# A People Profession: Understanding the Career Decisions of Early Career Teachers in England

Abigail Elena Bowling

PhD

University of York

Department of Education

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# Abstract

England, like many countries, has experienced enduring issues with teacher recruitment and retention for over 50 years, with short periods when teacher demand has been met. The profession's volatility complicates workforce planning, demanding research into teachers' career decision-making. While existing literature often focuses on one or two career decision points, this thesis investigates teaching as a career trajectory: exploring the justifications that explain early career teachers' decisions to enter, remain in, and potentially leave the profession. I present a systematic literature review and a reflexive thematic analysis of 44 interviews with early career teachers in England. I developed a theoretical framework which reconciles major sociological divergences, bringing together Bourdieu's theory of practice and Archer's morphogenetic approach to understand teachers' career decision-making. The themes—*the journey of helping others*, *the intuitive feel* and *the social influence* sub-themes of *homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced*, *mentored into momentum*, *socially boosted* and *wisdom on loan*—were developed through abductively coding. Teachers' referral to others unifies the themes, characterising teaching as a people profession. This research contributes a matrix that maps career justifications across two parallel categories: intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations and philosophical versus practical environments. I contribute three developments to social theory. Firstly, I demonstrate the stratification of Bourdieu's social capital, showing how social contacts offer teachers varying job market advantages. Secondly, I expand on Archer's communicative reflexivity, to include how external conversations with others and imagined futures through others influence career decision-making. Thirdly, I introduce the concept of the negotiated habitus by linking Bourdieu's habitus with Archer's communicative reflexivity. The findings support existing and new initiatives, including supporting altruistic motivations, reducing workload, encouraging flexible working, extending mentorship, addressing student behaviour and elevating the profession's status. I recommend future research identifies long-term justifications of mid-career and more experienced teachers to inform further strategies.

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# Author's 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 a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

Parts of chapter two contribute to a manuscript currently in development, co-authored with Sally Hancock. Dr Hancock's involvement involved screening studies for inclusion in the systematic review and providing comments on the draft manuscript. These contributions were carefully managed to remain within the permitted scope of a supervisor's involvement in PhD candidates' work. The analysis and the findings presented within this chapter are entirely my own.

**List of Publications**

Bowling, A., & Hancock, S. [Manuscript in preparation]. The career trajectories of teachers: a qualitative systematic review on why teachers enter, remain and leave the teaching profession.

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# List of Abbreviations

| Abbreviation | Full Term |
|---|---|
| AI | Artificial Intelligence |
| BA | Bachelor of Arts |
| BQQRG | Big Q Qualitative Research Guidelines |
| BSc | Bachelor of Science |
| DfE | Department for Education |
| DLHE | Destination of Leavers from Higher Education |
| EAL | English as an Additional Language |
| FIT-Choice | Factors Influencing Teaching as a Career Choice |
| GDPR | General Data Protection Regulation |
| ITT | Initial Teacher Training |
| ITTECF | Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework |
| LGBTQ+ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, inclusive of other identities |
| MFL | Modern Foreign Languages |
| NHS | National Health Service |
| NQT | Newly Qualified Teacher |
| PE | Physical Education |
| PGCE | Postgraduate Certificate in Education |
| PGDE | Postgraduate Diploma in Education |
| PPA | Planning, Preparation and Assessment |
| PRISMA | Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses |
| QTS | Qualified Teacher Status |
| RE | Religious Education |
| SCITT | School Centred Initial Teacher Training |
| SEN | Special Educational Needs |
| SENCO | Special Educational Needs Coordinator |
| SLT | Senior Leadership Team |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |
| TALIS | Teaching and Learning International Survey |
| TLR | Teaching and Learning Responsibilities |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UK | United Kingdom |

# 1 Introduction

In this thesis I investigate how early career teachers in England explain their career decision-making. I argue that teachers' career decision-making can be understood through justifications which span across career trajectories (i.e., entry into, moving within and leaving the teaching profession). I define justifications as teachers' self-identified reasons for their past, present and anticipated career decisions. The justifications developed in this study include the desire to help others, social influences such as homes serving as geographical boundaries for work, children, mentors and wider social connections, and the feel of such career decisions (e.g., feelings of comfort and discomfort). Uniting these justifications is the idea that teaching is a people profession, as it is impacted by personal, professional and/or a hybrid form of these relationships. Each justification adds to an overall pattern of understanding teachers' career decision-making[1]. Using justifications to describe career trajectories rather than focusing on individual, isolated career decisions (i.e., joining, remaining and leaving the teaching profession) extends an emerging body of work examining teachers' career pathways.

Three prior studies have explored teachers' career decisions holistically, spanning the different stages of their career trajectories in Australia (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015), in Flanders, Belgium (Mombaers et al., 2023) and in a small-scale cohort study in England of just three trainee teachers aged 21–22 (MacLeod, 2025). This emerging literature suggests that teachers' holistic career trajectories remain underexplored, with current knowledge in England limited in scale and scope.

This thesis develops this preliminary body of work by offering four contributions. First, a systematic review of previous studies on teachers' career decision-making across the world. Second, a primary study on the career decisions of 44 teachers in England, with no more than seven years of experience. Third, a novel approach to examining teachers' career decisions through the concepts of structure (i.e., forces that constrain our actions; Healy, 1998), agency (i.e., the ability to act; Archer, 2000) and reflexivity (i.e.,

[1] This overall pattern can be visualised through the matrix created and presented in figure 9 (p. 227).

our deliberations on our available actions; Archer, 2003). Fourth, a matrix that maps these career decisions by motivational value (i.e., intrinsic and/or extrinsic) and the decisions' orienting environments (i.e., practical and/or philosophical).

This introduction provides the reader with the context, background, research problem and rationale for this study (1.1 and 1.2) before briefly outlining the subsequent research aim and questions, methodological overview and the significance and contribution of this research (1.3). The introduction closes by informing the reader of the structure of the thesis (1.4).

## 1.1 Why Understand the Career Decisions of Early Career Teachers in England?

Understanding the career decisions of early career teachers in England addresses a lacuna in the literature and may help contribute towards ongoing recruitment and retention issues. This section expands on this by examining teacher recruitment and retention worldwide (1.1.1), within England (1.1.2) and by outlining the rationale for focusing on the career decisions of early career teachers in England (1.1.3).

### *1.1.1 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Worldwide*

There is an urgent need worldwide in developed, developing, high-income and low-income countries for teachers throughout all age phases of teaching, due to recruitment and retention challenges. UNESCO (2024) statistics forecast that by 2030 all regions around the world will require more teachers than they currently have, with Sub-Saharan Africa requiring the most (178% more teachers needed) and East Asia requiring the least (21% more teachers needed). According to the most up-to-date statistics, the United States has 12.5% of their teaching posts unfilled, with Mississippi holding the highest state-level vacancy rate (10%) (Tan et al., 2025). In Europe, Sweden (5%) and Austria (4.6%) report the highest levels of unfilled teaching posts (OECD, 2025). The United Kingdom (UK) reports an unfilled vacancy rate of 0.3%, which may appear relatively low; however, the country faces persistent challenges with teacher retention, suggesting that while individuals are entering the profession, many are also leaving (OECD, 2025). In contrast, South Korea has filled all teaching vacancies and currently has more teachers than available posts (OECD, 2025). Nevertheless, in a similar pattern to England, despite filling vacancies, South Korea's National Assembly

Education Committee has reported a growing trend of teachers leaving before retirement age over the past five years, suggesting that low vacancy rates do not necessarily equate to a stable or sustainable teaching workforce (Kim, 2024). This comparative data highlights how teacher recruitment and retention is a worldwide challenge.

Despite these worldwide challenges, this study focuses exclusively on England. Each country has distinct education systems and contextual factors shaping the working lives of teachers and their decision to enter, remain in or leave the profession. Focusing on one country allows for a nuanced exploration of these factors. I selected England due to the enduring teacher shortages, continuous reforms in the teaching profession and my personal experience in the English education system, first as a student and later as a teacher, which is detailed further in 1.1.3.

### *1.1.2 Teacher Recruitment and Retention in England*

England has experienced issues with teacher recruitment and retention for over 50 years, albeit with short periods in which teacher demand has been met (Howson, 2020). Teacher demand was momentarily met during the 2020/21 academic year, due to the perceived security of the profession in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic (Education Policy Institute, 2022a; Maisuria et al., 2023; Scott, 2025). However, recruitment of teachers again fell below target from 2022/23 onwards, with only 62% of the secondary targets and 88% of the primary targets being met for the 2024/25 academic year (Scott, 2025). Missing teacher targets can result in unfavourable working conditions as serving teachers must compensate for shortages in the workforce, often without suitable remuneration (UNESCO, 2024). Indeed, during the 2022/23 academic year, the year in which I interviewed my teacher participants, teachers in England staged multiple strikes for better pay, school funding and working conditions (Department for Education, 2023a). While this resulted in a 6.5% pay increase, concerns remain over workload and funding for schools (Department for Education, 2025a; National Foundation for Educational Research, 2025). Nevertheless, the Initial Teacher Training Census (2025) suggests that teacher recruitment for the 2025/26 academic year has improved with targets being met for primary, English, geography, mathematics, chemistry, history, art and design, biology and physical education (PE) teachers, while total recruitment of

secondary teachers is at 88% of the target. Worth (2025a) concludes that these figures suggest "some green shoots of recovery, but we need to keep up the momentum", which this thesis aims to do.

The Department for Education (DfE), the governmental body responsible for educational services and policies in England, has continuously aimed to address teacher recruitment and retention issues. More recent policies have aimed to "reset" the government's relationship with the teaching sector (Education Committee, 2025, p. 3). These more recent policies are divided into addressing recruitment and retention.

To address recruitment challenges, the DfE are appealing to the intrinsic, altruistic and financial motivations of potential teachers. Restarting their "every lesson shapes a life" Get Into Teaching campaign, appears to appeal to the intrinsic and altruistic rewards associated with teaching (DfE, 2024a). The DfE also offers financial incentives to encourage individuals to train to teach. However, most available bursaries and scholarships for the 2025/26 academic year will be cut for the 2026/27 academic year (DfE, 2025b, 2025c). Tax-free bursaries of £26,000 are being reduced to £22,000 for trainees teaching French, German and/or Spanish; £20,000 for trainees teaching design and technology and languages (not including French, German and Spanish); and £5,000 for trainees teaching biology and geography. Tax-free bursaries of £10,000 for trainees teaching art and design, music and religious education (RE), £5,000 for trainees teaching English and tax-free scholarships of £31,000 for trainees teaching mathematics are being removed entirely. Nevertheless, tax-free bursaries of £29,000 and tax-free scholarships of £31,000 remain for trainees teaching chemistry, computing and physics. Worth (2025b) estimates that these cuts could result in 2,400 fewer trainee teachers in 2026/27.

To retain teachers, the DfE have developed both financial and practical strategies. The DfE (2025d) continue to offer financial rewards through their Targeted Retention Incentives (up to £6,000), which are given to chemistry, computing, mathematics and physics teachers in the first five years of their career working in disadvantaged schools. The DfE (2024b) accepted the School Teachers' Review Body's recommendation of a 5.5% pay award for teachers and leaders in maintained schools, which was applied from 1st September 2024. They also have removed the requirement for performance

related pay (DfE, 2024c). To make teaching a more flexible job, they aim to support schools' adoption of flexible working practices, such as taking Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time remotely (DfE, 2024d). Ofsted (2025), the government body responsible for school inspection, are reforming the school inspection system to address criticism of the model. The DfE are aiming to reduce teachers' workloads through encouraging schools to utilise the workload reduction toolkit (DfE, n.d.-a) and Oak National Academy's (n.d.-a), a non-departmental public body sponsored by the DfE, Artificial Intelligence (AI) lesson planning assistant for teachers.

### *1.1.3 The Rationale for Focusing on the Career Decisions of Early Career Teachers in England*

My rationale for focusing on the career decisions of early career teachers in England stems from my own career decision-making and engagement with previous research. At school, I initially wanted to enrol onto a primary education undergraduate course at a post-1992 university. However, my sociology teacher encouraged me instead to consider studying for an "academic subject" at a Russell Group university to allow for greater flexibility with my career prospects. Studying sociology at my Russell Group university introduced and sparked my interest in both the concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity for explaining human action and my desire to pursue research through a PhD. At the time, I knew I wanted to research issues within education, but I was unsure of my specific research interest. Consequently, and inspired by the sociological ethnographers I had studied, I joined the Teach First Leadership Development Programme, as it was called then, teaching secondary Computer Science, with the intention to refine my research interests and apply for a PhD. During this time, I witnessed first-hand the rapid turnover of staff in my Teach First school.

High teacher turnover reflects and exacerbates teacher shortages, a pattern more prevalent in disadvantaged schools such as those employing Teach First teachers (García & Weiss, 2019; Scott, 2025). The structure of Teach First lends itself to increasing teacher turnover as teachers are contracted to work in schools on a short-term, two-year basis (Teach First, n.d.). Indeed, the normative messaging of the name "Teach First" suggests that teachers teach first and progress into a different profession after they finish their training (Parker & Gale, 2017). This messaging risks devaluing the

teaching profession as a fulfilling long-term career for high achieving graduates who are often prioritised in Teach First's recruitment. Teacher shortages are indicative of the "crisis" in recruitment and retention of teachers within England (Ovenden-Hope, 2023; Perryman et al., 2025, p. 181). Addressing teacher shortages and having well-staffed teachers provides quality education to children and young people (UNESCO, 2024). Furthermore, keeping teachers in their schools, benefits learning as these teachers accrue experience and acclimatise to schools to serve their students (Ost, 2014; Simon & Johnson, 2015).

After working in schools, speaking to trainee teachers, experiencing the impact of teacher shortages and initially reading about teacher recruitment and retention, I had decided my PhD topic. The irony that I was going to leave the teaching profession to pursue a PhD, thus contributing to teacher turnover and retention figures, was not lost on me. Nevertheless, I maintain that I was an accidental teacher, entering the profession to experience the education system before deciding what I wanted to research. At the beginning of my PhD, the topic of my research was the role of social background in the choice of teacher training route. However, after engaging further with the literature on recruitment and retention of teachers, I noticed a lacuna. This led me to shift the focus of this research onto understanding the career decision-making of early career teachers. The emphasis on early career teachers stems from my own observations and wider evidence which suggests that attrition among early career teachers exceeds the average attrition rates across the teaching workforce (e.g., McLean & Worth, 2025).

As I show in chapter two: the systematic review of literature, there is an absence of studies looking holistically at teachers' career decision-making. Previous literature focused on why teachers enter, remain and leave the teaching profession, in service of addressing teacher shortages, often focus on one or two of these career decision points. There are studies which have looked at why teachers join the profession (e.g., Fray & Gore, 2018; Heinz, 2015; Siostrom et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2021), why teachers remain in their schools or within the profession (e.g., Nguyen & Springer, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2020) and why teachers leave the profession (e.g., Booth et al., 2021; den Brok et al., 2017; Doherty, 2020; Simon & Johnson, 2015). There are also studies which look at

two of these career decision points including why teachers join and remain within the profession (e.g., Han et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2021) and why teachers remain or leave the profession (e.g., Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Macdonald, 1999; Oke et al., 2016; Vittek, 2015). Indeed, some studies investigate teachers' decisions to join, remain or leave the profession (e.g., Brantlinger, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; See et al., 2020). However, these studies separate teachers' decisions within the analysis to present factors which influence each career point (i.e., joining, remaining or leaving). This approach can be beneficial for stakeholders who can influence one or two career decision points (e.g., teacher training providers attracting teachers and schools retaining them). Nevertheless, I argue that an investigation of teachers' career trajectories offers a holistic understanding of career motivations.

A holistic investigation of teachers' career trajectories is evident in three published studies. Firstly, Howes and Goodman-Delahunty's (2015) study of Australian teachers found that personal fulfilment, practical considerations (e.g., job security and income), a lack of alternative careers and the need for change influenced teachers' decisions to enter, remain and leave the profession. Secondly, MacLeod's (2025, p. 1) cohort study following three women who became teachers in England from ages 10 to 22, found that they were motivated by viewing teaching as a vocation they were "meant" to pursue. Thirdly, Mombaers et al. (2023) explored why those working within education (e.g., teachers, policy supporters and principals) enter, remain, move around and leave the teaching profession in Flanders, Belgium. Thus, this research joins Howes and Goodman-Delahunty (2015), MacLeod (2025) and Mombaers et al. (2023) in providing a holistic view of teachers' career decision-making and contributes to the knowledge field by offering an English perspective of teachers ranging from one to seven years of experience in the profession. By combining structural influences with agentic decision-making, this study's approach provides a novel lens to examine teachers' career decision-making, which can complement and extend research, policy and practice.

### *1.1.4 Understanding the Career Decisions of Early Career Teachers in England Conclusion*

This section has provided background information on teacher recruitment and retention both worldwide and in England and has justified why I focus exclusively on early career

teachers in England. Through this discussion, I demonstrated how this research addresses a lacuna in the literature and can contribute to ongoing recruitment and retention issues. The following section provides the reader with the necessary context on the English education and teaching system to help frame this research.

## 1.2 The Context: The English Education and Teaching System

Given the high policy and practice relevance of this study, in what follows I provide the reader with an understanding of the context of the English education (1.2.1) and teaching system (1.2.2). It is useful to establish this context as I will return to assess the policy and practice landscape in the conclusion chapter to recommend reforms. Furthermore, many teachers in the presentation of themes chapters refer to elements of their context and understanding this context is beneficial for understanding the themes developed.

### *1.2.1 The English Education System*

Education in the UK is a devolved matter, meaning that systems in the four nations (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) are independently controlled (DfE, 2024e). In England, education policy is controlled by the Department for Education (n.d.-b). Schools and teacher training providers are inspected by Ofsted (n.d.), which provide publicly available evaluations. These governmental bodies, and the work they do, influence teachers' working lives and their intention to remain in the profession (Kim et al., 2024; Perryman & Calvert, 2020; Perryman et al., 2025). Despite aiming to support teachers, these studies demonstrate instances when governmental bodies impose burdensome requirements that result in increased stress levels for those working in schools.

As some teacher participants in this study refer to different school types, a brief overview of the English school system is next provided to support the reader with understanding their experiences and opinions. There are three classifications of schools in the English education system. First, state schools, which are funded by the government and include academies, faith schools, free schools, grammar schools and local authority schools (GOV.UK, n.d.-a). Second, independent schools, which are privately funded, often by students' families (GOV.UK, n.d.-a). Third, special schools,

which serve students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) (GOV.UK, n.d.-a). Some of these schools can be selective in who they admit based upon religious characteristics (faith schools), SEN (special schools) and academic ability (grammar schools and some independent schools), while others are open to all students living within a school's geographical region, referred to as a catchment area (academies, local authority schools and some free schools) (GOV.UK, n.d.-b). Within all types of these schools, education to children and young people is split into four consecutive stages: early years (ages 3–5), primary education (ages 5–11), secondary education (ages 11–16) and post-16 education (ages 16–18), the latter often being embedded within secondary schools (GOV.UK, n.d.-c).

### *1.2.2 The English Teaching System*

To teach any of these age ranges in any of these types of schools, teachers can either be employed as unqualified teachers (i.e., they do not have Qualified Teacher Status [QTS]) or as qualified teachers (i.e., they have QTS). Unqualified teachers are often paid less, evidenced through the qualified versus unqualified teacher pay scales, and usually ineligible to apply for promotions (e.g., heads of subject) without QTS (DfE, 2020, 2025b; TES, 2025). Accredited initial teacher training (ITT) providers in England offer courses to provide QTS. Employment-based routes include assessment only route to QTS, Teach First, salaried School Direct and the Teaching Apprenticeship Programme (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, n.d.). Placement-based routes include School Direct (self-funded by the trainee), school centred initial teacher training providers (SCITT) and university courses which offer QTS such as some Postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas in Education (PGCE, PGDE) and undergraduate Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) degrees (Universities and Colleges Admissions Service, n.d.).

For a teacher to be a qualified teacher, they must complete an ITT course which grants QTS. Thus, a teacher's ability to enter the profession is dependent upon the availability of ITT. In 2022, English ITT providers had to reapply for accreditation (i.e., approval for their courses to grant QTS). This requirement arose from the DfE's (2022a) ITT market review, which concluded that ITT providers needed to provide consistent, quality training with effective mentorship. Only approved ITT providers could offer courses to grant QTS from September 2024. However, many ITT providers were denied

accreditation, with all appeals being rejected (Schools Week, 2022). The Education Policy Institute (2022b) estimated this reduction in ITT would result in the loss of over 4,000 teacher training places. Thus, the process was described as "controversial" because of its impact on teacher shortages, particularly in "cold spots" for teacher training around England, most notably in the North East and the East of England (Brooks & Perryman, 2024, p. 301). In response, the DfE reopened re-accreditation applications for previously accredited providers that had not received consecutive "requires improvement" or "inadequate" ratings by Ofsted (Schools Week, 2025). Successful applicants will be permitted to provide ITT from September 2026 (Schools Week, 2025). Some of the accredited providers are located in the North East and the East of England, potentially addressing these training "cold spots" by expanding provision (DfE, 2025e).

After training, effective integration into teaching enables teachers to both understand and enjoy their jobs, thereby supporting retention in the profession. Before 1999, teachers served probationary periods without any formal guidance on transitioning from ITT to employment (The Education (Teachers) (Amendment) Regulations, 1992). Induction periods were introduced in 1999 with the creation of the Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) period, which teachers completed during their first academic year (the equivalent of three school terms) after gaining QTS (The Education (Induction Arrangements for School Teachers) (England) Regulations, 1999). The NQT year was replaced by the two-year Early Career Framework from September 2021 (DfE, 2024f). This was later replaced by the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) from September 2025, which aims to reduce repetition within training, improve subject training and enhance the transition from trainee to teacher to benefit teacher retention (DfE, 2024g).

In England, the label "early career teacher" is often used within policy and schools to refer to teachers who are training for QTS or are within their first or second year immediately after training (DfE, 2024f, 2024g). In contrast, academic research often extends this definition to around seven years (e.g., Booth et al., 2021; Day et al., 2007; Jones, 2018; Sulis et al., 2022). This is because research on teachers' professional life phases suggests that teachers in the first seven years are all similarly exploring their commitment to the profession and acquiring skills to sustain their teaching (Day et al.,

2007; Huberman, 1989). Thus, when referring to early career teachers in England within this thesis, I am referring to teachers within the first seven years of their teaching career.

### *1.2.3 The Context Conclusion*

This context provides the reader with useful knowledge for understanding both the themes generated (chapters 6, 7 and 8) and the policy and practice recommendations I make in the conclusion chapter (10). Having outlined the context, background, research problem and rationale for this study, the next section outlines this thesis's contribution to knowledge.

## 1.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis advances understanding of how some early career teachers in England make career decisions. This section elaborates on this contribution by outlining the research aim and questions (1.3.1), providing an overview of the methodology (1.3.2), presenting the argument developed and highlighting the significance (1.3.3).

### *1.3.1 The Research Aim and Questions*

To address the lacuna, this thesis aimed to understand how early career teachers in England make career decisions through answering an overarching research question:

> How can early career teachers' career decisions be explained?

Four sub-research questions were created to answer this overarching research question:

1. Why did early career teachers decide to become teachers?
2. How did early career teachers decide upon their training route and subsequent employing school(s)?
3. What are the career aspirations of early career teachers?
4. How does structure, agency and reflexivity explain these career decisions?

### *1.3.2 Methodology*

These research questions were answered through adopting a narrative, cross-sectional research design rooted in Big Q and critical realist philosophy. Big Q research is guided "fully" by qualitative perspectives through reflective interpretation of data using

researcher subjectivity (Braun et al., 2016, p. 192). Within critical realist philosophy, reality is understood to exist independently of individuals, while interpretations of it are mediated by researchers' identities and experiences (Bhaskar, 2008).

I interviewed 44 early career teachers in England and followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) recommendations for reflexive thematic analysis to develop three overarching themes. These themes were created using inductive (i.e., using the dataset as the base for forming meanings) and deductive (i.e., labelling data with instances which replicate and/or expand theoretical concepts) coding to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The deductive codes were created by utilising a reconciled theoretical framework which unites Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice with Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach to understanding human action.

The themes are *the journey of helping others*; *the social influence*, comprising five sub-themes: *homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced*, *mentored into momentum*, *socially boosted* and *wisdom on loan*; and *the intuitive feel*.

### *1.3.3 Argument*

Based on the research questions, I argue that teachers' career decision-making is divided into distinct justifications which span across teachers' career trajectories and are engaged with fluidly over the course of teachers' lives. I observe that these justifications can still explain decisions at particular career points (e.g., entry into, remaining in and leaving the teaching profession). I posit that exploring these decisions using the concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity demonstrates how teachers' career justifications are shaped by individual reasoning and wider social contexts, offering researchers a novel lens through which to examine career decision-making.

These key arguments are significant as they offer an original insight to the knowledge field, while also informing government policy and suggesting practices for teacher training providers and schools. These implications are elaborated upon in the conclusion chapter (10).

### *1.3.4 Contribution to Knowledge Conclusion*

This section has provided an overview of the thesis's contribution to knowledge by briefly outlining the research design and argument. The final part of this introductory

chapter presents the thesis structure, in which the following chapters expand upon this contribution to knowledge.

## 1.4 Thesis Structure

To elaborate on this contribution to knowledge, the thesis is organised into ten chapters. This first chapter, the introduction, has provided the reader with the background and context of the study, explaining why the research is needed and how it contributes to the knowledge field, policy landscape and practices within institutions (i.e., teacher training providers and schools), which are expanded upon in the conclusion chapter. The second chapter, the literature review, presents a systematic review of previous literature that explains what is already known about the topic and how this study builds upon that knowledge. The third chapter, the theoretical framework, outlines a theory of action that reconciles Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice and Archer's (1995, 2024) morphogenetic approach used alongside inductive methods for analysing the data and explaining the mechanisms of the justifications. The fourth chapter outlines the policy context and initiatives aiming to support the recruitment and retention of teachers in England. The fifth chapter, the methodology, explains the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research, the aims and questions, the research design, how I conducted interviews with 44 early career teachers in England, the reflexive thematic analysis used to develop teachers' justifications for their career trajectories, the assessment of research quality and the introduction of the themes. The themes are presented across three chapters. The sixth chapter presents the first theme of teachers framing their work as a *journey of helping others*. The seventh chapter presents the second theme, the overarching theme of *the social influence* on teachers' career decision-making and the five sub-themes of *homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced*, *mentored into momentum*, *socially boosted* and *wisdom on loan*. The eighth chapter presents the third theme of how intuitive feelings influence teachers' career decision-making. The ninth chapter, the discussion, answers the research questions through drawing upon the themes presented in chapters six, seven and eight. The tenth chapter, the conclusion, unites all nine chapters and recapitulates the key arguments, significance and contribution, limitations and future directions for research policy and practice.

## 1.5 Introduction Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has introduced the context, rationale, aims and contribution of the study. As mentioned in 1.4, the subsequent chapters build and expand upon these. This begins with chapter two, which provides further context by presenting a systematic review of previous literature. It highlights the lacuna in existing work alongside the limits of our current understanding of teachers' career decisions, and introduces a new approach (i.e., a matrix) to address these gaps.

# 2 Systematic Review of Literature

This chapter presents a systematic review of previous literature on teachers' career decision-making. The aim of this chapter is to familiarise the reader with the field of existing research and how the primary study advances understanding in this area.

I make an original contribution to the knowledge field by developing the matrix of teacher career decisions (figure 2, p. 37) and the notion of teaching as a people profession to emphasise the influence of students, families, principals, administrators, leaders and previous teachers on teachers' career decisions.

Based on the reviewed literature, I argue that my primary study is necessitated by gaps identified in this systematic review. While existing literature tends to focus on one or two aspects of entering, staying or leaving the profession and samples teachers associated with each (e.g., pre-service teachers for studies on entering the profession), my study focuses on the career trajectories of currently serving teachers. This design captures not only the decisions teachers make, but how they can be explained. This justification for the primary study is returned to when I discuss the state of the knowledge field (2.9).

This chapter begins with the rationale (2.1) and the method used (2.2) for conducting a systematic review. After, the thematic synthesis is presented to explain how previous studies suggest that teachers' career decisions are made due to practical, philosophical, intrinsic and/or extrinsic reasons (2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7). Then, assessments of the explanatory strength of the themes developed (2.8) and the state of the knowledge field (2.9) are presented. This chapter concludes by restating the answers to the review questions and reflecting upon the challenges and limitations of this systematic review (2.10).

## 2.1 Rationale for Conducting a Systematic Review

Three reasons informed my decision to conduct a systematic review over a traditional, narrative literature review: 1) to ensure I reviewed relevant, high-quality studies, 2) to understand the breadth of the knowledge field and 3) to be able to adapt this chapter into a journal article.

### *2.1.1 Reviewing Relevant, High-Quality Studies*

A systematic review involves following rigid practices to ensure included literature is relevant and high-quality. Indeed, some studies lack methodological rigour (Gorard, 2024). Systematic review practices include drafting review questions, defining inclusion and exclusion criteria, appraising included studies, synthesising the reviewed literature and assessing the confidence in cumulative evidence (Torgerson, 2003). It is possible to adopt some of these within a traditional, narrative literature review (e.g., applying a systematic approach). However, I chose to engage in all the practices, which constitute a systematic review, to ensure the relevant, high-quality inclusion and synthesis of literature.

### *2.1.2 Breadth of the Knowledge Field*

A systematic review allows for a breadth of studies to be included, often at the expense of a depth of discussion (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). Depth over breadth is often a feature of a narrative, literature review. I decided to compromise depth to ensure breadth due to the scale of the knowledge field (e.g., 3646 records of studies were identified as being published between 2014–2025, as shown in figure 1 on p. 34). This approach is beneficial for situating the present research within the expansive literature field.

### *2.1.3 Journal Article Adaption*

In addition to the research benefits, I also decided to conduct a systematic review to adapt this chapter into a journal article. Systematic reviews are favoured over narrative literature reviews within peer-reviewed publications due to the methodological rigour of evidence synthesis (Greenhalgh et al., 2018; Review of Education, n.d.; Review of Educational Research, n.d.). To aid with this, I registered this systematic review with the International Database for Systematic Reviews in Educational Research (Bowling, 2024).

Nevertheless, this chapter differs from the journal article manuscript. I initially reviewed descriptive, qualitative studies only and used these to form the literature themes, which are presented in the manuscript. However, to contextualise the primary study within the reviewed literature, I added all study types (i.e., descriptive-quantitative, correlational and causal) to the themes presented in this chapter. While these studies were not used

to create the themes, they serve as a helpful addition to elaborate upon evidence in support of these. This allowed me to engage deeply with existing qualitative research, a recommended practice by Braun and Clarke (2024) when conducting a qualitative study.

### *2.1.4 Rationale for Conducting a Systematic Review Conclusion*

These three benefits provide the rationale for undertaking a systematic review of previous literature. Unlike a traditional narrative literature review, a systematic review requires specific methodological procedures, which are outlined in the following section.

## 2.2 Method

Conducting a systematic review requires a structured methodological approach. This section details this process, including the review questions (2.2.1), the literature search (2.2.2), the record screening (2.2.3), the synthesis and the assessment of confidence in cumulative evidence (2.2.4).

### *2.2.1 Review Questions*

The systematic review was guided by the following review question:

> What are the decision-making processes of teachers when they enter, stay and leave teaching?

Answering this question was supported by the following secondary research questions:

- Are there any similarities or differences between teachers' reasoning for entering, staying and leaving teaching?
- Do these decision-making processes differ depending on the country of employment? If so, how?
- Do these decision-making processes differ depending on the age range taught? If so, how?

I decided to review studies on teachers at all stages of their career, rather than restricting the focus to early career teachers. There are many conflicting definitions of an early career teacher. For example, English policy and schools define this as a teacher within the first three years of their teaching (DfE, 2024f, 2024g), while some research

extends this to around seven years (e.g., Booth et al., 2021; Day et al., 2007; Jones, 2018; Sulis et al., 2022). Adopting one of these definitions over the other may result in overlooking studies. Therefore, focusing on all teachers meant that I would not omit any studies on early career teachers. Furthermore, including studies on teachers at all career stages allows for my primary study to be contextualised within the wider knowledge base on teachers' career decision-making over the longer term.

### *2.2.2 Literature Search*

A variation of the following search strategy was used to search Educational Resources Information Centre, the British Education Index, Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest's Sociological Abstracts database, ProQuest's Dissertations & Theses and PsycINFO:

> (Teach* OR Schoolteacher OR Educator OR Instructor) AND ((career N2 decision-making) OR (career decision*) OR (why N3 teach) OR (vocation* reasons) OR (reasons N2 teaching) OR (job decision*) OR (job N3 choice) OR (career N3 choice) OR (vocation* choice))[2]

These databases and search strategy were used after engaging in training on literature searches and consulting library professionals at the University of York to determine which databases would yield relevant and high-quality studies.

The first search was conducted on 14th December 2022 with updated searches being conducted on 11th April 2024 and 9th July 2025. Citation searches were completed on the following information sources: Doherty (2020), Heinz (2015), Macdonald (1999), Nguyen and Springer (2021), Nguyen et al. (2020) and See et al. (2020). Macdonald (1999) is the earliest systematic review of teacher attrition, but subsequent reviews, such as Doherty (2020), have revisited this topic more recently. Therefore, studies published from 2014 onwards were included, as Heinz's (2015) systematic review of choosing teaching is the oldest identified review of a concept relating to teachers' career decision-making.

[2] N2 and N3 are proximity operators which specify that two search terms should appear between within two (for N2) or three (for N3) words of each other, in any order. * is used as a truncation tool to capture all word endings (e.g., Teach* captures teacher and teaching).

### *2.2.3 Screening*

Studies found from search criteria were extracted into EndNote. Once duplicates were removed, my supervisor and I independently first-stage screened the same 649 records from a total of 3646 records (17.8% of total records identified) using the inclusion and exclusion criteria (table 1).

**Table 1.**

*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

| Criteria | Include | Exclude |
|---|---|---|
| Research design | Studies which report on research. | Any articles which do not conduct research or report on research.<br>This includes opinion pieces and book reviews. |
| Population | Studies examining the teaching population who teach in primary, secondary and further education providers (ages 4–18).<br>Studies conducted in any country.<br>All ages and career stages.<br>Studies on former teachers reflecting upon their reasons for leaving the profession.<br>Studies on student teachers and pre-service teachers. | Studies on teachers who teach in higher education institutions. Studies on students if they are not on a teacher training course. Studies on staff in nurseries.<br>Studies on support staff in schools (e.g., teaching assistants and learning support assistants). |
| Interest | Studies which focus upon the population's career decision-making process and the experience of this process. | Studies which relate to teachers but do not reference their career decision-making (e.g., studies which look at how teachers use pedagogy or how they teach certain subjects). |

| Criteria | Include | Exclude |
|---|---|---|
| Interventions (causal research) | Interventions which influence the career decision-making of teachers. These include interventions which aim to increase the number of trainee teachers, the retention of teachers within the workforce and encourage any other type of engagement with continuous professional development (e.g., professional qualifications and subject knowledge enhancements).<br><br>See et al.'s (2020) systematic review focused upon interventions for attracting and retaining teachers in hard-to-reach areas which demonstrates there are intervention studies published. | Studies which detail interventions for higher education providers, nurseries and those focused on support staff.<br><br>Studies which do not focus upon career decision-making of teachers (e.g., those which focus upon the impact of a particular pedagogy). |
| Comparison (causal research) | As the interventions detailed above may be measuring the effect of a particular condition on teacher career decision-making, it is anticipated that comparison groups will be most likely limited to control groups.<br><br>It may be that studies include multiple intervention groups (e.g., financial incentive group, a group of teachers given time off their teaching timetable).<br><br>However, as a mapping review, this systematic review is interested in all of these groupings.<br><br>Thus, there will be no explicitly stated alternative comparison groups included within this systematic review. | N/A |
| Date of publication | Studies published from 2014 (inclusive) onwards. | N/A |

| Criteria | Include | Exclude |
|---|---|---|
| Grey literature | The initial literature review demonstrated that there is grey literature on this topic through government commissioning of research (e.g., in England and in the United States).<br><br>Therefore, in addition to peer-reviewed studies, we will include grey literature when it specifically relates to teachers' career decision-making.<br><br>Inclusion of grey literature helps to reduce publication bias. | N/A |
| Language | Articles reported in the English language. | Any articles in any other language than English. |

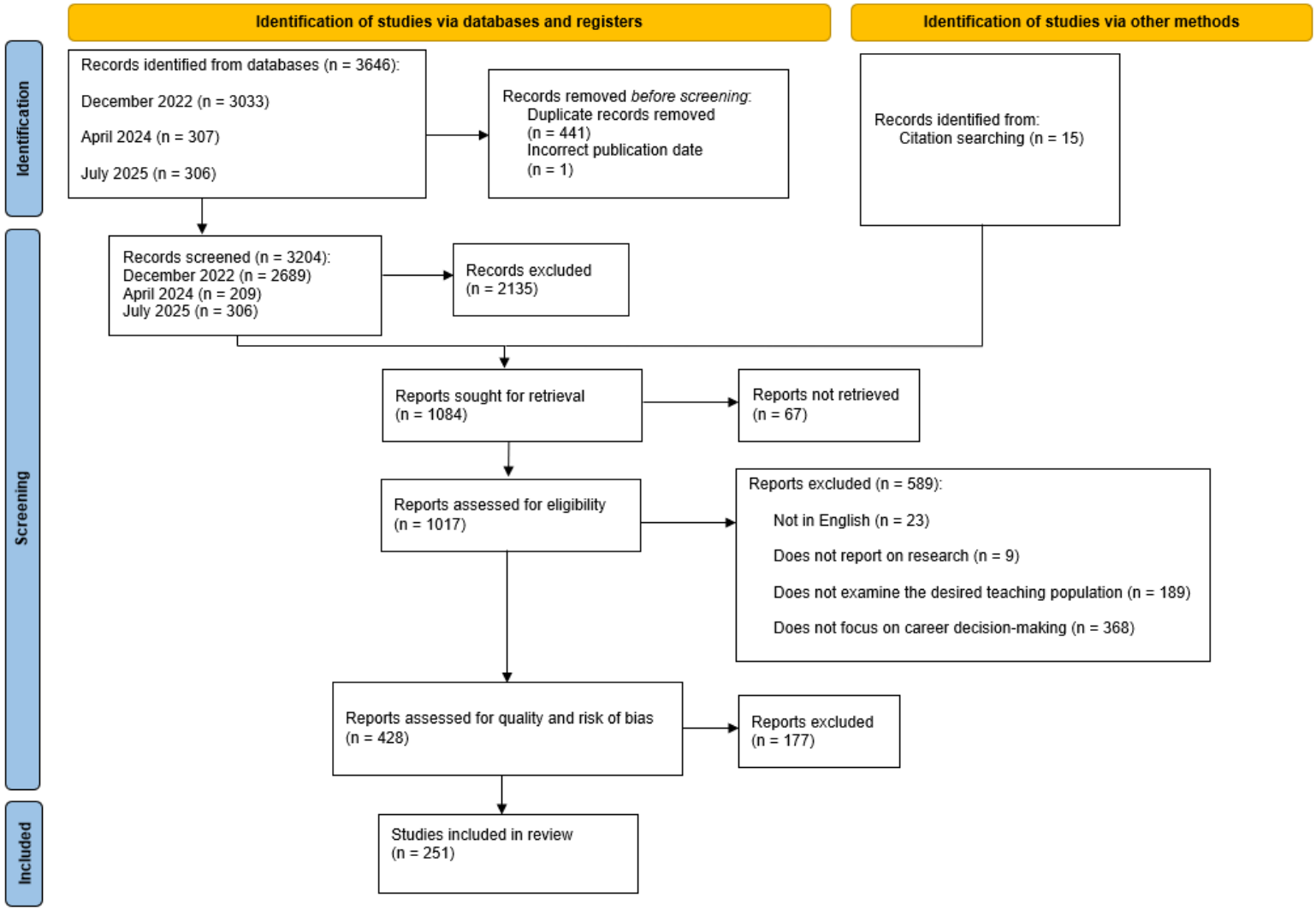
First-stage screening resulted in 95.5% agreement (Cohen's K = 0.88) which is defined as almost perfect agreement and allowed me to carry on the first-stage screening process.

My supervisor and I independently second-stage screened the same 76 records from a total of 1005 records (7.5% of total records). This resulted in 94.8% agreement (Cohen's K = 0.89) which is defined as almost perfect agreement and allowed me to carry on the second-stage screening process.

The process of identification, screening and inclusion of studies is shown within the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) diagram in figure 1.

**Figure 1.**

*Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Diagram*



### *2.2.4 Synthesis and Confidence in Cumulative Evidence*

Thomas and Harden's (2008) method for thematic synthesis for qualitative systematic reviews was used to analyse the qualitative studies. This involved coding and developing themes to generate new, interpretive findings. Like a primary study with multiple participants/cases, not all studies were used to generate the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This was the case when studies were coded, but these codes did not form a part of a theme. This may demonstrate the limitation of prioritising the breadth of the research field, over the depth. After creating the literature themes, I synthesised non-qualitative studies, identified through the screening process, into these arguments. Just as quotations are included in primary qualitative research, the thematic nature of the synthesis means that most themes reference one or two participants from previous studies, using quotations present in the original publications (Thomas & Harden, 2008). These provide an illustrative account of career decision reasons which preserve the original language of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2022). They also provide the reader with the data used to develop these themes, allowing for transparency in the review process (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yardley, 2000).

The GRADE-CERQual approach was used to assess the confidence in the cumulative evidence (Booth et al., 2018; Colvin et al., 2018; Glenton et al., 2018; Lewin et al., 2018a, 2018b; Munthe-Kaas et al., 2018; Noyes et al., 2018). My supervisor and I assessed each theme as high confidence with no or very minor concerns about the included studies' methodological limitations, coherence, adequacy and relevance.

### *2.2.5 Method Conclusion*

This methodological process ensured that reviewed literature was rigorously acquired, synthesised and assessed. The subsequent sections present the matrix and themes developed, which form the basis for interpreting the state of the field.

## 2.3 A Matrix of Career Decision Reasons

The themes developed from the reviewed literature were organised into a matrix to illustrate their interconnections and conceptual underpinnings. This section first discusses how the career decisions (i.e., the themes) exemplify diverse conceptual

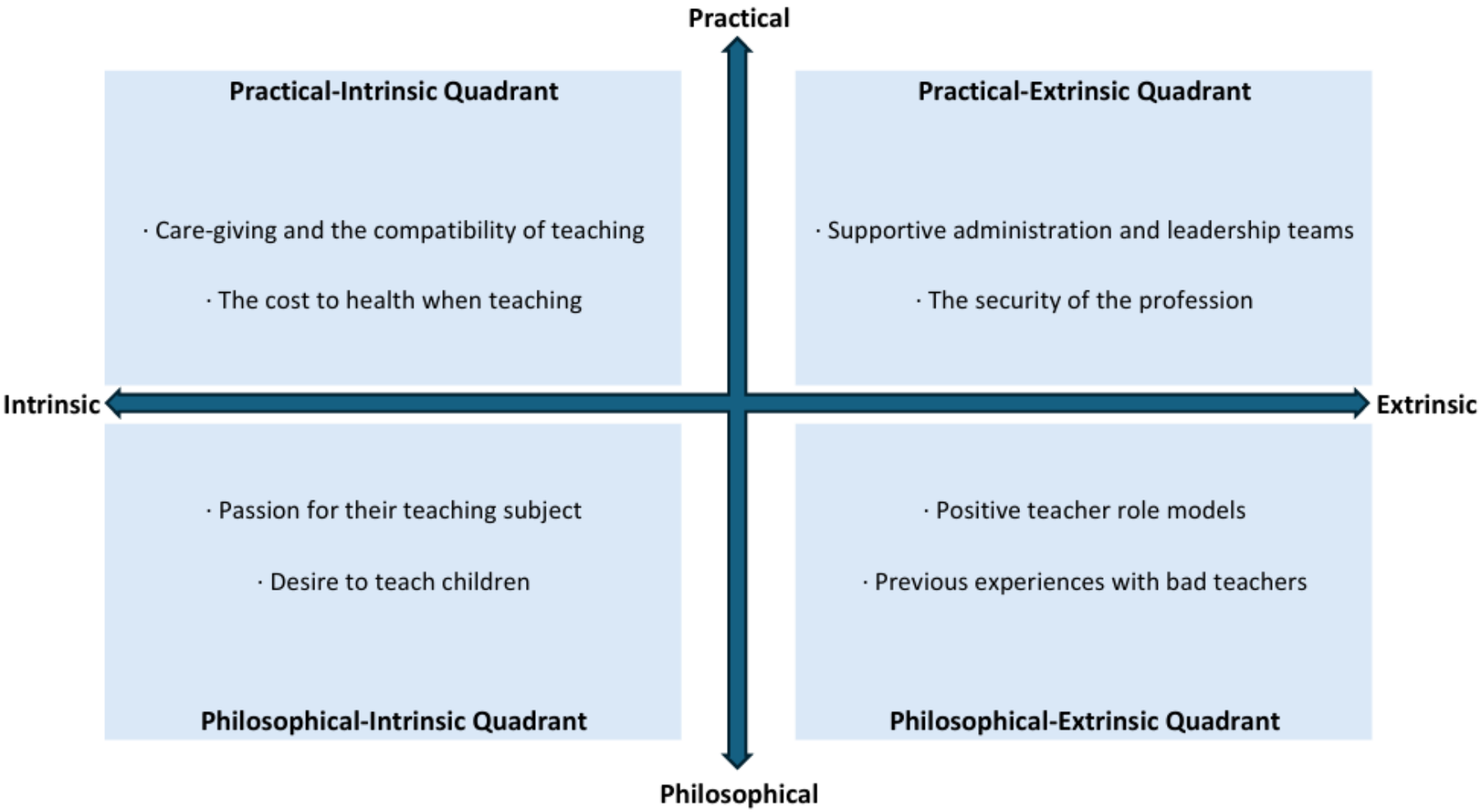
orientations (2.3.1), then presents the matrix (figure 2) and concludes by arguing that these reasons collectively demonstrate that teaching is a people profession (2.3.2).

### *2.3.1 Conceptual Orientation of Career Decisions*

After synthesising the reviewed literature and developing themes, I posit that career decisions are made due to practical, philosophical, intrinsic and/or extrinsic reasons. A practical orientation refers to tangible environments which influence career decisions (e.g., being a caregiver). A philosophical orientation refers to abstract reflections about careers (e.g., being passionate about teaching a particular subject). An intrinsic orientation refers to career decisions which come from within (e.g., wanting good health). An extrinsic orientation refers to career decisions which originate from others (e.g., role models). Further clarification on each of these is provided when outlining the themes in 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7. I mapped the themes onto a matrix to visualise how they relate to these conceptual orientations (figure 2).

**Figure 2.**

*A Matrix of Reasons for Career Decisions Informed by Reviewed Literature*



### *2.3.2 Teaching as a People Profession*

I argue that all these reasons for career decisions, mapped on the matrix, support the view that teaching is a people profession. Using the themes developed from the synthesis of reviewed literature, I develop the notion of teaching as a people profession to refer to how families, students, principals, administrators, leaders and previous teachers impact upon teachers' career decisions.

### *2.3.3 Matrix of Career Decision Reasons Conclusion*

This matrix shows the overall visual representation of teachers' career decisions, according to reviewed literature.

Over the rest of this chapter, I discuss each quadrant of the matrix in turn. I begin with reviewing practical-intrinsic reasons for teachers' career decisions, examining whether caregiving is compatible with teaching and the cost to health when teaching. I then turn to the practical-extrinsic reasons, such as the role of supportive administration and leadership teams in teacher retention and the influence of job security on career decisions. Next, I review the philosophical-intrinsic reasons, including how teachers' passion for their subjects or to teach children leads them to enter teaching. Finally, I review the philosophical-extrinsic reasons, focusing on how teachers' own previous teachers influence them to join the profession.

## 2.4 Practical-Intrinsic Reasons

The practical, intrinsic quadrant refers to the influence of tangible environments on teachers' internal career rationales and decision-making. The systematic review finds that, within this quadrant, teachers' care-giving responsibilities (2.4.1) and their health (2.4.2) influences their career decision-making.

### *2.4.1 Caregiving and The Compatibility of Teaching*

Reviewed literature offers conflicting accounts as to whether teaching is compatible with caregiving. Within the reviewed literature, caregiving is defined in a heteronormative manner, assuming a gender binary and positioning men in instrumental roles and women in expressive roles when parenting. Studies investigating why people become teachers suggest that there is a perception that teaching is

compatible with caregiving (2.4.1.1). There are some descriptive studies suggesting that teaching, in general, is compatible with women's expressive caregiving, but these do not provide an explanation as to what features of employment make them compatible. There are some studies which suggest that caregiving and teaching are compatible within certain situations: when teaching specific age ranges, within rural schools, when teachers do not move schools or do not progress into leadership positions and for men with instrumental caregiving roles (2.4.1.2). However, most studies suggest that, in most cases, teaching is not compatible with women's caregiving (2.4.1.3). The following sections explore each of these viewpoints.

**2.4.1.1 The Perception of Compatibility Before Entering Teaching.** Studies which focus on teachers' entry into the profession find that some pre-service teachers believe that the working hours are compatible with being a parent/caregiver (Bauer et al., 2017; Dewi & Fajri, 2023; Gustafson, 2017; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; McDonald, 2017; Moreau, 2015; Öztürk-Akar, 2019; Redman, 2015). Lynda in Bauer et al. (2017) and Ursula in McDonald (2017) both previously worked in academia, while Elsie in Redman (2015) previously worked in business, they believed these working environments were not compatible with "raising a family" (Ursula in McDonald, 2017, p. 39). Indeed, studies explain how academia and private sector work favours workers without care commitments due to their demand for 24/7 availability, which most often impacts women as they are significantly more likely to be default caregivers than men (Devine et al., 2011; Lynch, 2010; Stone & Lovejoy, 2019). Contrastingly, pre-service teachers perceive teachers' working hours, which refers to both daily teaching hours and the school holidays, as "family friendly" (Moreau, 2015, p. 413), allowing them to care for both their children and parents (Bauer et al., 2017; Dewi & Fajri, 2023; Gustafson, 2017; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; McDonald, 2017; Öztürk-Akar, 2019; Redman, 2015). This compatibility influences some women's choice to train to become teachers. However, Bowling and Wakeling (2025) found that women working in jobs adjacent to teachers (i.e., support staff roles in schools) believed the opposite: they viewed teaching as a job with long working hours, which were not compatible with caregiving. This perhaps demonstrates how those in jobs outside of schools incorrectly perceive teaching to be a job with working hours compatible with caregiving.

**2.4.1.2 When Teaching is Compatible with Caregiving.** Studies which suggest that caregiving is compatible with teaching can be split into those which suggest that women's caregiving is compatible with teaching but do not provide factors which aid this compatibility; those which suggest circumstances which make teaching compatible with women's caregiving; and studies which find that men's caregiving is compatible with teaching.

Some studies suggest that teaching is compatible with women's caregiving (e.g., Abonyi et al., 2021; Gomba, 2015; Prabjandee, 2015; Salifu et al., 2017; Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). However, these studies only provide descriptive accounts to support this viewpoint. For example, Cecelia in Gomba (2015, p. 60) states "my husband and the kids are the reason why I am still teaching" and an unnamed participant in Selçuk and Yöntem (2019, p. 157) states "my parents supported me to choose teaching as a profession expressing that I would feel comfortable in the future when I had my own family and kids". Patience in Gomba (2015, p. 60) hints at a feature of teaching which allows her job to be compatible with caregiving, referring to "the educational support for my kids, I don't know any job that would in that regard support me [in that way if I] leave teaching". Samantha in Pozderac et al. (2022, p. 55) compared her teaching practice to her father, who was also a teacher, by stating that she could not be a "good mother if she puts in the same amount of work as her father", which could suggest that a lower work effort in teaching makes the role compatible with women's traditional caregiving. Indeed, Booth et al. (2021) found that there is a care ceiling within teaching, in which those with care commitments are unable to take up professional development activities and, thus, advance to leadership roles within schools. Perhaps, this is a feature of teaching which makes the role compatible with caregiving. Nevertheless, these studies omit to offer specific factors which make teaching compatible with caregiving.

Other studies offer the following circumstances which make teaching compatible with caregiving: when teaching within primary/middle schools, within rural schools and when teachers do not move schools and do not progress into leadership positions. Both Pozderac et al. (2022) and Suryani (2020) found that the stage of schooling has a positive association with a teacher's ability to care for their own children. Sierra in Pozderac et al. (2022, p. 55) states that she teaches in a middle school (ages 11–14) as

she can “be there” for her children, who “come first”, something which she states she would not be able to do if she taught other age ranges. Suryani’s (2020) findings suggest that primary school teachers in Indonesia perceive their work as more compatible with caregiving compared with high school, early childhood and special education teachers. Proximity to their family home is an influential factor for teachers deciding whether to work in a rural school (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Ulferts, 2016), particularly among women (Handal et al., 2018). Indeed, Leech et al. (2023) theorise that many rural teachers choose the profession as it is a viable job close to home. Similarly, Robison and Russell (2022) found that teachers with multiple children were more likely to remain within teaching positions and less likely to move schools than teachers with either fewer children or no children at all. They note that 83% of their sample were women, suggesting a gendered element to this finding. They theorise that women in teaching with children feel guilty about moving schools or progressing and thus self-exclude from these positions.

Teaching is described by men in reviewed literature as a job which allows them to fulfil their self-adopted traditional, instrumental role of economically providing for their wives and children (Gomba, 2015; Gratacós et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2019; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Pozderac et al., 2022; Scott & Alexander, 2019). Teaching fulfils this as it is described as a dependable job (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014) with a “regular and reliable income” (Luke in Gray et al., 2019, p. 9), allowing men to provide for their wives and children (Gomba, 2015). According to Solomonson et al. (2019, p. 123), men in teaching discuss “feel[ing] like you have to choose your school over your family” (M5) and “despising” going on field trips as they have to leave their wives and children (M2). Nevertheless, this suggests that men in teaching prioritise work over family time, reflecting gendered expectations of providing economically. Therefore, teaching can be seen as compatible with caregiving when it is defined in an economic, instrumental manner, a role traditionally and heteronormatively ascribed to men.

**2.4.1.3 More Broadly, Teaching and Caregiving are not Compatible.** Outside of these specific contexts, teaching has been found to be, more broadly, incompatible with family commitments.

Studies utilising the factors influencing teaching as a career choice (FIT-Choice) model have found that the *time for family* factor demonstrates gendered differences in how teacher applicants anticipate conflict between work and family. For Spanish men in teaching, *time for family* was reported as an important factor in becoming a teacher (Gratacós et al., 2017). For Serbian women, it was also an important factor in becoming a teacher, yet these women reported stronger anticipated conflict between work and family roles as a teacher, suggesting that they perceive teaching as less compatible with their family caregiving roles than men (Marušić-Jablanović & Vračar, 2019; Simić et al., 2021). In contrast, in Britain, Germany, Iran, the Kurdistan region of Iraq and Sweden, *time for family* was not identified as a significant reason to enter, and stay within, teaching, possibly indicating an awareness within these contexts that balancing teaching and family caregiving is difficult (Celik, 2020; Eghtesadi Roudi, 2021; George & Thornby, 2023; Kang et al., 2024; Kristmansson & Fjellström, 2022; Lucksnat et al., 2022). Indeed, this viewpoint can be supported by further reviewed, often qualitative, literature.

Reviewed literature suggests, contrary to public opinion, that teachers' working hours are not compatible with expressive caregiving, a responsibility often adopted by women. Two studies include women in teaching who recount instances of "having" to rely on (Hester et al., 2020, p. 359), and "forcing" (Zavelevsky & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020, p. 8) their husbands to care for their children while they work late into the night and during the summer holidays. Similarly, having to work evenings, weekends and holidays is what has prompted Frances (in Wang & Wang, 2023, p. 52) to decide that "if I have children, I might give up teaching for a few years so that I could focus on raising them". Indeed, women in Bain et al. (2022), Farinde et al. (2016), Heffernan et al., (2022), Huang (2021) and Randi (2017) either left teaching or planned to do so in order to care for their children, as they did not find teaching compatible with motherhood. These women detailed their plans to re-join the teaching workforce, in a flexible manner (e.g., part-time) in the future. This is similar to Stone and Lovejoy's (2019) study on women in "high-flying careers" who opted out of the workforce to raise their children before "opting back in" to jobs viewed as compatible with caregiving, with teaching perceived by these women as such. Neta in Zavelevsky and Shapira-Lishchinsky (2020,

p. 8) expresses her frustration at “other working mothers in her social circle [who] perceive the teaching profession as a part-time job with a lot of vacation… [when] nothing could be further from reality”. These studies indicate that teachers and public perception of the profession and its compatibility with women’s traditional role as a caregiver are conflicting, and how patriarchal assumptions influence these perceptions.

### *2.4.2 The Cost to Health When Teaching*

Previous research suggests that the ability to maintain good mental and physical health impacts teachers’ decisions to remain or leave the profession (e.g., Casely-Hayford et al., 2022; Li & Yao, 2022).

#### 2.4.2.1 Factors Conducive to Teachers’ Health and Therefore Retention.

Previous studies detail factors which are conducive to teachers’ health and influence their decision to remain in the profession. Manageable workloads and low teaching hours are credited with keeping stress to a minimum, which is likely to keep teachers in the profession (Adusei et al., 2016; Kerr et al., 2025; Kim & Cho, 2025; Singer et al., 2024; Straková & Simonová, 2024; Wilcox et al., 2024). Teachers who practice awareness and acceptance of situations (often referred to as mindfulness) are better able to manage workplace stressors, and often stay in their roles (Ellison et al., 2022). Indeed, Bock et al. (2021) recommend teachers are provided with courses on emotional regulation to improve their health, to keep them in the profession. Similarly, Moser and Wei (2024) found that higher psychological capital (i.e., having hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism) was associated with teachers who stayed in the profession, in comparison to teachers who left the profession. Practices these teachers engaged in included: setting boundaries, routines, not sending emails after 8pm and not eating whilst working (Moser & Wei, 2024). However, this study noted that their findings were based on self-reported data from volunteer teachers; teachers who were stressed or had high workloads may not have volunteered to take part. Thus, it is unclear how feasible these practices are to support teachers with high workloads or levels of stress, or whether they have tried to implement them previously.

**2.4.2.2 The Association Between Poor Health and Teacher Attrition.** Studies investigating teacher attrition find that poor health is associated with leaving teaching. Poor health is defined as elevated stress and anxiety, feelings of mental and physical exhaustion, diminished quality of life, unhappiness, depression, panic attacks, emotional suppression, somatisation, fatigue, reduced ability for family time and leisure, hair loss, poor diet and sedentary lifestyles (Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Heffernan et al., 2022; Hester et al., 2020; Kim & Cho, 2025; Kutsyuruba et al., 2018; Mäkelä et al., 2014; Mateos-Moreno, 2022; Singer et al., 2024; Solomonson et al., 2019; Sulis et al., 2022). This poor health is triggered by factors including limited work autonomy, excessive workload, consistently long working hours, challenging student behaviour, unsupportive parents of students, inadequate leadership and lack of institutional support, toxic school cultures, high expectations of teachers, the perceived need to maintain a professional façade every day, resentment of teaching and the fear and experience of inspection frameworks, such as England's Ofsted (Chambers Mack et al., 2019; Harfitt, 2015; Heffernan et al., 2022; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Kutsyuruba et al., 2018; Mäkelä et al., 2014; Mateos-Moreno, 2022; Perryman et al., 2025; Solomonson et al., 2019; Sulis et al., 2022). Therefore, to retain teachers, literature recommends that those with institutional control (e.g., school leadership and management teams, education systems and government bodies) should address these trigger points to ensure optimum health of teachers.

### *2.4.3 Practical-Intrinsic Reasons Conclusion*

Overall, this section demonstrates how the tangible environments of caregiving and schools influence teachers' intrinsic rationales for their work. Teaching is most often compatible with men's caregiving, defined as their instrumental breadwinner role. Whilst it is claimed that it is compatible with women's traditional caregiving, defined as looking after children and the wider family, studies only provide specific contexts in which this is the case (i.e., teaching primary/middle schools, in rural schools, not moving schools or progressing into leadership roles). There is a consensus within the literature that, more broadly, women's caregiving is not compatible with teaching due to the working hours and workload. In terms of health and career decisions, maintaining good health through manageable workloads, effective management of emotions and

adequate working hours is positively associated with a teacher's decision to remain within the profession. Conversely, high workloads, long working hours, poor behaviour by students, parents and leadership and management teams is associated with poor mental and physical health which is positively associated with a teacher's decision to leave the profession. Looking at both caregiving and health suggests that workload and working hours is often the root cause of a teacher's decision to enter, remain or leave the profession. Therefore, practices to ensure adequate workload and working hours should be adopted by schools. Future studies should investigate, and potentially trial, which strategies schools could adopt that would be successful in achieving this goal.

## 2.5 Practical-Extrinsic Reasons

The practical, extrinsic quadrant refers to tangible, external environments which influence teachers' career decision-making. Within this quadrant, reviewed literature suggests that supportive administration and leadership teams in schools (2.5.1) and the security of the profession (2.5.2) influences teachers to enter and remain within the profession.

### *2.5.1 Supportive Principals, Administration and Leadership Teams Benefit Teacher Retention*

Literature suggests that the general work environment of a school comes from 'above', often referring to principal, senior leadership and administration teams (Dos Santos, 2019; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Kutsyuruba et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018; Newton, 2018). Indeed, Paul in Murphy (2018, p. 12) refers to the "Inner Circle", referencing his school's leadership and administration team, and stated that the "kind of day it [was] going to be" depended on "how they were going to be that day". This section begins by reviewing studies on how the practices of principals and administration/leadership teams either encourage them to remain or discourage them from staying at their school or in the profession entirely. Then, I examine the degree of freedom given to teachers by senior school leaders, exploring how too little or too much autonomy may influence teachers' career decisions.

**2.5.1.1 Principals.** Principals either positively influenced teachers to remain within their employing schools or negatively influenced them to either leave their school or the profession entirely.

Studies have found a positive correlation between strong principal leadership (i.e., being open, trustworthy and supportive) and teacher commitment (De Nobile & Bilgin, 2022; Ni, 2017), retention (Olsen, 2019; Tiplic et al., 2015), staying, rather than moving from, an employing school (Hanušová et al., 2020; Player et al., 2017; Tiplic et al., 2015) and teachers' choice of school (Gunther, 2019). Nevertheless, studies investigating the link between principal leadership styles (i.e., transformative, authentic and participative) and teacher commitment and retention found that these were not correlated (Williams, 2018; Zavelevsky et al., 2022). Instead, teachers discussed how principals providing quick access to resources (Murphy, 2018), support for difficult circumstances (Glazer, 2018; O'Malley, 2019), help with intensive parents (Zavelevsky & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020), incentives (Gomba, 2015), clear and helpful policies (Mombaers et al., 2023) and confidence in their teaching ability (Sunzhong et al., 2022) encouraged them to stay at their employing school.

Studies have also found a correlation between some principals' practices and leaving schools or the profession entirely. These practices include principals spending a substantial time observing teachers' teaching practice (Huang, 2021), not supporting alternative teacher training routes (Randi, 2017), "pit[ting] staff against each other" (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017, p. 368), creating negative classroom environments (Ewing, 2021), speaking negatively about their teachers (Zavelevsky & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020), implementing practices that counter teachers' own beliefs about how to teach (Glazer, 2018) and ignoring teachers' suggestions for school improvement (Bristol, 2020). Some practices were paradoxical. For example, a principal in Sulis et al. (2022) expressed support for teachers by discouraging them from working outside of contracted hours, yet they simultaneously sent emails late in the evening about early morning meetings. Thus, negative and paradoxical practices discourage teachers from remaining at their schools and, in some instances, the teaching profession entirely.

