

**Primary school teachers'  
experience of policy reform in  
the second decade of 21st  
century England**

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Primary school teachers' experience of  
policy reform in the second decade of  
21st century England

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## Abstract

### Primary school teachers' experience of policy reform in the second decade of 21st century England

The aim of the research is to understand primary school teachers' responses to the changing English educational policy context, specifically subsequent to the government's 2010 White Paper reforms.

My research reflects two key questions:

1. How is education policy reform perceived and experienced by primary teachers in England?
2. What are significant influences on, and threats to, primary teachers' motivations and morale?

Internationally, many of the discourses of primary teaching reinforce an interpretation of a profession constituted by dedicated, 'natural' teachers working hard to maintain the interests and welfare of the young child. In recent years, the profile, status and political position of primary teachers in England has continued to evolve as the profession has undergone something of a transformation. Overarching reform continues to re-define the aims and purpose of primary education which are framed in increasingly essentialist terms.

This qualitative study focuses on 22 primary teachers across three professional life phases, encompassing teaching experience of two to fourteen years. The teachers were employed in the South-East of England across 20 schools and four local education authorities. Data were collected between 2014 and 2015, and teachers were interviewed on two occasions. Central to my research is the aspiration to explain how particular aspects of neo-liberal educational reform reposition primary teachers and the work that they do.

Thematic analysis facilitated identification of four categories of findings reflecting teachers' experiences of accountability, performativity and managerialism, alongside the commitment to 'make a difference'. The four findings chapters serve to illuminate the duality of what it means to *teach* as well as be *a teacher* these days. The findings offer insights into teachers' encounters with neo-liberal policy reform, the emotional toll and the impact on morale. I suggest that the complex interaction between the discourses of altruism and accountability elicits a profound professional and personal burden on primary teachers.

The emergence of the primary practitioner as 'tactician' reveals a particular brand of survivalism necessary for a context that acts to pedagogically and philosophically constrain the purpose of primary education, and thus, primary teachers. My exploration of 'gaming' necessitates reflection on the moral(e) predicament for primary teachers, and the threats to teachers' professional motives, aspirations and occupational stamina are considered. I suggest that teachers' experiences of policy reform in primary education are better understood as situated in, and exacerbated by, an increased culture of 'miserabilism' in education that transcends notions of 'teacher stress', low morale and reputational decline.

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## **Glossary**

<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development.
<b>DFE</b>	Department for Education.
<b>FLOOR STANDARDS</b>	The minimum standard for overall pupil attainment and/or progress that the government expects schools to meet.
<b>KEY STAGE</b>	The demarcation of stages in primary and secondary education with correlating expectations for teaching.
<b>NASUWT</b>	The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers.
<b>NAO</b>	National Audit Office.
<b>NATIONAL CURRICULUM</b>	A programme of study for each key stage of primary and secondary education across designated subject areas.
<b>NCTL</b>	National College for Teaching and Leadership.
<b>NPQH</b>	National Professional Qualification for Headship.
<b>NQT</b>	Newly Qualified Teacher.
<b>NUT</b>	National Union of Teachers.
<b>OFSTED</b>	Office for Standards in Education.
<b>PGCE</b>	Post Graduate Certificate in Education.
<b>PPA</b>	Planning, Preparation and Assessment.
<b>PRP</b>	Performance-related pay.
<b>SATS</b>	National Statutory Curriculum Tests.
<b>SCHOOL DIRECT</b>	School-Led Initial Teacher Training.
<b>TEACHERS' STANDARDS</b>	Government expectations for teachers' professional practice and conduct.

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Interviewing the twenty-two primary teachers was a highlight of the Doctoral journey, and they each warrant my heartfelt appreciation. Their words continue to ring in my ears, and for their generous contributions and presence in this thesis, I thank them.

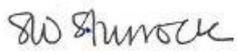
Thank you to my caring family and friends, and a particular thanks to the teachers in my life who tolerated my intermittent and unwitting slips into 'researcher mode' over dinners and drinks.

Finally, a special thanks to the best teacher, Jo. Unconditionally supportive, patient and gentle, your love and faith in me has motivated, revived and inspired me at every stage of the journey. I dedicate this thesis to you.

# Author's Declaration

## Declaration

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree, and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed: 

Dated: June 22nd 2018

# **Chapter 1 – Overview of the Study**

## **1.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I detail the motivation and rationale for the research and explain the significance of the policy context for the study. I outline the aim of the study and its potential for understanding English primary school teachers' experiences of their work.

Central to the research is education policy reform in England since 2010 and the consequent implications for the profession. The publication of the Government's White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching' (DFE, 2010b), signalled considerable reform and restructuring in several areas including curriculum review, accountability, teacher training, and the infrastructure of the schooling system itself. Of particular relevance for primary classroom teachers is the revision of both the curriculum and assessment protocols as well as the related accountability measures.

The research considers primary school teachers' perceptions and experiences of their work at a time of change. I briefly outline the influences on the study and the ways in which the context informs the rationale and subsequent research questions. In addition, I include an overview of the thesis and the content of the subsequent chapters.

## **1.2 Biographical context**

Having worked in primary education in England for 25 years, initially as a qualified primary teacher and then in initial teacher education, it is vital to acknowledge both my position and emotional attachment to the field as features of the study. I have taught on a number of initial teacher education programmes as well as worked with teachers in a range of contexts. I have led the PGCE primary programme for many years, devising programmes for student teachers and developing partnerships with schools and settings, and now lead the MA Education programme.

Integral to my professional role is a belief that teachers are important and that the work they do in schools can be transformative. Having been ensconced in primary education for so long, it may be unsurprising that primary teachers are

a motivation for research. Beyond the personal and professional interest, there is a real need to focus the spotlight on this sector, and I further justify this in Chapter 2.

The impetus for this study is two-fold. Re-reading Jennifer Nias's seminal work, 'Teachers Talking' (1989), reminded me of the value of trying to understand and explain teachers' experiences and of probing issues of professional identity. Equally imperative is the White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching' (2010b), and my exploration of teachers' experiences of the associated reform in relation to primary education is at the centre of the study.

### **1.3 Rationale for the study**

In England in 2010, the Education minister at that time, Michael Gove, promoted a "vision of the teacher as our society's most valuable asset" (DFE, 2010b, p.7), and this prefaced some of the most significant education policy restructuring in England since the 1988 Education Reform Act (DES, 1988). The pace and complexity of change made the time between 2010-2015 "a remarkable period of policy which has altered the landscape" (Lupton and Thomson, 2015, p.23). This is further explained in the literature chapter, but it is helpful to provide a prelude to contextualise the research focus.

In the White Paper, the government made explicit the relationship between the quality and type of schooling and the country's economic competitiveness. The aspiration was to reform education in seven areas: teaching and leadership, behaviour, curriculum and assessment, new schools system, accountability, school improvement, and school funding. The extent of the remit meant that all phases of education would be affected.

At the same time, well-documented issues of teacher recruitment and retention persisted and at the start of my fieldwork, the overall number of teachers leaving full-time teaching was at a ten year high (Worth et al, 2015). In 2016, almost 35,000 full-time equivalent teachers left before retirement (NAO, 2017, p.9). Commentary about the profession and concerns about workload and morale (Van Droogenbroeck et al, 2014; Bundrett, 2015; Bricheno and Thornton, 2016; NUT, 2016) and recruitment (Morris, 2015) pointed to an

insecurity in the profession raising questions about the general 'health' of the sector. My interest is in understanding the influences on primary teachers' motivations and morale at a time of flux and within the context of the increased politicisation of primary education (Cunningham, 2012).

There is already a body of research about teachers' experiences of reform (Ball et al, 2012a; Hopkins, 2013; Bates, 2013; Hall and McGinity, 2015; Wilkins, 2015), and that draws attention to the relationship between specific aspects of neo-liberal education policy which closely interact. Ball identifies "three interrelated policy technologies [as] the market, managerialism and performativity" (2003, p.215). Several empirical studies about teachers in England reflect the professional encounter with, and consequences of, the aforementioned neo-liberal policy 'trinity' and are of particular interest and relevance for my research.

Ball maintains that "what it means to teach and what it means to be a teacher ... are subtly but decisively changed in the process of reform" (2003, p. 218) and the consequences for professional identity are acknowledged (Brown and Manktelow, 2016). However, there has been less focus on English primary teachers' experience of policy reform, making it a fitting area of study. As noted on the previous page, and as I will go on to detail (2.4), teacher recruitment and retention is construed as in 'crisis'. As such, there is a benefit to knowing more about primary teachers who stay in the profession, and about the particular challenges and threats to maintaining this position. Given that teachers' experiences are influenced by "professional factors such as... educational policies and Government initiatives" (Sammons et al, 2007, p.685; Flores and Day, 2006), my research takes the current context, specifically since 2010, as a parameter for exploring what it means to be a primary teacher in England in the second decade of the 21st century. The 'setting' of primary teaching is an equally important parameter and I now highlight some of the defining features of primary education and schooling and clarify the distinctive nature of primary teaching.

## **1.4 The context of primary teaching**

Overall, there are 457,300 teachers in English state funded schools and almost half are primary teachers (NAO, 2017). In the United Kingdom, primary schools constitute 65% (20,954) of all schools, with 76% of these in England (DFE, 2016). One in four teachers in the primary sector is part-time (Lynch et al, 2017, p.5) and there are 29,807 primary head teachers (Lynch and Worth, 2017).

The aims and purposes of primary education invariably contrast from school to school but are broadly encapsulated in vision statements and individual school policies. The Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander, 2010) recognised the shift in the aims and purposes of primary education, and the move from the espoused child-centredness of the 1960s to the Standards' agenda prevalent in more recent years. Schools now necessarily enact a 'hybrid view of primary education' (ibid).

To establish the context for policy enactment, the day-to-day experience of the primary teacher must be understood. There are a number of different primary school types, for example, infant schools (for pupils aged four to seven years), junior schools (for pupils aged seven to eleven years), and most commonly, primary schools (often with pre-schools or nurseries (typically age three to eleven years)). In England, the majority of pupils are taught in primary schools and usually organised into 'key stages' and six year groups, according to age. In some parts of the country children are taught in first schools (between the ages of five and nine years old) and middle schools (between the ages of nine and thirteen years old), although these are increasingly rare; there are just five middle schools across South-East England. There are a small proportion of schools (mainly academies or Free schools) that provide for both primary and secondary age pupils.

The majority of primary school teachers work in relatively small schools, compared to their secondary counterparts. The average state-funded primary school has 279 pupils on roll (DFE, 2017c). The primary teacher typically teaches one class of (the same) pupils all year and is considered highly familiar with the pupils' needs, including, though not exclusive to, their learning needs. The primary teacher is described as a 'generalist' and typically teaches most, if

not all, of the National Curriculum subjects (DFE, 2014c). More recently, schools increasingly deploy 'specialist' teachers to cover class teachers' designated time for planning, preparation and assessment (PPA time). A specialist teacher may teach music, languages, and/or physical education but this varies from school to school.

Brown and Manktelow (2016) acknowledge that "teachers' positions are complex and change according to situational influences at a classroom level" (p. 78). Broadly speaking, the experience of primary teaching is shaped by the aforementioned contextual factors and positions the profession differently from other phases of education. What is common to the vast majority of primary teachers is gender; 85% of full-time qualified teachers in nursery and primary schools are women (DFE, 2016a).

The primary school teacher is said to work within a "politicised and pressurised environment, balancing professional practice that often demands an instrumental approach to teaching with strong individual and communal desires to offer children the care and nurture seen as an essential part of primary education" (Murray and Passy, 2014, p. 499). In recent years, the profile, status and political position of the primary teacher continues to evolve as the profession undergoes something of a transformation. In 2012, the English National College for Teaching and Leadership suggested that relative to other phases of education, the "reform of the primary sector presented far greater structural, professional and cultural challenges" (NCTL, 2012, p.7). As noted, inherent to this reform is the interaction between the market, managerialism and performativity (Ball, 2003) which is envisaged as having specific consequences for the traditions, expectations and values associated with primary education. Thus, the setting is professionally and politically complex and is pivotal to the rationale for the study and the research questions.

## **1.5 The research questions**

The aim of the research is to gain an understanding of primary teachers' experiences of, and responses to, the changing policy context, specifically of the 2010 White Paper reforms. The questions complement and extend previous

research in the field and orientate to notions of teacher identity and education policy reform.

Specifically, my research focus is determined by the following questions:

1. How is education policy reform perceived and experienced by primary teachers in England?
2. What are significant influences on, and threats to, primary teachers' motivations and morale?

**Research Question 1** How is education policy reform perceived and experienced by primary teachers in England?

Central to the research is a curiosity about what it means to be a primary teacher at this particular point in time. Whilst teacher anecdotes, media soundbites, calls for industrial action and industry headlines may provoke hunches about primary teachers' lives and experiences, the first question is deliberately constructed to reflect an uncertainty about individual teachers' policy preoccupations and influences. The timing of the initial stages of fieldwork (Autumn 2014) coincided with the introduction of the revised National Curriculum in England, perceived as fundamental for teachers and pertinent to issues of workload.

Underlying this research question is Ball's notion of "three interrelated policy technologies" (2003, p. 215) and I am especially interested in teachers' commentary about performativity, accountability and managerialism and the effect on their perceptions of work.

**Research Question 2** What are significant influences on, and threats to, primary teachers' motivations and morale?

There is an abundance of literature about morale and motivation (for example, Evans, 1998; Addison and Brundrett, 2008; Walker and Taylor, 2013; Day and Gu, 2014; Heinz, 2015; Bricheno and Thornton, 2016; NUT, 2016; Chiong,

Menzies and Parameshwaran, 2017), and the second research question is stimulated by the ongoing concerns raised about teacher morale.

I am especially interested in the ways that elements of current policy influence individual teacher motivation as well as morale. Understanding how teachers feel about their work, their self-efficacy and their professional aspirations may inform insights into why they remain in teaching, as well as the challenges that impact on career choices and decision-making.

## **1.6 Outline of the thesis**

Having outlined my professional and personal interest in primary school teachers in England, and the rationale and purpose of the research, the remaining chapters are organised as follows.

In Chapter 2, I situate my study in relation to previous research, as well as clarify the potential to contribute to a growing field about teachers' experiences of the 2010 White Paper. The chapter critically reviews the literature and explores a number of related concepts that interact to address the research questions. I explore the influences of neo-liberal education policy on conceptions of primary education and teaching.

In Chapter 3, I detail my methodology. At the heart of my research is the intent to explore and understand individuals' perceptions and experiences, and I begin from the premise that qualitative methodology can enable a specific view of present-day primary school teachers' experiences of school life. An interpretivist research design will support an interpretation of individual teachers' experience of current education policy. A feature of this research is my position as a 'peripheral insider' (Adler and Adler, 1987). I am not a primary practitioner nor employed in the institution/s where I research, but I have professional connections with the participants and my work entails an ongoing knowledge of, and relationship with, teachers, schools and the broader profession.

I critically account for the merits of semi-structured interviews as well as the limitations of the method. I discuss the selection of participants, the pilot study, the interview questions and the underpinning ethical considerations. The

centrality of reflexivity for the methodology is also clarified. I detail the decision to analyse the data thematically and present the process of analysis with a view to making explicit the rationale for the key findings.

I present the findings in four separate, though related, chapters (Chapters 4 - 7). Chapter 4 explores teachers' altruism as a powerful incentive and professional motivation. For the participants, perceptions of their capacity to affect children's lives are variable and compromised; views of 'making a difference' are perpetually contrasted to those factors that work to diminish the individual teacher's agency in this regard.

Findings in Chapter 5 explore the politics of working in school and considers the relatively new – and still evolving – field of teacher 'gaming' in relation to the context of assessment in primary education (Basford and Bath, 2014; Robert-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016; Pratt, 2016b). Findings suggest that teachers' interpretations of what it means to work in schools, and the associated 'game-playing' and 'gaming', necessitates a kind of professionalism that is flexible to accommodate behaviours which may not always tally with the assumed attributes of autonomy and collegiality.

In Chapter 6, the findings focus on teachers' experiences and perceptions of primary school management, and these are couched in relation to staff politics, dynamics and morale. Teachers' expectations of 'leadership', in the context of accountability and performativity, are influenced by interpersonal relationships and school ethos.

Chapter 7 presents findings which focus on teacher morale and the affective repercussions of the tensions previously detailed. Despite the acknowledgement of the 'rich rewards' of teaching pupils, sustaining positive feelings and optimism about being a teacher is challenged by the increasingly challenging relationship with their school leaders, as well as the perceived disregard of teaching perpetuated in wider society.

In Chapter 8 I interpret and analyse notable research findings in relation to concepts identified in the literature chapter and discuss the possible meanings

and implications for primary teachers. The chapter explores the juxtaposition between perceptions of being a teacher and the daily experience of teaching, and I draw upon particular findings to illustrate my contribution to knowledge.

In the conclusion I reflect on, and situate the findings in relation to, the limitations and strengths of the research. My contribution to knowledge is reiterated, and I discuss the implications of the study in relation to professional practice, policy and future research, as well as my aspiration for further study in the area.

## **1.7 Summary and conclusion**

In this introductory chapter I have highlighted the policy context for primary teachers as worthy of study. At a time when teachers in England have been described as ‘under siege’ (Leaton-Gray, 2006; Mortimore, 2013), as the retention of teachers proves increasingly problematic (Wilshaw, 2016; House of Commons Education Committee, 2017a), whilst teacher morale is expressed as low (Walker and Taylor, 2013; Bricheno and Thornton, 2016), and when primary teachers’ working week can comprise 60 hours (DFE, 2014a), a deeper understanding of the experience of teachers who stay in the profession is vital. Specifically, there is a need to understand how neo-liberal educational reform impacts on primary teachers’ perceptions and experiences of the work that they do.

In the next chapter, I draw upon the literature that explains some of the idiosyncrasies of primary teaching and the specific legacies and discourses which act to shape notions of identity. I review the landscape of neo-liberal reform in education in England, alongside the specific policy objectives of the 2010 White Paper and the implications for primary teachers.

## **Chapter 2 – The Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

There is some consensus that the change of Government in 2010, and subsequent White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching', signalled the start of an extensive change in education in England (Evans, 2011; Wright, 2012; Furlong, 2013; Exley and Ball, 2014; Eyles, Machin and McNally 2017; Bates, 2016; Pratt, 2016a; Rayner, 2017). The dynamic nature of this period has meant that education generally has become increasingly 'research and news-worthy', both during and subsequent to my fieldwork. For example, the publication of thirteen separate reports about teacher retention and workload have been published since February 2016 (Foster, 2018), revealing a key challenge of this period. The dynamism in the field has implications for the literature review and there is pertinent literature published simultaneous to, or subsequent to my data generation.

In this chapter I demonstrate the imperative for research about primary teachers' perceptions and experiences of the 2010 White Paper policy reform. I draw upon literature that explains some of the idiosyncrasies of primary teaching and argue that the nature of primary school teaching is highly complex, both in its institution, and purpose, but also as a consequence of the professional historical legacies. My suggestion is that elements of neo-liberal reform are experienced distinctively by primary school teachers.

I selectively review the considerable body of theoretical and empirical knowledge about neo-liberal policy in education and illustrate the ways this is encapsulated in the White Paper. A critical analysis of the literature includes a number of related concepts that necessarily interact to address the research question and to underpin the study. Specifically, the inter-relationship between policy and professional identity is central to the research aim.

In section 2.2, I briefly acknowledge the seminal influences on the research. In section 2.3, I explore the traditions and remit of primary education to outline the specific nature of primary teaching. In section 2.4, I examine the overarching

context of neo-liberal policy reform, specifically the period since the publication of the Coalition Government's White Paper in 2010, and this is contextualised against the backdrop of educational policy and reform more broadly.

Subsequent sections (2.5 - 2.8) focus on the selected policy reforms perceived as central to the step-change, purpose and positioning of primary education in England. In section 2.9 I suggest that the policy context and tenets of accountability, marketisation, performativity and managerialism provoke discourses contrary to those historically associated with primary teaching.

These discourses are considered with a view to the prospective repercussions for the primary teacher's experience and identity.

## **2.2 Seminal influences on my study**

The teaching profession has always attracted substantial attention and warranted research that has enabled insights into the complexities of schooling and education. The literature is vast, international and reflective of a myriad of methodologies, but it is useful to acknowledge some of the contributions pertinent to my research interests.

Much of the theory about teaching and professional identity is situated within the broader field of, for example, the sociology and psychology of education. Waller (1932) claims that the world of school is a 'social world' and his commonly cited question, 'what does teaching do to teachers?', proved instrumental for my thinking about the relationship between policy reform and teachers' lives.

Some of the most influential studies about teachers' lives (for example, Nias, 1989; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Cortazzi, 1993; Woods and Jeffrey, 2002) are those which employ qualitative and specifically, narrative methodology. These studies provide a depth and breadth about individual teachers' perspectives and influenced my methodology.

Other research in this vein has explored teachers' relationships, attitudes and feelings and occupational perceptions (for example, Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 1980; Nias, 1989). A common theme in the literature is of professional identity and this is an implicit facet of my research; understanding what teachers 'make'

of their work, how this influences or underpins their feelings about what they do, and the ways that (recent) policy reform influences perceptions of professional and personal identity. I define professional identity and further explore this in relation to policy reform in section 2.9.

I have acknowledged the influence of Nias's work, 'Primary Teachers Talking' (1989), and how it clarified my interest in teachers' experiences of work. Building on previous findings about teachers (e.g. Lortie 1975), Nias (1989) reiterates teachers' altruistic sense of vocation, the desire to 'make a difference' and be a force for 'social good' and the ways this underpins teachers' career choices and the motivation to stay in teaching. Almost thirty years later, the motivation to 'make a difference' features prominently within professional discourse about primary teaching and is discussed in section 2.9.3.

## **2.3 Primary education and the primary teacher**

Ahead of the discussion on policy reform (2.4), and to fully recognise the ramifications for primary school teachers, I now locate the distinct nature of the work and the role of the primary school teacher. To understand the role, the aims and purpose of primary education should be understood as changeable and subject to political intervention.

### **2.3.1 Influences on primary education**

The term 'primary' was first utilised by the Hadow Committee in 1931 and signalled the distinctive nature of schooling for very young children, and a pedagogy conceptualised as more than simply preparation for secondary education. In the 1960s, primary education was regarded as a phase in its own right, and the Plowden report (CACE, 1967), promoted primary pedagogy that "placed the individual child at the centre and promoted self-expression, discovery learning with an emphasis on process" (Garratt and Forrester, 2012, p. 71). Plowden is often associated with progressive and informal primary education stimulating traditions and practices subsequently held responsible for the 'ills of primary education' (Alexander, Rose and Woodhead, 1992).

I will argue that, historically, the connotations of primary education are of a more relaxed, less rigorous and more marginalised stage of education than secondary schooling, with the accordant implications for the primary teacher's professional status. Primary education has traditionally encompassed theories of child development and learning, curriculum knowledge and skills, as well as the broader requirement to socialise and nurture the child. Rose describes the young learner as having an "appetite and zest for learning [and] it is this which makes primary teaching truly rewarding, and primary education so important in its own right" (2009, p. 8). Historically, it is portrayed as more 'informal' than secondary schooling, revealing a potent conception of the primary phase as one of 'laissez-faire' and a more liberal canon. The term 'informal' has "acquired a peculiar potency in primary education" (Alexander, 1995, p.8), and its influence on political, policy and societal discourses about primary teaching (2.9) should not be underestimated.

Since 1992, the primary sector has experienced more systematic and ongoing policy reform (compared, for example, with secondary and early years education). Ongoing legislation in the last twenty-five years, along with curriculum adjustment and prescription, in, for example, the National Strategies (Alexander, 2004), and subsequent national curriculum reviews (Rose, 2009; Alexander, 2010), all served to determine and adjust the remit of primary education. The outcome has been "increased central control over pedagogies in primary school" (Forrester, 2000, p.134).

The remit of 'raising standards' in recent years has been with an eye to improving key or 'basic skills', and the current policy context promotes the view that "the single most important outcome for any primary school is to give as many pupils as possible the knowledge and skills to flourish in the later phases of education" (DFE, 2014b, p. 4). Teaching children 'the basics' has stimulated "a public discourse in political and media debate that is categorical and reductive" (Cunningham, 2012, p.75), and the perception of the primary teacher is shaped by expectations about the knowledge and intellectual capital necessary to work in the sector.

It is argued that the two main influences on primary education have been child-centred education and the country's social and economic progress and aspirations (Shuayb and O'Donnell, 2008). These opposing influences are difficult to reconcile, and, as a consequence, primary teachers may be particularly vulnerable to a 'values schizophrenia' (Ball, 2003), where educators grapple with reconciling the disparities between their own personal view of professionalism and the professionalism demanded by a performative culture.

### **2.3.2 Primary teacher identity**

In my study, the concept of identity is an implicit 'analytic lens' for exploring primary teachers' perceptions and experiences of their work (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Day portrays professional identity as "a composite of the interaction in different work scenarios between socio-cultural/policy, workplace, and personal dimensions" (2011, p.15), and this possible divergence is helpful for understanding Ball's aforementioned 'values schizophrenia' (2003).

Nias (1989) correlates the terms 'commitment' and the 'investment of the self' with primary teacher identity, whilst other research on teacher professional identity links identity with motivation, confidence and well-being (Alsup, 2006; Kelchtermans and Ballet 2002; Day, 2011; Hall and McGinty, 2015). Pertinent to my research questions, the relationship between identity and motivation is of interest.

The motivation of primary teachers to 'make a difference' is strongly related to the incentive of working with young children and seeing them achieve (Day et al, 2006b; Addison and Brundrett, 2008), as well as to the broader societal contribution, and the sense of worth invoked by the value of the work to the individual and community (Cunningham, 2012). Reiterating points about identity, care, commitment (Troman and Raggl, 2008) and 'making a difference', research confirms the eminence of humanism and vocationalism for primary teachers (Woods and Jeffrey, 2002). The notion of "being of service signifies a moral obligation to care for and nurture children" (Bates, 2013, p.52). Heinz (2015) reviews and updates the literature on teacher motivation; "individuals entering teaching for altruistic reasons see teaching as a socially worthwhile

and important job; they want to contribute to society and work with/help children and adolescents” (p.266).

Studies of teachers’ career decisions show how these are primarily driven by altruism and by intrinsic rewards. An altruistic sense of vocation, the desire to ‘make a difference’ and be a force for ‘social good’ (Lortie, 1975), is not just influential in teachers’ career choices, but in the motivation to stay in teaching (Day et al, 2006a; Chiong et al, 2017). Of interest is the distinction between primary teachers’ and secondary teachers’ motivations in this regard. Generally, primary teachers’ motivation and experiences of school have been reported as more positive than their secondary peers (Day et al, 2006a, p.121). For primary teachers, the motivation to ‘make a difference’ is deemed influential alongside the ‘desire to work with children’ and contrasts with secondary colleagues’ motivation to teach the subject (Menzies et al, 2015).

As acknowledged, the characteristics of primary education have influenced perceptions and constructions of teacher identity. For example, the association with the ‘basics’ and the ‘generalist’ role of teaching young children (including the provision of play) may serve to locate the primary teacher as intellectually and professionally subordinate to secondary colleagues. Evetts (1990) proposes a relationship between the (lower) status of the primary teacher in relation to the age of the pupil and the more generalist training necessary for this age phase (and perceived weakness in subject specialism). The perception that primary teachers have less occupational prestige than their secondary counterparts is evident in some literature. Coldron et al (2015, p.1) notes the “long standing difference in status between the two phases (of education)” with variances in professional capital corresponding to sector. A survey revealed that in 81% of the countries cited, secondary teachers are more respected than primary teachers (Dolton and Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2013, p.17). In England, there is some acknowledgement that “primary school teaching suffers as the poor relation to secondary teaching” (Conor, 2009, p16), although public perceptions do not always tally here (Everton et al, 2007).

Murray and Passy position the “pervasive sense of the academically low status of primary schooling ... [with] its gendered associations with the care and

nurture of young children” (2014, p.493), so the feminised nature of primary teaching is key for understanding professional identity.

### **2.3.3 Gender and the primary teacher**

Whilst gender is not an explicit focus in my research, primary teaching is an “undoubtedly gendered field” (Braun, 2015, p.7) and warrants acknowledgment. The gender profile of the primary education sector in England, and internationally, is a notable characteristic of the workforce, and may help to further situate the perception and experience of the profession. Internationally, “two-thirds of teachers and academic staff are women ...with the proportion of female teachers decreasing as the level of education increases, for example from 97% at the pre-primary level to 41% at the tertiary level” (OECD, 2013, p.404). Overall, in England, 337,700 teachers are women - almost three times as many as men (NAO, 2017, p.7) - and 84.8% of primary school teachers are female (DFE, 2016a). Evetts argues that the predominance of women in the profession impacts on the ongoing status of primary teachers (1990).

The literature about the gendered and feminised nature of primary teaching is wide-ranging (for example, Acker, 1995; Munro, 1998; Forrester, 2005; Skelton et al, 2009; Skelton, 2012; Braun, 2015). Traditionally, the association of women’s ‘caring nature’ positioned them as well suited to primary teaching (Vogt, 2002; Forrester, 2005). The continuing ‘cultural script’ of the teacher, the gendered workforce and the low status accorded to the work is not coincidental (Alsup, 2006), although in recent years, “the professionalisation of primary teachers may have raised the profile of primary teachers’ pedagogic expertise, as opposed to their caring role, in the public eye” (Everton et al, 2007, p.262).

Research highlights “the sometimes overt but often unspoken gender dimensions linked to the esteem of the profession” (Braun, 2015, p.259) and this is particularly notable for primary teaching, given the proportion of women in the sector. Despite the preponderance of female primary teachers, the research exclusively focused on women is negligible. Research that relates to ‘gender issues’ in education often features male teachers and the rarity of the phenomenon (Pollitt and Oldfield, 2017).

To summarise, the context of primary teaching, and of being a primary teacher, is an essential parameter for my study. In section 2.4, I explore the second contextual marker for the research as the period of change and reform in education in England since the 2010 White Paper. This is with a view to establishing the significance of this policy context and to further situate my research aims.

