 12*Seven Areas of Leadership Failure*

Note. The substantive theory shared findings from existing literature around two elements of 'leadership failing'. Figure 12 has been adapted minimally from how it is depicted in the findings chapter to demonstrate this – the two elements of leadership failure noted in existing literature are identified by blue ovals.

In the existing attrition literature, lack of support from the principal/headteacher is shown to have a powerful negative impact (Pillen, 2013; Gallant & Riley, 2014; Borman & Dowling, 2008). This study supports those findings. In the data, where participants felt unsupported by leaders, this contributed to strong negative feelings. Interestingly though, what constitutes 'good support' can be perceived differently by leaders and teachers and this can also be dependent on the career stage (Gallant & Riley, 2014). Leadership support needs to be adaptive to the needs of teachers at different stages of their careers. Hall and Gilles (2022) found that dynamics between teachers and leaders were more likely to be reasons for leaving the profession for seasoned teachers rather than new teachers.

Both the data and the wider literature also found that lack of teacher involvement in decision making, and autonomy can also lead to attrition (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Amitai & Houtte, 2022). This study subsumed 'lack of involvement in decision making' under the 'autocratic leadership style' box in [Figure 12](#). Other examples of autocratic leadership style behaviours were noted in the data. Whilst no leadership style is perfect (Ul Huda, 2014), team members are more committed to action when they have some involvement in decision making, leaving them more empowered where a participative style of leadership is employed. Peker et al. (2018) notes that where leaders exert an autocratic style, the emphasis is on maintaining a hierarchical structure rather than prioritising work rather than human relationships. Findings from this study showed that 'being a team member' was a dimension of the role that teachers enjoyed and valued, therefore working for an autocratic leader would lead to internal discord between their values and those of leadership. Autocratic school leaders assign tasks to staff and define how to do them resulting in loss of creativity, damaged motivation, and dwindling job satisfaction (Kars & Inandi, 2018). In this study, teachers began to struggle when they made realisations, comparing their perceptions to the reality of the role. One such realisation was that their creativity was hampered as a result of the time demands of juggling but working for an autocratic leader where 'unimportant' admin tasks were delegated to teachers, on top of the existing demands of the role could contribute to this. Kars & Inandi (2018) also found a 'significant negative relationship between autocratic leadership behaviours and all dimensions of trust' p. 156. This, they report, stems from a lack of teacher involvement in decision making and consideration of teacher needs by leaders. It seems that the autocratic leadership style behaviours also feed into the 'lacking soft skills' sub-category in Figure 12. Teachers in this study listed soft skills such as leadership listening to them as valuable. Findings from my study showed that the experiences teachers recounted of leadership were mainly negative. Some had experienced fleeting positive encounters or had heard from colleagues in other settings about the positive impact on staff that leadership had, though they had not experienced this directly.

One point that was highlighted by this study and in research by Kelchtermans (2017) is that participants felt that leadership could play a vital role in supporting

teachers by protecting them (shouldering external pressure of burden) from external change and policy making impacting on education (Kelchtermans, 2017). In addition, participants felt that it was important for leaders to have an adequate general understanding of the realities they faced in the classroom grounded in their own ongoing experiences of teaching classes, for their expectations and demands of teachers to be realistic. This is mirrored by Evans (2001) who found that leaders need to be realistic in terms of expectations and perspective.

The substantive theory highlighted that participants often felt failed by leaders in areas wider than 'lack of support' and 'leadership autocratic style' (both highlighted in general literature). In addition, bullying and having favourites, for example, were subsumed under 'unprofessionalism' which participants recounted. Gonzalez et al. (2008) highlight other unprofessional behaviours that were not raised by participants in this study such as the impact of corruption and reduced moral ethics. The link between leadership and workload was also noticed by participants in this study who noted that leadership had a part to play in examining workload, though often contributed to it with administration demands that teachers themselves saw as 'unimportant' amidst their facilitating learning, such as unnecessary meetings and very detailed planning demands. A frustration identified by this study was that when leadership failed to make changes highlighted by teachers it would result in a difference to the juggling and struggling experienced by teachers. For example, teachers noted that elements of being a team member (such as spending time in the staff room) were squeezed out when workload worsened. However, small differences such as having a boiler tap rather than one shared kettle in the staffroom and a paper trimmer in each classroom (to save teachers visiting another part of the school) were elements which participants had been frustrated by when request were ignored by leaders.

Some problems concerned with leadership that were not identified by this study but elsewhere in literature included: high leadership turnover leading to spikes in teacher turnover (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Harrell (2004) felt that those leaving teaching could return at a later time equipped with a better understanding about what to expect from leaders, potentially resulting in more desirable outcomes.

6.6.3.2 School culture

School culture can have a considerable impact on the experiences teachers have in their school settings. It is the 'rule book' for success (Gallant & Riley, 2017). Findings indicated that teachers felt that leadership and school culture were heavily intertwined; culture, participants felt, was heavily shaped by leaders. In this study, many elements of a disharmonious culture were shared such as competition between teachers, divides within the teaching team and toxicity (finger pointing and blaming). The data showed that teachers felt this was influential on turnover (though not necessarily attrition from the profession) and that it led to low morale. Similarly, Doherty (2020) states that working conditions in schools can be responsible for turnover and Amitai and Houtte (2022) also state that the context can reinforce any career doubts for teachers. In an Australian study, Gallant and Riley (2017) discovered that New Public Management (NPM) (constituting contractualism, performativity, and competition) negatively impacted ECTs health and wellbeing. Their participants' ideals did not match with the school system/culture. Elements of NPM, such as performativity (frequent lesson observations for example) and competition (between teachers) were also perceived in a negative light by participants in this study too.

Borman and Dowling (2008) state that schools with inherent lack of collaboration, teacher networking and leadership support facilitate higher attrition. Interestingly, teacher networking has already been mentioned in this discussion as a part of the role teachers enjoy and lack of leadership support too, has already been identified as an issue with leadership that could lead to attrition. Other studies highlight, on the other side of the same coin, that some elements of culture can become protective factors (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond (2017). Within school culture, opportunities for CPD, feeling valued, having professional autonomy and supportive leadership are important (Doherty, 2020); mutual respect is important (Bryk, 2010); and employing initiatives to lessen bureaucracy and promote genuine leadership support (Borman & Dowling, 2008) will improve retention.

6.6.3.3 Judgement from external sources

Judgement from external sources was a stressor acting on the struggle already felt by participants in this study. Overall, findings showed a feeling among participants that the long working hours and difficult nature of the role was not acknowledged by outsiders (the general public without experience of teaching). Misconceptions of role demands could be compounded through television advertisements for teacher recruitment. However, Everton et al. (2007) state that teachers tend to underestimate public respect for their profession; their study showed that 50% of the public deemed teaching an attractive career. In their study, fifteen years ago, public perception of the most common activities teachers engaged with included: Educating; Responsibility for children; Controlling a class; inspiring children; dealing with difficult behaviour; stress; large workload/paperwork; coaching/guiding; knowing a subject; preparing children for future careers. Though this study was undertaken over a decade ago, it does demonstrate that the public understanding of the teacher role is limited. My research similarly states that outsiders would have great difficulty understanding the full nature of the role unless they have insider experience personally or understanding through a close family member or friend.

Within my research, one participant noted that public for specific situations involving teachers could be quick to pass harmful judgements which are lacking in empathy, and this can lead to attrition. Similarly, Kelchtermans and Deketelaere (2016) found 'vulnerability from passivity and exposure' to be catalysts in teachers leaving the profession, but no other studies list this as a potential factor contributing to attrition. In my study it was only talked about by one participant.

6.6.4 Summary of 'Situating the theory: influences on the struggle (mitigators, stressors and double-edge sword characteristics)'

The substantive theory states that stressors (aggravating factors) and mitigators (protective factors) act on the juggle and struggle that teachers experience. In

this study, particularly influential stressors included leadership support (or lack of) and autocratic leadership style. Particularly influential mitigators included personal characteristics, skills and attitudes and having realistic expectations about the nature of the role. Interestingly, this substantive theory also suggested some 'double edge sword' characteristics such as perfectionism and approachability that teachers indicated could be useful in the profession, or, on the other hand, could prove to be destructive and add to the struggle. This research also highlighted that mitigators mainly came from teachers themselves, whereas stressors were mainly external to the teachers, making it difficult for teachers to have any control over or capability to change them.

6.7 Situating the theory: Experiencing adverse emotion and feeling of failure

The substantive theory highlighted the prevalence and importance of emotion in the attrition process. Similarly, Torres (2020) found that emotions are 'at the heart of leaving teaching'. They explain the importance of examining emotions and identity as a way of better understanding teacher attrition. They state:

To understand better why teachers are leaving ... requires not only examining factors and circumstances that influence teacher career decisions, but also how emotions influence or even reinforce teacher identity as well as practical reasons for leaving the profession. (pp. 517-518)

The substantive theory demonstrates that teachers experience powerful negative emotions during their juggling and struggling journeys in teaching; these emotions can lead to attrition. A variety of negative emotions were shared by teacher participants, this finding is mirrored in other studies (Patulny et al., 2019; Kelchtermans, 2017; Schaefer, 2013; Doherty, 2020; Torres, 2020). Lazarus (1999) explains that it is difficult to define emotion given the wide variance of definitions in literature, though states that emotions refer to a "complex organised system consisting of thoughts, beliefs, motives, meanings, subjective bodily experiences, and physiological states."

6.7.1 The cognitive-motivational-rational theory of emotion (Lazarus, 1991) applied to this research

Many emotions expressed by participants could be classified as ‘stress emotions’ (Lazarus, 1999) as they arose from the challenging person-environment relationship. The ‘cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion and sociocultural theory’ (Lazarus, 1991), can be employed to help explain how the emotions of participants came to be negative. This cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion has been adapted in Table 5 to represent two experiences provided by teacher participants in this study.

Table 5

*The Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory of Emotion (Lazarus, 1991)
Adapted to Represent the Experiences of Participants in this Study*

Cognitive-motivational-relational process	Participant examples
Teachers strive to achieve goals (both broad and narrow)	1. Complete my ‘to do’ list. 2. Ensure my class understands this area of their learning. (links to the JUGGLING area of the substantive theory)
Cognitive appraisal of the situation according to the goal	1. More administration has been added to the to-do list. It is just as far from being complete even though work has been done to tick some items off. It seems impossible to achieve. 2. There is too much curriculum to cover. This area of learning was rushed through, and children do not have a sound grasp of it. (links to the STRUGGLING area of the substantive theory)
Teacher experiences negative emotions when goals not achieved (goal incongruence)	1. Frustrated, stressed 2. Demotivated, angry

[\(links to the EXPERIENCING NEGATIVE EMOTION area of the substantive theory\)](#)

Note. The left column entries were adapted from Lazarus (1991) to suit the teaching context. Examples from participant interviews were used in the right-hand column.

Lazarus (1991) states that as lives change, goals are revised once they are no longer reachable. It is important to note that at stage three, teachers could have experienced positive emotion should goals have been achieved (goal congruence), which would lead to the experiencing of positive emotion. Veen and Slegers (2006) explain that within cognitive-motivational-rational theory, the self; the situational encounter or demands; and the appraisal process are all important concepts. Thus, the substantive theory was not entirely new in explaining that the situational encounter or demands (juggling and struggling) could lead to experiencing of emotion, with the mitigating factors (such as own skills, attitudes, beliefs) acting upon the struggle and the appraisal of process (making realisations) further acting on the struggle. Interestingly, Dreer (2021) suggests that providing teachers with ownership over how they teach, and decision making can result in positive emotions. This mirrors the findings of this study; on the other hand, instructional and autocratic leadership can disempower and be a stressor on the struggle participants faced, hence leading to the negative emotions. In addition, Torres (2020) found that negative emotions resulted from the fact that teachers had felt unable to accomplish what they had hoped for in the role. This was evident in this study, when teachers had compared their reality in the role with the perception they initially had.

In addition to feeling and experiencing the negative emotions, there is a process of 'hiding' emotions at play in the teaching role. In the juggling section of findings, 'being an actor' had been described by one participant as a role subsumed under teaching for them. This emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) of masking felt emotions, through surface and deep acting, in order to instead display emotions that are appropriate for engaging and motivating students can be exhausting (Beltman & Poulton, 2019). This suppression of emotion can be classified as a

'response-focused' strategy of managing emotion (Gross, 1998). This method of re-appraisal of emotion (response-focused) can be seen as detrimental to health in comparison with antecedent focused (Gross, 1998, Beltman & Poulton, 2019). One of the most frequently cited emotions was a 'feeling of failure' in this study, though other negative emotions were at play, they could have contributed to the feeling of failure. Participants felt that just managing to get by meant that they were failing in their role as teacher, which was a key factor in attrition. Schaefer (2013) similarly found that the moral dilemma of not doing enough or being enough could lead to frustration. Having a sense of self-efficacy is important in retaining teachers (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

6.7.2 Feeling of failure: low self-efficacy

Feeling like a failure in the work we do, is indicative of low self-efficacy. Bandura's (1997) work on the nature and structure of self-efficacy belief systems tells us that self-efficacy beliefs, or belief in one's own competencies, derives from four sources: enactive mastery experiences; vicarious experience; verbal persuasion; and physiological and affective states. Applied to a primary teaching role, what could each mean? Enactive mastery experiences for teachers might include previous experiences of successfully teaching a class of year three students over the course of a term or academic year, or successfully navigating a parents evening. Vicarious experience may include observing and imitating a role model in the classroom teacher role, or a leader in school. This social modelling provides motivation through seeing the success of other similar individuals. Verbal persuasion for a teacher may include being encouraged by others (teachers, teaching assistants or leaders) through positive affirmation - others having faith in their abilities. Finally, physiological and affective states may include a teacher reflecting on their emotions in the role and noticing that they feel happy. Each of these can contribute to the experiencing of higher levels of self-efficacy. With teaching being an insular role, especially in terms of the length of time spent in own classrooms, vicarious experience and verbal persuasion (which involve interaction with others) may often be lacking and a teacher is more likely to need to draw on their enactive mastery experiences to maintain self-efficacy. It is unsurprising that teachers in this study relished the opportunity to build bonds

with peers and work together as part of a team - perhaps this provided them with the vicarious experience and verbal persuasion that they were missing at work in their own classrooms. Unfortunately, self-efficacy may be low when enactive mastery experiences have been difficult (an inadequate lesson observation, for example); there is a lack of belief in the teacher from others (either because there is a lack of opportunity for colleagues to share verbal persuasion, or because of the school culture); and there is a lack of verbal persuasion as opportunities to work with others and see others teach is limited. Incidentally, those experiencing high self-efficacy often have lower incidences of stress. High stress levels for teachers with low self-efficacy would compound the difficult emotional state and lead to elevated distress. This supports goes some way to support findings from Zee & Koomen (2016) and Kim & Buric (2020) who found that teachers with low self-efficacy experience burnout – this burnout leads to attrition. In this study, the negative emotion led to attrition, though burnout is often defined in many ways, most definitions accept that burnout is influenced in some way by the experiencing of negative emotion. Maslach, Jackson, Leiter, Schaufeli, and Schwab (1986) state that burnout is comprised of three symptoms: emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy. It seems therefore that emotion and burnout are intertwined. Kim and Burić (2020) state “unless external measures are brought in to fill their resources (e.g., changes in the school culture), teachers will continue to experience the burnout symptoms and also show other signs of resource depletion, including low self-efficacy” p. 1672.

Emotions have a significant influence on life decisions, acting as a compass to navigate away from experiences bringing negative emotions (Torres, 2020). They impact on professional identity and self-efficacy (Day & Gu, 2009; Kelchtermans, 1996), in the same way that self-efficacy can impact on emotion. In this study, the ‘feeling of failure’ because of experiencing intense and ceaseless juggling, struggle in one or more ways and subsequent negative emotions, led to attrition. However, Acheson et al. (2016) suggests a ‘downward spiral’ which includes burnout because of both feeling ineffectual and being in a state of emotional exhaustion. Perhaps burnout was the final phenomena participants experienced prior to attrition, though the word ‘burnout’ specifically was not used by participants; perhaps the experience of negative emotions (leading to emotional

exhaustion) and feeling of failure over time (lack of self-efficacy) constitutes this, as suggested by Acheson et al. (2016). Similarly, Torres (2020) also points to burnout being a consequence of lack of personal accomplishment (self-efficacy) and exhaustion - they also state that such burnout can contribute to career decisions. In addition, Goddard et al. (2006) found that all dimensions of burnout are overwhelmingly associated with early career turnover intent.

In the case of this study, for some, attrition away from the teaching profession was an outcome. It could be that the teachers able to revise their goals and professional identities in light of the frustration at goal incongruence, were able to remain in the profession, and those unwilling or unable to for a variety of reasons, such as wanting to stay true to the values and reason behind entering the profession in the first instance, left teaching. Relational spaces (Clandinin, 2015) or spaces for teachers to talk openly about their emotions (either on a 1:1 basis or in a small peer group), without judgement, might be a helpful start to addressing change in this area.

Dreer (2021) advocates a focus on positive emotions with teachers from ITE focusing on education for teacher wellbeing and suggests that school leaders adopt leadership styles which foster positive emotion, as well as giving teachers ownership which, in turn, can manifest positive emotion. Mansfield et al. (2016) state that increasing teacher awareness of emotion can also play a role in building resilience, which can contribute to lowering attrition.

6.7.3 Summary of 'Situating the theory: Experiencing adverse emotion and a feeling of failure'.

This substantive theory pays particular attention to the emotions experienced by teachers and the impact of this on attrition. Emotion is at the heart of teaching and the heart of attrition. Most emotions teachers share can be classified as stress emotions, arising from a challenging person-environment relationship. The cognitive-emotional-relational theory of emotion (Lazarus, 1991) provides insight into the process and reasons beneath the emotion. A compounding of emotions can take place when teachers engage in surface or deep acting, suppressing

their emotions whilst in the role of teacher, which is of detriment to their wellbeing. A feeling of failure and lack of self-efficacy arose as a result of the negative emotion for participants in this research. This led to a navigation away from teaching for some.

6.8 Figurative language as a means of sharing experience

Figurative language can be defined as “a linguistic phenomenon in which the literal meaning of an expression is not the intended meaning of the speaker.” (Bohrn et al., 2012, p.2669) Alvesson (2011) explains that metaphors are constructions. They help participants to conceptualise and come to understand their life experiences (Mahlis, 2010). In this research, participants used these constructions regularly; appearing to feel that the use of figurative language fit seamlessly within the constructivist methodology employed.

Across nine semi-structured participant interviews, there were over 140 examples of figurative language use (see [Appendix 17](#)). Accordingly, it felt apt to use figurative language within the title of the thesis. ‘Juggling’ was a commonly cited word by participants which quickly became an ‘in vivo’ code and, due to its significance, subsequently elevated to focused code and category heading before becoming part of the title of this work: ‘Juggling and struggling, walking the teaching tightrope’. The high incidence of figurative language was unanticipated but highly noticeable throughout early interviewing and coding. Other examples of figurative language relating to a circus theme were used by participants such as ‘spinning plates’; consequently, the inclusion of ‘walking the teaching tightrope’ appeared an appropriate, reflexive addition to the title also indicating that whilst some teachers stay in teaching (or, in other words, on the ‘tightrope’), others leave the profession. Noticing and examining the metaphors used by teachers when expressing themselves is a useful way of beginning to understand their thinking (Munby, 1986).