The correlational nature of these studies highlights positive and negative principal practices associated with teachers' career decisions. However, they do not explain how

such experiences influence teachers' decisions to remain in a school, move to another or leave the profession entirely. Therefore, future research should investigate the trajectories of teachers' careers in relation to responding to principal leadership.

**2.5.1.2 Administration and Leadership Teams.** Administration and leadership teams' practices also influenced teachers' decisions to remain within or leave schools or the profession entirely.

Previous studies discuss how administration and leadership teams engage in practices which push teachers out of their schools and/or the teaching profession. These include expecting teachers to complete work outside of their contracted hours (Farinde et al., 2016; Heffernan et al., 2022; Hester et al., 2020; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Scott et al., 2020), not giving teachers the recognition for doing their job well (Göktürk et al., 2021; Hester et al., 2020) and making teachers apply for their own funding to support their classrooms (Dos Santos, 2019; Rodriguez, 2017). Other practices include a lack of communication about the school day (Glazer, 2022), a lack of general support (Conley & You, 2017; Hester et al., 2020; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Jakuback, 2017; Mäkelä & Whipp, 2015; Sulis et al., 2022) and telling teachers to focus on high-achieving students rather than those who are struggling, a practice at odds with some teachers' commitment to provide an education for all (Glazer, 2022). In a similar manner to the principal practices (2.5.1.1), teachers were disheartened when administration and leadership teams ignored their ideas for making the school a better place (Coats, 2021; Farinde et al., 2016; Trent, 2017). For some, these practices are enough to push teachers out of the profession (e.g., Glazer, 2022). For others, the practices encourage teachers to move schools in search of a better administration/leadership team (e.g., Coats, 2021; Farinde et al., 2016). Tamir (2014) describes a teacher who decided to stay in teaching for five more years before planning to progress into an administration role, with the aim of changing the school system to improve conditions for both teachers and students.

Teachers who intended to stay teaching in their schools described how the support from their administration/leadership teams created positive work environments which influenced their decision to remain (Gomba, 2015; Göktürk et al., 2021; Jakuback, 2017; Maggi, 2023). A teacher (P2) in Maggi (2023, p. 43) discussed how they could "work in

their [administration and leadership team's] office any time during the day and talk to them about whatever is on my mind". Carmen in Harfitt (2015, p. 29) felt encouraged to try new techniques in the classroom and share problems and ideas in staff meetings led by administrators: "knowing that older teachers have the same problems as me was surprising but comforting", which empowered her to stay. Liav in Zavelevsky and Shapira-Lishchinsky (2020, p. 4) felt pastorally supported when teaching incorrect material and was encouraged to "carry on and not give up" which helped her teaching resilience. These examples suggest that leadership and administration teams have the ability to retain teachers by fostering positive work environments.

**2.5.1.3 Ensuring the Right Balance of Freedom.** A common concept alluded to within the literature was freedom given by principals, administration and leadership teams to teachers. Mateos-Moreno (2022) and Seelig and McCabe (2021) found that teachers valued space, control over the curriculum and being given the tools to solve a problem, over being told how to teach. When teachers were given time each day to plan, as opposed to being timetabled a full day of teaching, they had the freedom to effectively manage their workload (Adusei et al., 2016). However, teachers just starting their careers discussed how being given too much freedom by principals, administrators and leaders was detrimental to their work. For these teachers, too much freedom meant they had to navigate teaching alone without any resources, while they were expected to become experienced teachers without support from others (Harfitt, 2015; Murphy, 2018). Therefore, freedom given by principals, administrators and leaders should be appropriate for each, individual teacher to encourage them to stay within their employing schools and the wider profession.

### *2.5.2 The Security and Stability of Teaching*

Reviewed literature provides discussions on how the (in)security and (in)stability of the profession motivated and dissuaded some teachers into, and from, the profession.

**2.5.2.1 When Teachers Viewed the Profession as Secure and Stable.** Teachers viewed the profession as secure and stable in contexts where there were teacher shortages, societal perceptions of low social status and high levels of pay for teachers. This perception was also expressed by teachers with certain personal characteristics,

those teaching primary or science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects, those who considered teaching as a second-choice career and within certain types of schools.

Teachers in reviewed literature drew upon teacher shortages to frame teaching as a secure and stable profession, which influenced their decision to enter teaching. Within countries that had shortages of teachers, the high likelihood of getting a job was a primary reason for some teachers to enter the profession (Bergmark et al., 2018; Wang & Wang, 2023). The opportunity teaching provided for some to travel around the world (to places in need of teachers) and secure a stable job drew them into the profession (Bright, 2022; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). If they left the profession, the ability to return at any time due to the demand for teachers also motivated pre-service teachers to train to teach (Wang & Wang, 2023; Wang et al., 2023). These instances demonstrate how teacher shortages attract some teachers to the profession.

The influence the security of teaching has on teachers' career decision-making differs depending on national context. In countries where teaching holds a low social status (e.g., Israel and Türkiye), the security of the profession is a motivator, whilst in places where it holds a moderate to high social status (e.g., Finland and South Korea), security is a lower motivator (Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Dündar, 2014; Kang et al., 2023; Lehtinen et al., 2025; Yaffe & Dan, 2018). Similarly, teachers in countries where salaries are high in comparison to other jobs (e.g., Germany and Switzerland) place a strong emphasis on financial security, which motivates them to enter teaching (Tillman et al., 2020). In contrast, teachers in countries where salaries are proportionally lower (e.g., Ukraine) are less likely to view financial security as a primary motivation (Tillman et al., 2020). This demonstrates how low social status and high financial security both influence teachers' decisions to enter the profession.

Personal characteristics, teaching specialism and type of school were associated with viewing teaching as a secure and stable job. Women were more motivated to teach due to the job security of the profession than men in both Pakistan and Ghana (Abonyi et al., 2021; Shaukat et al., 2023). Nevertheless, men in other countries describe teaching as a stable job which is needed so they can support their family (e.g. Australia; Gray et al., 2019). Older teachers described salary and job security as the most important factors

influencing their decision to enter teaching, in comparison to younger teachers, whose primary motivations were passion and altruism (Randi & Zumwalt, 2017). Primary education pre-service teachers were more motivated by the job security than early childhood, English, science and special education pre-service teachers (Bilim, 2014; Suryani, 2020). Taylor in Smith (2022) decided to teach a STEM subject, instead of music due to her perceived instability of the future of arts education. In Türkiye, some teachers prefer state schools because of the job security, in contrast to the precarious conditions of private school teaching (Selçuk & Yöntem, 2019). However, Polat (2025) found that the social contribution and personal fulfilment of teaching was as important of a reason for joining the profession in Türkiye as financial stability. This demonstrates that there are multiple factors which are associated with teachers' viewing the profession as secure and stable, across different contexts and education systems.

For some pre-service teachers, job security was the decisive factor that drew them into teaching, even though they had not originally planned to enter the profession. When students were placed in teacher training schemes when other university majors were unavailable, job security was the main reason for accepting this originally disliked career (Toprak & Tosten, 2017). Indeed, Gorard et al. (2022) found that those who had some interest in teaching but did not intend to become teachers valued the profession's job security amongst other factors (i.e., job satisfaction, status, intellectual stimulation and progression prospects). Öztürk-Akar (2019) found that job security pushed sport pre-service teachers out of their sport related professions and pulled them into teaching. Callum in Bauer et al. (2017) and Liana in Rinke and Mawhinney (2017) discussed the job security of teaching in comparison to their first-choice job sectors of manufacturing and academia, respectively, which influenced them to become teachers. This suggests that the profession's job security can attract individuals who once regarded teaching as a fall-back or secondary career.

Job security within the profession also influences teachers' decisions to remain within the profession. Studies on teacher persistence show that the security of tenure and permanent positions keeps teachers in the profession (Agboola & Emmanuel, 2018; Gomba, 2015; Murdoch & Lim, 2022; Parding et al., 2017; Saks et al., 2021). Teacher pensions are described as secure and stable and motivate teachers to remain within

the profession until they retire (Gomba, 2015; Kwa & Kim, 2022). This demonstrates the influence of job security on teachers' long-term commitment to the profession.

**2.5.2.2 When Teachers Viewed the Profession as Insecure and Unstable.** The lack of available tenured teaching positions was found to influence teachers' decisions to leave the profession. John, a teacher in the United States, had yearly contractual posts which meant he could not accrue time towards achieving tenure and subjected him to job instability. When his wife became pregnant, he decided to leave teaching and stated that if he was offered security and stability he would have stayed. John, like other men in teaching in 2.4.1.2, is motivated by his instrumental breadwinner role in the search for job security and for him, unlike others, teaching does not provide this. In Flanders (Belgium), there is conflicting research on the link between job security and teacher attrition. De Neve and Devos (2016) could not find a link between job insecurity and early career teachers leaving the profession. However, a more recent study by Amitai and Van Houtte (2022) found that early career teachers drew upon the insecurity of non-tenured, temporary contract teaching work when discussing push factors for leaving the profession. Perhaps, this suggests that the teaching job landscape in Flanders has changed in the six years since De Neve and Devos (2016). Together, these studies demonstrate how structuring teaching as a non-permanent, temporary position may harm teacher retention.

**2.5.2.3 When Security and Stability Does not Factor into Career Decisions.** There are instances in which job security and stability do not motivate teachers to join or remain in the profession. It was hypothesised that teachers would remain in the profession during the COVID-19 pandemic due to the job's relative stability (Amir et al., 2025; Zamarro et al., 2021). However, these studies found there were higher attrition rates as schools transitioned back to in-person teaching (Amir et al., 2025; Zamarro et al., 2021). This was due to increased stress while teaching during lockdowns, demonstrating a delayed effect on career decisions (Amir et al., 2025; Zamarro et al., 2021). Worth and Van den Brande (2019, p. 5) found that, in the UK, the idea that teaching is "recession-proof over other professions has eroded over time due to a relatively strong graduate labour market". This suggests that the security of teaching exerts less influence on career choices of some graduates. Furthermore, four FIT-

Choice studies (one Finnish, One Kurdish and two Serbian) found that job security was a weak motivator for becoming a teacher or not valued at all by participants (Celik, 2020; Lehtinen et al., 2025; Marušić-Jablanović & Vračar, 2019; Simić et al., 2021). This suggests that the stability of the profession is not a motivator for all prospective or current teachers.

### *2.5.3 Practical-Extrinsic Reasons Conclusion*

Overall, this section demonstrates how practical, external environments of teaching influence teachers' career decisions. Much of the reviewed literature categorise teaching careers into distinct phases of entering, staying or leaving the profession. Looking at careers across a trajectory could illuminate how different work environments influence turning points in teachers' careers. This could involve examining leadership practices that prompt teachers to change schools and contrast them with practices which influence teachers to leave the profession entirely. Another approach could involve investigating whether the perception and importance of stability/security changes across a teacher's career. For example, life events may influence whether job stability and security are valued by teachers at particular points in their career. Life events referenced within reviewed literature include family planning, pregnancy and travelling the world. These priorities may fluctuate across teachers' career trajectories and reveal insights into how practical, external environments influence decision-making on a long-term basis.

## 2.6 Philosophical-Intrinsic Reasons

The philosophical, intrinsic quadrant refers to introspective and self-directed reasons for career decisions. Reviewed literature suggests that teachers enter and remain within teaching due to their passion for their teaching subject (2.6.1) and/or their desire to work with, and improve the lives of, children (2.6.2). The reviewed literature examines how these reasons are associated with the age phase taught (2.6.3). In some cases, teachers who were originally motivated by either of these reasons leave the profession when certain structural circumstances make it so that they cannot achieve their aims of either enjoying their subject or helping children.

### *2.6.1 Passion for Their Teaching Subject*

Reviewed literature finds that teachers' passion for their teaching subject motivates entry into the profession and supports retention. However, there are some factors which can override this passion and lead teachers to leave the profession.

**2.6.1.1 Entry into the Profession.** Reviewed literature strongly suggests that teachers' passion for their teaching subject encourages them to become teachers. This passion can be defined as teachers believing their subject provides important knowledge about life (Kwa & Kim, 2022) and different cultures (Yuan & Zhang, 2017), but mostly teachers referred to their strong interest in the content, often using the word "love" to describe this passion (Bauer et al., 2017; Colyott et al., 2021; du Preez, 2018; Prabjandee, 2015; Redman, 2015; Rinke et al., 2014). It is this passion that motivates them to enrol onto teacher training courses (Dawes & Wheeldon, 2020; Dewi & Fajri, 2023; Dominguez et al., 2015; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Koklu, 2023; Krell, 2023; Martínez-Moreno & Petko, 2024; Moses et al., 2017; Nigar et al., 2023; Sunzhong et al., 2022; Olan & Belló, 2022; Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). Indeed, studies utilising the FIT-Choice scale found that passion for subject ranked highly as a motivating factor (Glutsch & König, 2019; Marušić-Jablanović & Vračar, 2019; Murdoch & Lim, 2022). This motivation has been linked to specific demographic characteristics. Brantlinger (2021) found that older, career-changing teachers were more likely to state that their passion for their subject influenced them to become a teacher than younger graduates. Kammermeier et al. (2025) and Koklu (2023) found that men teaching in Germany and the United States, respectively, were more motivated by their subject interest when deciding to become a teacher, in comparison to women. Moreau (2015) found that in France, teachers were mainly motivated by their subject. This literature highlights that subject passion influences teachers into the profession and how this varies depending on personal characteristics.

Some studies hint at the difference in subject-based motivation to become a teacher. Some teachers were motivated purely by their interest in the subject. For example, Duan in Yuan and Zhang (2017) discussed how they became a teacher so they could continue learning English due to their passion for this subject. Other teachers discussed how they became teachers to spread their passion with others, which is

perhaps a more altruistic justification (e.g., Cate in Bauer et al., 2017; Claire in Dawes & Wheeldon, 2020; Kelsey in Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). For some teachers, subject passion was their primary reason to enter teaching; once training, the motivation to share their passion with children through teaching influenced their decision to commit to the profession (Dominguez et al., 2015; Moreau, 2015). It would be useful to examine how each of these types of motivations endures once teachers begin their careers, whether one type of motivation is more long lasting than others and, therefore, more conducive to teacher retention.

**2.6.1.2 When the Passion Keeps Teachers in the Profession.** Some studies find that when teachers believe their subject is important, they are more likely to sustain their passion and remain within the profession (e.g., Kwa & Kim, 2022; Murdoch & Lim, 2022). For teachers who initially viewed teaching as a temporary career, fostering their enjoyment of their subject and its relevance for children was found to retain these teachers in the profession (Wong et al., 2014). Pre-service teachers who believe that children should learn about their subject specialism exhibit higher intrinsic, social-altruistic and pedagogical motivation, which may help them sustain motivation for a teaching career (Glutsch & König, 2019). These four studies demonstrate how recognising the importance of their subject for children retains teachers in the profession.

**2.6.1.3 When the Passion is not Enough to Retain Teachers.** Literature suggests three scenarios which override teachers' passion for their subject and influences them to cease teaching their subject or leave the profession. Firstly, teachers of arts and music worry about the uncertain future of their subject in schools; this insecurity leads them to consider either teaching other subjects or leaving the profession entirely (Mateos-Moreno, 2022; Smith, 2022). Secondly, when teachers teach students who are not similarly interested in their subject, and often focus on assessments over the content, teachers become disillusioned which leads them to leave the profession (Currie-Knight, 2020). Finally, some teachers found that they could not fully engage with their subject passion because structural constraints, such as timetabling and inadequate facilities, inhibited this (Iannucci & MacPhail, 2017; Torres, 2020). Instead, some teachers responded by leaving the profession to explore this

passion by returning to education and completing graduate degrees in their subjects (Torres, 2020) or by teaching different subjects and shifting their career motivation towards improving students' lives (Iannucci & MacPhail, 2017).

### *2.6.2 Desire to Work with Children*

Reviewed literature found that the desire to work with children influenced teachers into the profession. When teachers developed meaningful relationships with their students, they remained in the profession. However, when they felt they were unable to help their students, they left the profession.

**2.6.2.1 Wanting to Work with Children.** Previous studies suggest that the desire to work with children influenced many teachers into the profession (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Currie-Knight, 2020; Dos Santos, 2019; Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Redman, 2015; Reeves et al., 2021; Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2016; Wang & Wang, 2023). Indeed, FIT-Choice studies found that working with children and the desire to shape the future of children and adolescents were cited as a primary influence in motivations to become teachers around the world (Agaj et al., 2023; Alvariñas-Villaverde et al., 2022; He et al., 2025; Hennessy & Lynch, 2016; Kang et al., 2024; Lehtinen et al., 2025; Nesje et al., 2017; Pavin Ivanec, 2022; Saito, 2024; Tillman et al., 2020). Moreau (2015) found that teachers in England cited the child-centred nature of the job as being the main justification for joining the profession. Koklu (2023, p. 12) found that men teaching in the United States and Türkiye, in their study, have no "strong desire" to work with children, perhaps illuminating a gendered aspect of this type of motivation. Like with teachers who were motivated by their passion for their subject, teachers motivated by their desire to work with children also used the word "love" when describing this justification for teaching (e.g., Colyott et al., 2021; Currie-Knight, 2020; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Kwok et al., 2022; Redman, 2015; Reeves et al., 2021). Together these studies demonstrate how a desire to work with children influenced them to join the profession.

There were conflicting views on the desire to teach disadvantaged students within reviewed literature. These are split into those who wanted to help these students and those who believed they could not help these students. A participant in Reeves et al.

(2021, p. 78) stated that they had a specific "love for the children that are in – I don't want to use the word neglected, but the students who don't get the attention they need". Indeed, teachers who teach students perceived as disadvantaged (e.g., students of colour, those with special educational needs and those from low socio-economic backgrounds) often drew upon their desire to work with these types of children and adolescents when deciding to teach (Kass & Miller, 2018; Scott et al., 2020; Tamir, 2014). David in Cross and Ndofirepi (2015) wanted to help children in need through his aspiration of being a social worker, but financial constraints meant that he could not train for this profession, so instead he trained to become a teacher. It is not clear in other studies whether these teachers considered any other child-centred professions before becoming a teacher, whether teaching was their first-choice career to achieve this goal or if they encountered any structural constraints in joining other child centred jobs/professions, like David in Cross and Ndofirepi (2015). Other studies suggest that intrinsic and altruistic motivation is not tied to social backgrounds (Bartanen et al., 2024; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2025). Doyle and Easterbrook (2024), for example, found that teachers who did not want to work in schools serving low-income children held beliefs that educational inequality was due to external factors teachers cannot influence, intelligence is fixed, and schools are meritocratic. However, such beliefs arguably uphold a classed view of educational meritocracy in which middle-class individuals, including teachers, use this argument to express their disdain for poorer individuals as they mark them as "lazy and incompetent" (Drissen, in press). Thus, these studies demonstrate how a desire to work with children is stratified, with some wanting to teach middle-class children and others wanting to support disadvantaged children.

**2.6.2.2 Teaching in the Back of One's Mind Versus a Calling.** Previous research suggests a mixed view of whether the desire to work with children is linked to viewing teaching as a calling or just a profession that has been in "the back of their mind" as it allows them to achieve their career aim (Kwok et al., 2022, p. 587).

Some teachers discussed how they have always known they wanted to be a teacher to work with children and used the word "calling" to describe this (Coats, 2021, p. 114; Eros, 2018, p. 410; Kwok et al., 2022, p. 587; Moses et al., 2017, p. 450; Yinon & Orland-

Barak, 2017, p. 920). Seeing teaching as a calling is linked to the teachers expressing that they are "born a teacher by nature" (Emily in Chimbi & Jita, 2021, p. 103) or that "teaching is in my DNA" (Judith in Weinburgh, 2020, p. 665). Indeed, 37.3% of Bala and Parihar's (2025) teacher participants felt that the skills associated with teaching were innate. Lertluck in Prabjandee (2015, p. 529) credits Hindu Devas with showing her that teaching was her destiny through "putting me in places with the end goal to be an English teacher". MacLeod's (2025) teacher participants similarly felt destined to teach. Participant 1288 in Kwok et al. (2022, p. 587) articulated teaching as central to their identity, stating "why did I become a teacher? It is who I am". Samantha in Eros (2018) became a teacher after recognising it was her calling, which her religious upbringing encouraged her to pursue. Thus, seeing teaching as a calling could be seen as a spiritual influence on the career decisions of teachers, particularly as a factor which influences people into the teaching profession.

Other teachers contrast this view and see teaching as something which they have always been interested in potentially pursuing. Participant 1326 in Kwok et al. (2022, p. 587) stated that teaching "has always been in the back of my mind". Natalie in Coats (2021) does not view teaching as a calling. Instead, she was drawn to the profession as the job involves helping children. This suggests that for other teachers, like David in Cross and Ndofirepi (2015), teaching is a profession which can help them achieve their goal of working with children, rather than something they were born or called to do.

Regardless of whether teachers saw the profession as a calling or a job they have always been interested in, both types of teachers engaged in teacher role play as a child, which encouraged a desire to work with children. Teachers discussed how as children they would pretend to teach dolls, siblings, cousins and friends (Coats, 2021; Colyott et al., 2021; Dominguez et al., 2015; Ewing, 2021; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Prabjandee, 2015; Smith, 2022; Weinburgh, 2020). Teachers often emphasised that they were the ones to be the teachers, while those they were playing with were the students (Coats, 2021; Colyott et al., 2021; Dominguez et al., 2015; Smith, 2022). Teachers drew upon these early experiences when explaining how they had always thought about being a teacher.

**2.6.2.3 Relationships, Seeing Progress and Happy Students Keep Teachers in the Profession.** Teachers who are motivated by their desire to work with children stay in teaching when they are cultivating meaningful relationships with their students, seeing progress and teaching happy students. Positive relationships with students were credited as keeping many teachers in the profession (Gundlach, 2025; Procter-Legg et al., 2025; Wilcox et al., 2024). Liz in Towers and Maguire (2017, p. 951) taught the same year group for three years, she stayed as she "want[ed] them to do so well… you build up a rapport and that was a good reason why I didn't leave". In a similar manner, Mia in Seelig and McCabe (2021) continued teaching in her district as she felt valued by the community she was serving, which made her enjoy her job. Seeing progress in the children they are teaching motivates teachers to remain in the profession (Colyott et al., 2021; Kwok et al., 2022; Smith, 2022; Redman, 2015). Seeing progress is described as "ah-ha moments… the almost auditory 'click' that occurs when everything starts to fall in place and make sense" (participant 2248 in Kwok et al., 2022, p. 588), "seeing a child's eyes light up or the raw emotion of their face when they have an 'aha' moment in a subject they have been struggling with" (participant 676 in Kwok et al., 2022, p. 588), "that light bulb click" (Redman, 2015, p. 76) and "someone getting that 'aha' moment… I don't know how to explain that feeling but that is what I want to feel for the rest of my life" (Smith, 2022, p. 109). Cengiz in Göktürk et al. (2021) discussed how having the agency to integrate fun activities into their lessons resulted in enjoyable student learning, which in turn made Cengiz happier in the classroom. Overall, when students and teachers feel positive about the learning process, these teachers remain within their classrooms.

**2.6.2.4 When Teachers Cannot Help Their Students, They Leave.** Some teachers who felt a desire to work with children left teaching as it did not allow them to fulfil their goal of helping their students. Yaara in Yinon and Orland-Barak (2017, p. 921) was one of the teachers who saw the profession as their calling; once she realised, she was "just passing the time for" students and she felt her work was meaningless, she left teaching. Teachers in Glazer (2018), Rinke and Mawhinney (2017) and Torres (2020) felt that the school system was not structured in a way to meet students' needs, which in turn led them to feel like they could not make a difference in their students' lives, which

led them to leave the profession. Indeed, a teacher in Hester et al. (2020, p. 357) felt they could not make a difference to this system as their "voice has not been heard, so I think it's about time to move on to something new". When Lora in Rinke and Mawhinney (2017, p. 368) left the profession, she attended graduate school as she could not "kill it [the system] from within, I had to kill it from the outside". This suggests that some teachers' careers continue to be motivated by their desire to support children after they leave teaching. Cuervo and Vera-Toscano (2025) and Mansell (2025) found that teachers in their samples leave teaching and move into healthcare or other educational adjacent jobs (e.g., higher education). This widens the reach to suggest that these individuals are intrinsically motivated to help others, rather than just children, through their work. However, for other teachers, like Yaara in Yinon and Orland-Barak (2017) who moved into a Human Resources job after leaving teaching, they abandon this desire to work with children. Together, these studies suggest that when teachers cannot help their students, they often leave the profession. This leads to differing subsequent career motivations. Some teachers continue to be motivated by their desire to help children, others expand this to include everyone, while others abandon these helping motivations entirely.

### *2.6.3 Is Passion for Subject or Working with Children Associated with Choosing Primary or Secondary Teaching?*

Reviewed literature suggests an association between teaching particular age ranges and being motivated either by their passion for their subject or working with children. Previous research suggests that teachers who express a motivation to work with children are often teaching at a primary school level (ages 4–11) (Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Heinz, 2015; Moran et al., 2001). Teachers who express a motivation to share their subject passion are often teaching at a secondary school level (ages 11–18) (Brandmo & Nesje, 2017; Heinz, 2015). Although literature does not state why, one could theorise that the structure of each job influences this association. Primary teachers teach a range of subjects to one class on a full-time basis, meaning they cultivate close relationships with each student and monitor their progress in all subjects. In contrast, secondary teachers teach one particular subject to multiple classes and while they may also cultivate these relationships, their subject knowledge is a primary requirement of

their employment. However, this does not mean that primary teachers do not have a passion for a subject they teach or that secondary teachers are not motivated by their desire to help children. Indeed, a secondary teacher in Low et al. (2017) discussed how their desire to help children led them into secondary teaching instead of primary:

> I want to be that figure, that role model that helps to nurture these younger children especially teenagers. That's the main reason why I choose secondary track. Secondary school is the time when students actually make life changing decisions. And I wanted to be part of that. I wanted to be part of that experience that these teenagers will be going through. I mean that's the time they also reach puberty, and they start to think maturely and it is the way that we teachers get them to think and provoke their thoughts that helps them mature (ST10 in Low et al., 2017, p. 39).

Therefore, although there is an association between passion for subject or working with children and primary or secondary teaching, different teachers can realise their career aims through different areas of teaching. This depends on how they interpret which age phase would best meet their career aim.

### *2.6.4 Philosophical-Intrinsic Reasons Conclusion*

Overall, literature in this quadrant suggests that teachers join the profession due to their desire to help children or their passion for their subject. When these goals can be achieved, they often stay in the profession. When these goals cannot be met, they often leave the profession. This highlights the importance of examining teachers' career trajectories as focusing only on motivations for entering the profession obscures how these reasons interact with the educational landscape and influence teachers' decisions to remain or leave the profession.

## 2.7 Philosophical-Extrinsic Reasons

The philosophical, extrinsic quadrant refers to teachers' reflections on external influences on their career decisions. Both positive role model teachers, including family members who are teachers (2.7.1), and unhelpful teachers and school contexts (2.7.2) were cited as motivating factors to join, and in some instances leave, the profession.

### *2.7.1 Previous Positive Teacher Role Models*

Reviewed literature found that positive teacher role models influenced some individuals to become teachers. This involved having family members who were teachers and seeing how their own teachers had an impact on their students and wanting to make a similar impact, admiring their own teachers' image, subject knowledge and teaching methods.

**2.7.1.1 Wanting to Make the Same Impact Their Own Teachers Had.** Teachers in previous studies were influenced to become teachers after directly or indirectly seeing the impact teachers had on their students and wanting to make that same difference. Some teachers referenced challenging school experiences and the support they received from teachers (Ellison et al., 2022), especially with fostering their personal growth (Rinke et al., 2014) and strengthening their self-esteem (Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020). In Bradley (2023), participant P8, a Black male teacher, cited his Black male high school teacher as an inspiration for becoming a teacher. Other teachers offered less detailed accounts, instead referencing the broader pastoral impact their teachers had on them (Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Colyott et al., 2021; He et al., 2015; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Kwa & Kim, 2022; Nigar et al. 2023; Siostrom et al., 2023). Therefore, reviewed literature suggests that experiences with impactful teachers in the classroom can be seen to influence teachers to join the profession and make the same impact on "the next generation of students" (Low et al., 2017, p. 38).

**2.7.1.2 Admiring Teachers They Have Encountered Leads Them into Teaching.** There are two types of admiring which reviewed literature suggests influences teachers into the profession: the superficial image of a teacher and the teachers' subject knowledge and teaching ability. Some teachers in previous studies referred to "cool" (Unnamed participant in Bergmark et al., 2018, p. 272; Unnamed participant in Colyott et al., 2021, p. 11), "self-confident" (Unnamed participant in Bergmark et al., 2018, p. 272), "glamorous and classy" (Pam in Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020, p. 73), teachers "wearing new clothes… eating delicious food" (Bessie in Chimbi & Jita, 2021, p. 101) that they encountered who influenced them to become teachers, as they wanted to be "just like" them (Pam in Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020, p. 73). Once in the

profession, it would be interesting to investigate the self-image of these teachers and whether this affects their career decision-making. Many teachers discussed how they admired their own teachers' subject knowledge and their use of teaching methods to transmit this knowledge (Bergey, 2021; Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Dawes & Wheeldon, 2020; Dominguez et al., 2015; Ewing, 2021; Eze et al., 2022; Gao & Xu, 2014; Kwok et al., 2022; Nigar et al., 2023; Olan & Belló, 2022; Rinke et al., 2014; Wang & Wang, 2023). Examples of admired practices include "active… lively" teaching methods (Duan in Gao & Xu, 2014, p. 160), "ease with teaching skills" (Amanda in Olan & Belló, 2022, p. 36), "making sure students enjoy their studies" (Nancy in Wang & Wang, 2023, p. 51), being "supportive and encouraging" (Emma in Wang & Wang, 2023, p. 51) and "working hard every day to help me, as their student, learn as much as possible" (participant 15 in Kwok et al., 2022, p. 589). These teachers wish to replicate these practices; as Jason in Bergey (2021, p. 7) stated he wanted "to pay back, to give back to society. It's like a cycle. I received the help, and I want to give it back". Thus, admiration of the way their own teachers look, act and even eat influences teachers into the profession.

**2.7.1.3 Being Inspired by Family Members who are/were Teachers.** Teachers with family members in the profession cited seeing the impact they had as an influence for joining the teaching profession (Bradley, 2023; Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Coats, 2021; Ewing, 2021; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Kwok et al., 2022; Olan & Belló, 2022; Pozderac et al., 2022; Prabjandee, 2015; Randi & Zumwalt, 2017; Redman, 2015; Siostrom et al., 2023). Sierra in Pozderac et al. (2022, p. 52) was influenced to become a teacher after seeing the impact her father had:

> I love the rapport [my father] had with his students. Like I could see their interactions…. and how they interacted with him, and they respected him…. That relationship that he was able to build with his students because of the time he would spend with them, like it's more than just the classroom time it's… It's you really get to know them.

Indeed, teachers who are family members (parents and siblings) were described as role models (Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Siostrom et al., 2023). Teachers in previous studies described how they had grown up hearing about teaching from their teacher parents (Bradley, 2023; Ewing, 2021; Randi & Zumwalt, 2017). After hearing and watching their family members, they were inspired to become teachers (Bradley, 2023; Prabjandee,

2015; Randi & Zumwalt, 2017). T4 in Ewing (2021, p. 9) appears to refer to occupational reproduction when discussing her entry into teaching: “what you see is what you do, I see them (parents) enjoying it (teaching)”. These comments suggest that teaching is seen as an enjoyable profession which influences family members of teachers into the profession. However, it could be argued that teaching has changed since these teachers were children; it would be interesting to examine whether these teachers find the profession as enjoyable as they initially anticipated.

### *2.7.2 Negative Experiences with Teachers and Schools*

Teachers in previous studies were motivated to join but also leave the profession by negative experiences during their own schooling. Previous teachers cited their school in general and specific teachers who contributed towards this experience.

**2.7.2.1 General Negative Experiences of School.** Two teachers in different studies were influenced to become teachers after criticising their respective schools’ focus on transmission of subject knowledge to pass exams. This focus was described as stressful and inadequate in preparing students for life outside of formal education (Kwa & Kim, 2022; Trent, 2017). Interviewee 19 in Kwa and Kim (2022, p. 258) cited the bad experience they had at school as “the main reason why I wanted to be a social studies teacher”. They felt that their school did not “sufficiently prepare [them] to engage critically and meaningfully in ongoing civil discourse” as their “educational experience was dominated by constant drilling and teacher-guided practice” (Kwa & Kim, 2022, p. 258). In a similar manner, Dan in Trent (2017, p. 92) cited his “really negative experiences in school which was mostly due to exam pressures” as part of the reason he became a teacher. Dan “really wanted to challenge what goes on (in schools) … to make students’ experience better, less stressful. [He] thinks change can definitely come from a single individual” (Trent, 2017, p. 92). However, once in teaching and as mentioned in 2.6.2.4 by other teachers, Dan felt he could not make this change to the education system within his school, and he then left teaching. This demonstrates the importance of looking across a teacher’s career trajectory and not just at a single career point (e.g., entry into the profession). Indeed, it would be useful to know if Interviewee 19 in Kwa and Kim (2022) had the agency to prepare their students to engage critically

and meaningfully in ongoing civil discourse or whether structural constraints meant that they had to engage in constant drilling and teacher-guided practice.

**2.7.2.2 Specific Negative Interactions with Teachers.** Other teachers cited specific teachers that they had negative interactions with, which influenced them to become teachers and ensure future students did not have these experiences. Frances in Wang et al. (2023, p. 201) felt like she "wasn't given the opportunities and encouragement" she should have had by her teachers. G in Kass and Miller (2018, p. 96) experienced bullying by their peers and her teacher "was a complicit accomplice, meaning she chose to ignore it". Mary in Chang-Kredl and Kingsley (2014, p. 33) cited her "poor experiences with teachers [which] made me want to learn how to create better school experiences for future children". N in Kass and Miller (2018, p. 96) recalls a specific encounter in which she fell asleep during a lesson and her teacher:

> pulled [her] by the hair and lifted [her] in front of the whole classroom and I was shocked, I started crying and went out. She (the teacher) lied and told the principal that she caressed my head and I don't like people touching me, I responded aggressively. For me, it was a great injustice, the whole class saw it, but the school's principal believed the teacher.

For these teachers, their own teachers' lack of action or behaviour resulted in negative experiences at school, which influenced them to be teachers who they believed they needed at school. It would be interesting to see if these experiences sustain their motivation to remain in the profession in the long-term.

Teachers have different reactions to their negative experiences whilst at school. For instance, four pre-service teachers in Suryani and George (2021) ultimately decided against entering the profession because of negative experiences during their own schooling. These included physical punishments, bad tempers, poor teaching, swearing at students and not helping students who were seen as having low ability. This demonstrates that career decisions can shift throughout a teacher's trajectory, indicating the importance of examining these decisions holistically and considering teachers' internal deliberations.

### *2.7.3 Philosophical-Extrinsic Reasons Conclusion*

Overall, teacher role models and negative experiences at school can be seen to influence teachers into the profession. A few studies have examined the extent to which these initial motivations persist once teachers are working in the profession (Trent, 2017; Suryani & George, 2021). However, for the most part these studies do not investigate whether these teachers draw upon these reasons as a method to sustain their teaching, whether other motivators replace these or whether certain issues arise which prompt them to leave the profession. For example, it would be interesting to investigate the self-image of teachers who were drawn to the profession after admiring the image of teachers they have encountered (e.g., in Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Bergmark et al., 2018; Colyott et al., 2021; Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020) or whether new role models (e.g., colleagues, managers and principals) arise and motivate them to progress within their role.

This concludes the presentation of the thematic synthesis of reviewed literature. In the next section, I reflect on which quadrants provide explanations for career decisions to answer the review questions with depth.

## 2.8 Explanatory Strength Across the Quadrants

While each quadrant and its associated reasons have been presented, a critical look across these suggests variation in explanatory strength. Assessing the quality of studies, using Hong et al. (2018) has meant that robust research designs have been included. After the review, a GRADE-CERQual assessment indicated high confidence in the cumulative evidence with no or very minor concerns with the included studies' methodological limitations, coherence, adequacy and relevance (Booth et al., 2018; Colvin et al., 2018; Glenton et al., 2018; Lewin et al., 2018a, 2018b; Munthe-Kaas et al., 2018; Noyes et al., 2018). Therefore, the discussion of which quadrants and reasons provide stronger results to answer the systematic review questions are guided by their narrative/conceptual depth. I define narrative/conceptual depth as when a reason provides elaborated explanations that go beyond the description/identification of factors associated with career decision-making. Although identifying factors that are linked to teachers' career decision-making is useful, explanations of why teachers make

particular career choices add depth to answers for the review questions. This section outlines the reasons which provide explanations of teachers' career decisions (2.8.1) and those which provide descriptions of teachers' career decisions (2.8.2).

### *2.8.1 Explanations for Teachers' Career Decisions*

I argue that the following reasons provide explanations of teachers' career decisions: supportive principals, administration and leadership teams benefit teacher retention; teaching and caregiving are not compatible; the desire to work with children; previous positive role models and negative experiences with teachers and schools (the philosophical-extrinsic quadrant). This strength lies in their grounding in the lived experiences of teachers and how well they answer the systematic review questions. Therefore, these reasons provide narrative and conceptual depth for answering the review questions.

### *2.8.2 Descriptions of Teachers' Career Decisions*

I argue that the following reasons are descriptive accounts which identify factors associated with career decision-making: when teaching is compatible with caregiving; the cost to health when teaching; the security of the profession; and passion for their teaching subject. While these reasons highlight factors associated with teachers' career decisions, they do not explain how these factors influence the decision-making process. Therefore, these reasons provide correlational and descriptive accounts, rather than conceptual depth, that inform answers to the review questions.

### *2.8.3 Explanatory Strength Across the Quadrants Conclusion*

This section suggests that supportive principals, administration and leadership teams benefit teacher retention; teaching and caregiving are not compatible; the desire to work with children; previous positive role models and negative experiences with teachers and schools provide more in-depth explanations than when teaching is compatible with caregiving; the cost to health when teaching; the security of the profession; and passion for their teaching subject. Engaging in this assessment, as well as the wider process of the systematic review, has developed my understanding of the state of the knowledge field and how my primary study contributes to this. The next section outlines these insights.

## 2.9 The State of the Field

Reflecting on the thematic synthesis, as well as the research design and methods used by reviewed literature, I identify four insights about the research field which necessitate my primary study.

### *2.9.1 Focusing on One or Two Career Stages*

Reviewed studies organised teachers' career decision-making into isolated career stages: entry into teaching, staying in teaching, and/or leaving teaching. Studies often focus on one or two of these career stages. Only three studies attempt to connect these isolated points to understand career trajectories of teachers in Australia (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015), Flanders, Belgium (Mombaers et al., 2023) and among three trainee teachers aged 21–22 in England (MacLeod, 2025). In response to this limited literature, my primary study aims to contribute to the field by examining the career trajectories of 44 early career teachers in England.

### *2.9.2 Sampling*

Most reviewed literature drew upon samples which directly related to the study's targeted career stage. For example, studies interested in why teachers enter the profession often sampled pre-service teachers and those interested in why teachers leave the profession often sampled former teachers (e.g., Abonyi et al., 2021; Hennessy & Lynch, 2016; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Tillman, 2020; Towers & Maguire, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2024). While this demonstrates an alignment between research questions and sampling, it also reveals a gap: few studies invite currently serving teachers to reflect on their full career trajectories. This approach, which my primary study adopts, allows for insights less shaped by the optimism of pre-service teachers or the retrospective negativity of teachers who have left.

### *2.9.3 Cultural Differences in Education Systems*

Cultural differences across national contexts support the rationale for focusing on a single country within my primary study of teachers' career decision-making. While cross-country comparisons were only possible with studies using the FIT-Choice model, these instances demonstrated gendered differences, particularly around caregiving with teachers' career decision-making. A synthesis of these studies suggests

how the national, contextual factors of job security, the social status of teaching and culturally embedded expectations of women and men in relation to caregiving shape career decisions in distinct ways (e.g., Agboola & Emmanuel, 2018; Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Dündar, 2014; Gomba, 2015; Murdoch & Lim, 2022; Parding et al., 2017; Saks et al., 2021; Tillman et al., 2020; Yaffe & Dan, 2018). Although two FIT-Choice factors transcended countries (i.e., wanting to work with children and the desire to shape the future of children and adolescents), these were gendered; men in the United States and Türkiye did not cite this as a reason to enter teaching, perhaps reflecting cultural norms around gender and caregiving in these contexts (Agaj et al., 2023; Alvariñas-Villaverde et al., 2022; He et al., 2025; Hennessy & Lynch, 2016; Kang et al., 2024; Koklu, 2023; Lehtinen et al., 2025; Nesje et al., 2017; Pavin Ivanec, 2022; Saito, 2024; Tillman et al., 2020). These cultural differences justify a single country focus for my primary study, allowing for an exploration of career decisions within one sociocultural context.

### *2.9.4 Multi-Dimensional Reasons*

The matrix points to the multi-dimensional nature of career decision-making, ranging from surface-level to deeper, introspective reasons (figure 2). Thus, this matrix provides a conceptual scaffold for interpreting the research field, helping distinguish between pragmatic reasons and those rooted in identity, values and emotional labour. The research approach for my primary study is designed to accommodate and analyse this layered aspect of decision-making. Indeed, my broader research aim is to explore not only what decisions teachers make, but how they can be explained (see 5.2). This multi-dimensional framing is revisited in chapters six, seven and eight, where I present the themes I developed that extend its analytical utility and deepen the research field's engagement with teachers' career decision-making.

### *2.9.5 The State of the Field Conclusion*

These observations about the state of the field necessitate the design of my primary study, including its focus on the career trajectory, the population of interest (i.e., current serving teachers working in England) and the research aim (i.e., exploring not only what decisions teachers make, but how those decisions can be explained). This concludes the presentation of insights drawn from the reviewed literature. The next section

concludes this chapter by reflecting on the challenges and limitations of the systematic review.

## 2.10 Systematic Review Conclusion

This chapter has presented the rationale for conducting a systematic review, the methodological process, the matrix, the quadrants created to explain teachers' career decision-making, an assessment of the explanatory strength of the reasons contained in the quadrants and the state of the field, using reviewed literature.

This chapter has contributed a framework for explaining teachers' career decisions to the knowledge field and has justified the primary study by identifying gaps in the reviewed literature. By developing the matrix of teacher career decisions and the notion of teaching as a people profession, this chapter provides a framework that highlights the multi-dimensional, diverse social influences on teachers' career trajectories. This systematic review also highlighted gaps in the knowledge field, as reviewed literature often narrowly focuses on entry, retention or attrition, and sampling teachers associated with each (e.g., former teachers for attrition studies). These gaps necessitate my primary study, which examines the career trajectories of currently serving teachers.

To conclude this systematic review chapter, I collate answers to the review questions (2.10.1), based on the thematic synthesis presented (in 2.4, 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7) and I reflect on the challenges (2.10.2) and the limitations (2.10.3) of this systematic review.

### *2.10.1 Review Questions*

This section revisits the review questions and collates the ways in which the quadrants contribute to answering them.

The overarching review question that guided this systematic review was: "what are the decision-making processes of teachers when they enter, stay and leave teaching?" This review demonstrates that these processes can be philosophical, practical, intrinsic and/or extrinsic in nature.

The first secondary review question was: "are there any similarities and differences between teachers' reasoning for entering, staying and leaving teaching?" Most reasons

developed highlight cross-national similarities in teachers' reasoning for entering, staying and/or leaving the profession. These reasons include wanting a job that involves working with children, offers job security and support by leadership, is compatible with caregiving, supports their health and allows them to explore their passion for the subject, as well as being inspired by other teachers.

Conflicting accounts of job and financial security across different national contexts contribute towards answering both "are there any similarities and differences between teachers' reasoning for entering, staying and leaving teaching?" and "do these decision-making processes differ depending on the country of origin? If so, how?" The systematic review found that in countries where teaching is viewed as a low social status profession (e.g., Israel and Türkiye), teachers are motivated by the job security due to the availability of jobs, while in countries where it is of a moderate to high status (e.g., Finland and South Korea), job security is a low motivator (Balyer & Özcan, 2014; Dündar, 2014; Kang et al., 2023; Lehtinen et al., 2025; Yaffe & Dan, 2018). In countries where teachers have relatively high salaries (e.g., Germany and Switzerland), teachers are motivated by the financial security of the profession (Tillman et al., 2020). Whereas in countries where teachers have proportionally lower salaries (e.g., Ukraine), financial security is a weak motivator into the profession (Tillman et al., 2020). These findings demonstrate how national contexts of teaching vary, and how these differences influence teachers' career decisions. However, as this systematic review only included studies published in English, the answers to the second question (focused on the country of origin) are necessarily limited.

The final secondary review question was: "do these decision-making processes differ depending on the age range taught? If so, how?" Section 2.6.3 answers this by exploring the association between 1) passion for subject and secondary teaching (ages 11–18) and 2) passion for working with children and teaching (ages 4–11) (Brandmo & Nesje, 2017; Brookhart & Freeman, 1992; Heinz, 2015; Moran et al., 2001). In building on this association, I theorised that the structure of each job influences this association: primary teachers teach a range of subjects to one class on a full-time basis, meaning they cultivate close relationships with each student and monitor their progress in all subjects; secondary teachers teach one particular subject to multiple classes and

whilst they may also cultivate these relationships, their subject knowledge is a primary requirement of their employment. To strengthen this explanation, future research could explore this theorisation.

### *2.10.2 The Challenges of Conducting This Systematic Review*

I encountered two challenges related to the volume of literature screened and synthesised during this systematic review.

The first challenge was balancing gaining insights from teachers around the world without the impracticality of screening a large number of studies. An initial search yielded over one million studies to be screened. To address this, I amended my systematic review protocol and set a date parameter to screen studies published from 2014 onwards (Bowling, 2024). The year 2014 was decided as this marked the final year reviewed in the earliest of the systematic reviews on either teacher recruitment, attrition, turnover and retention (i.e., Heinz, 2015).

The second challenge was that after screening, I had a large number of descriptive (i.e., qualitative, quantitative and mixed method) studies that were meant to be synthesised. Due to time restraints, I again amended my systematic review protocol and decided to initially synthesise qualitative studies and add in the other types of studies found to the themes created in this chapter (Bowling, 2024). I decided to review qualitative studies as previous systematic reviews either employ quantitative (both descriptive and correlational) or mixed methods approaches to reviewing studies in their respective areas of teacher career decision-making. The quantitative studies, which these systematic reviews use, often rely upon a preselection of teacher motives that teachers are asked to rate, which can prevent teachers' voices from being included (Krell, 2023). Mixed method studies have a tendency to prioritise the reporting of quantitative data over qualitative findings (e.g., Booth et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). Whereas, a review of available qualitative research on all aspects of career decision-making would expand existing understandings through adding teachers' perspectives to transcend reasons for entering, remaining within and leaving the profession. I initially planned to use Popay et al.'s (2006) guidance for synthesising studies that draw upon a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence. However, I decided to switch to a qualitative method of synthesis

and used Barnett-Page and Thomas (2009) to decide upon Thomas and Harden's (2008) method for thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. After synthesis, I integrated other studies (e.g., mixed methods, quantitative and correlational) by identifying where they could enhance and supplement the themes created from the synthesis.

Both of these challenges arose from the time constraints of a PhD; my decisions aimed to balance methodological rigour against the practicality and feasibility of doctoral research.

### *2.10.3 Limitations*

There are two limitations of this systematic review relating to the inclusion strategy and the matrix's framing.

The inclusion strategy contains a methodological limitation related to language, as only literature published in English was reviewed. The inclusion of articles only in English may limit the discussion of teachers' career decisions to those in English speaking countries, or countries in which English is a dominant language. It may be worthwhile for a reviewer who is able to review studies in other languages, particularly those spoken in the Global South, to reproduce this systematic review.

The matrix's framing of career trajectories is shaped by constraints of the reviewed literature, which only allows thematic construction over individual narrative. As the thematic synthesis aggregates data from many teachers from different studies on particular types of teachers (e.g., joiners, leavers, stayers), the themes developed reflect group-level patterns, rather than individual trajectories. Therefore, although I have traced how the themes appear across career stages, when reviewed literature allowed for this, I cannot determine where these reasons developed and whether they persist or evolve across one teacher's career. Thus, the matrix reflects constructed trajectories based on the thematic synthesis, rather than lived trajectories grounded in individual longitudinal accounts. This limitation is addressed by my primary study, which invites teachers to reflect on multiple career stages.

### *2.10.4 Concluding Remarks*

Overall, this chapter has presented and reflected upon the thematic findings from the systematic review of previous studies focused on teachers' career decision-making. Understanding action (such as teachers' career decision-making) has been a focal point of social theory, with scholars aiming to create theories of practice and action. This is explored in the next chapter (3), which presents the theoretical framework that this study adopts when analysing, and understanding, teachers' reasonings.

# 3 Theoretical Framework: An Emergentist Theory of Action

This chapter presents the theoretical framework that underpins this thesis. This theoretical framework was used to inform key aspects of the research design, such as the research questions, the type of data collected and how I approached data collection (see 5.2 and 5.3), and as a tool for parts of data analysis (see 5.7.3). Firstly, the rationale for using this framework is given (3.1). Secondly, the two theories which are utilised are outlined: Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice (3.2) and Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach (3.3). Thirdly, the theoretical framework, which rests upon the reconciliation of the two theories, is presented (3.4).

## 3.1 Theorising Structure, Agency and Reflexivity

Understanding career decision-making relies upon understanding human action. The foundational concepts used to understand human action in social theory are structure, agency and reflexivity (Archer, 2003). The meanings of these concepts are contested by different theorists. In this thesis, I define these concepts by drawing on the core idea of each. Structure refers to the influence of institutions (e.g., the family, education and religion) which transmit shared expectations surrounding behaviour (i.e., norms and values) and constrain and enable actions (Healy, 1998). Agency refers to an individual's ability to freely act through making decisions and enacting these (Archer, 2000). Reflexivity refers to processes in which an individual deliberates, often through an internal conversation, on what actions they could, would want to or could not perform through considering their structural constraints and agentic abilities (Archer, 2003). Many social theorists have aimed to provide a succinct theoretical framework which can be used to explain these concepts and, thus, human action. These include Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach, Bourdieu's (1977) outline of a theory of practice and Giddens' (1984) structuration theory. Differing theories have been created as a result of differing views on how the concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity relate to each other: namely, whether these are analytically treated as distinct, isolated entities (i.e., analytical dualism), a position criticised for oversimplifying the relationship between the two and creating a false dichotomy (Hay, 2002); or whether they are analytically

interwoven, a contrasting position criticised for conflating the two by those advocating for analytical dualism (Archer, 2007, 2012).

Career decision-making models have been developed from drawing upon theories of action. Examples include Gati et al.'s (1996) taxonomy of career decision-making difficulties, Gottfredson's (1981) circumscription and compromise, Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) careership, Lent et al.'s (1994) social cognitive career theory, Mason and Poyatos Matas' (2015) four-capital model for modern foreign languages (MFL) teacher retention, Watt and Richardson's (2007) factors influencing teaching as a career choice (FIT-Choice) scale as well as chance and happenstance theories (Betsworth & Hansen, 1996; Krumboltz, 2009; Pryor & Bright, 2014). However, these have often been created for use with a specific methodological approach. For example, Gati et al.'s (1996) taxonomy was used to develop the career decision-making difficulties questionnaire. Watt and Richardson's (2007) FIT-choice scale is used in survey approaches. Furthermore, except for Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) careership and Mason and Poyatos Matas' (2015) four-capital model, these career decision-making theories are grounded in psychological concepts meaning that explored motivations emphasise individual cognition. While offering a cognitive understanding, these theories do not adequately include environmental factors, such as socialisation and skills acquisition, as elaborated by Bourdieu's (1977) habitus and capital and Archer's morphogenetic approach (2003), as well as physiological factors, such as Archer's (2012) reflexivity, in explaining career decisions.

I decided against using either Hodkinson and Sparkes' (1997) careership or Mason and Poyatos Matas' (2015) four-capital model to understand teacher career decision-making due to issues I identified with both. Mason and Poyatos Matas' (2015, p. 59) four-capital model "steps back from individual factors which have been the focus of most research… taking a bigger-picture, holistic approach". However, the creation of their theoretical framework brings together four existing concepts (human, social, structural and positive psychological capital) without examining whether these concepts are philosophically compatible and, thus, capable of being used together. Although Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) aim to avoid overemphasising structure within their careership theory, their overreliance on Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice means

they neglect other theories, such as Archer's (1995) reflexivity, which could enhance their theoretical framework. Therefore, after reviewing the career decision-making theories, I conclude that none of these provide the opportunity to explore how the application of structure, agency and reflexivity together can explain early career teachers' career decision-making in a philosophically compatible manner and, thus, are not suitable to answer my research questions and aim.

I have decided to use structure, agency and reflexivity to explain career decision-making. I chose this approach rather than amending my research question to "how can [career decision-making theory] explain early career teachers' career decisions". Using structure, agency and reflexivity offers the freedom to explore career trajectories without relying upon prescribed concepts, which are often only relevant at particular career decision points. It also provides the opportunity to contribute to the theoretical literature. This position comes despite Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) taking issue with applying social theory to career decision-making. They believe that 'pure' decision-making theories place too much emphasis on structural impacts on career decision-making. Indeed, as is explored in 3.2, this is a broader criticism of the theory they draw upon when creating careership: Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice. Instead, I use a reconciliation of Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, which has been criticised as conflating structure and agency (Archer, 2003), and Archer's (2003) modes of reflexivity, which has been criticised as creating a dichotomy between structure and agency (Hay, 2002), through reconciling their ontological and theoretical layers.

## 3.2 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

According to Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) theory of practice, everyone has a habitus and capital which they bring to a field, and these interact to produce action. This is expressed by Bourdieu (1984, p. 101) as "(habitus x capital) + field = practice". Habitus refers to dispositions (i.e., qualities and ways of thinking and doing) and habits which have been learned through primary (family) and secondary (societal institutions, such as education) socialisation (Bourdieu, 1977). There are four types of capital: social (e.g., networks and relationships with others), economic (e.g., finances and assets), cultural (e.g., embodied, knowledge and skills; institutionalised, qualifications; and objectified,

owning material possessions) and symbolic (i.e., when economic, social and/or cultural capital is valued within a particular social context) (Bourdieu, 1977). Fields are social spaces (e.g., working in schools), each have their own *nomos*—i.e., rules, both formal and informal (e.g., Disclosure and Barring Service checks and maintaining professional boundaries with children)—and value differing habitus and capital (Bourdieu, 1990, 1992). Fields have *doxa*, taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions that are often perceived as natural and guide actions that do not need to be justified (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu (1990, p. 66), people develop a practical sense, which refers to an intuitive "feel for the game" that guides action within fields, without needing to engage in reflexivity. Some people engage in *illusio*, which means they commit to a field when they believe that the rules and rewards are worth pursuing and are meaningful despite any struggles they may encounter (Bourdieu, 1990). Dominant groups of people within a field maintain power through imposing these rules, together with a field's norms and values, which Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) refer to as symbolic violence.

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice has been adapted by various researchers to expand upon his core concepts. Reay et al. (2001) introduce their concept of institutional habitus which demonstrates how educational institutions can provide students with habits, ways of thinking and behaviours which influence their decisions. Ingram and Abrahams (2016) provide a typology of habitus that develops when individuals experience disruptions, resulting in an abandoned habitus (i.e., leaving their previous habitus), a reconfirmed habitus (i.e., reaffirming their habitus), a reconciled habitus (i.e., integrating elements of previous and new habitus) and a destabilised habitus (i.e., internalising conflicting dispositions which cannot be reconciled). Various forms of capital have been developed including Pöllmann's (2016) intercultural capital (i.e., the skills associated with interacting with other cultures), Reay's (2000) emotional capital (i.e., emotional resources given to children by their mothers; a gendered, yet heteronormative, process of socialisation), van Dijk's (2005) information capital (i.e., having the financial resources to purchase technology and technical skills), Ignatow and Robinson's (2017) digital capital, (i.e., secondary capital to information capital such as the ability to successfully converse and interact online, often via social media).

Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice has been criticised for conflating agency and structure which results in a deterministic theory that overemphasises the role of structure in human action (Archer, 1995; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Jenkins, 2002; Mouzelis, 2007). Indeed, Decoteau (2015, p. 304) notes that "it has become commonplace" to critique Bourdieu's habitus in this way. These criticisms can be seen when Bourdieu (1997) draws upon *amor fati*, a Stoic concept which refers to loving and accepting life events, including positive and negative experiences (Nietzsche, 1889/2008). As to align with his interest in social reproduction and inequalities, Bourdieu (1997) interprets *amor fati* as capturing how individuals accept and embrace their social environments, including their available choices, often without an awareness that these are constrained by their social context. However, this, as well as Bourdieu's (1977) broader framework, has been criticised for being unfalsifiable given its capacity to interpret any data/experiences, which may discredit agency (Pellandini-Simányi, 2014). Indeed, Bourdieu appears to present individuals as what Garfinkel (1967, p. 66) would refer to as "cultural dopes": passive individuals who conform to norms, values and rules of social spaces (i.e., fields) without engaging in conscious reflexive deliberation. Garfinkel (1967) argues for understanding how individuals navigate and make sense of the world around them, which is often done through engaging in reflexivity and agentic choices. Bourdieu (1990) has responded to this criticism by emphasising the dynamic nature of habitus as it evolves when individuals encounter new spaces. Furthermore, in later work addressing criticisms and although directed at sociologists, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and Bourdieu (2001) explored how reflexivity allows individuals to critically reflect upon their position within a field to avoid reproducing inequalities (i.e., symbolic violence). Nevertheless, Archer (1995) criticises Bourdieu's habitus for ignoring the role of reflexivity and reducing agency to structure (i.e., conflating the concepts). Archer (1995, 2003, 2007) perceives that her morphogenetic approach addresses gaps in Bourdieu's habitus to provide an understanding of how structure, agency and reflexivity can account for action.

## 3.3 Archer's Morphogenetic Approach

Archer's (1995, 2024) morphogenetic approach is based on a critical realist philosophy and aims to understand how structure, agency and reflexivity interact to produce

individual action. According to Archer's (1995) critical realist ontology, structure is seen as the pre-existing conditions that individuals engage with. Archer (2007) posits that for the purpose of analysis, structure and agency are separate entities, an approach referred to as analytical dualism. Separating the concepts analytically avoids conflating structure and agency (Archer, 2007). This can be evidenced in Archer's (1995) morphogenetic cycle which theorises that firstly, individuals' opportunities and resources are influenced by existing structures; secondly, that individuals decide on actions through engaging in an internal dialogue referred to as reflexivity; and finally, individuals act in ways that either reproduce (morphostasis) or transform (morphogenesis) the structures over time. Archer (1995, 2003) distinguishes between corporate agents (i.e., organised groups with a shared goal, e.g., the Department for Education) and primary agents (i.e., individuals or loosely organised groups, e.g., individual teachers) when discussing morphogenesis and morphostasis; corporate agents have the ability to transform (i.e., morphogenesis) or reproduce (i.e., morphostasis) structures whilst primary agents often have limited influence over structures and are, instead, shaped by structures. This could be compared to Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) symbolic violence, as both ideas recognise how certain individuals have the power to shape and maintain social spaces whilst others are powerless.

As a core concept in her theorisations, Archer (2012) defines reflexivity as the process whereby individuals reflect upon their social context and deliberate on their available actions through engaging in internal conversations. Archer (2003) categorises reflexivity into four modes: autonomous, communicative, meta and fractured reflexivity. Autonomous reflexivity is when individuals reflect independently. Communicative reflexivity is when individuals rely upon discussions with other people to confirm their course of action. According to Archer (2010a), communicative reflexivity is declining due to the rise of contextual incongruity (i.e., a break/disruption in a person's social context). Meta-reflexivity is when individuals reflect critically on their social environment (i.e., structure), their available actions and the meaning and purpose of their choices. Parallels can be drawn between meta-reflexivity and Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) advocation for individuals (i.e., sociologists) to engage in reflexivity

to avoid reproducing inequalities within fields (i.e., symbolic violence). Fractured reflexivity is when an individual's internal conversations lead to distress, confusion or anxiety which often results in a struggle to make a decision and subsequent inaction. Reflexivity is thus seen as the mediator between, the analytically separate, structure and agency.

Archer's theorisations are criticised for overemphasising agency which results in underexploring the role of structure. Caetano (2014) highlights that, in theorisations of reflexivity, Archer focuses solely on the outcome of engaging in reflexivity (i.e., the action) and thus overemphasises the agentic nature of reflexivity. This ignores both the formation of reflexivity (i.e., its social origin rooted in structure) and instances where reflexivity is a valuable standalone process rather than as a method to produce actions (Caetano, 2014; Mrozowicki, 2010, 2011). Structure is further minimised in Archer's (2003) conceptualisation of reflexivity as it is only present in her theorisations of the internal conversation, when individuals draw upon structures to decide upon their action (Caetano, 2014). This has two implications: firstly, it may suggest that Archer's internal conversation relies upon neurotypical, adult-centric assumptions, which may not be appropriate for exploring reflexivity in all individuals who may not be able to mediate structure internally (e.g., children, older adults with cognitive impairments and neurodivergent individuals). Indeed, Decoteau (2015, p. 314) argues this theorisation proposes that individuals "are always able to fully comprehend the external world and their place in it". Secondly, viewing structure as solely external entities which are drawn upon when individuals engage in reflexivity means that one cannot explore how society also exists in individuals' subjective minds, one of the philosophical beliefs of critical realism, which Archer uses to base her theorisations (Caetano, 2014).

By drawing on other researchers' work on reflexivity, Archer can be criticised for her limited conceptualisation of reflexivity. Lahire (1998, 2008) found that reflexivity can take the form of writing, not just internal conversations within individuals' minds. Burkitt (2012) argues that the way in which humans emotionally relate to each other affects our internal deliberations when deciding upon how to act; emotions have been undervalued in Archer's conceptualisation of the internal conversation. In a similar manner, Caetano (2014) discusses the importance of conversations with others and how these should be

considered when explaining action. Although Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity touches on this, this type of reflexivity is theorised as instances when individuals engage in internal conversations and use others to confirm these plans. Thus, communicative reflexivity is an extension of the internal, individual dialogue rather than a social form of reflexivity which emerges from conversations with others and perhaps is either confirmed through the internal conversation, or through what I label as the external conversation (i.e., reflective conversations with others, as opposed to the internal conversation). Archer (2010a) would contend that this external, social manner of reflexivity is not able to explain action in current times due to the decline in contextual continuity. However, Caetano (2014) takes issue with Archer's (2010b, p. 136) claim that "socialisation isn't what it used to be" as Caetano believes that Archer's empirical examples do not support this claim: incongruity is not exclusive to current times. Indeed, in addressing criticism of being overly structural, Bourdieu (1990) discusses the transferability of habitus which provides dispositions which guide individual action within new social environments, suggesting that incongruity is not a new phenomenon. In addressing these criticisms, Caetano (2014) and Vogler (2016) advocate for combining different theories to help provide a useful tool to analyse social action.

## 3.4 Reconciling Archer and Bourdieu: An Emergentist Theory of Action

To address overemphasis on agency and structure, many scholars have attempted to theorise ways in which both Archer and Bourdieu's theories can be used together (e.g., Adams, 2006; Akram, 2012; Caetano, 2011, 2015; Chandler, 2013; Elder-Vass, 2007, 2010; Farrugia, 2013; Pöllmann, 2016; Sweetman, 2003). This section draws upon these to provide a theory of action which will be used to understand the career decision-making of early career teachers in England.

As demonstrated in the previous sections, Archer and Bourdieu have opposing theoretical (i.e., the degree of freedom humans have in shaping their future) and ontological (i.e., whether social structures exist independently of people or are co-constructed by human action) views of agency (Elder-Vass, 2007). Reconciling these two layers can provide a sound method enabling the use of Bourdieu's (1977) and

Archer's (2003) modes of reflexivity together to understand the career decision-making of early career teachers in England.