## **2.4 Education reform in England**

In this section, I explore the nature of neo-liberal education reform in England with a view to establishing the remit and aspiration of the 2010 White Paper. As acknowledged earlier (1.1), the White Paper heralded wide-ranging reforms in what the Government described as ‘the key elements’ of the education system, which include “the recruitment, training and practices of teachers and leaders, the standards being set by curriculum and qualifications and the autonomy and accountability of schools” (DFE, 2010b, p.18). The reforms also encompassed policy changes in the structure of the school system (West and Bailey, 2013), school funding (West, 2015), as well as underpinning issues of social mobility, educational inequality and parental power and choice (Morris, 2012).

There are several facets to the White Paper reforms and I explain the rationale for my focus as those most pertinent for primary classroom teachers. In sections 2.5 – 2.8, the characteristics of neo-liberal reform are further considered where relevant to primary education. Ahead of this, I summarise the features of neo-liberal education reform more broadly.

### **2.4.1 The context of neo-liberal reform**

Gunter argues that “education has been politicised in England from the nineteenth century onwards” (2015, p.1209), and policy change is understood as a feature of teachers’ lives (Galton et al, 2002). The detail of specific past reforms in England is less relevant for my study than the overarching background of the successive ‘reform fatigue’ in the profession (Campbell, 1996).

Whilst neoliberal reform “has had a long and complex history in education policy in England” (Wright, 2012, p.280), the ‘modern era’ of education reform (Ball,

2013) is commonly understood as the time following the Education Reform Act (DES, 1988), and heralds a period that “witnessed a steady growth in Government micro-management of what happens in the classroom” (Bangs et al, 2011, p.378). It is agreed that the English education system experienced salient changes during this era (Furlong, 2013, Wilkins, 2011; Evans. 2011; Addison and Brundrett, 2008, Brown and Manktelow, 2016). Central to the changes is a preoccupation with economic competitiveness and a concern about ‘Standards’.

The commodification of education and schooling positions the ‘product’ competitively and is increasingly portrayed through the language of business, with pupils and parents enacted as consumers with choices. In accordance with the underlying neo-liberal premise of reform, “much of education policy in England has promoted values and culture change programmes which originate in the management theory and practice of business organisations” (Bates, 2016, p.192). The notion of ‘the market’ and “the discourse of the market brings distinctly different visions front and centre” (Apple, 2001, p.19). Inherent to this notion of competition is the incentive to ‘improve’; school effectiveness and improvement programmes are underpinned by entrepreneurship, with the incumbent targets and data necessary for evidence and comparison.

Neo-liberal reform is agreed as dominating the international educational landscape (Apple, 2004), and, as a result, universal interest in teaching and teachers continues to proliferate (Apple, 2004; Ball, 2012; Ball, 2013, Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Chiong et al, 2017 ). For some, neo-liberal education reform in England is considered the vanguard (Furlong, 2013; Wilkins, 2015), although concerns about the impact of systematic neo-liberal reform on the teaching profession are shared within and beyond the UK. Research has provided insights about concepts of schooling, teaching and teachers in a variety of contexts renowned for such reform, including studies by Day et al (2007) and Day and Gu (2014) in the UK, Locke et al (2005) and Codd (2005) in New Zealand, Zeichner (2010) and Stone-Johnson (2014) in the USA, and Mockler (2013) and Choi and Tang (2011) in Australia. Consequent to neo-liberal policy reforms in the last thirty years, the aims, purpose and governance

of education have been indisputably adjusted, most notably to meet the needs of the global economy (Rizvi and Lingard, 2009).

A key premise is that “what is new over the last two decades is the pace, complexity, and intensity of change” (Day, 2012, p.8), both structural and ideological. In England it is increasingly recognised that the reforms of 2010 represent a “paradigmatic change” (West, 2015, p.21), and this institutes a critical standpoint for my study and one central to the research questions.

#### **2.4.2 The 2010 English White Paper reforms**

A detailed overview and analysis of the White Paper reforms is beyond the reach of this chapter although I precis the key themes as they relate to my research and to establish the scope of the changes. There are several more detailed accounts of the reforms emanating from the White Paper (for example, Morris, 2012; Allen, 2015, Lupton and Thomson, 2015; Brundrett, 2015).

The Government detailed the ‘Case for Change’ (DFE, 2010a) ahead of the White Paper, and the rationale for the reforms. The aspiration was to “strengthen and simplify the curriculum and qualifications, to set high standards, create curriculum coherence and avoid prescription about how to teach [and] increase both autonomy and accountability of schools” (Ibid, p.27). The relationship between the quality and type of schooling and the country’s economic competitiveness is made explicit in the aspiration for “a highly educated population ... vital to our national prosperity” (Ibid, p.4). The report draws heavily on global examples and comparisons, although arguably represents a ‘pick and mix’ approach to international policy borrowing (Morris, 2014). Underpinning the aspiration for change, teachers are understood as “society’s most valuable asset” (DFE, 2010b, p.7), and a “key resource in ensuring the global competitiveness of each nation state’s education service” (Furlong, 2013, p.29).

The White Paper signals the increased politicisation of education and (some) far-ranging developments which are ideologically significant and structurally irrevocable (Rayner, 2017). The broader premise of the White Paper signals a “radical new agenda for schools” (Furlong, 2013, p.40). ‘Radical’ directives

relate to the reform of school systems and structures, school improvement and school funding, all of which provide a vital context for the individual teacher. Whilst entitled 'The Importance of Teaching' "probably the most substantial element ... is its structural reforms of the school system" (Lupton and Thomson, 2015, p.14). Gove described the need for such reform as 'pressing' to ensure successful schools are rewarded while simultaneously putting "pressure on the failing to improve" (2009, n.p).

This is a crucial feature of the 'change-environment' and emphasises the urgency and pressure of the associated reforms positioned as key to raising standards in education. The White Paper demarcates this policy reform in seven areas: teaching and leadership, behaviour, curriculum and assessment, new schools system, accountability, school improvement, and school funding, and several of these reforms are consequential for primary teachers. I contend that the implications of curriculum change and reforms in assessment and the over-arching relationship to teacher accountability are the most influential for individual primary teachers.

Other aspects of reform, for example, the remodelling and expansion of initial teacher education and changes to the Teachers' Standards (DFE, 2011) are consequential for the primary sector, but I maintain that whilst changes to teacher training and the subsequent growth of school-based and school-led systems are relevant, they are less immediately noteworthy for classroom practitioners' experiences. Similarly, the decline in school funding, the growth in pupil numbers and the transformation of the support services from the local authority are also positioned as contributory to the changing landscape of primary teaching (Simons, 2016, n.p), but more generally, and not as pressing for daily classroom life.

My interest in understanding primary teachers' experiences of reform was stimulated by what I perceived as the impending systemic change. In the next three sections I highlight the three related policy transformations which are central to the step-change, purpose and positioning of primary education in England. For the purposes of my study, I define these as the reforms to the primary national curriculum, primary assessment reform and the accountability

reforms (school and teacher), and I explain their particular relevance for primary school teachers.

## **2.5 Primary national curriculum reform**

The Government instigated several key changes to the national curriculum as part of the White Paper reforms and I focus on those relevant for primary teachers. The changes were underpinned by a concern about low academic and attainment standards as well as nervousness about the appropriate 'preparedness' of pupils for the future workforce and for life after school (Lupton and Thomson, 2015). The revised curriculum was intended to provide "a rigorous basis for teaching, a benchmark for all schools to improve their performance, and give children and parents a better guarantee that every student will acquire the knowledge and skills to succeed in the modern world" (DFE, 2013a, n.p)

The issue of educational underachievement and the relationship to economic prosperity, or that "far too many fail to secure robust, rigorous and respected qualifications" (Gove, 2009, n.p), inspired a curriculum that specifies a "tighter, more rigorous, model of the knowledge which every child should expect to master in core subjects at every key stage" (DFE, 2010b, p.10). More precise and challenging, the curriculum changes encompass "more demanding content in maths, science and literacy, the addition of languages at Key Stage 2, and an emphasis on learning about key figures in British history" (Lupton and Thomson, 2015, p.20). The starting point of children's literacy is described as tackling "the problem at the root by ensuring children are reading properly after their first two years at primary school" (Gove, 2009, n.p). Thus, the remit of the primary teacher is further reformed simultaneous to the curriculum changes.

Primary teachers are tasked to raise standards in reading via prescribed (and 'proven') teaching methods which prioritise phonics, as well as to ensure pupils' mathematical and scientific prowess better prepares them for more advanced topics at secondary school. The detail of the curriculum changes reveals the heightened attention to 'the basics' of spelling, grammar, handwriting, more challenging mathematics and 'facts'. At the heart of the reform is a focus on an academic curriculum with an emphasis on 'core knowledge' and 'mastery'. The

emphasis on 'core knowledge' was a response to the perceived overcrowded curriculum (Winter, 2014) and signals disapproval of thematic and inter-disciplinary learning. The Minister of State for Education continues to advocate for a 'good education' as dependent on a "fundamental basis of knowledge about the subject in question" (Gibb, 2016, n.p).

The changes to the primary curriculum are theoretically testing for a number of reasons.

Successive governments' appetite for change and subsequent instigation of multi-faceted reforms signifies dissatisfaction with the schooling of young children. The underlying assumptions about the pupil's experience of the primary phase are revealed in the White Paper and reinforce the discourse of 'the basics', emphasising the "effective teaching of English and mathematics in primary schools" (DFE, 2010b, p. 44). This is the "recurrent narrative in English primary education" (Alexander, 2014, p.365) and the ongoing vision of the primary school to ensure 'secondary-readiness' is made explicit (DFE, 2013a). This further perpetuates the "strong secondary-centric way in which much education policy is made" (Briggs and Simons 2014, np).

Some of the changes to the curriculum are deemed controversial and are well-documented (for example, Lingard et al 2013; Steers, 2014; Burn, 2015; Tidd, 2015), not least because of the overt ideological nature of the adjustments to certain curriculum areas. Expectations in specific subject areas continue to prompt disputes, and the debates about the teaching and testing of, for example, grammar and phonics, with the correlating 'Phonics Check', are ongoing (Marshall, 2017; Moss, 2017; Glazzard, 2017). As fundamentally, the broader curriculum is further diminished with the "core subject programmes of study for primary schools (as) over-prescriptive in contrast to the very broad-brush treatment afforded to the foundation subjects" (Steers, 2014, p.12). Teachers and academics have been critical of the further politicisation of the curriculum and the emphasis on future employability, as well as the impact on the pupil's experience of school. It is imagined that the breadth of the curriculum should offer all pupils an opportunity to excel, and beyond that which is tested. However, it is recognised that "a restricted policy environment...[has] narrowed

the curriculum and the experience of children to a point of manifest imbalance” (Barnes and Scoffham, 2017, p.306). The inconsistency between the aims and purposes of primary education (2.3), and the content-heavy ‘pied-piper’ curriculum, relegates the pupils and their needs (Wrigley, 2014) and is perceived as at odds with the primary school’s mission.

There are both practical and professional issues to consider. The emphasis on pupils’ ‘secondary-readiness’ relegates the work of the primary teacher as subservient to the subsequent stage of education. This presents both a moral and professional quandary with potential consequences for morale and self-efficacy. More practically, changes to curriculum content and the accelerated expectations “to (ensure) children will be equipped to do more advanced work once they start secondary school” (DFE, 2012, n.p.) necessitate modifications to schemes of work and advanced levels of specialist subject knowledge. There are implications for teachers’ continued professional development and training although budgetary limitations may impede opportunities for learning and support.

Curriculum reform necessitates administrative, pedagogic and political adjustments for teachers, with predictable burdens for the individual teacher. It influences the work of primary teachers which is as much a consequence of the general workload to overhaul schemes of work in all curriculum subjects, as well as of the demands of the related assessment and accountability measures. The implications of additional workload have consequences for professional well-being and morale which warrants additional attention and further discussion (2.9.5).

Despite the enhanced expectations for teaching some subject areas, the adjusted content, the workload and the challenge to purpose of primary education, the new curriculum has “been implemented by teachers in schools with surprisingly little protest, an ataraxy quite possibly born out of exhaustion from multiple and overlapping processes of innovation and change” (Brundrett, 2015, p.57). The impact of the new national curriculum has to be situated in relation to previous efforts to refine it (for example, Rose, 2009; Alexander,

2010), and experienced teachers will already have had substantial experience of curriculum reform.

Far from being a conduit for standardisation and pupil entitlement, the curriculum is often viewed as highly political and central to the exercise of control over teachers (Apple, 2004a). Whilst there are several issues manifest in curriculum reform, they should be viewed alongside the simultaneous reforms to pupil assessment. An important influence on primary education, in the next section, I explore the assessment and accountability reforms before examining the implications of such restructuring.

## **2.6 Primary assessment reform**

The aforementioned changes to the primary curriculum (2.5) may not be considered as far-reaching as those related to pupil assessment which, up until the time of writing, have been under almost constant review since 2010. A vital component in reform, the changes to assessment procedures are positioned as fundamental to the ongoing drive to improve standards (DFE, 2014b).

Assessment is agreed as a “powerful tool for reform in education. What is tested, especially if it carries important consequences, will determine what is taught and how it is taught” (Stobart, 2008, p.118). The consequences of assessment data are highly significant for schools and for individual teachers, both for their experience of teaching pupils and their formal appraisal. The relationship between assessment and accountability is pivotal and I explain this further in section 2.7.

In 2010, the aspiration to reform assessment was “so that parents have the information they need, and schools can be properly accountable without feeling that they must drill children for tests” (DFE, 2010b, p, 41). The White Paper reiterated a commitment to assessment at key points in a child’s education, defined as when they begin school, learn to read and move from one phase to the next (ibid). For a primary school, this relates to the Phonics Check in Year one, and the end of key stage assessment requirements. “The system of testing, assessment and accountability at the end of key stage two has a profound impact on primary school education” (Bew, 2011, p.6) and specific

reform of the key stage two tests (SATS) was a vital element of the recommendations.

There were two commissioned reviews that made proposals to enact the White Paper assessment reforms. The recommendations of Bew (2011) and McIntosh (DFE, 2015b) would influence schools' practices (for example, the adjustments to SATS tests and the removal of national curriculum levels), but at the time of my fieldwork, some policy adjustments were impending. Nevertheless, the preparations to remove national curriculum levels and consider alternatives for pupil assessment were influential for schools at the time.

In 2011, ahead of my fieldwork, Bew's recommendations were three-fold. Firstly, in relation to key stage two tests: pupils' writing would be assessed through a mixture of both testing (of grammar, punctuation and spelling) and summative teacher assessment. The externally marked key stage two reading test would become more challenging entailing more demanding extracts and levels of difficulty. In the externally marked key stage two maths tests, calculators are disallowed. Secondly, the expectations for the moderation of teacher assessments in both key stages are further reiterated with an eye to quality assurance and consistency. Thirdly, Bew's recommendation for a greater emphasis on pupil progress alongside pupil attainment has ramifications for the range of 'evidence' necessary to satisfy both internal and external scrutiny. The consequences for teachers are in heightened workload, a more restricted curriculum and increased accountability.

In 2015, and simultaneous to my fieldwork, McIntosh made recommendations about the removal of national curriculum level descriptors. Historically, these were used to make judgements about pupils' performance at the end of a key stage but were increasingly evaluated as unhelpful and unreliable (DFE, 2015b). Dismantling the assessment framework signalled a sea-change for the primary curriculum and testing, and provoked anxiety about the likely workload of such loosely-defined assessment policy. Teachers were described as being "conditioned by levels" (DFE, 2015b, p.4), but their absence would create an insecurity about pupil assessment.

Although the focus of the White Paper, and the two subsequent reports, were less about formative assessment than summative assessment, it is notable for teachers' daily classroom practice, and for the relationship between inspection (Ofsted) and the emphasis on pupil progress and effective teaching. Both Bew and McIntosh reiterate the place of formative assessment and how 'in-class' assessment practices "provide teachers and pupils with useful, real time information about what needs to happen next (DFE, 2015b, p.21). However, with an increased emphasis on tracking pupils' progress, this type of assessment also becomes high-stakes. Marking children's work and providing written feedback in books assumes a greater potency for teacher accountability. Despite a recognition of the merits of various marking protocols in the primary context (for example, Clarke, 2003), that were emergent at the time of my fieldwork, some types of in-class formative assessment practices were perceived increasingly negatively. The Government's Workload Review' (DFE, 2015a) corresponded with criticism about the demands of marking policies and the correlation with Ofsted inspection feedback about marking (Tidd, 2014; Elliott et al, 2016). This is frequently documented in The Guardian, 'Secret Teacher' editorials and education blogs (Marwood, 2014).

Bew and McIntosh both highlighted the relationship between assessment and accountability and the implications for teaching and learning more broadly. It is fair to acknowledge that changes made to curriculum and assessment "invoke very different day-to-day approaches to assessment and signal fundamental shifts in ideas about learning and assessment" (DFE, 2015b, p.3) and that the ramifications of simultaneous curriculum modification and the associated changes to assessment are considerable. The implications of high-stakes assessment procedures for both pupils and teachers commonly reiterate the necessary change to daily practice and pedagogy more broadly (Stobart and Eggen, 2012; Bradbury, 2014; Basford and Bath 2014; Taylor, 2016). These high stakes are viewed as "pivotal to asserting an increased control over teachers' work" (Stevenson and Wood, 2014, p. 43), and should be viewed in relation to the previous overview about the curriculum revisions (2.5).

I have established the relationship between curriculum and assessment, but, as vitally, "the assessment and accountability systems are inherently linked at

primary school” (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017b, p.18).

Potent for the triangulation of professional maelstrom, in the next section I focus on the priority afforded to key accountability measures and elaborate this facet of the White Paper reforms and the consequences for primary schools and teachers.

## **2.7 Accountability reform**

In 2015, Lupton and Thomson commented that accountability measures may have “attracted less attention and debate than the wholesale reform of the school system but may be more important to shaping schools’ day-to-day priorities” (2015, p16). External school accountability is agreed as essential for raising standards (Bew, 2011), and one of the White Paper’s over-arching objectives is to further establish the sector’s responsibility to improve, as well as to reinforce accountability measures for the individual professional (DFE, 2010b).

Central to the vision of the ‘market’ is the ‘consumer’, and the accountability reforms are intended as ‘more meaningful’ for parents, making “more information about schools available in standardised formats to enable parents and others to assess and compare their performance” (DFE, 2010b, p.66). In primary schools in England, SATS results and progress measures are used to hold schools and teachers to account through the publication of league tables. Floor standards identify the expectation for overall pupil attainment and/or progress that schools must meet, and Ofsted use this data to inform its judgement of a school, which is also made public. The White Paper maintained that “schools should be accountable for achieving a minimum level of performance because tax-payers have a right to expect that their money will be used effectively to educate pupils” (DFE, 2010b, p. 66). The agreed indicator of a primary school’s efficacy is in relation to key stage two performance data which is published in ‘league tables’ and constitutes a critical component of the schools’ inspection framework. In primary schools, the more recent phonics check data has “become another element of the system of surveillance of school performance” (Bradbury, 2014, p.623).

Teachers' accountability for overall outcomes is implicit but made further explicit in the Teachers' Standards (DFE, 2011) - another facet of the White Paper reforms - which confirm the responsibility to "be accountable for pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes, promote good progress and outcomes by pupils and use relevant data to monitor progress, set targets and plan subsequent lessons" (p.10). Teachers may have always felt themselves to be accountable to pupils (Cunningham, 2012) but are also accountable to the head teacher, the school governors, as well as to parents (Ranson, 2003). Teachers' pay is linked to performance and their impact on pupil progress and outcomes (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017b, p.18).

Crucial for any discussion about school accountability, Ofsted has increasing and influential scope. Recognition of Ofsted's influence is longstanding in the literature: "even when the inspectors are not there, they are the absent presence in the school influencing [the] teachers' work" (Troman, 1997, p.345). A school's 'Ofsted-readiness' results in the modification of practices and self-regulation ahead of the "forensic gaze of the school inspectorate" (Stevenson and Wood, 2014, p. 50). The 2010 White Paper instigated a change of focus for Ofsted and reiterated four elements as pivotal to school effectiveness: pupil achievement, the quality of teaching, leadership and management, and pupils' behaviour and safety (DFE, 2010b, p. 69). Whilst key stage test data are essential for a school's appraisal, the evidence about children's learning and progress 'over time' further contributes to the school's evaluation and grading. The change to 'short notice' inspections was intended to capture schools 'as they really are' (Ofsted, 2012), and critical for reframing how schools operate. The escalation of neo-liberal reform has altered the discourse about inspection and the symbolism of the 'panopticon' is utilised to describe the inspection 'regime' (Perryman, 2009; Page, 2015; Courtney; 2016).

There are important implications of high-stakes assessment and the related accountability measures which are closely related. Notions of school effectiveness are influenced by SATS scores which determine the position in league tables and the Ofsted grading. The school inspection framework, methodology and criteria rely heavily on the school's performance data which

itself is subject to 'floor standards' set by Ofsted. An Ofsted grading determines the frequency of subsequent inspections as well as other more stringent monitoring and re-inspection if a school is deemed to be 'under-performing', so "the weaker the school, the more frequent the monitoring" (DFE, 2010b, p. 70). A whole new lexicon is commonplace; inspection gradings warrant description of schools as failing, coasting, outstanding and assessed as 'requiring improvement' or inadequate and in 'special measures'. Schools unable to demonstrate pupil outcomes as at least 'good' are assessed as 'requiring improvement', an appraisal that necessitates close monitoring and regular inspection. Schools assessed as inadequate are also subject to monitoring and re-inspection within a relatively short time-frame.

The pressure to raise standards means that schools are recognised as acting increasingly strategically in their approach to pupil achievement and performance. The Government acknowledge the tactics used to intentionally deploy resources and teaching to curriculum subjects and pupils, with the view to maximising pupils' outcome data (DFE, 2010b; DFE, 2014b). A specific phenomenon which has arisen as a consequence of high stakes assessment and accountability cultures is that of 'gaming'.

Gaming encompasses a variety of intentional tactics which are employed to deliberately manipulate the system (Astle, 2017). More discernible in the literature about secondary education, Perryman et al (2011) note tactics to enhance both pupil and school performance. These include 'setting children', teaching to the test, targeting 'borderline' students and adjusting timetables to accommodate booster classes. Certain strategies serve to enhance the school's performance, for example, the increasingly common tactic of submitting pupils for "early and multiple examination entry" to specific exams is with a view to enhancing the school's results (Taylor, 2016, p.1; Busby, 2017).

Ofsted continue to highlight the unacceptability of such practices as well as monitor schools in relatively new domains like 'off-rolling' (OFSTED 2017e) where under-attaining secondary pupils are deliberately taken off the school register and transferred to other provision before or during the exam period (Nye, 2017).

Primary schools and early years settings are not immune to similar charges of 'gaming'. The Government notes primary schools' tactics to "narrow the curriculum and over-rehearse tests" (DFE, 2010b, p.22), and to deliberately extend the provision for maths and English where children are formally tested (DFE, 2010b; Berliner, 2011). Significant for the espoused values of primary education, these practices signal the "subtle but crucial shift in emphasis from student needs to student performance and from what the school does for the student to what the student does for the school" (Apple, 2004, p.26). The pressure to produce 'good data' renders effective practice and pedagogy secondary to pupil outcomes and performance, or what Ball terms the "reorient(ing) of pedagogical and scholarly activities towards those which are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance outcomes" (2012b, p.20).

Bradbury (2013) suggests that the performativity culture within some early years settings is so intense that the teachers are encouraged to manipulate data to produce 'appropriate' results. In an environment of competition and high-stakes, "there is an extreme and perverse incentive for teachers to bias their judgements" (Baird et al, 2013, p.7). Ofsted continue to highlight the unacceptability of certain practices as well as monitor schools. The portrayal of gaming as "the 'unintended consequences' of policy" (Stevenson and Woods, 2014, p. 50) has more recently shifted to a more critical and accusatory depiction of schools (Ofsted, 2017e; Ofsted, 2017f; Weale, 2017).

The magnitude of the role of pupil outcomes and data, and the subsequent implications for teachers, cannot be underestimated. The end of key stage tests are estimated as having "very negative effects on the primary curriculum and on children's experience of education" (NUT, 2016, p.1). The narrowing of the curriculum and 'teaching to the test' are increasingly recognised as affecting teacher and pupil wellbeing" (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017a, p.3). It is unsurprising that "in preparing for the new primary floor standard, the majority of primary senior leaders reported that they had changed the curriculum covered (69%) and changed the way in which they monitored pupil progress (60%) (Straw et al, 2016, p.9).

The heightened level of accountability has “become a pervasive part of teachers’ daily lives [and] has increased, expanded, intensified and regulated their roles, responsibilities and practices” (Day and Hong, 2016, p.118). The level of pupil data impacts on the school’s position in the performance (league) tables and their inspection category, both of which may exert influence on the day-to-day experience of working in school, as well as on teacher identity (Case, Case and Catling, 2000; Perryman, 2009). Enhanced accountability measures demand the ever-increasing expansion of managerial systems necessary to audit, monitor and evaluate effectiveness, and in the next section I clarify the relationship between accountability and managerialism in education.

## **2.8 The rise of managerialism**

In the White Paper, the Government assigns kudos to the role of the head teacher: “after the quality of teaching, the quality of school leadership is the most important determinant of pupils’ success” (DFE, 2010b, p.26). The vision of school leadership is situated in a culture where head teachers should “feel empowered to do what they think is right, know where they can go for support if they want it and are accountable for the results they achieve” (DFE, 2010b, p.29). There are a number of specific and contentious issues for primary school head teachers which reflect the conflict between leading the marketised primary school and the traditional values of primary education. The remit for school leadership is defined by the urgency of school improvement and increased pupil performance, creating a “tension between meeting external expectations together with those related to the provision of a ‘good’ education” (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015 p.199).

In this section I focus on the rise of managerialism in primary schools and the implications for both primary school leaders and teachers. Inherent to the increasing marketisation of education, the rise of managerialism acts to reposition senior leaders and primary teachers both practically, and in an everyday sense, as well as more fundamentally for primary education. The positioning of the primary school as a small business necessitates a “shift from a ‘learner-needs’ perspective toward an ‘institutional-needs’ perspective (Gewirtz and Ball, 2000, p. 254). The culture of managerialism continues to

influence understandings of the 'repertoire of leadership', and a corporate model of leadership is clearly discernible in English education. I explain the implications for the primary teacher and the particular influence on staff relationships and dynamics, motivation and morale. This is especially pronounced when considered in relation to performance management, which is also discussed.

The 'market' is situated as key to the neo-liberal enterprise (Apple, 2001) and the necessary attention to standards and efficiency creates a culture of managerialism "with an increased concern with results, performance and outcomes" (Forrester, 2000, p.134). Schools are held accountable for pupil learning and progress, and accountability measures demand the ever-increasing expansion of managerial systems. The term managerialism "is underpinned by an ideology which assumes that all aspects of organisational life can and should be controlled" (Wallace and Hoyle, 2005, p. 9). Stevenson and Woods suggest it is the "pincer movement of markets and managerialism that have combined to effectively and radically re-shape teachers' experience of work" (2014, p.43).

The repositioning of the head teacher as "manager rather than as leading a group of fellow professionals" (Case, Case and Catling, 2000, p. 607) symbolises a distinct shift in school life. The role of the head teacher to teach pupils and to lead teachers, and to act as (what I call) the 'pedagogue-in-chief' is seriously diminished when confronted with the expectation to meet increasingly demanding external expectations. In some schools, a change of title to 'CEO' increasingly signals the shift in the head teacher's role. Arguably, this culture necessitates a different kind of leadership ethic, contrary to 'traditional professionalism in its alignment with the methods, cultures and systems of the private sector' (Keddie, 2017, p.2) or what she terms 'entrepreneurial professionalism'.

This is in conflict with the narrative of the primary school as a 'family'. The vision of the primary school is publicly reinforced through school policies as well as through the formal inspection process where the 'family atmosphere' and 'sense of community' (Ofsted, 2016; Ofsted, 2017a) continue to be cited as strengths

of a school's provision. The primary school head teacher is viewed as central to the enactment of such a vision but must reconcile "the extent to which educational values are constrained by the neo-liberal value-based market agenda" (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015, p.198).

Given the unique features of the primary school and the daily proximity of the school leadership team to the primary class teacher, head teachers can exert a strong influence on staff both in relation to their core responsibility as teachers, but also in relation to motivation and commitment (Matthews et al, 2014).

School leaders are envisaged as improving teaching most "powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment and working conditions" (Leithwood et al, 2008, p.32) reinforcing the need for strong interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. "School leadership matters in sustaining a sense of resilience, commitment and effectiveness amongst the staff" (Gu and Day, 2014, p.38), although relationships with colleagues and general workplace collegiality are viewed as increasingly shaped by the culture of accountability and performativity (Webb et al, 2012, Mausethagen, 2012). Collegiality is more difficult to maintain at the same time as rigorous monitoring, target setting and appraisal, and the culture of managerialism and surveillance inevitably shapes professional interactions and relationships (Forrester, 2000; Page, 2015).

In the context of performance-management, this is especially pertinent. The culture of performativity "employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition and change based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic)" (Ball, 2003, p.216), and impacts on both class teachers and school leaders. The complexities of performance-related pay are documented (Down, Hogan and Chadbourne, 1999; Evans, 2011; Forrester, 2011; Page, 2015). In appraising teachers' eligibility for a pay award, the criteria emphasise "a teacher's impact on pupil progress and (their) impact on wider outcomes for pupils" (DFE, 2013b, p.8). Conceptions of 'effectiveness' are reproduced via narrowly conceived parameters and teachers' "pay and career trajectories are essentially tied to the accomplishment of centrally devised standards and therefore, arguably, a device to augment managerial control" (Forrester, 2011, p.7). The workload demands of collecting and reviewing

evidence for performance reviews and the pressure to meet pupil outcome targets are important to note (Sharp et al, 2017).

The cultures of managerialism and performativity signal a pivotal shift in the discourse about school leadership, and specifically of headship (Gewirtz and Ball, 2000). Managerialism is equated to “excessive leadership and management, reaching beyond an appropriate educational support role and threatening to become an end in itself” (Wallace and Hoyle, 2005, p. 9). The National College (NCSL) advise that the “constant flow of new initiatives together with an increasing emphasis on output measures has affected the role and remit of head teachers profoundly” (2007, p.8) and the implications for everyday work are immense.