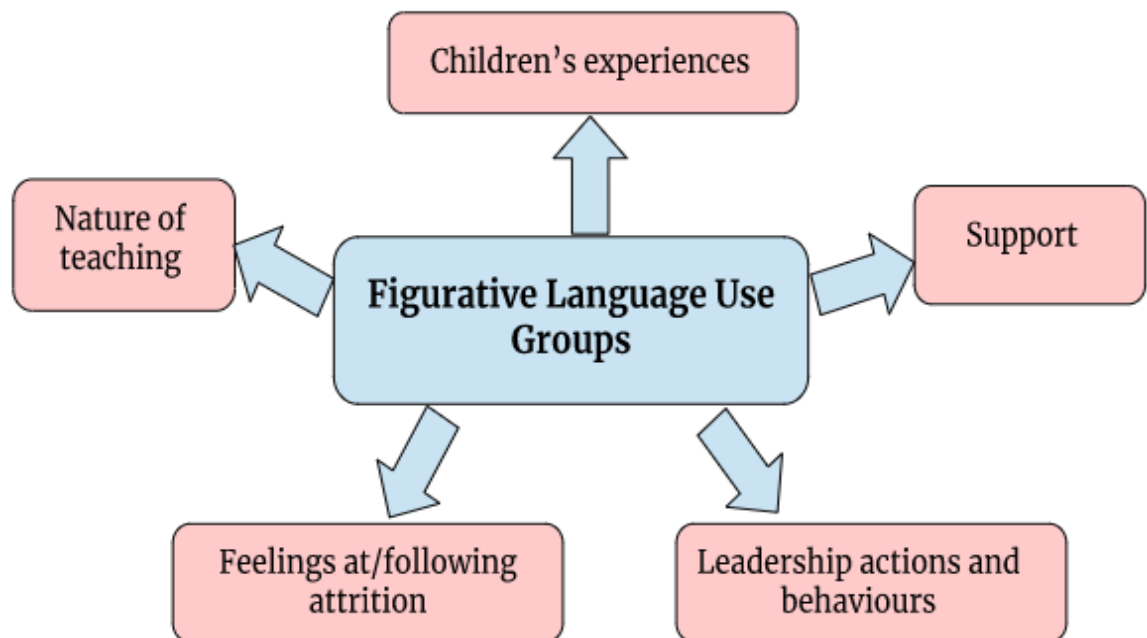
When the examples of figurative language were examined, they could be organised into five groups as shown in [Figure 13](#). The categories included: nature

of teaching; children's experiences; support; feelings at/after attrition and leadership actions and behaviours.

Gibson and Zellmer-Bruhn (2001) contribute an interesting detail around metaphor interpretation: "A given metaphor is likely to convey complex meaning best comprehended alongside a rich understanding of the context." (Gibson & Zellmer-Bruhn, 2001, p.297) For this study, the researcher produced a short autobiography for participants, so they were aware that the researcher shared lived experience of teaching in the primary classroom – they were somewhat an 'insider'. This personal experience in the field may have helped to gain a more accurate or detailed interpretation of the metaphors, and wider examples of figurative language, used by participants.

Figure 13

The Clusters of Figurative Language used by Participants



Seminal work by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) explored how people made meaning of their life experiences using metaphor. They felt that the use of metaphor helped “provide ways of comprehending experience.” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 185) Metaphors, and examples of figurative language generally, are often used to bring experiences together, show how people connect, interact with reality, and make sense of complex realities (Means et al., 2016; Mann & Warr, 2017; Alvesson, 2011; Colston & Gibbs, 2021). They communicate ideas that would be “otherwise difficult to visualise.” (Chakrabarty et al., 2022, p.589) Figurative expressions help to concretely demonstrate rather than describe (Colston & Gibbs, 2021). Given the above, with teaching itself proving to be a complex phenomenon to describe, it is understandable that figurative language choices were employed frequently by participants.

Burgers et al. (2016) discuss how metaphors, and other devices such as hyperbole and irony, are framing and reasoning devices. They go on to share that combining more than one figurative frame, e.g., using a metaphorical hyperbole, strengthens its effect. Certainly, for participants trying to capture and share their complex experiences as teachers, it makes sense that figurative language was a vehicle (Martinez et al., 2001) by which they were able to do this and it seems understandable that there was such a high frequency for figurative language use by participants.

Findings from this research demonstrate that high levels of emotion were experienced by participants in their teaching role, particularly a feeling of failure. Many studies in recent literature have revealed that figurative language helps participants to describe their array of emotions and enhance intense feelings (Beaty & Silvia, 2013; Chakrabarty et al., 2022; Citron et al., 2019). Figurative language use is also particularly suited to conveying affect and demonstrating feelings about personal events (Citron et al., 2019). When the line between work and life became blurred for most participants as they became consumed, it made sense for them to use figurative language as the events and thoughts they described became personal. Delfino and Manca (2007) go further, explaining that participants tended to use figurative language more for meaningful or critical events. They found the greater the emotional involvement, the more instances of

metaphorical language were present. In this research, teachers expressed a range of emotions (for the most part negative) and this demonstrated that they were emotionally involved with their teaching role and subsequently either remaining in, or leaving, the profession. The high frequency of figurative language shared by participants in this study supports the above finding by Delfino and Manco (2007).

Metaphors can be the most commanding form of figurative language for conveying emotion (Mahlios et al., 2010). They help define the emotional meaning of interactions. Interestingly, the processing of the metaphors itself creates “interpersonal closeness or intimacy” and “enhances ability to detect mental states and emotions of others.” (Citron et al., 2019, p.234) In this study, at the member-checking stage, participants' felt that their feelings and emotions had been accurately depicted in the findings. The shared processing of metaphors from their interviews may have contributed to this enhanced ability to detect their emotions and mental state.

Interestingly, in their study with teachers, Mahlios et al. (2010) discovered that after one year of teaching, participants' prior metaphors had not changed indicating a persistence of ideas that had extended from pre-service through their initial year of teaching. However, in this research, it seemed that participants' initial perceptions of the role did change following their experiences in the classroom; all participants in the study had been teaching for six years or more. Perhaps it can be deduced from this that it takes longer than the initial year of teaching for their metaphors to change. Mahlios et al. (2010) did however note that there was some disconnect for cases in their study between their metaphorical beliefs and sense of what teaching is (the ideal) and the challenges they faced in the classroom (the reality). This dissonance between the ideal and real (or in this research, perception and reality) has been observed by other researchers (Argyris & Schon, 1974; McCarty, Abbott-Shim & Lambert, 2001).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) developed Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) claiming that metaphors in language often group within larger conceptual structures: “conceptual metaphors”. It also found that many conceptual

metaphors can often be found to describe a certain topic, opening the possibility of presenting competing conceptual-metaphoric frames. For example, in this study, 'sink or swim', 'drowning' or 'thrown in at the deep end' were used to describe experiences in the classroom. These metaphors can be grouped within the conceptual metaphor 'provided with little support before being given a difficult task thus increasing the likelihood of failing'. In addition to examples of conceptual metaphors, the research provided examples of both conventional and creative metaphors (Beaty & Silvia, 2013). Creative examples from participants in my research included: teacher as a crumpled paper bag; the conventional included: small cog in a large machine. In the main, conventional metaphors were used by participants - straightforward and idiomatic yet befitting of the experience.

Possible future direction for work on metaphors and teacher attrition:

Means et al. (2016) advocate examining existing metaphors, working with them to contest them, juxtapose them and subsequently creating new conceptual metaphors that consider circumstances and environment. Inviting new participants to work with the figurative expressions or inviting participants to work further on the expressions they came up with could be fruitful and create new frames.

Following on from the work of Mahlios et al. (2016) it would be beneficial to examine pre-service metaphors that teachers use to frame their ideas and compare these with metaphors six or more years on, rather than just one year into the profession. Martinez et al. (2001) state that metaphorical representations may be changed by reflective and analytic experiences and advocate that collection and reconstruction of metaphors should not be limited to a short collection period of less than a year. A more longitudinal approach (Sumsion, 2002) could be utilised to discover whether there is more change to their metaphorical beliefs. Strong links between metaphorical language and action (classroom practice) thus the metaphors employed by teachers are a lens into classroom activity and deserve attention (Tobin, 1990, McGrath, 2006).

Summary point (Figurative language)

Participant interviews highlighted figurative language choices as frequently employed by participants, to make meaning of their complex experiences and realities in teaching. This was an interesting and unexpected finding and one not previously uncovered or discussed existing in research on teacher attrition. Research shows that figurative language, particularly metaphors, are used in conveying emotions and to describe particularly significant and consequential events. Teachers are emotionally involved with the teaching profession; their emotions and the role are inextricably intertwined, especially when approaching the important decision about whether to stay or leave. As a consequence, figurative language was also reflexively employed by the researcher, for example through use of in-vivo codes (such as 'juggling') and in the title for this thesis.

6.9 Summary

The substantive theory brings together teachers voices to come to an understanding of how teachers get to the point of attrition. Forefront and centre to the substantive theory is the reality of teaching - teachers described the nature of the role as 'juggling' and many aspects of this juggle have been recounted in other studies on teacher workload. Overwhelm can happen at this stage, especially in ECT years and result in attrition, but for longer serving teachers, other factors are at play. A struggle, consisting of being consumed; making realisations; and difficult ECT experiences begins to develop because of the juggling encountered. The result of this ceaseless juggling and struggling is negative emotion experienced by teachers, in particular a feeling that they are not enough, they are failing. Many of the contributing factors to attrition laid out by this substantive theory have been discussed in other studies or mirror parts of other studies – lots of commonalities exist. Though, in the main, other studies around attrition look at one factor, such as 'resilience' or 'leadership influence' on attrition, but do not look at the wider picture that is presented by this research. The substantive theory shows that no one single factor leads to teachers leaving

the profession, there are a multitude of factors. The way they have been brought together in this study is different to that of others (Den Brok et al., 2017; Kelchtermans, 2017). A thread running through the theory impacting on all parts is the experiencing of negative emotion which plays a central role in teacher attrition. In this substantive theory attrition is displayed as a process rather than a one-off event, placing emphasis on the role of negative emotions, especially the feeling of failure and lack of self-efficacy at the heart of the negative emotions which influence the attrition decision.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This conclusion chapter brings the work to a close by reviewing and evaluating the substantive theory. It suggests recommendations and implications of the theory for school leaders, teachers, ITT/ITE providers, ECTs; and it also identifies further research opportunities. It critically reviews the methodology against Charmaz' (2014) criteria for quality in a constructivist grounded theory and Birks and Mills' (2015) three factors which influence quality in a grounded theory study, before comparing these. Limitations of the study are acknowledged and main contributions to dissemination and knowledge outlined.

7.2 Recommendations and Implications

The research highlights the need for awareness and change in many areas, particularly: teacher emotional awareness; school leadership; ITT/ITE provision; and ECT experience. Most recommendations and implications come directly from participant suggestions in interviews. The recommendations intend to be a flexible guide rather than a prescriptive checklist.

7.2.1 Implications and recommendations for teachers and their emotions

Allowing, and making time for teacher reflection on the internal changes that they experience as they progress through their career seems to be an area that is currently neglected. Providing therapeutic opportunities for teachers to talk freely about how they are feeling and how they feel they are doing, in a non-judgemental setting, as the nursing profession do in their clinical supervision, would enable teachers to process their complex feelings and emotions around self-efficacy. This might help them to reframe thoughts such as 'I'm failing' or 'I'm just managing and it's not enough'. If desirable to teachers, psycho-education opportunities could be provided, such as the sharing of the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion (Lazarus, 1991) and its application to their role. Teachers could

use models such as this to make sense of their experiences and the heavy emotional labour intertwined with the teaching profession. It should provide the opportunity for teachers to talk openly about their experiences and how they feel they have changed since embarking on the teaching profession, so that they could talk through any realisations and internal tensions that may have resulted. This is not a new suggestion, Madigan and Kim (2021) state that teacher education and professional development programmes should equip teachers with the ability to identify early symptoms of burnout and provide them with coping resources and strategies to combat these symptoms. These approaches may lead to teachers feeling increasingly validated, less isolated and would allow time to acknowledge emotions. Joint teacher-teacher peer discussions may lead to newer teachers picking up coping strategies for the struggle from longer serving teachers. In turn, this dialogue and space to consider feelings may help teachers to uncover other ways forward in the profession, rather than attrition from the career.

7.2.2 Implications and recommendations for school leadership

A primary function of school leaders in the face of high levels of attrition concerns easing the juggling (high workload) that teachers are faced with and ensure that leaders themselves move from being 'stressors' which contribute to the juggling and struggling, to mitigators, which help to ease the juggling and struggling. Some recommendations for the research include:

- Protecting teacher time: Practically this can be achieved through ensuring that teachers PPA time is protected, that meetings are held when important, but not when they could be replaced by an email or brief chat, for example. Positively influencing work-life balance is important too, so that teachers are not consumed by work. Regularly monitoring the working time of teachers and removing the additional, unimportant, administrative tasks could help with this. Keeping time at the forefront of the conscious mind the high value of teacher time when making leadership decisions is crucial.

- Reducing the juggling load felt by teachers by reviewing their workload domains and conducting workload reviews by working with teachers to see which areas of workload they view as having little or no impact on the children's learning is important. These elements of the workload can be reduced, removed completely or reallocated to others in the wider staff team.
- Providing spaces and time for teachers to talk freely and openly about their thoughts, experiences, and feelings in teaching as part of regular CPD, for example, may be useful in helping teachers to work with their peers through their difficult emotions and internal tensions that are arising.
- Valuing the role of a teacher in its most acute form - the teaching and facilitation of learning with children in the classroom. Ensuring this is the most prized, important part of the role and that other peripheral tasks are not more highly valued.
- Ensuring constant awareness of the realities of teaching and the 'juggling' endured by teachers enables teachers to feel that leaders are aware of the struggles they face. Timetabled teaching for leaders would help towards achieving this. It would be a highly visible way to demonstrate that leaders are still in touch with teaching realities.
- Listening, hearing, and valuing teacher suggestions, teacher feelings and teacher concerns is crucial. Subsequently, taking action on what matters most to teachers will help teachers feel that they are listened to, and their needs are responded to.
- Protecting teachers from external pressures. This can be done through shouldering teachers from burdens of pressure, only sharing with teachers what they need to be aware of.
- Being a visible supporter of teachers and their work. For example, ensuring that teachers feel supported in the face of difficulties with parents and being available at times that teachers are facing heavier workloads, for example at parents' evenings. Being a positive role model helps with this.
- Ensuring the cultivation of a professional, supportive learning environment for teachers and wider staff and learners. Being principled in decision making and ensuring fairness and promoting care for all staff.

- Involving teachers and teacher voice in the recruitment of leaders.
- Providing space and time to identify what matters to teachers and aligning these with duties.

7.2.3 Implications and recommendations for ITE and in-career CPD

ITE providers should ensure that student teachers have access to the reality of teaching through adequate time spent on placement. Trainee teachers should be provided with support to teach a range of curricular subjects, including subjects such as music and PE, for which participants felt their knowledge and confidence was limited. Opportunities to hear long-serving teachers' experiences, particularly with regards to behaviour management and classroom organisation would be useful as teachers felt this was an area of challenge when they were newly qualified. Managing behaviour in the classroom was an area teachers felt was incredibly important they were equipped for as it had a large impact on success in the classroom. In career CPD should allow regular opportunity for teachers to talk in a dedicated, non-judgemental space about their experiences and emotions in the role.

7.2.4 Implications and recommendations for the ECT experience

Rethinking the purpose of the initial year in teaching could be valuable for new teachers. Allowing new teachers, the opportunity to teach in more than one primary setting during their first year, may be helpful for them to gain insight and experience of working within different school cultures. De-isolating new teachers using an independent body or organisation which seeks to promote links between new teachers from different settings so that they can share their experiences and share ideas is also important. Restructuring how the initial year of teaching looks in school, to ensure that teachers are not overwhelmed in their first year, could be helpful. This could be done through allowing new teachers to teach in different year groups, either within the same key stage, or across school (depending on desire and confidence) in order to remove the pastoral load by allowing a wholly teaching focus. This would reduce the administrative load too, for example in report writing and creating classroom displays - the classroom teacher would

retain responsibility for these areas whilst the new teacher is developing their classroom management, curriculum knowledge and pedagogy related skills.

7.3 Evaluation of the substantive theory

The importance of evaluating the research product is reflected in the following statement: “Reflective evaluation of your own work is necessary to ensure that the grounded theory you produce has merit and potential practical value.” (Birks & Mills, 2015, p. 148) In evaluating the research process and product, two different sets of evaluative criteria will be employed.

Charmaz (2014) suggests evaluating a constructivist grounded theory against four criteria: “credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness” (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 337-338). Birks and Mills (2015) refer to a ‘comprehensive evaluation’; they advocate examining three factors which influence quality in grounded theory research: “researcher expertise, methodological congruence and procedural precision” (Birks & Mills, 2015, pp. 147-148). Both evaluative frameworks will be used in order to evaluate this research, before comparisons are drawn.

7.3.1 Charmaz’ (2014) criteria for evaluating CGT research with evaluative statements from this study.

1. Credibility

Charmaz (2014) states that credibility can be achieved through various means, including: achieving intimate familiarity with the topic; having sufficient data to merit claims made; making systematic comparisons between observations and categories; strong logical links between gathered data and analysis; and, providing enough evidence for the reader to form an independent assessment and agree with claims made (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 337-338).

The research achieved a high level of familiarity with the topic of teacher attrition. Many of the same concepts were raised by participants time and again. Detail around the nature of the workload teachers face, was discovered as a result of

the study and nature of the workload (juggling) became one of the contributing factors to attrition. Though the sample was small (9 participants) the depth of observations contained in the data was high, due to employing two methods with each participant, generating an initial high number of codes from data for analysis (1,900 initial codes). A high level of constant comparison was achieved through the sorting and filtering of initial codes at least three times. Initial codes went from approximately 1,900 to approximately 1,200 through this process, which shows that initial codes were compared and expanded or subsumed within another. Memo making helped to strengthen this process as did external validation from a peer for coding checking. In addition, a high level of transparency in tracking the resulting codes and the link between codes and the contributing transcript/participant voice was created in a table form (see [Appendix 11](#)). This added transparency aided the credibility of the research. A strength of this research lay in the fact that the categories covered a wide range of empirical observations. This is evidenced in the theoretical diagram which shows the diverse range of categories. In addition, the discussion chapter required a range of additional literature to be consulted in response to the findings which were wider than anticipated. It seems that there are strong links between the gathered data and analysis. This can be evidenced by the high number of in-vivo codes that became categories, focused codes or initial codes. In addition, when findings were shared with participants through the member checking process, these were in line with participants' thoughts and feelings.

2. Originality

In terms of originality, Charmaz (2014) suggests looking at whether categories are fresh and offer up new insights; whether analysis offers up a new conceptual rendering of the data; identifying the social and theoretical significance of the work and considering how the grounded theory challenges, extends or refines current ideas, concepts and practices (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 337-338).

Though the findings had strong overlaps with existing research, for example with regard to high workload being a contributing factor for attrition, this research

offered new categories such as 'juggling' and 'struggling' which explored the nature of the workload. These categories uncovered more about the participants' experiences and their resulting feelings and emotions. New insights into the felt emotions of participants and their use of figurative language was indicative of this. Looking at the topic through the lens of the language used by participants (figurative language particularly) was a fresh insight. This research mainly contributes to the existing literature on teacher attrition by extending the literature on high workload but also bringing in emotion and its consequences for attrition. Subtle changes in the way the research was carried out emerged as the research process got underway. For example, the language choice: 'interview' was changed to 'conversation' considering a comment made by a pilot participant about feeling nervous because they felt that the word 'interview' has negative connotations. Using a visual method alongside interviewing within CGT added to existing literature around educational research methods in grounded theory and made new contributions to literature (pre-publication chapter on this for a CGT edited text). Often, in researching teacher attrition, easily accessible groups to researchers are selected, such as ECTs with strong affiliations to University institutions, or teaching practice students on ITE courses. This research focused on experiences from longer serving teachers, some of whom had left the profession. This can be a difficult to reach sample, due to the time demands and pressures they face. To add reflexivity, findings were presented visually to participants, reflective of their sharing of a visual in their part of the data generation process. Charmaz (2014) proposes that strong credibility and originality increase the following criteria: resonance and usefulness.

3. Resonance

In evaluating this criteria, Charmaz (2014) suggests considering: whether the categories portray the fullness of the studied phenomena; whether liminal and unstable or taken-for-granted meanings have been revealed; have links been drawn between larger collectivities and institutions and individual lives, when the data suggests; and, does the data make sense to your participants and does the

analysis provide them with deeper insight into their lives (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 337-338).

In depth interviews, alongside the use of a visual data generation method enabled a rich picture of each participant's experiences, thoughts, and feelings to develop. The categories do reflect the fullness of the experiences of teachers related to attrition. Participants gave full pictures of their lives in teaching, and these are reflected in the theoretical diagrams. No significant additions were derived from participants at the member checking stage. This grounded theory made sense to participants. Participants took part in a member checking process where they were offered a full explanation of findings - in two visual forms, spoken form and in written form. They indicated that the findings of the research mirrored their experiences, thoughts, and feelings on the topic of teacher attrition. No amendments or major additions were suggested. Participants did acknowledge that they had not realised that they used figurative language so often in describing their experiences.

4. Usefulness

Charmaz (2014) suggests thinking about whether the analysis offers interpretations that people can use in their everyday worlds; looking at whether analytic categories suggest any generic processes; considering whether the analysis can spark further research in other substantive areas and thinking about how the research contributes to knowledge (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 337-338).