As Bourdieu does not disclose his ontology and instead focuses upon epistemology, Elder-Vass (2007) argues that Bourdieu's theorisations are compatible with an emergentist ontology through a metaphorical, rather than literal, reading of Bourdieu's (1977, p. 72) claim that habitus involves the "internalisation of externality and externalisation of internality". This metaphorical reading sees external structure as influencing our dispositions and beliefs, features of people which cannot be equated to social structure (Elder-Vass, 2007). Indeed, although Elder-Vass (2007) focuses upon Bourdieu's (1977) habitus, the concepts of capital (i.e., cultural, economic, social and symbolic) can be seen as features of individuals which are shaped from social institutions such as the family and education but their possession by individuals allows them to be theorised as distinct from social structure. While their activation within fields which value particular capital again shows the influence of structures. Thus, this metaphorical reading is compatible with an emergentist ontology as it views structure and individual's dispositions as interrelated yet distinct entities. Akram (2012) concurs with the ability to view Bourdieu's ontology in a critical realist sense through recognising how habitus can exemplify the real domain (i.e., a critical realist concept which refers to structures that produce events).

Although Bourdieu and Archer's concepts are theoretically opposed as Archer emphasises reflexivity, whilst Bourdieu emphasises non-reflexive action, connecting both to neurological processes involved in action allows for a reconciliation of this theoretical layer. Neural networks store dispositions (i.e., skills and habits based upon previous experience and socialisation) which guide action (Bourdieu, 1993; Elder-Vass, 2007). When individuals are unable to rely upon these pre-reflexive dispositions within a field due to their positionality, they invoke reflexivity to deliberate potential actions in relation to their social context (Archer, 2012; Decoteau, 2015; McNay, 1999). These actions and participations in new fields re-constitute one's habitus (i.e., hysteresis occurs, Bourdieu, 1993/1999). Indeed, as an individual makes their way through the world, they can develop a habitus clivé, a contradictory split sense of past experiences resulting from social mobility and/or social change (Bourdieu, 2004). Within their

theorisations of this process, Adams (2006), Adkins (2003), Farrugia (2013), Ingram (2018) and Sweetman (2003) place reflexivity within the habitus. However, doing this could be reductionist rather than emergentist as it may reduce reflexivity to structure (Archer, 2010a). Thus, within this theoretical framework I keep reflexivity as a separate process an individual engages with, to ensure that the concepts drawn upon are theoretically distinct entities. Taking Caetano (2014, 2017) and Lahire's (1998, 2008) critiques of Archer's reflexivity into account, as outlined previously, I also theorise reflexivity as an activity which may be invoked at any point when an individual engages in internal conversations (both mentally and physically through writing, drawing or speaking aloud) and external conversations with others to reflect upon previous events, current circumstances and potential future actions. Indeed, Chandler's (2013) conceptualisation of desaturation (i.e., when individuals in a field begin to question underlying assumptions and beliefs they once unconsciously accepted) demonstrates how reflexivity can occur without the need for action.

Archer (2010a) opposed efforts to make her and Bourdieu's theorisations compatible. She argued that the decline in relevance of habitus, due to twenty first century capitalist environments, means reflexivity is more capable of explaining human action than pre-reflexive dispositions (Archer, 2010a). Although others have critiqued this stance through highlighting the ability for habitus to explain actions that take place without thought (Chandler, 2013; Lash, 1994; Sayer, 2010), even if Archer's argument is correct, the theoretical framework I have outlined would allow for this as individuals would engage in reflexive deliberation if they were unable to rely upon previous experiences and dispositions. This theoretical framework does not posit that habitus accounts for most decision-making. Indeed, it may be that reflexivity is invoked in 99% of decisions whilst habitus accounts for 1% of actions. Instead, this theoretical framework theorises that habitus and capital can account for some action whilst reflexivity may be needed in other fields in which the individual cannot rely upon their habitus and capital as a tool to decide upon an available action. Furthermore, this transcends the "bad habitus" and "good reflexivity" labels which often discredit the role of Bourdieu's (1990) practical sense in social action (Pöllmann, 2016, p. 3). Consequently, this theoretical framework

allows for a flexible exploration of how habitus, capital and/or reflexivity can explain the career decision-making of early career teachers in England.

## 3.5 Theoretical Framework Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the theoretical basis for explaining career decisions, highlighting structure, agency and reflexivity as foundational concepts within social theory for explaining human action. I briefly presented career decision-making theories and argued against using these within this research. Instead, I decided to adopt a purer theoretical framework aimed at explaining general human action, which overcomes criticisms of these career decision-making theories as overly individualistic or emphasising structure. I outlined Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice and Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach to understanding human action. I drew upon criticisms of the two to develop a reconciled theoretical framework which can explain early career teachers' career decision-making. This framework provides methodological flexibility (i.e., the analysis is not tied to prescribed concepts developed in career decision-making theories) and avoids criticisms of being overly individualistic or emphasising structure over agency, or vice versa.

Using this theoretical framework allows for an exploration of early career teachers' career decision-making, offering methodological flexibility to examine both the reasons for career decisions and the processes that produce them. The systematic review (presented in chapter 2) and wider searches conducted through citation searching the works which attempt to bring Archer and Bourdieu's theorisations together (Adams, 2006; Akram, 2012; Caetano, 2011, 2015; Chandler, 2013; Elder-Vass, 2007, 2010; Farrugia, 2013; Pöllmann, 2016; Sweetman, 2003), suggest that this is the first study to use both theories to understand teachers' career decision-making. This builds towards a perspective on teachers' career decision-making that may enrich current understandings and efforts to address teacher shortages.

This chapter builds on chapter two's mapping of existing scholarship and introduces the theoretical framework to be employed. The next chapter outlines the policy context and initiatives aiming to support the recruitment and retention of teachers in England.

# 4 The Policy Context for Teacher Recruitment and Retention in England

This chapter bridges the international focus of the systematic review and the English data collection by outlining the policy context for teacher recruitment and retention in England. This situates the sample of 44 teachers within the policy context that shaped their entry into and decision to remain in the profession. This chapter first outlines the policy context and initiatives for teacher recruitment (4.1) and retention (4.2), before summarising the research which inform these policy initiatives (4.3).

## 4.1 Recruitment Policy Context and Initiatives

Initiatives to recruit teachers are shaped by the recently changed ITT landscape as created by the DfE's (2022a) ITT market review (4.1.1). Within this context, the DfE support policies aiming to recruit teachers into the profession (4.1.2).

### *4.1.1 Recruitment Policy Context*

Teachers in England are recruited into a system of ITT which has recently undergone some changes. This section outlines the general structure of ITT before detailing the recent ITT market review and re-accreditation process, which has restructured where training can take place and, thus, where teachers can be recruited.

To be a qualified teacher, teachers must complete a qualification route which grants them QTS. The DfE grants accreditation to ITT providers in England so that they can grant QTS. Teacher training routes that offer these can be split into employment-based and placement-based routes. Placement-based teacher training routes refer to programmes which involve the teacher training candidates paying their own tuition fees and living costs through bursaries, student loans or their own funds. Employment-based teacher training routes refer to programmes which involve teacher training candidates being employed by their training school and, thus, given a salary, pension benefits and pay taxes.

In line with the DfE's (2019a) teacher recruitment and retention strategy, the DfE (2022a) conducted an ITT market review. This concluded that ITT providers needed to provide consistent, quality training with effective mentorship (DfE, 2022a). Therefore, all ITT

providers were required to apply for re-accreditation in 2022, with the new accreditation taking effect from September 2024. However, many ITT providers were denied accreditation, with all appeals being rejected (Schools Week, 2022). This created concerns about its impact on teacher shortages, particularly in “cold spots” for teacher training around England, most notably in the North East and the East of England (Brooks & Perryman, 2024, p. 301). In response, the DfE reopened re-accreditation applications for previously accredited providers that had not received consecutive “requires improvement” or “inadequate” ratings by Ofsted (Schools Week, 2025). Successful applicants will be permitted to provide ITT from September 2026, including some in the affected areas (DfE, 2025e; Schools Week, 2025).

With the re-accreditation taking effect from September 2024, the teachers in this study are unlikely to have been directly affected by these changes. The sample of teachers completed their training between 2016 and 2023. Nevertheless, the accreditation process may still have shaped the wider environment of certain training routes during this period, particularly if any of these providers were initially denied accreditation in 2022.

Within this recruitment context, the DfE supports recruitment initiatives aimed at attracting potential teachers to the profession. These are outlined in the following section.

### *4.1.2 Recruitment Initiatives*

Recruitment initiatives can be split into those aimed at potential teachers, those aimed at teacher training providers and planned initiatives.

4.1.2.1 Recruitment Initiatives Aimed at Potential Teachers. Recruitment initiatives aimed at potential teachers include: the Get Into Teaching media campaign and website and financial incentives to train.

The DfE (2024a) utilise media (e.g., public advertisement boards, video advertising via live television channels, cinemas and social media feeds) to transmit their “every lesson shapes a life” Get Into Teaching campaign. This campaign has endured across different parliamentary governments (e.g., both conservative and labour governments) (DfE, 2024a). The Get Into Teaching campaign has been running since at least 2014, meaning

it was active during the period in which the teachers in this study entered teaching (i.e., 2016–2023) (Blackberry, n.d.). The Get Into Teaching (n.d.) website encourages potential applicants to start thinking about entering the profession by a) speaking to a free teacher training adviser (i.e., Get Into Teaching mentors), b) arranging experience in schools shadowing teachers and/or c) attending teaching taster events.

The DfE offers financial incentives to encourage individuals to train to teach. Between 2016 and 2023, financial incentives focused on bursaries and scholarships for shortage subjects (e.g., biology, chemistry, computing, design and technology, geography, languages, mathematics and physics) (DfE, 2023b; National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2016; National College for Teaching and Leadership & DfE, 2018). However, most available bursaries and scholarships will be cut for the 2026/27 academic year (DfE, 2025b, 2025c). Tax-free bursaries of £26,000 are being reduced to £22,000 for trainees teaching French, German and/or Spanish; £20,000 for trainees teaching design and technology and languages (not including French, German and Spanish); and £5,000 for trainees teaching biology and geography. Tax-free bursaries of £10,000 for trainees teaching art and design, music and religious education (RE), £5,000 for trainees teaching English and tax-free scholarships of £31,000 for trainees teaching mathematics are being removed entirely. Nevertheless, tax-free bursaries of £29,000 and tax-free scholarships of £31,000 remain for trainees teaching chemistry, computing and physics.

**4.1.2.2 Recruitment Initiatives Aimed at Teacher Training Providers.** Initiatives aimed at teacher training providers to support the recruitment of teachers include: the Taking Teaching Further recruitment scheme and the find a candidate feature on DfE's teacher training provider portal.

The Taking Teaching Further recruitment scheme aims to encourage more industry professionals to retrain as teachers (DfE, 2026). This scheme was launched in 2018, meaning that some teachers in the sample may have been affected by it if they met the eligibility criteria (IFF Research, 2022). Through this recruitment scheme, Further Education providers (i.e., those teaching 16–19-year-olds) can apply for financial and educational support to recruit individuals with industry knowledge and experience to retrain as teachers (DfE, 2026). These include subjects related to: care services, health

and science, engineering and manufacturing, creative and design, business and administration, protective services, education and early years, catering and hospitality, construction and the built environment, legal, finance and accounting, digital, hair and beauty, agriculture, environmental and animal care, transport and logistics, sales, marketing and procurement (Skills England, n.d.).

The DfE (2026) offer a find a candidate feature on their portal which ITT providers use to manage teacher training applications. This feature was launched in 2025, meaning that none of the sampled teachers in this study could have been impacted by it. I include it in this overview as its maintenance is a current priority for the DfE (2026). The find a candidate feature lists anonymised teacher candidates who have submitted at least one teacher training application, currently have no open applications (i.e., they have been rejected from an application or have withdrawn an application) and have consented to appear in the candidate pool (GOV.UK, 2025). Training providers can use this feature to find teacher training candidates that meet their eligibility criteria and read their application details (i.e., qualifications, work history and personal statement) (GOV.UK, 2025).

**4.1.2.3 Planned Recruitment Initiatives.** In addition to supporting the current recruitment initiatives, the current government also pledges to enhance routes into teaching (DfE, 2026). This includes making Postgraduate Teaching Apprenticeships easier for teacher training providers to deliver (DfE, 2026). They are also targeting recruitment efforts to mainstream secondary schools, special schools and FE colleges as they have identified these schools as places that require more teachers (DfE, 2026). To minimise bias within recruitment, the DfE (2026) are piloting anonymised teacher training applications. They are also planning to commission research, through the Office for Equality and Opportunity, on improving the recruitment (retention and progression) of ethnic minority teachers (DfE, 2026).

### *4.1.3 Recruitment Policy Context and Initiatives Conclusion*

This section has outlined the recruitment context and initiatives aiming to attract teachers to the teaching profession in England. The next section moves to retention policy context and initiatives.

## 4.2 Retention Policy Context and Initiatives

Induction periods for newly qualified teachers and offers of professional development form the context for retention policies (4.2.1). Within this context, the DfE support policies aiming to retain teachers (4.2.2).

### *4.2.1 Retention Policy Context*

After training to teach, teachers join the profession contextualised by government provided support. The aim of this support is to help them transition into the profession. Support includes induction periods and voluntary national professional qualifications, which, alongside other continuing professional development activities, are often supported and delivered by teaching hubs.

All qualified teachers need to complete an induction period, which aims to effectively transition teachers from training into the profession. Teachers in the sample gaining QTS between September 2016 and August 2020 have completed a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) period (The Education (Induction Arrangements for School Teachers) (England) Regulations, 1999). For teachers in the sample who gained QTS between September 2020 and August 2023, they either were completing (at the time of data collection) or have completed the two-year Early Career Framework which aimed to better support teachers during their induction period (DfE, 2024f). This was later replaced by the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) from September 2025, which aims to reduce repetition within training, improve subject training and enhance the transition from trainee to teacher to benefit teacher retention (DfE, 2024g).

For progression and professional development, the DfE offers voluntary national professional qualifications for teachers, and leaders, to develop specialist knowledge and leadership skills (DfE, 2024h). National professional qualifications were reformed in 2021 to broaden their scope beyond leadership and to include teachers' development of their practice (DfE, 2024i).

Alongside induction periods and national professional qualifications, the government introduced teaching hubs, a network of school-led professional development (DfE, 2024j). These can support and deliver ITT, ECF, national professional qualifications as well as their own continuing professional development activities and events (DfE,

2024j). These were introduced before the data collection took place in September 2021 (DfE, 2024j). Prior to this there were networks of teaching schools, rather than a central hub for schools (DfE, 2024j).

Although these indirectly aim to keep teachers in the profession, the DfE supports specific retention initiatives directly aimed at keeping teachers in the profession. These are outlined in the following section.

### *4.2.2 Retention Initiatives*

Policies to support the retention of teachers are split into those aimed at teachers (4.2.2.1) those aimed at schools (4.2.2.2) and planned initiatives (4.2.2.3).

**4.2.2.1 Retention Initiatives Aimed at Potential Teachers.** Retention initiatives aimed at currently serving teachers include financial incentives and curriculum resources.

Like recruitment initiatives, there have been financial incentives aiming to keep teachers in the profession. Annual uplifts were 1% in September 2016 and 1.2% in September 2017 (DfE, 2017; HM Treasury & Hands, 2016). These rose to 3.5% in September 2018, 2.75% in 2019 and 3.1% in September 2020 (DfE, 2019b; DfE & Hinds, 2018; HM Treasury, 2020). However, a pay freeze followed in September 2021 (DfE, 2021a). Subsequent uplifts were significantly higher including 5.4% in both September 2022 and 2023, 5.5% in September 2024 and 4% in September 2025 (DfE, 2022b, 2023a, 2023b, 2024k, 2025f). In addition to these pay uplifts, Targeted Retention Incentives (up to £6,000) are given to chemistry, computing, mathematics and physics teachers in the first five years of their career working in disadvantaged schools (DfE, 2025d).

The DfE supported Oak National Academy (n.d.-b) to become a non-departmental public body to provide curriculum resources in 2022. This includes lesson plans, slide decks, quizzes and resources for all age ranges (e.g., early years to key stage 4) (Oak National Academy, n.d.-b). However, standardised curriculum packages, like Oak National Academy provide, have been criticised for contributing towards job dissatisfaction, which has been negatively linked with teacher retention (Traianou et al., 2025).

**4.2.2.2 Retention Initiatives Aimed at Schools.** To help promote the retention of teachers in schools, the DfE supports schools through mentoring, the use of AI tools and guidance on improving workload and wellbeing of teachers.

To support the retention of both early career teachers and more experienced teachers, the DfE offer grant funding for schools to provide mentor training (DfE, 2025g). Mentors are given up to 20 hours to undertake this training within one year (DfE, 2025g). The mentors who undertake this training will support early career teachers (DfE, 2025g). A variation of this scheme has run from September 2021 to present (DfE, 2025g).

The DfE are promoting the use of AI to support teachers' and leaders' workloads, which they state could help address retention challenges in teaching (DfE, 2025h). This includes financially supporting the creation of AI tools and developing training and resources for schools to increase teachers' and leaders' confidence with using AI (DfE, 2025h). The DfE began considering the use of AI in schools through their call for evidence on the topic in June 2023, one month after my data collection period (DfE, 2023c).

"Improve workload and wellbeing for school staff" is a DfE initiative aiming to support schools with free resources (DfE, n.d.-c). These include the workload reduction toolkit, staff wellbeing resources and the flexible working toolkit (DfE, n.d.-c). Each of these aim to help schools examine and/or create their existing policies and provide resources to support reviewing/evaluating these once implemented (DfE, n.d.-c). This service was launched in March 2024, one year after my data collection period (DfE, 2024l).

**4.2.2.3 Planned Retention Initiatives.** Examining the plans that the DfE (2026) have for future policies aiming to retain teachers to the profession suggests that they will continue to focus on using technology, workload issues, flexible working practices, pay and supporting teachers to deepen their subject expertise (via national professional qualifications outlined in 4.2.1). Due to missing targets, they will focus these efforts on mainstream secondary schools, special schools and FE colleges as they estimate that there are enough primary school teachers being retained to the profession to meet demand (DfE, 2026).

### *4.2.3 Retention Policy Context and Initiatives Conclusion*

This section has outlined the retention context and initiatives aiming to retain teachers to the teaching profession in England. The next section outlines the research the government uses to inform these policies.

## 4.3 Research Informing These Policies

These recruitment and retention policies are informed by research conducted and produced by the DfE (4.3.1), commissioned independent research groups (4.3.2), which are used by the wider government (4.3.3).

### *4.3.1 Department for Education Outputs*

The DfE conduct their own research to inform their teacher recruitment and retention policies. These often take the form of high-level statistical releases which contextualise school workforce figures and show the movement of staff. These are largely based on two datasets they produce: the School Workforce Census (2025) and the Initial Teacher Training Census (2025).

The School Workforce Census (2025) collects workforce information from state-funded schools in England annually including: characteristics of teachers and support staff, teacher retention and pay, qualifications and subjects taught in secondary schools. Based on the School Workforce Census, the DfE (2025i, 2025j) publishes the school workforce in England and teacher and leader development reports. The school workforce in England report provides statistical analysis annually on pupil teacher ratios (i.e., the number of teachers per pupil) in state-funded English schools, proportion of teacher vacancies filled and unfilled and the average pay for schoolteachers (DfE, 2025i). The teacher and leader development report provides statistical analysis on teachers enrolled in the early career framework or national professional qualifications including provider type, working pattern, school and teacher characteristics and early career retention (DfE, 2025j).

The Initial Teacher Training Census (2025) collects information about the amount of people taking part in an ITT course in England annually including: school subject, training route, accredited provider type, training region, demographic characteristics and funding type. The ITT Census is used to produce the initial teacher training

performance profiles which produce annual national, regional and provider level statistics on teacher trainee outcomes, with the aim to help potential trainee teachers with their choice of a training route (DfE, 2025k).

In addition to these censuses, the DfE, alongside wider funders, commission research to help support teacher recruitment and retention policies.

### *4.3.2 Commissioned Outputs*

There are two types of commissioned outputs, those which the DfE have commissioned and those which other funding bodies have commissioned to help support teacher recruitment and retention.

The DfE commissioned IFF Research to conduct the annual working lives of teachers and leaders (DfE, 2025l). This study began in spring 2022 (wave 1) and has most recently reported wave 4 findings (DfE, 2025l). This survey asks teachers and leaders in state schools in England about their workload, wellbeing, flexible working arrangements, pay, professional development, pupil behaviour, career reflections and plans (DfE, 2025l).

Ad hoc research has also been commissioned by the DfE. CooperGibson research have been commissioned to undertake research for the DfE including understanding factors affecting teacher retention (DfE, 2018a), exploring teaching assistants' appetite to become teachers (DfE, 2019c), staying in the teaching profession beyond normal pension age (DfE, 2018b) and a review of incentive programmes for the recruitment and retention of teachers in FE (DfE, 2018c).

Research with the aim to support recruitment and retention initiatives has also been commissioned externally to the DfE. The National Foundation for Educational Research conduct the teacher labour market in England annual report (McLean & Worth, 2025). This is commissioned by the Nuffield Foundation (n.d.) who aim to help guide decisionmakers to implement solutions that improve people's lives. Similarly, Teacher Tapp and SchoolDash produce an annual report on teacher recruitment and retention, which is funded by the Gatsby Foundation (Allen et al., 2026). It is not possible to establish whether these reports are drawn upon within the DfE in their development of policies. However, they nonetheless contribute towards discussions of teacher recruitment and retention in an English policy context.

Research produced and commissioned by the DfE are used to inform wider parliament research briefings, namely, the teacher recruitment and retention in England briefings (Long & Bridges, 2026; Long & Danechi, 2021; Maisuria et al., 2023).

### *4.3.3 Wider Parliament Outputs*

The House of Commons use DfE data to make inferences about teacher recruitment and retention. These include the teacher recruitment and retention in England research briefing which have been published in 2021, 2023 and 2026 (Long & Bridges, 2026; Long & Danechi, 2021; Maisuria et al., 2023) and the House of Commons Committee reports by the Education Committee (Education Committee, 2024). These briefings provide initiatives to improve recruitment and retention, which the government must consider and respond to (e.g., Education Committee, 2025).

### *4.3.4 Research Informing These Policies Conclusion*

These datasets and reports can be seen as the knowledge base drawn upon by the government to inform policies aiming to recruit and retain teachers in England. The next section concludes this chapter by highlighting how the present study aims to contribute to this knowledge base.

## 4.4 Policy Context Conclusion

This chapter has provided the background for the system in which the teachers in the study work within, including the recruitment and retention initiatives that may have contextualised their careers. It has also outlined the research which has informed these policies. This research is mostly large-scale quantitative survey designs, rather than small-scale qualitative research. Rather than looking at overall workforce movement and patterns like governmental research often focuses on, my research aims to provide an analysis of the lived experiences of teachers to understand their career decisions. The next chapter, the methodology, illustrates how this research was conducted.

# 5 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present this research project's methodology and outline how I conducted the research. This is done through detailing my philosophical assumptions (5.1), presenting and defending the project's research questions (5.2), explaining the project's research design (5.3), describing the ethical considerations taken (5.4), outlining the population of interest, sampling methods used and resulting participants (5.5), explaining the techniques for data collection (5.6) and analysis (5.7), assessing the quality of analysis (5.8) and introducing the three themes I developed (5.9).

## 5.1 Philosophical Assumptions Underpinning This Research

I engaged in three stages of reflection to decide upon and categorise my philosophical assumptions. In the first stage, I wrote out my assumptions about the nature of reality (ontology) and how knowledge about reality should be created (epistemology). In the second stage, I compared this to the philosophical approaches I read about in Blaikie (2007) and Clark et al. (2021). These comparisons led me to debates on using the term *qualitative research*, which is not a single paradigm but instead a group of research approaches, in place of the term *interpretivism* when distinguishing this type of research from positivism (e.g., Madill, 2015). In the third stage, I read further into the qualitative approach to research (using Archer, 1998; Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2023; Hammersley, 2002; Isaksen, 2022; Jackson, 2015; Quraishi et al., 2021). This led me to categorise my philosophical assumptions within approaches aligned with this qualitative research umbrella.

Specifically, my ontological and epistemological assumptions align with big Q and critical realism. Big Q refers to research guided "fully" by qualitative perspectives through reflective interpretation of data using researcher subjectivity (Braun et al., 2016, p. 192; Braun & Clarke, 2023; Finlay, 2021; Kidder & Fine, 1987). It stands in opposition to small q, where researchers operating within this approach use qualitative methods within a (post)positivist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2023). Critical realists view reality as independent to individuals and knowledge construction as influenced by both researchers' and participants' social contexts and experiences (Bhaskar, 2008;

Lawson, 2003). These definitions demonstrate how my Big Q and critical realist approaches can be used together within research: I used qualitative methods to construct an understanding of teachers' career decision-making (the reality) through collecting teachers' own interpretations of their career experiences and analysing these using my own subjectivity (the knowledge generation). Therefore, I adopted this position as it allows for an exploration of early career teachers' career decisions while acknowledging my subjectivity as the researcher, in comparison to other approaches such as small q (as defined above).

## 5.2 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this research was to understand how early career teachers in England make career decisions. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, my experience as a schoolteacher in England reflecting with colleagues on our career decisions and my sociological interest in structure, agency and reflexivity inspired my initial interest in the topic. As an orienting decision (Cohen et al., 2017), I decided that this research would be helpful for three audiences. Firstly, bodies that recruit and aim to retain teachers (the Department for Education, teacher training providers, early career framework providers and school leaders). Secondly, for teachers themselves to reflect upon their career justifications. Thirdly, for fellow scholars aiming to advance understandings of either general social action (i.e., social theory) or career decisions in the interdisciplinary fields of work, employment and career studies.

The aim was operationalised into research questions with reference to the identified limitation with previous literature, which only focuses on one or two aspects of teachers' career decisions (i.e., recruitment, retention and attrition). The overarching research question was:

> How can early career teachers' career decisions be explained?

Four sub-research questions were created to answer this overarching research question:

1. Why did early career teachers decide to become teachers?

2. How did early career teachers decide upon their training route and subsequent employing school(s)?
3. What are the career aspirations of early career teachers?
4. How does structure, agency and reflexivity explain these career decisions?

The first three research questions separate career decision-making into three sequential time periods: the past (deciding to become a teacher, choosing a training route and employing schools), the present (current decisions surrounding their immediate future) and the future (long-term career aspirations). One could argue these research questions resemble the isolated time points which were criticised in the literature review. However, I decided to use time points for each research question to be able to structure participant data into a logical format using the COVID-19 pandemic as a separator. Then, the main research question and sub-research question four were used in the analysis of the data to create a holistic understanding of how career decisions (across all time points) can be explained.

## 5.3 The Research Design

To answer the research questions and meet the research aim, a primary, cross-sectional, narrative research design with multiple sub-samples was utilised.

### *5.3.1 Primary Over Secondary Research*

The UK Data Archive (n.d.), Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS; n.d.), School Workforce Census (2025), Labour Force Survey (n.d.), Graduate Outcomes (and the previous Destination of Leavers from Higher Education; DLHE, n.d.) survey were examined to see whether secondary data exists to answer these research questions. I determined that the answers given in these surveys would not answer all the research questions. Therefore, I adopted a primary research approach.

### *5.3.2 Narrative Research Approach*

A narrative research approach was chosen due to its compatibility with the research questions, its advantages and the ability to mitigate associated challenges.

The research questions concur with a narrative research design as they can be answered through analysing participants' stories and accounts, which are used to

express their thoughts and emotions surrounding their behaviours and justifications (de Vries, 2018; Mishler, 1999; Overcash, 2003). A narrative approach to research is more concerned with interpretation rather than determining facts, which aligns with my Big Q and critical realist philosophy (Atkinson et al., 2003; Frost, 2011; Somers, 1994). This type of research design is advantageous as it is easy to elicit stories from people as most are happy to share about themselves; when telling stories, people most often recount truthful events of what happened; and these stories result in in-depth data (i.e., thick descriptions) (Creswell, 2015; Newby, 2014; Ntinda, 2019; Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007).

I adopted a range of strategies to avoid the storytelling aspect of the research becoming a therapeutic rather than an analytic practice (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). A semi-structured approach to data collection, further outlined in section 5.6, was adopted. This involved asking probing and follow-up questions during the storytelling, such as "that's really interesting, and what was it about x that helped you decide you would make y career decision?", which aimed to provide analytical answers to the research questions.

Storytelling, as a data collection method, can create challenges with the presentation of data (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Indeed, one participant in my study commented: "I don't know how you are going to put us all together because we have all had different journeys". It can be difficult to navigate the relationship between a narrative account, the interpretation and a retold story (Ntinda, 2019). To mitigate this, I decided to use reflexive thematic analysis, as further outlined in section 5.7, to analyse the stories and present patterns and divergences of data to answer the research questions. I decided against member checking of the themes as some participants may not see their stories reflected in some themes and instead opted for member checking of their own stories at the close of data collection (further outlined in section 5.6.2). As the themes represent my own interpretation of the participants' stories, the decision to member check in this way aligns with my critical realist philosophy since member checking would incite another level of interpretation from the participant. Furthermore, member checking in Big Q research projects is not desirable due to the practice being in service of providing validity, a concept which I do not assess my research against (explained in more detail in section 5.8) (Braun & Clarke, 2024; Motulsky, 2021).

Ntinda (2019) outlines five difficulties surrounding boundaries with a narrative research approach. The first is deciding who authors the account. Traditionally, narrative research is led by the participant with the researcher acting as a facilitator (Ntinda, 2019). However, in this study, while participants shared their accounts and had the opportunity to revise these, I ultimately shaped the final narrative through conducting thematic analysis. Thus, I authored the account of career decision-making. The second is deciding the scope of the narrative, which refers to whether the research requires asking the participant to recount their entire life or a part of their life. To answer the research questions, I asked participants to detail their career history from secondary school to present day (further outlined in section 5.6.2). The third is deciding who provides the story. To answer the research questions, the participants provided the story. The fourth is deciding on the conceptual framework that influences the study. This was outlined in section 5.1; I also referred to this framework when addressing the other challenges with conducting narrative research. The fifth is deciding whether all stories are included in one narrative. As mentioned, reflexive thematic analysis was used to create themes to answer the research questions, rather than trying to amalgamate all the stories into one cohesive narrative. As one of the participants quoted above stated, it would be impossible to fit every teacher together into one overarching story. The teachers' stories may have clustered into a finite set of pathways. However, I decided that, if this was the case, reflexive thematic analysis would allow me to develop this.

### *5.3.3 Cross-Sectional Design*

A cross-sectional over a cohort research design was taken due to its compatibility with the research questions and the time scale of a PhD project. This involved collecting data once from each participant from January to May 2023. This data collection was designed in a way to answer all the research questions and is detailed in section 5.6. The use of research questions which require the participant to discuss past events could result in issues with memory recall, recall bias and post-hoc rationalisations. While it is difficult to mitigate against recall bias and post-hoc rationalisations, I used a visual data collection instrument (a timeline; outlined further in section 5.6.2) to reduce issues with memory recall, which is recommended by Kolar et al. (2015). Indeed, Elder-

Vass (2007) distinguishes between the event and the post-event rationalisation as two separate actions; post-event descriptions are useful but cannot be relied upon to evidence motivations present during the original action. Nevertheless, the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study recognises that interpretation of experiences is an epistemological part of research (see 5.1). Furthermore, I use the word "justification" in place of motivation to refer to the themes created in this research; this word captures the participants' sense-making and retrospective reasoning. Therefore, while I acknowledge this limitation of post-event rationalisations, I do not consider it to significantly undermine the analytical findings.

A cohort or longitudinal approach may have been compatible with the research questions, which may have been beneficial for avoiding issues with memory recall. However, these approaches take several years, which was not feasible for this PhD research project. Furthermore, outside of a PhD setting, collecting data over a seven-year period is more difficult to fund than a shorter project. For example, the Economic and Social Research Council's (2024) responsive mode call for funding any social science research project awards funds for up to five years.

### *5.3.4 Multiple Sampling*

As the research questions indicate, the population of interest for this research was early career teachers. Due to the differences in teacher training and early career training frameworks across the four nations of the UK, I decided to only include teachers in England. The population of interest can be stratified by time and by training programme. I decided to divide early career teachers into six sub-samples to include all types of early career teacher voices (see table 2 below). Compared to pre-COVID and post-COVID, the peri-COVID sub-samples may be less homogeneous as this includes teachers who started training just before the pandemic began (in September 2019) and during the pandemic (in September 2020). Nevertheless, these teachers were grouped together as they both experienced teacher training during the pandemic which resulted in lockdowns, online teaching and socially distanced in-school teaching (DfE, 2021b). The decision to define early career teachers in this way is explained in section 5.5. Multiple samples were chosen over sampling just early career teachers to incite the advantages of triangulation and depth of analysis: gaining perspectives from teachers

from varying training routes with differing years of experience ensures these voices are collected within the data. This avoids overrepresenting a particular training route or teachers with a particular number of years of experience in the answers to the research questions.

**Table 2.**

*The Six Sub-Samples*

| Teacher training route type | Time period of teacher training | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-COVID (2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19) | Peri-COVID (2019/20, 2020/21) | Post-COVID (2021/22, 2022/23) |
| Placement-based | Sub-sample A | Sub-sample C | Sub-sample E |
| Employment-based | Sub-sample B | Sub-sample D | Sub-sample F |

*Note*. Placement-based teacher training route type refers to programmes which involve the teacher training candidates paying their own tuition fees and living costs through bursaries, student loans or their own funds. Employment-based teacher training route type refers to programmes which involve teacher training candidates being employed by their training school and, thus, are given a salary, pension benefits and pay taxes.

### *5.3.5 The Research Design Conclusion*

This research design was adopted to meet the research aim and answer the research questions. When implementing this research design, I followed guidelines and practices to ensure the research adhered to ethical standards of research.

## 5.4 Ethical Approval and Considerations

To conduct this research in an ethical manner, I obtained institutional ethical approval, followed ethical guidelines, identified and planned for distress and feelings of coercion and shared my research findings with those who had helped with the data collection.

Ethical approval was granted by the Education Ethics Committee of the Department of Education at the University of York, in line with their ethical approval process. Appendix A contains my approved ethics form.

I followed the University of York's (2022) and the British Educational Research Association's (2024) ethical guidelines for research. Participants had the right to

withdraw at any point during, and up to two weeks after, the data collection process. Participants remained confidential: no one other than me and the participant knew they had taken part in the research. Participants were anonymised through assigning pseudonyms to them, any other person, schools and towns mentioned by the participant. I asked the participants if they wanted to receive a copy of the analysis and explained that these will be in the form of themes to protect their own and other participants' anonymity. Participants were given an informed consent form, shown in appendix B, to ensure they understood the research and had the opportunity to ask me any questions before signing this form and participating in the research. Appendix C shows my data management plan which explains how I adhered and continue to adhere to the Data Protection Act (1998) and the General Data Protection Regulation (2024) to safeguard my participants' data (e.g., the choice not to archive my data as, even when anonymised, there is the ability to reveal who my participants are due to the unique life choices they mention).

Despite the research not meeting the criteria to be described as "sensitive or potentially distressing" (see appendix A), I identified that there was the potential for participants to disclose sensitive information. Within a previous research project, I explored the career decision-making of school support staff using the same methods for data collection and analysis as this project. During the data collection two participants recalled events (i.e., workplace bullying and a cancer diagnosis), unprompted by me, which provoked emotional responses from both me and the participants. To mitigate harm, I did not ask any probing or follow-up questions about these situations, validated their emotions and allowed them space to move onto the next career decision when they felt ready. Upon reflection, there are two practices I should have engaged with in the previous project, which I planned to do if this happened with this current research project: signposting participants to where they can receive help and support (e.g., Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service; ACAS, n.d.; and Samaritans, n.d.); and to mitigate harm against myself, have a debrief session with my supervisors if I felt distressed after an interview. Therefore, I planned to engage in these practices, if the participants recalled any distressing events. However, after

conducting data collection, no interviews contained any sensitive topics, so these measures were not actioned.

During recruitment through my own personal network of teachers, I noticed that there was the potential for these individuals to feel a sense of coercion into engaging in the research. As I knew these individuals, I was worried that they would feel a social obligation to take part in my research, a common anxiety which McConnell-Henry et al. (2010) state researchers interviewing people they know experience. To mitigate this, I included a section in my recruitment message where I reiterated that there was "absolutely no pressure to take part in this research and I completely understand how busy you must be" which was not present in recruitment materials for participants I did not know. I only sent singular recruitment messages and did not follow up to ensure I did not pressure the individuals to feel that they needed to take part. However, in practice I found it more difficult to recruit from my personal network than from strangers as the teachers I knew would often cancel and re-arrange the data collection, perhaps as they felt comfortable doing so with someone they knew. This is elaborated upon in the next section (5.5) on sampling.

After data analysis, I shared a summary of the themes with both participants (see appendix D) and the ITT providers who forwarded my recruitment message to their early career teachers and indicated an interest in being given a copy of the findings (see appendix E). These summaries were different, with the teacher summary being an overview of all themes and the ITT provider summary being specific in how teachers selected their training routes. I decided on these differing structures as teachers indicated their interest in the holistic results, while I identified that ITT providers would only be interested in the results which they can act upon. Both were high-level summaries, which meant that no teacher could be identified. Furthermore, I ensured that I used accessible language which did not contain any technical phrases (e.g., those relating to the theoretical framework) so participants and ITT providers could understand the findings. This practice allowed for reciprocity and transparency in a way that thanked participants and ITT providers for their time and effort and showed them what I had done as a result of the interviews.

Following these practices ensured that I conducted this research in an ethical manner. Implementing this ethical research design began with sampling from the population of interest.

## 5.5 Population, Sampling and Participants

The first stage of conducting this research involved identifying the population of interest and employing sampling methods to recruit participants.

### *5.5.1 The Population of Interest*

The population of interest was teachers with no more than seven years' teaching experience who had completed or were undertaking training through an English teacher training programme at the time of data collection (January–May 2023). England rather than the UK was chosen as education and teacher training is a devolved matter, meaning that there are different systems in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The label "early career teacher" is often used within policy and schools to refer to a teacher who is training, in their first or second year immediately after training (referred to as ECT1 and ECT2 years; Department for Education, n.d.-d). However, academic research often extends this definition to around seven years (e.g., Booth et al., 2021; Day et al., 2007; Jones, 2018; Sulis et al., 2022). This is based upon Huberman (1989) and Dreyfus (2004) who theorise that teachers start as novices focused on survival and exploring the profession within the first one to three years of teaching. They subsequently progress to become advanced beginners, deciding whether to stay or remain in the profession, which takes place in years four to six of teaching. Indeed, Day et al. (2007, p. 57) draw upon this work when defining their "early professional life phase" as zero to seven years of teaching experience. Because of this, I decided to adopt this definition of early career teachers as those within the first seven years of the profession.

### *5.5.2 Sampling Method*

Purposive sampling, selecting participants who fit the population of interest (Clark et al., 2021), and recruitment of participants took place over five stages.

The first stage involved recruiting participants from my own network: sending a recruitment message (appendix F) directly to individuals who I knew to be teachers.

This was advantageous as it allows for a fast start to data collection and provides an opportunity for snowball sampling as I asked these individuals to forward on this recruitment advert to other teachers they knew (Clark et al., 2021).

The second stage involved recruiting from my wider network through posting advertisement materials (appendix G) on social media (Facebook, Instagram and X, formerly known as Twitter) and asking others to share to their own networks. This allowed for recruitment of teachers outside of my own personal network. Through my networks, I easily recruited for sub-samples A and B (where I would be located) but struggled to recruit trainees and more recently qualified teachers for sub-samples C, D, E and F.

Therefore, the third stage involved posting in Facebook groups aimed at early career teachers. This aimed to account for the age limit or bias which may have been introduced by recruiting through my own network. However, some teachers who had trained more recently commented that they saw my advertisement and wanted to discuss their career with me as it was not a usual path due to changing careers. Nonetheless, recruitment in this way was dependent on group administrators, who can be seen as gatekeepers (Clark et al., 2021); some were accommodating (e.g., one administrator included my advertisement in their weekly emailed early career teacher newsletter which went beyond Facebook users), while others denied my request to maintain their group's culture as a space only for teachers. At this point I had sufficiently recruited for sub-samples A, B, C and D.

To recruit trainees and those in the first year of their teaching after training (sub-samples E and F), stage four involved contacting ITT providers and asking them to circulate my advertisement to their teachers (appendix G). I used the Department for Education's (2024) published list of providers who are accredited to deliver initial teacher training from September 2024 to decide who to email. I emailed 119 out of 180 providers. After researching who to email for university-based teacher training for a couple of universities and receiving no reply, I decided to exclude universities from my recruitment. It would often take a lot longer than other providers to find out who to email as universities offer various training programmes (primary and secondary subjects). This strategy helped me gain a lot of placement-based teachers, especially

for the post-COVID (2021/22, 2022/23) sample which I was struggling to recruit for. However, it did not help recruit many employment-based teachers.

Therefore, the final stage involved using LinkedIn to directly send the recruitment message (appendix F) to employment-based post-COVID teachers. This felt like an ethical recruitment strategy as LinkedIn is used a lot by recruiters (CLIQHR Recruitment Services, 2023). However, it relied upon teachers having open profiles with when and how they are, or were, training which made it a laborious recruitment method. Nevertheless, this recruitment method allowed me to meet my participant targets for each sample.

Across all stages, I relied upon volunteers who opted in to the research who may differ systematically to those who did not opt in. For instance, two participants disclosed that they knew people (e.g., a partner and a friend) who had done a PhD and struggled with the recruitment, so they wanted to help me when they saw my advertisement. The dispositions of participants, and how they may differ to the population of interest, is further discussed within the presentation of analysis and discussion chapters.

Reflecting upon the sampling methods I deployed, there are some which I would and would not utilise again in a similar research project. I found that using LinkedIn worked better than I expected, as more teachers responded to my messages, even to politely decline an interview, than I anticipated. Therefore, I would use LinkedIn again for recruiting teacher participants. Using Facebook groups was a mixed experience with some being more useful than others. If I were to recruit more teachers in future studies, particularly younger ones, I would avoid Facebook groups due to their declining use among younger generations and instead turn to platforms more frequently used by generation Z, such as Instagram and TikTok (Elkatmış, 2024). I decided not to contact individual schools as I felt this would be time consuming. I would group universities with this as it felt laborious researching which programme directors to email when none responded to my emails. However, I would contact the other ITT providers mentioned as they were enthusiastic about helping. Perhaps, this difference is due to the reported low morale and workload pressures which are being felt by university staff, both at the time of interviewing and presently (University and College Union, 2022, 2025). Finally, I would use my network to recruit again as I felt this worked well for not only gaining

participants but feeling comfortable with the interview process with familiar faces at the beginning of data collection.

Participants who wanted to take part in the research filled out a screening survey to ensure they fitted into one of the samples. I used Qualtrics to do this and asked the following questions:

1. what year did you complete your teacher training?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. Which route did you choose to take into teaching?
5. What is your job title? (e.g., Teacher of Art and Design or Teacher of Year 4)
6. What is the postcode of your school?
7. Please write your email address in the box below. Abby will use this to contact you and arrange an interview about your career so far.

A screenshot of the Qualtrics screening survey is shown in appendix H.

A total of 44 interviews were conducted after setting a target of 6 per sample: 12 per time period and 18 per teacher training route. This target was decided as these are often cited as common targets for small-scale qualitative studies, so each sample, or collection of samples, could be standalone studies (Guest et al., 2006; Kuzel, 1992). However, the foundations of deciding this are based upon the assumption that at around 12 interviews, data saturation will occur (Guest et al., 2006). Since setting this target, I have read about the shortcomings of relying upon data saturation to decide when to stop interviewing and data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Saturation may be compatible with approaches that use codebooks but, as section 5.7 states, I adopted an approach (reflexive thematic analysis) which is not compatible with the practice of saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

In the future, I would instead follow Braun and Clarke's (2021) advice to estimate a lower and upper sample size range which has the potential for collecting data that can be used to create rich and complex findings. Then, when researching, I would decide

the final sample size through reflecting on how adequate the data is for answering the research questions and the aim. This is different to saturation as the goal is to account for diversity in answering the research questions with differing viewpoints, rather than finishing analysis when there is a cohesive narrative (i.e., saturation). This is similar to Emmel's (2013, p. 138) advice when determining a sample to not focus on "how many, but what for", with "what for" referring to answering the research questions and aims. Qualitative data often includes gathering lots of data for one individual/case which means the "what for" is important so that the researcher does not waste resources on useless information in pursuit of a large sample. This aligns with Doucet and Charmaz's (2021) advice to consider the appropriate practices within epistemic communities when deciding how many interviews to conduct.

Despite setting a target of 36, I conducted an extra 8 interviews leading to a total sample size of 44. I contacted all teachers who met the screening requirements and gave their contact details to protect the study from attrition (e.g., withdrawals and cancellations). I contacted everyone as I wanted to get them as soon as they had indicated an interest to ensure they would not drop out. This was the lowest risk approach as teachers are busy and I was worried about not reaching my target. However, data collection was more successful than I anticipated. I felt I had an ethical obligation to continue to interview the extra 8 participants who had already consented and scheduled an interview, rather than cancelling these interviews to meet a numerical target. As interviews took place between January and May 2023, I felt 44 interviews of approximately 1 hour each was feasible to me as the researcher. I also felt able to transcribe and code 8 more interviews after using a Gantt chart to plan data analysis.

### *5.5.3 Participants*

Table 3 shows the characteristics of the 44 participants who were included in this research, ordered by training year and training type (sub-samples A, B, C, D, E and F). All teachers taught in mainstream, non-selective state schools (i.e., academies, local authority-maintained schools and faith schools; Catholic and Church of England) with no teachers working in private, special or grammar schools. This was unintentional as I was not sampling based on the type of school a teacher worked in.

**Table 3.**

*Participant Characteristics*

| Name | Training Route | Training Year | Gender | Ethnicity | Job Title | Location of School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Elise | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; government bursary) | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Art Teacher and Head of Year 7 | West Midlands |
| Elle | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; government bursary) | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Science Teacher | North West |
| Harriett | Undergraduate teacher training course (e.g., BA or BSc with QTS) | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Olivia | School Direct (tuition fee) | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Science Teacher | North West |
| Patrick | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; self-funded) | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Man | White | Primary School Teacher | London |
| Tracy | School Direct (tuition fee) | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | MFL Teacher | North West |
| Ava | Assessment only route to QTS | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | English Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Elizabeth | Teach First | 2016-17, 201-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | North West |

| Name | Training Route | Training Year | Gender | Ethnicity | Job Title | Location of School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Erica | Teach First | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Assistant Principal (Teaching and Learning) | London |
| Esme | Teach First | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Head of MFL | North West |
| Lucy | Teach First | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Head of Computing | London |
| Mia | Teach First | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Head of Religious Studies | North West |
| Naomi | School Direct (salaried) | 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | London |
| Grace | School Direct (tuition fee) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | South East |
| Hannah | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; government bursary) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | Biology Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Helena | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; government bursary) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Jack | SCITT (government bursary) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Man | White | PE Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Joan | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | North West |

| Name | Training Route | Training Year | Gender | Ethnicity | Job Title | Location of School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | PGCE, PGDE, etc.; self-funded) | | | | | |
| Julia | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; self-funded) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Kenny | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; government bursary) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | Mathematics Teacher | East |
| Megan | School Direct (tuition fee) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | English Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Danielle | Teach First | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | Black, Black British, Caribbean or African | Primary School Teacher | London |
| Giselle | Teach First | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | English Teacher | West Midlands |
| Jerry | Teach First | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Man | White | Science Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Katherine | Teach First | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | English Teacher | London |
| Polly | Teach First | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | English Teacher | West Midlands |
| Stacey | School Direct (salaried) | 2019-20, 2020-21 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | London |

| Name | Training Route | Training Year | Gender | Ethnicity | Job Title | Location of School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Jennifer | SCITT (tuition fee) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | East |
| Laura | SCITT (government bursary) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Science Teacher | South West |
| Lena | School Direct (tuition fee) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | MFL Teacher | London |
| Penny | SCITT (tuition fee) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Social Science Teacher | East Midlands |
| Saskia | SCITT (tuition fee) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | London |
| Shamsi | Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE, etc.; government bursary) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | Black, Black British, Caribbean or African | Primary School Teacher | London |
| Sheldon | SCITT (government bursary) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Man | White | Mathematics Teacher | North East |
| Sophie | SCITT (tuition fee) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | East |
| Victoria | SCITT (government bursary) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | MFL Teacher | East |
| Craig | Teach First | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Man | White | Science Teacher | South East |
| Iqra | Teach First | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | Asian or Asian British | Science Teacher | West Midlands |

| Name | Training Route | Training Year | Gender | Ethnicity | Job Title | Location of School |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Luke | Assessment only route to QTS | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Man | White | English Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |
| Paula | SCITT (employment) | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | South East |
| Rumaisa | Teach First | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | Asian or Asian British | Computer Science Teacher | South East |
| Shona | Teach First | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | History Teacher | West Midlands |
| Susan | Teaching Apprenticeship Programme | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | East |
| Zoe | Teach First | 2021-22, 2022-23 | Woman | White | Primary School Teacher | Yorkshire and The Humber |

The sample contained slightly more teachers who identified as women and/or White than the teaching population. Women comprised 75% of the teaching population in England, compared with 87.5% of the sample (DfE, 2025m). Nearly all the teachers in the sample (40 out of 44; 91%) identified as White, whereas 87.5% of the teaching population in England identified as White (DfE, 2025m).

### *5.5.4 Population, Sampling and Participants Conclusion*

This section has outlined the population of interest, the sampling methods used and the resulting participant characteristics. The next section explains the data collection tools employed with these participants.

## 5.6 Data Collection

This section explains how interviews, structured by a timeline, were used to collect data and provides reflections on piloting and my questioning practice.

### *5.6.1 Interviews*

After filling out the screening survey indicating their willingness to participate in this research, I contacted these teachers and conducted one-to-one interviews over Zoom conferencing software. On average, interviews were around 45 minutes. Individual, over group style, interviews were chosen due to the personal nature of the topic and to allow for an exploration of each teacher's career and their decision-making (Clark et al., 2021). Real time interviews over asynchronous messaging (i.e., allowing teachers to respond to questions at their own convenience) were conducted to allow for effective probing and questioning (Opdenakker, 2006). Conducting interviews using the internet was beneficial as neither I nor the participant had to travel and book adequate interview spaces. However, there were some issues with connectivity in a few interviews which disrupted the flow of the conversation. Nevertheless, I would still conduct the interviews online, rather than face-to-face, as it allowed me to interview multiple participants in one day (usually at the end of the school day) from different regions of England.

### *5.6.2 Timeline Approach to Structure the Interview*

Interviews can be described as semi-structured as they were structured using a timeline (see figure 3). This meant that the participant controlled the topics discussed during the interview, while I asked probing and follow-up questions when I felt it was necessary and relevant in relation to the research questions. In addition to a timeline, I also used an interview guide to help ensure certain topics were explored (see appendix I). A timeline is a visual aid for data collection and an example of a graphical elicitation tool (Bagnoli, 2009). Using a timeline involves the participant chronologically, to the best of their ability, drawing upon life events related to the research topic (Berends, 2011). Timelines were chosen to aid with interviews as they assist participants with their story telling and feelings associated with specific instances (Baú, 2024). As mentioned in section 3.3.3, a longitudinal research approach may have been beneficial for this topic, but the PhD's time restraints favoured a cross-sectional approach instead. Therefore, timelines were chosen to aid in answering the research questions through a cross-sectional approach to research. Indeed, Kolar et al.'s (2015) study

suggested that timelines can enhance interviews conducted with participants at a single time point and support memory recall.

Previous research has often involved the participants creating the timeline (see Adriansen, 2012; Bagnoli, 2009; Baú, 2024; Kolar et al., 2015; Mazzetti & Blenkinsopp, 2012; Pell et al., 2020). However, due to the online nature of interviews I decided to be the scribe and create the timeline whilst the participant recounted their career history. Baú (2024) also conducted their interviews using Zoom and created online timelines which were screen shared during the interview. I decided against this and instead opted to have a physical timeline on my desk as a participant in the meeting, so the participant still felt like they were in an interview setting rather than the timeline taking up the majority of the screen.

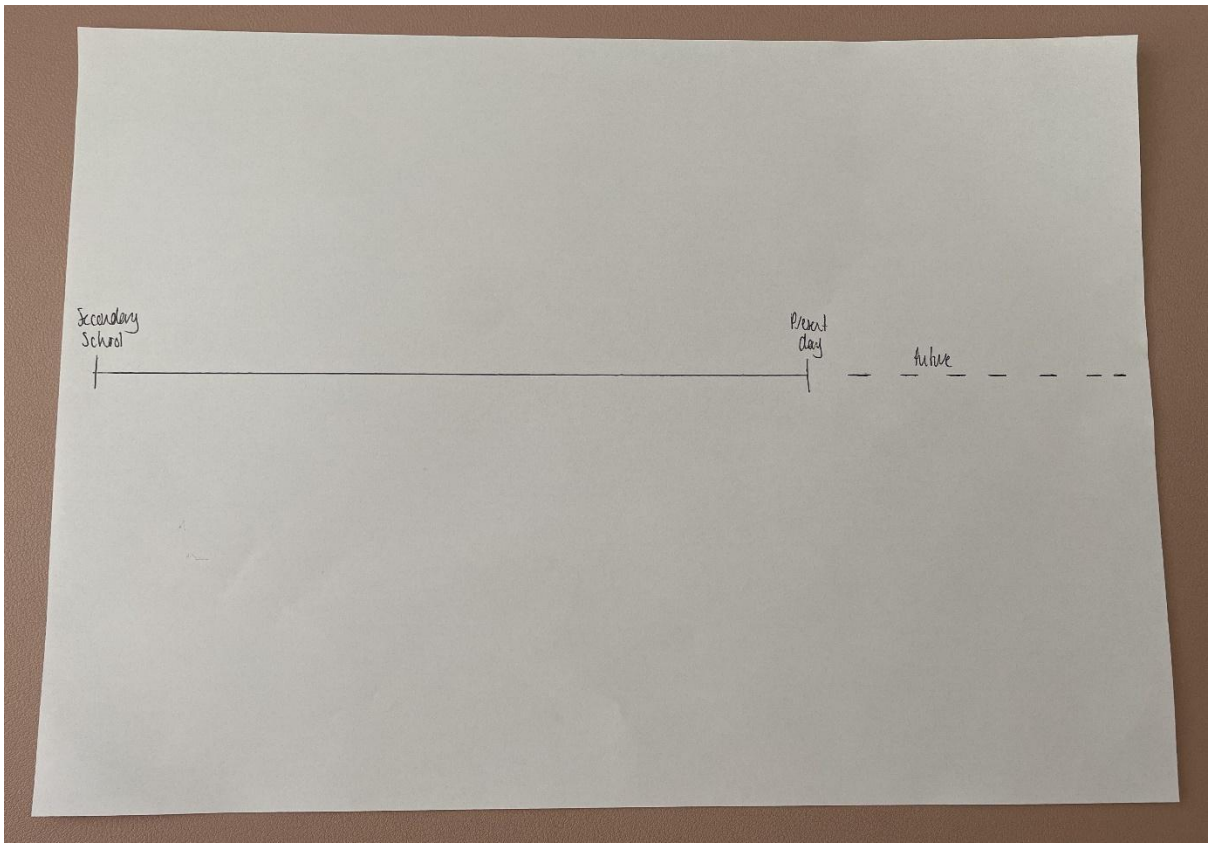
Kolar et al. (2015), Pell et al. (2020) and Smith's (2022) participants created the timelines before the interview with the interview then used to discuss these. I decided against this as teachers have many time pressures, and I wanted to limit their time commitment to just the interview.

After securing informed consent, each interview started with an explanation of the interview's structure and a starting question:

> So, I've got a blank timeline on my desk here which you should be able to see [wait for visual or verbal confirmation from the participant]. So I want you to discuss your career decisions and what you did starting from secondary school [points to secondary school] all the way up to present day [points to present day] and then we'll spend some time thinking about the future [points to future]. So, if we start from secondary school, did you have any idea of what you wanted to do career wise in secondary school, or even before? (Abigail, interviewer)

**Figure 3.**

*A Blank Timeline*




Most participants were able to discuss their career decisions chronologically without any prompt. Two participants would stop after discussing a particular point in time. As the interviewer, I interpreted this as my cue to prompt the next phase, which I would do by asking “so what did you do after that?” I would then ask probing and follow-up questions to determine why they made such a decision.

Upon reflection, I felt that timelines were beneficial as they gave both the participant and the interviewer something to focus on and use to prompt follow-up and probing questions. However, sometimes participants focused too much on the creation of the timeline (e.g., recalling dates and ‘facts’ rather than how they decided upon career changes). As Adriansen (2012) states, timelines should not be used to assume linearity or coherence, rather as a tool to organise events and link these experiences to decision-making. When this would occur, I would reassure participants that I did not need the exact dates and would ask probing questions about their decision-making.

Furthermore, the timeline approach could have resulted in retrospective coherence in which participants may have narrated their past experiences with knowledge of their subsequent actions. Nevertheless, this provides an insight into how individuals construct meaning, their professional identities and justifications for their career decisions which aligns with my Big Q, critical realist ontology and epistemology. As my analytical approach focused upon justifications, rather than the construction of teachers' individual stories, I felt that this would not impinge upon my analysis.

### *5.6.3 Piloting*

Although I have used this data collection and analysis technique in a previous study with fifty adults who worked in support positions within schools (see Bowling & Wakeling, 2025), I still conducted pilot interviews to ensure its suitability for this project. Pilot interviews were conducted with five participants who I personally knew. Malmqvist et al. (2019) states that there are two types of piloting in social science research: the first is a feasibility study to assess what resources are needed for the main study and the second is to test/try-out data collection tools. My pilot interviews fit into the second type as I piloted to test the technology (e.g., checking that timelines could be seen as a separate meeting participant and seeing where Zoom recordings were saved), to practise using the timeline as the interview's structure and asking probing and follow-up questions. When reflecting upon these interviews, I felt that nothing needed to change as the technology, the timeline and the follow-up and probing questions worked as intended. Therefore, I decided to include these pilot interviews in this study as they did not differ from the other interviews and provided useful data for the research. The absence of changes needed may reflect my prior experience with this data collection tool (Bowling & Wakeling, 2025).

### *5.6.4 Reflecting on my Questioning Practice as an Insider/Outsider*

Throughout the interview process I kept a diary of my thoughts. I would often quickly scribble down a thought during the interview off camera and then write these up after the interview when I had more time to process the thought. Keeping a diary during data collection allows qualitative researchers to engage in reflexivity and process the interviews (Engin, 2011). I often reflected on the feeling of being an insider, an outsider

or somewhere in between at fluctuating times during interviews and how this related to my questioning practice (after reading Mercer, 2007).

As a Teach First trained teacher, I often felt like an insider during conversations about this training route. The language used within Teach First is particular to the training route, mentions of “platinum partners” and “development leads” were common in interviews and did not need to be explained. I reflected that I needed to ensure that this comfort did not affect the answers given through ensuring I asked follow-up and probing questions if participants were vague. For instance, if Teach First trained teachers said they would consider working for a platinum partner in the future, I would ask why and which one as these range from the private sector (e.g., Deloitte) to public sector positions (e.g., police and social work training schemes).

Contrastingly, when other training routes were discussed, I often felt like an outsider and reflected that I asked a lot of questions about how the routes were structured. Upon reflection in my research diary, I made a note to make sure that I did not ask too many questions about structures to ensure that the interview focused on the topic of their career decisions and instead researched the routes before the interviews.

Finally, I found myself rapidly fluctuating between insider and outsider identities when participants discussed teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. I worked in a sixth form college as an Exams and Assessment Officer during the 2019/20 academic year. Although I was not involved in the online teaching that took place from March to April, I did experience the in-person teaching that took place from May to July through supporting my own *bubble* of students. Like the previous two examples, I found that I would often ask questions about online teaching and whether this had any impact on career decisions. For example, I asked if they enjoyed this type of work in comparison to the in-person bubble teaching, and whether they would consider a career change to home working. I reflected that this was adequate practice as I focused upon the experience in comparison to the return to in-person teaching because I asked relevant questions about their career decisions.

Overall, reflecting upon how I fit on an insider/outsider continuum, rather than viewing insider/outsider identities as a dichotomy, allowed me to ensure I stayed on track with

my questioning in relation to the research aim and to answer the research questions (Mercer, 2007).

### *5.6.5 Data Collection Conclusion*

The interview practice outlined, together with the resulting interviews, established the basis required for data analysis.

## 5.7 Data Analysis

To analyse these interviews, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. This section outlines how I decided on, prepared for and conducted this reflexive thematic analysis.

### *5.7.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

I chose to analyse the interview data using reflexive thematic analysis as it can be used to create findings to answer my research questions and it aligns with my philosophical assumptions of research. Thematic analysis refers to a "family" of approaches that produce patterns of meanings through coding a dataset and developing themes from the codes (Braun et al., 2024, p. 238). Reflexive thematic analysis is a specific type of this approach in which the researcher critically reflects on their role, their research practice and the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This aligns with a Big Q approach to research because, as mentioned in section 5.1, this approach involves reflective interpretation of data using the researcher's subjectivity (Braun et al., 2016). It also aligns with my critical realist perspective as, again mentioned previously in section 5.1, independent reality is constructed by both the researcher's and participants' social contexts and experiences (Bhaskar, 2008; Lawson, 2003); reflexive thematic analysis involves reflecting on this when analysing data. Because of this, Braun and Clarke (2022) claim that critical realism appears to be the most popular philosophical position used with reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis was an appropriate method to create answers to the research questions due to the thematic and reflexive element. Themes can explain people's experiences, views, behaviours and how they make sense of phenomena which is the essence of my research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The reflective element fit, almost subconsciously, with my data collection and analysis practices: I reflected on the research questions throughout data

collection, as I had these written down on my desk and used them to guide the follow-up and probing questions I asked within each interview, while also reflecting on the research questions when analysing data (detailed below).

### *5.7.2 Preparing for Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

In preparation for data analysis, I familiarised myself with the process of reflexive thematic analysis, cleaned the interview transcripts and uploaded these to NVivo. I familiarised myself with the process of reflexive thematic analysis; having used Braun and Clarke's (2006) seminal paper on *just* thematic analysis in previous research projects, I reflected on my previous research projects and read Braun and Clarke's (2022) updated guide to reflexive thematic analysis. I re-read Braun and Clarke (2022) at the start of, and during, each phase of reflexive thematic analysis to ensure I knew what to do and felt comfortable doing so. Transcripts were automatically created by Zoom, which includes time stamps and repeating speaker names. I applied code created for this project to remove the time stamps and repeating names and uploaded this code to GitHub for others to use (see Ellis, 2024). Once I checked the transcripts and corrected any wrong words using the audio files, I uploaded these to NVivo.

### *5.7.3 Conducting Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

I followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022). As noted, these phases are not linear, and a previous phase can be returned to at any time (Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, for the purpose of reader ease, each phase is outlined and then discussions surrounding when I revisited phases are described.

The first phase involves the researcher familiarising themselves with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Before adopting Braun and Clarke's (2022) familiarisation methods, I read my research diary to remind myself of my thoughts, feelings and reflections I had on the interviews. After this, I tried a few methods that Braun and Clarke (2022) recommend using when familiarising oneself with the data (e.g., poems and doodles). I decided to use a spreadsheet to make notes when reading the transcripts. These notes can be seen in figure 4 and could be viewed as pseudo-codes. Some resemble actual codes I created (e.g., "teaching as a safe and steady job") but others were either too long (e.g.,

“it was a hard context to work in there were a bit more…”) or too short (e.g., “deprived backgrounds”) to be classed as codes. Nevertheless, this process helped familiarise myself with the data and coding, even though I did not intend to do the latter during this phase.