There is a powerful insinuation about professional trust inherent in the policy of micro-managerialism. “Externally-imposed accountability systems, by their very nature, assume that some outside agent needs to hold accountable individuals whom if left to their own efforts would fail to teach adequately or would not make adequate academic progress” (Dworkin and Tobe, 2014, p.125). As mentioned (2.7), the literature on sophisticated surveillance mechanisms evident in schools (Zeichner, 2010; Burns, 2016, Page, 2016) positions the teacher as a heavily scrutinised performer and necessarily ‘Ofsted-ready’ (Clapham, 2014). Whilst the role of leadership is proposed as key to the motivation of teachers (Day et al, 2006), it should be considered in light of the interpersonal demands of the context. Significant for my study, the place of emotional intelligence, and capacity to engage with and manage relationships with sensitivity and empathy, is heightened.

The ramifications may be of greater significance for primary schools than for their secondary counterparts (Coldron et al, 2015). The size and organisation of a primary school influences the frequency and type of interactions between class teachers and the senior leadership team. In a primary school, the structure of the leadership team, with, for example, a head and deputy head teacher, assistant head teachers and key stage and ‘team’ (year group) leaders, affects the daily experience of the individual class teacher. The structure of school staffing teams has transformed in this regard although the head teacher

is ultimately accountable (Torrance, 2015). The penchant for 'distributed leadership' has been borne out of the "steep acceleration in the quantity of policy directives, advice and guidelines to which (head teachers) were required to respond" (Hall, 2013, p.470), and in a primary school, this may be experienced by teachers as inescapable surveillance because of the proximity to the senior leadership team.

Ongoing policy reform continues to raise "questions about the capacity of primary leaders to respond to the challenges and opportunities of the new education landscape" (Matthews et al, 2014a, p.26). Head teachers are charged to "take on the difficult challenges of schools' performance and adopt a no excuses culture" (Wilshaw, 2012, np). Reiterated in his annual report, the responsibility for such a change is firmly assigned to a "senior leadership team support(ing) a relentless drive to improve the quality and management of teaching" (Ofsted, 2015, p.32).

What it means, and takes, to be a head teacher in the current context is problematic. The role of the head teacher to honour the "dual aims to develop 'good' education as well as meet societal goals" (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015, p.211) is increasingly complex. The pressure of ongoing change, unsatisfactory end of key stage assessment results (SATS), Ofsted inspection, national curriculum modifications, budget deficits, staff morale and staffing issues is linked to increased stress and burnout and an increase in early retirement and resignation (Williams, 2017). Typically, these factors constitute a 'system instability', a key factor cited in head teacher resignations (Lynch and Worth, 2017).

The 'moral purpose' of the role continues to be cited as an essential feature of headship, but accountability requirements act to compete with and undermine this facet of the job. It necessitates other skill-sets necessary for 'non-educational' work, for example, personnel, finance and general administration. The high levels of accountability experienced at every level of leadership and management is manifest in a professional experience that may privilege unexpected and less attractive obligations of headship. The complexities of personnel management, performance-related pay and general staffing issues

constitute an increasing proportion of school management. These are further challenged by the implications of the Government's Spending Review and the expectation for making savings in the profession (approximately £1.7 billion by 2019-20).

In the final section of this chapter, I draw upon previous discussion to consider the pervasive influence of reform on primary teachers. The tenets and language of accountability, marketisation, performativity and managerialism provoke discourses contrary to those historically associated with primary teaching. These discourses are considered with a view to the repercussions for the primary teacher's experience and identity.

## **2.9 The influence of discourse on identity**

"The persistent, public debates about the role of teachers place them at the centre of a range of national and local discourses" (Cohen, 2008, p.80). I now explore the ways neo-liberal discourse is reflected in the White Paper, the relationship to other dominant discourses about teaching and the influences on teacher identity. Despite the fact that "neo-liberal discourse has had a long and complex history in education policy in Britain" (Wright, 2012, p.280), related discourses about teachers and teaching continue to evolve.

Moore (2004) and Sachs (2001) suggest that the notion of context shapes discourses about teachers and teaching, and which of these retain their dominance over time. Powerful in their influence, discourses can "constrain our actions, limit our understandings (and) force us into subservience to the agendas of dominant groups" (Moore, 2004, p.31). There are a number of persistent discourses about teachers and teaching; constructions that are dynamic and informed by wider social and cultural phenomena and which are provoked and underpinned prevailing ideology. In this section I review the potential influence of particular discourses on teacher identity.

### **2.9.1 The power of discourse**

Inherent to my use of the term 'discourse' is the understanding that "language is a form of social practice" (Fairclough, 2001, p.20). The term 'discourse' is contested, and I draw upon literature that positions the concept of discourse as

inherent to the shaping of identity (Cohen, 2008), that reinforces the dynamism of discourse for identity (Machin, 2017), and which recognises the politics and power of discourse (Maguire and Ball, 1994).

The individual's conception of her/himself as 'teacher' is imagined, in part, as a consequence of the prevalent discourses about teachers/teaching which are powerful and susceptible to change. Discourse socialisation, life history and biography are intrinsic to the formation and reformation of identity. "In times of rapid change identity cannot be seen to be a fixed 'thing', it is negotiated, open, shifting, ambiguous (and) the result of culturally available meanings" (Sachs, 2001, p.154). Discourses are "about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (Maguire and Ball, 1994, p.6) and, in this case, are shaped by cultural interpretations of what it means to be a teacher.

In light of the overview about the reforms in curriculum, assessment, accountability and school leadership, I consider the consequences for the advancement and power of particular discourses and their impact on teacher identity.

### **2.9.2 The White Paper and neo-liberal discourse**

Wright (2012) argues that the White Paper reforms must be understood as part of the ongoing neo-liberal discourse in English education. I suggest that the document reflects the central tenets of neo-liberalism whilst simultaneously fortifying particular values about the role of the teacher. The language "is dominated by discourses of the international competition, autonomy, standards and traditional conceptions of school subject knowledge" (Winter, 2014, p.12).

The commitment to teacher freedom, head teacher autonomy and parental empowerment and choice is reflective of the prevailing discourse of 'the competitive market'. The discourses of 'improvement' and 'standards' correlate with the discourse of accountability, fundamentally situated as a central tenet of the White Paper, and inherent to educational reform (Comber and Nixon, 2009; Burns, 2016).

An aim of the reform is to “make direct accountability more meaningful” (DFE, 2010b, p. 66), and must be considered in tandem with the increased responsabilisation of the teacher. The Teachers’ Standards require teachers to “make the education of their pupils their first concern, and [to be] accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct” (DFE, 2011, p.10). Standards are evidenced by pupil progress and educational outcomes, connecting the discourses of data (Ozga, 2009) and performativity (Ball, 2003). In a “regime of accountability, teaching can be made legible, calculable, measurable, evaluate-able, and comparable” (Holloway and Brass, 2017, p.3), and thus underpinned by the discourse of performativity. Ball describes this as “a moral system that subverts and re-orientates us to its ends (making us) responsible for our performance and for the performance of others” (Ball, 2012, p.19). The ways in which these discourses conceivably re-orientate the primary school teacher and the consequences for professionalism and identity, is of particular interest.

In recent years, the managerial and performativity discourses about teachers’ work have evolved in the literature (Sachs, 2016) reflecting a broader neo-liberal ideology about teacher professionalism. In this discourse, the teacher is positioned as a ‘directed technician’, organised by managers intent on offering the best product to the consumer (parent), with education “articulated as a commodity” (Wright, 2012, p.281). The discourse of managerialism (Sachs, 2001) impacts on both teachers and head teachers, which positions both as subject to hierarchical regulation.

Teacher identity is influenced and shaped by discourses beyond those underpinning and reflected in the White Paper. School culture, broader society and the media play a part in reproducing and interpreting popular discourses about teaching *and teachers* (Larsen, 2010), which may be understood as conflicting with neo-liberal discourses.

### **2.9.3 Competing discourses**

Competing discourses position teachers as romantic, idealistic, nostalgic, heroic, altruistic and fatalistic, although they are rarely problematised and are often made public through practice and particular pedagogies. Discourses are

exposed and reproduced in the classroom and compelling for teachers' conceptions of professional identity (Moore, 2004; Alsup, 2006; Sachs, 2001; Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015; Bates, 2016). Commonplace in these discourses, and in contrast to neo-liberal discourses about teachers and teaching, is the responsibility to the pupil and wider society.

Specific to primary education, the discourse of professionalism is pervaded by notions of 'family' and 'community' (Hilferty, 2008) and 'care' (Forrester, 2005). Historically (at least), the discourse of 'care' in the context of primary teaching has been both compelling and oppressive. As noted in section 2.3.3, primary teaching has been recognised as a feminine domain (Vogt, 2002) and the degree to which the discourse of care evolved as a consequence of the large proportion of women in the profession, and the feminisation of primary teaching or as a pre-cursor to the essentialism of mothering to primary teaching, is debatable.

The discourse of determinism establishes the teacher as a particular type of professional whose personal and professional values and aspirations may align and reciprocate. The evolution of this discourse can be traced consequent to and provoked by the historic career trajectories of predominantly (single) women. It is powerful in the continued gendered construction of primary teaching profession and feminisation of the sector (Munro, 1998). Inherent is a pseudo-religious discourse which acts to position the teacher as 'called' to the profession.

Still powerful for primary teachers is the discourse that emphasises the intrinsic fulfilment gained through the 'psychic rewards' offered by the work and the satisfaction of experiencing positive interactions with young people (Lortie, 1975; Smethem, 2007). Further to section 2.3, the discourse of 'making a difference', is frequently cited as underpinning teachers' motivations for the work. This discourse is also made explicit and reproduced in 'The Importance of Teaching' (DFE, 2010b), although refashioned to endorse the agenda of 'raising standards'. The deployment of this discourse can be useful to engage with and appease the profession. The (then) Education Minister, Michael Gove, argued that it was "because we know teaching can make such a difference that we

have instituted policies that help teachers make that difference ... giving teachers as much freedom, autonomy and independence as possible” (Gove, 2013, n.p). Creatively utilising the tenets of a child-centred, humanist ideology is intended to resonate with a very particular value about teaching and one which continues to retain some authority, albeit increasingly positioned in the context of the agenda of ‘raising standards’.

There is a fusion of discourses evident in the 2010 White Paper; one of ‘continuous improvement’ (Bates, 2016) positioned with the ‘moral purpose and value’ of education. Teaching is portrayed as a ‘moral endeavour’ (Fenstermacher, 1990) with the associated expectations for ethical behaviour and virtuosity (Carr, 2000; Campbell, 2008), and this is appropriated and subtly re-shaped in the White Paper. The discourse of ‘making a difference’ is adopted and aligned with the discourse of ‘raising standards’. Teachers are portrayed as “guided by a sense of moral purpose” (DFE, 2010b, p.31) and necessarily responsible and accountable for student performance. The White Paper is seen to present teachers as virtuous (Lumby and Muijs, 2013) and positioned to “make a profound difference” (DFE, 2010b, p.19). Historically, the teacher’s work has been described as a “valuable service of special moral worth” (Lortie, 1975, p.28) - a perspective that accords a very particular status to the profession. Fullan asserts that “teaching is a moral profession” populated by teachers with ‘moral purpose’ (1993, p.1).

As above, the White Paper harnesses this discourse to position head teachers and teachers as “guided by a sense of moral purpose and a desire to help children and young people succeed” (DFE, 2010b, p.28), whilst simultaneously reflecting the new management discourse in education of raising standards. This is “frequently articulated within a lexicon of enterprise, excellence, quality and effectiveness” (Gewirtz and Ball, 2000 p.256). As signalled (2.7), the Ofsted inspection framework plays an irrefutable role “not purely as a single institution but also as the producer and effector of discourses that influence the way in which standards in English education are understood and conceptualised” (Baxter, 2014, p. 22).

The neo-liberal policy context challenges dominant discourses about primary teaching and is instrumental in the evolution of a hybrid discourse which may be evident in teachers' policy enactment. The competing tenets of determinism, vocationalism and accountability may stimulate this fusion which (re)shape teacher identities. For example, inherent in the discourse about the altruism there are assumptions about the intrinsic reward of the work which renders unionisation, activism and action about salary as objectionable. Indeed, the "idea of teachers being political does not fit with the idealised vision of the selfless, sacrificial teacher" (Alsup, 2006, p.29). The paradox in the professional positioning, or the 'noble calling' of teaching (DFE, 2010b, p. 7), and the depiction of teachers as victims (Lumby and Muijs, 2014) and as 'serial moaners' (Coughlan, 2014), is marked. Periodically revived, the deficit discourse of the 'moany teacher' is unmistakable in some media representations and political rhetoric (Wilshaw, 2015).

The Government's perceived anxiety about declining standards may account for the 'discourse of derision' often evident about teachers (Ball, 1990) and in turn, reflects and provokes a deterioration in societal trust and esteem. Perceptions of the 'life-long' teacher 'called' to the profession are incompatible with the projected professional instability and ongoing attrition debates (Lindqvist, Nordäng and Carlsson, 2014; Schaefer, 2015; Dunn et al, 2017; NAO, 2017). The newly emergent discourse of teacher 'exodus' goes some way to disturb (broader) perceptions about the status or agency of the teacher.

The notion of the 'good teacher' is a shifting concept (Moore, 2004, p.27) and remains contested and vulnerable to the vagaries of ideology and discourse. Teachers are "provoked and sustained by the educational discourses whirling round them" (Taubaum, 201p.xi), which shape conceptions of identity. However, discourses are viewed as "amenable to resistance and influence" (Davis and Harre 1990, p.23), and part of my study will focus on the ways that this is (or not) apparent in relation to particular aspects of policy reform. In the next section, I explore the implications for notions of professionalism and professional identity.

#### **2.9.4 Threats to professional identity**

Further to the overview in section 2.3.2, the concept of identity is an implicit 'analytic lens' for exploring primary teachers' perceptions and experiences of their work (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). The reconstruction of the role of the teacher from autonomous, principled professional to 'teacher-as-technician' is already well-documented (for example, Huberman, 1992; Fullan, 1993; Dadds, 1997; Coolahan, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2005; Cochran-Smith 2008; Webb and Vulliamy, 2006; Evans, 2011). The White Paper positions the teacher as a 'professional', and discourses of freedom, liberation and empowerment are echoed throughout; teachers should be freed "from constraint and improve their professional status and authority" (DFE, 2010b, p.8).

The literature indicates a data-driven culture of accountability and one unquestionable for the primary teacher whose identity is "bound up in a complex relationship with their own performance as well as the performance of their students (Wilkins et al, 2012, p.67). The implications for professional identity as increasingly 'performed' (Ibid) are especially relevant. In the context of neo-liberal reform, teachers are held accountable for their performance through pupil progress and attainment. These demands are internalised by teachers and interact with identity (Buchanan, 2015). I have acknowledged the professional implications of a culture of increased accountability and performativity (2.7), but three core points warrant reiteration in relation to the identities required by neo-liberalism (Apple, 2014).

Firstly, in relation to the individual's self-esteem and efficacy, the teacher's perceptions of value and priority in the work are possibly compromised by the conditions of accountability and performativity. The rise of accountability has specific implications for the notion of the autonomous professional. The discourses of primary teaching are characterised by the dominance of humanist, child-centred values and care (Vogt, 2002), but are made vulnerable by the principles of marketisation. In addition, the management and operationalisation of reform infers the teacher as powerless and controlled. The underpinning ideology of reform is calibrated in relation to 'raising standards'

and acts to regulate professional critique of changes in policy, depicting disapproval or objection by teachers as irresponsible.

The second implication of performed professional identity is in the relationships with pupils and parents. In the 'reinvented school' (Bangs et al, 2011) the teacher is repositioned accordingly. The implication for relationships with children is that "everyday educational practices are (increasingly) geared to the transmogrification of students into data" (Thomson et al, 2010, p.653). 'Success', in this model, is construed in relation to pupil outcomes in specific subject areas, and teacher performance necessarily affects identity (Sachs, 2001). The consequences of increased parental empowerment borne of consumer 'rights' and freedom are experienced in a shift in relationship between teachers and families. Increasingly, interactions with parents are experienced as less than favourable, with teachers feeling questioned and judged (Brown and Manktelow, 2016).

Lastly, relationships with colleagues and general workplace collegiality are viewed as shaped by the culture of accountability and performativity (Webb et al, 2012, Mausethagen, 2012). Collaboration and trust between teachers may also be influenced by dominance of performativity. One of the ways this is evident is in the way that assessment and accountability practices emphasise the importance of 'pupil progress over time' and the impending consequences for teachers are competition and rivalry (Pratt, 2016b). Feeling 'pitted' against each other acts to undermine the "maintenance of core professional values and practices" (Clement and Vandenberghe, 2000) which are critical for the morale of the profession (Addison and Brundrett, 2008). Subsuming personal values and beliefs in favour of professional obligations may be more or less meaningful according to the teacher's career stage.

The concept of career stage is relevant for the connection to both identity and policy reform. Understanding the characteristics of teachers' career stages has enabled insight into the factors that influence and undermine identity (Nias, 1989; Huberman et al, 1993; Hargreaves, 2005; Day et al, 2006a). In the comprehensive longitudinal project, 'Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and Effectiveness', Day et al (2006a) highlight the relationship between teachers'

professional life phases and identities and the effect on commitment and resilience. Pertinent to my study, teachers' experience of policy reform may be further influenced by their professional life phase, and less or more destabilising or demoralising.

### **2.9.5 The impact on teacher morale**

I have acknowledged the role of discourse to shape identity construction and professional perception, but also recognise the particular potency of emotion for identity, notable in times of educational reform (for example, Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Choi and Tang, 2011; Wilkins et al, 2012). Internationally, "there are concerns about the image and status of teaching, and teachers often feel that their work is undervalued" (OECD, 2005, p.3) and there is mounting research about teachers who opt to leave (for example, Struyven and Vanthournout, 2014; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015; Lynch et al, 2016; Santoro, 2016; Dunn et al, 2017; Towers and Maguire, 2017). Employment patterns and fluctuations in teaching have always warranted attention and analysis although never more so than in recent years (Lindqvist et al, 2014; Courtney and Gunter, 2015; Boffey, 2015; Bricheno and Thornton, 2016; Smith et al, 2017; Des Clayes, 2017). In the context of policy reform, the retention of teachers continues to raise questions about working conditions and professional status.

Workload strongly correlates with morale and identity (Day and Gu, 2014; Kell, 2018) and is a serious challenge for primary education. The issue recurs in the literature (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009; Van Droogenbroeck et al, 2014; Sellen, 2016; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2017); inherent to centrally-directed policy change is the consequence of increased workload. Simultaneous to my fieldwork, the Government's Workload Challenge survey (DFE, 2015a) revealed three commonly cited issues which underpinned subsequent recommendations in regard to marking, planning and data management. The Marking Policy Review advised that "the accountability system must encourage good practice rather than stimulate fads (DFE, 2016b, p.4) and highlights the expectation for feedback that is meaningful (and pertinent to the age group), manageable and motivating. Apple uses the term 'intensification' (1986) to express the growing demands of work consequent to policy directives. The "experience of

intensification is commensurate with the degree to which the demand is perceived as impossible or difficult to ignore” (Ballet and Kelchtermans, 2009, p.1152) and the consequences of honouring an unrealistic workload has important consequences for teachers.

Thus, the steady rise in workload generally, alongside a shift in the type of work expected in the primary phase is increasingly associated with job dissatisfaction, overall morale and retention. One NFER survey highlights workload “as a causal factor in two negative outcomes - poor health and feeling undervalued “(Lynch et al, 2016, p.15) and connects teacher morale with feelings of efficacy and identity.

It is argued that “the manner in which teachers react to educational reforms is largely determined by whether (they) perceive their professional identities as being reinforced or threatened by reform” (Van Veen and Slegers, 2006, p.106). The rise in teacher resignation has been accounted for as ‘resistance’ to reform and unacceptable workload (Hayes and Butterworth, 2001) and as conscientious objection to the work, or a kind of “expression of professional ethics” (Santoro, 2016, p.1). Santoro (2016) and Dunn et al (2017) highlight the function of resignation as empowering and portray stories of resignation as a particular kind of activism, with teachers as liberated and agentic (Dunn et al, 2017). I return to the relationship between ‘staying’ and compliance in Chapter 8.

The pace of policy reform in English schools has been regarded as ‘extreme’. The enactment of policy cannot be disaggregated from the teacher’s role, their professional aspiration, vocation and identity. When “the holistic and humanistic purposes of education - conceptualised as better life chances for all children - are redefined as ‘success in school league tables’” (Bates, 2013, p.47) there is a discernible impact on teachers’ sense of efficacy as well as morale. Braun suggests that the “lack of esteem for the profession” (2015, p.258) is a recurring theme in the Government’s White Paper. Teachers are positioned as constrained and burdened, and, with doubts raised about training and professional development, potentially ill-equipped to manage the demands of policy reform.

Research on teacher morale and motivation (Addison and Brundrett 2008; Van Maele and Van Houtte 2015; Bricheno and Thornton, 2016; Day and Gu, 2014; Day and Hong 2016; Chiong, et al 2017) assesses an individual's capacity for staying-power and professional optimism relative to a variety of internal and external factors. Inherent to the rise of accountability and performativity is the issue of trust; indeed, the protocols for monitoring and micro-management imply a lack of trust. Van Maele and Van Houtte (2015) link burnout and teacher attrition with five facets of trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty and open-ness. Indeed, "trust becomes more fragile when others do not behave in line with one of these five facets" (Ibid p.97). When workplace culture relies on performance, appraisal and competition, trust is further jeopardised.

Common in the literature about teachers (Vandenberghe and Huberman, 1999; Van Veen and Slegers, 2006; Van Droogenbroeck et al, 2014), and other high-contact and interpersonally demanding employment, burnout is sometimes described as a "persistent, negative, work-related state of psychological exhaustion", notably emotional exhaustion (Van Droogenbroeck et al. 2014, p. 99). In a report about work-related stress, depression and anxiety, "jobs that are common across public service industries (such as healthcare workers; teaching) show higher levels of stress" (Health and Safety Executive, 2017, p.1). Two of the factors found to be contributory to stress and anxiety are workload pressures and a lack of managerial support.

The marketisation of education with the attendant threat to the values and mission of primary schooling are liable to have profound implications for professional identity. The individual must reconcile "the extent to which educational values are constrained by the neo-liberal value-based market agenda" (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015, p.198) and the 'no excuses' ethos dominant in the White Paper. The current 'system instability' (Lynch and Worth, 2017) has implications for teachers and head teachers, and for the relationship between the two. "Recruiting and retaining enough teachers to serve growing numbers of pupils is one of the key challenges currently facing England's education system" (Worth et al, 2017, p.3). As previously noted, employment patterns have warranted attention and analysis in recent years (for example, Smith et al, 2017; Des Clayes, 2017).

On the basis of my reading of the literature, I propose that low morale and dissatisfaction with school policy and everyday life in the classroom has been replaced with a culture more ubiquitous. As “policy making has been appropriated by the central state in its determination to...reform and modernise education provision and 'raise standards'”(Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010, p.547), the profession has become increasingly resigned to, and pessimistic about, education reform and current policy. The ramifications of reform may prove wide-ranging in teachers' perceptions and experiences of their work. Simultaneously, the practical and emotional consequences of multiple policy adjustments, and the associated workload, may equally impact on professional identity and morale.

## **2.10 Summary and conclusion**

The primary school teacher emerges from the literature as negotiating a professional environment rife with change, threat and pressure, and the implications for identity are of interest. Cultures of accountability, managerialism and performativity may exert inimitable pressures, and prove profound for identity enactment and management. The literature reveals the primary teaching profession as susceptible to challenge and conflict and research about 'satisfied teachers' is hard to discern.

Primary teaching is different from secondary teaching (Evetts, 1990). Some research corroborates a particular occupational prestige for primary teachers, and the experience of work and perceived threats to primary teacher identity might be better understood in relation to the landscape which situates primary teaching as subordinate to secondary practice and less professionally prominent. A central premise of the study is that aspects of the White Paper reform are experienced distinctively by primary teachers whose experience reflects the interaction between the specific organisation, nature and expectations for primary education. Ten years ago, reforms in primary education were described as riding “roughshod over the values of English child-centred teachers” (Troman and Raggl, 2008, p.86), but the nature of the 2010

reforms are positioned to transform what it means to be a teacher in the primary sector in the second decade of the 21st century.

Apropos the research questions, the remit of the literature review has been confined to two areas: the professional and policy context for primary school teachers. As I have shown, the literature reveals a series of inter-connecting challenges for primary teachers. I do not assume that morale, workload or the specifics of the White Paper are automatically critical for individual teachers and am minded that “policy is only ever part of what teachers do” (Maguire, Ball and Braun, 2012, p.6). In that sense, the research questions are necessarily exploratory and open-ended, and suitably flexible to encourage broad reflection on what it means to be a primary teacher in the current context.

To that end, I remind the reader that the research focus is determined by the following questions:

1. How is education policy reform perceived and experienced by primary teachers in England?
2. What are significant influences on, and threats to, primary teachers' motivations and morale?

In the next chapter, I detail the methodological framework. Specifically, I explain the rationale for the methods and analyse the implications of my role as a ‘peripheral insider’ (section 3.6.1). I detail the sampling, and provide pen portraits of the individual participants, before explaining the pilot study, interview questions and the underpinning ethical considerations.

## **Chapter 3 – Methodology and Methods**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In this chapter I explain the underpinning rationale and decision-making for my methodological choices. I detail the ways that qualitative methodology specifically enables a greater understanding about present-day primary teachers' experiences of recent policy reform. The chapter also includes a thorough account of the ethical considerations and challenges specific to my position as a 'peripheral' insider researcher. Establishing the research as trustworthy necessitates a transparent process and in this chapter, I provide a detailed and critical breakdown of the chronology of the research and the protocols.

Crotty suggests that "the justification of our choice and particular use of methodology and methods is something that reaches into the assumptions about reality that we bring to our work" (1998, p.2). In section 3.3 I clarify the epistemological, ontological and theoretical perspectives that have informed the identification of the research questions and supported and sustained the research. I explain my rationale for an interpretive research paradigm and the subsequent decisions for 'data collection' and analysis. Despite the historical connotations of the term 'data-collection', my stance is that verbal or written data are not identical to the participant's experience, and that the data are a product of the interaction between us (Polkinghorne, 2005). Congruent with my methodological principles (3.3), the term 'data generation' (Koch, 2006) is more fitting and used throughout the thesis.

As a foreword to the chapter, I have elected to contextualise the methodology in relation to previous research about teachers and illustrate where and how legacies in the field have supported my own decision-making.

### **3.2 Researching teachers**

Studies of teachers encompass a wide range of research methodologies and methods. Longitudinal studies of primary school teachers have utilised mixed methods including questionnaires and interviews (for example, Day et al, 2006a, and Lindqvist et al's (2014) work on teacher attrition employed similar

methods). Life history research about teachers' identity privileges biography and life story (for example, Kelchtermans, 1993; Munro, 1998; Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Goodson, 2008).

The prevalence of ethnography and narrative enquiry should be recognised as influential for understanding the rich detail of teachers' lives and the 'world of teaching'. My own understanding of the field has been strongly influenced by, for example, Lortie (1975), Nias (1989), Troman (1996) and Woods and Jeffrey (2002). Employing ethnographic methodology, engaging in long periods of immersion in the field and utilising several methods of data generation including observation and interviews, is understood as enabling a breadth and depth in the data. Whilst my research aims and questions made ethnography a methodological possibility, my status as a part-time Doctoral student, and 'peripheral insider' (with the associated ethical considerations and institutional responsibilities), diminished the suitability of an ethnographic study.

Similarly, the use of narrative inquiry as a methodology for researching teachers is increasingly acknowledged as valid and fitting (for example, Goodson, 1992; Cortazzi, 1993; Clandinin and Connelly, 1996; Riessman, 2000; Webster and Mertova, 2007). It is argued that "narrative inquiry provides a methodology, a set of broad procedural ideas and concepts, rather than a pre-set method or specified technique, and it encourages responsiveness to the dynamics of the research context" (Stanley, 2008 p.436). My research design draws upon key principles of narrative enquiry to encourage participants' 'storying' of experience and perceptions. Whilst my study is not a narrative enquiry, the decision to employ one-to-one interviewing as the sole research method, with a view to encouraging rich accounts, is central to the interpretivist position underpinning the project, and illustrative of a commitment to the co-construction, or 'joint production' (Mishler, 1991) of knowledge. In the next section, I provide further explanation of the philosophical roots of the research design.

### **3.3 Ontological and epistemological rationale**

Central to the development of my researcher-identity has been the recognition of several influences and legacies that have shaped both the area of my research as well as the framing of the enquiry. My induction to methodology has

involved understanding the field specific to teachers and teaching, and a growing interest in teachers' lives and experiences. I acknowledge that "researchers develop different identities, with differing interests and value positions, and consequently see research issues differently" (Hodkinson, 2004, p.20). How I 'see' a problem or issue, as well as my perspective on the most appropriate strategies to learn more about the matter, has been informed by (amongst other things) undergraduate studies in Sociology, small-scale Master's research, my work as a primary teacher and my role as an English tutor within initial teacher education. Indeed, my conviction about the capacity and status of language to communicate, think with, and make meaning, informs and reflects a personal and broader philosophical position.

In that sense, my personal, professional and methodological beliefs strongly align, and I am persuaded by the view that ontological and epistemological commitments may be viewed as deeply personal; a 'skin not a sweater' (Furlong and Marsh, 2010). The way I think about and know the world and what can be learnt and understood is fundamental to my identity and ahead of, though intrinsic to, the development of my researcher-self. My research focuses on "how people are experiencing an event, a series of events, and/or a condition" (Agee, 2009, p.434).

The relationship between philosophy, research paradigm and methodology is necessary to distinguish, although the nomenclature employed to describe this relationship is inconsistent in the literature and often contested. The necessity of a set of relationships between ontology, epistemology and methodology is well-documented (e.g. Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Cresswell, 1996; Crotty, 1998); "epistemological principles and research practices do not necessarily go hand in hand in a neat unambiguous manner" (Bryman, 2012, p.16). In this chapter, I will account for the planning, as well as the subsequent adjustments, that enabled an appropriate research schedule, and one well-suited to the research questions.