The analysis has particular implications for teacher training (ITE), leadership, and teachers in educational settings. It can help teachers make sense of the emotions that they are managing and the 'juggling' that they endure. The analytic categories, by their nature, offer up two generic processes at play 'juggling' and 'struggling' that are inherent to the attrition process. Factors which influence these processes are also outlined in categories. It could be the case that the same categories are evident in attrition from other similar professions, such as nursing; it would be interesting to apply this frame to attrition in other areas. Comments from participants also indicated that being part of this research was useful for

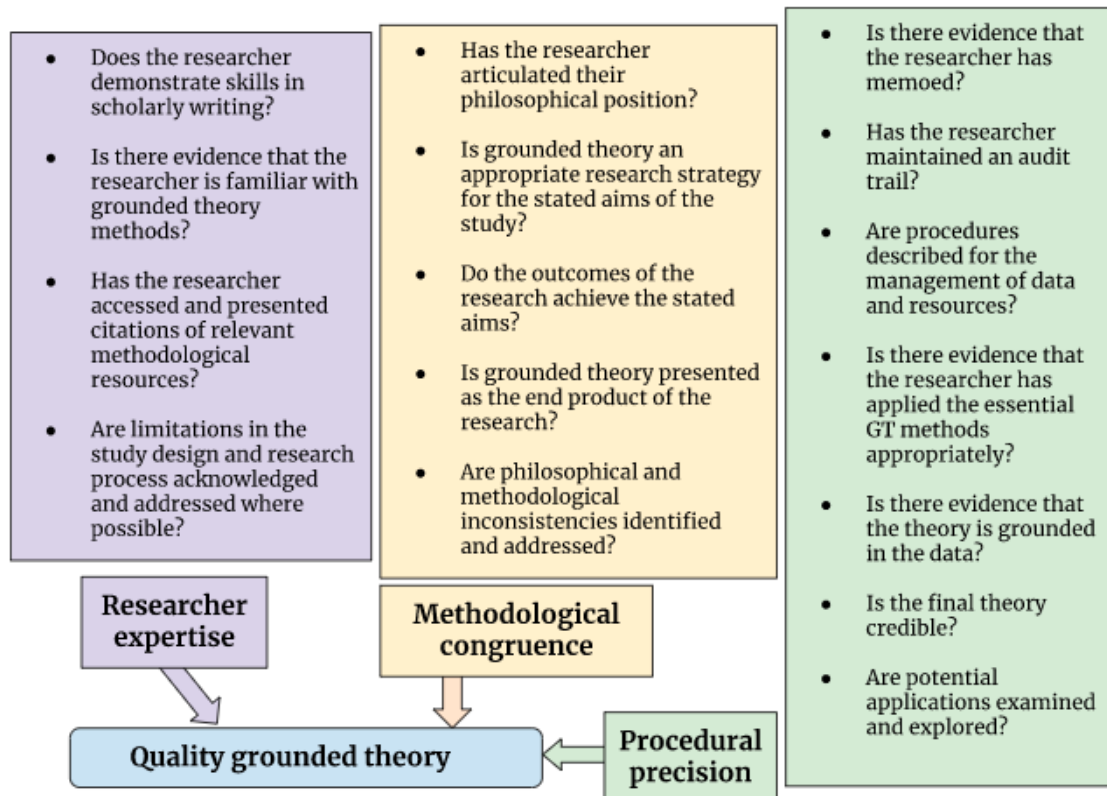
them in processing their experiences. For example, one participant stated: 'that was like therapy' K. Another stated: 'it's been a bit like, almost like closure' E.

Evaluating the research study against the four criteria suggested by Charmaz (2014) was a useful process. It enabled the discovery of strengths of the research: credibility and resonance, though many aspects of the research were also original and useful too. This reflection on the research allowed a positive appreciation of the work carried out; this can be lost in the depths of the research process. In order to evaluate the research thoroughly, a further evaluative frame was employed (Birks & Mills, 2015). Figure 14 illustrates the application of this evaluative model to this CGT research.

7.3.2. An application of Birks & Mills (2015) 'Factors influencing quality'.

Figure 14

Factors Influencing Quality in the Conduct of Grounded Theory Research



Note. The three factors influencing quality (researcher expertise, methodological congruence, and procedural precision) are taken from Birks & Mills, 2015, pp. 147-148. In their original source, they are not presented in Figure form, though the questions in the bullet points are suggested.

Applying “factors influencing quality” (Birks & Mills, 2015, pp. 147-148) to this research involves asking the questions suggested in Figure 14 of the research product and process, for each of the three factors. These questions are outlined both in Figure 14 and examined below in three separate paragraphs - one for each factor.

Researcher expertise:

In terms of scholarly writing, the researcher produced two pieces of academic writing for publication during the process of this research; one piece, a vignette on moving from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence with CGT, another being a methodological chapter on the use of visual methods in a CGT study for an edited textbook (eds. Keane & Thornberg). In addition, abstracts were written for four conferences which were attended to disseminate the research. In the Methodology chapter, grounded theory practices that were used in this research were outlined, such as memoing, theoretical sampling, coding practices, theoretical saturation and gathering rich data (through in-depth interviews and visual methods). Many references are cited in the Methodology chapter demonstrating that the researcher sought guidance in the process. In addition, the researcher met with a cross-university peer group to discuss methodological challenges, interpretations and ideas on a regular basis. The limitations section of this chapter acknowledges and outlines some of the methodological limitations that were present in the research.

Methodological congruence:

The researcher clearly articulates their philosophical position in the Methodology chapter and discusses the assonance between their position and the choice of methodology. In addition, they describe how the selection of this methodology is suitable for answering their meeting the research aims and answering the research questions. The substantive theory is the product of the research (explicated in the discussion chapter), though this may be taken forward and used in subsequent attrition studies.

Procedural precision:

Memos are referred to in the Methodology chapter, Findings chapter, Discussion chapter and Conclusion chapter. Examples of memos are provided in the Findings chapter. An audit trail of the research process is provided, with memoing taking place through the process and a clear demonstration of the progression in the coding and analysis of data through photographs and tables (see Appendices). Procedures for data storage and management are clearly explained in the documentation for ethical approval (see appendices), hence the research

project was granted ethical approval. Evidence that the theory is grounded in the data can be found. For example, in-vivo codes were used (some became categories) showing that participant interviews had direct bearing on the findings. The member checking process also demonstrates the close relationship between data generation and findings. The final theory is credible because it, in many places, mirrors findings from the extant literature on teacher attrition, though there are subtleties that are different in this research. It adds to existing literature, particularly around the topic of emotion and attrition. Other applications for the theory of attrition can be found, for example, the theory could be tested on other professions, such as nursing. There was careful consideration of when theoretical saturation had been reached; when no further categories were being added and the second round of interviewing brought few new focused codes.

The data analysis process was thoroughly documented, and data was treated carefully throughout. Through the process of constant comparison, almost 1,900 initial codes were sorted into plastic wallets (representing tentative categories), before being sorted again where each initial code was assigned to a focused code (on a post in note within each plastic wallet). Then, a final level of comparison was completed, where the contents of the 'categories' (wallets) was emptied and revisited before being sorted once again, onto boards. This tangible process provided a high level of opportunity for constant comparison. The high level of transparency - the trail of the code could be traced from interview transcript through to category. Memoing demonstrated parts of this process: '06.01.22: I'm around two thirds of the way through examining the contents of the plastic wallets. There are focused codes (post its) in each with initial codes (strips of paper with original quote on back and initial code on front), inside each plastic wallet. I have been painstakingly emptying each plastic wallet, around others of similar nature and checking the initial and focused codes before reorganising them on large boards, which removed the need for the plastic wallets. In turn, I hope it will help the codes become even more visible. Plastic wallets make it difficult to compare within and across categories. Attempting to merge focused codes where sensible to.' A further memo describes the process further along: '12.01.22 - Feel that now all initial codes are organised onto the four boards they are much more visually accessible... Hopefully I can now begin to create a table

of categories and focused codes which identifies which transcripts featured each focused code. This will help to aid transparency.’ Constant comparison was therefore an area for which procedural precision was applied. In addition, transparency in terms of the data analysis was a strength of the research. Few studies document and present the process of analysis in photographs before evidencing it in the appendices.

7.3.3 Summary of the evaluation

Comparisons can be drawn between the two types of evaluative frame applied to the research. It appears that Birks and Mills (2015) highlights researcher expertise explicitly, whereas for Charmaz (2014), though this is not mentioned, it could sit within the ‘credibility’ section. It seems that the Birks and Mills (2015) criteria for evaluation are more strongly focussed on the research process, whereas the Charmaz (2014) criteria focus on both the research process, product and interaction with participants. Both are useful evaluative tools, though perhaps when used together they strengthen the evaluation by prompting further thinking. For example, ‘researcher expertise’ (Birks & Mills, 2015) could be a question added when thinking about ‘credibility’ (Charmaz, 2014). As with the above example, it seems that the ‘factors influencing quality’ (Birks & Mills, 2015) could be subsumed until the four criteria for evaluating a research study (Charmaz, 2014).

7.4 Strengths and Limitations

7.4.1 Strengths

Reflecting on the merits and weaknesses of the research is an important step in the research process (Silverman, 2001). The research underwent an evaluation process against two frameworks (section 7.3) which concluded that the quality of the research was sound for all levels of the criteria employed. This detailed evaluation is also a strength of the research. Other strengths lie in the contribution to research (outlined in section 7.5).

A strength of this research is its high level of focus on participants that are experienced primary teachers - a difficult to reach sample due to their busy professional commitments. In many studies of teacher attrition, easier to reach participants are often utilised, such as teaching students or ECTs. This does not provide a picture of why teachers leave in subsequent years, following their initial year of teaching. Another clear strength of this research is the use of a combination of methods which, to the best of my knowledge, have not previously been used in constructivist grounded theory research with teachers. These methods allowed for rich, in-depth insights into teacher attrition, with a small sample. The use of a combination of visual methods and online synchronous interviewing was a unique approach to the research which later became a focus for a chapter in a text edited by two constructivist grounded theory experts. Usually, more common methods such as surveys are employed when working in this field.

The research uncovered a diverse range of reasons for attrition – it did not solely focus on one of two reasons. In this way, connections and links could be made with an existing wide range areas of literature, all which can be applied to the teaching profession.

A particularly reflexive part of the process involved mirroring the participants process by presenting findings back in a visual way with participants in the member checking process. A visual representation of findings added a different dimension to the findings chapter in the thesis, and, to the best of my knowledge, is one which has not been used before in research with teachers on attrition.

Care and attention to procedural precision in the data analysis process was a particular strength, which is evidenced by memos, photographs and tables of the data analysis process (many of which can be found in the appendices). This elevated the transparency of the process.

A further strength lies in the sensitivity and care in which participants were attended to in the data generation phase of the research and beyond. For

example, participants left the experience feeling that the process had been a positive one for them.

7.4.2 Limitations

A brief note on generalisability: for some, generalising from research findings is of paramount importance and an important outcome of the research process. However, constructivist grounded theory does not share this intention. It assumes multiple realities and believes that there is no such thing as a 'context free' generalisation (Charmaz, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1982). This inability to generalise from findings could be seen as a limitation, especially when considered through the lens of a different philosophical perspective. However, the research aspired to provide further insight into the primary school teacher attrition and gain a deeper understanding of this phenomena, from the perspective of long serving teachers. There is no desire, with constructivist grounded theory research to generalise, in fact, it is seen as impossible to generalise in the case of social phenomena (Coe, 2012). Though the ability to generalise can be seen as a limitation, it was a limitation that was understood from the outset of the process, given the choice of methodology.

The modest sample size employed by this study could be viewed as a limitation. However, it did provide distinct advantages: it allowed in-depth inquiry and time for detailed constant comparison in the analysis phase of the research, which enhanced the quality of the study. This small-scale approach allowed for increased depth in terms of the phenomena being researched. It is important to note, though, that the sample may have been victim to self-selection bias; by nature, all participants had a natural inclination to help or participate in research. For example, perhaps this topic was particularly important to them due to personal experience, thus they were driven to participate.

The nature of the sample was limited in terms of gender and ethnicity. Only one participant was male, and all participants were White British. This lack of gender and cultural diversity within the sample may have meant that useful insights remain undiscovered. The sample consisted of primary teachers with more than

six years' experience in the primary setting, but details about the school settings participants had worked within (and where their insights had formed from) were not collected. In particular, the grades of the school settings (Ofsted ratings: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate) were not collected. This data could potentially have enhanced the research findings; as a result, this has been identified as a consideration for future research in this area. The sample was purely focused on experienced teacher views, since these are the people directly involved and mostly impacted by attrition. However, there is a place for also considering the voice of others in different roles and levels of expertise in the educational setting, such as leaders, teaching assistants and newly qualified teachers in their ECT years, for example. Although the aims of the research were to explore qualified, experienced teacher perspectives on attrition and theoretical sufficiency was achieved in this respect. In addition, it should be noted that the sample incidentally included participants working in a diverse range of geographical locations in England, they were not confined to one local authority or region, as in other research in this field.

Another limitation involves the knowledge and skills of the researcher. As a novice constructivist grounded theorist, the researcher was actively developing their skills in this methodology concurrently with carrying out the research. However, this was useful in that the researcher was able to make new contributions to literature from that novice standpoint – for example, by creating a student vignette for a key Grounded Theory text (Grounded Theory - a practical guide, 3rd edition, Birks & Mills, due to be published in 2023). In addition, the researcher was able to contribute their developing ideas at conferences about their choice of methodology. Later in their research, they contributed a chapter for an edited constructivist grounded theory text.

The researcher acknowledges, due to these limitations, that the substantive theory helps to further explain attrition in primary settings and brings new insight, such as how teachers make sense of their experiences related to attrition (figurative language) but that there is scope for further research. The theory does present some new knowledge (outlined in section 6.5 however, these claims are limited to the contexts and conditions of the data employed).

7.5 Research Contribution

7.5.1 Contribution to dissemination

In terms of methodological contributions, the use of two methods (visuals and online synchronous interviews) within a constructivist grounded theory study provided the focus for the researcher's chapter in an edited text on constructivist grounded theory (see [Appendix 3](#) for the full chapter). In addition, a vignette on moving from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence in the use of this methodology was published in the third edition of a text on grounded theory (see [Appendix 2](#)). Furthermore, the approach to coding (manually by hand) within the constructivist grounded theory approach was documented in a transparent way by this research. Many presentations at conferences were made in order to share the methodology and findings from the research - these were carried out in diverse locations - some online and some in person, from presenting at the British Psychological Society conference 2022, to University conferences (such as the Durham Castle Conference), see [Appendix 18](#) for examples of abstracts and posters. The findings will also be shared in upcoming presentations and subsequent papers.

7.5.2 Contribution to knowledge

In terms of the contribution to knowledge, there were many areas for which this research has extended the research within. For example, previous research on teacher attrition does not note the language choices used by participants, though this can be highly significant. Noting that figurative language was used by participants in comprehending, sharing and making meaning of their experiences demonstrates that their experiences were personal, meaningful and conveyed feelings and emotions.

This research demonstrates that the experiencing of negative emotion is at the heart of leaving teaching. The negative emotion could come about through internal tension as realisations are made, or as a result of the juggling experienced, for example. The research uncovered specific detail around the

'high workload' in terms of the nature of this workload - referred to as 'juggling'. The juggling was explored in detail uncovering the domains teachers worked within and across and how this constant process is managed by teachers. The juggling highlighted implications for time, resulting in teachers being 'consumed by work'.

Lots has been written about work-life balance in teaching, though this study demonstrated that the thinking of work when not in work contributed to cognitive load as well as attempts to mediate the high level of juggling through adopting coping strategies such as stretching the working day and taking work home. How teachers tried to navigate and mediate being consumed by work was explored by the study. Overall, the research demonstrated that there is not one single factor which influences attrition; attrition is a process which occurs over time, not a one-off event. Though, the research highlights the importance of negative emotion felt by teachers (whether as a result of juggling, struggling or other factors). In particular, the feeling of failure, only just managing, and not being good enough (low self-efficacy), resulted in attrition. Practical suggestions for improving the situation are made in the recommendations and implications section.

7.6 Directions for future research

Further research drawing upon the impact of self-efficacy on attrition would be useful, especially in discovering more about enactive mastery experiences and how significant these are to teacher self-efficacy, compared with other sources of self-efficacy. When enactive mastery experiences have been difficult or not as expected, what other sources of self-efficacy (if any) do teachers feel they have at hand (vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, for example). Importantly, different approaches to raising teacher self-efficacy could be observed, and their impact measured, such as improving opportunities for vicarious experience and exposure to verbal persuasion.

There is a place for further exploration of the experiences of teachers and the role of teaching using figurative language in research. Different visual methods

in the research around teacher retention and teacher attrition could be employed; they are currently more uncommon research methods within studies in this field yet they help to provide deeper insights into this world.

The substantive theory and accompanying models of attrition could be taken to other educational settings to 'test', for example, pre-school settings, secondary schools and universities. The substantive theory could also be taken to similarly demanding roles in other fields, such as nursing in the healthcare sector, to discover whether the nature of attrition shares similarities.

Another area of interest that was not explored by this research was around the experience that school effectiveness gradings (Ofsted ratings) have on teacher attrition or on the felt pressure of teachers. An interesting area of attrition research could focus on whether there is a difference in reasons for attrition between primary settings across the range of ratings in England.

Further research is needed into spaces by which teachers can discuss their feelings, emotions and tensions that are arising between their personal and professional lives and, also, between the gaps as they emerge between their perception of what teaching might be, compared with the realities they face. These spaces are clearly needed, but the practicalities in terms of how they might work and what they may look like to be sufficient for teachers to navigate their juggle and struggle is something that requires further research.

7.7 Conclusion

To conclude, the aim of this study was to explore the reasons for teacher attrition from the perspectives of long-serving primary school teachers in England. This was justified by the lack of research specifically with long-serving English primary school teachers using a methodology which is not widely employed in such studies but intended to unveil more about this issue.

The thesis has explored, in detail, the current literature on teacher attrition; provided a detailed exploration of the methodology and method employed within

it; provided transparency in exploring the data generation and analysis process; presented the research findings in both visual and written form; discussed how the findings are situated in current literature and a critique of the research product and process was provided. The common threads running through the thesis included 'juggling' - the nature of the high level of workload teachers navigate, and the struggling that this brings. Areas of struggle, such as the realisations that are made when perception and compared with realities, teachers feeling consumed by their work and teachers experiencing negative emotions. Ultimately, the experiencing of negative emotions and the role of 'feeling of failure' are central to the attrition process because of juggling and struggling. In addition, the thesis presented the notion that teachers use figurative language to talk about their experiences as teachers as their work is strongly bound to their emotions.

Appendices

Appendix 1

A short researcher's autobiography for participants

This was provided to participants in their participant pack, prior to them consenting to take part in the research

Researcher Name: Jenna Bradford

Hi, I am Jenna - a PhD student at the University of York. I began my research study in the education department in September 2020. My research concerns the retention and attrition of teachers in and from the primary school setting. In particular, I am interested in discovering the reasons why teachers stay in the profession long term and, conversely, the reasons teachers leave the profession after qualifying.

My teaching career began in 2008 after graduating with a PGCE in Primary Education at Manchester Metropolitan University. Since graduating, I have taught in primary schools for the last twelve years, working UK and overseas. My first setting was a one form entry Church of England Primary School in Greater Manchester. I remained at this school for six years, teaching mainly in year six. I also held the roles of maths coordinator, arts coordinator and KS2 leader during this time. I was keen for new challenges so I moved and worked at a large international school in Singapore for two years, again teaching year six. This brought lots of new experiences and adapting to life here was exciting.

After returning to the UK in 2017, I worked at a school in West Yorkshire which was experiencing a tumultuous period after converting to an academy the previous year. Many staff had already left this setting and many left during the academic year I taught there. I left that year too, to return to the first school I worked at, in Greater Manchester. Here, I taught year five and looked after the wider curriculum in my role as head of curriculum. I have always been a team player in each of the settings I have taught - I believe that peer support is particularly important for teacher morale and, in turn, this influences teacher job satisfaction. I am passionate about teachers receiving the right support in post as I believe they do a remarkable job amidst constant 'changing of goalposts' from external and contextual sources.

In my time as a teacher and middle leader, I have experienced different prevailing leadership styles and very different contextual and environmental pressures in each of the settings I have worked within. I have seen teachers leave the profession permanently or for the short or medium term. I have also worked with teachers who have been long-stayers, though some have expressed intentions to leave or, alternatively, those who have been content in the teaching profession. I find it intriguing to converse with different teachers and teacher leavers, in order to discover

their life stories around teaching and their underlying feelings and motivations about teaching.