**Figure 4.**

*Spreadsheet Notes Made When Familiarising Myself with the Data*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Harriett** | |
| I saw teaching as a safe and steady job | |
| "Steady career and good salary" | |
| Making a bit more difference in a challenging context | 13 mins |
| "it was a hard context to work in there were a bit more n | 15 mins |
| Full circle (this idea of fate?) | 16 mins |
| Workload > leaving teaching | 28 mins |
| **Mia** | |
| Lack of careers advice at university | 3 mins |
| Couldn't affod to move to london to be a human rights la | 4 mins |
| Taught whilst travelling in hard to reach backgrounds - te | 5 mins |
| Workload > Change school | 13 mins |
| Comfortable | 15 mins |
| Husband is main carer of child | 32 mins |
| Work-life balance | 32 mins |
| **Penny** | |
| Nurse - help people (Harriett also mentioned this) | 20 secs |
| Full circle (like what Harriett said!!) | 14 mins |
| Prestige of training route (not TF) | 15 mins |
| **"The easiest part is when we're in the classroom, it's** | 30 mins |
| Not knowing names of students | 32 mins |
| Deprived backgrounds | 35 mins |
| **Esme** | |
| playing schools | 1 min |
| Educational psychologist | 1 min |
| "Teacher trapped" | 37 mins |
| Stable job and stable income | 55 mins |
| **Erica** | |
| When not challenged/learned all move onto something e | 6 mins |
| "I wanted that name on my CV (Teach First) | 9 mins |
| Hate academy chains (ignore context) | 25 mins |

The second phase involved coding the data set. I used an abductive approach to coding: both inductive and deductive coding, which involved coding parts of the

database using the participants' data to form meanings (inductive) and other or sometimes the same parts when I was reminded of concepts underpinning the theoretical framework (deductive) (outlined in chapter 3) (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This aligns with my Big Q philosophical approach as I, as the researcher, come with my own prior understanding and engagement with literature and theories but I also value the use of participants' voices in the development of codes and themes, which meant I did not want to rely solely upon deductive coding. Both semantic (i.e., coding the words often verbatim), and latent, (i.e., coding the implicit meaning behind words) codes were created (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In practice, coding looked like reading each individual transcript and highlighting elements and labelling these on NVivo using the "code" option. These were then refined through reading through each transcript and taking away the data extracts to see if the codes adequately explained meanings contained in the dataset to decide when to stop refining (Terry et al., 2017).

The third phase involved generating initial themes by grouping codes together based on how they can form a collective meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During this phase I felt that a few 'themes' that I had created were topic summaries rather than themes, as they were a collection of codes which related to a specific topic (e.g., "future ideal perfect teaching job") (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To generate themes, I made sure to explore codes from across the dataset, rather than just one participant, to ensure that the theme would express a collective meaning. I wrote in my researcher diary during analysis to critically reflect on my own biases and assumptions as a former teacher. This helped ensure that the themes I developed were grounded in the codes across the dataset and represented participants' experiences and opinions rather than my own (Ortlipp, 2008; Watt, 2007).

The fourth phase involved developing and reviewing themes. I checked the themes for internal homogeneity, external heterogeneity and coherency, ensuring that there was enough data to substantiate each theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Patton, 1990). This stage is where I decided to abandon the theme of being "teacher trapped" (i.e., Elise and Esme both discussed how teachers are "stuck" in teaching as they cannot find a comparable job with a similar starting salary). Despite being coherent, only two

participants referred to this idea. I felt it would be better left as a code that may factor into another theme surrounding financial decision-making, which I also decided to abandon. I felt that a lot of the data to support this revolved around social support for finances which was used to substantiate the overarching theme of *the social influence*, specifically the *homeward bound* sub-theme. *The social influence* theme allowed financial decisions to be explained whilst also explaining other aspects of social influence.

The fifth phase involved defining and naming the final themes and any sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The definitions came from reviewing the data extracts to tell the story of the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It is recommended to be creative in the naming process to create theme names that are concise, informative and memorable (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). To achieve this, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) suggestion to examine data extracts to create the names. This approach helped me name the final themes: *the journey of helping others*, *the intuitive feel* and the overarching theme of *the social influence* which consists of *homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced*, *mentored into momentum*, *socially boosted* and *wisdom on loan*.

The sixth, and final, phase involved writing up these final themes in the form of chapters for this thesis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I followed guidance by Braun and Clarke (2022) when writing up the themes: I avoided paraphrasing data and instead explained the meaning of the data and why it is important and interesting. Different themes were written in two different ways. I wrote *the journey of helping others* as an illustrative account of data as extracts were used to tell a story through exemplifying a point. For example, data extracts were used to convey how schools were seen as happy places. I wrote the other two themes as a mixture of illustrative and analytical accounts of the data which meant that as well as exemplifying points (i.e., the illustrative), particularities were drawn upon within extracts to advance an analytic narrative. For example, data extracts which indicated that teachers engaged in Archer's (2003) concept of communicative reflexivity were drawn upon to advance the analytical narrative of how others influence career decision-making alongside illustrative data extracts within the *wisdom on loan* sub-theme. Braun and Clarke (2022) recommend presenting themes in a logical sequence to convey a coherent narrative. Therefore, I

decided to present *the journey of helping others* first, as it prepares the reader to consider teachers' career decision-making across the span of their careers. I then decided to present *the social influence* second, as this flows from the first theme and shifts focus from the impact of students to the broader influence of others. Finally, I decided to present *the intuitive feel* last, as this moves beyond interpersonal influences to highlight how environmental conditions shaped by others affect teachers' career decisions.

Despite outlining my data analysis in sequential steps, reflexive thematic analysis did not follow a linear process. *The journey of helping others* was developed from an initial theme which came from coding 21 interviews to present at a doctoral conference. After, any subsequent interviews which had data extracts that fit within or altered the codes for this initial theme were incorporated into it. This theme then changed slightly, as Braun and Clarke (2022) state can happen as more data is coded, to include the code of future caring aspirations.

### *5.7.4 Data Analysis Conclusion*

Engaging in reflexive thematic analysis ensured that the themes were internally consistent, externally distinct and substantiated by adequate data. After determining this, I assessed the quality of the research report.

## 5.8 Assessing the Research Quality

There are numerous criteria that can be used by researchers and their audience to assess the quality of research. Using measures of reliability and validity is often promoted within research cultures which subscribe to a (post)positivist paradigm that strives for objectivity (Carmines & Zeller, 1979; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Yardley (2000) reject measures of reliability and validity within qualitative research and suggest that alternative criteria are required. Lincoln and Guba (1985) advocate for establishing trustworthiness through evaluating credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Yardley (2000) advocates for evaluating sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherency, and impact and importance to assess research quality. Braun and Clarke (2024) dismiss all criteria-based assessment approaches and instead offer guidelines for assessing research

quality through checking each section of a research report. The compatibility of criteria/guidelines with philosophical assumptions determines the choice of criteria for research.

I drew from my philosophical assumptions to guide my choice of assessment tool. My epistemology is not compatible with using measures of reliability and validity nor Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria due to my inclusion of researcher reflexivity. Using measures of reliability and validity and Lincoln and Guba's (1985) credibility criterion, which refers to whether the researcher's findings adequately reflect the participants' views, requires a desire for objectivity, which does not align with my critical realist perspective and adoption of reflexive thematic analysis. Within my research, my interpretation of the data is a part of the knowledge construction (Bhaskar, 2008; Braun & Clarke, 2022; Lawson, 2003). Yardley (2000) offers markers of sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. Although Yardley (2000) states that these can be reflexively adopted by qualitative researchers, I decided against using these to assess the quality of my research. Using these concepts suggests that "universal markers" can be adopted by all qualitative researchers, something which Braun and Clarke (2024, p. 3) argue against. Doing so is often a feature of small q methodology rather than Big Q (as a reminder, I adopt the latter) (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Small q is influenced by (post)positivism, in which procedures and standards are followed as a check list (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Using these can introduce incongruence to qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2024).

Braun and Clarke (2024) offer guidelines for researchers engaging with Big Q research to reflexively assess their research quality. They use the word guidelines in place of criteria to offer flexibility in the assessment process, as criteria can suggest a rigid process (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Their Big Q Qualitative Research Guidelines (BQQRG) aim to support researchers in achieving congruence and reflexivity in research (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Therefore, I followed this to assess the quality of my research due to its compatibility with my Big Q philosophical position and, thus, to achieve congruence.

Conducting Braun and Clarke's (2024) BQQRG involved reflectively checking every section of this thesis using their bullet pointed table with a list of considerations with regards to: writing style, terminology, title, abstract, introduction, methodology,

reporting of analysis, discussion and conclusion. This allows for the quality of research to be assessed throughout the report, rather than only within the discussion of research methods, as in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) and Yardley's (2000) criteria approaches. This assessment can be seen within appendix J.

This assessment ensured that the chapters which present the themes adhere to guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2024). For example, I have included analytical maps to show how codes (and sub-themes, where relevant) constitute each theme. The next section introduces the presentation of themes.

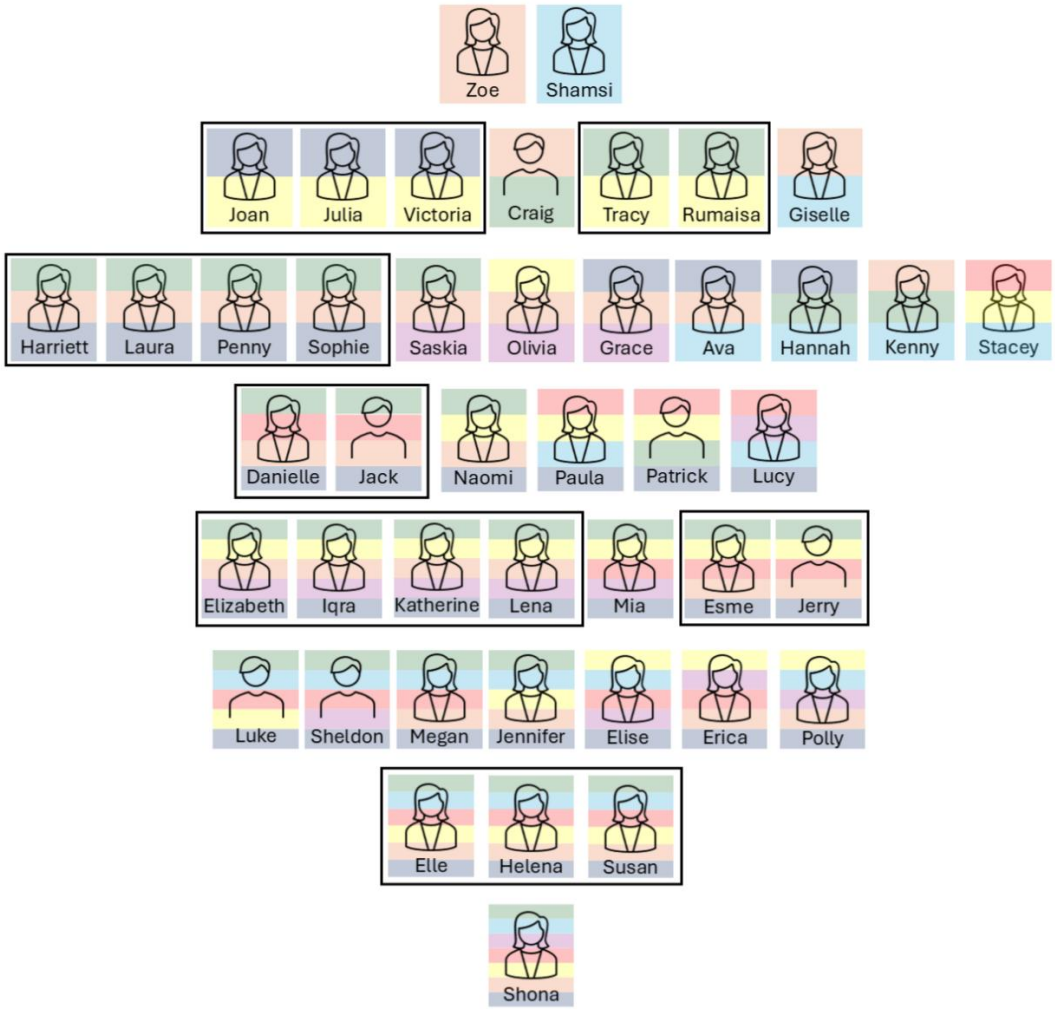
## 5.9 The Presentation of Themes

The final step to Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis is to present the themes developed. There are two themes and one overarching theme, with five sub-themes, that I developed through engaging with Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance for reflexive thematic analysis. I named the first theme: *the journey of helping others* and define this as how wanting to help other people has been a justification for some teachers' careers. I named the second theme: *the social influence* and define this as how other people have factored into, and influenced, some teachers' career decisions. *The social influence* is an overarching theme containing five sub-themes: 1) *homeward bound*, 2) *being kidfluenced*, 3) *mentored into momentum*, 4) *socially boosted* and 5) *wisdom on loan*. I named the third theme: *the intuitive feel* and define this as how some teachers draw upon feelings of (dis)comfort and (not) belonging as well as concepts of destiny and intuition to make career decisions. All the themes explain the career trajectory of a teacher, rather than one element (e.g., only why they entered the profession, only why they remain within the profession or only whether they want to remain or leave the profession). They are also united in their ability to demonstrate how teaching is a people profession. Each theme was developed using a mixture of different types of codes. *The journey of helping others* was developed with inductive codes. *The intuitive feel* was developed with deductive codes. *The social influence* was developed using both inductive and deductive codes, with *homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced* and *mentored into momentum* being inductively created and *socially boosted* and *wisdom on loan* being deductively created.

Figure 5 shows all 44 teacher participants, and which themes their interview data contributed towards developing. Although there are some participants who contributed to the same themes, their accounts, experiences and career reasons were not distinct enough to warrant the development of further themes based upon shared realities.

**Figure 5.**

*The Participants and The Themes*




| Colour | Theme Name | Number of Teachers* |
|---|---|---|
| | The intuitive feel | 34 |
| | The journey of helping others | 29 |
| | Homeward bound (the social influence) | 29 |
| | Being kidfluenced (the social influence) | 26 |
| | Mentored into momentum (the social influence) | 18 |
| | Socially boosted (the social influence) | 18 |
| | Wisdom on loan (the social influence) | 14 |

*Note.* *The number of teachers within each theme is only used for display purposes. It was not considered, nor is it important, for the development of the theme. I followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) argument that the richness, over frequency, of the data should drive a formation of the theme. The black boxes show where multiple teachers are members of the same themes, although there are no thematic similarities across these teachers as their responses and positions within each theme are divergent (e.g., Esme is *kidfluenced* by her daughter, while Jerry is *kidfluenced* by his students). Colours are not to scale and do not represent how the themes constitute teachers' career decision-making in a quantifiable sense. *The social influence* theme is divided into five sub-themes which are indicated in parentheses.

Chapters six, seven and eight present each theme and synthesise a discussion of how the theme compares to reviewed literature (presented in chapter 2) and, when relevant, the theoretical framework (presented in chapter 3). Chapter six presents *the journey of helping others*. Chapter seven presents *the social influence*. Chapter eight presents *the intuitive feel*. Chapter nine, the discussion, answers the research questions using these themes. Chapter ten unites these themes and research questions by outlining the significance and contribution, as well as limitations, of this research and subsequent recommendations for future research, practice and policy.

## 5.10 Methodology Conclusion

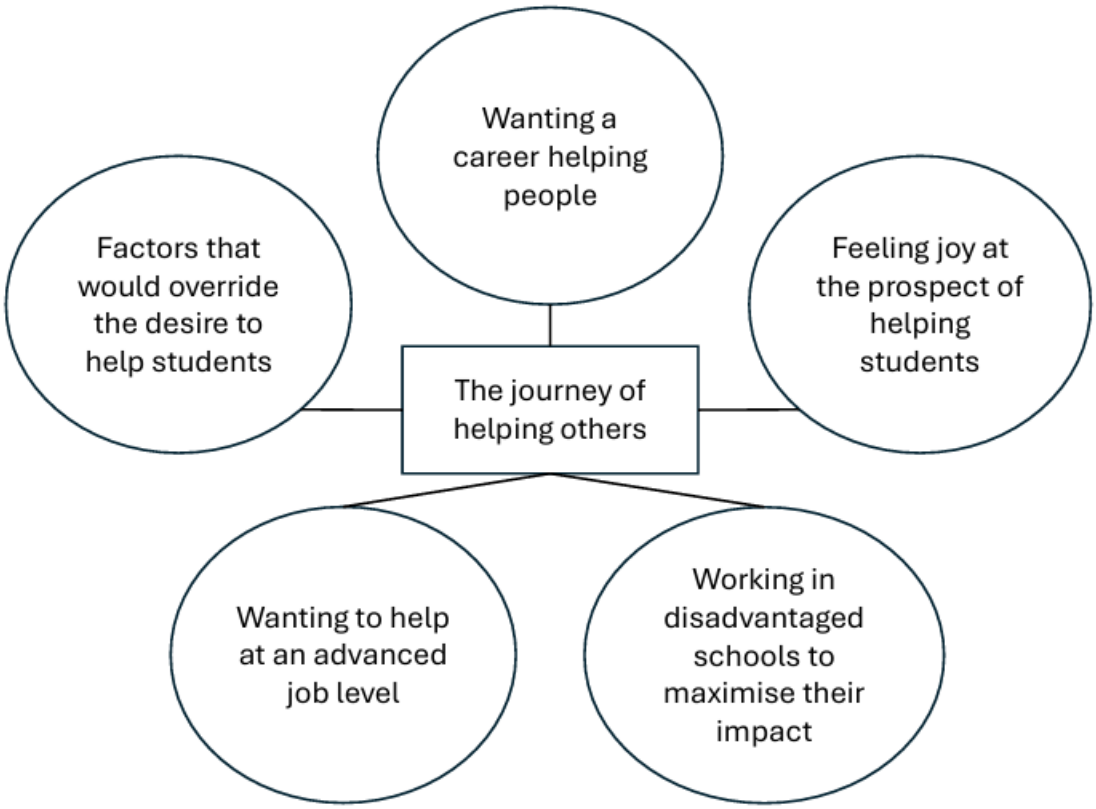
This chapter has provided the rationale for the chosen methodology, research design, data collection and analysis techniques, as well as an assessment of the research report. My reflexivity as the researcher in this study has been embedded within this chapter to provide an understanding of my decision-making to meet my aim of producing quality research which will provide an original contribution to, and advance, the knowledge field. The subsequent chapters present the themes developed, which evidences the final phase of Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis: writing the report.

# 6 The Journey of Helping Others

This theme was created from grouping inductive codes which labelled instances where the teachers discussed how their career decisions were motivated by wanting to help others. Appendix K shows examples of coding extracts for this theme. Thematic mapping was used to explore how the codes related to each other, and the final thematic map is shown in figure 6 (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

**Figure 6.**

*The Journey of Helping Others Thematic Map*




*Note.* The theme is in the square. The codes are in the circles. Shapes are not to scale and do not represent how much the theme or codes constitutes teachers' career decision-making in a quantifiable sense.

The codes which constitute this theme evoke an intrinsically and altruistically motivated career journey to help others through their work. This journey begins with the teacher participants expressing their desire for a career focused on helping people (6.1) and choosing teaching due to feeling joy at the prospect of helping students, in

comparison to other helping jobs (6.2). Once trained, these teachers look for jobs in disadvantaged schools to maximise their impact (6.3). When thinking about the future, the teachers want to help at an advanced job level (e.g., specialising in SEN and/or student counselling) (6.4). However, workload and teacher scandals were factors which would override their desire to help students, prompt them to leave teaching in the future and move to other helping jobs (6.5). After outlining and discussing each code, this chapter concludes with four arguments (6.6). Firstly, I argue that these teachers are motivated by their desire to help others, which can lead them both into teaching but, later, also out of the profession and into other helping jobs. Secondly, seeing helping as a pervasive reason for all their career decisions adds to the overarching thesis of the importance of investigating teachers' career trajectories, rather than researching isolated career points (e.g., entry into, remaining in or exiting teaching). Thirdly, despite Teach First exclusively training teachers in disadvantaged areas, I suggest that there is no thematic difference between teachers trained through this route and teachers trained through other, non-exclusively disadvantaged, training routes. Finally, I argue that the interplay between gender, helping and career progression is multifaceted.

## 6.1 Wanting a Career Helping People

Teachers discussed how, when they were younger, they wanted a job focused on helping people. In addition to teaching, participants considered other public sector jobs such as a nurse (Ava, Harriett, Helena, Laura, Penny), a doctor (Giselle, Iqra, Laura), working in a hospice (Saskia), a dentist (Erica), the police (Ava), a midwife (Harriett, Sophie, Susan), a social worker (Naomi, Zoe), a lawyer (Kenny, Rumaisa) and the civil service (Grace, Katherine, Olivia, Polly, Zoe). As children, these participants were less committed to a job and more "driven" (Giselle) towards "the feeling of helping someone" (Craig). This builds on previous literature which has found that the desire to work with children, specifically those at a disadvantage, motivates entry into teaching by broadening this to include how wanting to help others more generally also leads them into the profession (Cross & Ndofirepi, 2015; Kass & Miller, 2018; Scott et al., 2020; Tamir, 2014). The reasons teachers give for choosing teaching, as a helping job specifically, are explored in the next section.

## 6.2 Feeling Joy at the Prospect of Helping Students

After deciding they want a job which involves helping others, participants decided upon teaching due to feeling joy at the prospect of helping students. This code has similar sentiments to other codes in two other themes, *the social influence* sub-theme of *being kidfluenced* (presented in 7.2) and *the intuitive feel* theme (presented in chapter 8). However, the use of this code in this theme maintains external heterogeneity as the focal point within this section is on helping, unlike the other two themes (Patton, 1990).

### *6.2.1 Teaching is Happier Than Other Helping Jobs*

Erica, Esme, Kenny, Naomi, Penny and Saskia presented teaching as emotionally better in comparison to the other helping jobs they were considering. Erica and Penny switched career plans from dentistry and nursing, respectively, to teaching after realising they did not want "anything to do with medical settings or people that are ill" (Penny) or "all the blood" (Erica). Naomi studied to be a social worker. However, after hearing about how "sad" and "depressive" the profession was from her social work lecturers, who told Naomi "They'd cry all the time", she decided to volunteer at a primary school to see if she would enjoy teaching. She described this experience as "nice" and "lovely" and contrasts teaching with social work: "with teaching, it was joyful. It was nice to see everyone really happy… [while] still making that difference". She trained to teach after graduating with her social work degree. Similarly, Saskia decided against working as a play therapist for a hospice after doing work experience there and her line manager telling her, "This is a hard job, it's a lot and too much… emotionally" due to dealing with death. She decided on teaching due to the different, positive emotions she experienced while volunteering at a school in contrast to those associated with hospice work. Esme and Kenny considered, respectively, working for the council and being a lawyer to bring about change, but both found an office-based job "boring" (Esme) and "not for" them (Kenny). Previous literature has described the positive feelings helping students can evoke for teachers (e.g., Kwok et al., 2022; Smith, 2022). This adds a comparative aspect to the knowledge field, in which other helping jobs are negatively described, while teaching is viewed more positively.

### *6.2.2 Schools are Happy Spaces to Work*

Ava, Danielle, Elle, Erica, Kenny, Helena, Naomi and Penny presented schools as happy spaces to work. Elle, Erica, Esme, Helena, Naomi and Penny discovered this through work experience at schools and drew upon their enjoyment of seeing the students they supported learn from them. This is like teachers in previous studies who labelled these as "ah-ha" moments (Kwok et al., 2022, p. 588; Smith, 2022, p. 109). For Ava and Kenny, seeing schools as happy places to work comes from their own experiences with their English and mathematics teachers, respectively, who they felt made them "passionate" (Ava) and "fall back in love with" (Kenny) their subjects; and inspired them to teach to make a similar difference in other students' lives. This concurs with previous studies which also found that observing their own teachers' impact on students while at school influenced some teachers into the profession (e.g., Nigar et al., 2023; Siostrom et al., 2023). It also aligns with previous research suggesting that secondary school teachers, like Ava and Kenny, are motivated to teach to share their subject passion (Brandmo & Nesje, 2017; Heinz, 2015) but adds the component of helping others through promoting positive emotions when learning. Wanting to maximise the difference they can make to their students' lives leads many of the teachers to work in disadvantaged schools, which is explored in the next section.

## 6.3 Working in Disadvantaged Schools to Maximise Their Impact

Ava, Danielle, Elizabeth, Erica, Helena, Jennifer, Laura, Luke, Penny, Saskia, Shona, and Zoe all expressed how they (want to, in the case of the trainees) work in disadvantaged schools to maximise the difference they can make when helping students. This was one of the reasons Danielle, Elizabeth, Erica, Shona and Zoe gave for training with Teach First. Teach First (n.d.) teachers are required to train in schools with high proportions of students receiving Free School Meals and Pupil Premium (i.e., funding for educational activities). Although the other teachers all trained through routes that were not specifically aimed at helping address educational disadvantage, these teachers also drew upon making a difference through teaching.

### *6.3.1 Teach First's Requirement to Train in Disadvantaged Schools*

Teach First teachers chose this training route and made subsequent career decisions because they wanted to maximise the help they give. Danielle "resonated with" Teach First's purpose because of her own background and where she grew up. She plans to stay in disadvantaged schools. After three years, Erica moved from her Teach First training school to a school located in "one of the poorest" areas of London as she "wanted to work in the sink schools, the tough schools, the ones that are failing students from challenging backgrounds [so she can], make a difference". Elizabeth and Zoe both commented that they want to exclusively work with disadvantaged children, "the people who need you most, the children who don't get the same opportunities [as more privileged children]" (Zoe) which they find "rewarding because of the impact" (Elizabeth). This counters arguments that Teach First participants use the route to 'teach first' and change careers later, often into lucrative positions (e.g., banking and consultancy) (Parker & Gale, 2017). However, the present study is limited by survivor bias as the sample are currently serving teachers, rather than those who have left the profession (and may work in these lucrative positions).

### *6.3.2 Non-Teach First Trained Teachers' Similar Desire to Work in Disadvantaged Schools*

Teachers from other training routes, who do not have Teach First's requirement to train in a disadvantaged school, also drew upon their desire to work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Harriett, Laura and Saskia decided to apply for teaching jobs in schools in "deprived areas" to "make a difference". Harriett has been working in a school serving disadvantaged students since she qualified in 2016-17, however she planned to resign two days after the data collection interview (the reason for this is given in 6.5.1). Laura and Saskia are more recently qualified (in 2021-22 or 2022-23), Laura has accepted a job in a low socio-economic area, while Saskia is still looking for one. Jennifer plans to stay in her employing school, which serves students from deprived areas. If she were to leave, she would look for a job with students from a similar background because she enjoys "when the kids have a bit about them, when it's not straightforward". Penny and Shona, like Elizabeth and Zoe, want to exclusively work with students from deprived backgrounds "for the reason of wanting to help

people. It's the people going to private schools and in affluent areas that don't need the support that I necessarily want to give" (Penny), those schools "aren't appealing… I've got 15-year-olds with reading ages of 6-year-olds" (Shona). Like Danielle, Luke was motivated to work in a school serving disadvantaged students due to his background. Ava wants to continue working in disadvantaged schools as "it's really rewarding to… make them better human beings and give them knowledge about the world… challenge their world views".

Therefore, this analysis of teachers' career decisions across Teach First and non-Teach First training routes demonstrates a shared motivation to support disadvantaged students. The similarities between Danielle and Luke counter arguments (e.g., Parker & Gale, 2017; Smart et al., 2009) that Teach First teachers are often from middle-class backgrounds and placed in disadvantaged areas, although this is a small-scale comparison. Nevertheless, the analysis may subtly show a finer distinction between the two: Teach First trained teachers aim to maximise their impact from the beginning of their careers, whereas non-Teach First trained teachers are drawn to disadvantaged schools, later, by the intrinsic reward of helping those who need it most. This links with the next section, which demonstrates how these teachers want to help students at a more specialist level within their careers.

## 6.4 Wanting to Help at an Advanced Job Level

When discussing their future aspirations, Ava, Elizabeth, Helena, Jack, Jerry, Lena, Luke, Megan, Penny and Sophie maintained their desire to help others through wanting a more specialised job than teaching. Penny positioned the role of a classroom teacher as one that is not able to "fully help" some students (those with SEN), which drives her aspiration to become a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), with Helena, Lena and Sophie also wanting to progress into this role. Elizabeth is unsure of which "role in education" she wants to pursue: "educational psychology? Educational research? Educational policy? I'm still not sure. Most of that is about impact, I'm not sure which role would allow me to make the biggest difference". However, helping others is not Elizabeth's sole motivation, she also mentions "how family friendly" a job is, which is explored in chapter seven (within the *being kidfluenced* sub-theme, 7.2.2).

Jerry and Megan both want to support teachers with their development, which extends the definition of helping others from students to fellow teachers. Jack and Luke both want to pursue pastoral responsibilities in a school, such as a head of year position, which challenges traditional gendered behaviours. Ava wants to progress into a Senior Leadership Team (SLT) position, specialising in helping with the personal development of students.

This reveals nuances between gender, helping and career advancement. Across all codes within this theme, this discussion of progression contains the highest proportion of men. This may align with previous research indicating that men are strongly associated with career progression (Booth et al., 2021). Men are overrepresented within educational leadership positions and more likely, than women and other genders, to occupy these (DfE, 2025m). However, this research cannot make inferences as this is outside of the scope of this qualitative study. Nevertheless, when examining the roles the men in this study want to progress into (i.e., pastoral responsibilities), these are traditionally associated with feminised behaviours. Therefore, this demonstrates how the men in this theme are participating in traditional (e.g., progressing) and untraditional (e.g., helping, often pastorally) gendered behaviours when making career decisions.

Although these teachers express their desire to help specific students (e.g., those with SEN or those labelled as displaying challenging behaviour), it is unclear whether this progression is solely for this reason, as has been explored with Elizabeth's multiple influences. Indeed, Sheldon, who did not offer opinions or experiences which were coded to form this theme, suggested a culture in schools in which teachers "must progress" within their pay scales with additional responsibilities, such as SENCO or head of year. Indeed, many primary school teachers, who also did not offer opinions or experiences which were coded to form this theme, similarly indicated this when discussing how they were given responsibilities for a specific subject. They noted that this was an expectation of many primary school teachers. However, it is unclear whether culture and expectation influence the specialised decisions of teachers. Nevertheless, their desire to help is considered as a contributing factor in their decision to specialise, rather than the sole justification.

## 6.5 Factors That Would Override the Desire to Help Students

Craig, Danielle, Esme, Giselle, Harriett, Helena, Katherine, Penny and Saskia described how factors such as workload (6.5.1) and teacher scandals (6.5.2) would override their desire to help their students and push them out of the profession and into other helping jobs within education.

### *6.5.1 Workload*

Esme, Harriett, Helena and Saskia discussed how stress and workload would override their desire to help their students and lead them to leave the profession. Saskia recognised "the stress and the workload" and "would rather leave the career before I get burnt out" so that she would still be able to help others through "going into speech and language" therapy. Harriett planned to hand in her notice two days after the research interview due to "workload and purely workload". She has decided to leave the profession:

> I don't believe it's just my school. Looking at the news headlines, speaking to friends that work up and down the country, the workload is the same. I have colleagues that have moved from different schools thinking that the grass might be greener and it's not.

She has accepted another helping job working for a children's mental health service. She stated that she will miss "making the difference" and depending on financial circumstances may return to teaching part-time to mitigate the workload issues she encountered. Similarly, Esme and Helena discussed how workload would influence them to leave the profession so they could be present (future, for Helena) parents (further explored in 7.2). This suggests the importance of looking after their own, and their children's, needs before helping others. Otherwise, teachers would not be able to adequately help others nor meet their altruistic motivation.

### *6.5.2 Teacher Scandals*

Katherine and Giselle recounted how teacher scandals influenced their decision to leave the profession in the future. Katherine does not plan to teach long-term as she is "anxious" about "getting into trouble"; her father was a school governor and would "come home and say, 'oh this teacher said something stupid and now he's facing a

disciplinary'". Katherine has applied for a psychology conversion course with a view to being an educational psychologist and planned to hand her notice in after the research interview. Giselle's school had a teacher scandal which drove media and police to the school. Because of this, student behaviour worsened, Giselle described her students as "arrogant" and "entitled" which factored into her decision to leave the profession. Like Katherine, Giselle plans to switch to another helping job through training to become a police officer through the Teach First partner, Police Now. Thus, Katherine and Giselle position teaching as a helping job which is subject to public scrutiny and accountability, which overrides their desire to help students. This adds another layer to existing debates about how accountability, often in the form of Ofsted, can influence teachers' career decisions (e.g., Perryman et al., 2025).

### *6.5.3 Teachers Are More Committed to Helping than Teaching*

Examining workload and teacher scandals as factors that override teachers' desire to help their students prompts a return to the first code presented in this theme (7.2). This section demonstrates how these teachers are less committed to jobs and more "driven" (Giselle) towards "the feeling of helping someone" (Craig). Indeed, other teachers, like Giselle, Harriett, Helena and Katherine, are considering moving outside of teaching but still plan to work in helping jobs including educational charity work (Danielle), policy (Penny) and children's mental health (Craig and Hannah) due to the difference they can make in these roles, hopefully, without the unfavourable working conditions they described within teaching. This is like teachers in previous studies who left the teaching profession and moved into healthcare or other educational adjacent jobs (e.g., higher education) (Cuervo & Vera-Toscano, 2025; Mansell, 2025; Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017; Yinon & Orland-Barak, 2017). Furthermore, this builds upon the findings in the systematic review (2.6.2.4), which established that teachers leave when they cannot help their students (e.g., Glazer, 2018; Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017; Torres, 2020). It expands this to add the additional factor that when teachers cannot help themselves (e.g., their own wellbeing or their own children), they decide to leave teaching.

## 6.6 The Journey of Helping Others Conclusion

This chapter has presented *the journey of helping others* theme by presenting and discussing the codes which constitute this theme. This chapter has shown how intrinsic and altruistic motivations to help others has shaped and continues to shape some teachers' career decisions. There are four arguments that this chapter supports.

Firstly, these teachers make career decisions primarily based on their desire to help others. This leads individuals with this desire into teaching (6.1 and 6.2) but can also lead them out of teaching when they feel they cannot sustain their own wellbeing and into other helping jobs (6.5).

Secondly, seeing helping as a pervasive reason for all their career decisions adds to the overarching thesis (see chapter 1) of the importance of investigating teachers' career trajectories, rather than researching isolated career points (e.g., entry into, remaining in or exiting teaching).

Thirdly, despite Teach First exclusively training teachers in disadvantaged areas, there is no thematic difference between teachers trained through this route and teachers trained through other, non-exclusively disadvantaged, training routes. Both Teach First and non-Teach First teachers contributed equally to the development of this theme.

Finally, the interplay between gender, helping and career progression is multifaceted. The men exhibit both their desire to help others (a traditionally feminised behaviour) and their desire to progress (a traditionally masculine behaviour). However, when discussing progression, the men want to engage in traditionally feminised behaviours of helping (e.g., pastoral responsibilities). It would be interesting to see if these progression positions materialise or whether men move into non-helping specialist, traditionally masculine, educational leadership positions (e.g., Assistant Principal positions responsible for data-driven evaluation processes).

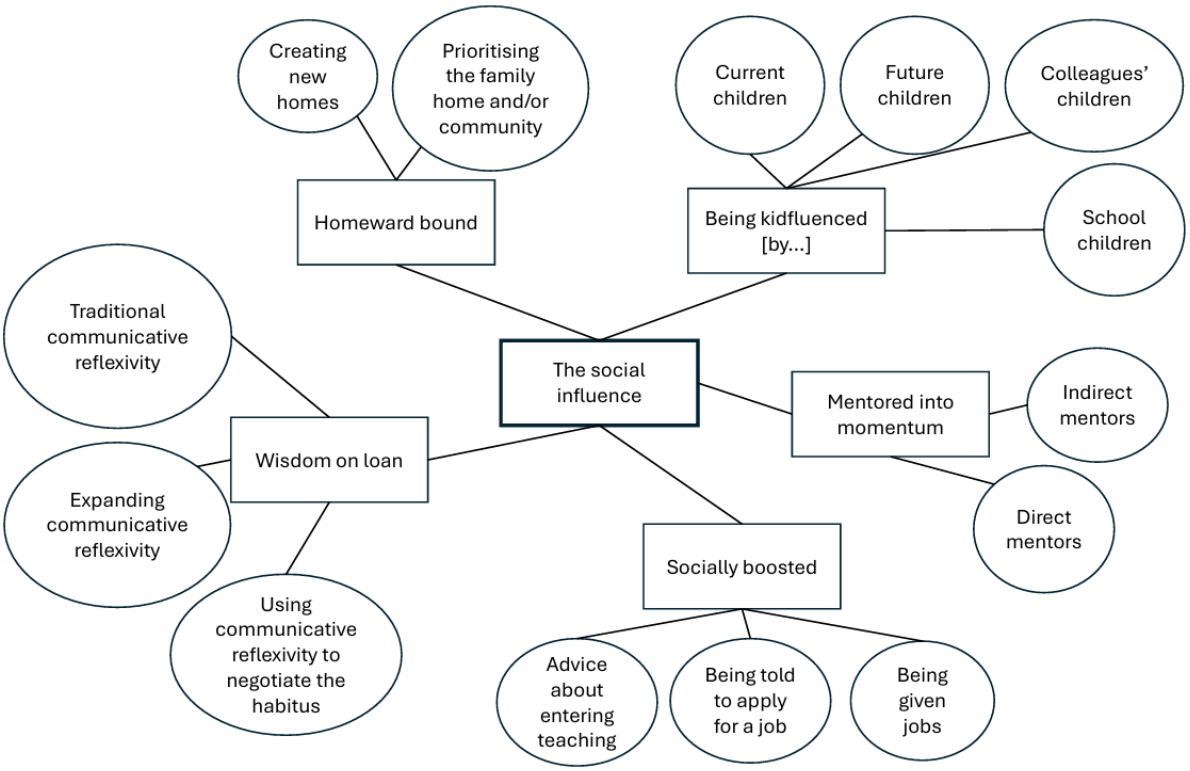
The next chapter outlines the overarching theme of *the social influence* and its five component sub-themes.

# 7 The Social Influence

This overarching theme was created by grouping inductive and deductive codes, which labelled instances where teachers discussed how other people had influenced their career decision-making, organised into five sub-themes. These sub-themes are *homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced*, *mentored into momentum*, *socially boosted* and *wisdom on loan*. Thematic mapping was used to explore how the codes and sub-themes related to each other, and the final thematic map is shown in figure 7 (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

**Figure 7.**

*The Social Influence Overarching Thematic Map*




*Note.* The overarching theme is in the thick lined square. The sub-themes are in the finer lined squares. The codes are in the circles. Shapes are not to scale and do not represent how much the theme or code constitutes teachers' career decision-making in a quantifiable sense.

This chapter begins by outlining and discussing the *homeward bound* (7.1), *being kidfluenced* (7.2), *mentored into momentum* (7.3), *socially boosted* (7.4) and *wisdom on loan* (7.5) sub-themes, before concluding that this overarching theme supports the

notion that teaching is a people profession and demonstrates how these people influence teachers' career trajectories.

## 7.1 Homeward Bound

Some teachers drew upon existing (family/parental) and new (created with partners) homes when discussing their career decisions. In both instances, the geographical boundaries that their homes create are used to justify their career decision-making. Appendix L shows examples of coding extracts for this sub-theme. The two inductive codes which constitute this sub-theme, prioritising the family home and/or community (7.1.1) and creating new homes (7.1.3) are outlined and discussed with reference to previous literature (presented in chapter 2). I conclude this sub-theme by arguing that prioritising the family home and/or creating new homes are fluid practices, as teachers can switch between them or, indeed, decide not to prioritise any type of home.

### *7.1.1 Prioritising the Family Home and/or Community*

Danielle, Elizabeth, Esme, Harriett, Hannah, Helena, Iqra, Jack, Jennifer, Luke, Megan, Saskia, Shona and Sophie all referred to wanting or needing to find teacher training and/or teaching jobs close to the area where their families (parents, for the most part) were based. This section presents firstly instances where teachers wanted to live at home and/or in their community; secondly instances where teachers needed to live at home; and finally, how the teachers presented Teach First as a training route which would often not facilitate either of these instances.

**7.1.1.1 Wanting to Live at Home and/or in Their Native Community.** Harriett, Helena, Jack, Luke and Megan discussed how they wanted to live in their family homes and/or communities whilst training, and/or working, as teachers. Megan wanted to be around her younger sisters. Helena wanted to be close to her grandmother as she would "never forgive" herself if "something happened to her" and she "couldn't get back in time. So, moving wasn't an option". After training to teach away from home, Harriett secured a teaching position in her hometown as she is "close to my family, so I wanted to move back" to be with them. Jack, Luke and Megan all drew upon wanting to stay and work in their community as reasons for their career decisions. Megan decided to train through the placement-based training route School Direct (tuition fee) as "it's within

[her] community". However, Megan was given a school in an unfamiliar area for her second school placement: "I'd never heard of it because I'm very homely, I've never explored outside my area… I was scared". Nevertheless, she "fell in love straight away" with the school as it was in "the next mining village" to her own so she felt a sense of familiarity with the community and students she taught. This led her to apply and gain employment at the school after her training. This is like Jack who wanted "to be local. I want to be in the area that I'm from" due to knowing his students' struggles. Jack wants to continue helping students like himself by being a role model for them as "they can relate" to him. This extends previous research, which indicates that building a rapport with students can encourage teachers to remain within the profession, by adding the component of community, belonging and a sense of helping others like themselves with their education (e.g., Colyott et al., 2021; Seelig & McCabe, 2021).

**7.1.1.2 Needing to Live at Home.** Danielle, Hannah, Iqra, Patrick, Sheldon and Shona discussed how they needed to live in their family homes whilst training, and/or working, as teachers. Hannah and Iqra respectively cite caring commitments for their parents and for a sibling as impacting their career decision-making. They both must be close to where their family lives to provide this care, so they could only look for teaching positions in their immediate area. Iqra "might consider moving in the future if my caring responsibilities can be shifted to someone else, I like the idea of moving". It would be interesting to follow up with these individuals, when and if they no longer have these caring commitments, to see how this impacts their career decisions. Danielle, Patrick, Sheldon and Shona cited financial reasons when needing to live, work and train at home. For Patrick:

> There was nothing special about the offer from my university for my PGCE, it was just, if I stay here, I can live with my mum, I can keep my job which keeps money coming in… purely [a] geographical [reason].

These teachers discussed how they lived at home to save money to buy their own houses, which relates to the other code which constitutes this sub-theme (in 7.1.2): when teachers make career decisions based on new homes.

**7.1.1.3 The Perceived Incompatibility of Teach First with Wanting or Needing to Live at Home and/or in Their Community.** Danielle, Elizabeth, Elle, Jennifer, Mia,

Rumaisa and Susan presented Teach First as a training route which would not facilitate living at home and/or their community. Teachers discussed how they either did not apply for Teach First because of, or got Teach First to waive, their requirement for their trainee teachers to be geographically mobile. Teach First can place their trainees anywhere in England. They ask their applicants to rank areas of England (i.e., East Midlands, East of England, London, North East, North West, South East and South Coast, South Central, South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and the Humber) in order of preference but do not promise they will get their first, second or subsequent choices (Teach First, n.d.). Elle, Jennifer and Susan said that they did not apply to Teach First as they wanted to stay close to home and did not trust that Teach First would find a placement close to them. Danielle, Mia and Rumaisa all trained through Teach First but described how they negotiated with Teach First to allow them to live where their home was. Rumaisa was placed in a school "way too far" from her home, "it was about 2 hours, 20 minutes away one way, so I declined it. Usually, they don't really take declines, you're not really meant to decline the schools because they place you where the need is". They contacted schools in her area and her current school "responded with 'yep, they'd love to have me' and lucky for me it's a 15-minute drive from home". There is a shortage of computer science teachers with computer science degrees like Rumaisa holds, which may explain how Rumaisa was able to get a Teach First placement so close to home (Initial Teacher Training Census, 2025).

Elizabeth, a Teach First trained teacher, demonstrates the fluidity of prioritising home and being geographically bound. She described herself as "mobile" when she applied and trained to teach through Teach First. She moved across the country and met her, now, husband who was also training through Teach First, in his hometown. After they finished the two-year Teach First programme, they moved back to Elizabeth's hometown, "partly because we wanted to buy a house and we could afford it here and partly because my family is here and I was lucky my partner was very amenable to that". Thus, after training to teach, Elizabeth prioritised her home and, thus, its location: "we want to stay in this home we're building, I'm settled now and that's a big career focus". She contrasted her current feelings to how she felt when she trained to teach:

> Like now I'm married, and I have a house, I don't feel mobile anymore. Like this is where I live, this is where I intend to stay. That has suddenly become a really big deal, whereas when I was at Teach First and they say, "we'll drop you anywhere in the country", I was willing to go anywhere, I was very mobile at that point.

As a PhD student and a part-time primary school teacher, Elizabeth noted how she had an interview with professors at Harvard University for an internship. She stated that she "would like to go to the US, for probably not that long" as she cannot "abandon" her husband for the full 3-month visit. Elizabeth reflected on her academic future and recognised that postdoctoral positions are "so competitive that [employers] expect you to move, and that's a definite red line for me, I'm not going to do that". Therefore, Elizabeth shows how prioritising home, and being geographically bound, can emerge after training to teach.

**7.1.1.4 Prioritising the Family Home and/or Community Conclusion.** This section demonstrates how these teachers' prioritisation of their family home and/or community, driven by desire or necessity, influences their career decision-making. The next section outlines how other teachers similarly drew upon the concept of home, but in a more mobile sense, away from their families and communities.

### 7.1.2 Creating New Homes

Craig, Elle, Jerry, Katherine, Kenny, Laura, Lena, Mia, Naomi, Penny and Sheldon discussed how they had moved to new places, away from their family homes, and created new homes with their partners and, in Jennifer, Mia, Naomi, Tracy and Susan's case, their children. There are two types of mobility that these teachers refer to: firstly, moving for education (either undergraduate studies or teacher training) and secondly, moving to live with partners. In both instances, teachers create new homes in these places. This section outlines both instances in the order they were introduced.

**7.1.2.1 Moving for Education and Subsequently Creating a Home.** When Jerry, Laura, Lena and Penny moved for their education, either undergraduate studies or teacher training, they "settled" (Laura and Lena) in these locations and built homes. Consequently, Laura, Lena and Penny would not consider moving away from their new homes, as they have developed "roots here" (Penny). Jerry, like Elizabeth in the previous

section, demonstrates the fluidity of prioritising home. He could not prioritise his home whilst being a teacher in his native country of Northern Ireland, due to the competitive nature of teaching. Thus, he did not prioritise the idea of home when he applied for Teach First, like Elizabeth, and moved to Yorkshire. However, after "building a life, [with] friends, connections and a good living situation", he plans to stay and teach in Yorkshire; thus, prioritising his new home he has created. Nevertheless, while he is happy in Yorkshire "at the minute", the availability of a job in Northern Ireland may lead him back to his home country. Thus, Jerry could, in the future, prioritise his home and native community, like the teachers in 7.1.1, demonstrating the fluidity of these two codes that constitute this sub-theme. This demonstrates how Teach First teachers can prioritise their home and be geographically bound, while simultaneously supporting the teachers', in 7.1.1.3, claim that Teach First is not compatible with wanting to live at, or near, their family home.

The discussion of home in this section relates to Jerrim's (2024) findings that those who stay in their family home during their undergraduate studies are more likely to become teachers than those who leave their homes to study. For the teachers who contributed towards this section of the sub-theme, mobility played a more prominent role as they either moved for university or teacher training. Their accounts show how their sense of home could change with difference household members (e.g., partners and friends) or a different geographical location, while the importance of wanting a home base remained a point they drew upon when making career decisions.

**7.1.2.2 Moving for Their Partner and Subsequently Creating a Home.** Teaching was positioned as a job which allowed for geographical flexibility to cater for their partner's jobs. Craig, Elle, Esme, Katherine, Kenny, Mia, Naomi, Rumaisa, Sheldon and Shona cited their partners as a factor when deciding where to train and work.

After graduating, Elle and Naomi moved to their respective boyfriends' locations. Both cited their boyfriends' stable jobs in these locations and the ability to train to teach and work, anywhere. Elle turned down a paid teacher training place in her hometown which she says might have been "a bit daft" but she "didn't want to leave" her boyfriend.

Craig, Katherine and Mia requested that Teach First place them in schools in locations close to their partners: Katherine secured a suitable position, whilst Craig and Mia were placed further than they wanted to be from their partners. Mia broke her Teach First contract after a year due to the impact that living away from her husband had on her mental health. She moved to work at a school close to her husband and felt her wellbeing improve when she moved in with him again. Craig secured a teaching job from a school close to his partner for when his Teach First contract ends.

After meeting their partners, Esme, Kenny and Rumaisa discussed how they left their respective schools after securing teaching jobs close to their partners' homes. Although their new schools had "good behaviour" (Kenny), "Ofsted Outstanding [rating, and] decent Teaching and Learning Responsibility" remunerations (Esme), the location was the main motivation for moving schools. Similarly, Shona, who is currently living with her parents, is looking for jobs near her boyfriend as he "will always have to be in a certain place" for work, while teaching is not location specific. This demonstrates the fluidity of prioritising home and being geographically bound; indeed, Shona demonstrated her prioritisation of living in her family home to save money (in 7.1.1.2), as these teachers prioritise new homes and are geographically bound after entering relationships.

While Handal et al. (2018) employs a statistical approach to suggest that women are more likely to move for their male partners, this analysis introduces a qualitative perspective of men moving for, or away from, their partners. Craig and Sheldon both detailed that they moved for their girlfriends due to the availability of teaching jobs in comparison to their partners' jobs. These reasons are akin to Elle and Naomi's reasons for moving to live with their respective partners. However, Patrick appeared to move against his partners' wishes and demonstrated fluidity through fluctuating between instances of prioritising and not prioritising his, multiple, partners' location preferences. Patrick lived with his mother during his teacher training to save money (detailed in 7.2.1.2). Patrick was offered a job at his placement school but declined this as his then fiancé did not want to live near this school, demonstrating how he prioritised his partner's preference for where they lived. However, Patrick later decided to take a job in

London, which "led to some awkward discussions" with his fiancé as she did not want to move to London:

> We split up when I moved here. She came up for a while and said it wasn't for her, and I decided that I actually wanted to stick it out here. So now I'm with someone who is from the same part of the world as me, but she's also been living in London independently and I think we both really like the London lifestyle.

This suggests that teachers choose whether their partners geographically influence their career decisions. This fits with sociological discussions, which suggest that a relationship involves each partner constantly choosing to be together; relationships are not fixed as they may have appeared in the past (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). Patrick's career decisions seem to be influenced by the *normal chaos of love*, in which "love seems to slip away because it is idolised by a society focused on growth of the individual", as he chooses a school job over his partner (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 2). However, love does not "slip away" from Patrick as he finds a compatible partner (i.e., being from "the same part of the world" and enjoying a similar lifestyle) once he moves for his work. Patrick's decision to relocate against his fiancé's wishes, an action not reported by teachers identifying as women, may extend Handal et al.'s (2018) findings. However, it is difficult to suggest whether gender influences Patrick's decision to move, and the small sample cannot support these statistical claims. Nevertheless, Patrick demonstrates how he has created a new home, with a new partner who has a similar lifestyle. Unifying the three men's experiences suggests that teaching is a job, regardless of gender, which facilitates mobility.

Adding to previous literature, this analysis identifies that the availability of schools and training routes allows teachers to move to and for their partners, an aspect which has not been previously explored. Closely aligned to this, previous literature found that the proximity to family was an influential factor in attracting and retaining teachers in rural schools (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Ulferts, 2016). This analysis adds to this literature to suggest that a partner's location, outside of a rural setting, also influences teachers' career decisions.

**7.1.2.3 Creating New Homes Conclusion.** This section demonstrates how teachers create homes with new partners and friends, and how these influence their

working locations. This concludes the presentation of the *homeward bound* sub-theme. The next section consolidates the main arguments which this sub-theme posits and directs the reader to the next social influence sub-theme.

### *7.1.3 Homeward Bound Conclusion*

This section has presented the *homeward bound* sub-theme by outlining and discussing, with relevant literature, how the family home, native community and/or new homes influence these teachers' career decision-making through creating geographical boundaries. There are two overarching arguments that this section posits.

Firstly, prioritising home and viewing it as a geographical boundary is a fluid practice. Some participants did not prioritise the idea of home in their past career decisions and some participants appeared to switch between prioritising their family and/or native community and creating new homes. Indeed, in Patrick's case, this involved moving away from his family home and native community and going against his then fiancé's wishes to remain in a location, which he once prioritised. He moved to London and created a new home with a new romantic partner. This fluidity suggests that investigating teachers' career trajectories allows for an understanding of how their priorities, as well as their ideas of home, change and how these impact their career decisions.

Secondly, the Teach First training route is not compatible with prioritising homes (both familial and new) as these trainees need to be mobile. Some teachers who are influenced by the idea of home have trained or are currently training through this route (with difficulty, e.g., Mia). Nevertheless, once their contract ends, they either searched or plan to search for teaching jobs in areas where they want their home to be located. Other teachers trained through this route when home was not their priority, however, it has since become one. Thus, adding to the argument that prioritising home is a fluid practice.

This section highlights the importance of parents, partners, siblings and grandparents on the creation of homes, with the absence of children. Teachers' children were briefly mentioned in some teachers' references to the importance of home. However, this did not develop into this sub-theme due to the lack of a clear connection between children

and home. Instead, I developed the next sub-theme dedicated to the influence of children, which I called *being kidfluenced*.

## 7.2 Being Kidfluenced

Teachers who are kidfluenced, as the name suggests, offered instances where they have been influenced by children when making career decisions. These children can be their own (7.2.1), as well as hypothetically their own (when planning for future children) (7.2.2), the children of colleagues, specifically women, when a teacher does not have their own children, (7.2.3) or they can be the children they teach (7.2.4). Appendix M shows examples of coding extracts for this sub-theme. This section outlines and discusses each of these influences, with reference to previous literature, which were developed from inductive codes. The section concludes that there is a gendered pattern present within this sub-theme. The men who contributed to this sub-theme's development are only kidfluenced by the children they teach and the children of colleagues who are women. In contrast, the women who contributed to this sub-theme are kidfluenced by these as well as their own children or their plans to have children in the future. None of the men disclosed whether they already had children or planned to have children, or whether this influenced their career decisions.

### *7.2.1 Current Children*

Esme, Jennifer, Mia, Naomi, Paula, Susan, Tracy and Victoria all drew upon their children when discussing their career decisions. The influence of children is found across the career trajectory of teachers; from joining the profession (7.2.1.1), searching for training routes/jobs (7.2.1.2), amending jobs (7.2.1.3) and staying in the profession (7.2.1.4). This section presents an exploration of these instances.

**7.2.1.1 Joining the Profession.** Paula, Susan, Tracy and Victoria's respective children influenced them, indirectly, to join the teaching profession.

When their children started school, Paula, Susan and Victoria joined their children's primary schools in support positions as reading volunteers (Paula and Victoria), a midday supervisor (Victoria) and teaching assistants (Paula and Susan). Following their children to school is what also led Bowling and Wakeling's (2025) participants to work in support positions. However, after working closely with teachers, and unlike Paula, Susan and Victoria, the support staff in Bowling and Wakeling (2025) did not move into teaching positions, as they did not see teaching as compatible with their caring

commitments. Paula, Susan and Victoria moved into teaching positions after numerous years spent in support positions and once their children were older (i.e., in secondary school). This aligns with previous research which suggest that teaching is not compatible with caregiving and adds an age range to caregiving compatibility (e.g., Bain et al., 2022; Bowling & Wakeling, 2025; Heffernan et al., 2022; Hester et al., 2020; Huang, 2021; Wang & Wang, 2023). Furthermore, I argue that this demonstrates the importance of investigating teachers' career trajectories to see how changes (e.g., their child's age) impact their career decisions.

Tracy was motivated to join teaching to increase her yearly wage from £19,000 to "the £25,000 bursary, as MFL was a shortage subject", in aid of supporting her "new, young family". Originally, Tracy wanted to work in another country but "because I had a young baby, the thought of moving abroad at that moment didn't seem right". Now her children are older, Tracy and her family are planning to relocate to South America, where Tracy plans to teach. Like Paula, Susan and Victoria, this demonstrates how their children's ages influence career decisions.

**7.2.1.2 Searching for Training Routes/Jobs.** Esme, Mia, Naomi and Victoria's children influenced their search for teacher training routes (Victoria) and jobs (Esme, Mia and Naomi).

Victoria struggled to find a part-time training route, which she required to facilitate caring for her children, and found that most routes catered to trainees "in their early twenties, I was 40 when I applied. My life is different to theirs". She trained through her SCITT provider after seeing an advert for their part-time route and attending an open morning where she conversed with the tutors who seemed "really positive about career changers and part-time" applicants.

Esme, Mia and Naomi discussed how their children influenced their search for teaching jobs. In the future, Mia and Naomi both want to search for teaching jobs at schools closer to their respective children's childcare providers to shorten their commutes. Esme left a teaching job in England to teach in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). However, she returned to England after discovering she was pregnant while unmarried, as this was illegal in the UAE at the time. Esme interviewed for a permanent

head of MFL job, went into labour, delivered her child after the interview and received a job offer the next morning. Esme's financial reasoning to get a teaching job to support her child aligns with Tracy's (in 7.2.1.1) and previous research suggesting that the profession allows teachers to fulfil instrumental roles of economically providing for their families, although this previous research focuses on how men adopt this role (e.g., Gomba, 2015; Gratacós et al., 2017; Gray et al., 2019; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Pozderac et al., 2022; Scott & Alexander, 2019). Thus, this analysis adds women, as mothers, to this discussion and shows that they can adopt these instrumental roles.

**7.2.1.3 Amending Jobs.** Esme, Naomi and Victoria described how their schools facilitated flexible working to support their caregiving. Esme's new school, as detailed in 6.2.1.2, approved her request for a November, instead of a September, start date and a two-day working week to allow for maternity leave, although she eventually had to amend this to work full-time. Naomi's school allowed her to return three days a week after her maternity leave. However, she found it "really hard to do my job in three days, I ended up doing the full five days", so she compromised by working four days and her workload "balanced itself out". Victoria also stated that she works part-time although, like Naomi, she uses her two days off "preparing lessons". Nevertheless, she expressed optimism that "in a year or two I'll be able to fall back on this stuff I've prepared and used". Despite not having children, Elle recognised that part-time teachers often work full-time hours. This suggests that, despite schools offering flexibility, teachers' workloads create difficulties in working part-time. This analysis adds a critical insight into whether part-time teaching and childcare practices are as compatible as previous literature has suggested (e.g., Bain et al., 2022; Farinde et al., 2016; Heffernan et al., 2022; Hester et al., 2020; Huang, 2021; Randi, 2017; Wang & Wang, 2023; Zavelevsky & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020).

**7.2.1.4 Staying in the Profession.** Esme and Victoria's respective children influenced their decision to remain in the profession.

Esme was questioning "how can I juggle [my workload] with being a good mum, being present for my daughter? Is it all worth it? Would I be happier in another career?" She

was close to leaving the profession and recounted how she "walked out" of a lesson in which her students were being disrespectful and told her line manager "I quit":

> I believed that was my last, ever day teaching but they [leadership] managed to talk me into staying and then fortunately it was [the COVID-19] lockdown. I think if lockdown hadn't have come, I probably would have left. But because of lockdown I got that extra time with my daughter.

It could be argued that having a child led Esme to consider leaving in the first place. Nevertheless, this demonstrates how teaching restricts spending time with children and how flexible working patterns (e.g., online teaching) can mitigate such constraints and retain teachers.

Only Victoria discussed how the school holidays are a contributing factor which keeps her in teaching. She described how although "teaching is stressful, every job is stressful, and you haven't got these holidays [outside of teaching]. I think that's one of the main things [keeping me in the profession]". Victoria's comments align with the public's perception of teachers and contrasts other teachers' views that holidays are not compatible with childcare as teachers must work during these (e.g., Neta in Zavelevsky & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2020).

**7.2.1.5 Current Children Conclusion.** This section demonstrates how these teachers' children influence their choices to join the profession, search for training routes and jobs, amend jobs and stay within teaching. The next section outlines how other teachers' plans for children influence their future career decision-making.

### *7.2.2 Future Children*

Elizabeth, Elle, Helena, Julia, Mia, Olivia, Rumaisa and Shona discussed how their, hypothetical, future children would influence their career decisions. These teachers would either stay (7.2.2.1) or leave the profession (7.2.2.2) or were unsure about their future in teaching (7.2.2.3).

**7.2.2.1 Planning to Stay.** Elle, Julia and Olivia stated that they plan to stay in teaching when they have children, but they acknowledged how their job might look different. Like Mia and Naomi (in 7.2.1.2), Elle and Julia would search for teaching jobs closer to home. Both attributed this to commute times, for example, Julia's "45-minute

drive and 20-minute walk [to school], isn't ideal if you've got young kids". Olivia described how having a child would be a "valid reason" for requesting part-time work. She suggested that her school does not allow for part-time positions without caring commitments as her previous requests for part-time work due to "stress and worry" have been denied on the grounds that these emotions are the "nature of the job". Elle stated that she would return to full-time teaching after one child but request part-time after two children. Furthermore, Elle, like Mia already has, would like to become head of her department but acknowledged that caring commitments may impact this due to the time needed to fulfil both roles. However, Mia did not comment on how her caring commitments, both present and future, impact upon her department head role. Nevertheless, Elle's views align with Booth et al.'s (2021) research on the care ceiling in schools; those with caring commitments (most often women, like Elle), are limited in their ability to progress into leadership positions.

**7.2.2.2 Planning to Leave.** Helena, Mia and Shona discussed how they would leave teaching after having (more, for Mia) children. Helena stated that when she has children, she wants a job that facilitates "switching off on a night" so that she can be "around more" for her hypothetical children. She stated that she would need to leave teaching to do this. Mia, already a mother to one child, stated that if she had another child, she would leave teaching due to her previous experience of teaching whilst pregnant:

> Up until I was 7 months pregnant, I was at school until 7pm every night because your work is never done. I think schools take advantage of the character of teachers because they know you want to do your best, so they keep taking and you keep giving and you end up with nothing left. When I finished for maternity leave, I was absolutely exhausted. I think actually if I have another baby, I would leave teaching.

Mia's comments add the component of the number of children which would prompt her to leave the profession to the knowledge field, which previous literature has not explored.

When Shona has children, she plans to leave teaching and return to the profession when her hypothetical "kids are a bit older". She attributed this decision to two women: her mother who was "always at home when [she] was little" and her Teach First mentor

who left teaching to work for Teach First when she had children "so she could work from home". Shona's plans are reminiscent of teachers in previous studies who planned to leave the profession when they had children and return to teaching after a few years (e.g., Stone & Lovejoy, 2019; Wang & Wang, 2023). However, Shona alluded to a longer period outside of the profession, stating that she would return when her children enter secondary school, which is the same age Paula, Susan and Victoria's children were when these teachers entered the profession (7.2.1.1). This adds to the argument that caring for children of secondary school age appears as compatible with teaching.

**7.2.2.3 Unsure About Staying or Leaving.** Elizabeth and Rumaisa both attributed their uncertainty of staying in teaching with gendered expectations. Rumaisa drew upon traditional instrumental and expressive roles adopted within heteronormative relationships as she hopes that her husband "would be earning enough to support me, so even if I choose not to [work when she has children], I can". As a part-time teacher and full-time PhD student preparing to submit her thesis, Elizabeth discussed her post-PhD plans:

> Maternity suddenly has become really relevant. So, I've been looking at how that works for teachers versus academics versus if I was doing a bit of this and that. It's not something that has weighed into my career decisions at all before. But suddenly it's like "what's the most family friendly career option?" Both in terms of maternity, but also in terms of raising a family afterwards.