A research paradigm can be described as a "set of very general philosophical assumptions about the nature of the world (ontology) and how we can understand it (epistemology)" (Maxwell, 2004, p.36). These assumptions then

specify “a set of questions that [the researcher] examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis)” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2001, p.28). Ontologically, I subscribe to a view of the world that is relativist where “reality is subjective and differs from person to person” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.110). Subscribing to the view that “there is no meaning without a mind” (Crotty, 1998, p.9), it follows that any deliberation about what can be known establishes a subjectivist epistemology. Inevitably synchronised to issues of ontology, epistemological problems pertain to knowledge and knowing; the key question is “what is there that can be known?” (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p.108). “The knower and the known (are positioned as) inseparable” (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p.37).

These philosophical orientations influenced my approach to the research process and my methodological decisions have been influenced by underpinning assumptions about the social world. My intention is to “consciously attend to the orientations that will shape what I see and what I make of what I see” (Peshkin, 1988, p.21). The ‘I’ here is vital; I am, with the participants, a co-constructor in the pursuit of knowledge with an aim to “draw on my data in order to illuminate and concretise theoretical ideas and arguments, not to present empirical proof” (Engeström, 1995, p. 396). Fundamental is the notion that “there is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world” (Crotty, 1998, p.8).

My research methodology reflects an interpretive, naturalistic interest in the world, “attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2001, p.3). The methodology and methods reflect this position as well as the demands of the research questions themselves.

### **3.4 Research methodology**

In this section, I detail the decisions about methodology and explain the boundaries and influences, some of which are deep-seated and biographical (Silverman, 2016). Having established a commitment to interpretivism, the research aims and questions are considered in relation to understanding the views, perceptions and beliefs of the individual teacher. My research questions

(1.5) reflect an intention “to raise significant questions about prevailing policy and practice that enrich an ongoing conversation” (Barone, 2007, p.466). The questions build on research in the field (see Literature Chapter), and orientate to notions of identity and policy.

Whilst the methodology might best be described as ‘generic qualitative research’, my study is underpinned and influenced by the tradition of researching teachers through narrative inquiry, and principles of such methodology were formative to the research design and need briefly accounting for.

### **3.4.1 The narrative disposition**

At the outset, the research plan was conceived in relation to narrative methodology. The appeal of narrative reflects a personal and philosophical assumption that “the story is one, if not the fundamental unit that accounts for human experience” (Clandinin, 2007, p.4). Narrative principles resonated with several dimensions of my research. My interest to narrate ‘teacher-voice’ reflected an empathy with primary practitioners and thus my attraction to a “methodology which unashamedly puts the experience and voice of the teacher...at the forefront of the inquiry” (Samuels and Stephens, 2000, p.490). The original intention was to reflect these principles through the choice of data generation method as well as analysis of the transcribed interview data. As a consequence of the progressive focusing in the early stages of the fieldwork (and analysis), I reviewed and then adjusted the method of analysis. I detail the rationale for the subsequent adjustments that better supported methodological coherence and rigour.

### **3.4.2 Progressive focusing**

As a consequence of progressive focusing, my methodology is best defined as ‘generic’ or that which is “not guided by an explicit or established set of philosophic assumptions in the form of one of the known qualitative methodologies” (Caelli, Ray and Mill, 2003, p.2), for example narrative inquiry or ethnography. Consistent with my research aim, the main focus of ‘generic’ qualitative research, or what Merriam (2009) describes as ‘basic qualitative

research', is to "uncover and interpret meanings" (p.25). I briefly detail the chronology of this process in my research.

As the fieldwork data amassed over the course of the first interviews, deliberations were made as to the ways that analysis of narratives and/or narrative analysis (Cortazzi, 1993; Holstein and Gubrium, 2012) would sufficiently expedite the research aims. Although the interview schedules were planned to invite and elicit story, not all data could be neatly classified as "sustained emplotted accounts with a beginning, middle, and end" (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.12). In addition, over the course of the first interviews, I became less interested in what are agreed as the salient features of a narrative (for example, structure, temporality) and more curious about key incidents repeated both within and across the majority of interviews.

Listening to the interviews, transcribing interviews and preparing extracts for member-return provoked further examination of the kind of analysis that would best address the research questions. Despite a systematic and thoroughly planned fieldwork strategy, the unpredicted congruence in the initial data, over several questions and amongst multiple participants, prompted reflection about the most appropriate and powerful method of data analysis.

Encouraged by the precedent to integrate both thematic and narrative analysis (Riessman, 1990; Jackson and Bailey, 2003), there was subsequent experimentation with a hybrid analysis protocol which I also rejected. The idea of utilising short narratives as vignettes to exemplify each of the themes and sub-themes was appealing but it made the analysis unwieldy and added little to the findings.

It is argued that "the progressive focusing approach recognises that issues arising during (the research) may necessitate the thoughtful modification of the research design" (Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012, p.825). In this instance it resulted in a shift away from a wholly narrative study; a narrative method of data generation was retained whilst the method of analysis was adjusted to a thematic approach, and I detail the process of analysis in section 3.8.

### 3.4.3 Quality and trustworthiness

The accomplishment of a trustworthy study entails attention to the rigour of the research design. Lincoln and Guba (1985) distinguish four criteria to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These four terms must be explained.

Credibility refers to the “trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (Tracy, 2010, p.842) notably for “the constructors of the original multiple realities” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.296). Patton (1999) details three elements vital for ensuring credibility as the use of rigorous techniques and methods (3.7 and 3.8), the credibility of the researcher (3.6.3) and the belief in the value of qualitative research (3.3). I have sought to foster credibility through the breadth of the sample group, the use of member checking and thick description as part of the analysis.

Member-checking warrants further explanation as it was included in the research design as a mechanism to enhance credibility (Doyle, 2007). In this stage of the research, “commonly, participants are given transcripts from the narratives they contributed during interview sessions and asked to verify their accuracy” (Carlson, 2010 p.1105). Participants who were interviewed twice were sent a fully transcribed extract (1000 words) from their first interview which reflected an evolving theme or themes at that time (see Appendix 6). Asking participants if the transcript extract reflected their views and feelings ‘at this time’ was one strategy to check “the reconstructions are recognisable” (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p.314). Worries about teacher workload and time constraints shaped my decision about member-checking, and I employed a variation of this protocol, namely, ‘member reflections’. Tracy (2010) describes this as “less a test of research findings as ... an opportunity for collaboration and reflexive elaboration” (p. 844), and the prospect to stimulate further discussion (Doyle, 2007).

Transferability means that “the findings in one context can be transferred to similar situations or participants” (Holloway, 1997, p.161) and this is conceivable in my study. In section 3.5, I explain the features of the sample and the merits of a relatively diverse group reflective of different professional life

phases, gender and various locations. In that sense there may be some applicability to the wider population. The importance of context in qualitative research makes it unrealistic to produce wholly transferable findings from a single study (Shenton, 2004).

If a study is “judged as dependable, it must be consistent and accurate” (Holloway, 1997, p.161). The concept of dependability correlates strongly to notions of credibility and relies on a suitably detailed ‘audit trail’ for a future researcher to repeat the study. The detail of this trail can be found in section 3.7. To achieve dependability and confirmability, the design of the research must be made explicit and the process should be transparent. The concept of confirmability relates to the way the findings are “grounded in data” (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p.323) and “as a result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). My decision-making and favouring of particular approaches are made explicit (3.4.2). Addressing this, and other criteria, is also achieved through reflexivity (3.6.3). Tracy (2010) maintains that the commitment to reflexivity supports the aspiration for researcher and methodological trustworthiness. As a peripheral insider (Adler and Adler, 1987), an underpinning tenet of quality has been in relation to ethics but also in the techniques adopted to engage reflexively (Finlay, 2002). An overview of limitations and strengths is included in the Conclusion (Chapter 9).

### **3.5 Selection of participants**

Appropriate to the research aims, the participants were qualified primary teachers. The overall strategy was of purposive or ‘judgement’ sampling, that is with a view to “studying information-rich cases in-depth and detail to understand and illuminate” (Patton, 2015, p.659). The research was intentionally orientated to primary school teachers so the rationale for this strategy is that “based on their a-priori theoretical understanding of the topic being studied, (these) individuals may have a unique, different or important perspective on the phenomenon in question” (Robinson, 2014, p.32). There were two instances where participants were recruited as a consequence of ‘snowballing’, that is when the researcher “accesses informants through contact information that is

provided by other informants” (Noy, 2008, p.330). This was specific to two teachers who had already resigned from the profession and were thus, ‘hidden’ and harder-to-reach.

Both the type of research (interpretivist) and size of the sample meant it was not appropriate to apply the criterion of generalisability. The features and boundaries of the sample are now detailed.

### **3.5.1 Participants and response rate**

Between August and November 2014, I contacted 45 primary teachers known to me through their initial teacher education and/or ongoing professional contact in local schools, and who were geographically positioned to participate (Appendix 1). The initial mail-out was sufficiently large to allow for non-respondents and participant attrition. The communication was conducted mainly via email, some by Twitter and some by letter direct to their school address.

In light of my professional connections, and for practical reasons, the sample had professional and geographical boundaries. It was also relatively small to ensure manageability. My experience and knowledge of local teachers (who are ex-students) meant my sample encompassed teachers working in and around Sussex (and one London borough), across four local authorities, in a range of urban and rural schools and with contrasting professional experience and responsibilities.

Further to the review about teachers’ professional life phases (2.9.4), Day et al’s (2006a) categories were adopted with a view to enabling further comparison and contrast in the data, and participants were recruited from three ‘professional life phases’ i.e. the novice (0-3 years), the early career professional (4-7 years) and the experienced practitioner (8-15 years). I should point out that apart from the two recently-resigned newly qualified teachers (Novice, 1 year), all teachers in phase one (0-3 years) were in their second or third year of teaching. There was no intent to filter for gender or age.

Based on the aspiration for breadth in the research and the constraints of part-time doctoral study, I sought to recruit and interview six teachers in each of these professional life phases, as well as two additional recently-resigned

'novice' teachers. I consciously sought recently resigned teachers to explore their professional experiences and with a view to comparison. At the same time, and out of sensitivity to their occupational status, I opted to confine participation to one interview.

All of the teachers had completed their initial teacher education at the University of Brighton (mainly in a full-time capacity as primary post-graduate (PGCE) students, except for two teachers who had completed the four-year primary under-graduate (BA QTS) teacher training programme).

The response was as follows:

- 24 out of the 45 teachers agreed to participate in the study, that is, 53 per cent (amongst these were two late respondents who were contacted and thanked for their interest but not invited to participate).
- Of the 45, the two recently resigned teachers were directly targeted. In one instance this was subsequent to a meeting with a school leader who mentioned a particular teacher in passing. In the second instance, a participant mentioned a colleague who had submitted their resignation and I invited her to contact me if interested in participating.
- 7 out of the 45 teachers (16 per cent) replied and showed interest but declined to participate.
- 14 out of 45 teachers did not reply (31 per cent).
- A final total of 22 teachers made up the sample.
- One teacher was explicitly canvassed as to the possibility of conducting both interviews in a relatively short period of time that is, over a few weeks compared to a year, and agreed to do so. This constituted the pilot study for the research (3.7.1) and the data were included in the main study.

The final figure of 22 teachers was slightly larger than planned but I recognised the advantages of slight over-recruitment to address possible drop-out after the first interview (although the concerns proved unfounded). Purposive targeting for 'professional life phase' was increasingly strategic as participants confirmed their involvement. Finalising the group representing phase two teachers was the

most challenging and the phase three group became slightly over-subscribed due to an administrative error where I had miscalculated two participants' professional life phase. In the final sample of 22 teachers, including the two resigned newly qualified teachers, seven participants were in phase 1, five participants were in phase 2 and eight participants were in phase 3.

During the first interview, two participants implied knowledge of each other's involvement in the study. Unbeknown to me, they were acquainted through their PGCE studies and in contact with each other. In addition, in two instances, there were teachers who worked at the same school. In one of these, the resigned teacher had been contacted subsequent to the colleague's participation, and in the second, neither teacher appeared aware of, or spoke about, their colleague's participation. For reasons of confidentiality and to prevent traceability and protect anonymity, I have not made this explicit in the participants' details.

### **3.5.2 Participants' biographies**

In the first interview, all teachers were asked some direct and indirect questions to elicit biographical details, which linked to the aspiration to teach and timeline of their teaching career to date. This biographical data is summarised to provide further contextual information about the sample composition (Table 1) and as a prelude to the individual teacher pen portraits prefacing the first findings chapter (Chapter 4).

I should note that the latter stages of the fieldwork provoked reconsideration of the ways in which (all of) these biographical details would be publicised. All teachers had pseudonyms, but threats to confidentiality and anonymity were carefully reviewed. In cases where, for example, a teacher's interests or professional responsibilities might divulge identity, those details were removed. This was also true of a school's 'status' (for example, being an Academy or Free school may reveal the participant) so these details were adjusted. A challenge has been to reconcile the quest for rich data alongside the preservation of anonymity.

In Table 1, the overview of participants shows the number of teachers in each professional life phase, their age, gender, professional context, for example year group, school category and basic biographical information. Nine teachers are men and thirteen are women. An unexpected consequence of the random gender sampling was that male primary teachers made up 41% of the final sample - a figure disproportionate to the gender make up in the workforce. It also shows where teachers were interviewed.

Of note is the relationship between professional life phase, previous employment and age. 'Novice' teachers are rarely recently qualified graduates. Prior to training to teach, the majority were employed in 'significant employment' (that is, beyond a temporary job). In addition, the diversity in school roles and responsibilities is apparent for teachers in phase three, with several in management positions. Also noteworthy is the number of participants who are also parents. Of the 22 teachers, just over a third (eight) are parents, with the highest proportion in professional life phase three.

**Table 1: Overview of participants in the sample**

Professional life phase (and years in teaching)	Pseudonym	Gender and Age	Age phase / Year group	Role / School Ofsted Category		Other biographical details	Fieldwork details
Phase 1 NQT resigned	Eleanor	Female 20s	KS1/ YR1	Class teacher	Requires Improvement	No previous employment.	1 interview that took place in the University.
Phase 1 NQT resigned	Fiona	Female 20s	KS2/ YR 3	Class teacher	Outstanding	Previous employment in unrelated fields. Parents were teachers.	1 interview that took place in the University.
Phase 1 2nd year	Barry	Male 20s	KS2 / YR 6	Class teacher	Good	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Mother was teacher.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 1 3rd year	Sara	Female 30s	Early Years	Class teacher	Outstanding	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Parents were teachers.	2 interviews that took place in her home.
Phase 1 3rd year	Ben	Male 20s	KS2 / YR 6	Class teacher	Good	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in his school.
Phase 1 3rd year	Wilma	Female 20s	KS2 / YR 4	Class teacher	Good	Previous employment in unrelated fields.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 1 2nd year	Lynn	Female 30s	Early Years	Class teacher	Outstanding	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields.	2 interviews that took place in her school.
Phase 1 2nd year	Nina	Female 40s	KS2 / YR 6	Class teacher	Outstanding	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in her school.
Phase 1 3rd year	Ryan	Male 30s	KS1 / YR1	Class teacher	Good	Previous employment in unrelated fields. Parent was a teacher	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 2 5 <sup>th</sup> year	Harriet	Female 30s	KS1 / YR 2	Class teacher	Good	Previous employment in related fields.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 2 5 <sup>th</sup> year	Verity	Female 40s	Varied	Supply teacher		Previous employment in unrelated fields.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 2 5 <sup>th</sup> year	Carl	Male 30s	Early years	Class teacher	Outstanding	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields.	2 interviews that took place in his school.
Phase 2 5 <sup>th</sup> year	Beth	Female 30s	KS1 / YR 2	Class teacher	Requires Improvement	Previous employment in unrelated fields. Both parents worked in Education.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 2 6 <sup>th</sup> year	Shirley	Female 40s	KS2/ YR5	PPA/ Class teacher	Requires Improvement	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Mother worked in Education. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in the University.

Phase 3 8 <sup>th</sup> year	Jimmy	Male 40s	KS2 / YR 5	Class teacher	Outstanding	Previous employment in unrelated fields.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 3 14 <sup>th</sup> year	Simon	Male 40s	N/A	Head Teacher	Requires Improvement	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Parents were teachers. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 3 11 <sup>th</sup> year	Tony	Male 40s	KS1 / YR2	Class teacher and middle leader	Good	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Mother was a teacher. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in his school.
Phase 3 10 <sup>th</sup> year	Alan	Male 40s	NA	Deputy Head	Good	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in his home and school.
Phase 3 9 <sup>th</sup> year	Glenys	Female 50s	KS2/ YR5	PPA/ Class teacher	Requires Improvement	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields. Parents were teachers. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 3 14 <sup>th</sup> year	Rae	Female 30s	NA	SENCO	Requires Improvement	No previous employment. Mother worked in Education. Parent.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 3 10 <sup>th</sup> year	Rose	Female 40s	KS1/ YR2	Class teacher and middle leader	Outstanding	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields.	2 interviews that took place in the University.
Phase 3 10 <sup>th</sup> year	Bryan	Male 30s	KS1 / YR1	Class teacher and senior leader	Requires Improvement	Previous employment in both related and unrelated fields.	2 interviews that took place in the University ( <u>Pilot interviews</u> )

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

As appropriate to a research context where my own history, experience and relationships position me as a peripheral insider, this discussion incorporates the interrelated issues of the ethics of insider research and reflexivity. There were ethical implications of drawing upon an existing relationship for the sake of research, and it is vital to frame the ethical considerations in relation to my positionality in the study ahead of the ethical protocols and procedures. This was especially pertinent given the sensitive nature of teacher morale.

#### **3.6.1 Peripheral insider**

Having led the PGCE primary education programme at the University of Brighton since 2004, my work has entailed close and extensive collaboration with innumerable primary schools and teachers. All the teachers in the study (bar one) were known to me via their initial teacher education, and in my capacity as their tutor or programme leader we had an established relationship. In some instances, I had current links and ongoing contacts with their schools in my professional role. Consequently, the data would be the “product of these strong connections” (Toma, 2000, p.177).

I have come to recognise and appreciate the methodological advantages afforded by a multi-faceted membership role. My insider-ness may well have supported the establishment of the necessary ‘interpersonal bridge’ (Kaufman, 1974) that enabled a greater degree of credibility, rapport and trust which enhanced rather than jeopardised the study. As an insider (of sorts), “the shared worlds of the participants can be invoked and made relevant ... and used as a resource” (Garton and Copeland, 2010, p.547). This may have been a drawback because of the assumptions made (on both sides) about what we understood about the current content of primary education. I review this further in the ‘Limitations’ in Chapter 9.

I am aware that the historical power dynamic may have influenced the interactions. At best, I was a ‘senior colleague’, but my previous relationships and current position in the University may have influenced the interviewee’s accounts. I made my student status explicit in my correspondence (3.6.2), but

my 'dual role' as a university tutor and doctoral student may have made for a 'blurring of boundaries' (Dickson-Swift, 2006) and provoked tensions for participants in relation to confidentiality (BERA, 2011).

My standpoint is that ethics are "embedded within, not external to, the paradigm" (Guba and Lincoln, 1985, p.265). The UK British Educational Research Association's ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011) helpfully outline the expectations for conducting research ethically and the expected procedures related to responsibilities to participants. These were actioned and included in discussion about, for example, consent, communication and the participant information sheet (see Appendix 2).

### **3.6.2 Information and consent**

Teachers were invited to participate (Appendix 1) and sent the information sheet (Appendix 2) and consent form ahead of the fieldwork (Appendix 3). The correspondence made explicit my role and position as a doctoral research student rather than the professional capacity previously or currently familiar to them. In some cases, I had seen or communicated with the teacher recently (as a consequence of everyday professional responsibilities), and in other cases I had not seen or heard from them since they qualified.

Central to ethical practice, I secured voluntary, informed consent. The existence of previously-established relationships, and within the boundaries of a known institution, meant that this was carefully navigated. For some participants, believing that they 'knew me' provoked a kind of 'disregard' for such processes and they initially appeared to spurn these protocols. Our personal and professional history and 'shared experience' may have promoted a relaxed environment and a climate of 'good faith', so I was at pains to reiterate the protocols for data generation, storage, analysis and reporting so the purpose and dissemination was made explicit. The protocols about anonymity and confidentiality were necessary to reiterate given my existing relationships and position in the profession locally. As I have declared (3.5.1), two participants made reference to each other, clarifying a friendship I was unaware of, and a third confirmed an intention to tell friends (ex-students) about his participation. Plans to protect anonymity and assure confidentiality are susceptible to

breaches and it is impossible to know the extent of participants' revelations (Wiles et al, 2008). The use of pseudonyms is still accepted as the principal way of protecting participants (ibid).

Because of the potentially sensitive nature of the interview, and to further reassure and protect the participants, I introduced a two-staged consent procedure, sometimes referred to as 'continuing' or 'process consent' (Munhall, 1988; Ellis, 2006). This can be utilised in research with, for example, vulnerable participants, and is a procedure that verifies the continuing participation throughout the research. My decision reflected a concern about participants' well-being, both in relation to the time constraints, as well as the ramifications of issues raised in the first interview, and consent was requested prior to the second interview (Appendix 5). Clarifying the expectations and 'ways out' were established despite the risk that teachers may opt not to continue. This was as much about personal as professional integrity.

Conducting the fieldwork confirmed the need for a heightened sensitivity about the interviews. The overtly emotional dimension to some discussion and teachers' sometimes unexpected and/or powerful responses prompted an ongoing review of the boundaries I should or could maintain. Sometimes the participant appeared depressed and I felt obliged to clarify whether they wanted to 'tell me about this'. On several occasions I was confronted by teachers who were either distraught and on the edge of tears, or crying. I had prepared for this eventuality (Palmer et al, 2014), and was ready to invite the teacher to take a break or to offer to stop the interview (Roulston, 2010). 'Stepping back', offering time, space, tissues and water allowed the participant a break and sometimes I automatically paused the recording of the interview. The decision to re-commence the interview provoked further dilemmas: "the participant may interpret the interaction as therapeutic, encouraging or simply a friendly chat rather than accepting that the prime intent of the interaction is to generate data" (McConnell-Henry et al, 2010, p.5). As important was the 'ethical exit' from the interview, and on occasions I felt duty-bound to offer further refreshment and time to talk more generally and to "leave that relationship honourably without causing further distress" (Fahie, 2014, p.26).

The procedural demands are one component of a bigger commitment to behaving ethically. Bond's work (2012) on 'ethical mindfulness' suggests this is as much about the researcher's principles and values. How I view the participants reflects an ethical position of acknowledging the teachers as individuals, with rights, rather than as 'data sources' (Smythe and Murray, 2000). Earlier doctoral fieldwork with ex-students confirmed the vitality of reflexivity for "forming ethical research relationships especially when prior relationships with participants already exist" (Etherington, 2007, p.599). Understanding and recognising the role of reflexivity as a methodological tool to enhance the quality and rigour of research, and its value for my work, has been essential.

### **3.6.3 The role of reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a way that the "researcher engages in an explicit, self-aware meta-analysis of the research process" (Finlay, 2002, p.531) and of considerable significance for me. Attention to the 'effect' I was having on the research motivated a strong interest in, and commitment to, the role of reflexivity at all stages of the research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). Understanding my position as ever-present in the research and instrumental to data generation was an ongoing priority. The process of reflexivity can help "monitor the tension between involvement and detachment of the researcher and the researched, as a means to enhance the rigour of the study and its ethics" (Berger, 2015, p.221). This is as much about a mind-set as it is about processes and protocols, and I began from the premise that "to learn participants' meanings, we need to be reflexive about our own" (Charmaz, 2004, p.982). The consequence of such activity is to enhance the trustworthiness, transparency and accountability of the research (Finlay, 2002, p.211).

Different phases of the research provoked a range of contexts for reflexive practice. Finlay identifies four subjective elements potentially impacting on research findings. The "researcher's assumptions, expectations, behaviour/emotional reactions and unconscious responses" (Finlay, 1998, p.453) are considered influential in data generation and analysis. I was proactive in utilising strategies for introspection, for example, the use of memo-ing

and assumption hunting (Loughran, 2002). I became more conscious of the process of locating unwitting perceptions and made explicit the interrogation of such feelings and inclinations via field notes and reflections.

The notion that “fieldworkers never return ‘home’ quite the same” (Hyndman, 2001, p. 265) has resonated, and as my own identity changed, being reflexive enabled a conscientious attendance to the meanings and implications for the research. I had not anticipated the affect and emotional toll of interviewing teachers who were often demoralised and distraught. When researching human experience “the burden of maintaining confidentiality” (McConnell-Henry et al, 2010, p.5) can pervade both personal and professional arenas and is a specific and more generalised consequence of this research. The ‘emotion work’ (Darra, 2008) was further complicated by the “idea of feeling simultaneously excited and guilty by the data” (Dickson-Swift et al, 2007, p.343).

In the following section, I discuss the fieldwork and the role of the pilot study to pre-empt questions and clarify the purpose and relationship of the two interviews. This provides an insight into the auditing of the research process, beginning with the sampling process and subsequent data generation method and analysis. The essence of such a process is with a view to “further establishing a confidence that the research findings ... are worth paying attention to” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290).

### **3.7 Fieldwork**

For the majority of participants (19), the fieldwork comprised two interviews conducted six to eight months apart in the period 2014 - 2015. In Table 2, the timeline clarifies the research plan and confirms the arrangements for the ‘pilot’ study and the two bespoke interviews with recently-resigned teachers.

**Table 2: Timeline and summary of fieldwork**

Date	Fieldwork	Notes	Data
August 2014	45 teachers were contacted and invited to participate in the research.	Teachers were emailed with suggested dates and times along with the information sheet and consent form (see Appendix 2 and 3).	
October – December 2014	<p>Pilot interviews with one teacher and a bespoke interview with two resigned newly qualified teachers (NQTs).</p> <p>Interview 1 with nineteen teachers (60-90minutes) (see section 3.7.2).</p> <p>Courtesy emails were sent after each interview.</p>	<p>Individual pen portraits were collated (see section 4.2). A spreadsheet for interview dates/times and locations was created.</p>	<p>Each interview was recorded and wholly or partially transcribed (see section 3.8)</p> <p>The pilot interview was wholly transcribed (see section 3.8)</p>
April 2015	<p>(1000-word PDF) Extract returned to participants (see Appendix 6).</p> <p>At this time, teachers were invited to attend the second interview. A new consent form was provided.</p>	<p>Teachers were also asked to check the individual pen portrait. The spreadsheet for interview two was updated.</p>	
May – August 2015	<p>Interview 2 with nineteen teachers (60minutes).</p> <p>Courtesy emails were sent after each interview.</p>		<p>Each interview was recorded and wholly or partially transcribed.</p>

### 3.7.1. The pilot study

Whilst not entirely appropriate to talk of ‘piloting’ in relation to qualitative interviews (Morse, 1997; Sampson, 2004), it was vital that the proposed questions and lines of enquiry were trialled and rehearsed. This was also imperative to the development and refinement of my research interviewing skills. The complexities of ‘asking questions’ and techniques for active listening, prompting and probing are well-documented (Rapley, 2001; Holstein and Gubrium 2001; Kvale, 2006; Roulston, 2010; McConnell-Henry et al, 2010; Jansen, 2015).

Preparation is understood to be especially helpful for the novice researcher (McConnell-Henry et al, 2010). Commonly experienced emotions (for example, apprehension and anxiety) “may be particularly exacerbated when the researcher is inexperienced in interviewing someone with whom a pre-existing relationship is held” (Ibid, p. 6). To that end, the pilot interviews supported an overall acclimatisation to the fieldwork.

“There are potential benefits in putting a toe or two in the research waters before diving in” (Sampson, 2004, p.399) and pilot studies can be useful to check the ‘feasibility’ of a study and to address issues of logistics, timings, structure and question design. The ‘pilot’ interviews were planned to engage with the issues of interviewing known participants (McConnell - Henry et al, 2010; Taylor, 2011), the demands of in-situ responses, question types and chronology and (my) identity-management. Understanding the distinct purpose and scope of each of the two interviews was also an aim of the pilot.

The first pilot interview was fully transcribed and exposed areas for my development and learning. This prompted question refinement and a review of strategies to manage tangents in the interview, as well as of transcription etiquette. Some questions were refined or changed and then trialled in the follow-up interview. Subsequent to this I used more examples of ‘grand tour’ questions (Spradley, 1979) and ‘watershed questions’ (Errante, 2000) both of which can provoke more extensive and detailed responses. For example, in the first interviews, I used a ‘watershed question’ to elicit biographical information and the influences and motivations to teach: ‘Tell me about your decision to become a primary teacher’. In the second interviews, two ‘grand tour questions’ (‘what’s the ‘story’ since we last met’ and ‘what does it mean to be a primary teacher nowadays’) were instrumental in eliciting extensive and rich accounts. The planned lack of structure and open-ended nature of the interview schedules necessitated careful use of prompts and probes which were utilised to enable elaboration, illustration and clarify meaning (Gillham, 2005; Legard et al, 2003). Copies of the final interview schedules can be found in Appendices 4 and 7.

More specifically, the experience highlighted the issue of rapport and relationships. I learnt how to tolerate and ‘read’ silence as (either) discomfort or

thinking time, how to gauge 'wait time', when to challenge or share and empathise, and how to think in the moment. Together with the necessary identity-shift, these were valuable lessons, and further enabled my confidence to manage the interpersonal dimensions with teachers I (once) knew.

The pilot interviews enabled some insight into the ways that "encounters in the field will always be personal and partial, dependent on a great number of factors that cannot be prescribed, measured, calculated, estimated or anticipated prior to the engagement" (Taylor, 2011, p.18). This all acted as good preparation for the subsequent phase of the research, as well as providing data for the study. Whilst there is some recognition of the drawbacks of using data from a pilot study, and of the hazards of flawed and inaccurate data (Van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001), both pilot and main interviews and questions were comparable. My decision was to include the data in the analysis and subsequent findings.