In my experience, long serving teachers appear to share some personal characteristics in common. I believe that teachers leave the profession for a multitude of reasons. I emphasise that each and every reality in teaching is different and will encompass individual, contextual and environmental factors, at different levels of interaction and relevance for each teacher, depending on the personal characteristics, value system and the situations each teacher finds themselves in. I believe that teachers should be able to voice their opinions and motivations about this topic in a holistic way and be given a platform to do this in an anonymised manner.

Appendix 2

Researcher's vignette written for publication in a constructivist grounded theory textbook.

The researcher's vignette (published in Birks & Mills: Grounded Theory – a practical guide, 2023) explains the challenges encountered using constructivist grounded theory (CGT) from a novice researcher perspective.

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The researcher's voice 3.1

Jenna Bradford on developing researcher expertise

Jenna Bradford spent 12 years as a primary school teacher and leader. She has a particular interest in the experiences, motivations, and feelings of primary school teachers. Her PhD is based on examining, and providing a platform for, teacher voice, with reference to the attrition and retention of primary teachers in England.

After refining my research questions, I settled on a constructivist approach to grounded theory. Reading about the work of Kathy Charmaz influenced my decision; I felt there was resonance between the philosophical position of Charmaz and the values – such as empathy – that I embrace and endeavour to represent through the research process. Though my career has previously been in primary school teaching, I concurrently studied for a counselling qualification – this undoubtedly influenced the selection of this interpretivist methodology that would place participant voice front and centre, while acknowledging that perceptions of reality are subjective. I should also state that the methodology worked to answer my research questions! When deciding on a constructivist approach, I recognised that I was in the ‘unconscious incompetence’ phase of my initial year of research. This was a comfortable place to be as confidence built in my previous career was still palpable.

Working with grounded theory became more uncomfortable as I began to uncover just how little I knew about the methodology – in particular, its history, guidance for data collection, and analysis. Nagel et al. (2015) present a comprehensive and reassuring account of difficulties encountered by researchers using a constructivist approach to grounded theory – this was incredibly useful and a resource I wish I had discovered sooner!

One such difficulty I encountered was an inability to articulate the differences between the different approaches to using grounded theory. In overcoming this difficulty, I employed a range of strategies:

- I returned to specific grounded theory texts or chapters, which was invaluable for troubleshooting;

(Continued)

- I drew on the support of my supervisor who was sympathetic to my struggle, though their expertise does not lay in this paradigmatic perspective;
- I began to seek greater opportunity to review the difficulties faced by others (to contextualise the difficulty and begin to work through solutions). Engaging with practical online resources such as Twitter feeds, videos, websites, and blogs proved useful;
- I sought out and familiarised myself with recent theses, which employ a constructivist approach to grounded theory.

Encountering difficulties can lead to crises of confidence, in turn resulting in procrastination and task avoidance for novice researchers. Using the above approaches in tackling future difficulties, or when battling crises of confidence, would prove useful. Seizing opportunities to acknowledge research strengths can also expedite the journey through any crisis of confidence. Strengths could lie in diverse pockets of the research venture such as ensuring philosophical alignment with personal values and being reflexive throughout the research process. Furthermore, conversations with participants can fuel motivation to provide a platform for their views to be heard, serving to augment and highlight the value of the research.

In my case, these strategies proved to drive my research forward, enabling me to abscond from the insecurity I had felt. Noting positive experiences through the grounded theory process can build researcher confidence, enable expertise to be recognised and monopolised, and allow a movement from conscious incompetence to conscious competence in the use of this methodology.

Note. Excerpt written by Jenna Bradford and taken from Birks & Mills (2023) *Grounded Theory – a practical guide*, pp.45-46.

Appendix 3

Pre-publication and post editor check researcher's chapter for a textbook (eds. Elaine Keane and Robert Thornberg) on employing visuals in Constructivist Grounded Theory

Chapter 14: Employing Visual Methods in Constructivist Grounded Theory Research

14.1 Introduction

One of the most exciting parts of the constructivist grounded theory (CGT) journey begins when we step into the field of study via the lives of our participants. Data collection or data generation methods become powerful tools early in the CGT research process, allowing the researcher to engage with participants in the joint creation of data. Therefore, it is important that appropriate methods are selected at the research planning stage. Selection of methods can be challenging due to multiple considerations. For example, it is important to maintain philosophical assonance between the chosen methods and the ontological and epistemological foundations of CGT; the chosen methods need to address the research aims and help to answer the research question/s (Birks and Mills 2015; Charmaz 2014); and they need to be able to serve the purpose for which they are employed.

This chapter explores the use of visual methods within a CGT research study. In 2016, Moss and Pini identified a dearth of literature concerning the use of visual methods in educational research and, though the literature is growing, this remains the case. Similarly, Mey and Dietrich (2017) discuss the lack of discussion and publications around grounded theory and visual methods. This chapter aims to contribute to the much-needed literature on visual methods in education research. It intends to provide an informative foundation for those hoping to employ a visual method as part of their suite of data collection or generation methods, or alternatively for those hoping to use a visual means as a standalone method within their CGT research. The chapter provides information about the appropriateness of visual methods and addresses the practicalities of using visual methods, such as participant choice, flexibility and coding. Further, it demonstrates how the researcher can employ a visual representation of findings as a way of solidifying understanding and providing an anchor for the member checking process.

14.2 The education research study

Throughout the chapter, references are made to the CGT research study for which the visual methods were used. The research study aimed to discover the experiences and perspectives of long serving primary school teachers in England around the troubling issue of teacher attrition. The sample was a combination of participants: some had left the profession and others remained, though all were experienced with at least six years of teaching experience in the primary classroom. Findings from the study suggest that teachers undergo a process of ceaseless juggling with a diverse workload leading them to struggle, especially in their initial

year of teaching, but thereafter too. As they navigate the process of juggling their diverse workloads, the study findings indicated that teachers become consumed by work and make comparisons between their initial perceptions and the reality of the role. Mitigators and stressors act upon the juggle and struggle encountered. The study found that over time, negative emotions, such as frustration, add to low self-efficacy - thoughts such as 'I am not good enough' emerge.

CGT was felt to be an appropriate methodological framework for the study given that it presupposes phenomenology and individual experience, acknowledges the construction of multiple realities, and considers the significant role of the knower in the process of knowing what is known (Charmaz 2014; Waring 2012). Like classical grounded theory, The Discovery of Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967), CGT remains inductive but in tandem with abduction since it rejects a tabula rase position and acknowledges researchers' perspectives and available knowledge as possible, provisional and fallible views. However, CGT assumes that the knowledge is constructed jointly by both the researcher and the researched. As knowledge is socially constructed, the researcher's position, perspectives and experiences must be acknowledged as, like participants, they are active in the research process. In this study, I created a short autobiography to provide participants with some insight into my life (I was a teacher prior to entering research), to encourage openness and reciprocity from participants. "Neither observer nor observed come to a scene untouched by the world" (Charmaz 2014, p. 27). The writing of the researcher autobiography helped me to acknowledge how I had come to the research as an 'insider' and therefore 'already knowing' in some ways (Clarke 2005). I was conscious of my own influence over the research process and therefore sought to employ a method which would allow the participants perspectives to be prized from the outset of the data generation process.

The methods employed in this research study included both participant-created visual representations (Figure 14.1) as a starting point, followed by online, synchronous, semi-structured interviews with each participant. Charmaz (2014) states the importance of methods allowing the researcher to see each participants world from the 'inside'. I felt that providing opportunities for participants to reflect on the issue prior to interview and create a visual from their perspective, prior to us engaging together, would allow for me to better see the world through their eyes. This chapter, however, will focus upon the use of visual methods alone, not the synchronous, online interviewing which followed – though Salmons (2010, 2014) provides excellent guidance on that process.

Data collection and data generation are similar terms which refer to the acquisition of data, however, they are subtly different. Birks and Mills (2015) explain that data generation involves researcher engagement with a data source to produce materials for analysis. In data collection, the researcher has less influence over the data source in the process. In this study, I refer to the process as data generation as the data used were newly produced by participants and researcher for the purpose of the study and involved researcher and participants working together to create the data.

Following the use of visuals and interviews as data generation tools, an iterative process of data generation and analysis ensued as each interview was coded and a process of constant comparison began with subsequent data. The analysis involved sorting and comparing approximately two thousand initial codes by hand – this process is explained in section 14.7. Focused codes were constructed, some early in the data generation process. Memoing and diagramming throughout concurrent data generation and analysis helped to crystallise

thinking and led to a researcher-produced visual representation of findings (Figure 14.2), which was shared with participants as part of the member checking process. This is also explained later in the chapter (section 14.7).

14.3 The appropriateness and advantages of visual methods in CGT methodology

Appropriateness of using visual methods

When planning a research project, there stands a foremost concern to ensure alignment between a) what we believe to be the form and nature of the social world (ontology); b) how what is assumed to be is known (epistemology); c) the methodology (procedure) employed to discover and d) the techniques of data collection/generation (methods) (Waring 2012). In this research study, it was known that each teacher would have their own unique, subjective, ideographic reality of teacher attrition and they would share these accounts in dialogue with the researcher, which would be subject to interpretation. Incidentally, visuals are also interpretations of the world, through the eyes of their creator; the creator displaying the world in their own unique way (Rose 2007). In this way, visual creations are philosophically aligned with the CGT methodology. Both are interpretivist and acknowledge subjectivity.

Though Glaser (1998) stated ‘all is data’, from a CGT perspective, only data that provide detail and focus on participants’ views, feelings and intentions as well as contexts and structures within their lives, can be deemed as ‘rich data’ (Charmaz 2014). Collecting this quality of data helps to build solid ground for analysis. Methods chosen, therefore, should not only flow from the research aims and questions but also be sufficient to enable rich data to emerge. CGT, like original GT, is open to use of a diverse range of methods. Selected methods should “extend and magnify our view of studied life and thus broaden and deepen what we learn and know of it...we first aim to see this world as our research participants do - from the inside” (Charmaz 2012, p. 26).

In this research study, it seemed fitting to perceive and comprehend each participant’s world using a visual vehicle: a participant elicited visual representation of their life as a teacher. This allowed me to approach participants’ everyday lives in teaching. It might, though, be equally appropriate to use a combination of different methods in a CGT study, for example to first see the phenomenon through a metaphorical ‘wide angle’ lens, before using a complementary method to focus more directly on the phenomenon or elicit further explanation. The use of a visual method can, therefore, combine with an alternative method (such as interviewing) within a CGT study to provide a fuller understanding of a phenomenon.

Advantages of using visual methods

Trust between researcher and participant is important in enabling participants to feel comfortable enough to share insights into their world. Often in research, the researcher is seen to be elevated in terms of their power in comparison with the participants, though this relationship is a complex one - there can be many dimensions of power at play (Marx 2001). If, in CGT, there is an implicit presupposition that both researcher and participants work together to co-construct data, it is beneficial to have an equal balance of power between both. In this way, participants feel that they have important insights and contributions to make and help to show that the researcher is keen to understand their valuable perspectives. Visual method/s may help to alleviate any anticipated inequalities in power dynamics. They can serve to

empower the participant to be front and centre in the research, from the outset. Respect for each participant shapes the data generation process. It can be demonstrated by making an effort to learn about participant views and actions and using empathy to try to see through their eyes, though we may not agree with their views (Charmaz 2006). Gaining rapport and respect is critical to eliciting data about what lies beneath the surface of an area of interest. Using an elicited visual method allows the participant to take ownership early in the data generation process and enter interviews with the confidence that they are intrinsically valuable to the research process. Hicks (2008) explains:

the ability to discuss images with participants means that the use of visual methods helps to ensure both the credibility and the resonance of the grounded theory by facilitating reflection on “taken-for-granted meanings” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 337) or mundane and irrelevant aspects of a person's engagement with information. (Hicks 2008, p. 197).

If the aim of the data generation methods is to facilitate rich, sufficient data, it is beneficial for participants to have spent time critically reflecting on the area of interest. Given that the most frequently used methods in qualitative research, and CGT specifically, are interviews, providing opportunity for participants to reflect prior to their interview through a visual method is a gentle way of providing a focus for, and reason to engage with, prior reflection. Generating data from interviews and combining this with data from other means adds value to a CGT study, as an extensive in-depth interview alone often does not allow time for consideration of all relevant issues.

The opportunity to reflect on the areas of concern or topic matter before an interview may unlock further data (Birks and Mills 2015, p. 81). This process of ‘getting the books off the shelves’ using a visual method, in advance of sharing with the researcher, can be indispensable. It unlocks ideas, views and actions that may have been locked away for some time, bringing these forward in participants’ minds, leading to more fruitful interviews. In this study, this was of particular importance as participants may have left the field of teaching up to three years prior to the study, should they be one of the ‘teacher leaver’ participants. Where a sample – such as teachers - lead inherently busy lives, they may enter an interview feeling strongly influenced by or consumed with events of the day, making it difficult to find the needed concentration and/or regard for the interview. For these reasons, participant elicited visuals provide participants with an immediate means of re-immersion in the research area when they may have been preoccupied in the events of the day. It also ensures that they spend sufficient time re-grounding in the research area, through visual creation, should they have left the teaching profession.

Whether used alone, or in conjunction with interviews, visual methods have a multitude of distinct advantages such as the ability to capture complex experience in a single image and to elicit unanticipated responses (Hall and Wall 2016); to aid communication, facilitate emotional experiencing and encourage reflection (Salmons 2014); to assist in rapport building and focusing meaning (Hurworth 2012); and, they help to explore phenomena that ‘extends the reach’ of interviews alone (Karlsson 2012, p. 94). Certainly in this research, I found that interviews were detailed and longer than those I had used in piloting (without the use of visual methods). In addition, when comparing the average length of the interviews (60 minutes) with the length of interview when visual methods had not been employed (38 minutes), it was found that interviews were over 35% longer where participants had created a visual representation in advance. This tentatively suggests that interviews can be more detailed

where visual methods are applied in advance and used as an intrinsic part of the interview conversation.

Triangulation is rarely touched upon in grounded theory research. Among the different forms of triangulation described by Flick (2019), it is appropriate to mention data triangulation here. Flick (2019) advocates systematic planning to use different sources of data; in particular, ensuring that the process of production is systematic so that they the data can be compared for their differences and similarities (Flick 2019, p. 137). However, the use of different kinds of data in grounded theory research can be traced back to Glaser and Strauss (1967) who referred to different 'slices of data' by which the researcher can better understand the properties of their developing categories (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 65). In this research, it was useful to corroborate visual data with interview data - this further exemplified the constant comparison at work and the process was helpful in the development of categories.

14.4 Practicalities for consideration when using visual methods

Preparing to use a visual method

Preparing to use a visual method is of primary importance (Salmons 2014). When embarking on data generation or collection in the educational field, it is crucial to consider which visual methods are most useful in helping to generate rich data to help answer the research question. When planning to use a visual method, decision making involves choosing how the visual data are produced. The visual data could be generated specifically for the research study (elicited materials – produced by participants at researcher request or jointly created by researcher and participants). Alternatively, use could be made of pre-existing visuals produced independently of the research (extant materials) created by participants, or by others, at a different time. Some researchers use graphic elicitation techniques (Crilly et al. 2006), whereby the researcher brings visuals (commonly researcher created diagrams) to interview. The aim of this being to provide a “common conceptual foundation upon which discussion can take place” (Crilly et al. 2006, p. 361). The hope is that, through this means, both communication between researchers and interviewees and conceptualizations of a domain can be improved.

At this stage, it is imperative to consider the feasibility of using different visual data, which is dependent on the available budget, equipment and/or materials required and capacity/capability of researcher and/or participants. In this research, I intended for the visual to be elicited – generated by participants at the request of the researcher, solely for the purposes of the research, in order that data generated were as close to the research area and questions as possible. I also considered whether the elicited visual image would be produced within the context of the interview, prior to the interview, or following the interview. I decided that the elicited visual should be created prior to the interview to ensure that participants felt relaxed in the process, creating the image in their own time, without time pressure which may be evident within an interview. I was also keen to capture the benefits of reflection on the topic area prior to interview, via the elicited visual.

Types of visual data

A captivating range of visual data are available, making use of a multitude of different visual images. Consequently, the type of visual data to be used is another important consideration. Educational contexts possess a rich visual culture and therefore visual data may be readily

available, pre-existing independently for other purposes. Examples of this include video footage, exercise books, graffiti, and wall art (Prosser 2007). Planning to use such data should lead to discussion around the ethical and legal implications of using independently produced images for a different purpose to which they were intended. Certainly, permission should be sought for using such images. The owner should be made aware of the detail and scope of the research study and ownership rights should be determined. Other visual images include photographs, which offer a multitude of options such as photo elicitation (Prosser 2007), photo-observation (researcher generated photographs of the observed) (Karlsson 2012), and photovoice (where participant/s and researchers collaborate in generating photographs and accompanying text) (Karlsson 2012).

Pink (2004) states that visual methods often work best in relation to other representations, including verbal. Thus, decisions need to be made as to whether the use of visual images will be a standalone method, or whether more than one method could be used -incorporating a visual method alongside or within others, such as interviews. Visual images could also, for example, be used alongside texts such as teacher journals as one of many alternative options. For the purposes of this research, elicited visuals were used as a prompt in support of the interview (Pink 2004).

Participant information and choice

Once the researcher has examined the above practicalities, it is important to consider the provision of participant information. Participants need to be provided with clear guidance and support as to the requirements of their participation, for the visual method, in addition to any further data generation methods. This guidance can range from being highly directive, to being free to interpretation. It is also important to decide how much participant choice is welcome in terms of their creation of the visual (for example, are there criteria around specific materials that should be used, or size of visual?) Providing detailed clarity in advance will ensure that participants' time is protected, rather than wasted on a creation that does not meet the requirements of the brief.

Decisions need to be made around the action to take if a participant decline to create a visual, especially if there is a research requirement for participation in more than one data generation method. If participants are uncomfortable with creating an elicited visual, a consequence may be their attrition from the study entirely. Therefore, if the sample is difficult to access or engage in the study, it may be fruitful to offer them an opt-out for the visual element, to retain their input in any other data generation methods planned. These practicalities should be outlined in the plan for ethical approval. In this research, a 'visual task guidance' document was produced for participants outlining the rationale for using a visual method. This document included the title for the visual representation (in this case: 'Produce a visual representation that captures the essence of your thoughts, feelings and motivations about 'life as a teacher') and a paragraph of guidance around practicalities (such as size, mediums that could be chosen, the structure of the visual and how to share it with the researcher and by what date). An excerpt from the visual task guidance provided to participants is shown below in Box 14.1.

Box 14.1

Excerpt of visual task guidance from the research study

The visual representation need be no larger than A4 - this size is ideal so that the visual can be readily scanned and shared between participant and researcher. It can be created in any medium: paint, pencil, crayon, pencil crayon, collage, for example - though this list is by no means exhaustive. It can be structured in any way - for example, it could be a collection of independent drawings, interconnected drawings or shapes, or one large image focusing on one object (tangible or intangible). It would be helpful to think about the meanings you attribute to each part of the visual in preparation for our discussion. We will be able to discuss the visual representation you have created when we 'meet' online.

Demands made of participants in creating a visual representation need to be kept to a minimum, given that participants may already have contributed time towards other data generations methods. I recommend that the visual task guidance provided to participants is as succinct as it can be, preferably fitting within one page – more than this can be overwhelming for participants who are often voluntarily giving up their time to contribute to research. The visual task guidance for this research was around three paragraphs long (one of which is shown in Box 14.1 above). Although participation in this part of the data generation was strongly encouraged, it was optional; participants were asked whether they would be comfortable in producing the elicited visual prior to interview. One participant declined, explaining that it was not something they were confident or comfortable in producing. In that case, I simply asked the participant to reflect on the issue prior to the interview. Instead of creating a visual representation, they were encouraged to make jottings.

Quality of rapport between researcher and participant may contribute to the extent to which the participants feel comfortable in producing visuals (Bagnoli 2009). Asking participants to create a visual prior to their interview, before meeting them in person or online (for interview, for example), can be a risky strategy and lead to refusal. It may be prudent to talk about the visual method in an information sharing conversation about the research prior to presenting them with the detail of the task later in the process.