Elizabeth has thought about becoming a childminder using "Brett's [Wigdortz, founder of Teach First] Tiny, a childminder charity, it's like the new Teach First". This adds to the debate outlined in 2.4.1 about whether teaching is compatible with caregiving. For example, while Dewi and Fajri (2023) argue that teaching appears to be compatible with caregiving, Bain et al. (2022) argue it is not. This analysis adds the aspect of relativity to this debate: considering how compatible it is in comparison to other jobs available to the (potential) parent.

**7.2.2.4 Future Children Conclusion.** This section demonstrates how teachers' hypothetical children influence their future career decisions. The next section outlines how other teachers' colleagues' children influence their careers.

### 7.2.3 Colleagues' Children

Elise, Elle, Erica, Joan, Luke, Naomi (who was not a mother at the time) and Polly recounted instances where they gained promotions, their first teaching jobs or valuable support due to colleagues' maternity/adoption leaves (7.2.3.1) and childcare responsibilities (7.2.3.2). This suggests that not having children benefits teachers' career progression, while having children can hinder and/or reverse progression.

**7.2.3.1 Colleagues' Maternity/Adoption Leave.** Joan and Luke, who were both struggling to find teaching jobs, got their first teaching positions due to teachers taking maternity leave. Luke's unqualified teaching position led to the school "setting up a role for me" to train to teach through the assessment only route to QTS once his contract for a maternity cover position ended. However, "obviously for legal reasons I had to apply for it, I was up against someone else, but I was successful". This demonstrates how teachers on maternity leave provide an opportunity for early career teachers to start their careers.

Polly was feeling disillusioned with teaching. However, she received a new mentor who she referred to as her "work mum" after her previous mentor went on adoption leave. She credited this change (resulting from adoption leave), and her new mentor, as keeping her in the profession.

Elise, Erica and Naomi all took up temporary teaching and learning responsibilities (TLRs) after the previous postholders took maternity leave. Before having her child, Naomi held a TLR for improving students' writing, which gave her a "good snippet" of what the job would be like "without taking on permanent responsibility". Erica's principal asked her to cover for her head of department whilst she took maternity leave, "even though" she was in her NQT year (i.e., her first year of teaching after her training year). Reflecting on this, Erica described it as "pretty mad" but stated she would not have progressed into an assistant principal position as fast as she did without this experience. Elise took up a temporary head of year position which turned into a permanent TLR when the postholder returned from maternity leave and resigned from the position. Although the reason for the resignation was not given, it may be reasonable to consider whether childcare commitments affected the postholder's

decision, as previous literature (e.g., Booth et al., 2021; Robison & Russell, 2022) and 7.2.3.2 may suggest.

**7.2.3.2 Colleagues' Childcare Commitments.** Elle discussed how she "took a lead in the department" with online schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic due to her digital capital (being "very capable with computers") and her childlessness ("leading [meant], I took the pressure off of people with children at home who had to care and teach [simultaneously]") (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). She stated that this leadership experience "made [her] stand out much quicker and propelled [her]" into further TLRs, including "the head asking [her] to put out a lot of the legacy after COVID stuff alongside the head of ICT". Elle's experience echoes arguments that suggest how those without caring responsibilities can more easily progress into leadership positions than teachers with caring responsibilities (e.g., Booth et al., 2021).

**7.2.3.3 Colleagues' Children Conclusion.** This section demonstrates how colleagues' maternity/adoption leave and childcare responsibilities benefit the early career teachers' careers, as they provide vacancies (TLRs, mentorships and teaching positions) that they or others (i.e., mentors) can fill. This suggests that not having childcare commitments benefits progression within teaching, while having children can hinder this. Furthermore, it demonstrates how women often provide opportunities for the early career teachers to work in the roles discussed due to their caregiving responsibilities, illustrating how caregiving can negatively impact the career progression of teachers who are women. The next section shifts from discussing teachers' childcare responsibilities and outlines how the children they teach influence the teachers' careers.

### *7.2.4 School Children*

Elise, Esme, Helena, Iqra, Jerry, Katherine, Lena, Naomi, Patrick, Stacey and Tracy drew upon the relationships with the children they have taught (7.2.4.1) and these children's behaviour (7.2.4.2) when discussing their career decisions.

**7.2.4.1 Relationships with School Children.** Elise, Helena, Iqra, Lena and Patrick referred to building relationships with the children they teach as a reason for joining and remaining within the profession. Lena and Patrick both volunteered in schools before

training. They both cited “the really good relationship” (Lena), which Patrick “loved”, they built with the children in these schools as a reason for entering the profession. Once trained and teaching, Elise, Helena and Iqra cited the “good connection” (Helena) they had with their students, which they “really enjoy” (Iqra), as one of the reasons they want to remain in their classrooms. Elise stated that she feels loyalty towards her students, which sustains her teaching as she does not “want to abandon them”. This demonstrates how positive relationships with students can encourage teachers into, and to remain within, both the profession and their classrooms. This aligns with previous research indicating that the rapport teachers develop serves as a factor in retaining them in the profession (e.g., Towers & Maguire, 2017).

**7.2.4.2 School Children’s Behaviour.** Esme, Jerry, Katherine Lena, Naomi, Stacey and Tracy cited the behaviour of the students they teach as influencing their career decisions.

When deciding on an employing school, Esme, Jerry, Lena and Naomi aim to work in schools that have “good behaviour”. They highlighted how, from their perspective, deprived areas (Jerry), state schools (Esme) and high levels of English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Special Educational Needs (SEN) students (Lena and Naomi) are associated with difficult student behaviour. This led them to look for schools with opposing characteristics. However, Lena expressed that she was wary of schools that are “excessively strict on behaviour” as “children don’t have the room to move and behave like children” in these environments. Thus, demonstrating the balance needed in students’ behaviour to attract and retain teachers. This observation builds on previous research (e.g., Bright, 2022) by including how behaviour that is “too good” can also deter teachers from certain schools.

Behaviour is cited as a reason some teachers have left an employing school (Stacey), plan to leave their employing schools (Tracy and Stacey), plan to leave the profession (Katherine) or would consider leaving the profession (Esme and Stacey). Stacey left her previous school as she felt her students still “saw” and “treated” her as a teaching assistant (the position she had before she trained to teach with this school). Furthermore, she plans to leave her current school due to challenging behaviour, which she stated is due to her students being developmentally behind due to the

COVID-19 pandemic. She stated that she intends to work as a supply teacher while she "has a think" about whether to remain in teaching. Tracy cited the "really, really draining" behaviour which "really grinds you down" as influencing her decision to potentially teach abroad. Esme stated that "if anything was to drive [her] away [from teaching], it would be the kids' behaviour". Like Stacey, she referred to the impact the pandemic has had on behaviour that has resulted in needing to "reteach and constantly firefight", which makes "the everyday so intense and constantly stressful". Katherine stated that she plans on leaving teaching because of concerns about the impact her students' behaviour may have on her life and her privacy:

> Like TikTok, one teacher, a student zoomed in on his bottom and posted it and it's all that. I'm just not someone who wants any negative record of me online or anywhere and that's very stressful. That's probably the biggest factor [for leaving teaching] if I'm being honest, the concept that something can go wrong because of one student['s behaviour].

This section demonstrates how behaviour can influence teachers' decisions to leave both a school and the profession. Although no teachers referred to good behaviour when discussing why they remain within their classrooms, it can be inferred from the present analysis that good behaviour retains teachers.

**7.2.4.3 School Children Conclusion.** This section shows how the children that teachers teach can influence their career decision-making. This concludes the presentation of analysis for the *being kidfluenced* sub-theme. The next section consolidates the main arguments provided for this sub-theme and directs the reader to the next sub-theme.

### *7.2.5 Being Kidfluenced Conclusion*

This section has presented the *being kidfluenced* sub-theme through exploring how teachers' current children, future children, colleagues' children and children they teach influence their career decision-making. In addition to each of these influences, this section postulates an overarching argument about the role of gender (specifically women) in caregiving (specifically their own children).

I argue that holistically examining the codes in this sub-theme demonstrates a gendered pattern: the women, who contributed to this sub-theme's development,

often assume traditional caregiving responsibilities for their own children (in addition to being influenced by the children they teach and the children of their colleagues who are women); while the men, who contributed to this sub-theme's development as well as those from the wider sample, are only kidfluenced through the children they teach or the jobs they can gain when their colleagues, who are women, leave positions to care for their own children. The teachers within these sections often drew upon experiences stemming from reproductive functions, which some women face (e.g., pregnancy, birth and the postpartum period). For instance, taking the example given in 7.2.1.2, if the roles were reversed and Esme was a man teaching in the UAE who had found out his girlfriend in the UK (as Esme's then boyfriend lived in the UK) was pregnant, Esme would not have faced the same legal constraints and would have had the opportunity to remain teaching in the UAE. Notably, none of the men interviewed discussed if they had children or planned on having children. Overall, this suggests that gender has a role in *being kidfluenced* and the type of kidfluence a teacher encounters.

The next section shifts the attention from children to mentors and outlines the third social influence sub-theme, which explores how mentors influence teachers' career decisions.

## 7.3 Mentored into Momentum

Some teachers recounted instances where their career decisions were influenced by informal and formal mentorship, that is, guidance by a more experienced teacher or school leader. Appendix N shows examples of coding extracts for this sub-theme. Teachers drew upon indirect mentorship from other teachers, which encouraged them into the profession (7.3.1) and, once they decided to become a teacher, direct mentors which influenced them to choose particular training routes, move schools and/or remain in the profession (7.3.2). This section outlines each of these mentorship types, which were developed from inductive codes, before concluding that mentorship should not end after a teacher is trained to teach and providing practices that are associated with teachers both remaining and leaving their respective schools (7.3.3).

### *7.3.1 Indirect Mentors*

Ava, Elise, Kenny, Luke, Paula, Polly, Shamsi, Sheldon and Stacey discussed how indirect mentorship from other teachers influenced them to enter, and in Sheldon's case remain within, teaching. I define indirect mentors as those who engaged in casual conversations and provided guidance to the teacher participants without the identified mentor directly being aware of their influencing role. These indirect mentors were the participants' own teachers (7.3.1.1) and teachers they worked alongside, whilst working as teaching assistants (7.3.1.2).

**7.3.1.1 Their Own Teachers.** Ava, Elise, Kenny, Luke, Megan, Polly and Sheldon detailed how they were inspired to teach by the teachers who taught them at school. These teachers were described as "so passionate" (Ava), "amazing" (Polly) and "really cool… really inspiring" (Sheldon). Ava and Polly both joined teaching as they wanted to be like their respective English teachers. For Polly, this was more generic as she commented "I was like, God! I wish I could be like her". Polly's comments echo previous research which found that admiring teachers leads them into the profession (e.g., Bergmark et al., 2018; Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020). For Ava, this was about replicating the "difference" her teacher made to her students' lives. Luke also talked about being inspired to help change his students' lives for the better after his schooling experience: "looking back, I wasn't very like well-behaved at school, I had

quite a lot of support from staff, they got me to sort myself out". Ava and Luke's reasons align with Ellison et al. (2022) and Rinke et al. (2014) who also found that teachers are influenced into the profession by teachers who had an impact on them. The passion that teachers exhibited for their subject influenced Kenny and Sheldon to study their subjects further, which led them to want to share their passion with future students and, thus, train to teach. This aligns with previous research which found that the passion for their subject influences people to become secondary school teachers (e.g., Brandmo & Nesje, 2017; Heinz, 2015).

It may be interesting to note that, thus far, these teachers were all inspired by secondary school teachers and became secondary school teachers themselves. Shamsi, a trainee primary school teacher, also detailed how she was inspired by teachers. However, she differs to the other, secondary teaching, participants as her inspiration came from her sister's teachers:

> I would often go with my mum to my sister's parents' evenings and then from the amount of support that they were giving us [Shamsi's sister has special educational needs] and the progress my sister was making, it hit me: I would like to do that. That's what teaching is really about to me.

Shamsi's comments can be used to expand previous literature on primary influences and age stages of career decision-making. Previous literature (e.g., Ellison et al., 2022), which appears to focus on the primary influence teachers can have on their own students, can be expanded to include the secondary influence of viewing the teaching experience through others (e.g., the impact Shamsi's sister's teachers were having on her sister), which can influence teachers into the profession. Furthermore, as Shamsi was inspired by primary school teachers whilst Shamsi was at secondary school, this could suggest that inspiration may be age dependent. This relates to Gottfredson's (1981) circumscription and compromise theory, which suggests from ages 9–13 the social status of a career influences a child's job preferences while from ages 14 career choices are refined based on personal interests and constraints. Although Shamsi does not disclose her age when she was inspired to teach, it can be inferred that she would have been between the ages of 11–18, like Ava, Kenny, Luke and Polly. This links Gottfredson's (1981) two age ranges together to suggest that inspiration can influence career preferences during this time.

Megan described how an encounter with the principal of the school she attended influenced her to remain in the profession when she was thinking of leaving. Megan applied for a support staff position at her old school and met with her old principal who said that he "recognised [her] name and basically convinced [her] to give teaching another shot". She stated that, at the time of the interview, he was going to "try and create a teaching position" for Megan. Thus, this demonstrates how leaders can encourage others to remain within the profession as well as within their employing schools.

Sheldon stated that he amalgamates teaching practices by two of his previous teachers, to keep teaching fun for himself and the students. Sheldon talked about how he received "fun puzzles" from his mathematics teacher when he finished his work. He observed that his friends in "lower sets" (i.e., groups of students perceived as being lower ability) would be given the work and no extra stretching exercises, which he felt was "not fair". Now as a mathematics teacher himself teaching predominantly "bottom ability", he was inspired by his previous teacher to utilise these fun puzzles. Instead of treating these as work to do after the main work, he was inspired by his economics teacher, who made his lessons fun and engaging, to utilise these throughout the lessons. He found that "they [the students] get so much more out if it when you make it interesting for them". Sheldon noted that "if I can teach like he [his economics teacher] teaches, then I'm happy. I'm going home with a smile on my face". Thus, Sheldon's use of fun puzzles by his mathematics teacher to create engaging lessons, as inspired by his economics teacher, demonstrates how his previous teachers have indirectly helped him enjoy his teaching and remain in the profession. This expands upon previous literature, which only discusses how teachers want to, rather than give examples of how they, replicate the positive teaching practices they experienced (e.g., Gao & Xu, 2014; Olan & Belló, 2022; Wang & Wang, 2023). It also expands upon literature (e.g., Kwa & Kim, 2022; Murdoch & Lim, 2022), which found that sustaining a passion for their subject keeps teachers in the profession by showing how a teacher, as influenced by their previous teachers, can foster an enjoyment of their subject during their everyday teaching.

**7.3.1.2 Teacher Colleagues.** Luke, Paula and Stacey all drew upon teachers they worked with, whilst working as teaching assistants, when citing why (and in Luke's

case, how) they became teachers. Paula and Stacey were both inspired to become teachers after directly witnessing the job. The teacher Paula supported was “a similar age to [her], she also had her children and trained as a teacher later in life and was singing its virtues and off the back of that I looked into different options” to get into teaching. It could be suggested that Paula was encouraged to teach after seeing herself and her own experiences reflected in her teacher colleague. Luke decided to apply for the assessment only route to QTS after working with a teacher who was training through this route and hearing about his colleague’s positive experience. This adds to the literature base to suggest that teachers can inspire not only their students, or in Shamsi’s case their students’ families, but also their colleagues to become teachers.

**7.3.1.3 Indirect Mentors Conclusion.** This analysis provides an example of how admiration for teachers (including their own, their families’ teachers and their colleagues) can translate into their teaching practice. The next section outlines how appointed mentors, who engage in direct mentorship practices, influence their career decision-making.

### *7.3.2 Direct Mentors*

Elle, Giselle, Hannah, Helena, Lucy, Jennifer, Megan, Polly and Shona detailed instances when direct mentors influenced their career decision-making. I define direct mentors as those who are appointed to guide and support teachers, or those who are aware that they are fulfilling this role. These mentors include teacher training tutors/mentors (7.3.2.1) and school-based mentors (7.3.2.2).

**7.3.2.1 Teacher Training Tutors/Mentors.** Elle, Hannah, Jennifer and Shona discussed how their teacher training tutors and mentors influenced their decision to choose training routes, remain in the profession for the long term and plan for their future outside of teaching.

Elle and Hannah detailed how they decided to accept offers for their teacher training programmes after their potential tutors, who interviewed them, instilled confidence in them as teachers. After answering a question about why she wanted to be a teacher, Hannah stated that the response her interviewer gave her made her realise “oh my god,

this guy actually sees me doing the job, he sees me as a person not just like applicant number 124". Similarly, Elle detailed how after her interview:

> The tutor pulled me back and told me how amazing I was… and how he could see that I was a natural born teacher, and like I know that's probably just rubbing me up the right way but it really instilled a bit of confidence from day one and I just thought "if you could do that in an interview, what's he going to do with me for the next 9 months while I am learning something new that is going to be incredibly difficult?" So that's why I went for that [training route].

This contrasts with Erica, a Teach First trained teacher whose experiences did not align with the patterns developed to explore this sub-theme. Erica did not get the opportunity to interview with her training tutors nor school leadership due to Teach First's application process. However, she noted that when she joined the school, in contrast to Hannah and Elle, she really liked the lack of supervision by leadership through "being left to my own devices" to create all her teaching resources and not be observed, although this is usually a requirement of Teach First schools.

Jennifer discussed how her university mentor influenced her ability to remain in the teaching profession for the long term:

> She was like "right, you already know about teaching and education, now I want to teach you to be a teacher so that you can stay at it and figure out how to have a work-life balance so that you can make it work for you".
>
> Interviewer: Can you tell me a bit more about what that involved?
>
> Jennifer: Yeah so, she'd ask "what no marking lessons can you do? How can you make your workload sustainable? How can you employ your TA? How can you get the children to do marking for themselves? Can you live mark?"… I came into this with my eyes wide open, I'm aware about the rubbish budget and the ridiculous government expectations and I don't want teaching to suck the life out of me.

Learning about how to best configure her classroom practices from her mentor encouraged Jennifer to feel optimistic about the longevity of her career in teaching.

Shona described how she sees her Teach First mentor as a role model for how she would like to progress within, and potentially out of, her teaching career:

> she's a girl boss; within 7 years she was a deputy head then she went away and had kids and now she works for Teach First so she can work from home… and that's something I'd like to go down the route of doing.

The systematic review found that discussions of role models for careers in teaching were limited to teachers discussing how they were inspired to become teachers by their own teachers (e.g., Ellison et al., 2022; Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020; Kwa & Kim, 2022; Nigar et al., 2023; Siostrom et al., 2023). Therefore, this analysis adds to the previous literature to show how, once in teaching, teachers can continue to be influenced by more experienced (sometimes, former) teachers.

**7.3.2.2 School-Based Mentors.** Once employed as teachers, Giselle, Hannah, Helena, Lucy, Megan, Polly, Shona and Susan discussed how their school mentors influenced their decision to both remain and leave their employing schools.

Helena, Polly, Shona and Susan credited their departmental mentors as the reason they remain in their schools due to their support. Polly felt so much support from her mentor that she described her as her "work mum". Susan recounted that she had some personal issues whilst on her second school placement, as part of her Teaching Apprenticeship training. When she returned to her employing school, her mentor was "really supportive, [she said] 'you're back home now and we'll help you'. I need people like that around me". Like Elle in 7.3.2.1, Helena was instilled with confidence as a teacher by her school mentor as she "made [her] feel like [she] was good at [her] job". However, when her mentor handed her notice in, this prompted Helena to begin looking for other jobs. This demonstrates how important mentors are for retaining teachers within their schools.

Hannah, Giselle and Lucy recounted instances where their mentors did not provide adequate support. Hannah's mentor was "so horrible" and would give her "a bunch of reasons I was a rubbish teacher". Giselle's mentor "would be talking about himself a lot when the meetings were supposed to be about my progress" and disregarded her workplace requirements to support her disability. Lucy's head of department "struggled with the job and being a mentor. So, I had an unofficial mentor, brilliant guy, but then he unfortunately handed his notice in". Like Helena, her unofficial mentor leaving prompted her to also leave. These experiences led these teachers to move to teach at different schools. This adds an understanding of how negative mentorship can influence teachers' career decisions to the literature field; as previous literature has often focused on how positive mentorship (e.g., sharing resources, Ferrari, 2016;

Harfitt, 2015; Kutsyuruba et al., 2018) influences teachers' decisions to remain within the profession and their employing school.

Hannah and Lucy both disclosed that poor mentorship practices had a negative impact on their health. Hannah "got signed off for 2 weeks due to depression. So, [her university PGCE lecturer, who she had kept in contact with after she qualified] came to the rescue and was like 'this woman cannot be her mentor' so I got this new guy". However, her new mentor left as "the trust was being horrible to him", which influenced her to leave her school. Lucy recounted her experience with work related stress:

> My doctor tried to sign me off and I said, "I can't do that for my students", so he recommended to reduce my hours significantly. I showed my work friend and he said "do not show this to anyone, you'll regret it" but I didn't listen to him and I sent it to my mentor and she said "fine but you're not going home when you're not teaching, you're coming into my office" and then she would get up my year 11's data and I would have to explain why some students weren't getting their target grade. After the third meeting I was like "I can't do this anymore" so I got signed off properly.

This triggered a cascade of issues for Lucy, including her school attempting to prevent her from successfully completing her NQT year, which led her to want to quit teaching. However, she decided to move to a different school after feeling validated when Teach First decided to retract their contract with the school after multiple grievances were raised with the leadership team. As found in the systematic review, poor leadership is associated with poor health of teachers (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). Thus, this analysis provides the literature field with lived experiences of how poor mentorship has impacted upon teachers' health and, therefore, their decision to leave their employing schools.

This analysis concurs with previous studies suggesting that supportive leadership and administration teams, to which mentors often belong, are conducive to teachers staying in their employing schools (De Nobile & Bilgin, 2022; Dos Santos, 2019; Hanušová et al., 2020; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Kutsyuruba et al., 2018; Murphy, 2018; Newton, 2018; Olsen, 2019; Player et al., 2017; Tiplic et al., 2015).

**7.3.2.3 Direct Mentors Conclusion.** This section demonstrates how appointed mentors' quality of support given to the teachers influences them to choose a training

route, remain or leave their employing schools, and plan to remain within the profession. Although Lucy thought about leaving teaching, this section does not include any reference to how mentorship practices can lead the teachers out of the profession. This section concludes the presentation of the analysis for this sub-theme. The next section consolidates the main arguments provided for this sub-theme and directs the reader to the next sub-theme.

### *7.3.3 Mentored into Momentum Conclusion*

This section has presented *the social influence* sub-theme of *mentored into momentum* by exploring how both direct and indirect mentors have influenced their career decision-making. There are two arguments that this section supports.

Firstly, I argue that mentorship should not end after a teacher is trained to teach or when they have finished induction periods (e.g., the early career framework years). The analysis suggests that these teachers value mentoring and, when conducted in a specific way (explored next), it can influence teachers to remain in their schools. Therefore, mentors should be offered to more experienced teachers to support them in remaining in their schools. However, this may not suit all teachers as the analysis suggests other teachers, such as Erica, do not place value on mentorship.

Secondly, the analysis shows how specific mentoring practices are associated with a teacher's decision to remain or leave their school. In this sub-theme the teachers' decisions to enter teaching and remain within their schools was influenced by their mentors: being passionate about their work (Ava, Kenny, Luke and Polly), their training route (Luke) and their job (Paula and Stacey); championing fun activities that teachers can use in their own teaching (Sheldon); supporting their own students (Shamsi); instilling confidence in teachers (Elle, Hannah and Helena); helping them make teaching a sustainable profession through coaching effective teaching methods (Jennifer); and cultivating a culture of feeling supported (Shona, Polly and Susan). The teachers' decisions to leave their schools was influenced by their mentors: micromanaging their time (Lucy); confronting them and demanding answers as to why a student is not performing (Lucy); telling them they are "rubbish" teachers (Hannah); not providing mentor meetings focused solely on the teachers' development and instead

using the meeting to talk about their personal problems (Giselle); having too many responsibilities or a lack of training to adequately mentor (Lucy); and jeopardising a teachers' career through attempting to prevent them from successfully completing their NQT (now ECT) year(s) (Lucy). Mentors should adopt the former practices to keep teachers feeling supported and happy so they can remain within their schools. If, after sustained mentoring and support, teachers and/or mentors identify that teaching is not a good career fit for them, a transition out of the teaching profession could be considered.

The subsequent sections of this chapter shift the focus from individual social influences (e.g., family, partners, children and mentors) to consider the broader role of social networks in influencing career decisions. The next section outlines the fourth social influence sub-theme exploring how social networks are used by teachers to advance their careers.

## 7.4 Socially Boosted

Some teachers discussed how they used their social networks to advance their careers. This sub-theme was developed using deductive codes related to the concepts introduced in the theoretical framework chapter (3). Appendix O shows examples of coding extracts for this sub-theme. These teachers used their social capital to obtain cultural capital, in the form of careers advice and knowledge about jobs, to gain access to spaces which provide them with economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). These teachers' experiences can be split into three levels: firstly, receiving advice about entering the teaching profession (7.4.1); secondly, being told about jobs and suggesting they apply for them (7.4.2); and finally, being given jobs without needing formal applications and interview procedures (7.4.3). As the levels increase, so does the ease with which teachers can gain teaching and leadership positions. These levels are used to structure the presentation of this sub-theme before concluding that the ways in which teachers use networks to support their career progression are stratified (7.4.4).

### *7.4.1 Advice About Entering Teaching*

Elle, Jerry, Patrick and Shona recounted instances where they used their social network of existing teachers to decide to enter the teaching profession.

Teaching has "always been" in Shona's family, which gave Shona's father and aunt knowledge (i.e., cultural capital) about entering the profession. Shona was unsure about what job to pursue once she graduated and recounted a conversation in which her father recommended teaching to her, saying she had "a calling for teaching" which she disputed. Nevertheless, Shona decided to train to teach through Teach First after her father and aunt recommended the route to her. Previous literature has discussed how some teachers saw the profession as their "calling" (e.g. Coats, 2021, p. 114; Eros, 2018, p. 410; Kwok et al., 2022, p. 587; Moses et al., 2017, p. 450; Yinon & Orland-Barak, 2017, p. 920). This analysis extends the literature by highlighting that individuals within a teacher's social network may perceive teaching as their calling and encourage them to join the profession. This introduces a secondary dimension to the "calling" literature. Other teachers in previous research, like Shona, stated that teaching is not their calling, but rather a job which can help them pursue their professional goals. For example,

Natalie's (in Coats, 2021) goal was to help children, while Shona's goal was to gain experience and build her CV. Both teachers saw teaching as a way to meet these goals. Shona and her family position teaching as a profession and Teach First as a training route which provides human capital to the teacher; to aid in their future career plans, particularly when they entered the profession without intending to remain.

Like Shona, Patrick's mother, who was a teacher, mentioned the profession when Patrick was not sure what job to pursue. Patrick's mother recommended teaching as he was "really great with children", which aligns with literature that found that teachers are influenced into the profession by their desire to work with children (e.g., Chang-Kredl & Kingsley, 2014; Currie-Knight, 2020; Dos Santos, 2019; Fuster de Hernàndez, 2020; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Redman, 2015; Reeves et al., 2021; Straubhaar & Gottfried, 2016; Wang & Wang, 2023) but adds the secondary influence of this desire, as recognised by a third party, to the existing research.

Elle benefitted from social capital whilst at sixth form (aged 16–18) in the form of careers advice from her head of sixth form who was also a PE teacher. At sixth form, she wanted to teach PE and/or science and was going to apply for a sports degree. However, her head of sixth form:

> Guided me towards going down the biology route as she pointed out the fact that with a biology degree I could teach both. Whereas, if I went more sports or sports science based, I would have to do more training in order to be a science teacher and obviously she made the point that there's not many PE teaching jobs compared to science.

Thus, Elle opted to study biology at university and then trained as a science teacher after receiving this knowledge (i.e., cultural capital) about the teaching profession. As students, it could be argued that everyone has teachers within their social network, which makes advice about pursuing teaching more accessible than other careers as teachers are relaying their direct experiences in the profession. This extends previous literature showing that teachers, often as (anti) role models, encourage students to enter teaching by highlighting how they can inform decisions about which subjects students should consider teaching (e.g., Nigar et al., 2023; Olan & Belló, 2022; Rinke et al., 2014; Wang & Wang, 2023).

After gaining a place on Teach First, Jerry met with one of the directors of Teach First to discuss his career plans, having been introduced by a mutual connection. He recounted their conversation:

> I said to her "you know, I'd love to teach science [which Teach First offered him] but equally in the future I'd love to teach psychology [his degree content]" and she was almost like "don't get ahead of yourself, let's just take this one step at a time rather than going five steps ahead." So that's always been in my head.

The advice given by a director at Teach First encouraged Jerry to focus on his present scenario, which he credited as influencing his decision to remain at his school, for now.

Alternatively, teachers can decide not to follow their teacher networks' recommendations. Ava, Jack and Polly recounted instances where they had teacher family members who tried to discourage them from teaching, while Zoe recounts how her brother trained through Teach First and tried to discourage her from the route into teaching. These teachers decided to go against their family's advice and train to teach, with Zoe training through Teach First. For example, Jack detailed how his mother, who was a teacher, provided him with a form of social capital by informing him that there was a limited amount of PE teacher jobs and to consider something else. This is similar to Elle's head of sixth form who provided her with the same insight. However, in Jack's case, and unlike Elle, he decided to continue pursuing his aspiration of being a PE teacher and ignored this advice. This is similar to Ajeet in Bergey (2021), Emma in Wang and Wang (2023), Margaret and Zanele in Cross and Ndofirepi (2015) who also ignored advice from others about the teaching profession. This demonstrates how teachers actively choose to follow or ignore the careers advice they are given by their social networks.

Having considered the advice teachers received to guide their career decisions, the next section describes instances where they were directly informed about job opportunities and encouraged to apply for these positions by social contacts.

### *7.4.2 Being Told to Apply for a Job*

Elise, Esme, Helena, Stacey and Susan recounted instances when social contacts with hiring abilities (e.g., head teachers, governors and heads of departments) told them

about job vacancies and encouraged them to apply. All teachers were successful and gained teaching positions in these instances. Helena and Susan were told about teaching vacancies in their training schools and were invited to apply by their respective head teachers. For instance, Susan recounted how she "was teaching and the head teacher came in and said, 'I'm putting a job out there, here you go' and gave me the application form". Stacey gained a teaching job as a result of "keeping in touch" with a former head teacher who told her the job was "online if you want to apply". At the time of the interview, Stacey was debating whether to apply for a new job. She had found out about this new job from her former teacher training mentor, a governor for a group of schools, with whom she had also "kept in contact with". Stacey demonstrates how keeping in contact with former leaders can benefit a teacher's career. Esme also demonstrates this in a similar manner. When Esme had to return to the UK from the UAE due to being unmarried and newly pregnant, as detailed in 7.2.1, she:

> Messaged my old head of department, who's like my second mum, to say what had happened and she said that literally that day a teacher on long-term sick had handed in her notice. So, she said "we do have a job going"... so I got in contact with the head teacher, just emailed her and she said "oh yes, we can give you a full-time teaching job. Yes, start on Monday, see you then".

Esme's experience spans across this section and the next. She found out about the job due to her connection with her previous head of department, but then was given a job, without having to apply or interview, after approaching the head teacher about the position.

Elise was informed of an art and design teaching position after a Facebook friend, who she went to school with and was now the business manager of a school, messaged her on the platform. She was "grateful" for this, as the job was only advertised on the school's website rather than mass recruitment websites. She would not have known about this job, which she subsequently secured, had it not been for her Facebook contact.

Many teachers discussed their curiosity as to whether schools identify a preferred candidate in advance, particularly when applying for teaching positions at schools where they have no connections. Indeed, Luke's unqualified teaching position led to the

school “setting up a role for” him to train to teach through the assessment only route to QTS. However, “obviously for legal reasons [Luke] had to apply for it, [he] was up against someone else, but [he] was successful”. None of the teachers provided instances where they were encouraged to apply for a teaching job and then were unsuccessful in getting that position. Thus, this may demonstrate that schools may already have preferred candidates when advertising for positions.

Building on this, the next section demonstrates instances where schools have preferred candidates but choose to circumvent formal hiring procedures.

### *7.4.3 Being Given Jobs*

Danielle, Erica, Jack, Lucy, Megan, Mia, Patrick, Paula and Sheldon were all given teaching (and for Mia, leadership) positions without having to apply or interview for these.

Mia gained a head of department position at her school through conversing with hiring managers about changing a requirement for the job which she did not meet from “essential to desirable”. Mia is agnostic and the head of RE position at her Catholic school initially required candidates to be practising Christians. This change demonstrates how Mia was able to progress into a leadership position within her school through drawing upon her connections with her head teacher and the school’s diocese to amend the job specifications. It would be interesting to know if she would have been able to do this as an external candidate, to understand whether connections with leadership influence one’s ability to amend job descriptions.

Megan, Patrick, Paula and Sheldon were offered, and accepted, jobs by the head teachers or principals at schools where they completed teaching training placements. Whilst Megan, Patrick and Paula were all offered these positions without having any interviews or observations, Sheldon had an “informal observation” with the school’s senior leadership team who said they wanted to “see how you’re doing and if we like you, we’ll offer you the job”, which resulted in a job offer. Jack was offered a PE teaching position at the school where he was working on a fixed-term contract. As a Teach First teacher, Danielle had a two-year teaching contract with her school. She recounted how the head teacher approached her and said they “would like to give me a permanent

contract for after I finish Teach First". Danielle felt it was "nice because I didn't have to worry about looking for a new school". These instances demonstrate how social capital acquired through working within a school can provide teachers with teaching positions that circumvent applications and competition with other teachers.

Lucy recounts three instances in which she gained teaching jobs after being recruited by head teachers and employers on LinkedIn. She reflected that "basically my whole career has been driven by LinkedIn". However, she has decided that in the future she will not accept offers from recruiters on LinkedIn as these "seem to be looking for heads of departments and I feel like I've missed out on having the experience to learn from someone above me". This demonstrates how social capital can be formed with hiring managers (i.e., head teachers) online, despite not having a prior working relationship with them, using digital capital (Ignatow & Robinson, 2017). This contrasts the analysis thus far in this sub-theme, as the other teachers recounted instances where head teachers or hiring managers they had previously worked with helped them gain employment.

Sheldon would potentially use his social network to gain employment as he stated that he would consider accepting help from his family members to secure a job in the future:

> I mean my auntie, she runs an all-girls private school, maybe nepotism will happen? I wouldn't be complaining but it's not something that was factored into the decision [to enter teaching], I wasn't thinking that's where I'll be ending up. If it happens me and my partner will be over the moon [but] if it doesn't happen, it doesn't happen.

Sheldon sees his family as a form of social capital which could help him progress in the teaching profession.

Overall, these instances demonstrate how social capital operates by privileging teachers who possess connections to hiring managers, enabling them to circumvent formal hiring procedures. This type of social capital is the most advantageous in securing teaching positions, when compared to the other uses of social capital (i.e., advice in 7.4.1 and being informed about jobs in 7.4.2). This concludes the presentation of this sub-theme. The next section consolidates the main arguments provided for this sub-theme and directs the reader to the final sub-theme.

### *7.4.4 Socially Boosted Conclusion*

This section has presented *the social influence* sub-theme of the *socially boosted*, which shows how some teachers use their social networks to advance their careers. The use of social networks to advance their careers demonstrates how teachers' social capital, and the subsequent cultural capital they transmit to these teachers, influences their career decision-making. Being socially boosted demonstrates not only that teaching is a profession in which social contacts can be useful to gain employment, but also that there is a stratification of network using. This stratification is evident from the three levels presented in this analysis: gaining advice, being told to apply for a job and being given jobs. I posit two arguments based on this stratification.

Firstly, I argue that each level presented in this section involves using a different type of social capital, resulting in a stratification of social capital. The first level of being socially boosted (advice about entering teaching) is typically comprised of family and friends. The second and third levels of being socially boosted (being told about jobs and being given jobs) are mostly comprised of professional connections. Previous professional connections (i.e., connections from previous work/training) inform the teachers about jobs. Current professional connections (i.e., those within the same current school) give teachers jobs without any formal application or interview process. This suggests a stratification of social capital which creates an unequal participation within the teaching labour market.

Secondly, although causal inferences cannot be proposed within this qualitative study, the gender composition of the teachers in the different levels may align with previous research which indicates that men are strongly associated with career progression (e.g., Booth et al., 2021). Indeed, the first two levels of being socially boosted (advice about entering teaching and being told to apply for a job) are dominated by women; only Patrick, as a man, used his network for advice about entering teaching. The men who contributed to the development of this sub-theme are largely found within the highest level of social network use (being given jobs). This may suggest a gendered pattern of social network use when advancing careers; the men in the sample more often use their social networks to gain employment, rather than for careers advice or information about potential jobs.

The next section continues examining the influence of teachers' social networks on their career decision-making, presenting the final social influence sub-theme of *wisdom on loan*.

## 7.5 Wisdom on Loan

*Wisdom on loan* refers to instances in which teachers drew upon other people's realities, opinions and/or values when making career decisions. This sub-theme was developed using deductive codes related to the concepts introduced in the theoretical framework chapter (3). Appendix P shows examples of coding extracts for this sub-theme.

This sub-theme extends Archer's (2003) concept of communicative reflexivity through engaging in criticisms of this concept (e.g., Burkitt, 2012; Caetano, 2014). Communicative reflexivity, as defined by Archer (2003), refers to a two-step process for mediating decision-making. The first step involves the individual engaging in an internal conversation (i.e., dialogue with oneself). The second step involves the individual sharing and discussing these problems and potential solutions with another person, most often a trusted individual such as a family member, to decide upon an appropriate action. Many have expanded upon Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity to include the impact of emotions (Burkitt, 2012), conversations with others (Caetano, 2014) and to counter Archer's (2010b, p. 136) claim that communicative reflexivity is on the decline as "socialisation isn't what it used to be".

Within this sub-theme, I introduce the concept of elaborated communicative reflexivity, which combines Archer's (2003) traditional definition (7.5.1) with new elements, namely external conversations and imagined futures through others (7.5.2). Furthermore, I demonstrate how communicative reflexivity links with Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus, as teachers drew on family influences to negotiate their career decisions with familial and cultural expectations (7.5.3).

This section concludes with three arguments. First, communicative reflexivity can be expanded to include how external conversations and imagined futures through others can influence reflexive deliberations. Second, reflexivity and habitus can be used together to understand career decision-making, despite assertions that the two are not compatible (e.g., Archer, 2010a). Third, communicative reflexivity is still undertaken in the present day, despite Archer's (2010a) claim that it is on the decline.

### *7.5.1 Traditional Communicative Reflexivity*

Elise, Erica, Saskia, Sheldon and Shona all recalled instances where they appeared to engage in communicative reflexivity. Rather than labelling these teachers as communicative reflexives, as Archer (2003) does in her study of different types of reflexivity, I propose that the teachers outlined here offer instances where they engage in communicative reflexivity. This does not necessarily mean that all reflexivity they engage in is of this type. This is justified as Archer's (2003) study asks individuals to discuss instances where they have engaged in the internal conversation, and thus, Archer is able to group participants by their mode of reflexivity whereas this study did not ask about internal conversations. Rather this analysis came from abductive coding during the reflexive thematic analysis in which I was reminded of this mode of reflexivity whilst coding these participants' transcripts. Furthermore, Archer (2003) states that communicative reflexives show little geographical flexibility, due to contextual congruity, which may be the case for Elise, Saskia and Sheldon but does not apply to Erica and Shona. Thus, this analysis does not label these teachers as communicative reflexives, but rather, instances they recalled in which they engage in communicative reflexivity.

**7.5.1.1 Elise, her Partner and the Temporary Head of Year Position.** When discussing her decision to apply for the temporary head of year (maternity leave cover) position, as first mentioned in 7.2.3.1, she cited a conversation with her partner as a decisive influence in her choice to apply:

> I said to my partner at the time "do you know what, I don't know what to do" and he kind of persuaded me actually and he said "the thing is Elise, the time is never going to be right, it's only maternity so if you don't like it you can finish at the end of maternity and it's really good to put on your CV" so I thought "yeah it kind of makes sense what he's saying" so I thought "you know what, yeah that's good advice, maybe I should show willing and apply"... long story short, I got it.

Elise exhibited communicative reflexivity in this career decision as she had a problem she could not solve using her own internal conversation, as would be the case with autonomous reflexivity. A discussion with her partner was required to help her decide on an action. Engaging in communicative reflexivity led Elise to apply and get the

position, which later turned into a permanent head of year TLR. This demonstrates how engaging in communicative reflexivity influenced Elise's career decision-making and the trajectory of her career.

**7.5.1.2 Erica, her Mother and Leaving Teaching.** Erica described how she became disillusioned with teaching after a difficult year of teaching and supporting students with challenging behaviour. Her leadership team did not recognise her hard work, and she was rejected for the SENCO position despite already carrying out many of the associated responsibilities as the assistant SENCO. She began looking for consultancy jobs in London but was unsure of whether to pursue a consultancy job or remain in the teaching profession. So, she turned to her mother to help her decide what to do about this problem:

> I had a conversation with my mum, which I mean everyone has these kinds of conversations, and she just kind of said to me "look, you've never wanted to do a job for the money. So, I don't think you should just do it to earn more money. I think if you're doing something you love that it'll just come naturally". And, yeah, I think I kind of did agree with that. I've never really been worried about salary or what I was earning, so I mean those [consultancy] jobs, your job is to try and earn companies more money. So, after that conversation I thought, "actually, that's yeah, really not me". And so yeah, that was the reason. I think the other reason is, I obviously do love teaching. And I thought "why am I going to stop doing something I love and was so passionate about and good at just because of one bad year?" And I think that's quite common in teaching, you know, you always think about the worst things. You have to remember all of the amazing stuff that goes on. And that's why I kind of decided I'll give it another shot. I'll do another year, and then I'll decide, which was quite a tough decision to make.

Erica appeared to add a third step to communicative reflexivity. Firstly, she recognised a problem she needed help solving by talking to her mother. Secondly, she discussed this problem with her mother who told her that she had never wanted a job for money and advised her to do something she loved. Thirdly, Erica then reflected on this conversation and agreed with her mother's statement. This led her to decide not to apply for consultancy jobs, to reflect on her passions and to conclude that she loved teaching and would not let the bad year deter her from the profession. Although it may appear that Erica engaged in autonomous reflexivity (i.e., when inner conversations require no confirmation from others, Archer, 2003), the idea that Erica should do something she

loved came from her mother. Therefore, this demonstrates how engaging in communicative reflexivity helped Erica remain in the profession.

**7.5.1.3 Sheldon, his Partner and Parents, and Becoming a Teacher.** When Sheldon was in the final year of his undergraduate degree in mathematics, he was uncertain about what graduate career to pursue. He decided to consult his partner and parents to decide what graduate jobs he should apply for:

> I was talking to my partner, talking to my parents about sort of "what do I do at this point?" And they said, "well, you've kept saying throughout the whole degree that the bit you enjoy doing the most, and then the bit that you've missed out on the most, is being able to talk about the maths and teach people it and so support people. And you did that all the time when you're in school, and you've been doing that the whole way through [your degree]. Why not go into teaching?" And I thought, "well, yeah, that's a good point". And then actually I was thinking you get to share the fun bits, you get to help people, you get to teach. Morally, it feels a lot better to be thinking sort of "I'm not going to an office job to make someone else money. I'm going to a job to try and do good for people". Like this feels like something that I'm going to be going home in an evening and not thinking I've done something bad today. I'm going to be thinking "this, this was good". So, at that point I was looking at Get into Teaching [the government website].

Comments from Sheldon's partner and parents indicate that they knew what he wanted from employment. This is similar to Erica's mother who also detailed an understanding of what she sought from employment. This may demonstrate why, as Archer (2003) states, people engage in communicative reflexivity with trusted people such as family members rather than strangers since they can offer personalised guidance. Like Erica, Sheldon referred to not wanting to "make someone else money", after discussing his desires from a job with his partner and parents. Thus, when trusted others highlighted the enjoyment of a job through communicative reflexivity, the moral satisfaction of teaching appeared to attract Sheldon to the profession.

**7.5.1.4 Shona, her Father and Helping her Through a Bad Day.** Unlike the other teachers in this sub-theme, Shona appeared to consistently engage in communicative reflexivity, most notably with her father, who supported her during "the difficult days" she experienced whilst training to teach:

> I think my dad in particular is a very like practical, logistical man. So, if I've had a bad day, my mum is very much like I'll get a hug and like a cup of tea made, and we can have a cry about it. Then my dad, he's like "okay, this is the problem. This is how we fix it". And I think the balance of the two worked really well, so I could go and have my cry with like my mum first, and then could then go to my dad and kind of get "right, this is what we're going to do this time [and] this is what we're going to do next time" like that. Because I think sometimes when you're in that mind frame you can't like see how to fix it. So yeah, that was a huge support.

Shona suggested that she relied more on the second part of communicative reflexivity (i.e., the discussion with a trusted other) than the first part of the internal conversation. Her comment, "when she's in that mind frame you can't see how to fix it", suggested that perhaps she could not engage in an internal conversation to fix her problems. This could even be interpreted as an instance of fractured reflexivity (i.e., when internal conversations exacerbate our confusion and lead to inaction). For Shona, engaging in communicative reflexivity involved her father helping identify her problems and "fix" them. As such, her family was credited as a significant source of support in completing her teacher training year and becoming a teacher.

**7.5.1.5 Saskia, her Mother and Deciding not to Work at a Hospice.** Saskia offered an instance which could be interpreted as engaging in communicative reflexivity. Unlike the other teachers, her reflexive exchange with a trusted other was briefly described before moving onto different thoughts she had during the interview. Still, Saskia's comments demonstrated how she briefly used her mother to confirm her internal dialogue. After discussing the role of a play therapist at a hospice for children with someone who works there, Saskia had a conversation with her mother about changing her career plans from working at a hospice to becoming a teacher:

> I just sat there to my mum about, and I was like "yeah, I'm emotionally unstable at the best of times, let alone having to deal with parents that have lost their children". And I just knew I couldn't do it.

Saskia did not recount what her mother said during this conversation, which suggests that engaging in communicative reflexivity for her was about using her trusted other (i.e., her mother) to confirm her next action, or in this case, the action she would not be taking, which ultimately led to her decision to become a teacher.

**7.5.1.6 Traditional Communicative Reflexivity Conclusion.** Overall, this analysis may suggest that there are different types of engagement with communicative reflexivity. A continuum of engagement could be seen starting from Saskia, who engaged minimally with her mother when confirming her decision, to Shona, who engaged more extensively with her father to identify the problem and develop solutions. Nevertheless, these teachers suggest that trusted others can influence their career decision-making through engaging with them in communicative reflexivity, as defined by Archer (2003). The next section transitions from Archer's (2003) traditional conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity to include new ways in which teachers appeared to use others to guide their decision-making.

### *7.5.2 Expanding Communicative Reflexivity*

Expanding communicative reflexivity refers to adding to Archer's (2003) conceptualisation of the concept. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity has been criticised for ignoring the role of emotion and focusing only on the outcome of reflexivity (i.e., action), rather than its formation or process. Building on both the concept of communicative reflexivity and these criticisms, I theorise two concepts: external conversations and imagined futures through others.

**7.5.2.1 External Conversations.** I define external conversations as instances when individuals engage in conversations with others to reflect upon previous events, current circumstances and potential actions. Unlike Archer's (2003) definition of communicative reflexivity, these external conversations do not need to follow internal conversation and can instead prompt deliberation on their own. Lucy, Mia and Polly discussed how colleagues influenced them to progress into, and in Lucy's case also stay in, leadership positions at their respective schools through engaging in external conversations.

Lucy, Mia and Polly engaged in external conversations with their departmental colleagues, which led them both to secure departmental leadership positions. Mia was not intending on applying to be the head of her department when the position became open. However, she was encouraged by her colleagues who said, "we really want you to

be our head of department… so for them to say 'we want you' was the push to make me really go for it". In this instance, Mia's colleagues prompted communicative reflexivity for Mia by initiating an external conversation in which Mia then deliberated the action of applying for this position. Similarly, Lucy was offered a head of department position after finishing her Teach First training. She discussed how she engaged in, what I call, external conversations with her departmental colleagues in which their reassurance that she would be "a good fit for the job" influenced her decision to accept the position. Polly discussed whether she had enough experience to apply for a second in department position with her colleague who was, currently, the second in department. Her colleague pointed out that "you're Teach First, it's a leadership programme and obviously they're going to try to get you into that position, aren't they?" This encouraged her to apply and get the position. Although they did not discuss whether they engaged in internal conversations to deliberate these discussions, it can be reasonably inferred that a form of this reflection occurred. Nevertheless, their omission of internal deliberation and emphasis on conversations with colleagues highlights the importance they placed on these external conversations for shaping their decisions to pursue these positions.

Lucy engaged in external conversations again with her principal, later in her career, which influenced her decision to remain at her employing school and not move to another school for a promotion. After securing a head of department position, Lucy decided to apply for assistant principal roles at other schools to gain experience with the application process, with the intention of drawing on this later when she felt "ready" to pursue these positions. After applying for one role, she was invited for an interview. Lucy told her principal that she would be attending the interview for the experience but had no intention of accepting the position. When she was offered the job and she told her principal that she was thinking about accepting it, she recalled his reaction: "he was really angry, I do get it, like no loyalty from me, he felt a bit betrayed". "Because the reactions were so strong and I wanted to show that they could trust me", she turned down the job. This aligns with Burkitt's (2012) work on how other people's communication of their emotions can affect internal deliberations on what action to take. Thus, external conversations can be used as an arena to express and

communicate emotions that others have about potential actions, which may influence decision-making.

Polly's mentor initiated communicative reflexivity by engaging Polly in an external conversation about the type of school that would enable her to remain in the profession in the long term. She described how her mentor told her "quite early on in [her] career" how she thought "if you're going to stay in teaching, you need to be in a grammar school". Polly agreed with this as she believes:

> I am happiest when I am doing that. When I'm finding more research, and I'm stretching students. That's what I love. I hate the kind of behaviour management kind of aspect of teaching; that's really not my bag.

As stated in chapter three, Archer's (2003, p. 167) communicative reflexivity is defined as "thought then talk": individuals engaging in internal conversations before presenting these to others to confirm their plans for their actions. However, Polly appeared to reverse this and engaged in talk and then thought: her mentor suggested what type of school she thought would enable Polly to remain in teaching, which Polly then thinks about and confirms. This adds another layer to Archer's conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity and expands its definition to include this inverted process. Furthermore, Archer (2003) discusses how those engaging in communicative reflexivity often rely upon contextual continuity (i.e., drawing upon relationships forged from childhood that remain intact in adulthood), which is eroding from our lives and being replaced with contextual discontinuity (i.e., new relationships and networks being forged due to the instability of long-lasting relationships). Archer (2003) argues that engaging in communicative reflexivity is on the decline due to the decrease in contextual continuity and the increase in contextual discontinuity. However, Polly drew upon a newer relationship forged with her mentor, which could demonstrate how contextual discontinuity can provide a way for individuals to engage in communicative reflexivity.

Within each instance, these teachers engaged in what I call external conversations, i.e., reflective conversations with others, as opposed to solitary internal conversations, which expands Archer's (2003) traditional conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity. These instances counter the traditional process of internally deliberating and

then confirming these plans with others, which constitutes Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity. Instead, they show how actions can be introduced by others starting conversations (e.g., Mia's colleagues asking her to apply for the position or Polly's mentor's opinion on how she should work in a grammar school), through reassuring dialogue between teachers and their colleagues (e.g., Lucy and Polly) and how the confirmation stage of Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity can be declined by others (e.g., Lucy's principal displaying his anger in her taking a new position). These empirical examples help expand the conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity.

Interestingly, no teachers mention instances where they were encouraged by colleagues but did not get these positions; where their colleagues advised not to apply for a position, and either they followed this advice and did not apply, or they went against this advice and applied. It is difficult to ascertain whether this is because these scenarios did not happen or whether participants chose to omit these instances.

Previous literature often defines support given by colleagues with reference to helping them with their workload or sharing best practice to work more effectively (Ferrari, 2016; Harfitt, 2015; Kutsyuruba et al., 2018; Mombaers et al., 2023). Therefore, in addition to expanding upon conceptualisations of communicative reflexivity, this analysis adds to the literature by showing how teachers' colleagues can be supportive of career progression, which encourages teachers to apply for leadership positions and, thus, remain within their employing schools.

**7.5.2.2 Imagined Futures Through Others.** I define imagined futures through others as when individuals use other people's emotions and experiences to decide whether they want to pursue a similar choice. As reflections are not discussed or confirmed with others, some may argue that imagined futures through others should be classified as a form of autonomous reflexivity. However, I categorise it as an extension of communicative reflexivity. Archer (2003, p. 167) states that communicative reflexivity involves "having raised an issue intra-personally, [then] resolving it inter-personally". Imagined futures through others involves this intra-personal reflexivity which is informed by others' actions. In this, the concept stands as a middle ground between the

intra-personal and inter-personal. Grace and Katherine both detailed instances in which they engaged in imagining futures through others to deliberate their career decisions.

Katherine expressed how observing her teaching colleagues' experiences and emotions influenced her to leave teaching:

> I always look at other people who are in the job, who've been there for a long time and I think "do I want to be you in like 20 years?" and obviously there were some teachers who had been really successful, they'd started off teaching and risen up through the ranks and achieved really cool things with the impact they had made. But then there was a lot of teachers who were kind of stuck, like my mentor for example, she's like 40 but she has had a lot of frustrations in her career about all of the times when she had not had the recognition she had wanted or maybe she had an opportunity but circumstances made it difficult to succeed or she'd been screwed over in some way by like her boss or the system. And I know a lot of teachers where they've been there for a long time and they are sitting in the aftermath of a lot of disappointments and I just thought "that's not what I want". That, together with the fear of getting into trouble through having conflict with a teacher, a parent or a student, made me think "I have to leave teaching".

Katherine's comments demonstrate the role of emotions and age when imagining futures through others. Katherine recognised both the positives and negatives of teaching through others by identifying "successful", "stuck" and "disappointed" teachers. However, she focused on the "stuck" and "disappointed" teachers when deciding whether to remain or leave the profession. This adds a new layer to the role of emotions within communicative reflexivity, to suggest that others' negative feelings of their jobs influence viewers' decision-making (Burkitt, 2012). It also suggests that age contributes to imagining futures through others, as Katherine looked to teachers around 20 years older than herself when deciding whether to remain or leave the profession. Looking to older individuals when imagining their futures through others was also a part of Grace's reflexive process.

After getting rejected by a graduate scheme, Grace "had a massive rethink" of her career decisions and deduced that "the little things that I've done over the course of my life pointed me to teaching". She reflected on why teaching was her "plan B" and not her "plan A":

> I came to the conclusion that it was never my plan A as a teenager because I was fearful of the life that my cousin was leading. So, my cousin is a teacher

> but she, I don't know what's a polite way to describe it, she's not living her best life. She's really struggled to enjoy her job. She never talks positively about teaching. She is single, which should not be a marker of success whatsoever, but she desperately wants to have a partner, and I think teaching isn't always the career where you get to just meet people like you do with other careers. So, I think my cousin's unhappiness led me to not want to pursue teaching for a really long time.

Seeing her older cousin's experience with teaching initially discouraged her from the profession. However, after being unsuccessful in her planned career, she returned to the idea of teaching, this time with higher levels of self-confidence that she would not succumb to the same unhappiness as her cousin. This highlights the importance of looking at career decisions across a trajectory. If Grace were included in a study on why university students do not want to be teachers, it could be theorised that this experience influences this decision, when this study suggests that it does initially (for a few years) before ultimately being overridden by other reasons to teach. However, previous literature suggests that the dissuasion of teaching by a family member could also come later. For instance, Emily in Bowling and Wakeling (2025, p. 18), as mentioned previously, was a teacher until she became a mother. She decided to leave the profession, as "it's not compatible with the parent and family life", after witnessing her father, who was a teacher, neglect his family in favour of his students. Thus, family members' influence on the choice of teaching could fluctuate across an individual's life, depending on their personal circumstances and their mindset.

This analysis suggests that others can be used, often without them being aware, to inform career decisions. These decisions often draw upon second-hand experiences and opinions as a trusted source of information or, in Katherine's case, as a way of envisioning her own future if she remained within the profession. This expands upon the traditional conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity by adding the role of others within the internal conversation; internal deliberations are influenced by how a person's life appears to them and whether they imagine themselves following a similar path, or not due to a stronger belief that they will not succumb to the same negative emotions.

**7.5.2.3 Expanding Communicative Reflexivity Conclusion.** Overall, the concepts of external conversations and imagined futures through others suggest that

teachers engage in new forms of communicative reflexivity which can be used to create an elaborated conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity. This expanded form of reflexivity counters Archer's (2010a) claim that communicative reflexivity is declining in present times by suggesting that it operates in different forms to this traditional conceptualisation. The next section continues challenging Archer's (2010a) claims by linking her and Bourdieu's (1977) theories together in examining how communicative reflexivity can be used to negotiate teachers' habituses.

### *7.5.3 Using Communicative Reflexivity to Negotiate the Habitus*

Elizabeth, Iqra, Lena, Lucy, Olivia, Polly and Shona all recounted instances where they engaged in, both traditional and expanded, communicative reflexivity to negotiate their career decisions with their families. Engaging in communicative reflexivity involved teachers' families communicating their expectations and then the teachers drawing upon these to adhere to their habituses (i.e., deeply ingrained ways of thinking, feeling and dispositions acquired through socialisation; Bourdieu, 1977). Expectations were shaped both by social class and by positive and negative views of teaching.

**7.5.3.1 Middle-Class and Working-Class Expectations.** Elizabeth, Polly and Olivia negotiated family expectations shaped by social class when entering and progressing within teaching. While Elizabeth and Polly appeared to negotiate a middle-class habitus, Olivia navigated a working-class habitus.

Elizabeth and Polly's parents transmitted middle-class knowledge about careers to these teachers, which they used to negotiate their entry into, and progression within, teaching. When Elizabeth and Polly told their parents that they wanted to be teachers, both of their parents advised them to do something else before they went into teaching. Elizabeth's parents (and her schoolteachers) "strongly encouraged" her "not to do an education degree or an early childhood degree", when she voiced her desire to teach whilst at secondary school:

> I was being told that, that [those degrees] would basically limit my options, whereas if I did a general undergraduate degree in another subject, I could then, if I still wanted to at 21 [after she graduated], do a PGCE. So, I took the advice on board, basically I was like "okay, I'm going to study something else".

Polly's mother gave her similar advice:

> My mum she said "I don't think you should go straight into education. I think you need some time out of it before you go back in. I think you're, kind of, limiting your worldview a little bit." So, I kind of had influence from other people going, "actually, this [teaching straight after university] is a bad idea", and I suppose to a point I sort of started listening to them a bit more.

Both Elizabeth and Polly's parents described going straight into teaching as "limit(ing)". This view positions teaching as a temporary job or one they might later consider. These external conversations were often prompted by others and show how communicative reflexivity can be extended beyond Archer's (2003) two-step process of engaging in internal conversation followed by a confirming conversation with others. This also shows how Elizabeth and Polly's parents exhibited knowledge about the use of educational degrees within the workforce, for example, favouring broad academic degrees (e.g., psychology, which Elizabeth studied at university as a result of this advice) over specialised degrees such as early childhood studies or education studies; as well as favouring work experience outside of the education sector over joining teaching directly after graduating from university. This knowledge is a form of cultural capital that these parents transmitted to their children through this advice (Bourdieu, 1977). Although Elizabeth and Polly ultimately became teachers, there are marked class differences when compared to other teachers: Elizabeth is a part-time teacher, full-time funded PhD student at a Russell Group university who plans to intern at Harvard University during her studies; while Polly has already progressed to a leadership position as second in department during her ECT1 year after building a "great working relationship" with her school's leadership team. After following their parents' advice both trained to teach through Teach First, which has been described as a training route for the middle-class (Smart et al., 2009). This demonstrates how Elizabeth and Polly reproduce a middle-class habitus, through engaging in communicative reflexivity which involves family members communicating their expectations about their work.

Olivia drew upon her working-class family's value of self-reliance when explaining her choice of teacher training route. Olivia discussed how she was "lucky" to have parents who "really understood" when she left university, worked in retail and returned to university later in life with their financial support. However, when she told her parents

she wanted to train to teach, they said she would need to be "self-sufficient". Olivia recounted that she understood her parents' withdrawal of financial support once she had graduated because there was an "expectation" in her self-defined working-class family "to make your own money". Olivia took this external conversation and used it to deliberate her available options for funded teacher training, which led her to obtain a government bursary for the School Direct (tuition fee) route. This demonstrates how the working-class necessity of "work[ing] for something if they want it" (Keane, 2024, p. 461), communicated through communicative reflexivity, influenced Olivia's career decision-making.

**7.5.3.2 Families' Views of Teaching.** Iqra, Lena, Lucy and Shona detailed instances where they negotiated their respective families' career expectations when joining the teaching profession.

Lena and Shona both expressed instances where their respective families' job ideals, which favoured teaching, led them to the profession. Lena chose teaching after she felt "a push for a kind of vocational route" from her family when discussing her future career decisions with them, an influence she attributed to "coming from a family of doctors and teachers". This is similar to the teachers in the literature review (section 2.7.1.3), whose career choices were shaped by relatives in teaching (Bradley, 2023; Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Coats, 2021; Ewing, 2021; Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Kwok et al., 2022; Olan & Belló, 2022; Pozderac et al., 2022; Prabjandee, 2015; Randi & Zumwalt, 2017; Redman, 2015; Siostrom et al., 2023). However, this analysis adds to the literature by showing how family approval of certain vocational field shapes career decisions. For Shona, teaching has similarly "always been in the family" and, as outlined in section 7.4.1, advice from her father and aunt created a similar "push" (Lena) to enter teaching. She engaged in an external conversation with her father, during which they argued about her suitability for the profession:

> He mentioned teaching and I was like "no, not teaching, I don't want to teach". He said "you have a calling for teaching", [I said] "I don't have a calling for teaching", [he said] "you've always taught dance and you really enjoy it", [I said], "that's different, that's not the same".

Nevertheless, she joined teaching after her aunt told her about Teach First, she read about it and decided:

> Okay, well, this [Teach First] isn't actually designed for people who want to be teachers, this is just something to do for 2 years and gain experience, build up my CV, they offer like the summer placement, so I can go try other schemes, so I signed up.

This shows how Shona negotiated her family's drive for her to enter teaching by following their advice but selecting a training route which would allow her to, from her perspective, easily leave the profession in the future. Both Lena and Shona used conversations with their families and their approval of teaching to reflexively decide to enter the profession. In Lena's case, she chose teaching out of available vocational routes as the best option for her, thus negotiating cultural pressures. In Shona's case, she entered teaching on her family's advice, even though she was reluctant to teach. After reflexive thought she chose to train through Teach First. She saw this as the best way to try teaching while maintaining the opportunity to move into another career later, due to Teach First's two-year contract and platinum partners (e.g., Deloitte). Together, these cases demonstrate how reflexive negotiation allowed Lena and Shona to navigate family pressures.

Iqra and Lucy demonstrated exceptions to taking advice from their family. Both of their families had a negative view of teaching. For Iqra:

> My family felt like I could do something better than teaching. So, I looked at tech, did a summer internship and got a job offer but I've chosen to defer that so I can do Teach First, if I still feel like teaching at the end of the two years, then I have the option of tech… I think they wanted me to become a doctor, I don't know whether it's the same in all cultures, but in South Asian culture, they value engineers. Doctors and teachers kind of get seen as "well you're wasting your skills on secondary school".

Iqra's experience is similar to Ajeet's in Bergey (2021) who discussed cultural pressures relating to career decisions as an Asian American man. Although Ajeet discussed how teaching was seen as a woman's job, Iqra illustrated that this is not her experience. This counters Lena's experience, outlined above, who insinuated that her family respects both doctors and teachers and values them equally. Therefore, this suggests that each family has their own opinions, which can impact upon reflexive thought.