### **3.7.2 The semi-structured interview**

In this section, I explain my decision-making and rationale as to why the semi-structured interview constitutes an appropriate method for data generation in my study (Rapley, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, Kvale, 2006; Gubrium and Holstein, 2008, Roulston, 2010). I used the interview "in ways that are consonant with the epistemological and theoretical assumptions underlying (the) study's design" (Ponterotto, 2005, p.129).

Given the aforementioned aim of the research, the semi-structured interview was conducive to an exploration of teachers' perceptions and to "unfold the meaning of their lived world" (Kvale, 2006, p.482). Interviews are commonly used in qualitative research and whilst there are different types, most qualitative studies employ semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). Typically, the semi-structured interview includes a schedule of questions which are supplemented with follow up prompts and probes, making them sufficiently open for participants to shape aspects of the discussion (Gillham, 2005; Bryman, 2012).

Whilst interviewing is not the only appropriate method to gain understanding of and insight into the participant's lived experience (for example, observation, focus groups, ethnography), the interview utilises verbal and non-verbal

communication in an intimate setting of a one-to-one discussion. “Non-verbal communication has been accepted as a formidable source of information” (Denham and Onwuegbuzie, 2013, p.12) so I was attentive to, and sometimes transcribed, for example, silences, hesitations, repetition and laughing as well as body language (like head shaking/nodding, gestures) and eye contact (3.8).

Inherent to my position is the recognition that “interviews cannot be seen as objective accounts of the interviewee’s reality, but rather, should be viewed as an interactional event in which interviewer and interviewee jointly construct meaning” (Garton and Copeland, 2010, p.533; Rapley, 2001). The process of interviewing and the notion of the ‘interview’ transcends merely the time-limited face to face contact. The process of data generation begins as soon as the first contact is initiated. Indeed, “the interviewer and interviewee have made assumptions about the purpose of the research and about each other long before the actual interview conversation takes place” (Lucius-Hoene and Deppermann, 2000, p.207). The challenges of this method must now be considered.

### **3.7.3 The challenges of the semi-structured interview**

There are particular drawbacks associated with the semi-structured interview. What can or cannot be shared and talked about may be mediated by the environment and efforts at establishing rapport. The data are highly dependent on the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Rapley, 2001), and in that sense rely on a skilled researcher with assorted interviewing techniques. In addition, the transcription of data further distances the intended meaning and is time-consuming.

The researcher as ‘research instrument’ has both merits and drawbacks in the process. Fundamental to the interview is the co-construction; through my presence, “and by listening and questioning in particular ways, we critically shape the stories participants choose to tell” (Riessman, 2008, p.50). Further to my overview of ethics (3.6), it is worth noting the specific ethical challenges of interviewing (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005) and especially when relationships with participants are established and characterised by affinity and varying levels of ‘friendship’ (McConnell-Henry et al, 2010). One of the risks of being known to

a participant is over-disclosure (McConnell-Henry et al, 2010), and whilst there may be advantages for a study (for example, strong rapport may provoke recounts of “full, rich, emotional detail” (Josselson, 2007, p.539)), the familiarity may inspire revelations unbefitting of a research interview. I reflect on this as part of the conclusion (3.9).

#### **3.7.4 The interview questions**

The planning for the interviews was informed by Troman’s (1996) research with primary teachers which inspired the scheduling of two semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview includes a mixture of specific questions reflecting the research questions, as well as follow up prompts and probes intended to clarify and extend the individual’s responses. The plan of interview questions is included in Appendices 4 and 7, and a schedule with prompts was printed off for use with each participant that allowed for in-situ field notes and reminders to return to any salient points.

It should be noted that the fieldwork plan was varied in two specific contexts. The first was for the pilot interviews which were both conducted relatively close together as opposed to several months apart. The second was in relation to the two newly qualified teachers who had recently resigned. They were both interviewed once with questions derived from both interviews one and two. The decision to interview them on one occasion was two-fold. Appropriate to the research aims, the participants are qualified primary teachers, so their recent resignation positioned them as anomalous to the sample, but as noted, out of sensitivity to their occupational status, I confined participation to one interview.

##### **The first interview**

In the first interview, the questions and prompts were designed to explore the individual teacher’s feelings about, and experience of, the current policy context. This enabled teachers to talk about their professional rationale and motivation to teach, with an emphasis on eliciting biographical information about their ‘journey into teaching’. Ahead of the second interview, I listened to the first interview and collated bespoke prompts to complement and extend the generic follow-up questions. To support the second interview, all teachers received a transcribed extract from the first interview. The overarching research focus was

about primary teachers' experience and the related sub-questions underpinned this, as well as reflected some emerging themes from the first interview.

### **The second interview**

The second interview was constructed to encourage reflection and elaboration on the teacher's work in the last year, with the extract used as an initial stimulus. Teachers were also sent an extract of an article about the characteristics of specific professional life phases (Day et al, 2006b). In this interview, the third question, 'What's the 'story' since we last met?' was unstructured and a deliberate attempt to invite the storying of their experience. This 'hinge question' was deliberately timed in the hope it would trigger recounts of the most significant events in the year for that teacher. In many interviews this provoked lengthy and uninterrupted stories.

In the next section, I explain the data analysis and reiterate the role of reflexivity in this process. Etherington advises "reflexivity requires researchers to operate on multiple levels: being aware in the moment of what is influencing our internal and external responses" (2004, p.46). This was true of fieldwork preparation, interviews, correspondence and data analysis. A very particular kind of reflexivity was necessary for the cycles of listening, transcribing and coding data. Indeed, "reflexive iteration is at the heart of visiting and revisiting the data and connecting them with emerging insights, progressively leading to refined focus and understandings" (Srivastava, 2009, p.77).

### **3.8 Data analysis**

Appropriate to qualitative methodology and semi-structured interviews, there were several options for data analysis (for example, discourse analysis, content analysis, narrative analysis). The choice of data analysis method reflects the "epistemological, ontological and theoretical assumptions of the researcher" (Mauthner and Doucet, 2003, p.415) and in this section I will explain the decisions that underpinned my analysis.

Further to my explanation of 'data generation' (3.1), there is no assumption that the 'answers' were waiting to be heard or that the data were awaiting 'collection'

or harvesting (Macleod, 2001). Thomson (2013) suggests viewing data in this way reveals an 'ontological slip': "as we construct events, objects, people, phenomena as data, we are in the process of constructing a particular set of social/cultural meanings" (np). The fieldwork and analysis occurred simultaneously (Merriam, 2009) and the process of analysis, or more preferably the process of 'understanding' the data, pervaded several stages of the fieldwork (Boyatzis, 1998). I began from the premise that the process of analysis is "not fundamentally a mechanical or technical exercise. It is a dynamic, intuitive and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking and theorising" (Basit, 2003, p.143). As previously confirmed, progressive focusing (3.4.2) clarified the increasing pertinence of thematic analysis but the presence of stories was regularly integral to the themes identified, and I explain how narratives were utilised in section 3.8.3.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis underpinned my approach, and the use of captions enabled an organised engagement with the salient features in the data. In Table 3 I detail the six phases in their entirety as they reflect key principles about the iterative process, and then I describe each stage relative to my analysis.

**Table 3: Phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 87)**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Description of the process.</b>
<b>1. Familiarising yourself with your data</b>	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
<b>2. Generating initial codes</b>	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data-set, collating data relevant to each code.
<b>3. Searching for themes</b>	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
<b>4. Reviewing themes</b>	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data-set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
<b>5. Defining and naming themes</b>	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
<b>6. Producing the report</b>	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

There is an extensive literature about coding and thematic analysis. As well as the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), I was influenced by Riessman (2001), Bazeley (2009), Hunter (2010) and Flick (2014). Common to all, but especially in Bazeley's work is the advice to go beyond the mechanical identification of themes. In the following sections, I explain my decision-making and protocols for analysis and the consequences for the study.

### **3.8.1 Phase 1: Familiarisation with the data**

Each interview was recorded and listened to in its entirety and immediate post-field notes and reflections were logged. Most recordings were listened to almost immediately after the interview, on multiple occasions thereafter and were transcribed. Consistent with my methodology and research questions, the level of detail in transcription was less about noting exactly how something was said but on the meanings of what was said. The pilot study confirmed my decision to transcribe; employing an external transcriber was discounted on the grounds that multiple engagements with the recordings would be invaluable and advantageous to the analysis (Tilley, 2003). An important methodological stage in data analysis, transcribing helped to challenge initial feelings and

interpretations as to the 'gist' of the heard interview and this was the first step in data familiarisation. I established a template for transcribing the interview with sections for recording first impressions and notes for myself to review as the fieldwork continued. An example of one transcribed interview can be found in Appendix 8. Whilst not as focused on every nuance of commentary (as more appropriate to, for example, conversation analysis), changes in volume, repetition, pauses and other non-verbal behaviours were sometimes attended to because of the implied meanings.

Poland suggests that "data are (re)constructed in the process of transcription as a result of multiple decisions that reflect both theoretical and ostensibly pragmatic considerations" (2003, p.268). What is transcribed, and how, reflects substantive and methodological assumptions (Hammersley, 2010), and a range of practical, theoretical and ethical considerations are intertwined in the approach to transcription (Poland, 2003). Some of the 42 interviews were fully transcribed and some were partially transcribed, for example, a few interviews were wholly transcribed from a particular point in the interview. This was with a view to reduce the data in relation to the research focus. Invariably, some of the commentary was superfluous and did not warrant full transcription as was neither pertinent to the research question nor enhanced the research outcome and this informed my decision to partially transcribe the majority of interviews. Fully transcribing all of the interviews would necessitate an unmanageable time commitment, and was not practical.

From the outset, I acknowledged that the transcribed text could only comprise a part of what happened in the actual interview (Poland, 2003; Mishler, 1991; Kvale, 2006). Listening to and word-processing the interviews enabled an immediate and ongoing engagement with potential themes and the search for meaning in relation to the research questions. The agreed next step in the process is coding, and I now detail my approach and the challenges of this stage.

### **3.8.2 Phase 2: Generating initial codes**

Whilst coding is acknowledged as a "researcher-generated construct ... and primarily an interpretive act" (Saldana, 2015, p.4), this sometimes felt at odds

with the underpinning rationale for the research. Even a short extract of transcribed text contained several possible 'codes' and to apply these to words/phrases or even by line, did not contribute to the kind of analysis considered pertinent to the research questions. The impetus for coding is often linked to the concept of reliability and a criterion for quality research linked to notions of objectivity, and thus less helpful or appropriate for a qualitative study.

Whilst this is a well-established stage in thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Bazeley, 2009; Boyzatis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2013), the emphasis on a close word/phrase scrutiny appeared misaligned for a data-set that was rich and detailed. I experimented with this (Saldana, 2015) and recognised that "coding is just one way of analysing qualitative data, not the way" (Saldana, 2015, p.3). Using a coding software package like Nvivo was also considered and rejected because of the perceived distance it created between researcher, interpretation and data.

My approach was to use 'captions' rather than codes (Syed, 2010) which were utilised to explore and capture relationships and patterns both within the individual participant accounts as well as across the data-set. Interviews were listened to and 'coded' and an interview extract is included (Appendix 8). Some of the captions were applicable to more than one theme and, ultimately, the decision to sort and 'classify' them was another aspect of the interpretation. Across all interviews, emergent from the captions, a number of strong and recurring themes were identified and some of these overlapped. Underpinning narrative principles continued to partially shape the analysis and the notion of 'story' featured here too. A starting point was to "fragment the interview text into code-able chunks that share a common content area or topic" (Riessman 1990, p.229). For example, one of the early captions was the phrase 'Down but not Out' which described the multi-faceted experience of reluctantly staying in the profession. This became a 'working theme' to explore commentaries in relation to morale, feeling tempted (to leave) but trapped, as well as deliberations over changing jobs. In that sense, the foray into narrative analysis enriched the analysis.

### **3.8.3 Phase 3: Searching for themes**

Subsequent to the application of captions, general themes were generated from the data. My view is that “the key-ness of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.10). For example, it was evident early on in the fieldwork that teachers were talking extensively about their head teachers - how they spoke about them, and the duration of the accounts prompted a closer analysis of what they were saying and what it meant. I also employed particular features of the sample to explore the potential of emerging themes, for example, teachers’ professional life phase, school grading and gender.

In the ‘first-stage’ analysis, I worked towards establishing a broad categorisation of some of the most pertinent themes as part of the preparation for the extract return to participants and to provide further stimuli as part of the second interview. In Table 4, the themes that emerged from the first interviews are listed. They constituted a useful framework for reflecting on the research questions and supported the planning for the follow-up interview. Many of these themes continued to permeate the analysis of the second interviews and are reflected in the findings chapters.

**Table 4: Interview 1 and emerging themes**

Narratives and/or captions	Overarching themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional trust between colleagues</li> </ul>	1. Relationships between teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Back-biting between colleagues</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Competition between colleagues</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trust</li> </ul>	2. Relationships between head teachers, management teams and teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Autonomy</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Them and us'</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Favouritism</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying / support</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Then and now': beliefs about schooling</li> </ul>	3. Policy Context and impact on philosophy, ideology and pedagogy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Then and now': beliefs about education, learning and pupils</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Then and now': beliefs about learning and pupils</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'The emotional toll'</li> </ul>	4. Policy Context and impact on health, well-being and self-esteem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Not ever being good enough'</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'Feeling proud' or 'rewarded'</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The numbers game</li> </ul>	5. Policy Context in relation to data and accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The struggle to meet targets</li> </ul>	

What makes most sense in relation to the research question “is a matter of considering the weight of evidence and looking for the best fit between data and analysis” (Patton, 1999, p.1191), and this strategy underpinned the further collation and review of the themes.

#### **3.8.4 Phase 4: Reviewing themes**

This is a vital stage in the meaning-making and shapes the further refinement of themes.

The second phase of fieldwork prompted the further review and generation of themes. Existing themes were 'tested' alongside new data and I adopted strategies to enrich the analysis, for example, "using 'describe /compare /relate' and comparison and pattern analysis, using divergent views and negative cases to challenge generalisations" (Bazeley, 2009, p.6). At this stage, I also re-read and listened to each individual teacher's interviews to enable the re-contextualising of extracts.

Crucial for this exercise was the role of reflexivity. As I have acknowledged (3.6.3), this is a vital strategy in all phases of the fieldwork. It requires researchers to be aware of what is "influencing our internal and external responses, while also being aware of what influences our relationship to our topic and our participants" (Etherington, 2004, p.46). Given the dynamic educational landscape, schools or teachers were featured in education editorials on a weekly, if not daily, basis. Conscious attention was needed to 'filter out' and reflect on these stimuli when engaging with the data. A very particular kind of reflexivity was necessary for the cycles of listening to data, transcribing and coding.

Various techniques can "help researchers see their data in a new light" (Ryan and Bernard, 2003, p.86), which was an important strategy for me as a 'peripheral insider', and I have acknowledged the support afforded by, for example, memo-ing (3.6.3) as a way of reflecting on and analysing my assumptions.

### **3.8.5 Phase 5: Defining and naming themes**

Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and careful attention to the overall 'story' arising from the analysis, generated clear definitions and names for each theme. Various incarnations of 'findings' have been deliberated and adjusted; as Denzin and Lincoln state, "there is no single interpretive truth" (2012, p.30). As noted in Table 5, eighteen sub-themes were identified across the data and congruent with my research questions, I categorised four overarching themes:

1. What it means to be a teacher
2. The experience of teaching
3. The experience of school life
4. How it feels to be a teacher

In Table 5, I show how related and recurring themes were grouped and the relationship to key findings. The process of reviewing and analysing the data inevitably relied on conscious decisions about what was meaningful, of worth, and relevant for the research questions. Fundamental to these decisions was the “contextualising and making connections between those themes to build a coherent argument supported by data” (Bazeley, 2009, p.21). For example, themes relating to meanings and perceptions of being a teacher reflected the factors sustaining or threatening motivation and morale (research question two). Closer analysis of the positive influences to motivation further clarified the link to altruism, which prompted the focus of one chapter as ‘making a difference’.

**Table 5: The relationship between themes and findings**

<b>Overarching theme</b>	<b>What it means to be a teacher</b>	<b>The experience of teaching</b>	<b>The experience of school life</b>	<b>How it feels to be a teacher</b>
Specific themes arising from coding	Meanings and motivations of being a teacher	Politics and tactics of school life	Professional relationships (them and us, cliques and favourites divide and rule)	The compromise (should I stay or go) Daydreaming and escape
	Importance of making an impact on children	Curriculum and Assessment	Management and mis-management	Morale - No thanks / undervalued/ lack of praise (nothing's ever good enough)
	The personal rewards (pride, fun, impact)	The 'numbers game' and data	Trust and insecurity/ uncertainty	Depression, despair, emotional toll
	Feeling valued, praised and respected	Accountability and accountability	Politics and tactics of school life Workload	Conflict (professional/ moral)
<b>Findings Chapters</b>	<b>Making a difference</b>	<b>Playing the game</b>	<b>The impact of managerialism</b>	<b>The affective consequences</b>

### 3.8.6 Phase 6: The report

In this thesis, findings are presented in four distinct, but related chapters and I interpret selected data extracts from all participants. Any pertinent contrasts or comparisons in the data are acknowledged within each of the chapters. Ahead of this, I include a short pen portrait of each teacher to provide biographical information to contextualise the findings.

The first findings chapter (Chapter 4) is entitled 'Making a difference' and presents findings about the positive influences on teaching and what it means to be a teacher. I structure this according to teachers' professional life phases because of the way this enables an understanding of the individual participants.

The next three findings chapters are organised thematically: Chapter 5 presents findings about teachers' experiences of school ('Playing the game'), Chapter 6 presents findings about teachers' experiences of school leadership and management ('The impact of managerialism'), and Chapter 7 presents findings about teachers' feelings about their work at school ('The affective consequences'). The intention has been to tell a story through the four broad themes and the premise has been that "themes only attain full significance when they are linked to form a coordinated picture" (Bazeley, 2009, p.9). In brief, the four findings chapters serve to explore the duality of what it means *to teach* as well as *be a teacher*.

### **3.10 Summary and conclusion**

In this chapter I have substantiated a case for my methodological choices and have drawn on literature to clarify the scope and power of semi-structured interviews as a research tool. I have made explicit the choices and adjustments both ahead of, and during the fieldwork, with a view to providing a comprehensive warrant for the research. The chapter specifies the rationale and audit trail that enables a plausible contribution to the field about primary teachers' experience of policy reform and with a view to convincing the audience that "the research findings are worth paying attention to" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 290).

In the next chapter, I present the findings about teachers' motivations and the meanings assigned to being a teacher.

## **Chapter 4 – What it means to be a primary teacher: Making a difference**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter I established the methodological rationale for the study and described the approaches to data generation and analysis. In the first of four findings chapters, I explore the experiences and perceptions of primary teachers at a time of considerable policy change. Appropriate to the research focus about influences on and threats to primary teachers' motivations and morale, participants were canvassed explicitly on the meanings they attribute to their work and their reasons for teaching. The findings in this chapter reflect the themes evident in teachers' commentaries about the motivation to teach and what it means to be a primary teacher.

Variations between teachers in professional life phases one and two, and the more experienced teachers (phase three), enable insights into perceptions of 'making a difference'. For teachers in phases one and two, the findings show how working with children in the classroom continues to produce consistently positive responses and are most frequently equated to 'making a difference'; for teachers in phase three, notions of 'making a difference' seem to be additionally calibrated to wider conceptions of social justice.

### **4.2. Pen portraits of the teachers**

In Table 6, the pen portraits further detail the basic biographical information of each participant. This information was collated from questions asked in the first interview (see Appendix 4). As a preface to the 'career-stage specific' findings, I present 'thumbnail sketches' of the teachers to contextualise later findings, and highlight age, gender, career-stage, along with other pertinent occupational and biographical information.

**Table 6 Participants' pen portraits: Selected biographical information**

<p><b>Professional Life Phase 1 'Novice Practitioner'</b> (i.e. 0-3 years in teaching) (Day et al, 2006a)</p>	<p><b>Fiona</b> is a newly qualified teacher in her 20s who resigned after her NQT year. She worked in a two-form entry village school graded 'Outstanding'. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Eleanor</b> is a newly qualified teacher in her 20s who resigned after her NQT year. She worked in a two-form entry school graded 'Requires Improvement'. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Barry</b> is a teacher in his 20s and in his second year of primary teaching. He completed a degree in 'Media Technology' and previously worked as a bar manager before teaching TEFL. His mother is a teacher. Before training to teach, he worked as a teaching assistant in the UK. This is his first primary teaching post and he works in a two-form primary school graded 'Good' and teaches Year 6. By the second interview he had resigned and due to take up a new teaching post. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Sara</b> is a teacher in her 30s and in her third year of teaching. She completed an English &amp; Art degree. She completed the Early Years Practitioner programme prior to starting teacher training. Both her parents were teachers. This is her second primary teaching post and she works with children under five in a Nursery School and Children's Centre which serves a diverse population and is graded 'Outstanding'. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Ben</b> is a teacher in his late 20s and in his third year of teaching. He completed a degree in History as well as studying theological leadership. He previously worked as a youth worker. Ben is a parent. This is his first primary teaching post and he works in a two-form, large urban primary school graded 'Good' and teaches Year 6. He coordinates maths and history in his school. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is positive.</p>
	<p><b>Lynn</b> is a teacher in her 30s and in her second year of teaching. She completed a degree in Spanish and Latin American studies and taught English as a foreign language in South America. This provoked her interest in training to teach back in the UK. This is her first primary teaching post and she works in a Reception class in a two-form entry, village First school graded 'Outstanding'. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is positive.</p>
	<p><b>Wilma</b> is a teacher in her 20s and in her third year of teaching. She completed a degree in philosophy and taught TEFL abroad before deciding to train to teach. This is her second primary teaching post and she works in Year 3 in a two-form, large urban primary school graded 'Good'. By the second interview she had been appointed to her third school. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed, with more recent experience as positive.</p>
	<p><b>Ryan</b> is a teacher in his 30s and in his third year of teaching after previous jobs in fashion, charity and PR. His mother is a primary school head teacher. This is his first primary teaching post and he works in Year 1 in a three-form entry recently merged primary school graded 'Good'. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Nina</b> is a teacher in her 40s and in her second year of teaching. She completed a foundation degree before her degree in professional studies. She trained to teach over several years after previous roles in Telecom and sales over 15 years. She is a parent. This is her first primary teaching post and she works with a very small class in Year 5 in an urban special school graded Outstanding. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is positive.</p>

Table 6 (continued....)

<p><b>Professional Life Phase 2 ‘Early Career Professional’ (i.e. 4-7 years in teaching) (Day et al, 2006a)</b></p>	<p><b>Harriet</b> is a teacher in her 30s and in her fifth year of teaching. She completed an art degree. She came into teaching after working with children in the voluntary/charity sector. This is her first primary teaching post and she works in Year 2 in a two-form entry urban school graded ‘Good’. She is also the KS1 coordinator. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Verity</b> is a teacher in her early 40s and in her fifth year of teaching. She completed a first degree in sociology and geography and came into teaching after working as a reflexologist. She works as a supply teacher after recently leaving her first primary teaching post. She taught in KS2 in a ‘Good’ School in a rural area. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed, with more recent experience as positive.</p>
	<p><b>Carl</b> is a teacher in his late 30s and in his fifth year of teaching. He completed a degree in History. He came into primary teaching after volunteering in a school. This is his first primary teaching post and he works in a Reception class in a large urban Infant school graded ‘Outstanding’. He is a foundation subjects’ coordinator and a teacher governor at his school. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed but negative views are dominant.</p>
	<p><b>Beth</b> is a teacher in her early 30s and in her fifth year of teaching. She completed a degree in sociology and psychology. Both her parents worked in education. This is her second primary teaching post and she works in Year 2 in a large three-form entry primary school which has been in Special Measures and now graded ‘Requires Improvement’. She is the subject leader for design and technology. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Shirley</b> is a teacher in her 40s and in her sixth year of teaching. She completed a drama degree and trained to teach after working in theatre and acting as well as community project/roles. Several family members were teachers. Shirley is a parent. After supply teaching as an NQT, this is her first primary teaching post and she now works part-time as a cover teacher in a large urban primary school which has been in Special Measures and now graded ‘Requires Improvement’. By the second interview she had resigned to take up a post in a new school. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>

Table 6 (continued....)

<p><b>Professional Life Phase 3 ‘Experienced practitioner’ (i.e 8-15 years in teaching) (Day et al, 2006a)</b></p>	<p><b>Jimmy</b> is a teacher in his 40s and in his eighth year of teaching. Previously he has worked in a number of jobs including charity and restaurant work before training to teach. After supply teaching as an NQT, this is his first primary teaching post and he works in Year 5 in a large, religious, 2 form entry primary school. The school is currently graded ‘Outstanding’. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed but negative views are dominant.</p>
	<p><b>Simon</b> is a teacher in his 30s and in his fourteenth year of teaching. He completed a Geography degree and trained to teach soon after. Both his parents worked in education and his father is a primary school head teacher. Simon is a parent. This is his third primary teaching post. He has worked in two large urban primary schools and by the second interview had been appointed as head teacher in his third school, graded ‘Requires Improvement’. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is positive.</p>
	<p><b>Rae</b> is a teacher in her 30s and in her fourteenth year of teaching. She completed a BA Education / QTS degree immediately after leaving school and went directly into teaching. Her mother worked as a teaching assistant. Rae is a parent. This is her second primary teaching post and she now works part time in a small primary school graded ‘Requires Improvement’. She has recently assumed the role of SENCO after working in a variety of roles and responsibilities (for example, class teacher, PPA cover). The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed but negative views are dominant.</p>
	<p><b>Tony</b> is a teacher in his 30s and in his eleventh year of teaching. He completed a degree in American Studies before training to teach. He is a parent. His mother is also a teacher. This is his second primary teaching post and he works in Year 2 in a small primary school graded ‘Good’. He is the KS1 phase leader and a member of the senior leadership team. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Alan</b> is a teacher in his 30s and in his tenth year of teaching. He trained to teach after many years TEFL teaching abroad. He is a parent. This is his second primary teaching post. He works as a non-teaching deputy head in a large rural primary school graded ‘Good’. He is a member of the senior leadership team and is aspiring to headship. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed but negative views are dominant.</p>
	<p><b>Glenys</b> is a teacher in her 40s and in her ninth year of teaching. She completed a degree in Classics. She trained to teach after a career in social work, and after working in schools overseas and in her children’s school. She is a parent and both her parents were teachers. This is her second primary teaching post and she now works as part time cover teacher in a school which has been in Special Measures and recently graded ‘Good’. By the 2nd interview she had resigned, with plans to pursue consultancy. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is negative.</p>
	<p><b>Rose</b> is a teacher in her 40s and in her tenth year of teaching. She completed a degree in Autism and trained to teach after working in a range of contexts, including homelessness. This is her third primary teaching post and she works in Year 2 in a small two form infant school graded ‘Outstanding’. She is also the key stage 1 leader and recently a member of the senior leadership team. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed but negative views are dominant.</p>
	<p><b>Bryan</b> is a teacher in his 30s and in his tenth year of teaching. He completed a degree in Sociology and worked with young adults with disabilities before training to teach. This is his second primary teaching post and he works in Year 1 and is the key stage one phase leader and a member of the senior leadership team. The general tenor of the account of teaching and being a teacher is mixed but positive views are dominant.</p>

In the next three sub-sections, the findings are organised to afford deliberation of the professional motivations of teachers in three professional life phases with the intent to understand meanings and perceptions of being a teacher.

### 4.3 'Novice' teachers (0 - 3 years)

The study included seven novice teachers in the first three years of their careers, and common to all is the perception of the role to 'make a difference'. The move into teaching can sometimes be inspired by an ambition for work to constitute something (more) meaningful. For example, Nina is explicit about the pressure of (reduced) time to realise her professional aspirations. Her capacity to make a difference, specifically for pupils with additional learning needs, acts to underpin her professional rationale. Nina came to teaching in her forties and was keen to make a difference:

*"Because I've only got a short space of time, if I've got to make a difference then I've got to do it now. It's interesting to think about the legacy. I want to make a difference now"* (Nina, Phase 1).

The sense of urgency may be compounded by the time already spent in earlier professional roles and conceptualising the (potential) legacy is made in relation to her growing acceptance of and commitment to a career as a teacher and more than just a job. Like Nina, the impetus for Ben is the inherent reward of doing something worthwhile and his potential impact on children:

*"The most rewarding thing is seeing children (or) the buzz of children learning. I still can't get away from that (and) there's nothing more rewarding in this job than leading this [class] room"* (Ben, Phase 1).

In the midst of the career induction, these new teachers couch the motivation to make a difference in relation to the barriers and challenges of 'school life'. The accounts do not appear idealistic or naïve, and pragmatism about 'the pressures' and subsequent stoicism about a teacher's life seem to co-exist. There is an appreciation that the work is important, but there is recognition of the struggle to achieve professional and personal goals:

*"What I do matters, and it makes a difference and I 'battle' and I fight for those children and see the difference"* (Lynn, Phase 1).

*“If you’re a teacher you are here to teach. Regardless of pressures you still have that opportunity to make that difference. You still have a choice and that opportunity”* (Ben, Phase 1).

Advocating for pupils and addressing their needs is central for both these teachers. Lynn may be ‘battling’ to make an impact or difference to children’s lives and whilst she isn’t “*changing the world [she] make[s] a difference to them*”. Likewise, Ben negates the influence of other school pressures as influential on his professional aims. Common to both new teachers is the sense of ‘conflict’ in their accounts but also of pragmatism as to how their aspirations are accomplished.

The rewards of teaching children are compelling even when the shocks of the first few years of teaching raise questions about the long-term potential of the career. Barry describes his professional induction in particularly negative terms, and is contemplating alternative employment, although the motivation to teach is still evident:

*“It’s why I got in [to teaching]. It’s why I’ve stuck around. It is for those lightbulb moments. The time where it just works and [the pupils] just get it and they’re happy and you’re happy. I like what I do. I’ve never been bored. I hate being bored at work. I’ve never had a boring day as a teacher”* (Barry, Phase 1).

His influence and impact on the pupils and their subsequent ‘lightbulb moments’ continue to maintain his commitment. Once again, the reward of the pupils and life in the classroom, as distinct and separate from school life more broadly, recurs in the findings.