14.5 Making use of participant created visuals through 'interviews'

In this research study, once the guidance had been provided to participants, they were free to create their visual representation at their leisure before sending a photo or scan of the visual through by email once complete, prior to the interview date. I took the opportunity to create initial memos based on the visual representations. After introductions at the interview, the visual was shared on screen and the participant was free to discuss their visual however they liked. Sometimes, questions from the interview guide were answered incidentally as part of their sharing and could therefore be removed from the interview guide. Often, participants' sharing of their visual representation led to further questions which I asked momentarily but only if they fit where the participant was at in their discussion, so as not to 'de-rail' their thinking. On other occasions, I would make note of more extensive open questions which had arisen through their sharing, with the intention of asking afterwards so as not to direct the course of their sharing. Where questions from the interview guide were left unanswered, I asked the participant such questions after their sharing, if they were relevant to their experience. In addition, following each interview, additional questions were added to the interview guide or existing questions amended for use in subsequent interviews considering

the data emerging so far in the process. The need for such modifications might not have come to light had the participant not engaged with discussing their visual verbally.

How participant-elicited visuals are analysed should be decided prior to their creation, though this could be open to adaptation following their production. On the one hand, intense analysis of the visual can take place. For example, the process of the visual's production could be analysed, in addition to the visual itself (Morrow 1998). Konecki (2011) proposes that images hold 'multiple layers of meaning' and thus advocate analysis of the image on various levels through 'multislice imaging'; they suggest one such level could be constructing a socio-cultural analysis of the image context. Mey and Dietrich (2017) go further, and suggest a visual grounded theory methodology (VGTM) setting out analytical steps to ensure "systematic, rule based analysis of non-textual data" (Mey and Dietrich 2017, p. 283). They recommend identifying and defining the segments to be coded before applying 'open coding' (or in CGT terms 'initial coding') to the visual data.

In this research, I regarded visuals as vehicles to integrate participants' thoughts and feelings into the interview discussion, and at the point of interview, as vehicles to create co-constructions, fitting with the CGT philosophy. This is an alternative to seeing visuals as independent documents to be analysed. It allows harnessing the power of participants' interpretations of the images into the emerging theory, as opposed to a researcher-driven analysis through coding of the document alone (Hicks 2008). In this research study, the decision was made not to engage in the practice of coding the visual itself; coding was exclusively applied to interview transcripts. The reasoning behind this decision was that the participant interviews ended up being strongly anchored in the visual representations they had created. In fact, many participants took time to carefully attend to talking through each specific part of their representation in turn in a logical fashion. This meant that their descriptions and the meanings behind each symbol in their visual were explained by the participant themselves. This was surprising because it was not necessarily expected. They were simply free to share a little about their visual, yet this sharing process seemed to become a larger part of the interview than anticipated. It seemed to provide participants with something familiar, comfortable and concrete to talk through – perhaps they were keen to lean on their visual representation to provide a source of familiarity and comfort at the start of their interview.

Incidentally, piloting highlighted that research 'interviews' can be perceived as intimidating interactions, prior to the event, due to the connotations of the word 'interview'. Usually, in the working world, interviews are seen as high stakes events in which some element of judgement takes place. For this reason, it was decided that they would be renamed in correspondence with participants as 'research conversations'. The sharing of visuals by participants certainly felt like a valuable part of the interview process, where meanings could be discussed together. It meant that I had not worked alone to imposed meanings on the visuals, there was opportunity to ask questions of participants meanings and collaborate during the interview, or 'research conversation'.

14.6 Data analysis

Throughout concurrent data generation and analysis, I made efforts to establish links between the visuals and interview transcripts, to assess and to validate any emerging interpretation through recurrence across multiple sources (Bagnoli 2009). ‘Ceaseless juggling of a diverse workload’ became a category with its own working definition; when I looked back at the participant’s visual representations, I noticed that representations of juggling (such as juggling balls) had been present on more than one participant elicited visual, before they had become central to the interview conversation. I took time to look at the visual representations created before interviews, within the interviews (as directed and referred to by participants) and after the interviews when transcribing, then analysing the transcripts.

Bagnoli (2009) asserts “visual data can thus centrally guide the process of analysis, allowing even participants’ own metaphors to lead in constructing interpretations” (Bagnoli 2009, p. 568). This research exemplified the statement above; many images were used to convey metaphors on the participant elicited visuals. These included images of leaders sitting atop an ivory tower; teachers as puppets on strings; an image of a teacher as a juggler; a depiction of a teacher with the weight of the world on their shoulders, and a teacher as a crumpled bag after experiencing life in the classroom (Figure 14.1). Reflective memos, to capture my initial thoughts on receipt of initial visuals, identified that metaphors and figurative language were being employed by participants to make sense of their realities (Box 14.2).

Box 14.2

07.04.21: Pre-interview memo reflecting on E’s visual

E’s visual contains a collection of different researcher created pictures. There is a figure with a world on their back/shoulders, cogs working together, a person atop a mountain, a puppet on strings and a juggler with juggling balls. This in particular struck me because K’s visual last month also included a similar drawing (a person with juggling balls above their head), in addition to a person atop a tower labelled ‘ivory tower’. I wonder how heavily figurative language will feature in the interview with E, it did feature in K’s and A’s and seems to be a common theme. I need to research figurative language use by research participants to explore this further.

Memoing (such as that in Box 14.2) provided me with a vehicle for some level of analysis of the images, from my perspective. This awareness heightened my sensitivity towards participants’ use of figurative language in interviews; it soon transpired that figurative language use (including use of metaphors) was a central way for participants to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings. In fact, it emerged through research in this area that figurative language is often used to express particularly emotional experiences. The participant visuals (Figure 14.1) were the initial alert to becoming attentive towards this in the subsequent interview process.

< Insert Figure 14.1 here >

Figure 14.1: A selection of participant elicited visual representations of 'life as a teacher' for shared discussion at online interviews.

Participants took complete ownership over the creation of their visual representation, though were provided with some basic guidance (Box 14.1). Interestingly, though writing was not mentioned on the guidance document, many participants chose to include words and phrases on their visual representations (see Figure 14.1).

Pain (2012) defines two distinct categories of visual data: those that enrich data collection or presentation and those apropos to the relationship between researcher and participant. In this research, visual data were used distinctly for the purpose of enriching the data, though there was also an indirect, incidental, accompanying benefit; it helped to ensure that participants felt listened to from the very beginning of the interview and helped them take ownership of the process. They were not being directed or instructed, they were able to share their important experiences from the outset. Therefore, this study could be deemed as using visual methods for dual purpose.

Though it is possible to answer researchers' questions visually within CGT using a VGTM approach (Mey and Dietrich 2017) through direct coding of the visual image, personal thoughts, feelings and experiences can only be made recognised and acknowledged with additional interpretation of the image/visual from the participant (Kearney and Hyle 2004). In this case, the verbal interpretation was made in interview, and subject to a process of mutual construction with the researcher, consistent with the CGT philosophy. It ensured that the process of interpretation was joint and close rather than being separate (participant held different meanings to researcher) and distant. Having said that, it still seemed appropriate to memo when visuals were received from participants to ensure that I captured my initial thoughts about them.

14.7 Reflecting the participants' process – using visuals for crystallising researcher interpretations and member checking

The purpose of member checking

Participant (respondent) validation or 'member checking' is a process of ensuring that there is no misrepresentation in the data (Yardley 2015). In this research, participants were encouraged to check their interview transcript (Bloor 1978; Greyson 2015) and comment on the analysis made (Silverman 1993). In practice, this meant that participants were responsible for reviewing their interview transcript with accompanying initial coding. Following this, in multiple small group sessions, participants were invited to multiple small group online sharing sessions of tentative findings, once further analysis was complete (this will be discussed later in the chapter). These sessions not only allowed for confirmation from participants, but also served as a means of gathering further data to elaborate categories (Charmaz 2014). For example, working as a team was a tentative focused code within the category of 'Ceaseless juggling' at the time of member-checking. Through the member checking process, information was gleaned about how frequency of staff room visits had impacted on the sense of 'team' for one participant. Another provided useful information about teaching assistants which helped to provide further insight for the category 'stressors and mediators.'

Reflecting the participants process by visually representing findings

Through the analysis process, diagramming had been a way of crystallising my developing thinking around the relationship between categories. Instead of presenting diagrams to participants in the findings sharing, I created a visual representation of the tentative findings to share with participants after the analysis had been conducted. I felt this was a reflective way to mirror the participants' experience of creating and sharing a visual representation in the development of the findings. Early ideas for the visual representation encompassed teacher as a 'steam train,' before settling on the central idea of teacher as a ' juggler' in a circus setting, reflective of metaphorical in-vivo codes such as 'juggling' and 'spinning plates,' some of which were elevated to categories in the analysis process.

The development of categories for the visual representation of findings

The analysis process itself was a manual process, involving physical movement of initial codes, with attached sections of transcript. This process was used as I wanted to 'stay close to the data' as much as possible. Initial coding, which often made use of gerunds or 'in vivo' codes, took place following the manual transcription of each interview. Each participant transcript was printed onto a different colour of paper (for identification purposes), with the initial codes in the comments section to the right-hand side. The transcripts were then cut into slices (each with dialogue and corresponding initial code). Each initial code could then be moved, multiple times if required, on a large table and compared with other similar initial codes. All the while, if reference needed to be made to the participants words, these could be found attached to the initial code.

In this way, focused codes were formed, as groups of initial codes emerged. Sometimes, in vivo codes were used as focused codes and sometimes initial codes were elevated to focused codes, instead of a new focused code being created to encompass the relevant initial codes. Initially, post-it notes were labelled with the focused code and the initial codes attached to the post it notes. As further transcripts were coded, their initial codes were compared with those already attached to post it notes (assigned to focused codes) and some would require new focused codes to be created or focused codes to be merged and renamed - additional post it notes were added as required.

Before long, plastic wallets were introduced (representing tentative categories) with a collection of focused codes housed within each – as post it notes (focused codes) with initial codes attached were placed into these categories (plastic wallets). Overall, more than 1,800 initial codes were created, compared with each other and organised within or elevated to focused codes. These focused codes were organised into tentative categories (each plastic wallet representing a different category). At any point, the plastic wallets could be emptied, compared with each other, overlapped, placed within each other and manipulated to enable constant comparison. When emptying out the plastic wallets (tentative categories) to compare categories, or focused codes within categories, became messy and it became difficult to see focused codes 'at a glance', I decided to arrange the focused codes underneath the categories on large boards. This provided an additional opportunity to sort through the focused codes, compare them with one another and compare categories too. Once organised onto large boards, it was easy to see the category (heading), focused codes (post it notes) within the

category, related categories (as these were adjacent) and even the initial codes (strips of paper) which made up each focused code.

The process of constant comparison was therefore a very manual one, but one which allowed for traceability back to transcript, for each focused code and emergent category. A table was created to demonstrate the origin (participant transcript) of different focused codes. Though it was a time-consuming process, analysing by hand, manually, and engaging with different iterations of this process, helped me stay close to the data and engage in constant comparison in a kinaesthetic way.

Throughout the process of constant comparison, memoing took place. Memos noted important points (such as where an in vivo code seemed to be significant as it became a focused code, then a category, for example). The boards themselves became a place I could go to in order to brainstorm and to create initial visual jottings of findings. The categories all became parts of the visual jottings. For example, 'ceaseless juggling of a diverse workload' (one category) was represented by juggling balls (or items being juggled) on the draft drawing.

I was aware that I was lacking in artistic ability, therefore I created initial drafts to provide an illustrator with a clear idea of what I would like to include in the visual representation. A to-and-fro process began as parts were added to the visual a little at a time by the illustrator, reflecting my drafts, and every step of the way I added a little more detail and ensured additions were in the correct position and place on the page. The resulting researcher-illustrator co-creation visual representation of findings can be seen in Figure 14.2.

<Insert Figure 14.2 here>

Figure 14.2: A visual representation of study findings for member checking purposes (part A, left, part B, right). Credit to illustrator: Erica Finlayson.

Links between categories and parts of the visuals

As mentioned earlier, each part of the visual representation represented a category, or focused code. These were decided upon prior to the commissioning of the visual. For example, in part A of Figure 14.2, the curve ball represented unanticipated demands. The beads of sweat represented the struggle that teachers faced, and the shadow being pulled into the juggler represented teachers becoming consumed by the role of teaching. In part B of Figure 14.2 the cloud represented the internal struggle arising from experiencing negative emotions such as a fear of failure or feeling as though the teacher participants were not managing or doing enough.

Sharing the visual representation of findings with participants

At the online synchronous sharing of findings via online video conferencing software, I shared the visual representation of findings to gain their immediate reactions. The visual representation of findings became a strong anchor for working through the findings in a methodical way and ensuring that no pertinent findings were missed (for example, the shadow represented the teacher becoming consumed by the role, but seeing this reminded me to talk

through the stretching of the working day and other related focused codes). Visuals can be excellent memory prompts. Participants appreciated the fact that findings were being shared in a way that was reflective of their efforts at data generation. They were provided with the space and time during, within and at the end of the sharing, to provide their comments and responses - many made additional remarks which further developed the findings. Engaging in a member checking process which uses a visual representation of the findings is an appropriate way of discussing tentative findings with participants, especially where they have been involved with creating a visual representation. It adds reflexivity by examining findings in a re-evaluative process with participants and enables participants to be able to relate to the analysis in a user-friendly manner (Silverman 1993; Cohen et al 2011).

14.8 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how visual methods, alongside others, can be incorporated into a CGT research study. Using visual methods within a CGT research study brings about distinct advantages. Visual methods “offer a means to enter into dialogue with participants in ways that privilege those participants’ experiences and understandings, the insiders with knowledgeable insight and expertise, and they provide avenues to ... delve into the issues often left unspoken” (Karlsson 2012, p. 99). This can help to generate the rich data that Charmaz (2014) references. Furthermore, the use of visual methods aligns well with the philosophy that underpins constructivism: they harness subjective participant thoughts, feelings and experiences and they can be co-created, researcher or participant created. There is always opportunity for researcher and participant to reflect on the visual together and co-construct knowledge together. Combining an original way of collecting data (such as incorporating visual representation) which helps to answer the research question/s, whilst remaining in line with the philosophical underpinnings of CGT, adds an original methodological contribution to research in the field. Reflecting back findings through member checking with participants in a visual manner adds credibility and resonance, helping to work towards two of Charmaz’ (2014) evaluative criteria for a CGT study.

There are a multitude of considerations and decisions to make where researchers endeavour to use a creative data gathering method such as a visual representation and some challenges. Some challenges of using a visual method within CGT research include: ensuring that the visual method employed helps to answer the research question; retaining participant commitment to the study where visuals are methods with which they are uncomfortable; making decisions about how to analyse the visuals; and, ensuring ownership of the visual is established and ethical considerations regarding permission to use the visual and purpose of use are made clear. With careful consideration to the challenges, using a visual method can contribute to the rich depth of the research study and uncover useful unanticipated insights.

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Appendix 4

Interview Guides/Schedules.

Interview schedules/guides used in interviews with participants and adapted considering the emerging data. There are two different interview guides, the first for use with teacher leavers and the second for use with teacher stayers. All question stems used in the guide were influenced by:

Charmaz, K. & Belgrave, L. (2012). Qualitative interviewing and grounded theory analysis. In The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research: The Complexity of the Craft, London: SAGE. p. 362.

Interview Schedule: Teacher leavers

<p><u>Researcher details:</u></p> <p>Jenna Bradford jb2734@york.ac.uk University of York</p>	<p><u>Title of research:</u></p> <p>The reality of teaching vs perceptions, non-cognitive attributes, and other factors, in the retention and attrition of teachers in primary settings.</p>
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Visual representation questions:

Can you describe how your visual representation captures your thoughts, feelings and motivations about 'life as a teacher'?

What choices did you feel were significant in creating this visual representation?

Can you describe the meaning of each part of the visual from your perspective?

General questions:

Tell me about how you came to be in teaching.

Can you share your perceptions and expectations of teaching before you joined the profession?

Can you describe your reality in teaching? / What was a typical day as a teacher like?

How did this impact on your feelings and motivations about the profession?

What personal characteristics do you feel are conducive to longevity in teaching? Changed on 16.06 into two questions as a result of emerging analysis into soft skills useful for teachers and survival kit for long serving teachers (good or bad, happy or not in role):

1. What personal skills/qualities/characteristics/abilities do you think are useful for primary teachers to have?
2. Thinking of long serving teachers that you've known, whether content or unhappy in the role, good or bad, what do you think has helped them stay in the role so long? Do they have skills/qualities/characteristics in common?

How do these compare with your personal characteristics?

How, if at all, did your reality of teaching differ from the initial perception/expectation? Could perceptions/expectations be made more realistic in some way?

Can you describe the factors, personal, setting related, or from the wider environment, that influenced your thoughts about leaving teaching?

How, if at all, do you feel teachers are supported to stay or encouraged to remain in the profession?

Tell me a little about your views on teachers leaving the profession.

Could you suggest any changes or initiatives that you feel would help to ease teacher attrition?

How do you feel now about your decision to leave teaching?

What impact has leaving the profession had on your life?

After reflecting on your experiences with teaching through this process, is there anything you would like to discuss?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Are you aware of anyone else who is a long serving teacher 8 years + or who left teaching that might be able to participate?

Interview Schedule: Teacher stayers

<p><u>Researcher details:</u></p> <p>Jenna Bradford jb2734@york.ac.uk University of York</p>	<p><u>Title of research:</u></p> <p>The reality of teaching vs perceptions, non-cognitive attributes, and other factors, in the retention and attrition of teachers in primary settings.</p>
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Visual representation questions:

Can you describe how your visual representation captures your thoughts, feelings and motivations about 'life as a teacher'?

What choices did you feel were significant in creating this visual representation?

Can you describe the meaning of each part of the visual from your perspective?

General questions:

Tell me about how you came to be in teaching.

Can you share your perceptions and expectations of teaching before you joined the profession?

Can you describe your reality in teaching? / What is a typical day as a teacher like?

How does this impact on your feelings and motivations about the profession?

What personal characteristics do you feel are conducive to longevity in teaching? Changed on 16.06 into two questions as a result of emerging analysis into soft skills useful for teachers and survival kit for long serving teachers (good or bad, happy or not in role):

1. What personal skills/qualities/characteristics/abilities do you think are useful for primary teachers to have?
2. Thinking of long serving teachers that you've known, whether content or unhappy in the role, good or bad, what do you think has helped them stay in the role so long? Do they have skills/qualities/characteristics in common?

How do these compare with your personal characteristics?

How, if at all, does your reality of teaching differ from the initial perception/expectation? Could perceptions/expectations be made more realistic in some way?

Can you describe the factors, personal, setting related, or from the wider environment, that influenced your decision to stay in teaching long term?

How, if at all, do you feel teachers are supported to stay or encouraged to remain in the profession?

Tell me a little about your views on teachers leaving the profession. Could you suggest any changes or initiatives that you feel would help to ease teacher attrition?

How does it feel to be a long serving teacher?

What impact has the profession had on your life?

After reflecting on your experiences with teaching through this process, is there anything you would like to discuss?

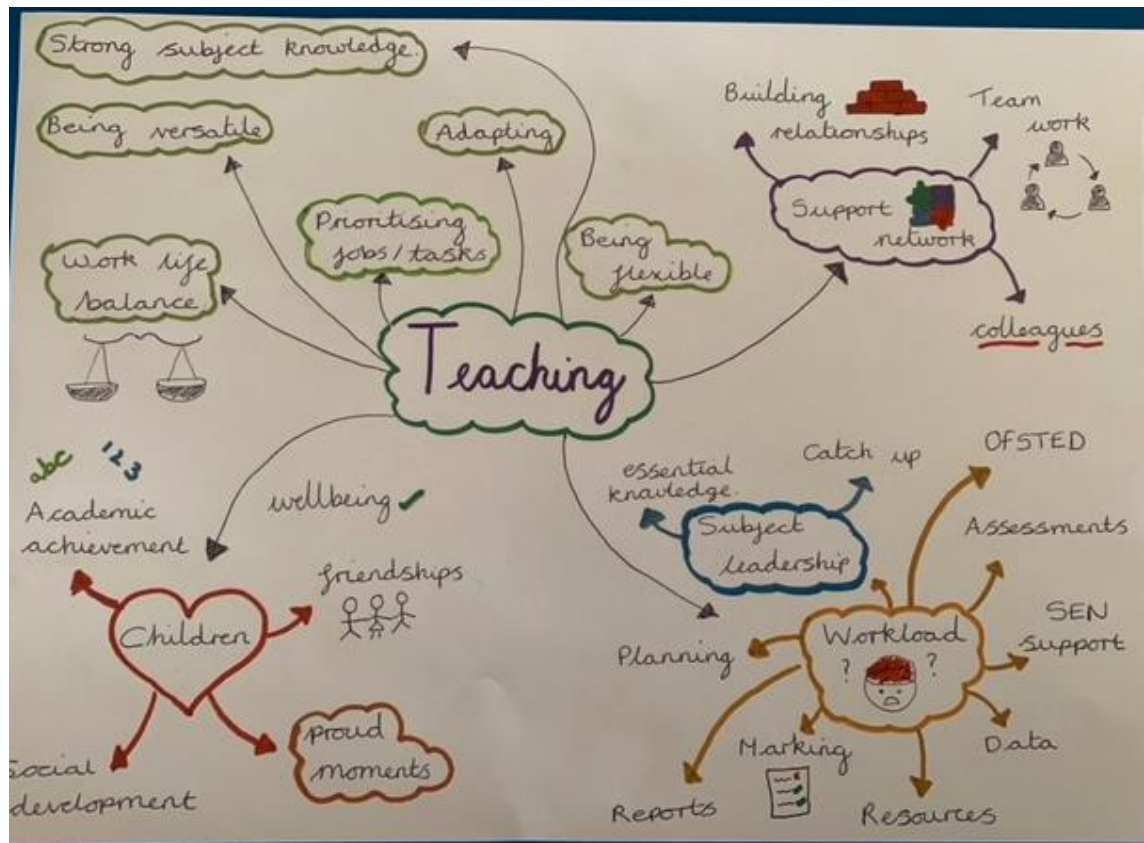
Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Are you aware of anyone else who is a long serving teacher 8 years + or who left teaching that might be able to participate?