Although Lucy is White, she also related to Ajeet's experience, in which law is a socially acceptable profession, as her father tried to discourage her from teaching, due to the long working hours for the pay, and encouraged her instead to consider law "if [she] wanted to work long hours". Nevertheless, these teachers went against their family's expectations and advice and became teachers. However, both Iqra and Lucy commented that their family can now see how hard working they are as teachers, which suggests a level of approval since entering the profession. This may illustrate secondary *amor fati*, i.e., embracing Iqra and Lucy's career choices as something they cannot control, which adds a secondary element to Bourdieu's (1997) interpretation of the concept. Alternatively, this could suggest that these family members engaged in a form of reflexivity to change their opinions towards the teaching profession. This could highlight how Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach illuminates how the family, as a structural institution, operates: certain family members (namely, parents) are corporate agents, holding the ability to transform or reproduce ideas about acceptable occupations for other family members. The participants are primary agents, shaped by these structures, who also prompted a shift in dominant family discourse, and negotiated these to fit their families' ideals. This may reveal insights into how reflexivity operates as a process which does not have an end-action as its ultimate aim, as Caetano (2014) criticises Archer for focusing on. However, it is difficult to ascertain this as these parents were not the focus of the research and, thus, not spoken to about their (changing) opinions. It would be interesting to see if these teachers sustain their careers with continued family approval, or whether family pressures will compel them to switch to a culturally acceptable occupation.

#### 7.5.3.3 Using Communicative Reflexivity to Negotiate the Habitus

**Conclusion.** Overall, this analysis shows how teachers use communicative reflexivity to negotiate their habitus and cultural pressures. I argue that this analysis adds the concept of a negotiated habitus to existing social theory which draws upon Bourdieu's (1977) habitus. The closest type of habitus that this analysis relates to is Ingram and Abraham's (2016) reconciled habitus (i.e., integrating elements of previous and new habitus). However, within this analysis new habituses do not appear to be present;

instead, the negotiated habitus involves using communicative reflexivity to adhere to existing habitus while maintaining their individual desires.

### *7.5.4 Wisdom on Loan Conclusion*

This section has presented *the social influence* sub-theme of *wisdom on loan* by demonstrating how teachers drew upon other people's experiences, thoughts and values (i.e., what I refer to as their wisdom) when making career decisions. I have shown instances of traditional communicative reflexivity, an expanded form of communicative reflexivity and how communicative reflexivity can be used to negotiate a teacher's habitus. This section has provided empirical examples which support three arguments.

First, communicative reflexivity can be expanded to include how external conversations and imagined futures through others shape reflexive deliberations. External conversations refer to conversations with others which invoke reflexivity to deliberate actions, thoughts and experiences. This concept moves away from Archer's (2003, p. 167) idea that communicative reflexivity is initiated within internal conversations, the "thought then talk" model, by showing how it can be initiated directly in the "talk" phase. Imagined futures through others refers to when individuals use other people's emotions and experiences to decide whether they want to pursue a similar choice. Positioned between intra-personal and inter-personal methods of reflexivity, this illustrates how others can influence actions often without realising they are doing so. Together, these concepts provide new insights into how communicative reflexivity can explain decision-making processes.

Second, reflexivity and habitus can be used together to understand career decision-making, despite assertions that the two are not compatible (e.g., Archer, 2010a). The teachers demonstrated how they engage in communicative reflexivity with family members to deliberate and adhere to existing habitual dispositions, expectations and attitudes while still pursuing individual desires. As a result, career choices are enacted through a negotiated habitus.

Third, communicative reflexivity is still enacted in the present day, despite Archer's (2010a) assertion that it is on the decline. This chapter has demonstrated how it is engaged with both in its traditional form, as Archer (2003) conceptualised, and newer

modes through external conversations, imagined futures through others and negotiating family expectations. Thus, communicative reflexivity persists today in an expanded form of borrowing wisdom from others.

*Wisdom on loan* is the final sub-theme within the overarching *social influence* theme. This section therefore closes the presentation of this theme. The next section concludes the *social influence* theme by demonstrating how this theme contributes towards the central argument of this thesis: that teaching is a people profession.

## 7.6 The Social Influence Conclusion

This chapter has presented the overarching theme of *the social influence* of others on career decisions through outlining the five sub-themes which constitute this theme: *homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced*, *mentored into momentum*, *socially boosted* and *wisdom on loan*.

Looking across the sub-themes, I argue that this overarching theme supports the argument that teaching is a people profession. Indeed, as the systematic review (in chapter 2) found, previous research suggests that students, families, principals, administrators, leaders and previous teachers influence teachers' career decisions. However, the analysis presented through the sub-themes suggests that this can be extended to explore how these people influence teachers' career trajectories and how the concepts of home, social and cultural capital and communicative reflexivity elaborate upon other people's influence. Therefore, this highlights the value of examining teachers' career trajectories for understanding the social influences shaping their career decisions.

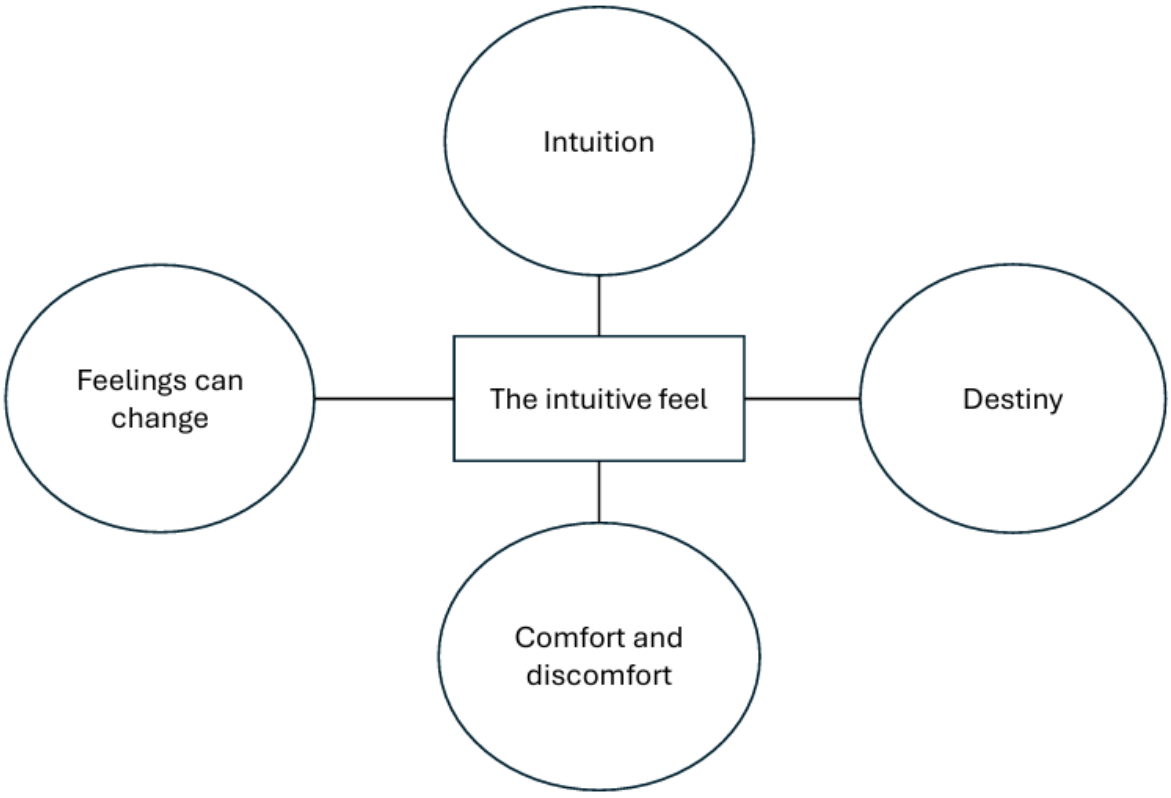
Having presented the social influence theme, the next chapter outlines the third and final theme of this thesis: *the intuitive feel* of career decisions.

# 8 The Intuitive Feel

This theme was created from grouping codes which labelled instances where the teachers discussed how intangible feelings guided their career decisions. Appendix Q shows examples of coding extracts for this theme. Thematic mapping was used to explore how the codes related to each other, and the final thematic map is shown in figure 8 (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

**Figure 8.**

*The Intuitive Feel Thematic Map*




*Note.* The theme is in the square. The codes are in the circles. Shapes are not to scale and do not represent how much the theme or codes constitutes teachers' career decision-making in a quantifiable sense.

Teachers in this theme drew upon intangible, rather than explicit emotional (e.g., happy or sad), feelings which guided their career decisions. These feelings were difficult to explain when I probed teachers, which represents the ineffable yet preconscious nature of these feelings. Nevertheless, during coding, I found that teachers referred to a range of concepts and ideas which help explain these intangible feelings. These include

instincts, gut feelings and intuition (8.1), destiny, fate and luck (8.2), comfort and discomfort (8.3). Teachers also discussed how these feelings can change as environments change (8.4). This chapter examines how each of these concepts influenced teachers' career decision-making before concluding with two arguments. First, the analysis challenges Archer's (2010a) argument that reflexivity is more capable than pre-reflexive dispositions of explaining human action (e.g., career decisions). Second, the reconciled theoretical framework allows for exploring how teachers engage in Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice and its continued influence, without rejecting the relevance of Archer's (2003) reflexivity.

## 8.1 Intuition

Paula, Jennifer, Julia and Susan referred to their "instincts" (Paula) and "gut" (Jennifer and Julia) "feelings" (Susan) when discussing how they made career decisions. Paula described how she did not plan her career decisions but rather, "it's been the right place at the right time and some of it is knowing when to say yes and, you know, trust in your instincts and all of those things" (Paula). Jennifer discussed how she chooses to work in schools based on "the feeling you get, I think that's always going to be something that I will look for, you know, my gut feeling". Susan attributed this feeling to the people:

> Having gone to that school that had the bad reputation [during her training, which she enjoyed] because you've just got to go there and feel. You get a feeling, don't you? You know about the people, the staff and the children. It just feels right.

Like Susan, Jennifer and Paula used the term "you know" when attempting to explain these feelings, which may denote how they view drawing upon their instincts, and their gut is as a ubiquitous experience. When discussing whether to stay in teaching, Julia was unsure about her future. She drew upon her instincts in helping her make this decision in the future: "I'd like to think that I would go with whatever my gut is telling me to do, whether that be actually sticking to teaching or not". These teachers highlighted the importance of their own intuition within their career decisions. According to Bourdieu's (1990, p. 66) theory of practice, individuals act in ways which "feel" right. These feelings are developed through prior experiences and socialisation (Bourdieu, 1977). Analysing the teachers' intuition using this Bourdieusian lens suggests that its

influence arises from compatibility between the teacher and a school, rather than from a mystical entity. After reviewing literature for the systematic review, it appears that this concept has not been explored in previous research on teacher career decision-making. Other concepts closely aligned to the sense of intuition, including happenstance, serendipity and teaching as a vocation or a calling, have instead been explored in previous literature (Chimbi & Jita, 2021; Coats, 2021; Eros, 2018; Kwok et al., 2022; MacLeod, 2025; Moses et al., 2017, p. 450; Prabjandee, 2015; Weinburgh, 2020; Yinon & Orland-Barak, 2017). Not only does this analysis introduce a new concept of intuition to the field but examining it through a Bourdieusian lens also clarifies how it operates. Thus, this analytical exploration offers new insights into career decision-making through examining how socialisation can influence decisions which "feel" right (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66).

## 8.2 Destiny

Ava, Elise, Elle, Harriett, Julia, Penny and Victoria referred to abstract concepts of fate, luck and serendipity when explaining their career moves and decisions. Penny described her entry into teaching as serendipitous as she "didn't know from the start what I wanted to do. Every decision I've made has made sense for ending up training to be a teacher". This reflection prompted by the timeline aligns with Bourdieu's (1997) interpretation of *amor fati* in which Penny accepted and embraced teaching as an available choice without an awareness that this could have been constrained by her social context (e.g., as she has a teacher parent) in a retrospective manner. Ava referred to a "sign" which encouraged her to pursue teaching by applying for an unqualified teaching position at her former secondary school:

> I saw it [the job advert] and I think I thought that was a bit of a sign. I was at a point where I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I'd always been wanting to do teaching and so then I just thought "I might as well do it now and see if it works".

Victoria described finding a suitable part-time teaching post as "really lucky" as she was "expecting to have difficulty finding something so I thought that I might do some teaching assistant work if I couldn't find a suitable post". Like Paula in the previous section, Julia attributed gaining her teaching position to being "in the right place at the

right time", suggesting that fate influenced her successful appointment. After finishing her training, Elise was alerted to a job at her former secondary school. She described how she felt this job was "right" for her and suggested that this job was meant for her:

> It genuinely felt like that job had my name on it. I don't mean that to sound like greedy or cocky in anyway because I didn't have any security that it might have been my job. It just felt like it was right for me to get it, if I was successful if that makes sense. When that job came up it's like it had my name on it, it truly did feel right, at the right place to be.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, Elise's sense that the job was "right" for her arose from her experience of the school, which fostered feelings of acceptance and belonging. This suggests that familiarity influences what teachers feel is destined, in a manner similar yet distinct from *amor fati*: experiences, rather than *amor fati*'s constraints, guide what feels destined and the teaching jobs pursued.

Harriett and Penny both used the phrase "full circle" to describe how they felt about obtaining teaching positions at their respective employing schools. Harriett was motivated to apply to the school she completed her work experience in, which encouraged her to join teaching, as she "liked the idea of it, sort of coming back around full circle and going back to work there". Like Ava and Elise, Harriett referred to getting a job at a school she has experienced in her past, which elicited feelings linked with fate. Penny used the same phrase to describe how "incidentally" the school she now works at is the one her husband attended, which she found "really weird and full circle". Penny applied to work at the school after "hearing good things about it" from her husband, suggesting that second-hand experience can also influence these feelings of fate. The phrase "full circle" positioned their career trajectories as aligned to destiny, with teachers returning to places of personal significance.

When describing her future, Elle appeared to leave her both career progression and motherhood to fate:

> I basically do my head of subject's job for him half of the time, so I know I can do it. But I want the recognition for doing it. And then the only thing that maybe will come in the way of that in the next couple of years is starting a family, it's just got to fit in amongst that, I guess. And things will fall where they fall.

Overall, feelings of fate, serendipity, destiny and luck appeared to guide these teachers in entering the profession, applying for jobs and, in Elle's case, shaping future career progression. While the teachers described these influences in a spiritual and mystical manner, they can also be examined with reference to their social positioning through Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice. Teachers in previous studies described teaching as their "calling": a spiritual influence that encouraged them to join the profession (Coats, 2021, p. 114; Eros, 2018, p. 410; Kwok et al., 2022, p. 587; Moses et al., 2017, p. 450; Yinon & Orland-Barak, 2017, p. 920). Other teachers in previous studies, however, contrasted this view and instead viewed teaching as a job they had always thought about doing, without it necessarily being a "calling" (e.g., Coats, 2021; Kwok et al., 2022). The teachers in the present study align with these non-calling perspectives, as they were driven by fate, signs and luck rather than an overwhelming vocational desire. For example, as shown above, Ava explained "I'd always been wanting to do teaching and so then I just thought I might as well do it now". The teachers demonstrate how destiny influenced their career decisions not only in entering the profession but also in choosing schools, adding how spiritual influences shape teaching trajectories to the knowledge base.

## 8.3 Comfort and Discomfort

Some teachers referred to how they felt in certain spaces when describing their career decisions. These feelings are divided into comfort and discomfort. This section outlines how feelings guided teachers away from other professions and into teaching, teacher training routes, employing schools and away from particular schools.

### *8.3.1 Feeling Uncomfortable in Other Professions*

Danielle, Elise, Jerry and Megan all recounted instances where they felt uncomfortable in other professions. Danielle was deterred from a job in investment banking after completing an internship she applied for through her secondary school (an academy sponsored by an investment banking company). Danielle cited the "hustle and just how competitive it is and how, like, unhealthy working practices are promoted. I don't think I'd survive in an environment like that" as reasons she did not feel comfortable in the profession. Elise, Jerry and Megan referred to elements of class and feeling

uncomfortable with "rich[er]" (Elise), more advantaged colleagues yet feeling uncomfortable with unemployment and receiving benefits. Elise was deterred from working in an administrative role at a company after feeling uncomfortable when visiting the office for an interview:

> It was literally like a film, you see like rich kids and non-rich kids. And then they all look at you. That's how I felt, I just walked into a room full of really rich people who knew I wasn't [rich]. I don't know. I felt like an impostor, like proper impostor syndrome and yeah, I just knew I wouldn't have liked it, no.

Jerry recounted a similar experience when he studied law at an elite university:

> It was more of a class thing, on reflection, you know, I come from a very working-class background. The school I went to I was very much a big fish in a small pond, one of the highest achievers. So, then I went to university, and I think it was the shock of like "oh this is going to be much harder, you're not as good as you think you are". And then in my halls [of residence] was this guy who I think his parents were lawyers and for our first introductory assignment he had done this fantastic piece compared to mine and that comparison sort of knocked my confidence. And it's funny because I found out years later that he came first in our law course and he went onto study at Harvard and stuff like that, so [it was] probably a really bad comparison to make.

Although not a profession, Megan discussed her discomfort with being out of work and how she "absolutely hated" claiming benefits to financially support herself. She stated that she "really felt out of place, the jobcentre [the building individuals must visit to claim government welfare benefits and receive help with finding employment] was not for me at all". During a visit to the jobcentre, she was informed of an apprenticeship at her former secondary school, which Megan applied for, and subsequently got, as she "knew it's a place [she] feels comfortable". Like Jerry, and Olivia in section 7.5.3.1, Megan cited her "working-class background", in which she "wants to work for her money", as the reason she felt uncomfortable claiming benefits at the jobcentre.

These experiences of class discomfort influenced Elise, Jerry and Megan to move out of these spaces, contributing to their eventual decision to join the teaching profession. While many theorists have explored how habitus can be transformed through participation with new fields (e.g., Ingram & Abrahams, 2016), these accounts demonstrate how misalignment between habitus and field can result in the decision to leave the field, rather than transform their habitus to remain. Furthermore, this adds an

understanding of how feelings and social class can influence career decision-making to the literature base, which, according to the systematic review, has been previously underexplored.

### *8.3.2 Feeling Comfortable in Teaching*

Danielle, Elise, Esme, Grace, Jack, Luke, Megan, Naomi and Sophie cited the comfort they felt in teaching as a reason to pursue the profession.

Teachers' decisions to enter the profession were shaped by formative school experiences and family influences, which provided a sense of comfort. Grace commented that she was "head girl, which I think is always a marker again for teachers", suggesting a correlation between student leadership positions and the likelihood of going into teaching. Danielle, Elise, Grace, Jack, Luke and Megan's comfort stemmed from how they felt at school when they were students. Danielle's decision to train with Teach First came from "resonating" with their "vision… because of my own background, where I grew up and went to school… I hadn't known my secondary school was actually a Teach First school". Elise, Jack and Luke all cited their enjoyment of school as a factor that led them into the profession. This enjoyment invoked feelings of comfort, as demonstrated by Elise:

> It comes down to my experience at school, and I just love that memory. The crowds, the corridors, the teachers, the memories I made and the impression it had on me, and it really is the best time of your life… I like the idea of just being in that environment, that bubble, that moment of having that impact on somebody and just sharing my passion with someone else and so yeah, I think that's the main reason [for entering teaching], I always envision myself back when I was at school.

The comfort Jack felt with the profession also came from hearing about his mother's workday as a teacher while he was growing up. He stated that she would tell him about some "bad days but [also] the moments where students say thank you". Jack gained comfort from knowing that he could also make the difference he heard about from his mother, which led him to the profession. Together, these teachers highlighted how the familiar comfort with the profession influenced entry into teaching.

Esme, Naomi and Sophie drew upon the feelings conjured by their work experience in schools, which led them to pursue teaching. Sophie "felt so comfortable" when she

"stepped into" the school, this led her to "think this is the place for me", which "time reaffirmed" during her work experience. Naomi described work experience in a primary school as "just nice, I don't know how to explain it". Like Susan, Naomi drew upon the intangible and difficult-to-articulate feelings she associated with working in a school. Esme's decision to apply for Teach First in her final year at university was guided by her experience working in a French school during her year abroad and tutoring throughout her studies:

> I only wanted to apply for what I had experience in and what I was sure I would get because at the time I had no confidence in myself. I was like stressed out trying to get all my uni work sorted and seeing all of my uni friends applying for all these graduate schemes and going across the country like for all these really stressful interview days and I just thought "that's not for me", I'll just choose the one I think my skills are matched to and that I've got experience in, so I'm likely to get and then we'll go from there so yeah, a bit lazy.

Esme felt comfortable with teaching as it matched her experience and skills and because recruitment into the profession seemed less intimidating than other graduate professions.

Teachers' feelings of comfort with the profession can be understood through sociological conceptualisations of habitus. As a reminder, habitus refers to systems of habits, ways of thinking and behaviours that have been shaped by a person's social environment, often the family (Bourdieu, 1977). Institutional habitus refers to how educational institutions provide students with habits, ways of thinking and behaviours which influence their decisions (Reay et al., 2001). For Jack, it is his familial habitus which guided his feelings of comfort with teaching, having gained an understanding of the positives, and indeed negatives, of the profession from witnessing his mother's career. For the other teachers, it is an institutional habitus which has created these feelings of comfort and belonging in the profession through their prior experience with schools (e.g., Esme, Luke, Naomi and Sophie). However, Craig appeared to go against his institutional habitus:

> The secondary school I was at was very academic. So they sort of pushed everyone towards university routes and then, they were quite good with careers actually, but the culture of people around me was all kind of looking at the Civil Service Fast Stream, banking, insurance, so that kind of stuff and I

> think I've always kind of known I didn't want to do that, I kind of wanted to do something that I felt was doing something useful.

Craig, thus, situated teaching as a profession which is at odds with a "very academic" culture through its "useful" function, perhaps due to its more person-centred nature as outlined in chapter five when presenting *the journey of helping others* theme. Nevertheless, Craig chose to train to teach through Teach First, which is often labelled as a middle-class (Smart et al., 2009) and "elite" (Erica and Esme) teacher training route, which may suit his institutional habitus. This suggests that Craig may have developed a habitus clivé, a split sense of dispositions which contradict one another; on one hand, Craig wants a "useful" job distinct from the "culture of" graduate schemes which are middle-class in nature (Office for National Statistics, n.d.). On the other hand, choosing Teach First positions his habitus as adhering to the requirement for a middle-class graduate scheme (Smart et al., 2009). These examples demonstrate that habitus not only fosters comfort and belonging in teaching but also can produce contradictory choices that nonetheless converge when deciding to enter the profession.

### *8.3.3 Feeling Comfortable with a Teacher Training Route*

Elizabeth, Elle, Erica, Esme, Grace, Helena, Joan, Julia, Katherine, Megan, Penny, Polly and Sophie all drew upon feelings of comfort when explaining how they chose their route into teaching.

Teachers' decisions about where to train were shaped by values, feelings of safety and institutional familiarity. Despite having a "very good Ofsted" and being closely located to a teacher training route, Sophie "didn't have a good feeling about it" and decided upon a different route as it aligned with her values as a teacher. Megan chose the School Direct route into teaching due to its school-based nature as she was worried that a university-based route with reduced classroom exposure would undermine her confidence in working within schools. In contrast, Helena, Joan and Julia all trained to teach with the universities they attended as undergraduate students. Reasons for this included knowing that staff would be "supportive" (Helena and Joan) in terms of the course and also with "the job market"; knowing they would "feel safe there and looked after" (Julia), "because of COVID, wanting something familiar" (Julia); and as it was "easier and less

stressful" to not have to "do all the paperwork" (Helena) to apply for student finance to support their studies and living costs. Thus, these teachers drew upon their institutional habituses when deciding where to train to teach (Reay et al., 2001).

Elizabeth, Erica, Esme and Katherine all decided to train with Teach First due to its "prestige" (Elizabeth and Katherine) and it being "a really hard grad scheme to get onto" (Erica). Erica and Esme, who were on the programme from 2016 to 2018, suggested that Teach First's prestige has declined since the time of their training:

> Obviously, it was at the point when I did it, a really hard graduate scheme to get on to. I mean, they opened it up after that. (Erica)
>
> Obviously, Teach First was rated like, really, quite highly at the time. It was one of the top graduate schemes. The fact there was like the competitive element to it, like not many people got selected, like compared to now, so it was quite prestigious, again, which is quite snobby, but I think that was part of the motivation. (Esme)

Interestingly, none of the Teach First teachers in this study, who started the programme in 2021/22 or 2022/23, referenced the prestige of the programme. This would be an interesting topic for a future study.

Elle, Grace and Penny also referenced how their training routes were seen as reputable. Elle trained to teach by getting a PGCE at a university after receiving an offer and "feeling like I couldn't turn it down with it being one of the best unis to do a PGCE with". Grace trained through School Direct and applied to a school that "had been training teachers for a really long time, like they knew what to do, they had systems in place, and it was established". Penny trained through a SCITT which was "known for being really selective, there's only 20 of us and there's only two social science trainees [including herself] so it's a really selective process". Previously, Teach First has been seen as the most prestigious training route, as evident by Elizabeth, Erica, Esme and Katherine's comments. However, this analysis demonstrates how routes, outside of Teach First, can be seen as prestigious due to their reputation and selective nature. The feeling of exclusivity and as Esme puts it "snobbery" influenced these teachers to choose these training routes in addition to the other factors relating to comfort and suitability.

These decisions can be interpreted as classed actions, with teachers distancing their training routes from those they disparage. Thus, the pursuit of elite training can serve as

a distinction between them and other teachers to mark symbolic distance (Bourdieu, 1984). This links with research showing that the mass expansion of undergraduate study has influenced those pursuing social status through education to move beyond university entry and consider institutional choice as well as postgraduate study (Mateos-González & Wakeling, 2022; Savage et al., 2015; Wakeling & Savage, 2015; Wakeling & Laurison, 2017). The analysis adds an understanding of how a mass expansion of teacher training routes influences the choice of route in relation to classed attitudes.

### *8.3.4 Feeling Uncomfortable in Some Schools*

Elle, Erica, Grace, Hannah, Katherine, Lena, Luke, Megan, Patrick, Penny, Polly and Stacey recounted instances where they felt uncomfortable within some schools, which influenced them to either leave their employing schools, not consider applying to work at some schools and not join a school.

Erica, Katherine and Hannah drew upon their feelings when explaining why they left their former employing schools. Hannah stated that her school was a "horrible place to work" due to the negative work environment she stated the leadership had created. Similarly, Erica cited changes in leadership and a principal which led to a change in her feelings:

> I could feel. You can feel a school, when it's going down. And it's like a sinking ship. So, I thought, you know, I need to change.

Katherine decided to leave her Teach First training school after finishing her contract as she felt as though she was not making as big an impact with addressing educational inequality (as Teach First advertises) as the school was:

> Fairly middle of the road, you know we had a decent proportion of Pupil Premium and SEND [special educational needs and disabilities] students and very few EAL [English as an additional language] and it's not affluent but it's not very poor, it's kind of average.

Now, in a school with a higher proportion of these students, she is "a lot happier".

Erica, Grace, Jerry, Penny and Stacey discussed how they would not feel comfortable working in an academy. For Erica, Grace and Penny, this is based on their experience

with academies. Erica worked in an academy whilst training through Teach First. During this time, she felt "quite used and I didn't think they thought I was a good teacher… you feel a bit like you're just a cog in a machine, in an academy". Erica reflected on this experience and how she would consider not working in certain academy chains which do not allow schools to retain their independent identity as they "feel quite culty… their focus has nothing to do with my teaching", with her previous academy chain "completely ignoring the context [of their schools] and trying to use the same principles they've used in all the other schools". Erica also commented on how she did not relate to her previous academy chain's leadership team:

> They had this really well-spoken private school educated CEO who was in charge, who was so out of touch with everything that was going on in any of the schools. He just would come in and talk for like 30 minutes and I didn't understand half of the words he said, and I have no idea what the point of his job was.

It could be seen that Erica feels a sense of class discomfort with the academy due to the "out of touch", "privately educated" CEO who she struggled to understand. Penny also drew upon her experience when she "worked in academies before and they were very sanitized, you know, the bell goes, and everyone walks in silence, and I was like I couldn't work there". Grace based her decision to "leave if the school turned into an academy" on her own school experience in which the school was taken over by an academy trust. Like Erica and Penny alluded to, Grace "would worry that the personality of the school would go". However, also like Erica hints, Grace stated that she would "think about what the academy is like, do they align with the values of the school or are they just buying us out because we're a school that needs financial help?" If the academy allowed her school to keep its "personality", Grace stated she would stay. By drawing upon their experiences within academies, Erica, Grace and Penny can be seen to use their institutional habituses to guide their future decision-making (Reay et al., 2001). These negative experiences, in which academies ignore school contexts and personalities, prompted feelings of discomfort. In turn, they influenced teachers to evaluate future employing academies based on whether they retained their "freedom" (Erica), "values [and] personality" (Grace), to help them decide whether they would feel comfortable working there. By contrast, Stacey had no experience attending or working

in academies. Instead, she relied upon her knowledge of what an academy is and their reputation:

> Some people say they're good in terms of like very clear set ways they're run but they seem to lean more like a business structure, and I just don't know how I feel about that in education… I think I would just always lean towards a local authority school.

Stacey's habitus, shaped by her educational values and her experience in local authority schools, guided her decisions. Jerry drew upon similar ideas when he discussed why he would not work in two of the biggest schools in his area who are a part of academy chains: "they seem quite cold and, probably not the right word but capitalist, you know it's very much a business". Overall, these teachers positioned academies as businesses, environments in which they did not feel comfortable working within.

Luke, Megan and Patrick all drew upon feelings of discomfort when discussing what schools they would not consider working in. Luke and Patrick both drew upon their own experiences and identities. Luke stated that he would not want to work in schools serving "middle-class [students], I'd feel a little bit out of place… obviously from my own context, I feel like [students] should be able to relate to me more". Patrick "went to a grammar school, it wasn't a fee paying one, it was like an 11 plus pass one, I wouldn't want to work at a private school just fundamentally I don't agree with them". Luke and Patrick's institutional habituses, informed their values and feelings of comfort, which influenced their career decision-making. After having to complete a mandatory second school experience as part of her training, Megan stated that she would not consider working in a school where the staff were "so laid back that they were almost horizontal [like her second school experience] … I just didn't feel like they were my kind of people… I felt they were a little bit lazy, and I survive off a fast-paced environment". She demonstrates how colleagues influence feelings of discomfort. Together, these accounts show how teachers' values and identities guided their feelings of comfort, which in turn influenced decisions about which schools they would or would not work in.

Elle recounted an instance when she attended an interview at a school:

> The minute I went in, I got a feeling that I just didn't like it. Even though I'd been for a look around and I'd been with the head and sat down with them and the deputy head showed me around on a Friday evening and I loved it then. Then, I went back with the kids on interview day and with the staff there and I just thought "no, this isn't for me".

Elle initially liked the feel of the building, the classrooms and the displays. However, she demonstrated how colleagues and students, like Megan indicated, create the overarching feel of the school, which Elle could not connect with. This led Elle to withdraw her application to work at the school.

Overall, these examples demonstrate how teachers' values and identities, informed by their habituses, shaped their sense of discomfort and unbelonging, which in turn influenced their choice to not work within particular schools.

### *8.3.5 Feeling Comfortable in Other Schools*

Danielle, Elise, Elizabeth, Grace, Iqra, Jennifer, Jerry, Joan, Julia, Kenny, Laura, Lena, Mia, Polly, Shona, Sophie and Victoria all drew upon feelings of comfort and belonging when discussing why they applied to work in schools, subsequently joined them and chose to remain within them.

Teachers drew upon metaphors of home and personality to explain their decision to work within particular schools. Elise, Joan and Lena all referred to the idea of home when explaining why they stayed at their schools. Home was used to describe the comfort and sense of belonging teachers felt in their schools, although they noted that these feelings may change, as explored in section 8.4. Grace decided to accept a job offer from her school because she felt she could "imagine sending my own child, if I had one, to it. It would be a school that I would be happy with them going to, there's a lot more personality than at my current school". Similarly, Jerry personified schools when explaining his decision to move to another local school: "it seemed to have sort of the charm and the character… I think that's what mainly attracted me". Together, these teachers demonstrate how schools were described as not just workplaces, but evocative spaces infused with comfort and personality, which influences their decisions to work in these environments.

Grace and Polly both drew upon their previous experience when discussing the schools they (would) feel comfortable in. Polly explained that she hopes to teach at a grammar school in the future, the same type of school she attended. Grace expressed a preference for a "smaller" employing school. She attributed this to her own schooling experience in a small school. Grace and Polly show how prior schooling experiences informed their sense of comfort and subsequently shaped their aspirations for teaching roles.

Analysing Grace's justification for a smaller school demonstrates how Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice can be utilised with Archer's (2003) modes of reflexivity. Grace drew on the same fish analogy as Craig (see section 8.3.1) when reflecting on how her prior school experiences shaped her decision-making, stating that she would feel comfortable working in a "smaller pond" like her school felt. This analogy links with Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992, p. 127) use of a similar "fish in water" metaphor. The "fish in water" analogy refers to how people feel comfortable in environments where they have previous experience, specifically that the "fish does not feel the weight of the water" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). Grace exhibited autonomous reflexivity (i.e., engaging in reflection to guide her decision-making) through recognising her comfort as a "big fish in a small pond" and seeking this familiar feel in future teaching positions. Thus, through engaging in reflexivity, Grace felt the weight, and the size, of the water. This analysis provides an example that supports the reconciled theoretical framework, which addresses criticisms of Bourdieu's emphasis on cultural conditioning and Archer's stress on reflexivity (Elder-Vass, 2007).

Danielle, Jennifer, Joan, Julia, Kenny, Laura, Lena, Mia, Shona, Sophie and Victoria discussed how they visit and walk around schools to decide whether they will feel comfortable working there. These teachers cited "the feel of a school" as the most important aspect of deciding whether to apply and subsequently work at a school. Most of these teachers directly referred to the "feel" (Jennifer, Joan, Lena, Shona and Victoria) of a school that was sensed during a visit to decide whether it was "for them" (Mia). Danielle and Kenny both referred to sensing "the vibe" of a school when visiting. Sensing "the feel" is something which was recommended to Joan by her PGCE tutors when searching for employing schools. Indeed, Julia stated that she would "not apply to

any schools that [she] hasn't been to and seen" as she stressed the importance of "knowing the environment you're working in". However, other teachers discussed how sometimes school visits and interview days can create a false sense of a comfortable "feel". Patrick discussed how he is anxious about mistrusting the feel of a school at an interview, which may lead to an uncomfortable work environment that may push him out of the profession:

> You know, all it takes at an interview is that they give you the right biscuits with the cup of tea and say the right things and suddenly you're like magically wooed and that's where my anxiety comes from, just leaving for the sake of leaving my school, because it doesn't take a lot and you get it wrong and before you know it you're not teaching anymore.

Sheldon offered a similar opinion when he stated how it is "so hard to gauge" the work environment "without being at the school… a lot of the time you have interviews with people who are absolutely lovely but then come the actual job, the actual pressure from leadership is a lot more". Victoria echoed this when she stated that "even if you read everything on the website and look around the school and meet them, you don't know what it's [working at the school] really going to be like". Sophie recommended that schools should be "really honest about the progression of the school, what things are developing. I don't like it when people are too silly because every school has got an area to improve on". This demonstrates how the feel of a school could be a comforting guide or a deceptive lure, which required teachers to balance instinct with caution when choosing an employing school.

Iqra and Stacey drew upon feelings of comfort when discussing their future career decision-making in teaching. Iqra expressed a desire to teach in the Middle East. When asked what it was about these countries which appealed to Iqra, she drew upon the sense of comfort she would feel due to her religion: "I think because I'm a Muslim and the countries have a majority Muslim population I'd feel, I don't know, comfortable in a sense". Stacey was unsure about where she would feel most comfortable working. Thus, she decided that she will pursue supply teaching to see what type of school "really fits" her. This demonstrates how Stacey valued experience in deciding whether she would feel comfortable in a particular type of school. This experience could form part of her teaching habitus, which she would draw upon when deciding where to work

in the future. Together, these examples show how comfort, drawn from religion or experience, shaped teachers' reflections on belonging and guided their envisioned career trajectories in the profession.

Overall, these teachers demonstrate that comfort operates as a reflexive tool for interpreting schools and guiding decisions about whether to join and remain within them.

### *8.3.6 Comfort and Discomfort Conclusion*

To summarise, this section has shown how teachers' feelings of comfort and discomfort shaped their career trajectories, guiding them into teaching and away from other professions, into training routes, some schools and away from other schools. The next section explores how these feelings are not fixed, which can prompt teacher turnover and attrition.

## 8.4 Feelings Can Change

Throughout the analysis, teachers made subtle comments suggesting that the feelings they drew upon to enter and remain in their schools could change. For example:

> There's a concept in German of how where you feel at home where you are and it is secure, calm and peaceful and I would say like, **for the moment**, where I am feels like that concept. (Lena, emphasis added)
>
> ...But it is changing, the culture of my school is changing. So, I just don't know. I couldn't say... you know it's got to be somewhere that feels homely like how my school does. (Elise)

Indeed, Erica, Hannah, Lucy and Polly all recounted instances where their schools changed (e.g., through changes in leadership and principals), which altered the feelings of comfort. This prompted these teachers to leave their schools and search for "the feel" in another school. Changes within fields can produce hysteresis, leading to either a habitus clivé if teachers remain or to desaturation when they begin to question school practices (Bourdieu, 1999; Chandler, 2013). Desaturation can invoke reflexivity and prompt teachers to leave their schools or the profession entirely (Bourdieu, 1999; Chandler, 2013). This suggests that teacher turnover and recruitment could be explained through teachers pursuing "the feel" of the school. This introduces a novel dimension to explanations of career decision-making to the knowledge field.

## 8.5 The Intuitive Feel Conclusion

This chapter has presented *the intuitive feel* theme by demonstrating how intuition, destiny, comfort and the shifting nature of feelings can explain teachers' career trajectories. A teacher's previous experience was commonly cited, or analysed as, the reason for feeling both uncomfortable and comfortable with occupations and schools (e.g., by Craig, Erica, Grace and Polly). Feeling comfortable was also due to helpful staff (e.g., Susan), how close the profession/school/training route aligns with a teacher's skills and experience (e.g., Esme), values (e.g., Sophie) and feeling a sense of familiarity (e.g., Polly). The inverse of these often caused feelings of discomfort. This section has provided empirical examples which support two theoretical arguments.

First, I suggest that this theme offers empirical insight into how the theoretical concepts of habitus, institutional habitus, habitus clivé, *amor fati,* hysteresis, desaturation, reflexivity and social class (comfort and expectations) can be understood in relation to explaining teachers' careers. This chapter also indicates ways in which the theme may contribute to developing these concepts, by suggesting that experiences, rather than constraints, appear to shape what individuals feel is destined for them (via *amor fati*); how a misalignment between habitus and field may prompt decisions to leave the field, rather than transforming the habitus to remain; and how the pursuit of elite teacher training can be interpreted as a distinctive class marker among teachers through symbolic distance.

Second, drawing upon these arguments, I raise questions about Archer's (2010a) claim that reflexivity is more capable than pre-reflexive dispositions in explaining human action, specifically in this case teachers' career decisions. This chapter suggests that teachers engaged in elements of Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, which could suggest its continued influence. Therefore, utilising the reconciled theoretical framework enabled an interpretation of feelings (via Bourdieu) while still recognising the relevance of Archer's (2003) reflexivity.

*The intuitive feel* theme completes the presentation of themes. Before closing the chapter, I conclude the presentation of themes through summarising the arguments and directing the reader to the discussion chapter.

## 8.6 Concluding the Presentation of Themes

I developed three themes which highlight different aspects of labelling teaching as a people profession. *The journey of helping others* showed how the desire to help young people motivated their careers which led them into, and sometimes out of, teaching. This theme aligns with the conceptualisation of teaching as a people profession due to the centrality of students' influence within it. *The social influence* demonstrated how the people in teacher participants' social networks influenced their career decision-making. This theme aligns with the conceptualisation of teaching as a people profession as it explores the influence of those whom teachers encounter within their jobs, while also expanding the concept by demonstrating how family and personal connections can influence career decisions. *The intuitive feel* illustrated how intangible feelings of belonging and comfort within spaces, which are more indirectly created by managers and society at large, influenced teachers' career decisions. This theme highlights the indirect ways that people cultivate and change spaces, such as senior leadership teams, architects and those who control institutions like law and teaching. These cultivations and changes influence the way in which teachers emotionally relate to the spaces they work within, which influences their decision to enter, remain and leave occupational spaces. Together, these themes suggest that teaching can be understood as a people profession as it is shaped by direct relationships with others and intangible personified feelings of institutional spaces.

All the themes examine the career trajectories of teachers to present how each theme can influence decisions across different time points and career stages. These insights are further developed in the discussion (chapter 9) and the conclusion (chapter 10). The next chapter, the discussion, draws on these themes to answer the study's research questions.

# 9 Discussion

This chapter presents answers to the research questions proposed in the introduction and methodology chapters (1 and 5) and a revised matrix of career decisions using the themes presented in chapters six, seven and eight. The aim of this research was to understand how early career teachers in England make career decisions. To achieve this aim, the overarching research question was:

> How can early career teachers' career decisions be explained?

Four sub-research questions were created to help answer this overarching question:

1. Why did early career teachers decide to become teachers?
2. How did early career teachers decide upon their training route and subsequent employing school(s)?
3. What are the career aspirations of early career teachers?
4. How does structure, agency and reflexivity explain these career decisions?

This chapter provides answers to each of these research questions by synthesising the themes, articulating the implications of the answers and connecting each answer to my thesis-wide overarching argument and contribution to knowledge (9.1–9.5). The chapter concludes that a holistic analysis of career trajectories is a powerful tool to understand what motivates teachers and the directions their careers take (9.6).

## 9.1 Research Question One: Why Did Early Career Teachers Decide to Become Teachers?

Across the themes, the feeling of comfort with the profession, other teachers and family members influenced participants' decisions to become teachers. The feeling of comfort stemmed from teachers' previous schooling experiences and from distancing themselves from private enterprise jobs that focus primarily on generating income, a pursuit they feel uncomfortable engaging in. Other participants referred to teachers they had learned from at school, teacher colleagues they worked alongside in support staff roles (e.g., as teaching assistants), and family members who were teachers. Family members influenced participants by recommending the profession and positioning teaching as a socially legitimate and culturally valued career path, a view often reached

through negotiation with the teachers. However, there were instances when families attempted to deter participants from entering teaching due to negative experiences with, or disdain for, the profession. When this was the case, teachers drew upon their desire to make a difference in students' lives and the comfort they felt in pursuing the profession as factors that outweighed their families' negative influences.

This answer connects to the overarching argument by showing how teaching is a people profession in that entry into the profession is influenced by others. While this appears to be a non-instrumental motivation, it is difficult to claim that pay and security did not influence the teachers because such motivations cannot be seen in a vacuum. The security of the profession allows teachers to hold a stable position which is often valued by those with caring commitments, and pay is used to support their families and contribute towards securing housing close to family and friends. Instead, it may be that these motivations are taken for granted and entangled within the influence others have on their career decisions.

This answer identifies the schooling experience and perceptions of teaching as critical contexts which form the basis for encouraging the teachers into the profession. Leveraging these systems could maximise the potential to encourage more teachers into the profession to cover teacher shortages. However, as demonstrated throughout this thesis, addressing teacher shortages cannot be limited to the recruitment of teachers alone, which makes the answers to the following research questions pertinent to encouraging teachers to remain within the profession.

## 9.2 Research Question Two: How Did Early Career Teachers Decide Upon Their Training Route and Subsequent Employing School(s)?

Across the themes, teachers chose training routes and employing schools based on the institutional context and affirming factors.

Institutional context encompassed the location of the school or training route and the student demographic. Some teachers were not influenced by location and therefore chose the Teach First training route, which placed them in schools situated in areas different from where their friends and families lived. However, once they had created homes in these areas, they then prioritised location when searching for subsequent

employing schools. Demographic preferences referred to students who either require additional support with their studies or those who display desirable behaviour within a classroom environment. The two demographics are dichotomised by the teachers to suggest that students who require additional support with their studies often engage in challenging behaviour, while students who display desirable behaviour often require less assistance with their studies. Teachers often chose one of these types of students when deciding on their training route or employing schools. However, when they chose to work with students who require additional support, teachers stated that if they were to remain in teaching, they would have to consider moving to a school serving students who display desirable behaviour within a classroom environment to sustain them within the profession.

Affirming factors referred to those which emotionally encouraged teachers to choose these routes or schools. These included the perceived support provided by the training providers or schools, colleagues' recommendations and the feel that the route or school was the right fit for them both professionally and personally, although these feelings could change as schools reconstruct their leadership teams. Support is referred to frequently in previous literature (see chapter 2); in this study, support referred to instances in which training providers or schools offered flexible working patterns to accommodate caring commitments, as well as meetings with tutors and mentors who instilled confidence in them as teachers.

This answer connects to the overarching argument as it demonstrates how people influenced the choice of training routes and employing schools. This includes those present within these institutions (e.g., students, tutors, mentors and senior leaders), those who work within the profession but not directly with these institutions (e.g., teachers encountered through networks or prior roles) and personal connections with no relation to these institutions nor the profession (e.g., partners and children).

This answer can be seen to offer insights into the fluid nature of justifications of career decisions, in that teachers adopt and later abandon certain justifications or initially do not centre a particular justification but subsequently adopt it. This was often due to life events such as meeting partners, creating homes, having children, as well as changes within schools or shifts in what teachers sought from a job. This may add a temporal

insight to the knowledge field to suggest that understandings of teachers' career decision-making should move beyond a fixed orientation to justifications and instead recognise their complexity; as teachers' lives, circumstances and desires change, so too may the justifications underpinning their career decisions.

## 9.3 Research Question Three: What are the Career Aspirations of Early Career Teachers?

Teachers' career aspirations can be divided into a) staying in teaching, b) staying in teaching and progressing into leadership/administration responsibilities, c) leaving schools but not the education sector and d) leaving the education sector. Some teachers were uncertain of their career aspirations but offered possible directions. Underpinning all these career aspirations was the teachers' need and desire to remain working close to their homes. This suggests that teaching suits individuals who are geographically bound, due to the availability of schools in most areas. Indeed, this aligns with other occupations which have a similar geographical availability such as the healthcare sector as many participants with career aspiration D (leaving the education sector) intended to or planned to move to roles within the National Health Service (NHS). Furthermore, another justification for aspiration D, which was also evident in aspiration C (leaving schools but not the education sector), was a continuing desire to help others through their work. In this case, teachers exiting the profession should not necessarily be seen as a negative or a loss as they continue to help others and therefore contribute to other societal issues such as the mental health and wellbeing of young people (Morris et al., 2025).

This answer demonstrates how teachers have an affinity for jobs that are readily available geographically and involve making a difference to the lives of others. I anticipate that this overlaps with justifications offered by individuals in similar professions (e.g., healthcare). Individuals who work in these roles, and want to change jobs, would be a valuable target for teacher recruitment initiatives by appealing to their altruistic and intrinsic motivations to address teacher shortages while satisfying the career motivations of these individuals.

This answer connects to the overarching argument of teaching as a people profession by highlighting the teachers' requirements for jobs close to their families, friends and

communities with a focus on helping others. Although I have made comparisons with other helping jobs (e.g., healthcare roles), it is beyond the scope of this thesis to suggest whether these similar workplaces should also be classified as people professions. This could be explored in future research by comparing how I define the people profession within this thesis to the career justifications of other workers who help others.

## 9.4 Research Question Four: How Does Structure, Agency and Reflexivity Explain These Career Decisions?

Teachers' career decision-making can be understood through structure, agency and reflexivity, which provided the theoretical foundation for the analysis. As outlined in the theoretical framework chapter (3), structure refers to the influence of institutions (e.g., the family, education and religion), agency refers to an individual's ability to freely act and reflexivity refers to processes through which individuals deliberate on their available actions (Archer, 2000, 2003; Healy, 1998). Across the themes, Archer's (2003) reflexivity, Bourdieu's (1977) habitus, capital and field, and wider structural constraints help explain teachers' career decision-making.

### *9.4.1 Bourdieu's Concept of Social Capital*

Bourdieu's (1977) concept of social capital is useful for explaining some teachers' career decisions. Social capital refers to networks and relationships with others that offer advantages with certain situations (i.e., fields, e.g., the teaching labour market) and can be converted into other forms of capital such as economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Thus, it can operate as a form of structure, both constraining and enabling actions.

The *socially boosted* sub-theme demonstrates how teachers possess different levels of social capital, which can result in unequal participation within the teaching workforce. Teachers who received advice about entering the profession benefitted from social capital derived from their families, who were themselves teachers, and from professional connections (i.e., their own teachers and connections who worked at teacher training routes). These connections provided the lowest form of advantage in the teaching job market compared with other teachers who discussed how their social

networks benefitted their careers. Such connections provided the teachers with advice and in some cases knowledge (i.e., embodied cultural capital) about the teaching profession and training routes, which may have helped them enter the profession.

Moving up the hierarchy, teachers who were told to apply for jobs benefitted from social capital gained through professional connections forged during their teacher training, while working in other schools or through peers they had attended school with. This could be seen as an intermediary form of advantage compared with the other instances of benefitting from social capital. These connections provided the teachers with a form of embodied cultural capital that could lead to financial remuneration (i.e., a job; economic capital).

At the highest level of advantage within this sub-theme, some teachers were directly given jobs by those with hiring abilities in the schools where they were training or working. These teachers did not need to demonstrate their embodied or institutional cultural capital through job applications or interviews. Instead, their connections secured positions for them, demonstrating how social capital translated directly into economic capital without the mediation of cultural capital, unlike in the previous examples.

Although social class was not asked for within the interviews, I found that many teachers who had disclosed that they were middle class, had parents who worked as teachers or in other lower managerial and professional roles, or attended private or grammar schools (which are all markers of advantage; Office for National Statistics, n.d.; Reay, 2017) benefited from this social capital. Those who had a combination of these markers of advantage and/or identifying as a man had access to the highest form of social capital in which they were given jobs without needing to apply.

The differing levels of social capital can be seen to produce unequal participation within the teaching workforce, which is consistent with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) theorisations of action across differing fields, which result in a reproduction of inequalities. However, there are instances in which some teachers entered the profession despite being advised against it by family members who were themselves teachers. This demonstrates how teachers exercise agency in choosing to use these

connections to gain cultural and/or economic capital. Thus, this research avoids any suggestion of overestimating structure and viewing people as passive actors, a criticism often directed at Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice (Archer, 1995; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997; Jenkins, 2002; Mouzelis, 2007).

### *9.4.2 Bourdieu's Concept of Dispositions*

Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualisation of dispositions helps explain how intuitive feelings guide teachers' career decisions. Dispositions are ways in which people think, feel and unconsciously act (Bourdieu, 1977). *The intuitive feel* theme illustrates how pre-conscious feelings guide teachers' decision-making. The feeling of comfort with the profession and certain schools, contrasted with discomfort in other professions and schools resembles Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992, p. 127) "fish in water" analogy; in which teachers seek jobs in which they "do not feel the weight of the water" (i.e., comfort). However, unlike Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 127), who theorise that this involves "taking the world for granted" and thus being unreflexive, teachers in this study demonstrate that the feel of a school and of the profession is a criterion they deliberately consider. Consequently, this frames the *feel* as a reflexive, conscious decision.

### *9.4.3 Archer's Concept of Communicative Reflexivity*

I expand upon Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity to outline how this elaborated form of reflexivity can explain teachers' career decisions. The *wisdom on loan* sub-theme demonstrates how Archer's (2003) traditional conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity explains some teachers' career decisions. Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity refers to individuals engaging in discussions with others to confirm a course of action. This was seen when making decisions about not working in jobs outside of teaching (Saskia), becoming a teacher (Sheldon), sustaining themselves day by day as a teacher (Shona), applying for promotions (Elise) and remaining in the profession (Erica).

However, this concept could not explain other career decisions which appeared to resemble communicative reflexivity but with some differences. This led to the

expansion of communicative reflexivity to include the two new concepts of external conversations and imagined futures through others.

As explored in chapter seven (7.5.2.1), I introduce external conversations as reflective conversations with others, as opposed to internal conversations. This differs from Archer's (2003, p. 167) two-step "thought then talk" process of communicative reflexivity, in which an individual engages in an internal dialogue and then shares it with trusted others to seek confirmation of a potential action, by instead showing that reflexivity can be initiated directly within the "talk" phase. External conversations help to explain why Elise, Lucy, Mia and Polly pursued, and achieved, promotions within their schools.

I conceptualise imagined futures through others as internal conversations that deliberate actions based on others' experiences and their expressed feelings resulting from these. Although teachers deliberate alone, a characteristic of autonomous reflexivity (Archer, 2003), engaging in imagined futures through others relies upon co-constructing actions using others. This practice differs from Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity, as when engaging in imagining their future through others, the others referenced are not aware they are being used in such deliberations. Nevertheless, I place imagined futures through others within communicative reflexivity due to the centrality of using others to co-construct deliberations. The concept of imagined futures through others helps explain why Grace was initially deterred from teaching, before deciding that she would cope better with the profession than she believed her cousin did, and why Katherine plans to leave teaching after seeing how teaching has impacted her more experienced colleagues.

The expansion of communicative reflexivity counters Archer's (2010a) argument that this type of reflexivity is on the decline and instead shows that the concept continues to be engaged with while also evolving. I argue that the underlying thesis of Archer's (1995) morphogenetic cycle explains my development of the concept of communicative reflexivity. The morphogenetic cycle posits that society develops through individuals reproducing (morphostasis) and/or transforming (morphogenesis) social structures (Archer, 1995). I have developed the concept of communicative reflexivity by demonstrating how individuals engage in Archer's (2003) conceptualisation of

communicative reflexivity (i.e., the morphostasis of the concept) and by developing new sub-concepts (i.e., external conversations and imagined futures through others) that expand and transform the concept of communicative reflexivity (i.e., the morphogenesis of the concept).

### *9.4.4 Habitus and Reflexivity*

Both Bourdieu's (1977) habitus and Archer's (1995, 2024) reflexivity can be used together to understand teachers' career decisions. This can be seen in the *wisdom on loan* sub-theme in which habitus and communicative reflexivity intersected. This outlined how structure, in the form of familial expectations and perceptions of teaching was communicated to teachers through external conversations (i.e., the expanded form of communicative reflexivity this research posits), as well as developed through a sense of what their family expected of them (e.g., Lena's feeling of a "push for a vocational route"), which influenced their career decisions. This often involved negotiating one's habitus using communicative reflexivity to pursue the teaching profession. I argue that this adds the concept of a negotiated habitus to existing typologies that build upon habitus (e.g., Ingram & Abrahams, 2016). The decision to choose teaching as a job that fulfils teachers' desire to help others can also be explained using Archer's (2003) autonomous and communicative reflexivity and Bourdieu's (1977) habitus. Wanting to help others means that teachers may pursue a multitude of jobs. *The journey of helping others* theme demonstrates how teachers deliberated (i.e., both autonomously and communicatively; Archer, 2003) where to work depending on the emotions tied to a job (i.e., feelings contained within their habituses; Bourdieu, 1977). This demonstrates how a reconciliation of the two theories meaningfully explains the career decisions of teachers.

### *9.4.4 Structural Constraints*

There are many instances when teachers were, or chose to be, structurally constrained in exchange for protecting other priorities. Thus 'home' emerges as a form of structure. Prioritising the home is a fluid practice influenced by further structural constraints such as finances (e.g., needing to live at home) and family (e.g., feeling rooted to a place due to their partner's job and/or their children's social lives). Therefore, for some teachers,

prioritising the home is an agentic choice, while for others it is a structural requirement. Similarly, women's caring commitments, both current and potential, influence their decisions, both current and future, to ask for flexible working patterns (i.e., part-time and flexible maternity leaves). This demonstrates how caring commitments function as a form of structure impinging on teachers' working patterns. However, although not contained in the sample, there will be teachers in the population of interest who work full-time and have caring commitments and, thus, do not see these commitments as a form of structure which influences their working patterns (although they could yet be experienced as a constraint in the form of the burden of the 'double shift'). Therefore, these teachers may be understood as choosing to uphold caring commitments as structural constraints. Teacher parents can also provide an opportunity for other teachers to pursue their jobs and responsibilities during times where they must give care (e.g., maternity leave and during the COVID-19 pandemic). A childless teacher therefore has the agency to pursue these responsibilities and positions, while a parent teacher is typically structurally constrained by their caregiving. These instances provide childless teachers with cultural capital in the form of knowledge, skills and experiences which can boost teachers' CVs and be useful when demonstrating how they meet criteria when applying for leadership positions (Bourdieu, 1977).

There are also instances where structures keep teachers in and push them out of the profession. Workload, public scrutiny, accountability, wanting to be present parents and student behaviour are structures that encourage teachers to leave or to consider leaving the profession. However, meaningful connections with students and supportive mentorship are structures which retain teachers in the profession. This demonstrates that structures can be positive experiences, a tone that differs from how Bourdieu (1977) often describes structural constraints.

### *9.4.5 Research Question Four Conclusion*

Together, these concepts answer research question four by showing how structure, agency and reflexivity shape teachers' career trajectories. They also extend and reframe Archer and Bourdieu's theorisations, demonstrating the value of integrating habitus and reflexivity in understanding career decision-making.

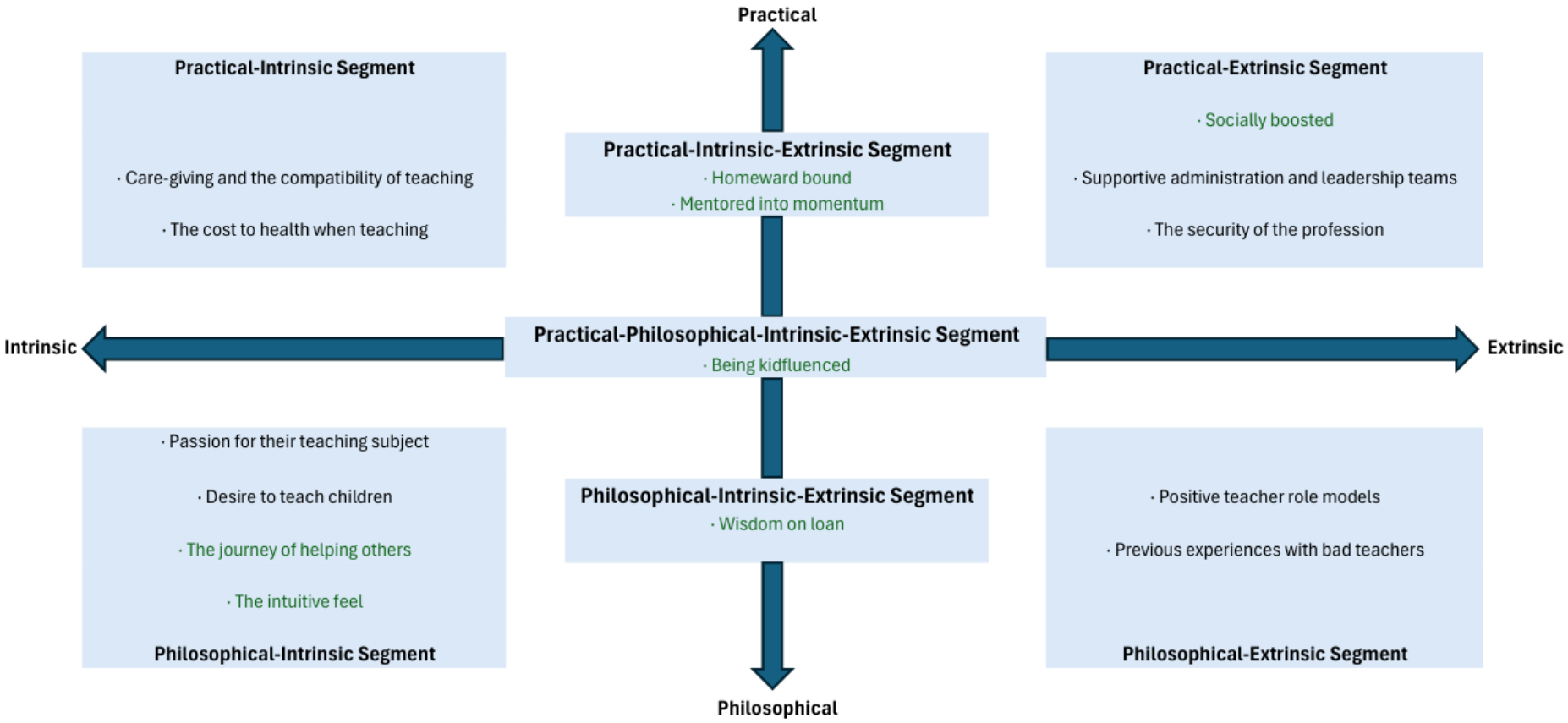
## 9.5 Overarching Research Question: How Can Early Career Teachers' Career Trajectories Be Explained?

As the themes suggest, early career teachers' career trajectories can be explained through justifications which influence decisions at different stages of teachers' lives. This suggests that there are guiding factors that transcend all career decision-making points (e.g., entry into, remaining within and leaving the profession) to explain the trajectories of teachers. The justifications developed in this research are wanting to help others, prioritising homes, being influenced by other people (their own children, students, mentors) through conversations with others and the feeling of working in a particular job and school. These justifications are united in their ability to explain how others influence the career decisions of teachers and, thus, how teaching can be labelled as a people profession. Using structure, agency and reflexivity, as research question four suggests, can be used to expand upon these justifications to see what mechanisms drive teachers' career decision-making. These justifications may be particular to the teachers in the sample; there may be other justifications that other teachers and other researchers may develop if employing the same methodology. Nevertheless, the creation of the justifications suggests that looking across teachers' careers can help explain their career trajectories, rather than isolated career points.

When answering this question, I returned to the matrix created as part of the systematic review (figure 2). I expanded and revised the matrix to include the justifications developed for the primary study (figure 9).

**Figure 9.**

*A Matrix of Reasons for Career Decisions Informed by Reviewed Literature and The Justifications Developed in This Study*




*Note.* Reasons from the reviewed literature are shown in black, while reasons from this research are shown in green. Practical refers to tangible environments (e.g., being a caregiver). Philosophical refers to teachers' reflections (e.g., passion for teaching a subject). Intrinsic refers to motivation which comes from within (e.g., wanting good health). Extrinsic refers to motivation which originates from others (e.g., role models).

The career decision reasons in figure 9 are grouped into segments, rather than quadrants as they are within figure 2 in chapter two, as I used the themes from the primary study to expand the number of groupings to include practical-intrinsic-extrinsic, philosophical-intrinsic-extrinsic and practical-philosophical-intrinsic-extrinsic reasons. Some justifications are also added to existing groupings (i.e., philosophical-intrinsic and practical-extrinsic). Adding justifications and expanding quadrants into segments demonstrates how career decisions can be explained through new justifications often with novel orientations not previously identified within reviewed literature. Thus, answering this research question using this matrix offers an original contribution to the research field. Indeed, future studies may also benefit from using this matrix by either adding to the existing segments or creating new segments (i.e., philosophical-practical-intrinsic and philosophical-practical-extrinsic reasons).

Although this research question focused on early career teachers, within the systematic review I decided to include studies of teachers with all levels of experience. I felt that this would allow for a comparison between my study of early career teachers and studies of teachers' career decision-making more broadly. However, upon reflection, there were many similarities between my justifications, and the reasons identified in the reviewed literature. While none of the themes developed could be characterised as being exclusive to early career teachers' justifications, prioritising the family home (as explored in *homeward bound*) is the most closely aligned justification with being an early career teacher, perhaps due to the potential age of the teachers (e.g., graduates saving to buy their own homes). Therefore, while the research question centred on early career teachers, the matrix may resonate with more experienced teachers.