Consistently maintaining the commitment to the learners and to ‘learning’ more broadly is revealed as problematic in some accounts. The struggle to reconcile the pressures and demands of policy with values about what constitutes ‘good teaching’ is apparent. Barry is not alone in raising the possibility of leaving the profession; Sara also appears to be in the process of both navigating and evaluating the professional landscape:

*“Maybe I should leave and should do something different, but I know at the same time it does make me happy because I love working with children and helping them make progress. I think it’s a gift I really do. But I just hate all the other stuff” (Sara, Phase 1).*

Findings indicate that ‘making a difference’ to pupils may be construed as academic or pastoral. Sara describes her work in terms of vocation and doing something worthwhile provokes feelings of pride. This emotion features heavily in several other commentaries (and across all professional life phases) and is further addressed in the conclusion to this chapter.

In the first three years of teaching, the rationale to teach can sometimes be couched in romantic and idealistic terms. The potential to ‘make a difference’ is compelling but what is marked is the tension evident in new teachers’ lives where the privileging of child-centred practice is perceived as threatened by ‘school life’. Most of these early-career teachers drew upon the powerful discourse of ‘making a difference’ and it might go some way to sustain and motivate them. In the following section, the perceptions of more experienced teachers reveal similar perspectives and motives for teaching.

#### **4.4 Early career teachers (4 - 7 years)**

In my study, there are five teachers in the second phase of their careers and their accounts reinforce the reward of teaching, the importance of pupils and of keeping them central to the vision of the teacher. The motivation of ‘making a difference’ is again evident and typically illustrated in accounts about children in their care:

*“It is making a difference to people. It’s not about even imparting knowledge. They make me laugh. Children make me laugh. Education is important. I really respected my teachers at school, and really liked them [and] for me, it is making a difference to people” (Carl, Phase 2).*

The multi-faceted responsibility of the teacher necessitates both academic and pastoral skills, and notions of ‘making a difference’ may encompass supporting pupils’ knowledge and progress, as well as their

emotional development. Like Carl, Harriet notes the responsibility to 'impart' knowledge, but her remit is described more broadly:

*"I think it's quite an honoured position to be imparting nuggets of information, information in the broadest sense, to little minds that are there to absorb it and are full of wonder at the world still. They're on that process of discovery and you're a part of it. For me particularly, it's about them feeling valued and loved as well"*  
(Harriet, Phase 2).

Other teachers reveal unease about the threats to what was seen as 'the main purpose of teaching'. 'Making a difference' to pupils was countered by the idea that 'school life' posed the real challenge for teachers.

*"The focus doesn't feel like it's the children. They are what give you the most pleasure out of the job at the end of the day. I do have moments when I think, 'I can enjoy it' (Beth, Phase 2).*

For Beth, the juxtaposition of the rewards of the children with the (external) pressures of school is implied. This is evident in other teachers' accounts, for example, in Harriet and Shirley's later comments. Balancing the motivation to honour the prime responsibility to the pupils alongside the perceived expectations of the school can cause unease:

*"I've had moments this year when I've said, 'I do like this job'. I'm feeling good about this today! It's when you know you're doing your job well. You close your door and it's not about whether you've planned it's about when you are really engaging and responding to the children and they're learning in that moment"*  
(Harriet, Phase 2).

The threats to the teacher's purpose to 'make a difference' may also jeopardise the rewards of teaching. A commonly cited footnote in teachers' accounts is that 'the children aren't the problem'. The challenges of teaching and being a teacher are couched in other procedural terms which sometimes act to destabilise the aspiration to make an impact:

*“The children aren’t the problem. I love teaching them. It’s great. The problem is at the end of the day when they’ve gone home. That’s the problem. The bureaucracy - it’s the outside of teaching. And then the pressures. No matter how much I do, no matter what I think, it’s endless” (Shirley, Phase 2).*

Teaching children, and being positioned to make a difference to them, is considered in relation to other processes that work to undermine this underpinning principle of ‘children first’.

Overall, the ‘in-class’ experience of teachers is generally cited as positive. The influence to ‘make a difference’ is portrayed as a central feature of the teacher’s experience. However, morale appears in jeopardy, and the tension between honouring the commitment to pupils and the increasing demands of teaching is more apparent. In the following section, the perceptions of more experienced teachers reveal similar perspectives for the rationale to continue teaching as well as some variation from other the professional life phases.

#### **4.5 Experienced teachers (8 - 15 years)**

In my study there were eight experienced or ‘mid-career’ teachers. The phase is sometimes described as a ‘watershed’ period and one prone to changes in professional and/or personal lives (Day et al, 2006). Notably for this group, there are a higher number of male teachers, a larger number in management roles, and a greater proportion of parents. These biographical factors may have some bearing on teachers’ views.

For teachers in this phase, the ‘type’ of school (for example, the catchment and ethos) appears influential to the individual’s capacity to ‘make a difference’. In particular, the influence of the school’s ethos and the ways this is manifest in the leadership and management of the school may shape teachers’ perspectives on their potential in this regard. Like the previous groups, the ‘in-class’ experience is expressed positively but the capacity to make an impact emerges at odds with other requirements of being a teacher.

Compared to participants in phases one and two, these teachers' philosophical convictions about the work are more apparent. The mantra of 'making a difference' appears to be understood in broader societal terms and beyond the immediate impact on individual pupils:

*"I have strong ideas about how I believe people should have opportunities to live and 'be'. I have a holistic view and help to create happy pupils that are ready for the world; not just about learning but have a positive world view and be globally aware and eco-friendly and you know all those things that are important that prepare them to be well-rounded citizens"* (Rose, Phase 3).

Rose's professional aspirations seem to closely interact with her personal values, which coincide with her school's ethos. The school's perceived capacity to promote a pedagogically sound experience for the pupils, and the congruence with the individual's philosophy is made explicit in several teachers' commentaries. An example of a variation from those in phases one and two, and specific to this career-stage, is that the 'type' of school is linked to the reward of the job, and clearly motivates particular teachers:

*"...it was more about being with the children that I felt I wanted to teach; the more difficult children, the more challenging children. It goes back to my social conscience thing. I just felt 'Oh yeah, this is the school for me' despite the fact it was utter hell actually at times. With Ofsted constantly there [it was] constant scrutiny, constant stress. I still felt it was right for me"* (Glenys, Phase 3).

Signalling her career-change as indicative of her "*political conscience*", this experienced teacher (and parent) makes explicit her earlier career decision to deliberately move schools despite the possible consequences of such a demanding context.

For both Rose and Glenys, the challenges of 'school life' are compensated by the local school culture. The congruence between individual philosophy and school policy (and leadership) validates and appeases the teachers in the face of national policy requirements. Despite the contrast of their schools (one

assessed as 'Outstanding' and the other as in Special Measures'), their perceptions of professional freedom and agency are equally positive in the accounts of school-life.

In the same vein, working in schools in an area of social and economic deprivation inspires a particular kind of commitment to social justice for these two mid-career teachers. Simon, a new parent and the most experienced teacher in the sample, comes from a family of teachers and made the decision to teach whilst studying for his degree. He repeatedly refers to his role to 'make a difference' and as a newly established head teacher, his appointment to lead a primary school in a disadvantaged area may have prompted a renewed commitment to his vision of himself as an educator:

*"I'm long enough in the tooth to understand that agendas change and there's always political interference but actually the context in which I find myself again in terms of the children and the school and the community has really reminded me [that] it's these types of children where the quality of education absolutely matters. And I know why I'm doing it and I know we will make an actual difference to life chances of some of those children"* (Simon, Phase 3).

The area and the type of school both serve to inspire and galvanise this experienced teacher. As a new head teacher, the experience of agency may be heightened, but the legacy of teaching in the family may also provide a professional inheritance that sustains and motivates him.

Tony's belief in his "*civic responsibility*" to do something worthwhile seems to play some role in his motivation to teach. The reward of a 'challenging school' appeals to Tony's values and conscience, although the attraction of a less demanding school prompts deliberation about moving:

*"There is that guilt of applying for a 'really nice school', [but] they get left alone [from Ofsted]. I was walking round the [prospective] school and I was thinking 'this would be so easy'. It'd be quite nice to take it easy for a bit. At the same time, I can't say I think it'd be*

*as rewarding as these kids. There's a certain reward within that. There's something in that [but] at the same time it's knackerin'"*  
(Tony, Phase 3).

The impetus to make a difference with children who are particularly disadvantaged may be off-set by the toll it takes. Inherent is the expression of conflicting emotion and apparent resignation of his current position. This is evident in his description of the “*real love-hate relationship with teaching*”; a phrase found frequently in the data overall.

In a few cases, a change to participants' professional role and the move into senior management marks a particular transition. How they 'make a difference' is being re-negotiated and the professional repositioning can provoke a dip in confidence and morale. Security and confidence in the school's circumstances, especially when these are conducive to the promotion of the individual's values, may act to alleviate other pressures. For Rose and Simon, the resentment about policy direction and the influence on their pedagogical aspirations is tangible:

*“‘Hate’ is maybe a strong word, anger maybe. I’m to blame for allowing things to take over. We are our own worst enemies. If I cared less, I wouldn’t love it as much. This is where the Government gets away with it; it’s a vocation for many. We believe in it. It gives me purpose in life. We really make a difference. It really does matter”* (Rose, Phase 3).

*“I love being a teacher. I love it. It’s the little things that matter most. I love that interaction with children and other adults. It’s more frustrations with the systems, being pulled a bit between what you know is right and all the other things”* (Simon, Phase 3).

Teachers who are also parents may further lament the shift in school culture, the narrowed curriculum and the impact on children's lives. Empathising as parents, they are well-placed to review the changes experienced as teachers and as encountered by pupils:

*“In year one, it goes ‘philosophy, grammar, phonics, something else, maths workshop, reading workshop’. That’s before play. It’s like bam-bam-bam. So, teachers are exhausted before play. Children are exhausted before play. It’s all about the learning; you’re not allowed one second of not learning time. You can’t have a moment to breathe” (Rae, Phase 3).*

*“[The kids] are constantly being pushed and there’s no room for elements of creativity. It’s got to be ‘what are you learning at this exact point in time’ which is really hard to maintain and it’s not realistic. I don’t think it’s conducive to good learning but that’s what we’re told” (Tony, Phase 3).*

As a consequence of such constraint, one teacher describes her changing feelings about primary teaching:

*“I’ve just fallen out of love with normal, bog-standard teaching ... the whole idea of being a teacher has changed. It’s more formulaic and more prescriptive” (Glenys, Phase 3).*

Despite reservations about the capacity to ‘act for the social good’, most of these experienced teachers continue to project a career path in education. Some of the negative emotion about the current professional climate and ‘stage-specific’ disenchantment is expressed through a stoic pride about being a teacher as well as romanticism for the ‘old days’. These teachers have noticed the way the changes in education have influenced their thinking about the role:

*“Some of the magic is being hammered out by relentless pressure on very small measurable things”. (Alan, Phase 3).*

*“You could really work with the children in a very free and creative way and I just absolutely loved it” (Glenys, Phase 3).*

*“I want to make a change to those children’s lives but I don’t want to lose my life as a result” (Jimmy, Phase 3).*

Teachers often refer to the all-consuming nature of the role, and Jimmy is explicit and pragmatic about his aspiration to make a difference although this is couched in relation to his self-preservation. This is one of the asides to the broader issue of workload made explicit in selected accounts of teaching life.

Noticeable for this career-stage, the theme of 'making a difference' encompasses a broader philosophical position to engage in work in specific schools for the wider 'social good'. The dialogue about 'making a difference' and the numerous interpretations of such a mandate, are evident in the ways teachers describe decisions regarding the choice and 'type' of school and where they work (and why). Comparable to teachers in the other career phases, idealism about the work is counterbalanced by the evident tensions and conflict inherent in maintaining this outlook.

#### **4.6 Summary and conclusion**

Central to understanding what it means to be a teacher at this time is an appreciation of the rationale and motivations for the work. The ambition to 'make a difference' is construed as one of the main motivations for primary teaching. The discourse of 'making a difference' is emphasised in policy and practice, but functions differently for individual teachers. Biography, school context and personal and professional values all contribute to the meanings teachers assign to their work. Congruent with the literature, my findings confirm the motivation and buoyancy of altruism in teachers' perceptions. The way this sustains and motivates teachers' work might be viewed as ambiguous due to the constraints and pressures currently experienced in school.

In this chapter, I have established some of the differences and commonalities between teachers in different professional life phases, and to understand what it means to 'make a difference'. For those in phases one and two, this is predominantly portrayed in relation to pupils and their learning and pastoral needs. Notions of altruism, 'legacy', 'impact' 'worthiness' and determinism are apparent, and inherent to the accounts are concepts of pleasure, fun, pride and reward. More experienced teachers in the sample judge their work (with children) as socially worthwhile, and the individual's school context or the 'culture' of the school (notably the ethos, the pupil catchment and the

leadership) strongly influences the individual teacher and combines potently with the underpinning rationale to teach.

The ways in which the rationale to teach consistently sustains and supports the teachers is at variance with other feelings about teaching. Inherent to the findings is the notion of conflict; teachers value and relish particular aspects of the work and are frustrated and compromised by others. In the following chapters, findings reveal common experiences and perceptions about the teacher's daily life in the current policy climate.

## Chapter 5 – What it means to be a primary teacher: Playing the game

### 5.1 Introduction

The aspiration to ‘make a difference’ is consistent both in the literature and my findings and continues to pervade interpretations of professional motivation. Chapter 4 was organised into ‘professional life phases’ to enable insight into the participants more generally. The remaining chapters are intentionally organised to present the findings thematically.

In this chapter I explore findings which reveal teachers’ perceptions and experiences of school life and of ‘teaching’, particularly in relation to pupil assessment. As noted in the Literature (sections 2.6 and 2.7), two spheres of professional practice are particularly high-profile in this regard and have been subject to reform. As noted (2.4), the Government’s vision for primary education reform positions pupil attainment as the ‘single most important outcome’ for schooling (DFE, 2010b). Participants were not canvassed about ‘playing the game’ at school, but teachers appear to deploy this phrase to describe a variety of phenomena that link to the assessment and attainment of pupils.

For one head teacher, his experience of working in school is couched in relation to the Government’s expectations for primary school assessment and tests, and his work reflects an increasingly tactical dimension to honour the values and mission of the school:

*“I’m tired of hearing that children are ‘better educated’. They are not better educated, and it drives me mad. They’re better at getting through a narrow SATS test because you play that game and schools get better at it. But it’s not education. Luckily the good schools know that, and they play the game; they make sure the children get a fully rounded education” (Simon, Phase 3).*

He is quick to disaggregate the pupils’ education from pupils’ attainment in tests but recognises the strategies that help schools to appear successful in this regard. Implied here, ‘the good schools’ are those that strike the balance between meeting pupils’ needs and the policy requirements:

*“We battled hard not to [narrow the curriculum] but at the same time, you had to get [the results] or otherwise it’s a damnation. The whole thing. I’m tired at playing the data game to prove we must be good at what we do” (Simon, Phase 3).*

Simon’s account sums up some of the dilemmas for schools and the tensions between honouring a child-centred pedagogy, the local and national policy requirements and personal values. Here, the impression of the teacher ‘playing the game’ is of frustration and compliance. Further to the overview of curriculum and assessment (2.5; 2.6), it is clear that Simon’s tactics might be better understood as ‘gaming’ although this term is not used. Some teachers appear to use the phrase ‘playing the game’ to denote particular tactics for pupil assessment or what is increasingly defined as ‘gaming’. This is evident in findings in section 5.2 and 5.3 and further discussed in sections 8.4 and 8.5.

Analysis shows that the term, ‘playing the game’, is also apparent in teachers’ accounts of school politics as well as of the national landscape; over half the teachers in the sample use the term ‘playing the game’ explicitly or use the language of games, for example, ‘charade’, playing a ‘part’ and ‘hoop-jumping’, when talking about their work. On a very general level, the ‘game’ may necessitate a particular kind of professionalism. Playing ‘the game’ intimates the broader and political decision making necessary to satisfy the demands of the senior leaders who themselves must demonstrate accountability for the ‘success’ and ‘standards’ of the school.

In the next two sections I present the findings about ‘game-playing’ and the particular strategic enactment of assessment policy and consider the behaviours and attitudes that constitute teachers ‘playing the game’.

## **5.2 Pupil assessment: Playing the marking game**

As noted in the literature chapter, the policy expectations for accountability position the teacher to prioritise externally agreed outcomes, with ‘standards’ in ‘the basics’ as privileged and high-stakes (2.7). In this section, findings highlight teachers’ interactions with ostensibly (low stakes) formative assessment practices (2.6) and the tactics employed to appear compliant with school

policies on marking. The implications of school expectations and behaviours around marking and moderation are understood in relation to the 'charade' of such behaviours, and the role of school leadership to mediate this kind of behaviour is emphasised.

Assessment policies are perceived and experienced as unworkable and as subsequently provoking nonsensical practices, all of which negate the professionalism and values of the individual teacher. In the following extract, the interpretation of 'game-playing' may reiterate the role of the teacher to conform to practices that reflect the needs of the school and the inspection process, rather than the needs of the pupils:

*"What's going on in some schools is insane. [Teachers] have to show the children have responded to the feedback. [The children] can't read it. So, you have to read it to them. Then you have to write it with them. Why? Because Ofsted are in. It's ridiculous. Absolutely ridiculous. You've got a year 5 teacher who's admitting to the fact that she's writing on post it notes what she wants the kids to write underneath her feedback so that it's there and it's responded to. This is insane, but I understand why she's doing it"*  
(Harriet, Phase 2).

The variability of assessment practices and expectations in the sector emerges and reflects varying degrees of teacher confidence and school leadership. Harriet's description highlights the way that some schools are navigating the perceived demands of school inspection and what teachers do to fulfil them. She queries why teachers are "*colluding in this (game)*" but reveals her experience to be similarly compliant:

*"I think I've just shut down a bit. I feel a bit like a puppet at the moment. In some ways I find myself doing things that I fundamentally disagree with but it's almost like I'm part of that process and I don't have time to question it or reflect on it"*  
(Harriet, Phase 2).

The workload generated by fulfilling the expectations of the internal surveillance by school leaders, or by retrospectively catching up and completing the expectations, may add to an already unmanageable workload. Eleanor's account highlights the pressure to catch up on marking every weekend:

*"This weekend I had a wedding and I didn't do my books. I was taking books back to my family's house at weekends and my mum and dad were sticking in work. All three of us sitting there sticking them all in"* (Eleanor, Phase 1).

The necessary data and paper trails evidencing pupil progress over the school year need to be immediately accessible and convincing for an Ofsted inspection, and school leaders and teachers are in a constant state of alert (2.7). Knowing that her books may be scrutinised at any moment prompts Eleanor to take action ahead of this. Her experience has shown this can happen at any time:

*"The head would come round and sit at the back [of the class]. Then he'd say I need this book, this book and this book"* (Eleanor, Phase 1).

More importantly, this pressure influences her work with children whom she 'hot-houses' because *"those three lines [of children's work] aren't going to look good when [Ofsted] look at my books"*. In both Eleanor and Harriet's accounts, being 'Ofsted-ready' appears to situate certain practices, and teacher activity, as professionally compromising.

In the following extract, Jimmy expresses his experience of game-playing and of the 'charade' of submitting children's books to the head teacher for scrutiny. Conceptions of primary teacher professionalism must necessarily extend to include new behaviours and tactics:

*"[the head teacher said] 'Could you please submit a top, middle and bottom book for scrutiny'. So, I take that one, that one, that one and sit and mark those; lots of key questions, lots of deep and spiritual thoughtful prompts and then asked the three children to go away and 'respond to those questions'. And then we learn that*

*every teacher has done the same thing. It's a joke around the school. Even my team leader was doing the same thing and we had a chuckle about it"* (Jimmy, Phase 3).

For Jimmy, who describes himself as "*on the more rebellious side of things*", this kind of practice is an absurd, even comical façade, that includes both class teachers and senior staff, and may be better described as 'gaming'. The suggestion is the expectation to authentically engage with this level and type of marking and feedback practices is unrealistic and unnecessary, but the illusion is perpetuated through agreed manipulation. The acknowledgment of 'the (shared) chuckle' with a senior colleague is a critical indicator of the degree of acceptance apparently assigned to the practice.

The leadership teams are implied as having varying degrees of confidence, expertise and anxiety about external monitoring and inspection and this may explain the extent of internal monitoring. The stipulation about 'doing it for Ofsted' reveals the impetus for many of the teachers and may be contrary to, or conflict with, the individual's own pedagogy and philosophy. There is recognition that teachers have little choice but to comply, because failing to adhere to the school policy could have important consequences for the school and the teacher. For some this resulted in "*obsessive marking*" (Verity, Phase Two), and teachers are aware that colleagues in schools in a particular Ofsted category (like Special Measures) experience a culture of "*over-marking*" (Rose, Phase Three). This point is developed in the discussion chapter (8.5).

Contrary to the majority of data about teachers' negative experiences, some data show teachers as relatively unperturbed about marking and pupils' books. In some cases, their circumstances might act to shield them from the expectations and pressures. Two of the early years teachers made little comment about marking. Both Sara and Lynn made little comment and contrasted with teachers in key stages one and two. Lynn describes her work in a Reception class as much more flexible compared to colleagues in key stage one and cites marking as a big difference:

*“I feel the pressure on my friends in the school is extremely high ... I see the amount of marking and the level the book has to be at” (Lynn, Phase One).*

Working in a special school, Nina’s experience of marking and book scrutiny appears positive and she fulfils the expectations of the marking policy when her books are scrutinised. Like Eleanor (p.94), she appears to be satisfying the school’s requirements in her own time, although is less perplexed about this:

*“If that means giving some time in the evening then why not? What difference does it make to me? If I’m sitting watching TV or if I’m doing some marking? It doesn’t bother me” (Nina, Phase ne).*

Integral to the marking of pupils’ work is the notion of moderation. It is expected that teachers jointly scrutinise pupils’ work and class profiles, and this informal moderation is designed to enable professional dialogue between colleagues and to confirm a consistent and shared interpretation of pupil progress. Inaccuracies or issues with the moderation can trigger a closer level of scrutiny from the head teacher or Local Authority. This extract highlights teachers’ engagement with the quality assurance and moderation processes required for pupil assessment and marking:

*“[My colleague’s] levels are the same as mine, but her children aren’t. So, either mine are too harsh, but then I don’t think hers are accurate. The problem with moderation is the way it’s done. You bring two books [and that’s it]. It’d be a genuinely brave person that brought a child [‘s book] you weren’t sure about. You still have to give an opinion [and] if you say it and you’re way out then it brings in concerns about the rest of the class. It is playing a game” (Wilma, Phase 1).*

Wilma’s account of engaging with the moderation process reveals a perceived lack of quality assurance as well as the apparent levels of acceptability appropriate to playing the ‘game’. The moderation process is described as flawed although the teachers engage with it nonetheless. Wilma alludes to a suspicion about her colleague’s books and certain manifestations of ‘playing the

game' acts to position teachers in competition with each other, and as self-interested, as well as mistrusting. This is a theme further developed in section 6.4.

In another example, Barry finds himself inadvertently drawing the head teacher's attention to colleagues' previous assessments of his current pupils. How this 'looks' to his fellow teachers shapes their relationships, as well as Barry's status in the school:

*"The two teachers who put the [writing] levels up are getting wind of this. It just looks like we're going behind their backs. So we spoke to them directly and said 'the Head's seen these levels, they don't quite marry [so] we just wanted to let you know'. One teacher hasn't made eye contact with me since"* (Barry, Phase 1)

Teachers' experiences of marking, as well as the monitoring and moderation of marking, suggest a complex experience and compliance with 'the game', with implications for teacher professionalism.

The next section extends the theme of game-playing (gaming) in assessment and focuses on findings about teachers' experiences and perceptions of numerical data. Some findings imply the 'pupil progress meeting' as a critical tactical setting for scrutinising pupil outcomes.

### **5.3 Pupil assessment: Playing the numbers game**

I have presented findings about teachers' experiences of marking pupils' work, and this, along with the associated book 'scrutiny' and assessment moderation activities, are described in broadly negative terms. In this section, I focus on findings which position a particular type of school meeting, the 'pupil progress meeting' as central to 'game-playing'. My finding is that this is a key setting for tactical scrutiny (and adjustment) of pupil outcomes. Ostensibly this meeting with senior leaders is an opportunity for teachers to review the individual pupil's progress against curriculum expectations and local targets and identify support and interventions. In section 5.4, I present further findings about game-playing and the 'pupil progress meeting' and more specifically in relation to teacher dissent.

Unprompted in the interviews, teachers unexpectedly talk about the ‘pupil progress meeting’ and portray it as a site for a particular type of game-playing. My findings point to the meeting as a pressured and stressful event, notably of senior leaders and head teachers querying and altering teachers’ judgments. The perceived pressure on teachers to account for and defend strategies for pupil progress is also evident.

In the context of numerical data and pupil progress, the meanings assigned to ‘playing the game’ may entail a far greater and explicitly tactical process, and the consequences for teacher identity and efficacy may be considerable. The following extract makes clear the experience of playing the game in this context:

*“The data, the levelling, it’s a game you play. I think it’s a game that the head and the deputy head play, but they don’t ever say that to you. But [they say] ‘we want everyone to go away and just have a look at those children that you say have made 2 points of progress. Is it actually the case that some of them have made 3 [points of progress], but you can’t commit to 4 [points of progress]?’” I do feel the pressure. I have a class now who are the most academically challenged class I’ve ever taken on. Sometimes I think, ‘how am I supposed to get them to the levels that are supposed to be at’. I feel that sometimes and then I think, ‘if it doesn’t happen, it doesn’t happen’. I will do what I need to do. So, I don’t shirk my responsibilities. I’m constantly battling that in my own mind” (Jimmy, Phase 3).*

There are several connected ideas here that usefully preface subsequent findings. The engagement with pupil data is a ‘game’ rendering alterations and modifications as strategic. The necessity of ‘playing’ is not formally acknowledged by staff but intimated in the context of private meetings between teacher and head teacher. The teacher is positioned as an obligated mediator between the children and the data, whilst simultaneously managing the ethical dilemmas of the compromise and the pedagogic challenges of honouring ‘aspirational targets’ for pupils.

Jimmy seems to acknowledge the internal dilemmas about these practices and the subsequent 'battle'. In his context, the 'battle' is about manipulating the levels of pupil progress, of negotiating such things with his senior colleagues and those who hold the power in a school, and in relation to his role as teacher and his aspirations for his pupils and himself. Senior leaders' participation and behaviours are conceivably meaningful for the longer-term implications of their relationship.

Barry portrays his head teacher in similar terms. In the 'pupil progress meeting', the dynamic of power invariably resides with the senior leaders or head teacher. Novice teachers may be more vulnerable in these discussions and expected to respond to subtle but clear instructions about pupil data. In this extract, the head teacher is portrayed as cajoling a new teacher:

“[She said], ‘Oh, are you sure that ‘2B’ writer’s not ‘2A’? You’re sure you can’t squeeze a level 3 out of them?’ You go into the pupil progress meetings; you’re told that a child that was given a 2A needs to be a 4A [in their SATS]. On what planet?” (Barry, Phase 1).

Images of a head teacher's careful and rigorous scrutiny are created in the account. I must note the tone of Barry's commentary, as he appears at pains to caricature his manager as innocently coaxing. He describes the head teacher as *'being on it'* suggesting the tact of micro-managing teachers' assessment practices, as well as questioning or over-ruling them. He portrays this encounter as being subtly manipulated; his position, especially as a new teacher, to reject such direction is untenable. Barry's verdict is that in his first two years in teaching, *"the number game" [is] the one thing that dragged me down"*.

Several of the teachers' accounts highlight the intricacies of data manipulation. Together, the teacher and head teacher explore the different ways that the statistics can be aggregated and manipulated by including or excluding particular pupil groups (pupil groups A, B and C). This next teacher knows how to 'play the game' - he considers the most successful combinations until the overall class profile is suggestive of pupils' good progress and attainment:

*“[The Head’s] exact words: ‘Do whatever you need to do to make your data look good’. So, I sat down and wrote down data with [pupil group] A taken out, with [pupil groups] A and B taken out, or [pupil group] C taken out. I sat down in the meeting [with her] and she said ‘well, by my data, 60% of your class made 3 points of progress’. I said, ‘oh in my data ...where I’ve taken out x/y’ it’s [higher than this] and she says, ‘oh that’s fine then, good’. What a load of bollocks” (Jimmy, Phase 3).*

His apparent derision for the head teacher’s instruction may be compounded by disdain about the collusion here. Whatever the implications for senior leaders and their accountability, the perceived lack of honesty potentially may undermine the credibility and integrity of the head teacher.

As a deputy head teacher, Alan’s account reflects the conflict between ‘playing a game’ and honouring another professional responsibility to promote and monitor high standards in the school. Describing some of the most vulnerable children in the school as ‘*screwing everything up*’ may compromise his philosophy on inclusion, but he implies there is no choice than to work strategically to manage these situations and pupils:

*“We have this hugely damaged ‘looked after’ kid dropped on us and he’s screwing everything up. In my heart of hearts, I want to ‘fix him’ but the other side of my brain says, ‘I need to move him on because he’s completely destroying classrooms and reputations and statistics’. I hate that way of thinking” (Alan, Phase 3).*

Given that the school’s effectiveness is judged on such statistics, the management of this pupil is vital for the overall ‘success’ of the school in an external appraisal. He talks about pupils with special needs as impacting on the school’s statistics and ‘*taking off my end of key stage levels*’ and reducing the percentage of acceptable levels of attainment. Particular pupils with special needs are viewed strategically: “*we need to find a special school for them before they hit the end of the key stage*” (Alan, Phase 3). The tactic of ‘off-rolling’ was noted previously in section 2.7. The influence of the imminent

Ofsted inspection results in a conflict between his heart and his head, and the ethical dilemma is evident.

There is some variation in the findings and of a head teacher's sensitive review of pupils' achievements. Here, the 'pupil progress meeting' is described very differently by one teacher and with no reference to data. In this extract, the meeting is cited as an example of good school support and child-centred philosophy:

*"I think that what works really well in our school is that we have got these pupil progress meetings. I was given a whole morning to sit with my Head and deputy head and SENCO and we discussed all the starting points of the children and all the needs they have and we have plans in place for every single child and that's always really satisfying"* (Rose, Phase 3).