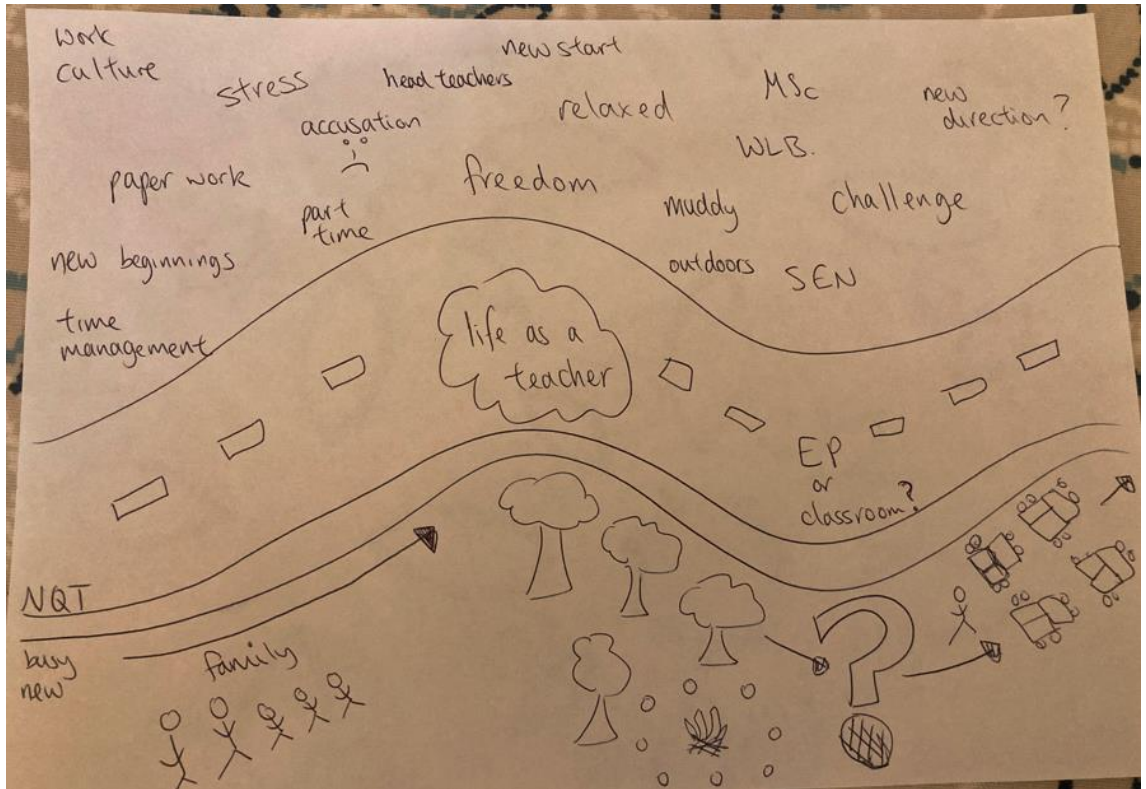
Appendix 5

Visual representations of 'life as a teacher' created by participants in advance of interviews (total = 8). One participant declined to complete a visual.

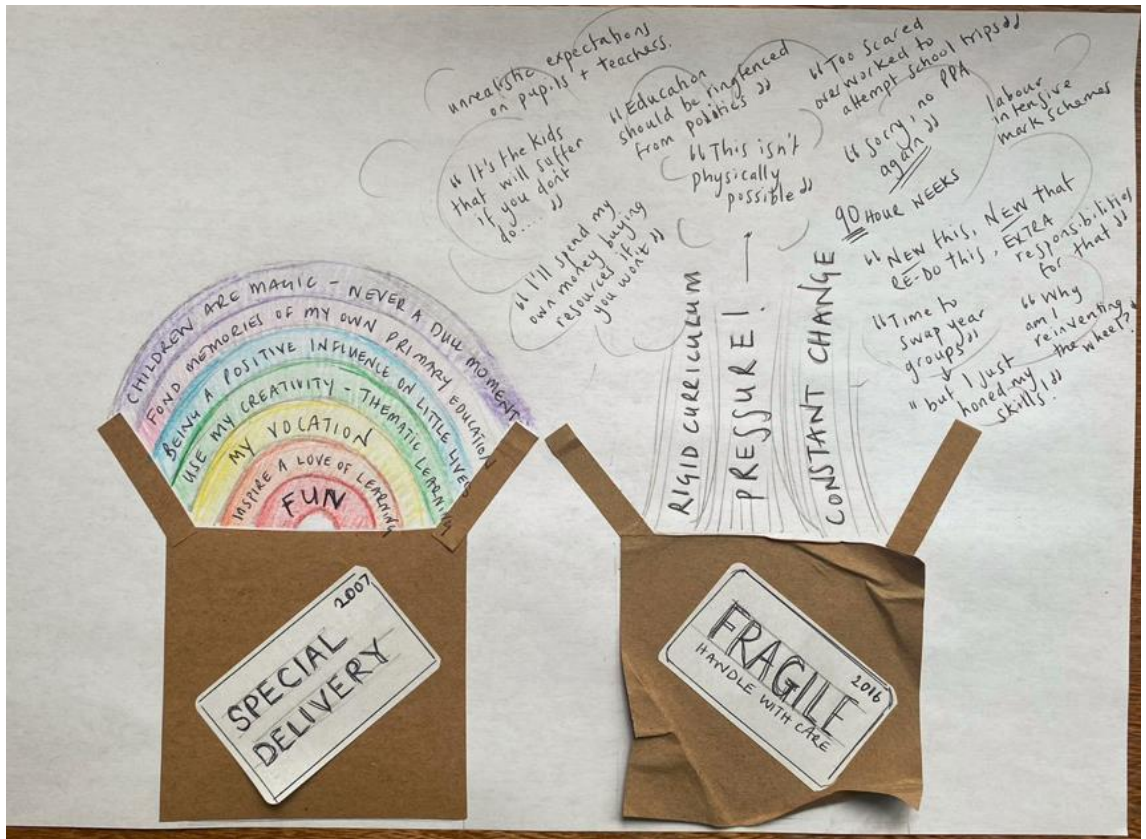
1 of 8



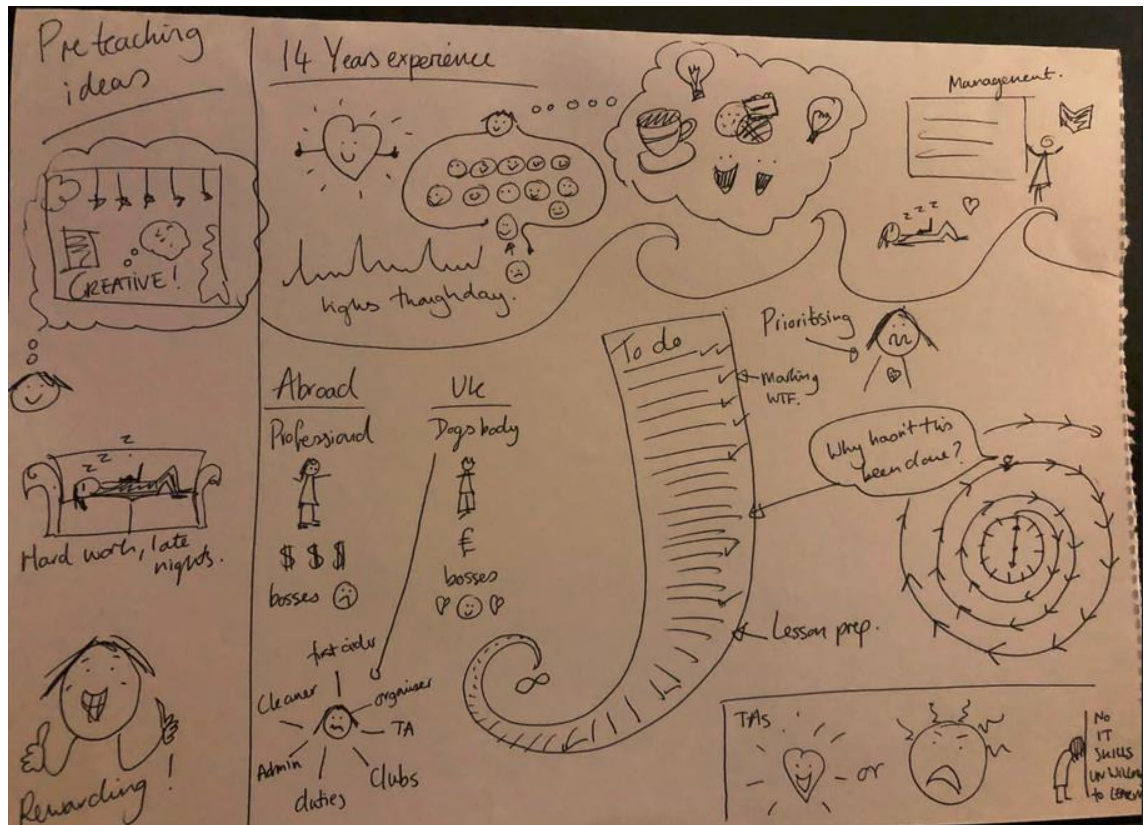
2 of 8



3 of 8



4 of 8



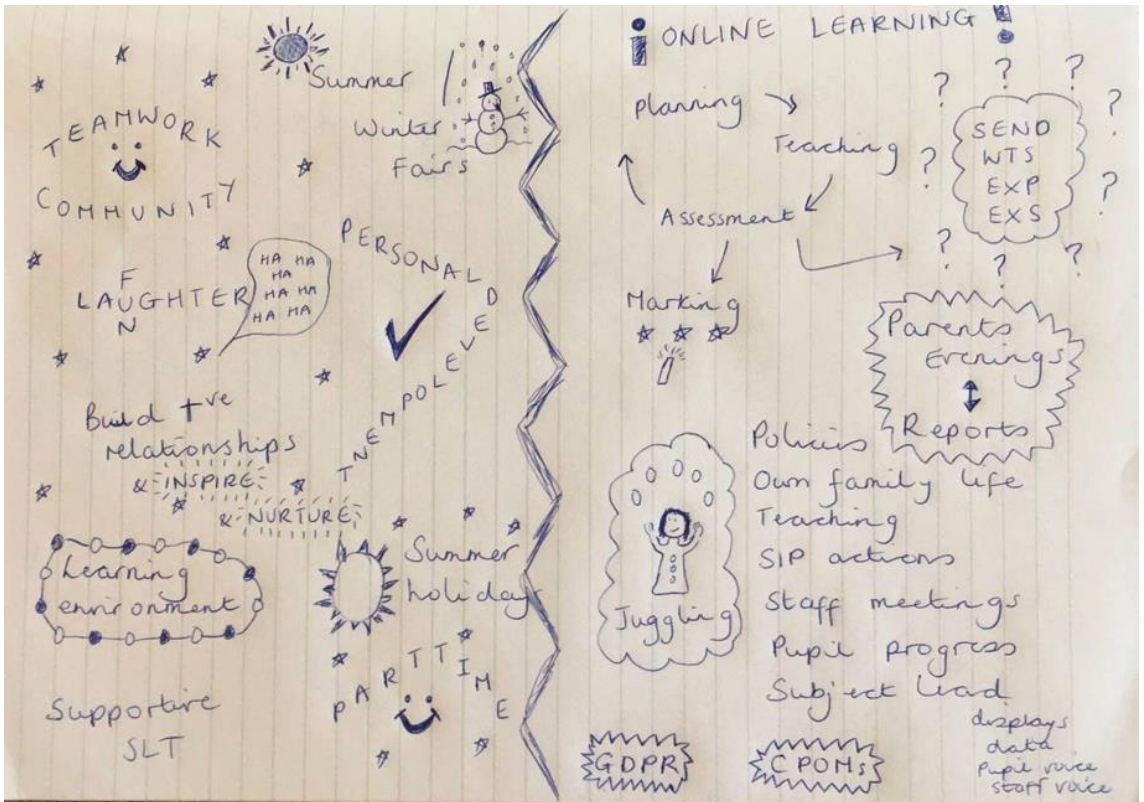
5 of 8



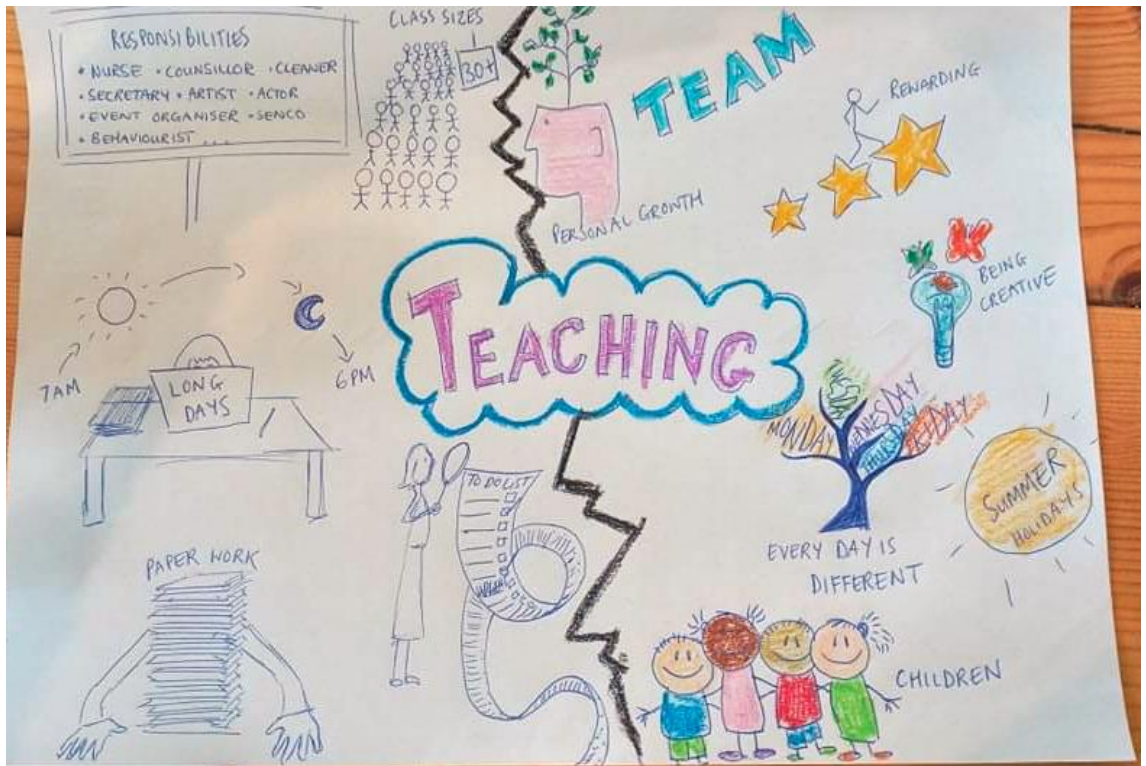
6 of 8



7 of 8



8 of 8



Appendix 6

Visual task guidance provided to participants in advance of interviews.

<p><u>Researcher details:</u></p> <p>Jenna Bradford jb2734@york.ac.uk University of York - Department of Education</p>	<p><u>Title of research:</u></p> <p>The reality of teaching vs perceptions, non-cognitive attributes, and other factors, in the retention and attrition of teachers in primary settings.</p>
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Visual task information and rationale:

For the purposes of this research, I am using a visual method and a semi-structured interview as qualitative methods with each participant. I hope that this enables each participant to enter the thought process about the topic prior to the interview (through the creation of a visual representation) and to ensure that the participant voice takes precedent and is heard from the outset (as they discuss the visual representation as a starting point for the interview). Every participant will have their own reality and perspectives that they wish to share - these are incredibly valuable insights.

The visual task:

Produce a visual representation that captures the essence of your thoughts, feelings and motivations about 'life as a teacher'.

Visual task guidance:

The visual representation need be no larger than A4 - this size is ideal so that the visual can be readily scanned and shared between participant and researcher. It can be created in any medium: paint, pencil, collage, for example - though this list is by no means exhaustive. It can be structured in any way - for example it could be a collection of independent drawings, interconnected drawings or shapes, or one large image focusing on one object (tangible or intangible). It would be helpful to think about the meanings you attribute to each part of the visual in preparation for our discussion. We will be able to discuss the visual representation you have created when we 'meet' online.

Appendix 7

A working wall of original initial codes.

To compare, contrast and organise initial codes in a tangible way, initial codes were copied onto post-it notes and arranged on a working wall.



Appendix 8

Audit trail showing how the number of initial and focused codes changed as the interviewing and transcribing progressed.

The table demonstrates that just 26% of the total focused codes were added by the second interview round and no new categories were added at this second stage of data generation and analysis.

Participant	Pages of transcript coded	Number of initial codes	Colour assigned for printing the transcript with codes
Initial interview round (4 interviews)			
KE	29	299	Classic red
EP	32	327	Classic blue
AS	12	117	Bright green
CS	27	241	Violet
Total	100	984	
From 984 initial codes, 218 focused codes were created to subsume or elevate these initial codes to.			

Second interview round (5 interviews)			
ASu	27	198	Yellow on yellow paper
PR	15	132	Grey on yellow paper
CM	15	179	Classic blue on green paper
NH	15	106	Pink on orange paper
TB	24	225	Blue on pink paper
Total	96	840	
From 840 initial codes, 75 additional focused codes were added to the original list created after the first interview round. This brought the overall total of focused codes to 293. 26% of the total focused codes were added by the second interview round. No new categories were added by the second interview round.			
Grand TOTAL		Initial codes = 1,824	Focused codes = 293 (75 of which were added by the second round of interviews)

Appendix 9

Progression of the manual data analysis (constant comparison) process.

Initial stage: the initial codes (with transcript excerpts on the reverse) were organised into tentative focused codes (plastic wallets) with post it notes indicating possible categories. *Second stage:* Initial and focused codes from similar wallets were compared again. The initial codes were then placed onto post it notes indicating the focused code they sit within. Groups of post it notes (with initial codes attached) were then placed into plastic wallets) indicating the categories. *Third stage:* Plastic wallets were emptied again, and the contents re-examined alongside those from similar plastic wallets (similar categories). They were then organised onto large boards to make them increasingly visible.

Initial stage:



Groups of initial codes, organised in plastic wallets.



Groups of initial codes, organised in plastic wallets to see similarities, differences or overlaps between tentative categories.

Second stage:



Third stage: An example of a board



'Juggling' and 'work life balance' board

Appendix 10

Formation of focused codes from initial codes.

The table below shows the initial codes which are subsumed under each of the four focused codes (in blue) which in turn sit within the category 'Struggling' and sub-category 'Being consumed by work'.