## 9.6 Discussion Conclusion

This chapter has provided answers to the research questions of this study by synthesising the themes presented in chapters six, seven and eight. It has also presented a revised matrix of career decisions based on the systematic review and the primary study. These answers demonstrate how looking across the career trajectories of teachers offers a useful lens for understanding factors underpinning teachers' career decisions and the directions their careers take. Uniting these justifications indicates that teaching is a people profession; others directly and indirectly impact the career

decisions of teachers. The final chapter draws upon these answers and discusses the key arguments, significance, contributions and limitations of this research. Building on this, the chapter also proposes future directions for research, policy and practice.

# 10 Conclusion

This final chapter unites the previous chapters to restate the thesis's key arguments (10.1), significance and contribution (10.2), and reflect upon limitations (10.3) and future directions for research, policy and practice (10.4). This conclusion highlights how the overarching argument, that teachers' career decision-making is motivated by justifications which span across their career trajectories, offers a contribution to both educational research and social theory, and towards policies and practices aiming to address teacher shortages.

## 10.1 Key Arguments

As outlined in the introduction chapter (1), the scarcity of research into teachers' career decision-making across career trajectories (i.e., entry into, moving within and leaving the teaching profession) in England motivated this research. A timeline approach was used to structure interviews with 44 early career teachers in England. A reflexive thematic analysis of these interviews led to the development of an overarching argument: that teachers' career decision-making is justified by drawing upon others. I developed eight ways in which the teachers drew upon others, which I refer to as justifications. This section summarises the justifications (10.1.1), examines their manifestation at career decision points (10.1.2) and considers how structure, agency and reflexivity illuminate their underlying mechanisms (10.1.3). As noted in 9.5 and revisited in 10.4, there may be other justifications for teachers beyond the scope of this study, which future research could explore.

### *10.1.1 The Justifications*

I developed themes that explain the justifications underpinning the career decision-making of my sample of early career teachers in England. *The journey of helping others* highlights how the career trajectories of some teachers in the sample are shaped by their desire to help others. This desire can be seen from teachers' decisions to enter the teaching profession (6.1 and 6.2), their choice of schools (6.3) and their career aspirations (6.4). These aspirations may include leaving the teaching profession if they feel they cannot sustain their own wellbeing before helping others and moving into

other jobs that allow them to help others (6.5). *The social influence* demonstrates how the people in a teachers' social network influence their career decision-making and comprises five sub-themes (chapter 7). *Homeward bound* captures how some teachers, variably, prioritise their family home and/or community (7.1.1) or create new homes which they subsequently prioritise (7.1.2) when making career decisions. *Being kidfluenced* shows that children (current, 7.2.1; future; 7.2.2; colleagues', 7.2.3; and those they teach, 7.2.4) influence teachers' career decisions. *Mentored into momentum* illustrates how informal and formal mentorship (i.e., guidance from a more experienced teacher or school leader) influences teachers to join (7.3.1), move schools, remain within, and leave, the profession (7.3.2 and 7.3.3). *Socially boosted* reveals how teachers benefit from their social networks when getting advice on entering the teaching profession (7.4.1), being told about teaching jobs (7.4.2) and securing jobs without needing to formally apply or interview (7.4.3). *Wisdom on loan* reflects how teachers' career decisions are influenced through conversations with other people, often family members (7.5.1 and 7.5.2), internal deliberations with other teachers in mind (7.5.2) and through negotiating social and cultural expectations of the participants' working lives (7.5.3). *The intuitive feel* illuminates how intangible feelings—i.e., instinct and gut feelings (8.1), destiny (8.2), comfort and discomfort (8.3)—guide teachers' career decisions, although these feelings can change over time (8.4). Together, these justifications articulate the explanations for career decisions across the sample teachers' career trajectories.

Looking at the justifications holistically, through figure 5 (p. 128), provides insights into how these operate. All justifications intersect, meaning that there are teachers who are motivated by at least two of every justification. Furthermore, most teachers contributed to the development of multiple justifications, suggesting that teachers' identities (e.g., as spouses, parents, sons/daughters and friends) and/or needs (e.g., wanting to help, wanting support and feeling comfortable) have an intersecting influence on their career decision-making. Besides the overall compatibility between justifications as showing how teaching is a people profession, there are specific points of convergence among justifications. *Homeward bound*, *being kidfluenced* and *wisdom on loan* all demonstrate the importance of family connections, while *mentored into momentum*,

*being kidfluenced* and *the intuitive feel* point to the significance of the school environment.

However, there is a notable tension between the *socially boosted* sub-theme and two other themes, respectively. While *socially boosted* demonstrates how teachers acknowledge advantaged gained in the labour market, *the intuitive feel* contrasts this by attributing success to destiny, which mystifies social advantage and obscures the "feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 66) and the symbolic capital required in the teacher labour market. Another tension arises when comparing *the journey of helping others* with the *socially boosted* sub-theme. The social justice nature of *the journey of helping others* presents teachers as intrinsically motivated individuals with a sense of civic duty to make society a better place for all. This contrasts with the opposing nature of *socially boosted*, which demonstrates how some teachers benefit from a system that undermines equity and fairness in the teaching labour market. Reflecting on this juxtaposition prompts a critical question: if these teachers, who have successfully navigated an inequitable labour market, aim to improve society, how much do the structural inequities of the teaching labour market matter? It could be argued that all trainee teachers have access to a form of social capital (i.e., their tutors and mentors), providing advantage in the job market. However, as in every social field, some individuals encounter structural disadvantages (Bourdieu, 1990); in this case, those who cannot secure teacher training places or teaching jobs, as suggested in interviews, may be disadvantaged by others with connections. The tension between these two justifications offers insights into how teaching, as a profession aiming for social justice, can be at odds with its mission since inequalities manifest and produce inequitable outcomes. This makes it difficult to provide concrete policies, beyond the Get Into Teaching advisors (DfE, 2024a), to promote access to social capital.

### *10.1.2 How the Justifications Manifest at Career Decision Points*

As well as a holistic understanding of career trajectories, the justifications can be synthesised to provide an understanding of how teachers make career decisions at specific points (e.g., why they become teachers, how they choose their training route, etc.). This is shown in the answers to research question one (9.1), two (9.2) and three (9.3).

Research question one asked “why did early career teachers decide to become teachers?” This was answered using the following themes: *being kidfluenced*, *mentored into momentum*, *the journey of helping others*, *socially boosted*, *wisdom on loan* and *the intuitive feel*. Teachers decided to become teachers due to their caring commitments, having been inspired by other teachers, their family’s advice and through following their intuition. This answer identifies the schooling experience and perceptions of teaching as critical factors which form the basis for encouraging the teachers into the profession.

Research question two asked “how did early career teachers decide upon their training route and subsequent employing school(s)?” This was answered using all the justifications. Teachers chose their training routes and subsequent employing schools based on available support, colleagues’ recommendations, the feel, the location and whether they preferred teaching students requiring greater academic support who often display challenging behaviour or those requiring less support who often display cooperative behaviour. Looking at why teachers moved around the profession demonstrates the temporal nature of their career justifications. Teachers’ lives influenced these justifications, with some not being prioritised in the first instance, which were later adopted, and vice versa. For example, teachers who were geographically mobile for training later became geographically fixed in their search for employing schools, as explored in *homeward bound* (7.2). Therefore, this answer may offer insights into the fluid nature of career decisions, suggesting that teachers adopt certain rationales early on, only to later revise, abandon or re-centre them as their circumstances and priorities change.

Research question three asked “what are the career aspirations of early career teachers?” This was answered through uniting *homeward bound*, *socially boosted*, *mentored into momentum*, *being kidfluenced*, *the journey of helping others* and *wisdom on loan*. Teachers’ career aspirations can be grouped into two broad categories: a) staying in the teaching profession, as teachers and/or with leadership/administration responsibilities, and b) leaving the teaching profession, and either staying in or leaving the wider education sector. This answer perhaps demonstrates how teachers have an

affinity for jobs which are readily available geographically and involve making a difference to the lives of others.

Examining how the justifications fluidly manifest at different career decision points illustrates the value of analysing teachers' career trajectories for understanding isolated career points, which may be needed by certain stakeholders. This discussion is extended after considering the usefulness of structure, agency and reflexivity (10.1.3), in the significance and contribution section (10.2).

### *10.1.3 The Usefulness of Structure, Agency and Reflexivity*

To understand the underlying mechanisms of the justifications, I examined them using the concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity. As a reminder, structure refers to the influence of institutions (e.g., the family, education and religion), agency refers to an individual's ability to freely act and reflexivity refers to processes in which individuals deliberate on their available actions (Archer, 2000, 2003; Healy, 1998).

Using a Bourdieu-Archer reconciled theoretical framework allowed for an exploration of how the justifications explained career decisions and how these operated (9.4). Specifically, Bourdieu's (1977) concepts of capital, habitus (including dispositions) and field, together with Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity, and critiques of these, were useful in exploring the mechanisms of these justifications. For example, *wisdom on loan* offered insights into how trusted others influence career decisions by framing interactions through the existing concept of internal conversations, which are confirmed by others in communicative reflexivity (Archer, 2003), alongside newly identified practices of external conversations and imagined futures through others. Similarly, Bourdieu's (1977) concept of social capital exposed inequalities in participation within the teaching labour market, where differing levels of social capital shaped outcomes ranging from informal advice to direct job offers without the need for applications or interviews. Thus, the theoretical framework provided a means of exploring the underlying mechanisms of career decisions.

Structure, agency and reflexivity helped explain the tension between structural constraints and teachers' choices to be influenced by structure. Some career decisions were driven by structure, while others reflected teachers' choice to let structure

constrain them. Regardless of whether they chose or were unable to choose, these structural mechanisms can both retain and push teachers out of the profession. The concept of home exemplifies this. For some teachers, financial constraints require them to seek training and employment close to their family homes, making home a structural constraint. For others, feeling rooted in a place due to a partner's job, children's social lives or family connections influenced their career decisions. I argue that these teachers can be seen to choose to uphold these structures in ways that allow them to shape their choices. This suggests that teachers' career decisions both arise from and illuminate the tension between structural constraints and agentic choice.

Applying the concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity offers a way of exploring the underlying mechanisms that may underpin teachers' career decisions beyond the descriptive or explanatory factors found within previous literature. Considering these underlying mechanisms (e.g., habitus, social capital and communicative reflexivity) helps explain how taken-for-granted (e.g., *the intuitive feel*) and normalised (e.g., *socially boosted*) justifications operate within teachers' accounts of their career decisions. Furthermore, it suggests that these career decisions are located within the teachers' respective social contexts.

### *10.1.4 Key Arguments Conclusion*

Overall, these insights support the overarching argument of this thesis: that a holistic investigation of teachers' career trajectories can help explain their career decision-making. The next section builds on these key arguments by a) highlighting my original contribution to knowledge and practice, b) reflecting on the limitations of this work and c) presenting suggestions for future research, policy and practice to benefit teachers, schools, students and wider society.

## 10.2 Significance and Contribution

The key arguments are used to offer contributions to the knowledge field (10.2.1), social theory (10.2.2) and are used to form recommendations for policies and practices (10.2.3).

### *10.2.1 Contribution to the Knowledge Field*

This research contributes to the limited literature which holistically investigates teachers' career decisions. It extends this work by offering a contextualised understanding of the career justifications of early career teachers in England, which I define as teachers with between zero (i.e., teachers in their first year) and seven years of experience working in the teaching profession. I contribute to the knowledge field through a) a thematic synthesis of previous studies, illuminated by the creation of a matrix of career decisions (figure 2, p. 37); b) the presentation of new justifications that expand the initial matrix (figure 9, p. 227); c) an exploration of how teachers fluidly engage with justifications depending on their life circumstances; and d) an analysis of how structure, agency and reflexivity help explain these justifications and the underlying mechanisms that shape their operation.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter, this thesis adds to the limited literature that holistically examines teachers' career decision-making. Previous studies have explored the career trajectories of teachers in Australia (Howes & Goodman-Delahunty, 2015), Flanders, Belgium (Mombaers et al., 2023) and three trainee teachers in England (MacLeod, 2025). This study contributes an understanding of the English context, focusing on a sample of 44 teachers with between zero (i.e., in their first year of teaching) and seven years of experience working in the teaching profession, thus extending this developing body of literature. This thesis suggests that investigating teachers' career trajectories provides insights into the justifications that span teachers' careers and how these may be fluidly prioritise at different points. In doing so, it addresses the limitation identified in the systematic review chapter (see 2.10.3): that it was difficult to determine whether the reasons identified across studies of isolated career decisions persist or evolve across a teacher's career. This contribution to the knowledge field may support more informed approaches to addressing teacher shortages since previous research, like policy cycles, often focuses on short-term, isolated career points (e.g., recruitment, retention or attrition), rather than long-term justifications spanning a teacher's career. For example, while the altruistic desire to help others is a common reason identified within previous research for teachers to enter the profession, *the journey of helping others* shows how this desire can develop

throughout teachers' careers and, in some cases, lead them out of the profession and into other jobs that also satisfy individuals' desire to help others, without the challenges of the teaching profession (e.g., workload). Advocating for this approach within the knowledge field may influence future researchers to consider investigating the career trajectories of other teachers, which may provide new justifications that can inform efforts to address teacher shortages.

### *10.2.2 Theoretical Contributions*

Using the reconciled Bourdieu-Archer theoretical framework (outlined in chapter 3), led to a deductive analysis that advances both theories separately, as well as together. The analysis presented in *socially boosted* (7.4) supports Bourdieu's (1977) concept of social capital. The development of the *wisdom on loan* sub-theme (7.5) offers concepts related to Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity by proposing the ideas of external conversations and imagined futures through others, and by showing how communicative reflexivity can be linked with Bourdieu's (1977) habitus. Consequently, I propose the concept of the negotiated habitus as a way of extending existing typologies of habitus within social theory (e.g., Ingram & Abrahams, 2016). These developments contribute to ongoing debates surrounding social capital (10.2.2.1), communicative reflexivity (10.2.2.2) and habitus (10.2.2.3), and demonstrate how a reconciled Bourdieu-Archer theoretical framework can help explain practice (10.2.2.3).

**10.2.2.1 Supporting Levels to Bourdieu's Social Capital.** This research provides an empirical example of how social capital can offer teachers advantages in a stratified manner, producing distinct levels of benefit. These levels include social connections that provide advice about entering the profession, connections that share information about job opportunities and connections that directly offer employment to teachers. At each level, teachers draw on their social capital to support their careers, with each level conferring greater advantage than the last. This supports Bourdieu's (1977) argument about the stratification of capital by showing how it manifests within social capital: social networks can benefit teachers' careers in different ways and at different levels, ranging from careers advice at the lowest level to direct job offers at the highest.

**10.2.2.2 Concepts Related to Archer's Communicative Reflexivity.** This research offers concepted related to Archer's (2003) conceptualisation of communicative reflexivity. Communicative reflexivity refers to instances where individuals rely upon discussions with others to make decisions (Archer, 2003). According to Archer (2003) this involves an individual engaging in an internal conversation (i.e., deliberating their actions) and then sharing the plans formed through this process with others to confirm a course of action. The internal conversation is central to Archer's forms of reflexivity. However, critics argue that reflexivity may manifest through other practices, such as conversations with others (Caetano, 2014) or writing (Lahire, 1998, 2008) and that Archer ignores and undervalues the role of emotions within deliberations (Burkitt, 2012). I address these criticisms by offering concepts related to communicative reflexivity: the external conversation and imagined futures through others.

I describe external conversations as reflective conversations with others in which career decisions (or available actions, more generally) are deliberated with others. This offers a different perspective to Archer's (2003) two-step process of communicative reflexivity (i.e., internal conversation then confirmation of these deliberations with others) by suggesting that, for some teachers, reflexive deliberation may take the form of a single process of external conversation or multiple sequences of external conversations, internal conversations, further external conversations and so on. Furthermore, this builds on Caetano's (2014) argument that reflexivity can take the form of conversations with others by illustrating, through empirical examples, what this looks like in practice. This conceptualisation suggests the value of recognising reflexivity as including both internal and external dialogues.

Imagined futures through others is a concept which I propose within the internal conversation. This involves using other people, situated in the context the individual is deliberating (e.g., a teacher in an early career teacher's school), to decide upon an action (e.g., whether to remain as a teacher). This deliberation occurs within the internal conversation and does not involve any direct conversation with others to confirm the action, which could make it a feature of autonomous reflexivity (i.e., when individuals reflect independently; Archer, 2003). However, I conceptualise imagined futures

through others as an aspect of communicative reflexivity because it involves engaging with others to deliberate whether the individual wants to pursue similar life experiences. Nevertheless, the practice of imagined futures through others illuminates the dynamics of the internal conversation. Future work could investigate how internal conversations vary across different modes of reflexivity (i.e., autonomous, fractured and meta-reflexivity).

External conversations and imagined futures through others may demonstrate that communicative reflexivity is not on the decline, as Archer (2010a) argues. Instead, this study offers empirical examples of how early career teachers enact communicative reflexivity. While the concepts of the external conversation and imagined futures through others were developed from interviews with early career teachers, the concepts are not limited to teaching and could be applied in other research areas to explain wider social practices.

#### 10.2.2.3 Linking Archer's Communicative Reflexivity with Bourdieu's Habitus.

This study is the first to use a reconciled theoretical framework of Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice and Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach to understand teachers' career decisions. There is other research, outside teacher career decision-making, that has successfully utilised a reconciliation of Bourdieu and Archer (e.g., Edwards & Burton's, 2021, study on young women's recovery from problematic alcohol use, which uses Bourdieu's capital and Archer's reflexivity). However, this remains controversial, as some argue that Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice no longer adequately explains contemporary action (e.g., Wimalasena & Marks', 2019, study on postcolonial Sri Lanka which concludes this).

In contrast, I found value in utilising Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice with Archer's (2003) morphogenetic approach. Using this framework demonstrates how Archer's (2003) communicative reflexivity can be linked with Bourdieu's (1977) habitus when explaining entry into, remaining within and leaving the teaching profession. As mentioned previously, communicative reflexivity involves discussing career decisions with others (Archer, 2003). In this research, teachers most often discussed this with family members. When doing so, family members drew upon cultural and social expectations about what forms of work were deemed acceptable and thus valued

within their habitus. This analysis suggests how families communicated and reproduced habitual expectations through reflexive deliberations, while individuals maintained their individual desires. I argue that this constitutes a negotiated habitus. Thus, this provides an empirical example that contributes to discussions about how both theories can be used together to illuminate practice.

**10.2.2.4 Theoretical Contributions Conclusion.** As mentioned in 10.1.3, applying the concepts of structure, agency and reflexivity using the reconciled theoretical framework was a useful tool to explore the analysis and understand how drivers of career decisions operate. Therefore, this section demonstrates a reciprocal relationship between this thesis and social theory. Not only did the reconciled framework support the exploration of my themes, but the themes themselves also offer insights that contribute to ongoing discussions within social theory.

### *10.2.3 Policy and Practice Recommendations*

From these findings, I make policy recommendations which align with the five themes of mentoring, community, teacher networks, protected time and progression and amending and reviewing current DfE policies. Within each I outline how each of these aim to influence teacher recruitment and retention.

**10.2.3.1 Mentoring.** I recommend that funding for mentor training is extended, Get Into Teaching mentors are continued to be supported and Continue In Teaching mentors and parent mentors are introduced, and mentors are adequately trained and matched with teachers.

I recommend that the DfE consider extending their funding calls for school mentors to include mentoring both before and beyond the early career stage in England. Having mentors for those volunteering in schools, completing school experience and working in support role positions could encourage these individuals to join the profession. This comes from the *mentored into momentum* sub-theme, which found that some participants were inspired by teachers they worked alongside to join the profession. I also recommend that the DfE fund training for mentors to work with teachers who have completed their early career framework years. This could provide support to teachers in the next phase of their teaching career, whether that be with enhancing their classroom

practice or progressing into a leadership position. This could be beneficial for the retention of both the teacher, whose practice is being enhanced, and the mentor teacher, who wants to help others.

I also recommend that the DfE continues to support and expand their Get Into Teaching mentor scheme. Many teachers referred to how these mentors helped them become teachers, suggesting its usefulness. To support the retention of teachers, I recommend the DfE investigate a version of this mentorship that covers keeping teachers in the profession (e.g., Continue In Teaching mentors). Having a mentor outside of the teachers' network, like the Get Into Teaching mentors, may be a beneficial form of social capital. Furthermore, this may provide spaces for external conversations between the teachers and their Continue In Teaching mentor once they have built up a relationship, which may help retain the teachers to the profession.

To support teachers with caregiving responsibilities, I recommend that the DfE look into the creation of parent mentors. This may involve teachers who feel as though they are able to balance their teaching with caregiving being trained to support teachers who are parents, want to become parents, or are planning to become parents. This may aid with transitional periods such as becoming pregnant, leaving and coming back from maternity leave and learning how to balance their new parental role with their teaching workload. It may also provide a source of support for teachers in the form of inspirational leadership. This comes from the *being kidfluenced* sub-theme, which found that teachers cited their own (both current and hypothetical) children as influencing factors on their decision to remain within the profession. Thus, the creation of parent mentors may support the retention of teachers.

Within these initiatives, I recommend that mentors should be adequately trained and matched with a teacher. Based on the *mentored into momentum* sub-theme, I suggest that mentor training includes interpersonal skills which allows for positive, supportive mentoring. In addition to this, I recommend that schools and teacher training providers consider matching their mentors and teachers to allow for an alignment between the two which may allow for the development of supportive and productive relationships. This training and matched mentoring may allow teachers to feel supported and, thus, remain in the profession.

**10.2.3.2 Community Engagement.** I recommend that community-based initiatives are explored to recruit and retain teachers.

To recruit teachers, I recommend that individuals who live within schools' communities could be targeted. This could include banners outside of schools with headings such as "be a teacher and give back to your community". It could also include targeting universities that have high proportions of students who live at home and commute to their institution to encourage these students to train to teach in their communities. This is based on the *homeward bound* sub-theme, which found that some teachers prioritise their homes when making career decisions. Embedding these recruited teachers within the community that they prioritise could further help with the retention of teachers.

Whilst training, I recommend that teacher training providers consider matching their school placements with what their trainee teachers want to pursue. The *journey of helping others* theme found that some teachers want to work within disadvantaged communities. Teacher training providers could provide placements within these communities as these may support teachers to learn how to best work within these environments. This may positively influence their retention to the profession.

To retain teachers, I recommend that teachers are supported to engage with their community. This could include supporting the arrangement of community initiatives such as stay and plays for babies and toddlers, seasonal fairs and adult education/support groups. These could be embedded within curriculums to ensure they are not additional practices that affect teachers' workloads. I also recommend exploring initiatives that engage students' families and communities. This may promote positive student behaviour and teachers may feel better supported to address disruptive classroom behaviour and strengthen relationships. These initiatives are based on amalgamating the *journey of helping others* theme, *homeward bound* sub-theme and *being kidfluenced* sub-theme. They aim to provide teachers with a space to provide and receive support from their community, which may help retain them to the profession.

**10.2.3.3 Teacher Networks.** Based on the *homeward bound* and *socially boosted* sub-themes, I recommend that links are made between local schools to

provide social networks. These could be developed from, or in addition to, the DfE's (2024j) teaching hubs which could expand their remit from continuous professional development and training to include networking. This may facilitate secondments to different schools, teacher loan programmes and spaces for teachers to engage in external conversations, which may influence the retention of teachers.

**10.2.3.4 Protected Time and Progression.** I recommend that the DfE explores initiatives related to progression and protected time beyond Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) to certain teachers.

I recommend that the DfE explores providing protected time for pastoral work (e.g., mentoring, engaging with families and supporting students' behaviour) and for parent teachers (e.g., those transitioning to or from maternity/paternity/adoption leave) for teachers who may benefit from this type of paid protected time. The recommendation of pastoral protected time comes from the *journey of helping others* theme, which found that teachers want to help others (e.g., students, families and other teachers) with workload being identified as an issue which impacts their ability to do this. Protected time for parent teachers for transitioning to and from the profession from periods of leave and continuous professional development may help these teachers both with their classroom practice and with progression. This comes from the *being kidfluenced* theme, which suggests that some teachers who are parents may hit glass ceilings when progressing in teaching, with potential parents thinking about leaving the profession. Therefore, exploring the potential to offer this protected time may help retain teachers to the profession.

To support the progression of teachers in the profession, I recommend that the DfE explore providing national professional qualifications in pastoral subjects. This may allow for teachers motivated by their desire to help others, as evidenced in the *journey of helping others* theme, to progress in their careers and remain within the profession. Furthermore, enhancing pastoral leadership progression may allow for teachers to engage in the concept of imagined futures through others, if they are similarly motivated by wanting to help others, which may also retain these teachers to the profession.

**10.2.3.5 Amending and Reviewing Department for Education Policies.** Based on the findings, I suggest that the DfE amend and review their Get Into Teaching media campaign, their flexible working toolkit, the find a candidate feature, the improving workload and wellbeing initiative as well as reviewing the motivational environments these policies address.

I suggest that the DfE considers targeting their Get Into Teaching media campaign within healthcare and social services settings (e.g., hospitals). This could result in the recruitment of teachers from other helping jobs, who may be motivated by their desire to help others. As the *journey of helping others* theme shows, some teachers decided to leave teaching and take up positions in mental health services, which are similarly helping jobs. Targeting healthcare settings could mean that the recruitment and attrition of teachers and healthcare workers are cyclical, in that one sector gains a worker when the other loses one. This could also fit alongside the DfE's (2026) pledge to enhance routes into teaching by exploring the potential for healthcare and social service workers to complete a teaching conversion course. Furthermore, the DfE could engage with other government departments, such as Public Health England, to help with similar initiatives to recruit teachers into healthcare and/or social services roles.

I recommend that the DfE provide further support, through their flexible working toolkit (DfE, n.d.-c), to support schools with timetabling for flexibility. This could be through providing more financial support to ensure that adequate flexibility (e.g., with enough PPA and other protected time) for teachers to do their work. This comes from the *being kidfluenced* theme, which found that current parent teachers and teachers who were planning on having children sought part-time teaching work. This may help retain teachers who require this type of flexible working.

I also recommend that the DfE amend their find a candidate feature on the teacher training portal to allow potential trainee teachers to disclose if they are geographically restricted (DfE, 2026). This comes from the *homeward bound* sub-theme, which found that some teachers are restricted to work in specific geographical regions as they prioritise their homes and communities. This may allow for an alignment between where trainee teachers want to train and training providers who have spaces on their

programmes. This may positively influence the recruitment of teachers into the profession.

I recommend that the DfE review their improving workload and wellbeing initiative to ensure that it is having the intended outcome. Issues surrounding workload and wellbeing were cited by teachers in their reasons for why they plan to leave or would consider leaving. To support schools with this, the DfE could review whether putting the responsibility on schools to conduct their own workload and wellbeing audits is the best approach, as this requires further workload from leaders which could negatively influence leader retention as well as working environments. The DfE could instead conduct an audit on what inefficient administrative duties schools are doing in service of the DfE or wider systems (e.g., set up by academies), eliminate the requirement of these and communicate this to schools. This may improve workload and wellbeing of teachers and leaders, which may facilitate their retention to the profession.

I also recommend that the DfE consider using a blank version of the matrix displayed in figure 9 as a policy tool. This could be used to evaluate current and future policy initiatives aiming to recruit and retain teachers. Policymakers could start by listing and categorising their policies into practical, philosophical, intrinsic and/or extrinsic motivational environments. If this is mapped onto a matrix, it may show whether some quadrants are more concentrated than others. From this, policymakers could identify which motivational environments may need addressing. Then, policies which aim to appeal to these environments could be created and enacted.

**10.2.3.6 Policy and Practice Recommendations Conclusion.** This section has provided policy and practice recommendations related to mentoring, community engagement, teacher networks, protected time and progression and amending and reviewing current DfE policies.

One of the key findings of this study is that early career teachers justify their careers in diverse ways. Teachers are not all motivated by the same factors, so prioritising one strategy and expecting it to address teacher shortages would be ineffective. For example, flexible working practices, as supported by the DfE (2024d), may help retain teachers who are caregivers but will not prevent those leaving due to challenging

behaviour in their classrooms. Furthermore, these justifications can change over time. For example, some teachers who were geographically mobile when they trained to teach often became geographically fixed once they entered romantic relationships, while others who were geographically fixed during their training later became mobile after exiting relationships. Thus, motivations to enter teaching may not sustain them and can even demotivate them later. For instance, some teachers who chose to work in disadvantaged schools to make a difference to the lives of students who required more support and often displayed challenging behaviour later cited this behaviour as a reason for leaving the profession. Therefore, I suggest a holistic strategy, proportionate to the context, that accounts for the multitude of teacher justifications, rather than adopting a strategy focused narrowly on one or two elements of recruitment and retention.

### *10.2.4 Significance and Contribution Conclusion*

Overall, this section has demonstrated how this study contributes to efforts to address teacher shortages and offers insights that engage with sociological theoretical debates and concepts. The next section draws upon these contributions, as well as the wider thesis, to critically examine the limitations of this research and their implications for future directions for research.

## 10.3 Limitations

Throughout this thesis, I have acknowledged some limitations with the study. This section unites these thematically to outline limitations of the research design, the engagement with reflexivity and understanding gendered and heteronormative patterns of teachers' career decision-making.

### *10.3.1 Research Design*

There are three main limitations of the primary study's research design: issues with memory recall, the cross-sectional approach and the sample in terms of capturing experiences of teachers who identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group and those who work in private schools, grammar schools and special schools. Although survivor bias could be seen as a limitation, since I interviewed teachers who had remained in the

profession and had not yet left, I interpret this as a strength. It enabled an exploration of factors that successfully influenced these teachers to enter and remain in the profession, as well as those that might prompt them to leave in the future.

As outlined in the methods chapter (5), this research involved asking teachers about their past decision-making, which can result in issues with memory recall. Elder-Vass (2007) discusses how the event and verbalising post-event reasoning are two separate actions. Tracking teachers while they make career decisions over the first seven years of their career was not feasible within the timeframe of a PhD. Furthermore, the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study recognise that the interpretation of experiences is epistemologically part of research. Thus, I used the word "justifications" to refer to the themes in this study to capture the participants' sense-making and retrospective reasoning. Nevertheless, while I have defended the retrospective design of data collection, I acknowledge the potential for issues with memory recall. However, my focus is not on the factual accuracy of events, but rather how teachers' career decisions can be explained.

The cross-sectional approach provides no follow-up with teachers to assess whether they achieved their aspirations, both within and beyond teaching. For instance, tracking teachers who planned for children and subsequently had them would illuminate whether they executed their plans for balancing work with children, which would add to understandings of teaching and caregiving. This limitation, together with the issue of memory recall discussed previously, highlights the value of longitudinal research designs that examine teachers' career decisions at successive data collection points. Brantlinger (2021) adopted a longitudinal cohort design to understand the characteristics of leavers, stayers and returners over a nine-year period. However, the study relied on a cross-sectional approach to data collection, using open-ended survey responses to provide explanations for teachers', isolated, career decisions (e.g., joining, staying, leaving and returning). Therefore, future research should consider adopting longitudinal approaches to collecting teachers' explanations for their on-going career decisions to enrich the field.

Neither the justifications, nor the coding, captured the distinct experiences that teachers who identify as belonging to a minority ethnic group may encounter. Previous

research suggests that this protected characteristic has an influence on teachers' career decision-making. For example, Worth et al. (2022) found that teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds experience racism whilst training to teach and once in the profession, which influences them to leave the profession. I did not develop any justifications, nor any codes or themes which centred around racism. The sample in this study comprised two teachers who identified as Black, Black British, Black Caribbean or African, two teachers who identified as Asian or Asian British and 40 teachers who identified as White. This is an underrepresentation of teachers identifying as belonging to minority ethnic groups working in state schools in England (9% of the sample compared with 14.9% of the population). Indeed, my identity as a White researcher may have deterred teachers from disclosing any of these experiences. Furthermore, as these are currently serving teachers there is a survivor bias in which other teachers who have experienced racism may have already left the profession. Therefore, future research should adopt sampling strategies that specifically examine the career trajectories of teachers who identify as belonging to minority ethnic groups. While all protected characteristics deserve consideration, the absence of opportunity to engage with race in comparison with other protected characteristics prompts this recommendation as it has been linked with exiting the teaching profession (Worth et al., 2022).

At the time of data collection, no teachers in the sample taught in grammar, private or special schools. All teachers taught in state schools (both locally maintained and academies) including faith schools (both Catholic and Church of England). Future research could explore how justifications compare across teachers in state, grammar, private and special schools, and whether teachers in these schools have their own distinct justifications.

### *10.3.2 Engagement with Reflexivity*

There are three limitations I have identified with the study's engagement with Archer's (2003) reflexivity: its focus on reflexivity for action; the absence of examples where communicative reflexivity was unsuccessfully engaged with; and its contribution to the neurotypical framing of the concept.

Although this research engages with criticisms of Archer's reflexivity to suggest how emotions, external conversations and other people can factor into reflexivity, which influences career decisions, it nevertheless reproduces the criticism that Archer focuses solely on the outcome of reflexivity (Caetano, 2014; Mrozowicki, 2010, 2011). I briefly discussed how teachers' parents who had previously expressed disdain for teaching may have engaged in reflexivity to reconsider the profession once they observed their children's commitment to teaching. However, this is difficult to ascertain as these parents were not the focus of the research. The focus on action was due to the research questions and aim which sought to explain early career teachers' career decision-making. Therefore, although this may not fully address this limitation, focusing on action was necessary to answer the research questions and address the aim. Consequently, future research could instead examine the formation of reflexivity and its engagement as a standalone process, perhaps through dedicated research questions, to address this limitation and fill a lacuna within the theoretical knowledge field.

Within the research, instances where teachers engaged in communicative reflexivity consistently led to the deliberated action. For example, if a teacher engaged in communicative reflexivity in deciding whether to apply for a promotion, the outcome was that they secured the promotion. This may be a limitation of the research design, as teachers were more likely to disclose successful career moves. However, there were also instances in which teachers disclosed unsuccessful applications for universities and jobs. Future research could examine instances where communicative reflexivity does not lead to the deliberated outcome, to explore whether and how further reflexivity is subsequently invoked.

Within the theoretical framework chapter (3), I criticised Archer's (2003) internal conversation for being neurotypical. However, this study could not explore how neurodivergent individuals engaged with reflexivity. Five participants disclosed (without being prompted) that they were neurodivergent: two with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder diagnoses and three with dyslexia. However, only one of these individuals, Erica (who is dyslexic), contributed to the development of the *wisdom on loan* sub-theme, and her neurodivergence was not examined within the sub-theme. Future

research could examine neurodivergence and engagement with reflexivity to overcome my criticism of Archer's (2003) neurotypical framing of the internal conversation.

### *10.3.3 Gender, Sexuality and Teaching*

There are two aspects of gender, sexuality and teaching that this study could not explain.

Firstly, while links were made between men and gaining employment and progressing within teaching, the study's small-scale and qualitative nature meant these links could not be statistically analysed to reveal significant associations (within *the journey of helping others, being kidfluenced* and *socially boosted* themes). Therefore, future research should investigate this link, and to avoid gender binarism, should include voices from teachers who identify outside of woman/man categorisations.

Secondly, this study did not capture teachers with caring commitments who fall outside of heteronormative assumptions of a family unit. Within the *being kidfluenced* sub-theme, caregiving was discussed through a heteronormative lens in which two parents of different, binary genders (i.e., a man and a woman) invoked different roles in caring for their family. Future research should explore how Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and other sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQ+) teachers' career decisions intersect with caregiving and parental responsibilities.

Together, these gaps highlight the need for future research that explicitly foregrounds LGBTQ+ and gendered perspectives in teachers' career decision-making.

### *10.3.4 Limitations Conclusion*

This section has outlined limitations relating to the research design, engagement with reflexivity and gendered and heteronormative patterns of teachers' career decision-making. Alongside these, recommendations for future research have been proposed. The following section builds on these by identifying further directions for research, policy and practice.

## 10.4 Future Directions for Research, Policy and Practice

Future directions for research, policy and practice have already been identified in the significance and contribution (10.2) and limitations (10.3) sections of this conclusion, as well as within the presentation of themes (chapters 6, 7 and 8). This section concludes the thesis by recommending that future research, policy and practice focus on long-term solutions to retain teachers within their jobs, schools and the profession. Such long-term solutions can be developed by identifying the justifications that drive teachers' career trajectories, rather than focusing on individual, isolated reasons for short-term career decision points (e.g., entry into, remaining within and leaving the profession). For the teachers in the sample, these justifications included the desire to help others through their paid work, prioritising their homes, being influenced by children and mentors, using their social networks, engaging in communicative reflexivity and being motivated by the feel of working environments. Policy and practice recommendations following these justifications include those relating to mentoring, community engagement, teacher networks, protected time and progression and amending and reviewing current DfE policies.

To follow on from this study, I recommend that the career trajectories of mid-career and more experienced teachers are examined. It would be valuable to compare the justifications developed from early career teachers' decision-making with those of more experienced teachers. For instance, future research could explore whether more experienced teachers demonstrate fluidity in their prioritisation of home, such as developing caregiving responsibilities for elderly parents or relatives, as may be the case for older, more experienced teachers. The issues with memory recall documented in the limitations section (10.3.1) may be exacerbated when researching more experienced teachers; therefore, researchers should adopt designs that mitigate this, such as prospective cohort studies tracking a diverse set of intending teachers from training into and within their careers. Such research would be beneficial in identifying longer-term justifications that could help address teacher shortages.

## 10.5 Concluding this Thesis

This thesis argues that teachers' career decision-making is influenced by unique justifications which span across their career trajectories. Previous research has typically focused on one or two career points (e.g., entry into, moving around or leaving the profession). This thesis suggests that such an approach is unsatisfactory for capturing teachers' career justifications, as most teachers experience multiple, evolving influences over time. It is hoped that this contribution will "keep up the momentum" needed to address teacher shortages and to ensure that teachers are able to thrive in their roles and make a meaningful contribution to the lives of the children they teach (Worth, 2025a).

To conclude, this thesis demonstrates that teachers are people with lives which influence their career trajectories. They are "not just applicant 124", in Hannah's words, isolated at the point of entry into the profession, nor are they just one of the 40,000 teachers leaving the profession each year, if looking solely at the retention of teachers (DfE, 2025m). They are individuals with families, homes, or at least plans for these, whose life trajectories motivate their career decisions, making trajectories a worthwhile focus for research, policy and practices. By centring the lives of teachers, this thesis suggests that teaching can be understood as a people profession.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Approved Ethics Form

This appendix shows my approved ethics form.

UNIVERSITY of York

Education Ethics Committee

Ethical Issues Audit Form for Research Students

This questionnaire should be completed for each research study that you carry out as part of your degree.

Surname / Family Name: **Bowling**

First Name/ Given Name: **Abigail**

Programme: **PhD in Education**

Supervisor (of this research study): **Paul Wakeling and Sally Hancock**

Topic (or area) of the proposed research study: **Career decision-making of early career teachers**

Where the research will be conducted: **Online (via Zoom)**

Methods that will be used to collect data: **Semi-structured interviews (30 minutes – 1 hour)**

| Methods (select one option) | Tick one box |
|---|---|
| Primary research (research with human participants): Population, sample and sampling and recruitment strategies; Data collection; Data analysis.<br><br>Note: if collecting data online: interviews must be conducted Via Zoom, Google, or Blackboard and surveys must be conducted using Qualtrics. The use of WeChat is NOT permitted except for the recruitment of participants. | ☒ |
| Secondary research (secondary datasets; systematic reviews; or documentary analysis): Proposed dataset; Data retrieval; Data analysis | ☐ |

If you will be using human participants, how will you recruit them? Social media, snowball sampling, my own social network.

Supervisors, please read Ethical Approval Procedures: Students.

The application is a joint one by the research student and supervisor(s). It should be submitted to the TAP member for initial approval and then to the Higher Degrees Administrator who will seek a second opinion from a designated member of Education Ethics Committee. Forms may also require review by the full Ethics Committee (see below).

Approvals

(This section is to be completed by a staff member.)

First approval: by the TAP member (after reviewing the form):

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). | ☒ |
| I am unsure if this study, as planned, meets normal ethical standards | ☐ |
| I believe that this study, as planned, does not meet normal ethical standards and requires some modification | ☐ |

Add TAP member's name: Lisa Kim

Add date: 17 August 2022

The TAP member should now **email** this completed form to the Programme Administrator.

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). | x |
| I am unsure if this study, as planned, meets normal ethical standards | ☐ |
| I believe that this study, as planned, does not meet normal ethical standards and requires some modification | ☐ |

Add the name of Ethics Committee member: Bill Soden

Add the date: 10.10.2022.

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).

Approval required by the full Education Ethics Committee

If the application requires review by the full Education Ethics Committee, please select one of the following options then forward the application to (education-research-admin@york.ac.uk).

| **Ethics statement** | **Tick one box** |
|---|---|
| The study involves deception | ☐ |
| The study involves an intervention and procedures could cause concerns | ☐ |
| The topic is sensitive or potentially distressing | ☐ |
| The study involves vulnerable subjects | ☐ |
| Other reason: | ☐ |

Please explain any other reason here:

Add the name of person making referral:

Add the date:

**That's the end of the staff section. The following section is for the student to complete.**

Data sources

1 If your research involves collecting secondary data only **go to SECTION 2**.

2 If your research involves collecting data from people (e.g. by observing, testing, or teaching them, or from interviews or questionnaires) **go to SECTION 1.**

SECTION 1: For studies involving people

3 a) Have you screened your study for risk using the UoY Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) screening questions?

YES

b) Did you have to submit a UoY Data Protection Impact Assessment template to the Data Protection Officer?

(If a DPIA is required, you will be sent a copy of the University DPIA template to complete.)

NO

Notes : If yes, please upload the submitted DPIA template with your supporting documents.

4 a) Is the amount of time you are asking research participants to give reasonable?

YES

b) Is any disruption to their normal routines at an acceptable level?

YES

5 Are any of the questions to be asked, or areas to be probed, likely to cause anxiety or distress to research participants?

NO

6 a) Are all the data collection methods used necessary and appropriate to the context and participants?

YES

b) Do you need to gather personally identifiable data?

YES

c) Are you capturing the minimum amount of personal data/special category data necessary for your research project? **Please choose *NA if no personal data is to be collected**.

YES

7 Could you anonymise (or pseudonymise) data at any point during the project to minimise data protection risk?
Tick one of the following options:
☐ a) I am only collecting anonymous data.
☒ b) I will anonymise/pseudonymise my data after data collection.
☐ c) I will not anonymise/pseudonymise my data. Reason:____

8 Will the research involve deception?

NO

9 Will the research involve sensitive or potentially distressing topics? (The latter might include abuse, bereavement, bullying, drugs, ethnicity, gender, personal relationships, political views, religion, sex, violence. If there is lack of certainty about whether a topic is sensitive, advice should be sought from the Ethics Committee.)

NO

If YES, please add here what steps you will take to ensure that the methods and procedures are appropriate, not burdensome, and are sensitive to ethical considerations?

10 Does your research involve collecting data from vulnerable or high-risk groups? (The latter might include participants who are asylum seekers, unemployed, homeless, looked after children, victims or perpetrators of abuse, or those who have special educational needs. If there is a lack of certainty about whether participants are vulnerable or high risk, advice should be sought from the Ethics Committee. Please note, children with none of the

above characteristics are not necessarily vulnerable, though approval for your project must be given by at least two members of staff; see above).

NO

If YES, please say here what steps you will take to ensure that the methods and procedures are appropriate, not burdensome, and are sensitive to ethical considerations?

11 Are the research participants under 16 years of age?

NO

If NO, go to question 12.

If YES, and you intend to interact with the children, do you intend to ensure that another adult is present during all such interactions?

Choose an item

If NO, please explain, for example:

This would seriously compromise the validity of the research because [**provide your reason**]

b) I have/will have a full Disclosure and Barring Service check (formerly Criminal Records Bureau check).

Choose an item

c) Please give any other reasons here:

Payment to participants

12 If research participants are to receive reimbursement of expenses or any other incentives, including financial, before or after the study, please give details. You should indicate what they will receive and, briefly, the basis on which this was decided.

It is often considered good practice to consider what the researcher might offer the participants, in the spirit of reciprocity. Some ideas of what this might be include: materials at the end of the study, a workshop summarising the results of the study, a delayed treatment/intervention at the end of the study, an indication about where the findings might be accessed at a later date, a letter or token of thanks. Please ensure that you have considered the potential for reciprocity in your research.

**Participants will be offered the opportunity to be contacted with the findings (anonymised themes which does not identify any participant). Also, this will be framed as a chance for participants to reflect on their career.**

Intervention

If your study involves an INTERVENTION i.e. a change to normal practice made for the purposes of the research, go to question 13 (this does not include 'laboratory style' studies i.e. where ALL participation is voluntary):

If your study does not involve an intervention, go to question 20.

13 Is the extent of the change within the range of changes that teachers (or equivalent) would normally be able to make within their own discretion?

Choose an item

14 Will the change be fully discussed with those directly involved (teachers, senior school managers, pupils, parents – as appropriate)?

Choose an item

15 Are you confident that all treatments (including comparison groups in multiple intervention studies) will potentially provide some educational benefit that is compatible with current educational aims in that particular context? (Note: This is not asking you to justify a non-active control i.e. continued normal practice)

Choose an item

Please **briefly** describe this / these benefit(s):

16 If you intend to have two or more groups, are you offering the control / comparison group an opportunity to have the experimental / innovative treatment at some later point (this can include making the materials available to the school or learners)?

Choose an item

If NO, please explain:

17 If you intend to have two or more groups of participants receiving different treatment, do the informed consent forms give this information?

Choose an item

18 If you are randomly assigning participants to different treatments, have you considered the ethical implications of this?

Choose an item

19 If you are randomly assigning participants to different treatments (including non-active controls), will the institution and participants (or parents where participants are under 16) be informed of this in advance of agreeing to participate?

Choose an item

If NO, please explain:

General protocol for working in institutions

20 Do you intend to conduct yourself, and advise your team to conduct themselves, in a professional manner as a representative of the University of York, respectful of the rules, demands and systems within the institution you are visiting?

YES

21 If you intend to carry out research with children under 16, have you read and understood the Education Ethics Committee's Guidance for Ethical Approval for Research in Schools?

Choose an item

22 If you are conducting research overseas, please tick one of the following options:

☐ a) Local ethics approval is not needed and I have provided evidence of this separately.

☐ b) Local ethics approval is needed and I have obtained it.

☐ c) Local ethics approval is needed but I have not obtained it. Reason:_

☐ d) Local ethics approval is *not* required (please give rationale, e.g., I am undertaking research in China, and I will be solely interviewing university students who will be informed about the research and then they will be asked to consent.)

Informed consent

23 Have you prepared Informed Consent Form(s) which participants in the study will be asked to sign, or agree to and which are appropriate for different kinds of participants?

YES

If YES, please attach the informed consent form(s).

If NO, please explain:

24 Please check the details on the informed consent form(s) match each one of your answers below. Does this informed consent form:

a) inform participants in advance about what their involvement in the research study will entail?

YES

b) if there is a risk that participants may disclose information to you which you may feel morally or legally bound to pass on to relevant external bodies, have you included this within a confidentiality clause in your informed consent form?

YES

c) inform participants of the purpose of the research?

YES

d) inform participants of what will happen to the data they provide (how this will be stored, who will have access to it, whether and how individuals' identities will be protected during this process)?

YES

e) if there is a possibility that you may use some of the data publicly (e.g. in presentations or online), inform the participants how identifiable such data will be **and** give them the opportunity to decline such use of data?

YES

f) give the names and contact details (e.g. email) of at least two people to whom queries, concerns or complaints should be directed? One of these people should be on the Education Ethics Committee (please use education-research-admin@york.ac.uk) and not involved with the research.

YES

g) in studies involving interviews or focus groups, inform participants that they will be given an opportunity to comment on your written record of the event?

YES

If NO, have you made this clear this on your consent form?

Choose an item

If NO, please explain here why not:

h) inform participants how long the data is likely to be kept for?

YES

i) inform participants if any data will be kept indefinitely?

N/A

j) inform participants if the data could be used for future analysis and/or other purposes?

YES

k) inform participants they may withdraw from the study during data collection?

YES

l) provide a date/timescale by which participants will be able to withdraw their data and tell the participants how to do this? (NB. If your data is going to be completely anonymised, any withdrawal of data needs to happen before this.) ***NA if your data will be anonymous at point of collection**

YES

If your answer was NO to any of the above, please explain here, indicating which item(s) you are referring to (a-j):

25 Who will be asked to sign an Informed Consent Form? Please select **all** that apply:

☒ Adult research participants

☐ Research participants under 16

☐ Parents (of U16s)

☐ Head/senior leadership team member

☒ Teachers

☐ Other

If other, please explain here:

26 In studies involving an **intervention** with under 16s, will you seek informed consent from parents?

Choose an item

If NO, please explain here:

SECTION 2

Data Storage, Analysis, Management and Protection

27 I am accessing data from a non-publicly available source (regardless of whether the data is identifiable) e.g. pupil data held by a school or local authority, learners' work.

NO

If YES, I have obtained written permission from a figure of authority who is responsible for holding the data. This informed consent

a) acknowledges the purposes for which the data will be used,

b) acknowledges responsibility for releasing the data, and

c) confirms that releasing the data does not violate any informed consents or implicit agreements at the point the data was initially gathered.

Choose an item

28 a) I have read and understood the Education Ethics Committee's Guidance on Data Storage and Protection.

YES

b) Are you working collaboratively with 3rd parties or sharing data with non-University personnel?

NO

c) If YES have you consulted the Information Governance Office and/or IP and Legal to ensure appropriate contract and/or data sharing arrangements are in place?

Choose an item

29 a) What technical and organisational measures have you put in place to safeguard data (e.g. storage arrangements, folder and file encryption, safe handling practices etc.)?

Please give details here: Stored on a password protected computer, anonymised, only the researcher will have access to this data.

b) Have you completed a Data Management Plan?

YES

If NO, please explain here:

30 If any anonymised data is to be kept indefinitely it will be stored with the University's Research Data York service, as I am practising Open Science.

N/A

31 If your data can be traced to identifiable participants: Data will be identifiable until data collection and transcription is completed.

a) Who will be able to access your data? Only the researcher, Abigail Bowling.

b) approximately how long will you need to keep it in this identifiable format? Until data collection and transcription is completed.

32 If working in collaboration with other colleagues, students, or if under someone's supervision, please discuss and complete the following:

We have agreed:

Abigail Bowling will be responsible for keeping and storing the data

Abigail Bowling will have access to the anonymised data

Abigail Bowling will have the rights to publish using the data

Reporting your research

33 In any reports that you write about your research, will you do everything possible to ensure that the identity of any individual research participant, or the institution which they attend or work for, cannot be deduced by a reader?

YES

If NO please explain here:

Potential ethical problems as your research progresses

34 If you see any potential problems arising during the course of the research, please give details here and describe how you plan to deal with them:

Add your name: Abigail Bowling

Add the date: 17/08/2022

Please **email** this form to your supervisor who will send it to the TAP member

Notes on implementing the procedures approved here:

If your plans change as you carry out the research study, you should discuss any changes you make with your supervisor. If the changes are significant, your supervisor may advise you to complete a new 'Ethical issues audit' form.

For Research Students (MA by Research, MPhil, PhD), once your data collection is over, you must write an email to your supervisor to confirm that your research did not deviate significantly from the procedures you have outlined above.

# Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

This appendix shows my informed consent form which every participant read and signed before I interviewed them.

**Project title: The career decision-making of early career teachers**

Dear Participant

I, Abigail Bowling, am currently carrying out a research project on the career decision-making of early career teachers (those who have completed their training from 2016/17 onwards) in England as part of my PhD in Education at the University of York. 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 me know If anything is unclear or if 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 an understanding of how teachers make career decisions whilst in the early stages of their career.

**What does this mean for you?**

If you agree to take part in this project, you will be invited for an interview. The length of the interview depends on your answers and can vary from 30 minutes to 1 hour. This interview will be conducted over Zoom, but if you are more comfortable with another video conferencing software, e.g., Teams, then I am happy to change this for you. Interviews will be audio recorded with your permission. During this interview I will ask you to discuss your career from leaving secondary school to the present day. Whilst you are telling me about your career, I will be writing this down in a form of a timeline which you will be able to see on the screen and can make comments about.

You may find this a great reflective exercise in thinking through how far you've come in your career and where you would like to take it in the future. As an impartial, objective individual who has worked as a teacher, I am more than happy to discuss your future career options and how you could work towards these.

**Participation is voluntary**

Participation is optional. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to complete a participant consent form and you can keep a copy of this information sheet. If you change your mind at any point during the interview you will be able to withdraw your

participation without having to provide a reason. If you wish to withdraw after the interview, you will have up to 2 weeks to withdraw by contacting me via the email address given below.

**Anonymity and confidentiality**

The data that you provide (i.e., your career history and your thoughts and opinions expressed throughout the interview) 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 2 weeks after the data is collected by contacting me via the email address given below.

**Storing and using your data**

I will put in place appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect your personal data. Data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Data will be fully anonymised after the interview has been transcribed.

Anonymised data will be kept until the PhD and related write up projects (e.g., journal articles and presentations) are complete, after which time it will be destroyed.

The data that I collect, questionnaire responses, career timelines and audio recordings of the interview, may be used in anonymous formats in different ways. Please indicate on the consent form with a tick if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.

You will be given the opportunity to comment on the career timeline, that you will be able to see during the interview on your screen, during the interview.

Please note: if I gather information that raises concerns about your safety or the safety of others, or about other concerns, I may pass on this information to another person.

Anonymised data may be used for future analysis and shared for research or training purposes. If you do not want your data to be included in any information shared as a result of this research, please do not sign the consent form.

**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 me, Abigail Bowling by email abigail.bowling@york.ac.uk or the Chair of the 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 attached and email this back to me at abigail.bowling@york.ac.uk.

Please keep this information sheet for your own records.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours sincerely

Abigail Bowling

abigail.bowling@york.ac.uk

**Project title: Exploring the career decision-making of early career teachers**

**Consent Form**

**Please click each box if you are happy to take part in this research.**

| **Statement of consent** | **Click each box** |
|---|---|
| I confirm that I have read and understood the information given to me about the above-named research project and I understand that this will involve me taking part as described above. | ☐ |
| I understand that participation in this study is voluntary. | ☐ |
| I understand that my data will not be identifiable and the anonymous data may be used in publications, presentations and online. | ☐ |
| I confirm that I have read the information about GDPR. | ☐ |

Name

Signature

Date

# Appendix C: Data Management Plan

This appendix shows my data management plan that I adhered to and continue to adhere to throughout this research process.

**PhD: early career teachers' career decision-making**

**1. Defining your data**

1a. What data will you create or use?

There will be three types of data I will create:

1 - A paper timeline with participants' career decisions which will be scanned into a .pdf (the paper copy will be shredded).

2 - Audio recording of Zoom meetings (.mp4).

3 - .docx Microsoft Word document with a written anonymised transcription of the interviews.

I estimate that this will generate 500MB per participant (at the most). My research design indicates that I am aiming for 45 participants which means I need 22.5GB of storage.

1b. Who owns the data you will create or use?

I will own the data.

1c. Are there any ethical or legal considerations relating to the data you will create or use?

I will maintain high ethical standards and comply with the UK GDPR/Data Protection Act.

Identifying information will be anonymised (e.g., participant names, school names, regions, cities, any other names given by participants) and will receive a pseudonym. A key to the participants' data will be securely stored separate to the data.

I will only collect personal data I need in line with data protection policy.

Transcripts, timelines and interview data will be stored in corresponding folders: "raw interviews" (for recordings), "timelines" (for timelines), "interview transcripts" (for transcripts). These will all be contained within the researcher's "data collection" folder within the researcher's "PhD" folder.

**2. Working with your data**

2a. How much data storage will you require during your project's lifetime? (tick the storage requirement you estimate for your project)

< 250GB

2b. Where will your data be stored for the duration of the project? (tick the storage option(s) you have chosen to use)

University of York filestore (my personal filestore - the M: drive - on the centrally managed network)

University of York Google Drive

2c. How will your data be backed up?

I will have my working copies on Google Drive and my master copies on the University file storage which is backed up by IT services.

2d. How will you manage access to your data and its security?

Interviews will be performed using Zoom. I will verbally notify participants in the meeting that this meeting will be recorded. Only I will have access to the Zoom recordings. No one will be invited to access my data on Google Drive and York IT account. I have 2 Factor Authentication set up to log into my Google account and my devices are password protected. My supervisors will only see pseudonymised data, if it is required. This will be shared using a secure transfer method, such as Google Drive or Drop Box (as these are both university supported).

2e. How will you organise your data?

Transcripts, timelines and interview data will be stored in corresponding folders: "raw interviews" (for recordings), "timelines" (for timelines), "interview transcripts" (for transcripts). These will all be contained within the researcher's "data collection" folder within the researcher's "PhD" folder.

2f. How will your data be documented and described?

I will create a readme document which will outline what each folder contains and a reminder of the project (the interview guide). I will generate a list of abbreviations if they are used by participants.

**3. Archiving your data**

3a. Which data will be retained long-term?

Anonymised transcripts and timelines will be kept until associated write ups of findings (e.g., journal articles) are complete.

I will have three types of data:

1 - the Zoom recordings of interviews

2 - the transcripts of recordings which will pseudonymise data

3 - the career timelines for each participant

The Zoom recordings and the career timelines will be destroyed after I have been awarded my PhD.

The transcripts will be kept on my York account for 1 year after being awarded my PhD (after which time they will be destroyed). This is in case of querying of my award.

Data will not be deposited or shared.

3b. Where will you deposit the data? (tick the data repository/archive you have chosen or are required to use)

Other repository/archival system (please provide details below)

N/A I will not be depositing my data.

Instead, journal articles and my thesis will ensure the data can be used in systematic reviews and meta-analyses (through explicit mention of data processes and methods used).

**4. Sharing your data**

4a. Will the data you archive be openly shared?

No (please explain why the data cannot be openly shared below)

I will not be sharing my data as these timelines, even when anonymised, have the ability to reveal who my participants are due to unique life choices they mention.

4b. What access restrictions will be imposed on the data you archive?

N/A

**5. Implementing your plan**

5a. Who is responsible for implementing your plan?

I will be responsible for all aspects of data management under my supervisors' supervision.

5b. How will your plan be kept up-to-date?

I will review my plan with my supervisors in the first instance before ethical approval. I will review this once I have began collecting data and once I have finished collecting data to ensure that data is managed effectively.

5c. What training or further information will you need to successfully manage your research data throughout the project?

At the moment, I feel I have a grasp of what I need to successfully manage my research data. However, as the project unfolds I will ensure I review this and consider any training or further information that I need to successfully manage my research data throughout the project.

Created using DMPonline. Last modified 17 August 2022

# Appendix D: Findings Summary Sheet Sent to Participants

This appendix shows the summary sheet I sent to teachers who I interviewed and expressed an interest in being sent information about the findings.

**Research project findings: Investigating the career decisions of teachers in England**

In 2023, you took part in an interview as part of my PhD where you told me about your career decisions. Thank you again for participating in my project, I really appreciate it. You spoke so passionately about working in education, it shows how lucky your students and schools are to have you, or wherever else if you have since moved out of teaching. Now that the project is over, I wanted to share a summary of what I found from the interviews.

I Interviewed 44 teachers and found three main themes in your career decisions:

**1 – Many teachers centred helping within career decisions**

Many teachers wanted a career helping people and considered other helping jobs in other public sectors like law and healthcare. Teaching was chosen after feeling joy at the prospect of helping students. Many of these teachers went on to work in schools serving disadvantaged students to maximise the impact they could have. Thinking of the future, many of these teachers want to continue helping others, whether that is within the profession as SENCOs or Assistant Principals, or whether they move out of teaching and into other helping jobs like educational psychologists and the police.

**2 – Many teachers' career decisions were influenced by other people**

Many teachers discussed how other people had influenced their career decisions. These include their family and family home, partners, current children, future children, colleagues' children, children taught at school, indirect mentors and direct mentors. Other teachers benefitted from these relationships with some offering advice and helping them to decide what career decisions they should make, while other social connections told them about jobs they should apply for or gave them jobs without any formal hiring procedures.

**3 – Many teachers discussed how they used their intuition to decide whether a job/school was the right "feel"**

Many teachers drew upon intangible feelings when deciding where to work. These included "gut" instincts, referring to ideas of destiny and feelings of comfort and discomfort within schools and jobs. However, some teachers discussed how these feelings could change, especially as a result of senior leadership team changes, which influence how the school "feels".

I would like to thank you again for taking the time to speak to me about your career, I really appreciate it. I wish you the best of luck for the future. – Abigail.

# Appendix E: Findings Summary Sheet Sent to ITT Providers

This appendix shows the summary sheet I sent to ITT providers who forwarded my recruitment messages onto their early career teachers and expressed an interest in being sent information about the findings.

**Research project findings: Investigating the career decisions of early career teachers in England**

In 2023, you kindly forwarded my advertisement asking for participants for my PhD research project which investigated the career decisions of early career teachers in England. I would like to thank you again for sharing this, I really appreciate it. Now that the study is complete, I would like to share a summary of my findings, which may help clarify how teachers choose their training routes.

**Motivation to support disadvantaged students**

Despite Teach First exclusively training teachers in disadvantaged areas, there was no thematic difference between teachers trained through this route and teachers trained through other, non-exclusively disadvantaged, training routes. Some teachers wanted to train in these schools to better understand how to sustain work in disadvantaged contexts. Tailoring school placements to align with trainees' motivations may support long-term retention in teaching.

**Proximity and community connection**

Many teachers selected training routes close to home so they could remain in tehri family homes, stay near relatives and work within schools in their own communities. This choice was often framed as a way to give back and contribute to their local area.

**The flexibility of part-time training for those with children and/or self-funding**

Part-time training routes provided essential flexibility for trainees balancing childcare responsibilities or those self-funding their training.

**The importance of mentors and their first impression**

ITT mentors were a crucial source of support. Teachers discussed how they knew after interactions at open days and interviews whether they would feel supported by tutors. Compassionate mentors who instilled confidence, even before observing teaching practices, were highly valued, with one teacher saying "if they can make me feel confident as a teacher in 1 hour, what are they going to do over 9 months? I had to train with them". Prestige and local reputation mattered too, but the feeling of a training route outweighed Ofsted ratings.

I would like to thank you again for supporting my research project, I really appreciate it.

Abigail Bowling

# Appendix F: Recruitment Message

This appendix shows personal messages I sent to teachers both in my personal network and outside of this on LinkedIn.

**Sent to my personal network:**

Hey [Name]! Hope you're well? I'm just starting data collection for my PhD which is looking at the career decisions of teachers (who have qualified in the past 7 years). I was wondering if you were free for an hour one weekend or even during the week (whichever is best for you) for an interview about your career history and decisions over Zoom? It can be nice to reflect on how far you've come, what you've achieved and what you'd like to do in the future - especially during the new year. Here's the link to a survey (just 4 questions about your teacher training route, job title, etc.) which explains a bit more: https://york.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8kzSkAOmLt1F6Sy if you're keen then just fill it out and we can arrange things over email? Absolutely no pressure to take part in this research and I completely understand how busy you must be. Thanks for reading!

**Message below sent to people I did not know:**

Hello, I hope you're well? I'm a PhD student and I'm just starting data collection for my study which is looking at the career decisions of teachers (who have qualified in the past 7 years). I was wondering if you were free for an hour one weekend or even during the week (whichever is best for you) for an interview about your career history and decisions over Zoom? It can be nice to reflect on how far you've come, what you've achieved and what you'd like to do in the future - especially during the new year. Here's the link to a survey (just 4 questions about your teacher training route, job title, etc.) which explains a bit more: **https://york.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8kzSkAOmLt1F6Sy** Thanks for reading!

# Appendix G: Recruitment Advertisements

This appendix shows the text and image I used to recruit participants using social media.

Please share!