For a small group of teachers, the experience of negotiating pupil progress does not appear expressed in relation to gaming. Two teachers (Nina, Phase 1 and Lynn, Phase 1) describe the experience of pupil assessment as less pressured or compromised, and offer a perception of being shielded from data by head teachers:

*"The head teacher always said, 'don't ever think that if they don't get [the predicted level], it's personal to you. If they don't get what they're targeted to get, don't take it personally. As long as we can see you're doing your best for them. Let us worry about the rest of it.'* (Nina, Phase 1).

For Nina, the context of working in a Special School and with pupils with specific learning difficulties, may influence the climate surrounding assessment and data, and the principle of individual teacher accountability is less tangible in this account.

## 5.4 Teacher resistance to gaming

In this section I present further findings about the ‘pupil progress meeting’ which explicitly signal teachers’ attitudes to ‘gaming’, and an implied disapproval and frustration about this aspect of primary teaching.

Using the phrase ‘playing the game’ when referring to pupil assessment, data and moderation, may provide an insight into teachers’ dissatisfaction and act as a means of dissent. The disparagement in Tony’s account reveals a frustration and contempt about his role to ‘hoop-jump’ and he alludes to the current requirements of the job:

*“It’s the emphasis on data and excessive workload, jumping through hoops that actually don’t benefit your children in any way. I think some people have had enough of that. It’s not the school, it’s the job” (Tony, Phase 3).*

Similarly, several teachers explicitly refer to their discomfort and disapproval of ‘the numbers game’ and of the interactions specific to the ‘pupil progress meeting’. In this extract, signalling opposition to the intimated ‘falsifying of results’ is made in the context of increasing pressure from the head teacher:

*“We didn’t want to start falsifying results. We couldn’t always drive up standards in the way [the head teacher] wanted us to. We were all told ‘it’s about being aspirational. Six points of progress we want for all children’. So we all questioned it [and we said] ‘we’ve got some children being predicted 9 to 10 points of progress in a year. I mean this is crazy. It’s ridiculous’. But when it came to it [the head said] ‘you need to think about your position in the school’ when we weren’t making significant progress towards those results. We fought that off; got the union in. It broke the trust there. How do you come back from this?” (Shirley, Phase 2).*

Implicit in the account is the management’s direction to inflate levels and that this is expected. The teacher’s agency to resist such measures through querying and questioning results in union action to defend her position in the school.

Similarly, Ben refuses to 'inflate levels' and this account shows an evolving agency to '*take a stand*', a phrase synonymous with determination and resistance. Along with his year group colleague, their joint action has potentially serious implications for appraisal and subsequent salary:

*"We made a stand (and) we both agreed that we are not prepared to inflate levels. As it turned out, my class made what was still 'good' progress. His didn't so he got 'dragged through the coals' because of that and had to fight to get his incremental pay increase"* (Ben, Phase 1).

His reference to pay is an important factor here, and in section 5.5, I present findings which further highlight the relationship between pupil assessment data and performance-related pay. The implication for teacher agency is further explored in section 8.5.

In contrast to the direction to adjust data upwards, one finding further illustrates the challenge of mediating data to 'dumb down' pupils' attainment and progress. In this school there are great strides to enable pupil progress, but subsequent and unexpected good data may expose them to further inspection and thus warrants a strategy to ameliorate the situation:

*"We had just over 40% of our kids get a level 3 and we usually get around 20%. Amazing. So, we're like 'right, hang on, we have to look at what National and County were last year. And they were both 29-30%. And we actually said, 'hang on we can't put 40% because if we do, Ofsted will go 'well, how did you get that' and it's ridiculous to think that you could trigger an inspection from having too good a result, but it could happen. I do feel bad that some of those kids who are level 3 readers are going as a 2a. They've earned it, yet we can't put them there"* (Tony, Phase 3).

The decision to 'game' the teacher assessments of pupils' reading tests appears borne out of an anxiety of further Ofsted scrutiny: keen to avoid an early inspection, and queries about accelerated pupil progress, the data are adjusted.

Some findings reflect teachers' responses as resistant to the data game and others emerge as acquiescent (8.5). Situating pupils predominantly in relation to curriculum attainment sometimes prompts anger and frustration and being held to account purely in relation to academic progress raises bigger questions about the role and nature of teaching. One teacher describes her role as *"reducing all [my] lovely children down to numbers on a piece of paper. That's what they have become at the end of the day"* (Beth, Phase 2).

In this extract, when confronted with a Head teacher appearing to privilege pupil outcomes over well-being, the teacher presents herself as galvanised and prepared to 'take a stand':

*"You go to a data meeting and pupil progress meetings [and you are asked by the Head] 'What are you doing about X?' [I replied], 'do you know what? I'm just looking after him'. [The Head teacher said] 'You need to get him to a 2A and [I thought] 'well, you can fire me if you want to'. Data was a massive issue"* (Verity, Phase 2).

Like other accounts, the teacher's language reveals elements of the conflict evoked by this discussion with the head teacher. The teacher is at pains to resist the required role to compromise ethics or pedagogy in favour of narrow assessment of the class. The status of high-stakes data may necessitate a shift in teachers' thinking and interactions with children, and the consequences could be considerable as they alter both teacher philosophy and pedagogy.

My findings are suggestive of varying degrees of resistance and compliance to gaming. Common in all accounts was my implied understanding that these behaviours are expected and enacted. The process of adjusting or misrepresenting data was described by one teacher as *'jiggery-pokery'*, a term sometimes used to imply dishonest or deceitful activity. The use of the term 'cheating' was only used by one teacher: *"There's all sorts of stuff that goes on with the SATs anyway. Cheating effectively"* (Jimmy, Phase 3). Teachers' behaviours insinuated my understanding of this dimension of pupil data analysis and that it isn't always conducted truthfully and accurately.

Government policy that mandates for a close relationship between pupil progress data and teacher 'performance' and appraisal means there is an added dimension to the dynamic between teachers and the school's leadership team. In the next section, the findings centre on the 'numbers' game and implications for teacher performativity.

## **5.5 Gaming, performativity and pay**

In this final section, I build on previous findings and present those that connect teachers' experiences of pupil assessment and moderation to their own performance management. 'Playing the game' in the 'pupil progress meeting' is further understood through accounts of teachers' pay reviews, and the consequences are made explicit as teachers' performance is correlated with pupil progress and informs salary decisions. The relationship between the two may help to further explain teachers' perspectives about the assessment and moderation process.

Evident in several accounts, teachers recognise the shift in the discourse about pupil progress and the link to performance-related pay and the (negative) impact this has. The recurring link to pay, and the emphasis on pupil progress, could have altered the stakes for teachers:

*"It's all very different. I've noticed the change. I think (it's) the accountability and the pay. People are scared. The amount of work I put in. If I didn't get my pay rise ... We care enough about the kids to get them to progress. It's not about 'you've got to get 4 sub-levels'. It was scary enough in pupil progress meetings [when the head said], 'why have they not made progress and what are you doing about it?' I wanted to make sure the best was being done for them" (Carl, Phase 2).*

In this vein, the altruistic motives for teaching and doing 'the best' for the pupils is re-shaped by the monetary incentive and reward. It may be that the consequences for asserting a right to be financially recompensed for 'the amount of work', and pupil progress, shifts the meanings associated with being a 'good teacher'.

Teachers navigate the policy of linking pay with performance with reticence:

*“On the one hand there are benefits of it, but there’s a lot of fear. It’s causing a lot of fear and a lot of stress. A huge amount of fear and stress. I’ve got a huge challenge this year because I’m going to really struggle to meet my targets with the class that I’ve got”* (Harriet, Phase 2).

The implications of not meeting pupil data-linked targets are considered far-reaching. The ensuing fear may have ramifications for the teacher’s sense of efficacy, well-being and job security. Jimmy portrays the position as tense and stressful:

*“I see myself as being subversive in some areas of the job possibly, but not in that one. I just feel like I’m playing a part in something that’s fake. I feel all the fears that anybody else fears ... you know I don’t want to lose my job. So, if my performance as a teacher is based on data, then I want my data to make it look like I’m a half decent teacher”* (Jimmy, Phase 3).

Acting ‘cynically’ could be viewed as an act of self-preservation for this teacher. Despite his better judgment and his reservation, he seeks validation for his work regardless of the tactics employed.

My findings emphasise the perceived primacy of data, above all other criteria, in determining performance-related pay. In the following example, performance-related pay is assessed as failing and, in some sense, culpable for teachers’ reactions in the pupil progress meeting:

*“[Performance-related pay] fails because people lie. [If] you start judging people on the levels they make, of course they’re going to make it up. I’ve been told I’ve got to get 85% [of pupils] in ‘the pink zone’ so I will get 85% in the pink zone. I think some teachers see it like that and certainly when we got our classes handed up [from the previous year group] ... we were given this set of data that the school had and then we were told that ‘that child’s not really there*

*but he has to be there otherwise I don't get my pay rise'. That is entirely down to performance-related pay" (Wilma, Phase 1).*

Earlier findings (5.3) suggest that the moderation of end of year pupil progress data is characterised by 'creative accounting' and a process involving teachers and senior leaders. Fulfilling the conditions for a pay increase relies on strong pupil progress data making the engineering of such statistics alluring for both the school and the individual teacher.

The current model for performance-related pay is detailed in section 2.7. An array of evidence is necessary to fulfil the appraisal criteria for a pay increment and pupil progress data (in English and maths) is one part. One teacher's experience of challenging the methodology for performance-related pay is exemplified in an extended account. Ben's earlier account about pupil progress (5.4) and his resistance to such direction ('taking a stand') sets the scene for his complaint about the inflated status of pupil progress data in the process of performance management:

*"I met all of the criteria for [the Ofsted grade of] Outstanding except for [pupils'] APS [average point score] because I refused to bow to a culture of inflating levels that I think is prevalent and ingrained. So, I argued that if you meet six out of seven criteria no one can argue that. But neither my Head teacher or Governors or Local Authority agreed with me. If you want to earn your increase, you have to get the APS. Everything else is subordinate. Yes of course I would have liked the pay increase or for them to grade me to be outstanding because I met all the other criteria. But that didn't happen" (Ben, Phase 1).*

Despite the appearance of a limited appetite for dissidence in the context of appraisal, there are a few examples of subversion and resistance in the findings, albeit 'controlled'. Several findings appear to indicate the perception of the current climate as characterised by fear and cynicism, although Ben's account highlights the possibility of a more agentic engagement with the process. His identity and efficacy is maintained beyond the lens of results, and may be strengthened by his challenge to the establishment. This is two-fold;

refusing to 'bow to a culture of inflating levels' as well as arguing his case within and beyond the school may have powerful consequences for this new teacher and his developing professional identity.

Contrary to suggestions that the policy of performance-related pay incentivises and inspires recruitment, retention and increased morale, findings point to cynicism and fear and the focus on pupil progress as 'scary'. The fear might be construed in a variety of ways and as pressure to deliver results in a culture of over-arching accountability. This is reflective of a bigger ideological shift that situates teacher 'performance' and success in the classroom mainly in relation to pupil progress levels in two curriculum areas.

## **5.6 Summary and conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter indicate the multi-dimensional nature of (what the teachers call) 'game-playing' and the context that positions these behaviours. They also highlight teachers' interpretations of assessment policy and shed light on the place and current attitude towards data moderation as a strategic tool to serve teachers and schools, occasionally at the expense of the pupils.

My findings show a continuum of practice in the sample which varies between 'game-playing' and engaging with professional politics, and 'gaming' which entails a more tactical approach to (particularly) assessment practices. At times the gaming entails data manipulation, and the pupil progress meeting may be perceived as a particular site of 'creative accounting' where strategic negotiations are enacted between teachers and the head teacher. These activities may distract teachers from their core responsibility or add to an already burdensome workload. Data practices of this kind may be viewed as separate to the job whilst simultaneously contravening a professional and ethical code.

Fundamental to gaming is the relationship and interaction between senior leaders and the teacher, and the ramifications for relationships and trust. In Chapter 6, I explore findings that suggest the expansion of managerialism has unfavourable consequences for the work of primary school teachers.

## **Chapter 6 – What it means to be a primary teacher: The impact of managerialism**

### **6.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I present findings about teachers' experience of managerialism and of being 'managed and led'. I detail findings that further point to the rise and consequences of managerialism in primary schools and compare the experiences of class teachers with those in senior leadership. The impact of managerialism becomes apparent in the nomenclature used by certain teachers; there is relatively little reference to the head teacher or senior leadership team (SLT) compared to the references to 'the management'. All teachers in the sample refer to aspects of being managed or to the school's management style, as well as to what is perceived as the mis-management of complex staffing or personnel situations, and more broadly about learning and teaching.

As noted in Chapter 2 (2.8), the culture of managerialism signals a more significant shift in the discourse about school leadership, and specifically of Headship (Gewritz and Ball, 2000). The move away from being (what I term) 'pedagogue-in-chief', with the attendant interest in, and understanding of, learning, pupils and of teaching, to leading and managing a school potentially influences the ethos and dynamics of the primary school.

There are some variations in the findings which reflect teachers' positive, negative and mixed perceptions of school leadership. The analysis shows that over half the teachers spoke at length about their experience of being managed and, in some instances, of being managers (the research sample was representative of those in leadership and management roles and main-scale teachers).

The chapter is organised into five sub-sections. To contextualise teachers' accounts, the first section presents findings about being a manager and features teachers who are employed to lead in some capacity, commonly a senior leadership role. Their perspectives preface subsequent sections which reflect the themes of staff divisions, morale and motivation and accounts of poor and mis-management as well as the consequences of strong school leadership.

## 6.2 The conflicts for school leaders

For the five phase three teachers whose job it is to lead and manage, for example, as key stage and middle leaders (Bryan, Rose and Tony), as a deputy head (Alan) or as a head teacher (Simon), there are frustrations and anxieties about the 'system' and the experience of being managers. All of these teachers have experience of working in at least one other school, and alongside a range of head teachers, which makes them well positioned to compare and contrast experiences and perceptions. Of note is the preponderance of male teachers in this sample.

School leaders are tasked to manage internally and externally mandated policy requirements whilst maintaining the ethos of effective primary education. The degree to which the 'tone' of the school is set by the head teacher is important to consider. It might be argued that the multi-faceted role to fulfil teachers', parents' and children's satisfaction alongside the Local Authority's remit to improve standards, whilst endorsing broader educational policy and national expectations is unrealistic (2.8). Simon, a recently appointed head teacher highlights the challenges of such a task:

*"There are certain elements of being a head teacher where you are damned if you do and damned if you don't. With some of the conflicting messages, and the way you feel about the philosophy of the school, something has to give if you're going to carry through all the Government initiatives and you're going to keep a school relentlessly moving forward or relentlessly focused on Standards and Blah-Blah, Yawn-Yawn. But you've also got to keep apart why you get out of bed in the morning because it's not those things" (Simon Phase 3).*

Feeling 'torn', 'pulled' and 'caught in the middle' are phrases used by this head teacher. Simon has recently completed his NPQH (National Professional Qualification for Headship) and is modest about the challenges he is expected to manage. The current role and expectation of the head teacher is now fundamentally different and there is little ongoing training and support available for such a complex role. The school's governing body is expected to establish

and monitor the overall strategy for the school whilst holding the head teacher accountable for the daily administration of such a strategy. This accountability may encompass the monitoring of over fifty statutory policies pertinent for primary schools.

Insecurity about leadership and professional roles and responsibilities might be traced to the lack of professional development and mentoring for head teachers and deputy head teachers. In this example, an ambitious and 'fast-tracked' deputy reflects on his short-comings:

*"We are experiencing a huge amount of things every day and we haven't got a clue about how to do them. The Government solution is [the appointment of] Governors [who] do it for free. One of them came in to talk about performance management. She asked me about the 'soft skills' and I said 'what? I've no idea what a soft skill is'. [She said] 'did they not pick this up on the performance management training you went on?' [I said] 'what performance management training? I'm making it up as I go along'. There's no training for any aspect of my job"* (Alan, Phase 3).

Insecurity about the necessary expertise may be more powerful depending on the various roles and responsibilities. Perceptions of proficiency and readiness for school management may link to the support provided by, for example, leadership qualifications, the Local Authority or school governors. In the following extract, a novice middle leader acknowledges the challenges of her new role and the way her interpersonal skills may necessitate refinement to ensure a more authoritative leadership style:

*"My KS1 leadership [has] been interesting. At this stage of my career, to go into SLT and develop my role further it's really exciting. It's given me confidence. I'm starting to get my head around working behind the scenes. I have to train myself slightly differently. You suddenly have to say things in different ways else you might be perceived in the wrong way. There are lots of areas that I'm not very confident with so I'm going on a leadership*

*course – how to motivate people. I need to. I like being part of a group but not sure about how to lead the group” (Rose, Phase 3).*

In an era of intense accountability and performativity, safeguarding professional relationships in the context of improving standards relies on credible and authentic leadership. Rose may be incentivised by the ‘improvement’ agenda and keen to make an impact on the standards of teaching. For both Rose and Alan, opportunities for professional and personal development are deemed central to success in a management role.

The ongoing and fast-paced changes to policy may have further created insecurity as to the perceived capacity necessary for such challenges, many of which are relatively new to schools. For these professionals in the second decade of their teaching, both the type and pace of change may challenge conceptions of school leadership. Indeed, aspiring head teachers are increasingly inculcated into a role that continues to morph further away from the model and context of school leadership that may have inspired the motivation to lead.

As noted (2.8), a school’s leadership and management is judged in relation to the capacity for school improvement. This is in relation to pupil outcomes but can also be in relation to governance and finance. The responsibility of this role is significant, and regardless of experience or context, head teachers are held accountable. This new head teacher realises just how far his accountability extends and how he imagines this can be managed:

*“The scariest meeting was the [Local Authority] ‘categorisation meeting’ where I’d been told we’d be put in the highest tariff category. The message was it is a very vulnerable school; we need change very quickly. There are certain things I’m going to have to just let go because I need to be relentlessly focused” (Simon Phase 3).*

Simon’s experience of being ‘relentlessly focused’ intimates the pressure of accountability for staff at every level of responsibility. Senior leaders are envisaged as shielding colleagues whilst also holding them to account. This

kind of work is described as “*distinctly unsatisfying*” (Alan, Phase 3). For middle leaders, ‘having a foot in both camps’ means having to simultaneously navigate relationships with colleagues, as well as honouring management responsibilities, whilst (usually) also acting as a class teacher.

Having ‘hard conversations’, handling sensitive situations and monitoring staff may position middle leaders as the ‘villain’, but these leaders are at pains to reinforce their pastoral responsibility to teachers. In the following extract, there is recognition of the advantages and challenges of the position as well as the underpinning rationale for a management role:

*“I can see that I’m gaining a lot of experience, but the flip side is it’s quite tough. When [the colleague’s teaching] is not good, part of my role is to question that and to see what I can do to help. I’ll think why I’m doing that. It’s not to piss this person off. I don’t want to threaten this person’s job. I want to ensure that this class gets good teaching. I think that’s the only way you can do it and rationalise it to not kind of see yourself as this villain who’s coming in ruining someone’s career or job or whatever”* (Bryan, Phase 3).

Establishing a positive and collegiate climate could offset the broader (and) ideological pressures felt by teaching staff. The impact of professional trust and respect and status of communication between staff may go some way to enable a shared vision of, and commitment to the school’s aims and ethos. For this middle leader, the benefits of a caring leadership team are clearly recognised and deemed potent for staff morale:

*“We’ve got a management team who do actually care about the staff; they’re not tyrannical. You do hear about some Heads who are horrible – ‘it’s my way or the high way’- and it’s not what we have here”* (Tony, Phase 3).

In primary schools, there is an increasing trend for several tiers of leadership; the senior leadership team are held to account as well as provide the ‘face’ of policy enactment in the school. Findings point to school leaders that aspire to

engage positively with this responsibility, and to promote a strong ethos which values staff and favours collaborative and communicative relationships:

*“I learnt a hundred things that I will carry with me throughout my career. About how you look after people and how you approach people and how individuals make up a school and about being yourself, actually” (Simon, Phase 3).*

Nonetheless, findings also highlight the presence of tension and all-encompassing pressure for school leaders. For middle leaders, the tension between collegial working with staff and assuming a managerial role is sometimes evident. Emergent in this theme is the conflicted nature of senior and middle leadership and the isolation that both position and context can affect.

The next section focuses on teachers’ perceptions and experiences of the school’s management team, and there are some variations in the findings. The theme of ‘being managed’ recurs, and all teachers refer to the school’s management style as well as to what is perceived as mis-management of complex situations.

### **6.3 The school leader’s motivational influence**

The role of the head teacher and senior leaders to sustain (or limit) motivation and morale through acknowledgment, praise and trust recurs in the findings. The links to accountability are most noticeable here and subsequent points resonate with those findings detailed in Chapter 5. Findings show a link between less effective management approaches and the impact on morale. The absence of explicit appreciation and feedback are perceived characteristics of less effective management.

In this extract, a teacher reflects on her experience of resignation from the school (and profession) and the perceived lack of care from the head teacher:

*“Maybe if [the head] said ‘you are a valued person, we’d really love you to stay’ it might have made me question [my resignation] a little bit. [He said] ‘I can see you haven’t been yourself’. I felt like*

*saying, 'why didn't you come and say that to me when I was struggling. Why didn't you come, when you are right next door, and say 'are you ok?'" (Eleanor, Phase 1).*

In this example, long-term communication between this newly qualified teacher and her head teacher may have faltered, and at a demanding time when there were ongoing personal issues. Eleanor was one of two teachers in her school who had resigned, and not feeling noticed or valued may have exacerbated her other concerns about high levels of accountability and workload.

The following four examples illustrate participants' perceptions about the lack of acknowledgement and thanks, and emphasise the impact of negligible praise:

*"There are so many balls to keep up in the air. To be juggling 27 balls and then someone says 'you didn't point your little toe'. Nothing you do is ever good enough. You could have got something 95% bang-on but they want to unpick the 5%. It can be very disheartening. It's just permanent put downs. There are never any thanks but there is a list of things that can be done better"* (Carl, Phase 2).

*"I find this really hard at our school. I don't think there's a lot of praise in teaching for when things go well"* (Harriet, Phase 2).

*"There's always something that's never right. We were never praised that much. How much we worked, how much we put into it and then it was never ever good enough"* (Eleanor, Phase 1).

*"It's the fact they find it acceptable to lump more and more on you with no reward or no thanks. We went through Ofsted the first two weeks back. Did we get a thank you? No! Nothing! They can't even say thank you"* (Ryan, Phase 1).

The comments reflect a range of emotions and there is evidence of indignation, frustration and dejection. In Carl, Eleanor and Ryan's comments, the issue of workload is made explicit, alongside a lack of recognition or approval. Teachers'

perceptions of their work highlight repeated themes about the lack of positive feedback and praise, and a general sense of unhappiness. As noted (2.9.5), issues of teacher morale and well-being are currently recognised as key to retention, and critical to the perception of professional satisfaction in teaching.

In a context of intensified accountability, the ‘success’ of a teacher is measured in pupil outcomes. In that sense, feedback to teachers becomes more narrowly confined to pupil progress, making other kinds of accomplishments with pupils less remarkable or praise-worthy. Whilst head teachers are guided by the protocols for performance management, the interpersonal skills and people-management vital for motivation and morale are less easily mandated for. As one teacher explained: *“the praise part of the appraisal is lacking ... that’s teaching in general. [Head] teachers have not trained to be managers”* (Harriet, Phase 2).

As teachers suggest (6.2), the management responsibilities of primary school leadership are far-reaching and complex. The degree to which head teachers and senior leaders are unprepared or ill-advised on the management demands necessary for the context of high levels of accountability, is less clear. Noticeable are teachers’ observations about ‘ways forward’ for school leaders, and how being noticed and acknowledged could be central to perceptions of more effective leadership:

*“There’s always something nice you can say. You do need to know the truth to be able to move forward. People are great teachers, but people management skills are different. If [head teachers are] giving feedback, they just didn’t have a clue how to do it in a nice way”* (Lynn, Phase 1).

In the following extract, Shirley’s language implies a high-stakes employment relationship and one that reiterates the ideological conflict in such a shift. Primary schools are historically situated as almost familial, that is, community-orientated institutions with a matriarchal or patriarchal leader. The Government-endorsed vision of the ‘modernised’ primary school with a focus on standards and improvement relies on a management approach that prioritises resourcing that will best demonstrate effectiveness and progress:

*“The incoming head doesn’t have a clue or even an opinion as to what primary education is about. The prime focus, it’s like we are a business and cutting costs [and] managing the budget, is absolutely on making a minimum of 4 sub-levels of progress. If [pupils don’t] then your job is on the line”* (Shirley, Phase 2).

Rather than resisting the repositioning of ‘the primary school’ or questioning why schools are adopting this pseudo-corporate position, one teacher reflects that head teachers need the kind of ‘training’ that is more in keeping with corporate ‘people-management’ and the incentivising culture necessary to motivate and reward:

*“I look at the way [leaders] manage, or mis-manage that school, and I just think ‘you need to go on a business course’. If you’re going to manage people, there’s a way of keeping people sweet”* (Ryan, Phase 1).

Ryan’s previous experience in a competitive industry may have prompted his insight of lessons to be learnt from the business world and management training.

For many in the sample, the lack of recognition and praise contributes to feelings of low morale (this constitutes a separate findings chapter). In the increasingly pressurised environment of the primary school, it may be that the corresponding experience and stress of increased accountability and performativity alongside the perceived mis-management and, for example, inconsistent use of praise and performance appraisal, potently combines. The repercussions of such a combination are manifest in more aggrieved and discernibly divided staff teams. This is the focus of the following section.

#### **6.4 School leadership and staff relations**

Some findings point to a perceived ‘divide’ in the primary school hierarchy and a fracturing of the staff team. This is exemplified in accounts of mis-management personified in staff cliques and favouritism, lack of feedback and subsequent poor regard for staff well-being. Whilst there are findings illustrating positive relationships, effective management and the vision of the head teacher, the

majority allude to either a mixture of both positive and negative aspects of management or the predominance of negative issues.

Participants commonly perceive the status of the class teacher as distinctly separate from the stratum of the leadership team, and that staff dynamics overtly reflect the power relationship inherent in traditional management systems. This is reinforced by behaviours that seem to favour one teacher over another and that locate staff teams as competitive and uneasy.

In this extract, the experience of the leadership team is described in terms of distrust and detachment. The 'divide' in the team is accentuated by the staff dynamics and through the isolation of groups of staff:

*"To start with I was so keen on [the head teacher] but I think he started to fall through on all the promises he'd made and then I got to see a different side of him. He started to get a bit cliquy with senior leaders. You'd never see them for lunch. Now I'm going round [other schools] as a supply [teacher], I see some deputy heads sat with the staff or the head teacher will come round and say 'hi guys'. [In our school] they wouldn't set foot in the staff room" (Eleanor, Phase 1).*

Described this way, 'the staff' exist as a homogeneous group and are afforded an identity regardless of individual teacher attributes and expertise. Similarly, Beth exemplifies how the context of an inspection serves to further polarise, rather than unify, a staff team:

*"It became very 'them and us'. The [deputy head] said the leadership didn't do very well [in the Ofsted inspection] and that was because we, as teachers, weren't doing what we were supposed to do. So that reflected badly on the leadership team. Essentially it wasn't their fault it was our fault" (Beth, Phase 2).*

Examples of leaders' negative, inadvertent turns of phrase or unfortunate word choice are subject to criticism by teachers. Such comments are open to misunderstanding but could exacerbate the feelings of a demoralised teacher. A

particular example of this is the way leaders are perceived as extending preferential treatment to particular teachers.

In these two extracts, school leaders' positive intentions to boost morale are sometimes poorly executed. One example of a less subtle managerial tactic is via what is perceived as favouritism, and Jimmy highlights the negative implications of being singled out in this way:

*"[The head] would always celebrate our team. We got known as 'golden balls'. But then it began to get really tough for a lot of people, and this is one of the issues I have with her. She pits people against each other to possibly motivate other people to do better. Whilst it's nice [for us], it also alienates other people. So that's a management style I don't approve of"* (Jimmy, Phase 3)

Despite being complimented and praised, the ramifications for others in a less secure position in the school are acknowledged. This is a practice deemed harmful to the overall efficacy of the team and the school, so for Jimmy, 'being in favour' is disapproved of even if the attention, however precarious, is positive. A consequence is the generation of further tensions and alienation between individual staff who are inadvertently positioned in competition. For Verity and Beth, the practice of identifying favourites is viewed as 'fickle' and the unpredictability of the head is viewed as disquieting:

*"You were kind of in [the head teacher's] 'good books' or you weren't. [We] were doing great stuff but it just wasn't 'our' year. We just got hammered. It didn't matter what we did, we just got hammered the whole year. And then the next year we were 'amazing'"* (Verity, Phase 2).

*"[The] head teacher takes a liking to people and not to others. He definitely has got his favourites. He does seem to like me for some reason. I don't fully trust him. Next week, I might not be liked"* (Beth, Phase 2).

The strategy of 'playing favourites' causes teachers to further raise questions as to the style and efficacy of the school leaders. Associations between

favouritism and discrimination serve to denigrate such tactics as inappropriate as well as harmful to staff morale. The dichotomy is that this kind of managerialism may depend on a more corporate approach and increased business 'savvy' congruent with the demands of the increased marketisation of primary schooling.

The position of primary school leaders to wholly and appropriately respond to the complex demands of school management appears to be evolving rather than embedded. Developing and maintaining credibility appears challenging for some leadership teams. The next extract points to one teacher's exasperation with the head teacher and their preoccupation with Ofsted, above and beyond the daily responsibility of school leadership. As a consequence, she raises questions about the leader's integrity:

*"I just didn't feel there was enough truth in what was coming through. There's just too much compliance for me. Just too much of 'this is what we've got to do because of Ofsted'. Just say you know it's wrong. Just say that you know this is utter nonsense. I found it really frustrating, just the lack of honesty. I think there's just so much fear in that management team"* (Verity, Phase 2).