Being consumed by work

Work 'consuming' life	Extending the working day into personal time	Attempting to redress the work life imbalance	Mediating work and life imbalance long term
No work life balance. No work life balance. Working seven days a week. <u>Wanting to sleep but more work to do.</u> Working evenings and weekends. Spending own time on management tasks. Talking about work whilst on holiday. Doing full time hours, though paid part time. All consuming - no chance of 'switching off'. 'All consuming'.	No end to work - your evening is not your own. Working back home - emailing. Staying up late when juggling. Being 'kicked out' by <u>caretaker</u> every night. Getting set up for the day by arriving early. 'Setting out' the day ahead <u>in shower</u> . Needing an early start. Needing to get there early due to workload. Arriving early to prepare. Teaching isn't 9-3. Feeling frustrated by taking work home.	Going part time due to time pressures. Mediating work-life balance at crunch point. Realising balance needed. Comparing self with someone with children to think about work/life difficulties. Explaining reason for declining SENCO course. Leaving teaching to regain personal family time. Trying to be boundaried about taking work home.	<u>Waning energy and enthusiasm.</u>

Appendix 11

Table of categories and focused codes showing their origin (transcripts).

Page 1

Table of Core Categories, Categories and Focused codes									
CORE CATEGORY CATEGORY > = Focused code o = Sub Focused code	KE	EP	AS	CS	ASu	NH	TB	PR	CM
	Board One								
JUGGLING	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Juggling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
> A demanding range of admin duties for 'running a classroom'	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
> Facilitating learning - teaching and presenting		✓	✓			✓	✓		
> Problems with additional 'hats'	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
> Less visible/unanticipated or indirect task/demands	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
o Widening role to include home issues	✓						✓		
o Being delegated to					✓				
o Anticipating 'curve balls'		✓	✓	✓					
o Managing changes – curriculum/pedagogy/government	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓
o Accessing CPD				✓					
o Building relationships						✓			
o Caring for staff		✓		✓					
o Running a club				✓					
o Being impacted by class behaviour		✓							
o Being observed			✓				✓		✓
> Being a member of the team		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
o Building bonds at breaktimes		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
o Working together as a team			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
o Trying to support others		✓							
o Feelings about team capability spread				✓					

Page 2

CORE CATEGORY CATEGORY > = Focused code o = Sub Focused code	K	E	A	C	ASu	N	T	P	C
	E	P	S	S	H	H	B	R	M
> Wearing other 'hats'	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
o Subject leadership						✓			✓
o Club leader	✓			✓	✓		✓		
o Advisor/counsellor (TB)							✓		
ENJOYING ASPECTS OF THE JOB		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Being with and benefitting the children		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Every day being different			✓			✓	✓		
> Being creative							✓		✓
> Leading subjects		✓		✓					
> Being part of a team			✓	✓		✓			
> Learning/self-improvement	✓	✓	✓						
> Continuous development			✓		✓		✓		
> Being supported and acknowledged				✓	✓				
> Relishing working hard				✓					
> Being with and benefitting the children		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
REASONING BEHIND TEACHING	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓
> Career opportunities or opportunities to develop		✓			✓				
> To inspire	✓								
> To keep brain active		✓							
> Wanting to help other people		✓							
> Seeing benefits of working with young people	✓								
> Wanting stability	✓								
> Loving being with children									✓
> Thinking it is a calling									✓
> Remembering own school experiences fondly						✓			✓
> Career opportunities or opportunities to develop		✓			✓				
DESERVING OF/NEEDING PAY AND HOLIDAYS		✓		✓			✓	✓	

Page 3

CORE CATEGORY CATEGORY > = Focused code o = Sub Focused code	K E	E P	A S	C S	A S U	N H	T B	P R	C M
STRUGGLING TO SEPARATE WORK AND LIFE / STRUGGLING TO FIND WORK-LIFE BALANCE		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Leaders influencing work-life balance				✓	✓	✓			✓
> Trying to mediate work-life imbalance	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
> 'Ridiculous hours' 'Consuming life'	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
> Arriving early and/or leaving late	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Taking work home	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
NEVER ENDING NATURE OF BEING A TEACHER		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Finding opportunities for a break difficult	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Being busy	✓	✓		✓					✓
> Never ending lists	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
> 'Hectic' – no time	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Board Two									
INSIDER/OUTSIDER	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓
> Comprehending reality difficult as an outsider	✓					✓			✓
> Inaccurate public perception	✓					✓	✓		✓
> Judgement by public	✓								
> Media and government ads do not show realities	✓	✓			✓				
STRUGGLING (ALL)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Experiences of NQTs	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓
o Feeling unsupported				✓					
o Being overwhelmed		✓		✓	✓		✓		
o Feeling isolated/alone	✓	✓							
> Finding tasks reductive and/or pointless	✓			✓		✓		✓	✓
> Realising initial perceptions were incorrect			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
o No time to bring interests				✓					
o Being unsupported				✓					✓
o Frequent observations				✓					

Page 4

CORE CATEGORY CATEGORY > = Focused code o = Sub Focused code	K E	E P	A S	C S	A S U	N H	T B	P R	C M
o Disappointing educational offer								✓	✓
o Managing behaviour is significant		✓		✓					
> Realising things are not becoming easier		✓		✓					
> Overwhelming workload	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
> Just managing is difficult enough *Meeting expectations is not enough				✓	✓		✓		✓
> Perfectionism impacting on satisfaction *LINKS TO CHARACTERISTICS BELOW		✓		✓			✓		✓
> Parental attitudes making or breaking				✓					✓
> Training TAs difficult				✓					
> Feeling time pressured	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
> Finding curriculum and delivery freedoms restricted							✓	✓	✓
> Challenging classroom conditions		✓					✓	✓	✓
> Same school/year group = motivation loss	✓								
> Negative incident					✓				✓
> Feeling let down by Local Authority		✓							
EVOKING NEGATIVE FEELINGS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
> Feeling of failure (not meeting weight of own expectations)		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
> Feeling bad		✓		✓			✓	✓	
> Hate					✓		✓		
> Feeling stuck			✓						
> Changing self		✓							
> Anxious and annoyed	✓								
> Demoralised		✓							
> Dissatisfied		✓							
> Let down		✓							
> Letting others down		✓							
> Unfairness				✓			✓		

Page 5

CORE CATEGORY										
CATEGORY										
> = Focused code										
o = Sub Focused code										
	K	E	A	C	A	N	T	P	C	
	E	P	S	S	S	H	B	R	M	
> Depressed				✓						
> Scared					✓					
> Undervalued				✓	✓					
> Flustered		✓								
> Frustrated	✓	✓					✓			
> Pressure		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
> Overwhelm/exhaustion		✓							✓	
> Emotionally challenged	✓	✓		✓						
> Apathy/deflation		✓								
> Impacting negatively on mental wellbeing and health		✓			✓					
MEDIATORS + Teacher characteristics (below) + Leadership desirables (below)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Suggesting improvements to NQT year	✓			✓	✓		✓			
o Rethinking purpose of NQT year				✓						
o Protection from parental bullying				✓						
o Induction and planning support					✓		✓			
o External support group	✓									
o Trying terms in different schools	✓									
o Shadowing subject leads	✓									
> Finding a way to cope	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓			
> Entering teaching with some realistic expectations		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		
> Long serving coping strategies				✓	✓					✓
> Teacher training shortfall/gaps (ASu/EP/AS/TB/KE/CS/CM)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
TEACHER CHARACTERISTICS/ATTITUDES/SKILLS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Double edge sword characteristics		✓		✓						✓
o Approachability		✓								
o Perfectionism		✓								
o People pleasing										✓

Page 6

CORE CATEGORY										
CATEGORY										
> = Focused code										
o = Sub Focused code										
	K	E	A	C	A	N	T	P	C	
	E	P	S	S	S	H	B	R	M	
> Useful personal characteristics	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
o Sense of humour							✓			
o Resilience		✓	✓			✓	✓			
o Patience		✓	✓							
o Enthusiasm/passion	✓	✓								
o Adaptability	✓		✓		✓	✓				
o Supportive of others	✓					✓	✓			
o Positivity			✓							
o Hard working		✓				✓				
o Accepting/accommodating of change	✓	✓								
o Switching off										✓
> Useful attitudes	✓	✓								
o Thick skinned (TB)							✓			
o Open minded (KE/EP)	✓	✓								
o Growth mindset (KE/EP)	✓	✓								
> Useful skills/abilities		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
o Creativity (TB)							✓			
o Tech ability (PR)								✓		
o Time efficient/organised (TB/NH/ASu/EP/PR)		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓		
o People skills/building rapport (EP)		✓								
o Communication (ASu/CM/EP)		✓			✓					✓
Board Three										
DISCUSSING LEADERSHIP FAILINGS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Holding unnecessary/pointless meetings									✓	
> Untrusting of staff								✓	✓	
> Rejecting/dismissing ideas – losing motivation		✓								
> Having unrealistic expectations								✓		

Page 7

CATEGORY > = Focused code o = Sub Focused code	K E	E P	A S	C S	A S U	N H	T B	P R	C M
> Failing to take action on what matters to teachers		✓			✓				✓
> Failing to resource adequately				✓		✓			
> Lacking leadership support	✓			✓	✓				✓
> Lacking understanding – being removed from realities		✓			✓				
> Failing to create important policies							✓		
> Allowing unmanageable workload /adding to workload	✓				✓		✓		✓
> Lacking example setting	✓	✓					✓		
> Negatively influencing teaching/learning experience								✓	✓
> Devaluing role of ‘teacher’ alone					✓		✓		
> Dictating down (us and them) egocentric bias	✓	✓		✓			✓		
> Directing/instructing		✓			✓				✓
> Removing autonomy/ownership		✓							✓
> Pushing teachers to become leaders					✓		✓		
> Communication/people skills					✓		✓	✓	
> Not listening		✓							
> Being unapproachable			✓						
> Failing to recognise hard work/long hours								✓	
> Devaluing ‘not good enough’					✓		✓	✓	
> Depersonalising/dehumanising		✓							
> Unfairness		✓		✓	✓			✓	
> Bullying					✓		✓		✓
> Allowing parental bullying				✓					
> Having favourites		✓		✓	✓				✓
> Viewing teachers in terms of monetary value					✓				
> Adding pressure/failing to act on pressured staff			✓					✓	✓
> Judging/labelling staff as failing	✓				✓		✓	✓	✓
> Attacking mistakes quickly	✓								

Page 8

CORE CATEGORY CATEGORY > = Focused code o = Sub Focused code	K E	E P	A S	C S	A S U	N H	T B	P R	C M
> Pushing/nudging out staff				✓	✓				
<i>Organisation/understanding-knowledge/style/unprofessionalism?</i>									
INDICATIONS OF A NEGATIVE CULTURE	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		
> Cultures can vary significantly across settings	✓				✓		✓		
> Expecting high turnover		✓			✓				
> Competition between staff				✓					
> Team disharmony/divide/disgruntlement					✓		✓		
> Finger pointing (blaming) and gossiping				✓					
> Low morale		✓							
DISCUSSING IDEAS FOR BETTER LEADERSHIP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
> Heads ‘shouldering pressure’ in order to protect staff							✓		
> Acknowledging/valuing role of teacher alone							✓		
> Teacher involvement in headteacher recruitment							✓		
> Actively teaching/being present and aware of realities						✓			
> Being aware, visible, in tune with morale		✓							
> Being interested in staff		✓			✓				
> Listening and acknowledging passions and ideas	✓	✓			✓				
> Providing staff with ownership and autonomy						✓			✓
> Providing additional support/time out of class at ‘crunch time’			✓						
> Supporting teachers who are also parents									✓
> Inducting new staff well					✓				
> Possessing soft skills/nurturing relationships		✓			✓				
> Helping troubleshoot and problem solve		✓							
> Valuing time as an important resource								✓	
> Supporting staff to learn through changes/new skills	✓						✓		
> Standing up for staff	✓		✓	✓			✓		
> Shaping workload positively					✓	✓	✓		✓

CORE CATEGORY										
CATEGORY										
> = Focused code										
o = Sub Focused code										
	K E	E P	A S	C S	A S U	N H	T B	P R	C M	
> Thoughts about returning	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓
FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE USE	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
> Day to day nature of teaching (CM/ASu/EP/CS/KE)	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓
> Feelings about teaching (CM/ASu/EP/CS/KE)	✓	✓		✓	✓					✓
> Leadership actions/behaviours (KE/PR/TB)	✓						✓	✓		
> Childrens learning experiences (TB/KE)	✓						✓			
> References to dehumanisation (EP)		✓								
> References to feelings after declared leaving (EP)		✓								
> Lacking support (ASu/CS)				✓	✓					

From plastic wallets:

218 focused codes after initial 4 interviews (approx. 984 initial codes)

293 focused codes after second set of 5 interviews (approx. 840 initial codes)

74% of focused codes collected in initial round. 26% of focused codes added by second round of interviewing – approx. same number of initial codes from this second round.

How many more focused codes after second group of coded interviews are focused coded? **+75 additional focused codes after second set of interviews (5 interviews) No new categories.**

Appendix 12

The end of the data analysis process – resulting boards including categories, subcategories, focused codes and initial codes.

Each board represents a different category. The pink and orange post it notes represent the focused codes and the individual strips of paper represent are initial codes. Some sub-categories are also identified – these are white rectangular pieces of paper.



'Juggling' and 'work life balance' board

An example of how a record of the board contents was documented

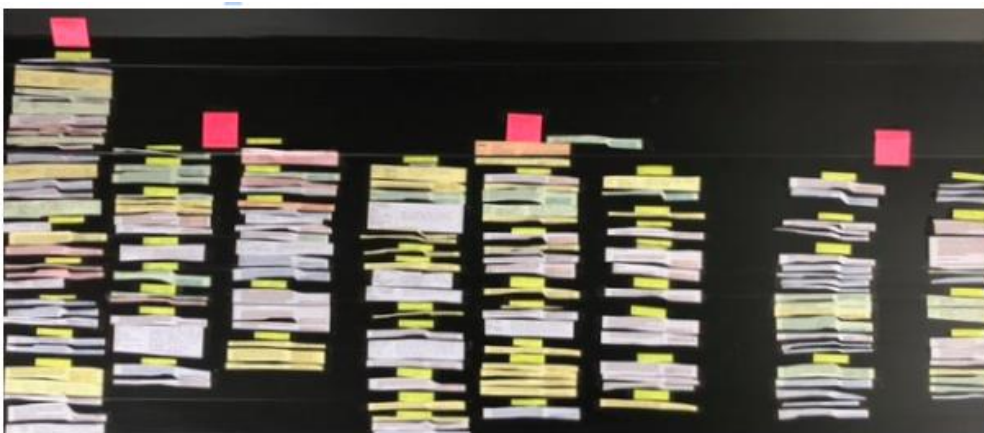
<p>REASONING BEHIND TEACHING (ASu/EP/KE/CM/NH)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Career opportunities or opportunities to develop (ASu/EP) > To inspire (KE) > To keep brain active (EP) > Wanting to help other people (EP) > Seeing benefits of working with young people (KE) > Wanting stability > Loving being with children (CM) > Thinking it is a calling (CM) > Remembering own school experiences fondly (NH/CM) 	<p>STRUGGLING TO SEPARATE WORK AND LIFE / STRUGGLING TO FIND WORK-LIFE BALANCE (ASu/TB/CM/AS/CM/CS/PR/NH/EP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Leaders influencing work-life balance (NH/ASu/CM) > Trying to mediate work-life imbalance (EP/ASu/CS/TB/KE/CM/NH) > "Ridiculous hours" "Consuming life" (EP/KE/CS/ASu/CM/TB/CS) > Arriving early and/or leaving late (PR/NH/ASu/AS/TB/EP/KE/CM) > Taking work home (ASu/KE/CS/EP/CM/TB) 	<p>ENJOYING ASPECTS OF THE JOB (ASu/TB/CM/AS/CM/CS/PR/NH/EP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Being with and benefitting the children (TB/CM/NH/CS/EP/PR/ASu) > Every day being different (AS/NH/TB) > Being creative (CM/TB) > Leading subjects (CS/EP) > Being part of a team (CS/NH/AS) > Learning/self-improvement (AS/EP/KE) > Continuous development (TB/ASu/AS) > Being supported and acknowledged (ASu) > Relishing working hard (CS) > Identifying positive aspects of job on life (ASu/AS/CS) > Fresh enthusiasm prompted by year group change (ASu) > Meeting career needs (ASu/EP)
<p>NEVER ENDING NATURE OF BEING A TEACHER (ASu/TB/CM/CM/CS/PR/NH/EP)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Finding opportunities for a break difficult (NH/KE/TB/CM/PR/ASu/CS) > Being busy (CS/EP/CM/KE) > Never ending lists (KE/TB/EP/CM/CS/PR) > "Hectic" – no time (ASu/CM/TB/PR/KE/CS) 	<p>DESERVING OF/NEEDING PAY AND HOLIDAYS (TB/EP/CS/PR)</p>	<p>JUGGLING WIDE RANGING DUTIES AND ROLES 'All encompassing' ALL</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Juggling (CS/EP/KE/NH) > A demanding range of admin duties for "running a classroom" (KE/CM/NH/ASu/CS/TB/AS) > Facilitating learning - teaching and presenting (AS/TB/EP/NH) > Problems with additional "hats" (CM/ASu/CS/TB/KE/EP) > Less visible/unanticipated or indirect task/demands (TB/KE/ASu/EP/CS/AS/NH/CM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Widening role to include home issues (TB/KE) o Being delegated to (ASu) o Anticipating 'curve balls' (EP/AS/CS) o Managing changes – curriculum/pedagogy/government (AS/EP/CM/NH/KE) o Accessing CPD (CS) o Building relationships (NH) o Caring for staff (CS/EP) o Running a club (CS) o Being impacted by class behaviour (EP) o Being observed (CM/TB/CS) > Being a member of the team (PR/CS/EP/NH/AS/TB) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Building bonds at breaktimes (PR/CS/EP/NH/AS/TB) o Working together as a team (NH/AS/TB/CS/AS) o Trying to support others (EP) o Feelings about team capability spread (CS) > Wearing other 'hats' (TB/EP/NH/CM/ASu/CS/KE)



'Struggling' board



'Leadership' board



'Post attrition thoughts and feelings' board

Appendix 14

Researcher's early visual representation of two categories: juggling and struggling.



Appendix 15

Informed consent and ethical approval confirmation.

Informed consent form.

The attrition of teachers in primary settings in England.

Dear Participant,

Jenna Bradford is currently carrying out a research project based on teacher perspectives of teacher attrition in primary school settings.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project. Before agreeing to take part, please read this information sheet carefully and let us know if anything is unclear or you would like further information.

For information about General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) please follow the link:

https://www.york.ac.uk/education/research/gdpr_information/

Purpose of the study

The study is designed to gain reflective, holistic insights from the participants perspective regarding their experiences and attitudes towards life as a teacher. In particular, the research has a focus on participants' motivations for staying in the profession long term or leaving the profession in the beginning years. In this research, participant voice is highly valued and research methods employed will enable the participants to have equal power as the researcher at the point of their contribution to the study.

What would this mean for you?

- Consenting to a one hour 1:1 online interview via Zoom or Skype (depending on participants own preference) with the researcher. N.B the interview will be recorded for the purpose of allowing the interview raw data to be transcribed.
- The preparation of an A4 visual representation of 'life as a teacher' and the sharing of this with the researcher in advance of the online interview. The visual task information is included in a separate document.

- Reviewing the interview transcript once prepared by the researcher to ensure the interview has been accurately recorded.
- Being Zoom or Skype ready - having the apps installed or enabled and ready to use.
- Sharing an email address with the researcher and being happy to receive emails regarding the administration elements of the interview and visual representation.
- Providing minimal socio-demographic information on a google form prior to the interview.
- Completing the informed consent form included in the participant information.

Participation is voluntary

Participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be given a copy of this information sheet for your records and will be asked to complete a consent form. If you change your mind at any point during the study, you will be able to withdraw your participation without having to provide a reason.

Anonymity and confidentiality

The data that you provide (e.g. video recordings of the interview, visual representation) will be stored by code number. Any information that identifies you will be stored separately from the data. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to one week after the data is collected.

Storing and using your data

Data will be stored on a password protected computer, backed up on a password protected external hard-drive and on the researcher's University of York Google Drive. Data will be fully anonymised at the transcription stage.

Anonymised data will be kept for five years after which time it will be destroyed.

The data that I collect [videos / audio recordings / visual representations] may be used in **anonymous or non-anonymised** format in different ways, e.g. publications, presentations and the PhD final thesis. Please indicate on the consent form your preferences.

You will be given the opportunity to comment on a written record of your interview.