I'm looking to speak to teachers about their career history and future ambitions during a 1-hour Zoom call as part of my PhD. Understanding the career decisions of teachers will, hopefully, help make teaching a better place to work 😤

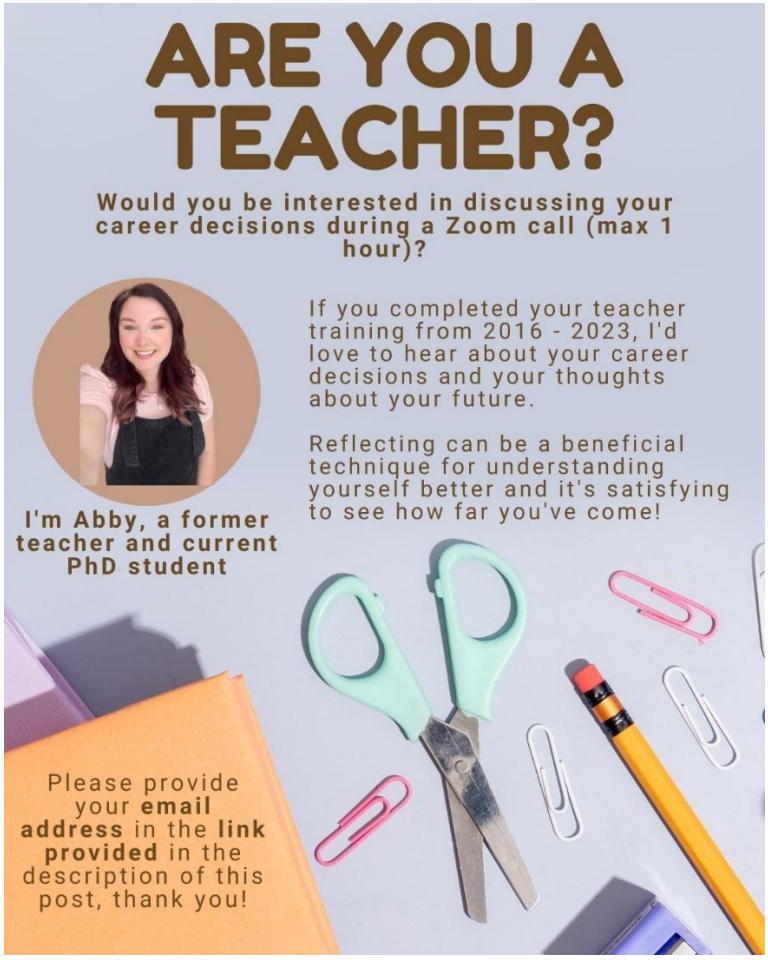
Past teachers have said they have enjoyed the interview as it's nice to stop and reflect upon what they've done and how far they've come 💭

If you are interested in this here's a link to a survey to register your interest (it also asks a few demographic questions just for sampling purposes): https://york.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8kzSkAOmLt1F6Sy

Hopefully, speak to you soon!

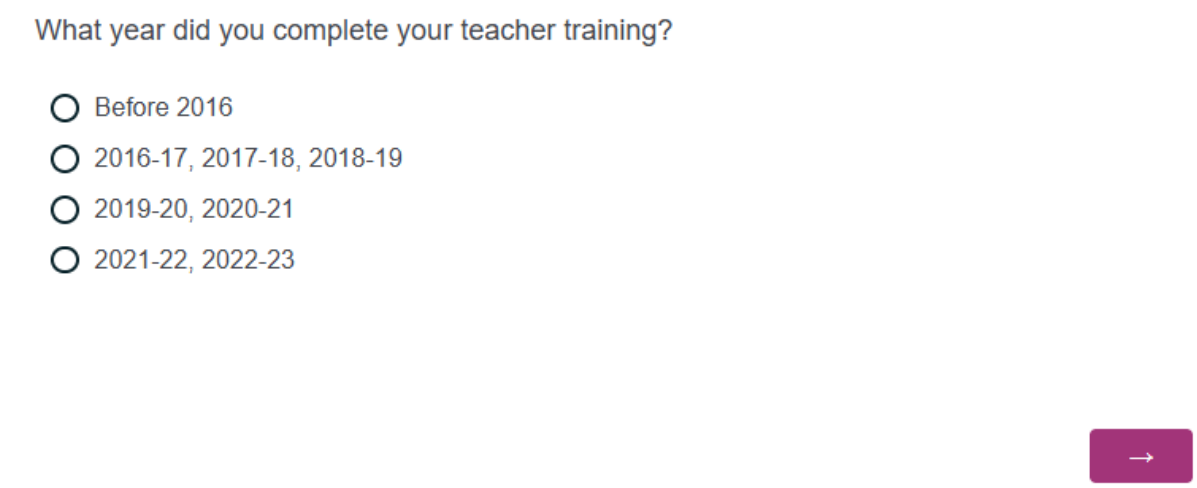
Best wishes,

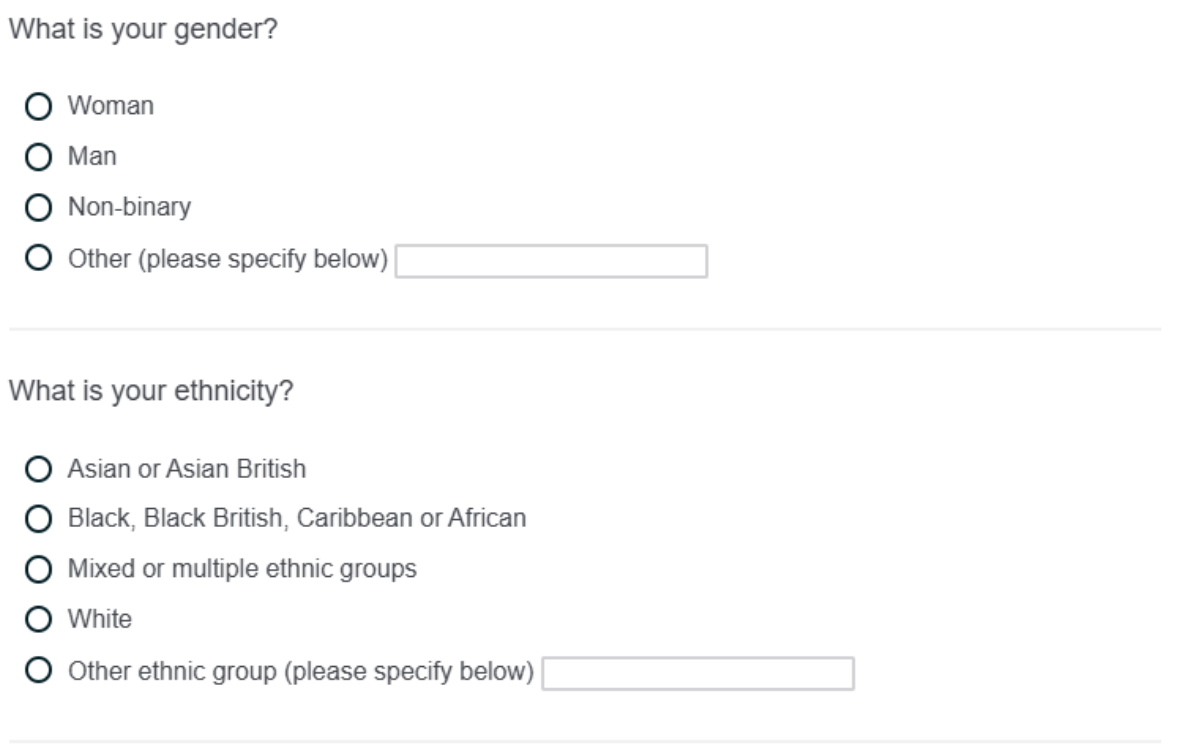
Abby



# Appendix H: Qualtrics Screening Survey

Before starting the screen survey, participants had to read the informed consent form (appendix B). After they clicked "next" to acknowledge they had read the informed consent form, the below questions were asked:



Which route did you choose to take into teaching?

- ○ Undergraduate teacher training course (e.g., BA or BSc with QTS)
- ○ Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE etc.; self-funded)
- ○ Postgraduate teacher training course (e.g., PGCE, PGDE etc.; government bursary)
- ○ School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT; tuition fee)
- ○ School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT; government bursary)
- ○ School Direct (tuition fee)
- ○ School Direct (salaried)
- ○ Teach First
- ○ Future Teaching Scholars
- ○ Researchers in Schools
- ○ Troops to Teachers
- ○ Assessment only route to QTS
- ○ Other (please state below)

What is your job title? (e.g. Teacher of Art and Design or Teacher of Year 4)

What is the postcode of your school?

Please write your email address in the box below. Abby will use this to contact you and arrange an interview about your career so far:

→

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.
Your response has been recorded.

# Appendix I: Interview Guide

This appendix shows my interview guide which I used to help run the data collection interviews with participants.

**Start:**

- Thank the participant for taking the time to be interviewed.
- Go through the informed consent forms, offer them the chance to ask any questions about the project or their data. Gather their informed consent.
- Outline the structure of the interview: "I will ask you to detail your career and any relevant decisions you made from when you finished secondary school all the way up to present day and your future ambitions" [gesture to the blank timeline participants will be able to see on their screen].

**Timeline:**

Ask the participant to start from when they finished school and detail their career choices and how they made those choices.

**Topics to cover:**

- Choice of teaching as a profession (When was this made? Why?)
- Choice of what and who to teach (e.g., primary, secondary, subject)
- Choice of initial teacher training provider
- Geographical position of jobs
- Probe other areas which the participant highlights as relevant to their career decision making

**Closing:**

When the timeline comes to a natural conversational end (e.g., future plans has been exhausted) and I have no more questions, tell the participant "That's all the questions I have for you, is there anything else you would like to add which is relevant to anything we have discussed today?".

Once this has been answered, thank the participant for their time and close the Zoom call.

# Appendix J: Assessing the Quality of Research

I used Braun and Clarke's (2024) Big Q Qualitative Research Guidelines (BQQRG) to assess the quality of the research. The following sections detail how I did this.

**Assessing Elements of this Thesis**

**Writing Style**. I aimed for a reflexive, contextualised and personalised writing style and aimed to avoid an objective, neutral and detached voice. I used the first person to write myself into the narrative as the researcher to aid in this.

**Terminology.** When classifying participants' ethnicity, and indeed using the term ethnicity, I did so using England and Wales's agreed list of ethnic groups to use when asking for a person's ethnicity (GOV.UK, n.d.-d).

**Assessing Sections of the Thesis**

**Title**. The title was drafted by ensuring it captures the topic of the thesis with reference to the methodology. Abbreviations were avoided to ensure the title could be understood without prior knowledge of the topic.

**Abstract**. The abstract summarises the main points of the article. I began with the context of the study. I outlined the methodology, including participant information. I presented the main analytical themes. I ended the abstract with conclusions and implications.

**Introduction**. I provided a robust context and rationale for the proposed research. Within the systematic literature review and the theoretical framework, I discussed existing research, theory and wider contexts relevant to contextualising the study. I engaged deeply with other qualitative research through identifying this and prioritising this within the systematic review.

**Methodology**. I discussed my own professional experience which influenced the creation of this PhD project. I used first person writing style to discuss reflexivity, decisions and the research process. I described how, and how many, participants were selected and why. However, I based this number from studies which could be seen to adhere to post(positivist) concepts (i.e., saturation) which are not congruent with my

research perspective. Therefore, I outlined how I would decide when to stop recruiting participants in the future using Emmel's (2013) question of not how many but what for: I would monitor the quality and diversity of the dataset in being able to answer the research questions and aim. I explained the selection criteria and how I recruited my participants. I described how I knew some participants and how I mitigated feelings of social coercion. I detailed institutional ethical approval and the process of obtaining informed consent. I described why an interview was the best method for answering the research questions. I explained the process for both data collection and analysis by referencing: how interviews were conducted, the range in length of these interviews, how I prepared for reflexive thematic analysis and how I engaged with all phases of Braun and Clarke's (2022) approach to reflexive thematic analysis using NVivo. This section serves to cover how I have ensured congruent quality with my Big Q research philosophy.

**Presentation of Analysis**. I have included an analytical map to show how codes (and sub-themes, where relevant) constitute each theme. I have reported three themes which allows for an appropriate amount of depth and detail for the length of a thesis. I have used names that align with the view of using "analysis" to convey how I created these themes (Braun & Clarke, 2024). Anonymised data extracts have been used where relevant to evidence the analytical claims I have made without overpowering the narrative. I have drawn upon previous research to situate the analysis.

**Discussion.** The discussion section was used to unite the themes and discuss how this analysis answers the research questions and addresses the aim. This was done by drawing analytical conclusions across the themes, rather than repeating each theme and how it answers the research question. I also discuss the contribution this research makes to, and how it has advanced, the knowledge field.

**Conclusion**. I reflected upon the process, outcomes and consequences of the research through drawing upon strengths and weaknesses of this research practice. I avoided using post(positivist), objective measures as a weakness (e.g., a lack of generalisability) as these were not valued within my research. I reflected upon how my role shaped the research and the knowledge generated. I suggested evidence-based practices for future work and practice through highlighting actionable outcomes.

**Reflection on Using Braun and Clarke's (2024) Guidelines**

Using these guidelines has involved an assessment of my research as adopted throughout the thesis, rather than assessing solely my data collection and analysis techniques. This has allowed for a holistic assessment which views research as embedded within the thesis, rather than a section of the thesis.

# Appendix K: Example Data Coded for the Journey of Helping Others Theme

The following table shows example data coded for *the journey of helping others* theme. Not all the data extracts which were coded for these codes are included to keep the tables short and concise and to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

| Code | Data Coded |
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| Wanting a career helping people | Interviewer: and what was it about being a doctor that attracted you to the idea of that job?<br><br>Giselle: I think it's the opportunity to be able to help people, and I know that sounds cliche. But I think I was really driven by people related work.<br><br>I knew that I wanted to work helping people. (Penny)<br><br>I know it sounds really cliche, but there is always that teacher at school isn't there that you can remember, and I feel like she just had such a profound impact on me, and it was my English teacher as well, and I think I just love the subject. I loved having a teacher that was just so passionate about it. and I think the way that she made a difference in my life. I just love the idea that I make difference in someone else's life. (Ava)<br><br>I always knew I wanted to make as big an impact as possible. (Erica) |
| Feeling joy at the prospect of helping students | It was just nice, I don't know how to explain it. It was just it was just nice, like the kids were just lovely and like they were so excited about learning, and it was really nice to watch, and and I they like. They ran into school in the mornings, and it was just really oh, and I was like, obviously, when I'd thought about doing social work, and obviously, from what my lectures are told me, where it was a bit more. It obviously it was rewarding if you do help someone, but I think it's a bit more sad, whereas with teaching it was just. It was just joyful. It was just nice to see everyone really happy. (Naomi)<br><br>I wanted to do dentistry. and and I did science and chem chemistry and biology, so I could do that. And then to the a levels, geography and psychology. As soon I went on. Work, experience, I think in year 12, and I realized I was not gonna enjoy it, and mainly like the blood. paperwork. And yeah, I don't know. I just didn't see like I would fit. (Erica)<br><br>wasn't really sure what I wanted to do at school. I'd got relatives that had been nurses, that worked sort of in the public sector, I really |

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| | enjoyed art and design. So I was a bit all over the place. So it's sort of came down to possibly going into the nursing or midwifery, and then I sort of considered teaching. (Harriett)<br><br>I knew that I wanted to work helping people. And at that point I thought, oh, I want to be a nurse. And then I realized that I don't want anything to do with medical settings or people that are ill. So I thought, okay, what can I do to help people? And I didn't know for a while. (Penny) |
| Working in disadvantaged schools to maximise impact | I think, seeing the difference that you make. It sounds so cheesy. But I think. seeing that you know you are making a difference, I mean. It's lovely when you see you know a child change, if you know, Say, to start at the beginning of the year when they've got, you know they really disengaged, or they don't enjoy school. And at the end of the academic, you know it's just that they come into school with a smile on face that's huge, you know. Huge thing. I think it's even the progression at the academic progression that they make. I think sometimes it's lovely when you're getting towards the end of the year, flick back to the beginning. Look at what they were doing, what they producing in September, and they flick to what they're doing now, that's you know. That's incredible. And and I think sort of that sense of community. I think it's really nice. You sort of feel and go with something, and you feel as though you are making a difference. And I think I think I'll definitely miss that. I think that's something that I will definitely miss, and I will be really sad about And so if if I were to ever go back to it, those would be the things that that yeah. (Harriett)<br><br>Like going into lessons like as a PE teacher like I had lessons, and students don't like, we know as soon as as a whole kids don't particularly like going to school, but I want it to be oh I've got PE today. I want. I can't wait for that. I said. I'm looking forward to it now. (Jack)<br><br>I just love the idea that I make difference in someone else's life, particularly in the area of my school which is a disadvantaged area. The students who they don't even get spoken to at home. They don't have dinner around the table they are never read to, and I think it's really well it's massive the impact that you can have on their lives as a teacher, and I think sometimes that's underestimated. And I just like the thought of being able to have an impact on people's lives. (Ava)<br><br>but I think more important than that is just literally what you're doing every day, and feeling that it is kind of at least doing something or helping someone. So I think it's. It's that kind of when they're It depends on what your role is, obviously. But I just feel in those kind of jobs when I'm. So when I ask my friends to be able to what they |

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| | actually do like one of my friends is that it works for a consultancy firm. And I just ask, what do you? What do you do on a? And then you'll tell me some sort of things, and I'll send you what you actually do. And it's that kind of that kind of thing like, yeah, I want to do something that I feel doesn't necessarily have to help people directly, but do something that matters and do something that I'm proud of. I do something that I like talking about. I think that was. (Craig) |
| Wanting to help at an advanced job level | if I was to stand teaching for 30 years. I know my dream rule would be working with ects on working and teaching, learning and the school so very much like the research side, and how we improve teaching learning in schools. I find that absolutely like that's my passion. That's what I'm really interested in. And and what gets me excited more so than the pastoral side. (Jerry)<br><br>I would like to do the course to be a SENCO and work with the children. Or become SENCO in another school or and in the school I'm in now. Our senco was quite an old schoolteacher, so I don't know how long she will stay the job. Mine come up in the next few years, so I would go on the course to do that. I mean, you can be a SENCO for 2 years without having the qualifications for it. But I think I'd like the qualifications before I started taking it on. (Helena)<br><br>I definitely see myself staying in teaching. Now that I've taken this much effort to train to do something, I think I'm not retraining unless it's to do like we got the play therapy, or maybe it's SENCO, or something like that. That that line I would like. I definitely think it'll be within education, so they'll always be like a kind of route With that. I like the idea of always kind of keeping my foot in the door with teaching, even if I do part time teaching. part time, not whether it be a like a senior role like a Sen Co. Or deputy, or doing all past all things, or I do kind of do half and half like play therapy and teaching. I definitely want to keep myself kind of constantly in the loop with kind of like theories, and how things are changing. I have definitely thought about being a head teacher One day. I'm like I'm gonna strive for big things like I said. (Sophie)<br><br>Actually, I I I'd quite like to go to Pastoral. So the I think that' be as I step in the door to that. And I like being that type kind of person that the kids look up to and can trust, and I don't know it. It's just nice, being the one that they feel like they can tell anything to. (Luke) |
| Factors that override the desire to help students | he last sort of year. Yeah, probably year that I've had. And I have been thinking about leaving, teaching. and and it's ultimately being that decision is ultimately come down to workload and just purely workload. I really enjoy being a teacher. There are lots of things I really love. I think 9 while 3 I really enjoy my job. It's just the demands that are put on me. and I think it's not just |

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| | It's not just my school. I don't believe it's just my school looking at sort of the news headlines, speaking to all the friends that have qualified to work up and down the country, and they have been very similar positions and field that that we're code is the same. I've got colleagues that have moved from all the schools, thinking that the grass might be greener, and you know it's not. It's just the there are, you know, different stresses, but the just presented in different ways. And and so for the past year. I've sort of been looking at different jobs either. They are within sort of social care jobs that are within the NHS opportunities where I would still be able to with with children and young people. but then, I've just accepted a position working for a mental Health Service that within the NHS. And so on Monday I'm. Handing in my resignation letter, and and I will be leaving at Easter and again in this new position. (Harriett)<br><br>No, but I wouldn't want to do it forever, and I think that my experience of teaching kind of solidifies that. I think one thing that always was in my mind was. I always have quite a lot of anxiety around getting in trouble in school because a lot of TV shows and like discourse around teachers like in the public high. It's about to get in trouble, like if you read newspaper articles about schools, it's often about some kind of trouble that's happened. Some kind of like safeguarding scandal, or some kind of like teacher to find something, and and a huge amount of the coverage that goes either the ends up in the public press about schools is is very negative, and it's about some kind of You know some kind of issue, and I've always had this anxiety about that, and I think you know I've also seen like friends and and colleagues and stuff you've You've had that where it a child has, you know, sort of. and said all that teacher is bullying me like you know. It was some kind of like, you know, and like my dad was a like a school governor as well like that, and he would sometimes tell these stories about like, oh, this this teach a cooler to have stupid, and now. He's like he's in disciplinary, and it's always like for me like it's just like a thing that I have right. Just hey getting in trouble. I'm just not someone that likes to be like. you know, kind of publicly disgraced, I mean, who would very like so it's always that's always in the back of my mind that I don't like the idea of like You know I like the dairy teaching and the kind of leaving and having it. (Katherine) |

# Appendix L: Example Data Coded for the Homeward Bound Sub-Theme

The following table shows example data coded for the *homeward bound* sub-theme. Not all the data extracts which were coded for these codes are included to keep the tables short and concise and to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

| Codes | Data Coded |
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| Prioritising the family home and/or community | Id wanted to go back to my home city just because I wanted to be able to live at home and save money, which is what I'm still doing. Now another reason I deferred actually, this is this: yet the a major reason I deferred was because I was placed in the in another region. and there was also no guarantee like that. I would know the school. I would be in until that summer, and because that summer was already really stressful. I I just really didn't want to have to deal with that. So that was another reason I deferred. But yeah, geographically, I'd I'd really want it to be put back in my home region just so I could be at home and commute if I had to. Yeah. So at the main thing, I really wanted to stay in my home region. (Danielle)<br><br>location wise. Some reason. I just really knew that I want it to be at home, like my family home. So in LOCATION I just had, like a massive desire to be at home. (Esme)<br><br>In a few years I wouldn't really suddenly start to look in like leads getting settled in the area i'm in. I'd like being in London. I like being able to go into town and be in the capital city. So that's and it's also kind of where I grew up as well. So yeah, it feels come from not planning on kind of moving geographically a significant distance within the UK (Lena)<br><br>What we we do have from my house. We don't have funds to move into a flat in the city I went to uni. So for for an extra year, just to kind of surround and get maybe a like, a not a job. But we all kind of fell into jobs very, very quickly, so it didn't really happen. And the reason why I kind of wanted to go to, maybe schools around for where i'm from is because and well, if it didn't work out, I mean i'm not travelling every like miles away, and if I want to, I didn't want to come out of the Comfort Zone too early. I just stick to what you know, really. And then. yeah, so that makes sense. (Luke)<br>I'm a home person I love being at home, and I like being surrounded by things that I know and feel comfortable with. (Megan)<br><br>I did look at Teach First but they only have certain schools, I think, and so I did look into that, but they were quite, my son gets dropped |

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| | off, of course, at 8. So I need to have a school that's close by that I can get to and Teach First didn't have any schools that were localish. (Susan) |
| Creating new homes | I 've now got another job lined up for September, which is still in teaching. So I kind of. There are a few people. So yeah, my school, if they've had a lot of Teach First. As over the last few years there was someone who was in exactly the same situation as me last year, so it's coming to the end of his 2 years. But he was of living miles away from his girlfriend and or his fiancée, and he yeah. too difficult. wasn't he wasn't hugely keen on the school. But I think he might have stayed if it made sense to. But he sort of yeah. He moved to to closer to where she is, and that's kind of that's exactly what I said to my school. (Craig)<br><br>And so I relocated to be with my boyfriend. so I didn't want to leave him. and I do just I just like over here where I live like the fact that i'm between 2 very major cities, but it's still like rurally. I don't dislike where I grew up I just feel like there's a lot more to life when I'm over here. I like being able to go home and see everyone and do everything over there still, but living where we lived near CITY, like it's such a little city and we didn't go often whereas here I'm in CITY, I'm in ANOTHER CITY all the time like I just feel like a better quality of life. (Elle)<br><br>Then I ended up moving to [region]. Where my partner lives, and in the May I think it was yeah, the May. I was like joining all teaching agencies, thinking i'll just do supply for you that'll be fine. But then I thought i'll just look for mass teach jobs around here and see if there is anything. And then there was literally one opening at a little school. (Kenny)<br><br>but I got married in October, and my husband lives in TOWN so I now live in TOWN and before we got married I started working here in a school as well, because I knew I was going to be moving here. (Rumaisa)<br><br>o we did look around the country because there's training providers for schools all over the place. and we ended up settling on. She picked CITY for her masters. and so I said, right well. there's a bunch of providers in and around the CITY sort of area. It's near family. It's got good transport links where we are. We'll sort of settle here. The fact that then it's turned out that there are so many schools and sixth farms sort of really nearby complete coincidence. It's just a very handy place to be living. Really, it's turned out would I move, for a school is a very good question. and I think it would have to be for us to up through sort of a big distance. Obviously, again, economy financially. It's a lot cheaper here. then. in HOMETOWN than it is in a |

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| | lot of places, sort of around the country. so from that perspective moving somewhere down south. would for me. I don't think I would be moving for a school because I don't currently I can't think of. I'm not unhappy where I am. I've I've as part of my training, been to these different sixth form colleges. If I decided to go to Sixth Form colleges. I know that there's regularly jobs there. and i'm not unhappy with what I've seen there, either, so it would probably more be if my partner gets an opportunity somewhere. (Sheldon) |

# Appendix M: Example Data Coded for the Being Kidfluenced Sub-Theme

The following table shows example data coded for the *being kidfluenced* sub-theme. Not all the data extracts which were coded for these codes are included to keep the tables short and concise and to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

| Codes | Data Coded |
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| Current children | Sort of higher level TA things like that. and at that point I had looked into teaching a little bit. Well. There was a new teacher at school who, who. almost similar to me age- She's had her children, she trained as a teacher. Later in life, and she was singing its virtues, and off the back of that i'd kind of looked into different options, and the head teacher at the school I was at was very kind of supportive, and it was just like, yeah, go for it, because nothing's gonna change here. You know. When you're a TA you know teacher is the next sort of step, if you like. And so yeah, I started the teacher training. (Paula)<br><br>Also because of [CHILD's] nursery at the moment, I take him to nursery and then my school is the opposite way, so i'd quite like to be in the area. so I can not have to drop off and run to school and pick up a like a reasonable time. (Naomi)<br><br>I had him in 2,021. So 2 years ago, so I taught for, so once I qualified I was teaching for 2 years, one year. one and a half years. and then obviously was pregnant well I was pregnant during Covid, so we obviously wasn't. I was teaching sort of online and half in school, half out of school sort of thing. Yeah, so we it was. And then I had 7 months off maternity. and I went back for quite early. when he was only 6 months old. When I went back. So now I only work 4 days a week. and he goes to nursery 3 days. Yes, my my work has been actually really good, and being flexible with that sort of thing. So I came back. I initially went back. I initially went back 3 days, and then I I put it up to 4 days, because it's really hard to do my job. In 3 days you end up doing the full 5 days, but in 3 days you just don't deliver the lessons. It was really difficult, so I just was like we'll put it up to 4 days, put him into nursery for an extra day, and it just sort of balanced itself out there. (Naomi)<br><br>So my plan is to stay at this school being head of department I'm quite happy with that role. To be honest with you for the time being, and the only thing, really that will make me leave the school is the distance. So I live in [town]. I work in [city], so it's like an hour. Drive each way every day, and and I think with my child sort of growing up and stuff, it would be nice to to be a little bit closer, and my husband |

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| | has switched to a a bank contract, so he's actually going to be the main care at home looking after her. so that I can sort of still work full time, and but sort of the dream in the future really would be to work close home, and possibly do part time. 3 or 4 days a week. probably a a 10 year plan rather than a 5 year plan. (Mia)<br><br>It would be stressful in the hours long, especially on. But now I think what else? For the jobs I will say stressful. And you haven't got this holidays. I think that's one of the main things. Yeah, but then you other jobs. Haven't got to do with the behaviour. So that's it's and the price of flights and holidays during. But if you want children, you you have to stick with school nice, anyway. Oh, yeah. And then you get. You don't need holiday childcare, which is also really beneficial. (Victoria) |
| Future children | I look within about the 30 Mile Mark Ish. which just take me all the way over to AREA sometimes, but so i'm flexible in that sense, may change having that family not wanting to spend too much time commuting. (Elle)<br><br>I basically, do my head of subject's job for him half of the time, so I know I can do it. but I want. I want the recognition for doing it kind of thing, and then the only thing that maybe will come in the way of that in the next couple of years is starting a family, it's just got a fit in amongst that, I guess, and things will fall when they fall. (Elle)<br><br>I mean, I quite like. The idea of this. Is that what my mentor has done is that she kind of did her like 7, 7 to 10 years. and then she went away and she have kids, and then she worked for teach first, so she could do it from home, and things like that, and then we'll go back once. The kids are a bit older. I think that would play like a difference in my mindset, too, just because it sounds funny. But my mom was always at home when I was left on. I quite like the idea of that when I have kids. But yeah, I think it will always be education. I don't know if it will always be teaching. (Shona)<br><br>things like maternity suddenly become really relevant. So I've been looking at how that works for teachers versus how that works for academics versus how that would work if I was doing a bit of this and a bit of that, and a bit of the other. How would that work? And again it's not something i'd weighed into my career decisions at all before. But suddenly it's like what's the most family friendly career option, both in terms of maternity, but also in terms of racing a family afterwards. So I did. I am also currently interested in going back to my childhood dream becoming basically a childminder. If I was to come back from a 10 a the you know, Brett from teach first, now runs Tiny. The child is like a he runs a child mining charity. Now it's like the new teach first, but it's for preschool. and they basically |

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| | saw all your training. And then you run quality early years provision from your own home. I know what 1 minute I'm like. I'm gonna look after babies in my own living room. And then next time i'm like i'm gonna do educational policy in Parliament the next one i'm like No, i'm going to go to Harv and be an academic, and it's a bit all over the place, but the unifying thread is definitely I'm going to work with children. I'm going to stay in education. (Elizabeth)<br><br>Then, after I've had children. Whenever that will be. I don't want to be a full time, Teacher. I want to be around more. and so should financial situations allow me to, I'd like to do a master in educational psychology and become an Ed Psych part time, or for an agency where my hours won't be so long and hopefully work wouldn't be so onerous. and I could switch off on a night. (Helena)<br><br>I would have to consider moving closer because it's just a 45 min drive in a day or a you know, a 50 min train line and a 20 min walk. Isn't ideal if you've got young kids, so I think I don't know so. But I do love the school. I don't. The idea of leaving makes me sad. (Julia) |
| Colleagues' children | My partner was like, "Well, thing is time's never going to be right. It isn't ever going to be the right time you. It's only maternity. So if you don't like it. You can finish at the end of maternity, and it's only having a short time. Something like 6 months, anyway. Well, it's really good for you. It's going to be, you know. You've got that. Then you've got the experience, and you know it's a really good opportunity, even if you don't get it. Applying just shows that you're ready for the next step." I said, "No, it's completely not ready for yeah. It kind of made sense what you were saying" So I was like, do you know what? Yeah, actually, that's really good advice. Maybe I should just show well in and apply. So because our school works very in mysterious ways that I don't know I need to school. She's been up, but they, if you don't apply, they'll write your foremost, because they think all, you don't want to progress. But the fact that when you do apply, even if you don't get it like you're in their minds then already. So so yeah, for okay, i'll. I'll put my name for what sort of thing and it did. I applied. (Elise)<br><br>the head teacher came to me and asked me to do it. He just said, cause I was gonna be in year 6, anyway, and that's where the teacher was previously. He was just like as this opening up as well. If you be open to it, he was, I will give you. You can go on the training day and all that stuff, and we'll give you a hand over day where before she left she sort of went through everything with me, and and obviously it was like it's a good place to start because it's sort of like a snippet into what. and to see if you like it, without actually taking on the responsibility for the year. And so. Yes, that was quite handy. |

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| | So he asked me to do that. and which is quite nice. trusted me the responsibility of writing for the school. (Naomi)<br><br>So I was there a year. and then the head of geography went on maternity leave. And I was just basically called into the Heads office, and she said, You can do it. We want you to do it. We'll pay you for it. and it'll be maternity cover. And we're gonna have to get somebody else in agency staff, and you're gonna have to line on it then. So I mean for your second year. I don't even think I was like an RQT. I was just an nqt. So that's pretty mad. (Erica)<br><br>So I went for an interview, and I didn't get it straight away. But I was devastated again. But then I got a call, saying the other person that got the job couldn't do it anymore. So I connect the ect it was did my act, but it was a Mat[ernity] cover job. (Joan)<br><br>There was somebody who felt pregnant within the department, so they needed somebody to cover for that and then given, and then that would give an opportunity to train somebody up to potentially be given a career after it, so that I got told that there was going to set up a role for me, and then i'd have to apply for it, because obviously for legal reasons that have to kind of a lot of people apply for it. And so I was up against somebody else who was also a ta For this role I was a successful. (Luke) |
| School children | You know I'm really passionate about my subjects. and you know I get to talk about it all day. and you know some of the kids are such a good company. But honestly, I find the behaviour is just really really draining. So I don't think i'll be in it long term. I think my AIM is to do international teaching for 2 reasons. One? Well, for a few reasons I know it's better to pay. You know I've just got this. I just always wanted to live abroad. I'd love to travel around, and also I know that the behaviour of the children is generally a lot better where I am at the moment. We've got over the national average of people premium and over the national average of 10, and I don't know if that makes the behaviour any worse. I couldn't really say, because this is, you know, apart from doing my training, this is the only school I've ever worked in. But I find the behaviour unbearable. (Tracy)<br><br>So actually recently I have had a bit of a crisis of. You know. What am I going to do? Because my is it? Is it all worth it like just this, the intense stress I I I absolutely love my job. and you know I'm passionate about the curriculum that I feel and passionate about teaching languages. I absolutely love seeing the kids made progress, but it's just so hard to juggle all the plates, and I think if anything was to drive me away it would be behaviour of the kids obviously post Covid, like a lot of the students, have mental health issues, but also have forgotten how to really behave in the classroom. So all of that |

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| | needs to be retaught, but it's the it just makes the everyday so so intense when you're having to constantly firefight, and you having to constant like that constant stress. So at the end of the day you're just like so caught up in that that it's difficult to then switch off. (Esme)<br><br>I think I think my only slight criteria was, it was just like better behaviour. I think my school struggles with behaviour. my lost to really struggle with behaviour, and I just sort of want to, especially in your your early stages of your career, and as a non subject specialist I find it quite mentally taxing, too. I teach science, and I'm very confident my biology, but as expected to teach chemistry and physics, and for contact with chemistry, I nearly feel the Gcse. I hear the chemistry so to have to then teach it to hire like a higher class of Gcse. Was quite taxing when you lay our behaviour on top of that. That was like a struggle. So I just wanted to go somewhere, right. My idea was, If I move somewhere with better behaviour, I can sort of refine all these elements of teaching much easier, like my teaching learning like developing curriculums just pedagogy in general, and then potentially in the future, come back to a more deprived area. Such. But very early on in. My job starts like one school sort of stood out to me, and which is the school I ended up plan for and getting my job back. So there wasn't much of a it wasn't a very long process of debating. Yeah, trying to figure out what I wanted. (Jerry)<br><br>One thing I would say is, I don't want to go to a school. That's 2 excessively strict that's 2. So I want those high expectations to be then behaving that we're going to learn respect. But things like you have to be tracking the teacher at all times. It's those kind of like really ventured systems that I find a bit off putting that they, the children, don't have room to move and kind of behave like children because they are not going to want to listen in. I expect them to want to pay, and that's fine. But yeah, I just find there are schools there are. So in the behaviour management approach, and those schools are not be looking at at all. Not given the time to. (Lena)<br><br>had such a good connection with the kids and had children that I wanted to be my key children, that, like I. I could easily do that group activities with them, and it would. It would be like really beneficial for them. I really enjoyed the people that we were that I worked with there was me and one of the students that were there. and he was kind of like. It is a bit useless. And then I ended up like doing my activity, plans, and lesson plans, and then, having to face time him and help him do his so like doing the activities for the setting just came really, naturally. So I was like, yeah, I love to stay like okay, that's fine with me. (Helena) |

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| | Sometimes I feel like, if you stay local you get. you can bond with the kids as well. It's not like some stuff where they might come from, CITY, or something in case for us from like ANOTHER CITY by now, or roughly, now the area, or I I say, i'm from where, where where it is, and you get a real like connection, especially when I was doing my teacher training. That was a school where i'm from. I could speak to the kids about the area, and it was kind of like. Oh, he he's 1 1, one of us type things that I think instantly it was like a bit more. I wouldn't say respect, but I would at the same time there was always from around here. He knows it. So I think that was a good thing. (Jack) |

# Appendix N: Example Data Coded for the Mentored into Momentum Sub-Theme

The following table shows example data coded for the *mentored into momentum* sub-theme. Not all the data extracts which were coded for these codes are included to keep the tables short and concise and to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

| Codes | Data Coded |
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| Indirect mentors | I know it sounds really cliche, but there is always that teacher at school isn't there that you can remember, and I feel like she just had such a profound impact on me, and it was my English teacher as well, and I think I just love the subject. I loved having a teacher that was just so passionate about it. and I think the way that she made a difference in my life. I just love the idea that I make difference in someone else's life, particularly in the area of my school which is a disadvantaged area. The students who they don't even get spoken to at home. They don't have dinner around the table they are never read to, and I think it's really well it's massive the impact that you can have on their lives as a teacher, and I think sometimes that's underestimated. And I just like the thought of being able to have an impact on people's lives. (Ava)<br><br>So I end up having [teacher] for a second year, and he just sort of made me fall back in love with maths again, and it was like, no matter what you do, I still think you're capable, and everything else. (Kenny)<br><br>I actually love to school, and and that's obviously why I wanted to kind of and to teach in. Because I don't know I really enjoyed it, and obviously I enjoyed English, because that's what I teach. and if you want to see if looking back, the fact that I wasn't very like that wasn't very like well-behaved at school, and I had quite a lot of support with like staff. and then they kind of like it's by me a little bit to kind of sort myself out, and then what I got to see and kind of yeah. (Luke)<br><br>it was a little. It sounds awful. It was a little bit depressive. No, it was a little bit full on, and it was a little bit All my lecturers used to tell us like they'd cry all the time, and like doing social work, and I was like oh I don't wanna do that. (Naomi)<br><br>I had always loved English. I think it's always like 5, and my English teacher, I hadn't the same English teacher for 7 years, and she was amazing. I was so. God! I wish I could be like her a bit like that. (Polly) |

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| | it's especially my a level economics teacher. e aspirational. If if I can teach like he teaches. then I'm happy. I'm going home in the smile on my face every day. And yeah. yeah, it's not something I've ever given conscious thought to. I don't think. But I think definitely. The desire to be a bit like them has definitely been definitely something that we is there. (Sheldon)<br><br>when I was a TA I was in a lesson with somebody who was who was on the PGCE. and so they was training, and I was a teacher in that class, and she was through the mouth. She said. That is really useful. She got a lot of guidance and support, and she the I like the idea that we were able to teach a lesson. Yeah, whilst we've been saying like, early in the clear and and the lady was on it, she she said that it was. She started the PGDE previously, and she decided that it wasn't for her, because it was too academic, which ahead again from somebody else as well. So that's why I decided to go for PGCE. I just wanted to kind of get another thing on the back, because I I quite like the idea of going back to University and studying again and teach first, and I think it was a little bit more of an easier route to go down because it is similar to what I did. (Luke) |
| Direct mentors | The tutor pulled me back and told me how amazing I was… and how he could see that I was a natural born teacher, and like I know that's probably just rubbing me up the right way but it really instilled a bit of confidence from day one and I just thought 'if you could do that in an interview, what's he going to do with me for the next 9 months while I am learning something new that is going to be incredibly difficult?' So that's why I went for that [training route]. (Elle)<br><br>My manager. He was going through like marriage difficulties, so he wasn't always able to give me the best support. and and then, whenever we had like a mentor meeting. he would be talking about himself a lot of time when it was like about my progress. So I had. I went off for 2 days, and then I came in, and we had about to work meeting, so I told him right. All the reasons why I was like getting stressed, and I said about I don't get any support for like being dyslexic and things like that, I said you giving me the same, marking as everybody else, and the same deadline, and I have no but flexibility. We've been select click. Anyway. He was like what everybody stressed. So I said, Well, I appreciate that, I said, but I've got dyslexia. and so I've got different needs. And then he went. I'm not listen to this. And then he walked out, and then we never spoke again, and that was quite difficult to continue working there after that happened. But I had to continue to finish a program last year. (Giselle) |

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| | The teacher training mentor, like when I was at the interview. I don't know how long it's gonna be that I didn't have very much money and I was parking at the free spaces at uni but they run out after a certain amount of time and I was like, oh, God, I'm going to get a ticket so I said to him “Can I go and move my car?” And I explained to him what I’d done, and he's like, yeah, yeah, go for it.. And then in the actual interview he’s asking me what would a good teacher be like to you. And I spoke about how I was a student. It's a bit of a I’m not gonna lie, and how I do it differently. And how actually a lot of what is going on for me as a student, as like a secondary school student was probably the result, of like all these things I experienced as like a young girl, but they didn't know, and a lot of other factors in the house, and that I mean you. And I think I was like, oh, yeah, I'd be that person that you needed when you was younger, and be aware of this, that in the then I try and motivate people, and he was like, yeah, I can imagine, like doing this, and I was like, oh, my God, this guy actually sees me doing the job. and he sees me as a person not just as like, all right into you, Number 124 like. So I think we still connected with that. And then Leanne was there. She didn't really say anything, but she was just like very friendly. and then actually landed one of the closest to, and I keep in touch with the on now, and it's like 93 years. (Hannah)<br><br>he was just on my wave length, and then every observation I had. She would pick out the things that I know. I've changed for the group of children I was working with, and she would immediately notice it. I know exactly why I've done it. I wouldn't have to explain myself even though she would ask me to in our mentor meeting. She'd be like I knew. That's why you done that like she she was. She just understood the way I talk. and and it just made me feel like I was so good at my job. By the end of my placement. I was like, I'm not. I'm a perfect at it. But I was like. Yeah, I can do. I i'm ready to go into the big. Wide world of not being observed every day. (Helena)<br><br>my mentor was one of my university lecturers. She yeah, she did my safeguarding modules, and she was bad. And she said to me, You know she she was the same as me. She was a lot older. She already had kids. When she did her degree she did the same course that I did. She did her teacher training a lot later, and so she was like right. You already know about teaching you already know about education. Now I wanna teach you to be a teacher so that you can stay at it so that you can figure out how to have a work, life balance, and so that you can make it work for you. And so that's what my last placement was, and they were absolutely amazing. (Jennifer) |

# Appendix O: Example Data Coded for the Socially Boosted Sub-Theme

The following table shows example data coded for the *socially boosted* sub-theme. Not all the data extracts which were coded for these codes are included to keep the tables short and concise and to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

| Codes | Data Coded |
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| Advice about entering teaching | I wanted to do sport at the time and but our head of sixth form, who was a PE teacher, sort of guided me towards going down biology route as she pointed out the fact that with a biology degree I could teach both. Where as, if I went more sport or sports science based I would be opening myself up essentially, to having to do more training in order to be a science teacher. and obviously she made the point that there's not many PE teaching jobs compared to science. (Elle)<br><br>Teach First advertise themselves in two ways: they advertise themselves as 'you want to be a teacher? Do it [Teach First] and get paid whilst you're doing it'. [or] 'You don't know what you want to do? Try teaching first and then see'. So, I read through it all and was a bit like 'okay, well, this isn't actually designed for people who want to be teachers, this is just something to do for 2 years and gain experience, build up my CV, they offer like the summer placement, so I can go try other schemes', so I signed up. (Shona)<br><br>I said to her 'you know, I'd love to teach science [which Teach First offered him] but equally in the future I'd love to teach psychology [his degree content]' and she was almost like 'don't get ahead of yourself, let's just take this one step at a time rather than going five steps ahead.' So that's always been in my head. (Jerry)<br><br>My mum sort of floated the idea of "You know we you're really great with children. What are you trying to be a teacher?" (Patrick) |
| Being told to apply for jobs | So this time it was my training mentor from the provider, my tutor from when I train she was. She's a governor at at like a federation, so she was like, oh, like I was. She was. She was lovely. What I got on really well with her, so I was kind of like keeping contact for out there my first year teaching. And then yeah, when I was kind of 10 that she's oh, well, they'll probably be jobs coming up at like the schools that I'm a governor of like. I think you'd really like it, you know. Go for |

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| | a visit to what you think. So I did that like my time, April my time. And yeah, it seems really nice. (Stacey)<br><br>I remember it was before the Christmas I got my job, so I think I was, I was one of the only ones on the course to get a job before Christmas, because, like I say, I don't think anyone had really even got to that. and I got told about the job. and it's at the school that I used to go to. So the school is my old school, and [NAME], who I used to go to school with he's now like business manager for the trust he there's a guy I went to school with that. I knew that he was a couple of years older than me, anyway, and he message me one day by messenger, saying, I just like you know. I know you're doing your teacher training. There is a job that's going to be coming up we're just advertising on the school website. I would never have known about that job if it wasn't for him messaging me because you were always checking TES. you'd never think of checking the individual school. (Elise)<br><br>I was teaching, and the head teacher come in, and he said this might be a bit early. but I'm putting a job out there. Here you go gave me the application form I was like, oh, my goodness! Oh, my goodness! And he had 2 jobs. 11 people applied. he interviewed, and I was like "oo that was good. I'm happy with that that's like all right." He rang me up an hour and a half after the interview and offered me the job. (Susan) |
| Being given jobs | So I was there a year. and then the head of geography went on maternity leave. And I was just basically called into the Heads office, and she said, You can do it. We want you to do it. We'll pay you for it. and it'll be maternity cover. And we're gonna have to get somebody else in agency staff, and you're gonna have to line on it then. So I mean for your second year. I don't even think I was like an RQT. I was just an nqt. So that's pretty mad. (Erica)<br><br>anyway, I message my old head of department to say what had happened and she said that literally like that day. the teacher on long term sick had handed in her notice. So she was like we do have a job going but she was only part time, you see, which is why the other part the other part would have to be made up with SEN/EAL work. So, anyway, I just got in contact with the head teacher just emailed her and said, Well, because before I before, the head of department had told me that I had said I will literally do anything like be a teaching assistant or I just need a job. Oh, yeah, the head teacher was like "oh yeah we can give you a full time teacher job, yeah start on Monday see you then" but yeah that was that. (Esme)<br><br>So it gets to the end of the school year and the school comes up to me and says we've got an opening for a PE teacher Are you |

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| | interested? Which I say, absolutely give me that job. So that was absolutely fantastic. (Jack)<br><br>But then the head of department left. So she left last summer. and and I became acting head of Department in September of 2021, and her job did come up. But one of the essentials on the job. Criteria was to have a reference from the church to be a practicing Christian, which I don't have so I continued to do the job. Got really good feedback from all the managers that I was doing a great job and ended up staying: and every time we put the advert out we wouldn't getting an R.E. teacher, and we weren't getting anybody, you know good enough for the school. And so I ended up speaking to the head head teacher and the diocese, and said, Look, you know, I might not be a Christian, but I think I'm doing a good job, and he changed the job advert of it. So it was a desirable rather than an essential. and I got the job so secured the job in January of 2022 as head of Department. (Mia) |

# Appendix P: Example Data Coded for the Wisdom on Loan Sub-Theme

The following table shows example data coded for the *wisdom on loan* sub-theme. Not all the data extracts which were coded for these codes are included to keep the tables short and concise and to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

| Codes | Data Coded |
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| Traditional communicative reflexivity | I said to my partner at the time 'do you know what, I don't know what to do' and he kind of persuaded me actually and he said 'the thing is Elise, the time is never going to be right, it's only maternity so if you don't like it you can finish at the end of maternity and it's really good to put on your CV' so I thought 'yeah it kind of makes sense what he's saying so I thought 'you know what, yeah that's good advice, maybe I should show willing and apply'... long story short, I got it" (Elise)<br><br>I had a conversation with my mum, which I mean everyone has these kinds of conversations, and she just kind of said to me 'look, you've never wanted to do a job for the money. So, I don't think you should just do it to earn more money. I think if you're doing something you love that it'll just come naturally'. And, yeah, I think I kind of did agree with that. I've never really been worried about salary or what I was earning, so I mean those [consultancy] jobs, your job is to try and companies more money. So, after that conversation I thought, 'actually, that's yeah, really not me'. And so yeah, that was the reason I think the other reason is, I obviously do love teaching. And I thought 'why am I going to stop doing something I love and was so passionate about and good at just because of one bad year?' And I think that's quite common in teaching, you know, you always think about the worst things. You have to remember all of the amazing stuff that goes on. And that's why I kind of decided I'll give it another shot. I'll do another year, and then I'll decide. and which was quite a tough decision to make. (Erica)<br><br>I was talking to my partner, talking to my parents about sort of 'what do I do at this point?' And they said, 'well, you've kept saying throughout the whole degree that the bit you enjoy doing the most, and then the bit that you've missed out on the most, is being able to talk about the maths and teach people it and so support people. And you did that all the time when you're in school, and you've sort of you've been doing that the |

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| | whole way through. Why not go into teaching?' And I thought, 'well, yeah, that's a good point'. and then actually I was thinking you get to share the fun bits, you get to help people, you get to teach. Morally, it feels a lot better to be thinking sort of 'I'm not going to an office job to make someone else money. I'm going to a job to try and do good for people'. Like this feels like something that I'm going to be going home in an evening and not thinking I've done something bad today. I'm going to be thinking this, this was good. So, at that point I was looking at Get into Teaching [the government website]." (Sheldon)<br><br>I think my dad in particular is a very like practical, logistical man. So, if I've had a bad day, my mum is very much like I'll get a hug and like a cup of tea made, and we can have a cry about it. Then my dad, he's like 'okay, this is the problem. This is how we fix it'. And I think the balance of the two worked really well, so I could go and have my cry with like my mum first, and then could then go to my dad and kind of get 'right, this is what we're going to do this time is what we're going to do next time' like that. Because I think sometimes when you're in that mind frame you can't like see how to fix it. So yeah, that was a huge support. (Shona)<br><br>I just sat there to my mum about, and I was like 'yeah, I'm emotionally unstable at the best of times, let alone having to deal with parents that have lost their children'. And I just knew I couldn't do it. (Saskia) |
| Expanding communicative reflexivity | So I always look at like other people who are in that job, and I look at the people especially, who like. I did this when I was way back at what is well, I would always look at the people who've been there for a long time, and I think, like what I want to be you in like 20 years. And what I did that a lot of teaching teach for us like. Obviously there were some teachers who had, like been really successful, that they had started off in teaching, and they had kind of risen up through the ranks, and they had achieved like really cool things. With that, you know the impact they made. But I also just upset, like a lot of teachers who were kind of stuck like my mental. For example, she was really nice. She's like 40, but she had, like great and remedy frustrations in her career like about all of the various times when she had not had the recognition that she wanted, or that maybe she had like, had an opportunity. But it, like the circumstances, made it very difficult to succeed, or, like you know, she had kind of felt that she's been screwed over in some way by, like her boss, so like as the system or something. And I know, just like a lot of teachers like that where they've been there for a long time, and like they just hadn't they They were sort |

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| | of sitting in the aftermath of a lot of disappointments, and I just thought that's not what I want, and I certainly don't want any extreme case scenario which would be like, you know. you know, having some kind of trouble like sort of having some kind of conflict with a teacher, a parent, or student. They were enough to kind of influence me to want to leave teaching. (Katherine)<br><br>I came to conclusion that it was never my plan A as a teenager because I was fearful of the life that my cousin was leading. So, my cousin is a teacher but she, I don't know what's a polite way to describe it, she's not living her best life. She's really struggled to enjoy her job. She never talks positively about teaching. She is single, which should not be a marker of success whatsoever, but she desperately wants to have a partner, and I think teaching isn't always the career where you get to just meet people like you do with other careers. So, I think my cousin's unhappiness led me to not want to pursue teaching for a really long time. (Grace)<br><br>I said I, I just really don't think I can do it. I just got so much going on with this house. and [friend who works in pastoral at the school] come out and said, you'll be surprised, but you will find it in you to find the energy to do it. She was like somewhere. It will. You will find it? And also okay, yeah, that's good. Where it's like the advice. So I think she was like You'll think you're on rock bottom now but you, you know you could always take it for like time and energy. And I was like. Okay, so. And then I spoke to the friends at the school, and I was like, maybe I'll just sleep on it. Maybe I need a good sleep I've got a lot of time, like the week after half term, I think it was. I can have. Think about it, and just see how I feel after a night sleep, and I think. (Elise)<br><br>So I spoke to. I just speak to my manager, she went. Well, you're Teach First. It's a leadership program. Obviously they're going to want. They're going to try and not groom you, but kind of get you into that position, Aren't. They? So I applied, and I think I was the only one who did. (Polly) |
| Using communicative reflexivity to negotiate the habitus | I started to do University research. and I did look at education degrees, and I did look at early childhood qualifications. But I was being still at this point, really strongly encouraged by school teachers and by my parents not to do an education degree, or an early childhood degree. I was being told that that would basically limit my options, whereas if I did a general undergraduate degree in another subject. I could then, if I still wanted to at 21, I could then do a PGCE So I took that advice on board. Basically I was like, okay, I'm going to study something else. So I chose |

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| | psychology as my undergraduate subject. But even in doing that I looked at the actual syllabus at every university, and I wanted educational content because I thought I might be an educational psychologist. (Elizabeth)<br><br>My mum she said 'I don't think you should go straight into education. I think you need some time out of it before you go back in. I think you're, kind of, limiting your worldview a little bit.' So I kind of had influence from other people going, 'actually, this [teaching straight after university] is a bad idea', and I suppose to a point I sort of started listening to them a bit more. (Polly)<br><br>He mentioned teaching and I was like 'no, not teaching, I don't want to teach'. He said 'you have a calling for teaching', [I said] 'I don't have a calling for teaching', [he said] 'you've always taught dance and you really enjoy it', [I said], 'that's different, that's not the same'...<br>okay, well, this [Teach First] isn't actually designed for people who want to be teachers, this is just something to do for 2 years and gain experience, build up my CV, they offer like the summer placement, so I can go try other schemes, so I signed up. (Shona)<br><br>My family felt like I could do something better than teaching. So I looked at tech, did a summer internship and got a job offer but I've chosen to defer that so I can do Teach First, if I still feel like teaching at the end of the two years, then I have the option of tech... I think they wanted me to become a doctor, I don't know whether it's the same in all cultures, but in South Asian culture, they value engineers, doctors and teachers kind of get seen as 'well you're wasting your skills on secondary school. (Iqra) |

## Appendix Q: Example Data Coded for the Intuitive Feel Theme

The following table shows example data coded for *the intuitive feel* theme. Not all the data extracts which were coded for these codes are included to keep the tables short and concise and to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

| Codes | Data Coded |
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| Intuition | Having gone to that school that had the bad reputation [during her training] because you've just got to go there and feel. You get a feeling, don't you? You know about the people, the staff and the children. It just feels right. (Susan)<br><br>I think, for me it's always been about the feel. So. The first school that I went in the first school that I got the job at. I wasn't sure I was going to be able to make it work, but it's thinking about, you know, getting my kids to school and getting across town and everything. I was worried that that was going to be a really massive barrier. But then, when I went in, and I had a look around. It just had such a lovely feel. and I think that was the big thing. They made me feel really welcome the school just had. I think there are certain places, aren't there when you go in, and it it it's not about what it it's, not about what it looks like. It's not about what they say, but it's about the feeling that you get, and I think that's always going to be something that I will look look for. You know my gut feeling as well. and you know, being with this school being part of its journey from you know our right to good. It's the day that we got told that we were good, and there wasn't a dry eye in that staff room, and it was just that real, that real family that it is kind of. It's a work family, and you know, with messaging each other this week, even though we're off. And you know we genuinely like being around each other. And you know, genuinely found friends there. And I think that's yeah, that's what that's what I look for. (Jennifer)<br><br>It's been the right place at the right time and some of it is knowing when to say yes and, you know, trust in your instincts and all of those things (Paula).<br><br>I'd like to think that I would go with whatever my gut is telling me to do. whether that be actually not stick in teaching (Julia) |
| Destiny | I saw it [the job advert] and I think I thought that was a bit of a sign at that point where I just didn't know what I wanted to do. I'd always been wanting to do teaching and so then I just thought I might as well do it now and see if it works. (Ava) |

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| | It genuinely felt like that job had my name on it. I don't mean that to sound like greedy or cocky in anyway because I didn't have any security that it might have been my job. It just felt like it was right for me to get it, if I was successful if that makes sense. When that job came up it's like it had my name on it, it truly did feel right, at the right place to be. (Elise)<br><br>I basically do my head of subject's job for him half of the time, so I know I can do it. But, I want the recognition for doing it. And then the only thing that maybe will come in the way of that in the next couple of years is starting a family, it's just got to fit in amongst that, I guess, and things will fall where they fall. (Elle)<br><br>just sort of the vibe that I got when I went and looked around, and so the staff that showed me around in terms of how welcoming they were in, and I think I like the fact that I've done my placement there. My initial sort of days when I was at college. I like the the idea of it. Sort of coming background full circle. and going back to work there. (Harriett)<br><br>what it sounds like. I come full circle, and I've heard people say before that the trust of every invested in ex students and bringing our students back. And so yeah, that I went in, and I didn't expect it to be that kind of meeting. It was really good. It made me feel really good. So, hopefully, that's a positive thing. (Megan)<br>So I've got a job for September. which is very exciting, and and it is in TOWN, and incidentally it's at the school that my boyfriend and the husband went to. So it's really weird and full circle. But and yeah, so it's it's nice. And yeah, unless something massively changes like this massive opportunity elsewhere, then yeah, I can definitely see myself saying. (Penny) |
| Comfort | It comes down to my experience at school. and I just love that memory. If the crowds, the corridors, the the teachers, the the memories that I've made, and the impression it had on me, and it really is the best time of your life, and I don't think people realize because it it gets harder on it. Life and I don't know. I think I quite like the idea of just being in that environment, that bubble, and that moment of having that impact on somebody and just sharing my passion on to somebody else. And so yeah, I think that's with the the main reason I always link back. I always vision myself back when I was at school. (Elise)<br><br>It was literally like a film, you see like rich kids and non-rich kids. And then they all look at you. That's how I felt, I just walked into a room full of really rich people who knew I wasn't, I don't know. |

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| | I felt like an impostor, like proper impostor syndrome and yeah I just knew I wouldn't have liked it, no. (Elise)<br><br>The hustle and just how competitive it is and how like unhealthy working practice are promoted. I don't think I'd survive in an environment like that. (Danielle)<br><br>It was more of a class thing, on reflection, you know I come from a very working-class background. The school I went to I was very much a big fish in a small pond, one of the highest achievers. So then I went to university and I think it was the shock of like "oh this is going to be much harder, you're not as good as you think you are". And then in my halls was this guy who I think his parents were lawyers and for our first introductory assignment he had done this fantastic piece compared to mine and that comparison sort of knocked my confidence. And it's funny because I find out years later that he came first in our law course and he went onto to study at Harvard and stuff like that, so probably a really bad comparison to make. (Jerry)<br><br>I was actually signed on at the job centre and I absolutely hated it, I just really felt out of place, the job centre was not for me at all. It was the lady who was like my mentor there and she said "there's a job going, well it was an apprenticeship at my former secondary school if you're interested". Straightaway I was like "well I know it's a place I feel comfortable at… so I applied and got the job. (Megan)<br><br>I just don't know, it was just always something that I always thought about. Like I said my mum was a teacher so I knew she was working long hours and she used to come home and sometimes the days would be bad but then you get moments where students had come to her and said like "thank you for that" or "oh Miss can you help me with extra work like I need your help" and just having that very like one-on-one connection with the students, or like bonding, the opportunity to genuinely change a kid's life is just mind blowing that I could have that effect on someone, so I feel like that's what I wanted to do. (Jack)<br><br>When I went to work in a school during my degree I was like "No, I just, this is, I felt so comfortable like when I stepped in there". I was like "I think this is the place for me". Time like reaffirmed it because I thought "oh my god" when I first got to a school like "what if I don't actually like it?" I kind of felt like I put the trust in that I would after the work experience. (Sophie) |

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| | I only wanted to apply for what I had experience in and what I was sure I would get because at the time I had no confidence in myself. I was like stressed out trying to get all my uni work sorted and seeing all of my uni friends applying for all these grad schemes and going across the country like for all these really stressful interview days and I just thought "that's not for me", I'll just choose the one I think my skills are matched to and that I've got experience in, so I'm likely to get and then we'll go from there so yeah, a bit lazy. (Esme)<br><br>The secondary school I was at was very academic. So they sort of pushed everyone towards university routes and then, they were quite good with careers actually, but the culture of people around me was all kind of looking at the Civil Service Fast Stream, banking, insurance, so that kind of stuff and I think I've always kind of known I didn't want to do that, I kind of wanted to do something that I felt was doing something useful. (Craig)<br><br>I knew I wanted to be in school a lot as opposed to predominantly being at uni and I think that paid off. I do think I made the right decision because I think that if I'd have done a PGCE I would have lost my confidence a little bit because I would have got comfortable with you know still being a student and I think I just like the way I went to twilights [after school sessions] across different schools and you could network and it was just, it just felt right. It just felt right. I met some of my best friends I'm still friends with now and it just felt really good. So, I go very much on how I feel at the time, so that's the reason I think I picked it. (Megan)<br><br>Some people say they're good in terms of like very clear set ways they're run [which indeed is why Megan likes to work in academies (due to the universal structure of a lesson)] but they seem to lean more like a business structure, and I just don't know how I feel about that in education… I think I would just always lean towards a local authority school. (Stacey)<br><br>There's a concept in German of how where you feel at home where you are and it is secure, calm and peaceful and I would say like, for the moment, where I am feels like that concept. (Lena) |
| Feelings can change | There's a concept in German of how where you feel at home where you are and it is secure, calm and peaceful and I would say like, **for the moment**, where I am feels like that concept. (Lena, emphasis added) |

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| | but it is changing, the culture of schools changing. So I just don't know. I couldn't say... you know it's got to be somewhere that feels homely like how my school does. (Elise)<br><br>I mean the head teacher knew I was not happy with the decision. and but at the same time, I've been at the school for 3 years, and I think I was getting very frustrated with things, and there was certain things that weren't changing, and they weren't in my control, and I was finding that really quite frustrating. and I didn't agree with a lot of the leadership decisions. I didn't agree with the new head teacher. I didn't think she was cutting it and I could kind of. I could feel. You can feel a school when it's going down. and it's like a sinking ship, so I thought you know I need to change what I'm doing. and yeah, after that, I think because I was quite unhappy for that last year. because I've just been working ridiculously hard, and I didn't feel like I got any recognition. I thought maybe I don't want to actually teach. (Erica)<br><br>That was teaching science. But then, yeah, this room with my mentor, and she was so horrible to me she'd been like, sit in my life, and like 6 hours a week, not do anything. And then, just like, give me like a barge of reasons. I was rubbish at it. She kept telling me that she wasn't going to give me any new targets until I got more organized. and I was like, Look, I'm not very come organized. I've got 80 hour day I like, but actually everything that needs to happen within. The lesson is going fine. It's the behind the scene stuff that's a bit crazy, and she's like you. You need to stop using that as an excuse. I know this that was really really to me... It was a horrible place to work. and people leave, and we lost the whole math department. Twice we had. We had to write a curriculum, and then taught a curriculum. I had to write one. and the lead we had for all of this was really unhelpful. But I don't know he he's in charge of all the ECTs, and he was useless, and during my second year of my teaching. I think that I was observed once. What is this? But since I got there the whole department's gone. So me and the head of department went at the same time and by then we were all gone. (Hannah) |