Questions or concerns

If you have any questions about this participant information sheet or concerns about how your data is being processed, please feel free to contact Jenna by email education-research-admin@york.ac.uk or the Chair of Ethics Committee via email education-research-admin@york.ac.uk. If you are still dissatisfied, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@york.ac.uk

I hope that you will agree to take part. If you are happy to participate, please complete the form and email it to Jenna: education-research-admin@york.ac.uk. Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Jenna Bradford

Ethical approval confirmation

Ethics approved Inbox x ⌵

E Education PhD Administrator <educ510@york.ac.uk> Fri, 5 Mar 2021, 12:10 ☆
 to Jenna, Robert, Jan ▼

Hi Jenna,

Hope all is well with you!

Your ethics application has been approved. Please find attached a signed copy of your ethics form. I have also saved it to your student file, should you need it in the future.

Best wishes,
Paisley

Research Degrees Administrator
 Department of Education | University of York

Second approval: by a designated Ethics Committee member:

Please select one of the following options:

Ethics statements	Tick one box
I believe that this study, as planned, meets normal ethical standards. I have checked that any informed consent form a) addresses the points as listed in this document, and b) uses appropriate language for the intended audience(s).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I am unsure if this study, as planned, meets normal ethical standards	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe that this study, as planned, does not meet normal ethical standards and requires some modification	<input type="checkbox"/>

Add the name of Ethics Committee member: Professor Carole Torgerson

Add the date: 04/03/21

The Ethics Committee member should now **email** this completed form to the Programme Administrator, unless approval is required by the full Ethics Committee (see below).

Appendix 16

Researcher's visual representation of findings (for sharing with participants in member-checking). Illustration credit to Erica Finlayson.

1 of 2



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Appendix 17

Figurative language employed by participants in interviews (table form).

1 of 4

KS 4	<p>...a lot more to it behind the scenes. keeping on top of your daily jobs it is very sort of up and down. she does have your back with a lot of things.</p>
KS 21	<p>It's as if I'm a new teacher with new enthusiasm again. I'm going up and down and that wasn't the idea of it being a high and a low. we were in for a really tough ride I kind of felt they've laid it on really thick. I don't think I've ever had rose tinted spectacles. I'm an early bird - like to be in for 730. ...not very good at keeping catching people before they drown. the people that have been drowning recently are possibly the ones that haven't wanted to know that they were drowning. she's very downtrodden about it all. you know, they're out for their things. she's a plodder she's quite happy with her head under the - what's the word - parapet. She's not really, she won't ever stick ahead out for it to be noticed so stays under the radar (researcher) it was those who just kept their head above water. it comes down to if your face fits. they're kind of trying to play the system. keeping your head above water and doing things you should be doing, then you're alright. both my placements weren't sugar coated. then having to pay for like some sort of like holiday club I'd be crippled. how we can nudge you out with some negative lesson observations. I could have quite easily crumbled at that point. her heart is in the right place.</p>
CM 6	<p>...the proverbial rose tinted glasses. Then we started getting compartmentalised in my eight years of teaching. the crumpled one yeah, so I wrote 'hand- handle with care' I yeah I was- it just consumed me. I just couldn't switch off. I remember logging my hours because I was crumbling. I feel like that education chops and changes so much in to do with politics. I think it stretches the more able.</p>
CS 27	<p>and I think it's the thing that, you know, kind of sometimes slips. I didn't like that you kind of felt like a bit of a cog in a big machine. you generally do feel like a complete dog's body. I felt was a bit dog's body ish. get the good TA and they're fantastic, and they support you, and they're brilliant and you know everything's rosy. it was a bit sink or swim. I'm going to have to like pull back, which was very, very difficult at the time. there's a lot of throwing people into the deep end in teaching. I think there is a lot of like right 'sink or swim off you go'. actually, it can make or break a year lot of the parents in your class. the same year group come hell or high water. everything they have, you know, they've thrown at this job.</p>

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	<p>in teaching there's a lot of like finger pointing and a lot of being pulled up on any little thing. that's just my default - to always go the extra mile.</p> <p>I would almost rather sort of finish this career on a high. I was just running myself into the ground. I was just like in a bit of a hole. I think just people feeling like they're drowning. I think people feeling like they're being pushed out. Rather than that first year - sink or swim. there's so much thrown at you in that first year . people <u>really just</u> work themselves into the ground. you kind of just need a breather. you're like gliding along the surface, I think it's fine and underneath your like paddling like this just to keep your head above water all the time. then you're both going like this (spinning plates).</p>
EP 35	<p>it was literally like a weight was lifted. I literally felt like a free spirit. I felt like I was a different person. yeah it was a weight lifted and there's a lot of weights on my visual representation. Oh and yeah that really weighted on me. it <u>consumes</u> you, it engulfs you. you can't switch off - it's <u>really hard</u> to switch off in a teaching job. I think the weight on the shoulders weight of the world on your shoulders. I think that really drives you down. it's like juggling you're suddenly from a child in need meeting, you know, you come back into school.. work life balance, which is obviously weighed heavily done with work. you know juggling so many different areas. even as a teacher, I think you'd have quite a few balls to juggle but then add on another responsibility, add on.. "I'm spread too thinly" with <u>all of</u> these juggling balls I'm spread too thinly.. "work them hard you know if they decide to drop off".. I've got a little puppet on a <u>string</u>. I feel like I didn't have any autonomy. But they were all pretty much knocked down. I knew I wanted to be able to climb a ladder. it's like the goalposts keep moving. so they were climbing the walls. as soon as I got into the classroom behaviour management was a whole new ballgame. as an experienced teacher we've got loads of things up our sleeves. you almost <u>have to</u> think on your toes. that eats into your time again. It was that weight of almost <u>almost</u> my own expectations. he lived, he breathed teaching and I think he expected that of other people. I can't just click my fingers and that happens. everyone's on the same page and everyone's on the same wavelength. they were like almost like <u>doos bodies</u>.</p>

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	<p>just instantly coming up against a brick wall and every suggestion is knocked down. everyone brings something different to the table. it's a vicious circle it really is. that's the puppet on a string isn't it! you can only get like I don't know, pushed down so many times.</p>
KE 14	<p>you got so much whizzing around in your head. You're constantly juggling lots of juggling balls. I did a little tree there - watching them grow from a little tree to a big tree. they were just sat there in the ivory tower like. everyone else yeah running around. Keeping the school afloat really. the highs and lows of teaching - bit of a roller coaster (referring to visual). You know, you have good days, you have bad days. had a breakthrough - with the child or a group of children know I would have stuck out that job because I had a mountain of work you're always clock watching. I did feel a bit like Groundhog day. not to just brush it to one side and be like 'what's the point in that we don't, we don't need that. you can get jumped on very quickly.</p>
MH 5	<p>marking policy is a joke isn't it? I know it'd be a nightmare. but then we were starting from scratch. how we delivered white rose, so it was - that was crazy. they're not just sat in an office dishing out stuff.</p>
TB 19	<p>they're like little sponges. most holidays, I do switch off for a certain <u>period of time</u>. it's almost like the like a witch hunt of the people that don't do very well. I don't know learn how to cut some amazing corners. <u>in order to</u>, you know, really deliver good quality lesson you've <u>got to</u> bend over backwards. I could draw a picture of children jumping through hoops. Then you're nurse - you're nurse as well. I do feel like I've got to pretend to be all like chirpy. I think generally went into it with <u>with</u> my eyes wide open because I have always worked with kids. I do feel a lot of people are quite blind to that don't <u>really quite</u> get going into it how difficult it is. I think those are the people that have a much rosier tinted view. there you've got booted out at six. the ethos of the school is down to the head teacher and then if they take the pressure on their shoulders. I will have to learn how to cut more corners. you've got to be able to look on the positive side of things, otherwise I think you'd get bogged down </p>

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	<p>frowned upon that you don't want to climb that ladder he was very good at stroking your ego I think. that's really subtle at times I hate it but that that tends to be when I've got 110 things to do.</p>
PR 12	<p>I think like kind of clouded a lot of kind of positives for me. almost kind of dampened my passion for teaching. or they're always kind of critiquing about something. like it was drilling home everything constantly. kids were not always taking it on board. why reinvent the wheel, I suppose. is a bit of an eye opener. I felt like, you know, a naughty school boy. why are they not being dragged in and told off for something. it's like some people could get away with murder. if not like I said they came down like a ton of bricks over anything. it's like a vicious cycle.</p>

Appendix 18

Researcher's abstracts and posters for conferences

British Psychological Society (Psychology of Education Section) conference 14th-15th September 2022. Poster and Abstract.

Juggling and Struggling: Walking the teaching tightrope

Research Questions

What factors intensify or reduce the likelihood of primary teachers leaving the profession?

How does the nature of the primary teaching role contribute to attrition?

How do primary teachers express their thoughts and feelings on teacher attrition?

Purpose and background of the study

Teacher attrition is a serious and ongoing concern for schools in England. Research indicates that up to 50% of teachers leave the profession within five years of joining^{1,4,6}. High levels of teacher turnover consume economic resources that can be used elsewhere⁵. Attrition also leads to cultural instability in school and an impairment of student learning experience⁴. In addition, it is harmful to student achievement²⁻⁷. This study aims to explore insider views of teacher attrition, specifically in primary schools, with a view to better understanding the challenges faced by teachers so that changes can be made to their experiences which may result in lower attrition rates.

Design and Methods

The study adopted a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach³, recognising multiple realities and mutual construction of data. A CGT approach highlights participant voices, and was chosen to provide an insider understanding of teacher attrition beyond the routinely cited existing data.

The study used an intensive, in-depth small sample approach to data collection. Initial purposive sampling was followed by theoretical sampling with experienced teachers. A total of 9 participants took part in the research. Open-ended visual representations of 'life as a teacher' were first produced by participants, providing a lens through which participants could share their experiences. Two follow-up semi-structured interviews (initial and member-check) were conducted with each teacher.

Visual representations created by participants

Visual representation of Findings (used for member checking)

Findings and discussion

Findings demonstrate that teacher attrition is a response to the process of 'juggling'. The process of continuously working with an intense, overwhelming workload often underlined by synchronous multitasking of a multitude of diverse demands (which widen over time) can directly lead to attrition. Findings also showed that this 'juggling' can lead to a struggle, then attrition indirectly.

The 'juggling' and 'struggling' faced by participants was made better or worse by mediators and stressors. Stressors included leadership, culture and context and mediators included personal competencies and system mediators, such as addressing gaps in ITT training.

Overarching theoretical model

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Conceptual Models

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Juggling and struggling - walking the teaching tightrope

Jenna Bradford, University of York

Objectives: Teacher attrition is a serious and ongoing concern for schools in England. This study aims to explore insider views of teacher attrition, specifically in primary schools.

Research question: What are the reasons for teacher attrition in primary settings from a teacher perspective?"

Design: The study adopted a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach, recognising multiple realities and mutual construction of data. A CGT approach highlights participant voices, and was chosen to provide an insider understanding of teacher attrition beyond the routinely cited existing data.

Methods: The study used an intensive, in-depth small sample approach to data collection. Initial purposive sampling was followed by theoretical sampling with experienced teachers. A total of nine participants took part in the research. Open-ended visual representations of 'life as a teacher' were first produced by participants, providing a lens through which participants could share their experiences. Two follow-up individual semi-structured interviews (initial and member-check) were then conducted to further explore teachers' views.

Results: Findings demonstrate that teacher attrition is a response to the process of 'juggling and struggling' experienced by teachers. Intense, constant juggling of a variety of demands leads to a struggle which is compounded, over time, through being 'consumed' by the role, leading to a strong feeling of failure.

Conclusions: The study highlights the overwhelming 'juggling and struggling' undertaken by teachers, despite mitigators (primarily internal capacity) that act on the struggle. Limitations include a small sample size and a sole focus on teachers rather than other players.

Durham Castle Conference (April 2022). Abstract and Poster.

Juggling and struggling - walking the teaching tightrope *Jenna Bradford, PhD Student in Education, University of York*

Teacher attrition from primary school settings in England has been an urgent concern in the education sector for the last two decades. This research project uses constructivist grounded theory incorporating visual analysis and in-depth interviews to understand the issue of teacher attrition. Participants (nine current and former primary teachers) provided vivid graphic depictions and verbal recollections of their time as a primary teacher. Analysis of the graphic and verbal data revealed the impact of the 'never ending' role on work-life balance and the centrality of the 'juggling' involved with the role. This juggling, over time, resulted in struggle, and in some cases, the decision to leave the profession. Teachers struggled for different reasons – some struggles were due to perceptions and realities being misaligned; challenging classroom conditions; finding curriculum and delivery freedoms restricted; leadership failings, or overwhelming workload. The struggling of participants was a precursor for the strong negative feelings and, in particular, a 'feeling of failure'. Struggles experienced by participants were often 'mediated' by finding their own ways of coping; filling teacher training gaps or shortfalls; making improvements to the experiences of new teachers; leadership desirables being present and personal characteristics, abilities and attitudes being brought to the role, alongside others. This poster will present the key findings of the research, with a particular focus on post-attrition reflections and transition to pastures new for some participants.



Juggling and struggling – walking the teaching tightrope



Jenna Bradford

Department of Education, University of York

Introduction

Teacher attrition has been a concern in England, and other countries, for many years. Research indicates that up to 50% of teachers leave the profession within five years of joining^{1,4,5}.

High levels of teacher turnover consume economic resources that can be used elsewhere⁵. Attrition also leads to cultural instability in school and an impairment of student learning experience⁴. In addition, it is harmful to student achievement^{2,3}.



Methodology

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)³ was the chosen inductive methodology for this research. CGT has a constructivist ontology – a belief that knowledge is socially constructed and that multiple realities exist⁷. Through its interpretive epistemology, it acknowledges researcher involvement, at acknowledges researcher involvement, at the very least in interpreting the data, the researcher themselves is subjective, not an objective observer.

Within this methodology, visual methods were employed to allow the participant power in the process. These were followed by semi-structured interviews.

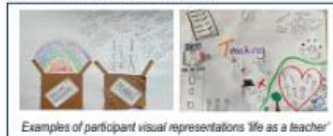
At the end of the data collection process, initial findings were presented back to participants in a visual form, as a way of member checking which mirrored their process.

Literature Cited

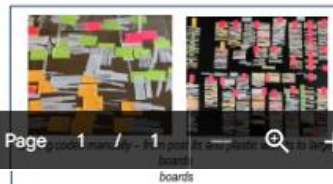
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The Project

Participants, either current or former teachers with six or more years experience in the profession, were asked to create a visual representation of 'life as a teacher' in advance of a semi-structured interview.



Following each interview, transcripts were then assigned initial codes using gerunds or in-vivo codes where possible³ and the constant comparison process continued as focused codes emerged and new data was compared with existing data and codes. After initial work with codes by hand, using post its and plastic wallets, codes were sorted and grouped by onto large boards under tentative focused codes and categories.



Memo making and diagramming started early in the research process and continued through data collection into analysis.



Future direction

Future work will outline the means by which participants made meaning of their experiences which were commonly thorough use of figurative language. There will be an emphasis on reflecting retention strategies suggested by participants.

Findings

All participants discussed undertaking wide ranging roles, with a variety of tasks within each, as part of their job as a teacher. This 'ceaseless juggling' leads to a pervasive struggle to manage as a teacher, characterised by life outside teaching becoming consumed by work; an emergence of gaps between the perception and realities of teaching; an experiencing of adverse emotion and an overall feeling of failure. This feeling of failure is underscored by time pressure leading to a cycle of 'just managing' or 'doing just enough', being unable to meet own expectations and the persistent belief that tasks could have always been completed to a higher standard than they were.



The struggle is compounded by stressors such as judgement from members of the public; parental attitudes; lack of leadership support; a multitude of differing leadership failures; a difficult school culture, in the eyes of the participants. Mitigators such as finding ways to cope; entering teaching with realistic expectations; a supported NQT year and having useful personal characteristics, attitudes and skills can work to relieve some of the experienced struggle.



Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the unwavering support of my supervisor Prof. Robert Klassen (University of York).

Sheffield Hallam Institute of Education Doctoral Conference (June 2021) conference poster.

Constructivist Grounded Theory

- from unconscious incompetence to conscious competence and beyond -

Unconscious Incompetence	Conscious Incompetence	Conscious Competence	Unconscious Competence
At this stage of the PhD journey confidence from a previous career or academic success may be fresh in mind. The challenges and difficulties of the PhD journey may be discovered.	Challenges particular to your own PhD journey begin to emerge. Difficulties may begin to feel uncomfortable and appear insurmountable. Perceived inferiorities may be hard to work through. Crises of confidence.	Action plans are deployed. Strategies are employed to troubleshoot. Support networks are utilised. Opportunities to articulate challenges are exploited. The PhD journey seems more manageable and progress is being made.	The PhD researcher feels comfortable with the work left to complete. Confidence in capabilities. Competent autopilot. A need to 'move on' or a thirst for new, exciting challenges may present itself and take the researcher back to a previous phase.

Grounded theory is a research design or methodology. It provides a framework for conducting research. It aims to construct theory from data. The data is 'systematically obtained and analysed using constant comparison' (Chun Tse et al, 2019). Both qualitative and quantitative data generation methods can be employed within a grounded theory study. Bryant (2019) explains that there are a family of grounded theory variants to choose from.

What is grounded theory?

Straussian Grounded Theory (Corbin & Strauss, 1990)

- Remains inductive.
- Positivist and pragmatic.
- Critiqued by Glaser in 1992.

Feminist Grounded Theory

Postmodern Situative Grounded Theory

With the emergence of different philosophical perspectives came different varieties of GT

Classic Grounded Theory (Glaserian)

- Remains inductive.
- Positivist and objectivistic (assumes external reality and neutrality and passivity of observer/researcher).

Constructivist Grounded Theory

Charmaz, Bryant (1990's onward)

- Remains inductive.
- Interpretive epistemology.
- Constructivist ontology - knowledge is socially constructed 'multiple realities exist' (Mills et al, 2006).

The origins of Grounded Theory:

In 1967, **Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss** published 'The Discovery of Grounded Theory'. Strauss had mentored a nurse (Quient Benoliel) in field research and the three had worked together on research around end of life care for terminally ill patients. At the time, the prevailing attitude was that qualitative research was lacking in diligence and thoroughness. Glaser and Strauss wanted to confront, and change, this view.

More on Constructivist Grounded Theory:

- A review of literature prior to commencing research is acceptable – Charmaz acknowledges that it's difficult to approach a topic without 'already knowing' to a certain extent. Of course many institutions require a literature review as part of a research proposal.
- Researcher position is acknowledged and often made evident through the process. For example, researcher autobiographies made available to participants which encourages authenticity and reciprocity of exchanges (Keane, 2015; Lather, 1991).
- Birks and Mills (2011) explain that Charmaz was warm and empathetic in interactions with participants and these characteristics follow through into the methodology. As a consequence the methodology often used in field of healthcare.
- Research is often highly phenomenological – explores individual realities (ideographic), meanings and experiences.
- Generalisations are partial and conditional – situated in time, space, positions, actions and interactions.
- Coding terms used: initial, focused and theoretical.

Strengths of Constructivist GT

Philosophical assonance

Feeling comfortable using the methodology

Providing researcher information – openness and honesty

Rich data can be collected

Interview transcripts are detailed / focus on participant feelings and meanings

Participant feedback on the process is highly positive and indicates a 'therapeutic nature'

The opportunity to use a range of research methods

Not prescriptive in RM to be used

Use of visual methods as a precursor to interview

Equal power balance through visual method

Challenges of Constructivist GT

Understanding different forms of GT

Specialist support geographically dispersed

Analysis paralysis when beginning to code

Overcoming difficulties

- Return to Constructivist GT seminal texts or chapters in GT and Nagel et al (2015)
- Draw on supervisor support or peers at university
- Engage with practical online resources: YouTube videos, twitter, websites, GT blogs
- Seek out and familiarise with recent Constructivist GT theses

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Acronyms

CGT	Constructivist grounded theory
CPD	Continuous professional development
DfE	Department for Education
DT	Design Technology
ECF	Early career framework (DfE, 2019)
ECT	Early career teachers
GT	Grounded Theory
ITE	Initial teacher education
ITT	Initial teacher training
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NPM	New Public Management
NQT	Newly qualified teacher
PE	Physical Education
PGCE	Post-graduate Certificate in Education
PPA	Planning, preparation and assessment time (non-contact time)

PSHCE	Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship Education
RE	Religious Education
SASS	Schools and Staffing Survey (National Center for Educational Statistics, US Department of Education)
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
STRB	School Teachers' Review Body
TA	Teaching Assistant
TALIS	The OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey (conducted every 5 years)
TFS	Teacher Follow Up Survey (National Center for Educational Statistics, US Department of Education)
TWS	Teacher Workload Survey (conducted by NFER)

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