Head teacher insecurity, insensitive mis-management and a lack of leadership credibility may promote instability, uncertainty and unhappiness in the staff team. Findings point to some teachers' highly negative experience of school leadership and the ensuing repercussions for morale.

## **6.5 Teachers' negative perceptions and experiences of the head teacher**

In some cases, teachers document the experience of managerialism in more adverse terms and in relation to the leader's negative use of power. In these four scenarios, the findings about the relationships with the head teacher and senior staff are characterised by the perception of mistrust, manipulation, threats and bullying.

One novice teacher describes the school as having a culture of 'backstabbing' and the implication for his own well-being is "*a depression (moving) into*

*bitterness and coldness*". Barry (Phase 1) described feeling "*anxious, stressed, worried and annoyed*", and being in the '*firing-line*' prompts a professional and personal withdrawal from his work and culminates in his resignation from the school. The impact of his experience of the head teacher and what he described as the "*dickheads in the staff room*" becomes unmanageable and his sense of himself as a teacher is jeopardised by what he terms '*bad management*'.

In each extract, the individual personality of the head teacher is called into question, and daily school life looks to be overshadowed by the emotional consequences of issues with the leadership. Feeling incapable, anxious and threatened is unlikely to promote autonomy and confidence. This is an example of another distraught novice teacher reflecting on her previous school:

*"The head was really manipulative. After she left it was a bit like Stockholm syndrome. I think everyone was terrified to speak out or say anything just in case she came back"* (Wilma, Phase 1).

Wilma and Barry both perceive their professional induction as overshadowed and threatened by the relationship with the school's management. For more experienced and confident teachers, the head teacher's power can be experienced in similarly influential ways:

*"This [head teacher] swept through the school observing and condemning teachers. Lots of crying and a few departures. I considered going as well. Not because of how I was actually being treated but because of what I felt was happening elsewhere [in the school]. My observations went very well [but] meanwhile other people were being slaughtered, as it were. I have lots of issues about the way she runs things but, in many ways, I like the way she runs things"* (Jimmy, Phase 3).

Here, the head teacher's observation of teachers is viewed as an opportunity to 'condemn' teachers although there are evidently other aspects of the management style that are approved of. As in many accounts, the experience of conflict is insinuated, with contrasting or mixed emotions that may influence the

teacher's sense of identity in the workplace. Leaders that assert authority in a way that is perceived as 'slaughtering' are likely to rouse feelings of fear and worry in staff. In the following extract, the teacher's perceived value is symbolised in an identity she described as a '*minion*'. Shirley's experience of her employment relationships is highly negative:

*"For the managers to be successful, they had to show they were cutting off the dead weight of teachers. They had to identify the weak and poor teachers who are clearly 'holding us all back' and take measures to get rid of them. Certain teachers were rounded on, picked on and picked off. And we all know it"* (Shirley, Phase 2).

In the business world, 'dead wood' refers to employees who are no longer productive or useful to the company. The increased emphasis on performativity in schools positions the head teacher as accountable for pupil outcomes and makes staffing and personnel issues a far more prominent feature of the management of the school. Here, the perception is of a head teacher adopting a confrontational and aggressive management strategy to address 'poorly performing' teachers. Shirley uses language to create powerful imagery about the school's head teacher '*Singling out*' teachers depicts professionals as cornered and helpless.

Primary school leaders, like teachers, are potentially caught in a crossfire of powerful discourses which demand the setting of high expectations and agendas of improvement, but within the policy context of accountability and the tradition of child-centred pedagogy. Whilst issues of mismanagement, lack of credible leadership and effective personnel skills are acknowledged as impacting on teachers' efficacy and confidence, in the final section of this chapter I detail findings offering alternative, and more hopeful, insights into teachers' perceptions of management.

## 6.6. Teachers' positive perceptions and experiences of the head teacher

Whilst less widespread, some findings indicate that employment relations are not as fraught as those in earlier descriptions. The following accounts acknowledge the positive influence and support of senior leaders as well as the collegiate ethos evident in their schools. The commentary is accentuated, however, by remarks about being 'lucky' or 'by chance', or as compared to their colleagues' experience elsewhere. Common in these accounts is the reiteration of 'feeling valued'.

Having an 'affiliation' with the head and describing him as a 'visionary', Glenys confirms the potential role of the head teacher to validate and support:

*"Every day I just think I'm the luckiest person ever really to have found the school that I want to work in, to find the head that I wanted to work under, for him to respect what I'm doing and for me to do it. I mean it's just incredible"* (Glenys, Phase 3).

Sharing a philosophy about 'what matters' can enable mutual respect as well as resilience to manage more challenging scenarios. For Rose, the credibility of the leadership is framed in relation to trust. Whilst the decisions might not always be to her liking, there is a sense of conviction in the head teacher:

*"The nice thing is that I absolutely trust our head; she's absolutely amazing. I'm respectful of the decisions she's made. The last head was very good at covering things up. When there's a problem [this head] will sort it [and] sort it properly. She has a very open approach [and] strong, but at same time open for suggestions which is very brave"* (Rose, Phase 3).

For Rose, the centrality of communication and respect is reiterated. The same educational context and policy priorities are filtered in very different ways by head teachers, and teachers' experience of school management can vary.

For Nina and Lynn, the induction period is characterised by a generally supportive management team and environment and, as such, recognised as

atypical. In these examples, the leaders are perceived to enable feelings of importance and of being part of the school team:

*“The one thing that stands out here is the support I got from the assistant head; they were always there. The support I’ve had has been absolutely fantastic. You feel part of the team. You never feel like you’re on your own. I don’t know how people survive without it and I know people that haven’t survived”* (Nina, Phase 1).

*“Under the new head I feel valued. The previous [head teacher] didn’t see me as particularly important. He was approachable, he was nice enough, he didn’t ever treat me badly or anything. I often read things in the union magazine and think ‘I’m so lucky I don’t have that issue in my school’, you know, about different sorts of people that are being bullied or the head teachers putting too much pressure on them”* (Lynn, Phase 1).

For Nina and Lynn, there is recognition that things could be worse, so their contexts are viewed relatively positively. In earlier findings, comments reflected teachers’ experiences in schools reflective of all the Ofsted grading boundaries. Common to Rose, Nina and Lynn’s accounts is the school’s Ofsted grading which is ‘Outstanding’. It could be noteworthy that the relatively positive reflections are made in similar contexts. There are particular pressures associated with an ‘Outstanding’ grading which can exert high stress and pressure levels for school leaders, alongside the ever-present threat of being ‘downgraded’. The findings are considered in light of the broader influence of Ofsted in section 8.9.

In another example, Harriet intimates her ‘luck’ with the head teacher. A ‘maverick’, he is perceived as *‘better than most’* because of a tolerance to pedagogical and staffing idiosyncrasies and a confidence to challenge policy and directives. Advocating for, as well as socialising with, the staff supports a perception of the senior leaders as credible, loyal and ‘having her back’. Pragmatism about the leadership and a sense of having things ‘quite good’,

despite the reservations about long- term employment prospects in the profession, reflects a ‘better the devil you know’ attitude:

*“Most teachers in my school feel that we do things slightly differently. And feel that we’ve got it quite good. There is a respect for how we have it. In that sense, I think that’s why there isn’t a very high turnover. I think most people have worked somewhere else and just know that it’s so much better [here]” (Harriet, Phase 2).*

The inferred resignation to the situation positions Harriet as acquiescent and powerless. Similar to Nina and Lynn, Harriet is evidently apprehensive about what happens in other school contexts. Having it ‘quite good’ reflects her recognition of the merits of her head teacher.

## **6.7. Summary and conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter highlight the idiosyncrasies of individual school leadership teams. Policy reform positions head teachers as managers as opposed to leaders of learning, and the findings reveal ‘the tone’ of the leadership team as negative or too often privileging the agendas of accountability and performativity. For many teachers, working within these constraints engenders feelings of frustration and despondency.

Teachers’ perceptions and experiences of their school management are embedded in accounts of staff politics, management dynamics and morale. Ironically, the literature on school improvement consistently confirms the relationship between secure, satisfied teachers and the greater propensity to work toward realising improvement goals. For many teachers, the perception of work and professional efficacy is coloured by interactions with the school’s management and for a selected group there is a more significant consequence that relates to overall well-being, levels of stress and anxiety and depression.

Despite examples of teachers enjoying more positive relationships with their leadership teams, the findings point to the ways that teachers are making sense of managerialism in primary schools and the shift in ethos that appears to

further alienate the head teacher and leadership team from the staff. Common to both teachers and leaders is the emerging sense of insecurity and inadequacy.

The affective consequences of such a context are reinforced by an inferred resignation and powerlessness experienced by teachers, even in 'good schools'. The final chapter of findings focuses on the affective consequences of working life in a primary school and the ways that coping strategies are employed to maintain engagement in the profession.

## Chapter 7 – What it means to be a primary teacher: the affective consequences

### 7.1 Introduction

In Chapters 5 and 6, implicit in the findings is the issue of morale. The problem of low teacher morale is a recognised feature of the sector at the moment (2.9.5) and understood as an increasingly influential affective dimension of working as a primary teacher. In this chapter I present findings about the positive and negative influences on morale as well as the strategies employed to manage the work and professional aspirations.

In this study, teachers in all professional life phases, and contrasting school contexts, make explicit reference to the emotional consequences of their working conditions, and the relationship to identity and self-esteem. Teachers overwhelmingly talk about the pressures and stresses inherent in their current job. That is not to say that participants did not talk about the rewards of working with children and their enthusiasm for teaching pupils (and one or two illustrations are provided). However, these should be understood in relation to the prevalent findings suggesting low morale.

The tenor of many interviews is regularly and unquestionably emotional with several teachers highly agitated or in tears. I have noted these particular challenges (3.6.2) but also position this as a finding. The proportion of those interviewed who appear depressed, angry, upset, frustrated and despondent seems particularly high and thus of consequence for the research.

Explaining the issue of morale and the relationship to the ‘exodus’ from the profession, one teacher ventures:

*“What other profession has [such a high turnover]? And It’s not because we’re all born whingers is it? But that’s how it’s portrayed. I mean statistically, that’s very unlikely isn’t it? That teaching just happens to attract people who are flaky [and] moany” (Simon, Phase 3).*

To reflect some of the more affirmative data, in 7.2 I present findings about the perceived positive rewards of teaching and those instances of professional

practice that support positive morale for some participants. To further contextualise later findings, I first examine those which highlight when and why morale appears high.

## **7.2 High morale: professional rewards and feeling positive**

The more general and holistic rewards of working with pupils, and teachers' enthusiasm for their work, are often couched in positive terms. Selected findings about high morale were also presented in Chapter 4 and related to teachers' overarching motivations for being teachers, which include the rewards of the work. In this section, I have opted to present a variety of findings as they relate to particular lessons taught or (perceived) 'good days' and where efficacy and morale seems higher. Cortazzi suggests that "a teacher's 'best lesson' is likely to have salient importance in defining that practitioner's personal parameters of what 'works well'" (1993, p.122), so these stories are especially pertinent for insights into teachers' rewards and priorities, and I have used them as illustrative in this regard.

All participants were asked about the aspects of teaching they considered most rewarding, or a day or episode that stood out for them (Appendix 4) and many teachers chose an example of their work with children. In these extracts, teachers acknowledge the 'fun' and 'laughs' borne out of work with children in the classroom. The variety, the peculiarity of daily life with pupils and the (sometimes) unexpected and unpredictable nature of the work is implied as pleasing and rewarding. The bizarre and madcap existence of everyday experiences is gauged in positive terms with wide-ranging and contrasting rewards as evident:

*"No day's the same. Running around the hall, I was Humpty Dumpty. I was all the kings' horses. On a Monday morning at 10.15 I'm prancing around saying 'on your tippy toes' and then suddenly you're doing some art, and suddenly you're hearing some reading" (Carl, Phase 2).*

*"I like the fact that I go home every day with a funny story. And I like that fact that no matter who I meet up with [they find] those*

*stories ... hilarious. I don't know if I would laugh as much in another job"* (Wilma, Phase 1).

*"Children are so amazing; that gives me joy. They make me laugh, they really piss me off. They're fascinating"* (Lynn, Phase 1).

Common in some novice teachers' accounts is the enjoyment in the work especially when juxtaposed with the monotony of other types of jobs they, or friends, have held. For Ben and Lynn, this supports job satisfaction:

*"I love my job - absolutely love it. The impact is that I'm satisfied. I go home happy [and] satisfied every day. I live a very fulfilled life in the sense of my career, my job. [I'm] the only person that gets asked about their job"* (Ben, Phase 1).

*"I wouldn't be in a job where I just go to my work and put on music in the morning in the car and not be thinking about anything. Just get to work, check Facebook, do my job and then go home. Boring!"* (Lynn, Phase 1).

Acknowledging the satisfaction in teaching, seeing pupils develop, and recognising the teacher's role in this transformation, links to the findings in Chapter 4 about the intrinsic rewards of teaching.

In pedagogic terms, these kinds of interactions and experiences with children may serve to illustrate the antithesis to other professional requirements described in Chapter 5. From Victorian 'dress-up days' to 'trips to a local castle' or 'imaginary dragon eggs arriving in the playground', these events act to constitute the 'real meaning' or reward of teaching and are described fondly. Perhaps they represent an important ideological gauge of effective teaching, and remind and reassure teachers of what can be, and is, achieved despite the perceived constraints of wider school life. As positively, several teachers portray events that are 'off-piste' and not timetabled or restrained by timings.

In these two extracts, Sara and Bryan's sense of satisfaction is evident in the perceived engagement of the children as 'engrossed', and 'mesmerised':

*“Today was amazing at the beach. That opportunity to really help two children and for them to have that experience ... [the pupil] was just so engrossed in exploring the sea and having an experience I don’t think that she’s had before. To give them that experience was very rewarding” (Sara, Phase 1).*

*“You know when you have a day and you think ‘that’s worked really well’ and it came from something that wasn’t planned. I had a child who was celebrating a festival who said, ‘can I talk to the class about this’. There’s a child in my class - a child in care - [and] he was just mesmerised. I’m thinking this shows the important part of teaching that gets lost” (Bryan, Phase 3).*

The tone and mood in these stories is positive and wistful. In both scenarios, the concepts of structure and order are less imposed, with teacher-led planning and assessment as secondary to the interactions between the pupils. In Bryan’s example, the ‘important part of teaching that gets lost’ may link to the necessary space and environment that enables simple but powerful conversations between children, and to important effect. There is a sense of teachers ‘in control’ here – these episodes may serve to reassure teachers of their purpose.

Jimmy’s example reiterates similar ideals and his ‘*beautiful day*’ is suggestive of a rare ‘freedom’ in the classroom:

*“There was no strategy, no plan, except that they were ‘making stuff’. We decided that they’d make artefacts [and] they were going to research and learn all about an aspect of Britain since 1948. So they chose fashion from the 60’s or music from the 70’s. One of them wanted to make Concorde, and upon Concorde’s wings would be presented their findings, their research. And it was just a beautiful day. There were no behaviour issues, the cooperation amongst them ... the buzz ... the atmosphere ... the joy in the classroom. That’s what I love” (Jimmy, Phase 3).*

He acknowledges a penchant for a particular romanticised and ‘bygone’ era of primary education and perhaps one that reflects nostalgia about his own

education. The importance of 'childhood' is reiterated with the vocational aspects evident in his philosophy and aspirations for the pupils. The mandate to engage with the class with 'no plan' is described positively. A recurring thread in these extracts, and a seemingly important source of reward and pleasure for the teachers, are the interactions and relationships with the pupils. This is as much about the pastoral as the academic reward, and in the following extracts, the repercussions of relationships with pupils are significant for teachers' self-esteem:

*"It's completely about my relationship with the kids. It's when you can see them go 'Oh!' [I think] 'I'm good at this'" (Harriet, Phase 2).*

*"I loved getting that class into a unit, getting them prepped, getting them calm. And just hearing the way they talked to me ... the banter was really good" (Barry, Phase 1).*

*"It sounds cheesy, but it is down to the interaction with the kids and those relationships and having a certain degree of confidence in what I'm doing" (Tony, Phase 3).*

Whilst this same group of participants all describe aspects of their work in highly negative terms, they are able to identify aspects of their job which are rewarding and positive. All teachers were asked about a 'success story' with the deliberate aim of encouraging a positive account, although finding 'balance' more generally is more demanding. Tracing positive stories about 'being a teacher' in individual accounts is less tangible than those which reflect experiences of teaching as challenging, frustrating or depressing.

Before presenting the findings about the negative influences on morale, there are a few exceptions in the data and it is imperative to represent the teachers, albeit a minority, who portray the experience of teaching overall in more pragmatic and (sometimes) positive terms. A few are notable in the ways they do not couch responses related to impediments to their well-being or problematic to morale. In each case, the overall tenor of the interviews is relatively upbeat despite prompting for feedback on workload and the pressures of school life. There are no discerning features to link experience and

perspective; their school lives and biographies are very different, although three teachers in this group of four are in the earliest phase of their teaching career. In all four cases, motivation and confidence seem high and stable despite challenges in one form or another.

Two of the novice teachers acknowledge some of the stresses in teaching, notably of workload, but are pragmatic about managing these. Nina acknowledges the workload, although working at weekends and in the holidays is accepted, and she repeatedly claims it *“didn’t bother”* her. The comments reflect a heightened but motivated pragmatism about school life. Apparently tolerant of the demands to work at home, she acknowledges her acceptance of this:

*“[The] trouble is I’m one of those people who if I have to work in the evening, I’ll work in the evening. If you’re going to do something, then do it properly. You give whatever you can give. If that means giving some time in the evening, then why not?”* (Nina, Phase 1).

Lynn (Phase 1) projects a very upbeat persona and is motivated by, rather than overwhelmed by, the challenges mentioned in other accounts (Chapters 5 and 6), and her colleague and mentor is cited as significant here:

*“Working with someone so brilliant this year is making me think, ‘I’m a million miles from being like that. ‘I’m never going to be as good as that’. It’s so wonderful to work with her and [I] think ‘I’m learning so much. She’s so the sort of teacher I want to be, so I aspire to everything she does”* (Lynn, Phase 1).

For both Nina and Lynn, the support of colleagues is a recurring motif in their data and contrasts with the distinct lack of positive reference to colleagues in other teachers’ accounts.

Another novice teacher, Ben compares his workload and working hours to friends working in business or commerce and for him, a *“significant factor is about perspective”*. Despite challenges at his school (5.4), he remains stoical

and positive about his work. In addition, he cites something he is “*absolutely adamant*” about:

*“My wife said, ‘please never become a ‘moany teacher’, because our experience of teachers was of the stereotypical moany teacher. So, I committed to never being that individual and I’ve never needed to be”* (Ben, Phase 1).

Evident here is a conscious awareness, and apparent rejection, of the caricature of the ‘moany teacher’. Intent on establishing a work-life balance, this teacher is prepared to tolerate ‘peak times’ of workload by off-setting this with the flexibility afforded by school holidays. Various aspects of the work are expressed as ‘disappointing’ and ‘challenging’ but his morale and sense of efficacy seems stable. His reiterated sense of ‘*capacity to bring positive influence*’ may be a sustaining feature of his work as a teacher.

Similarly, although a more experienced teacher and head teacher, Simon proffers lengthy diatribes and critique of current policy but his sense of well-being and morale is buoyant and maintained through what he calls “*a shield of professional arrogance*”. Having worked in a few schools with a range of head teachers, and through a series of curriculum and policy changes, he nevertheless maintains a strong sense of vocation which may sustain his confidence and morale:

*“I’ve never got to that point where I’ve genuinely thought ‘I don’t know if I can do this anymore’. I listen to Heads and they sound demoralised. They are too brow beaten; [they] can’t see the wood for the trees. They are drowning [and] they forget to filter. Some Heads lose their way and they can’t understand why they’re doing all these things”* (Simon, Phase 3).

He implies he has ‘escaped’ those more negative and destructive feelings’. Simon is confident of maintaining his perspective and his ‘way’, although these comments should be understood in relation to his recent appointment to head teacher.

Compared to others in the sample, negative emotions are less apparent, and an air of positivity is discernible. However, this kind of optimism is less tangible in the broader sample. Unlike this small group, most teachers share reservations and frustrations about aspects of the work in overtly agitated ways. In the next three sections, findings are presented to explore potential causes and implications of low morale. They seem to vary between the frustration and pressure of workload and the consequences of low self-esteem, to more evident indicators of depression and anxiety.

### **7.3 Low morale: public and personal perceptions of teachers**

The public image of teaching alongside teachers' increasing accountability may have repercussions for the pressures and scrutiny perceived by participants. The wider societal perceptions and subsequent positioning of teachers may feel like a 'double-bind':

*"I feel that teachers have this reputation at the moment. Either people see them as moaning teachers or they see them as 'poor teachers' getting a rough deal. I have had it with some people where they say, 'my friend's a teacher too and she moans about it all the time as well' (Beth, Phase 2).*

The representation of the teacher appears increasingly subject to criticism and the newcomer's self-image can be fragile and easily disrupted. For Sara and the other novice teachers, the expression of 'pride' may act as a coping or defence mechanism for the perceived disparagement:

*"It still means a great deal and I love telling people I'm a teacher. I do. I do take a lot of pride in it. I'm really proud of what I've achieved" (Sara, Phase 1).*

*"I feel very proud of my job. I find it upsetting when they say ... on the radio; they 'bad mouth'. They haven't a clue about what it's like to be in the classroom every day" (Lynn, Phase 1).*

An indicator of morale, the idea of 'pride' is frequently endorsed by teachers and may reveal feelings associated with the accomplishment of teaching.

Maintaining pride in the job may be less straightforward when the policy context is increasingly challenging and the public and wider perception appears increasingly negative. Two teachers quoted below perceive the public image of teaching as less than favourable and the consequences give the impression of demoralisation and frustration:

*“I’m very proud of what I do but I probably wouldn’t tell [a stranger] unless they asked. I’d like somebody to know me so it’s not just ‘oh you’re one of those that have six weeks holiday and goes home at three o’clock in the afternoon’” (Nina, Phase 1).*

*“I feel lucky being a teacher and I still feel proud. The media don’t like us very much. I don’t think they understand. You still hear we’re ‘nine till three’. The Government don’t seem to appreciate us very much. People don’t see it. I don’t know why they don’t see it as a good job, a proper job. I don’t know what they think we do. You just want to say, ‘come in and do our job for one month and get the pay at the end of the month and see if it’s worth it’” (Rae, Phase 3).*

Sustaining positive feelings and optimism about the work is challenged by the perceived disregard perpetuated in wider society. For teachers working in particularly challenging circumstances, the threats to self-esteem and efficacy are often more immediate and personal and thus, increased. This may be offset by the potentially greater rewards of working in such a context. For some teachers feeling and maintaining a sense of pride is accomplished despite the challenges of workload and stress:

*“I always feel quite proud to say I’m a teacher. Sometimes I say ‘it’s really stressful, I work sixty hours a week, I work evenings, I work weekends’. You get told constantly that it’s not good enough, that you’ve got to do better” (Beth, Phase 2).*

Despite the ‘exodus’ of individuals leaving the profession, participants continue to work in it, despite allegiance to the work emerging as somewhat precarious. The incidence of low morale recurs in accounts and for the more experienced

teachers this is tempered by frustration and despondency. Public perceptions of teaching frustrate teachers; Jimmy and Rae allude to being mis-understood and this compounds issues related to workload and the broader issue of public accountability. The discourse of the 'moany teacher' is deployed as a shorthand to describe demoralised and/or jaded teachers and this is sometimes perpetrated in Government circles as well as in the wider media.

The following comments reflect many accounts of mixed feelings about teaching and the tensions afforded by an apparent conflict between the individual's philosophy and rationale to teach and the changing status of the teacher and demands made on the profession. An experienced teacher, he appears to lament better times:

*"I'm very proud of being a teacher. I'm proud to say I am. Teachers are misunderstood. There's a frustration of trying to justify the holidays and that sort of thing. You bloody well earn that. I feel it's noble. I think when you look back on your life I had a period when I made a positive change to children's lives" (Jimmy, Phase 3).*

The current further shift and decline in morale is distinct and different from past times and as *"moving on from having a bit of a whinge"* (Tony, Phase 3):

*"It's literally, on a daily basis, people going 'I'm trying to find something else to do with my life'. In what is a fairly happy school, the morale is rubbish. We've had several (management) meetings about it this term. [The Head has] said, 'what can we do?' [I said] 'What can you do? There's only so many times you can bring cakes in and say, 'thank you' and stuff" (Tony, Phase 3).*

In the past, teachers may have been rewarded and gratified by the thoughtfulness of treats in the staff room and a 'thank-you' card, but the apparent futility of such superficial strategies reveals the wider implications of teachers' experiences and perceptions of the workload and current context.

## 7.4 Low morale: workload

The 'love-hate' dichotomy sometimes materialises in comments about the profession and appears to be situated in relation to workload and of sacrifices made to accommodate the insatiable professional demands. Rose recognises the binary at work here and the cost to her personal life:

*“Although I absolutely love my job, I also hate it. Sometimes I do get very depressed about it. About how much it impacts on my life. Since becoming a teacher I’ve been single. If I’ve got an evening free, the last thing I want to do is go out and try and meet someone because I’m just shattered”* (Rose, Phase 3).

The challenge of workload is also raised by novice teachers assimilating to the expectations. Some make explicit reference to workload and work-life balance; one teacher queries *“Are teachers not supposed to have a life?”* (Lynn, Phase 1). In these commentaries there is a sense of feeling overwhelmed by the workload as well as resigned:

*“I know that work had a massive impact on my life. I’d come home and say ‘I just want a bath’ (but) I can’t. I don’t have time for a bath. I have a stack of work and I knew it needed to be done. I’d be getting home at 6.30pm and it’d just get to a point where I just started crying all the time. It was horrible”* (Eleanor, Phase 1).

*“I don’t do anything with my evenings, and that’s a shame because I’m not getting massive work-life balance in terms of the evenings. Other friends who work in an office might say ‘ooh lets go out for a drink this evening’ (and I say) ‘no, I’ve got to be in bed by 9pm’. That’s a bit sad isn’t it? When you’re thirty!”* (Lynn, Phase 1).

The accountability and sense of powerlessness are both significant in terms of teachers’ perceptions of their workload. The sheer weight of what is expected each day encroaches upon and demoralises teachers, and for those at either end of the professional life-phase spectrum, the personal costs incurred by the vocational nature of the work are acknowledged.

In the next section, the findings highlight the recurrence of not ‘feeling good enough’ and the ways this appears to go beyond periodic professional self-doubt. For some teachers, low morale appears incited by specific experiences in their current context, although some maintain this feeling is provoked by something specific to teaching more generally at the moment.

## **7.5 Low morale: teachers not feeling ‘good enough’**

Not ‘feeling good enough’ is echoed in several commentaries and could be attributed to the increased culture of appraisal and observation. A recurrent theme infers the root of self-doubt consequent to a trait in the professional expectations more broadly, or ‘the whole ethos of teaching’.

It is also evident that high standards and expectations may be self-imposed with the sense of responsibility to pupils as influential and powerful. In others, the feelings are associated with a culture that emphasises the centrality of constant self-evaluation and improvement:

*“I think it’s the whole ethos of teaching. From day one you’re told ‘this was good, but this wasn’t’. You’re always thinking about things that aren’t good enough, because you want to be better. I don’t think any teacher has got perfect self-esteem. We’re always waiting to be told what’s not good enough. Always” (Rae, Phase 3).*

As an experienced teacher, Rae suggests this ethos has characterised her career and “*from day one*”, rather than being a feature of the current context. High expectations for practice and pupils may contribute to the struggle for perfection and this is reinforced through the gamut of performance management activities which assign a numerical value to professional expertise.

In the next extracts, the teachers work in contrasting contexts (in Ofsted terms) although share feelings about lesson feedback and grading in similar terms. The apparent status and security of a school’s grading does not appear to influence the teacher’s confidence or anxiety and may be a reason to further inspire angst:

*“I felt de-skilled, completely stripped and de-skilled. That really, really upset me. It pushed all my buttons. I felt vulnerable” (Carl, Phase 2).*

*“I think just the fact that you put your heart and soul, give over your life and your well-being to a job, and you’re still made to feel you’re crap or you’re not doing it well enough” (Beth, Phase 2).*

*“How I experienced teaching was to be a failure. The over-riding feeling has always been one of failure. I can never get it right. I can never be good enough. No matter how much I do, no matter what I think. It’s endless” (Shirley, Phase 2).*

Low morale may be provoked by the general weariness of workload and pressure, by a context and a personal and professional ethos that makes anything other than ‘outstanding’ practice unacceptable, as well as the experience of staff relations, and, notably, the management. Findings that linked morale to managerialism were also reported in Chapter 6, with those that made explicit the emotional consequences and feelings purposely assigned to the next section.

## **7.6 The impact of low morale on teachers**

Some findings about low teacher morale are less obvious, although traceable in the sense of resignation apparent in some commentary. In this extract, the repetition about what Tony ‘hates’ about his work signals a frustration about being told what to do:

*“I have a real love-hate relationship with teaching in that I do love teaching as a vocation. The ‘hate bit’ always comes from what we’ve been asked to do, what we’ve been told to do; what we’ve been told to change. It’s either keep my head down and get on with it and accept that there’s always going to be idiots in Government who tell us what to do, or pack it in and do something else. Which I periodically discuss with my wife and never do anything about it” (Tony, Phase 3).*

A lack of autonomy and control underpins Tony's exasperation, and a sense of compliance and apathy pervades his comments. A highly experienced teacher, and evolving middle leader, Tony creates an impression of despondency about his work.

In other examples, low morale is specifically attributed to particular aspects of professional life. Occasional findings are explicitly related to the relationship with the head teacher and/or the impact of the management, and, for particular teachers, results in an acute lack of confidence. One new teacher described the consequence of poor relationships and management and her persona of a *"shrivelled crying mess in the corner" who "cried almost daily"* (Wilma, Phase 1). In these extracts, the experience of adverse staff relationships is expressed in highly emotive language:

*"I've never, in any other profession, been treated the way I have been in teaching. Politics, backstabbing, nastiness. The stuff that just makes you feel rubbish. The first week (back at school) I was anxious, stressed, worried, annoyed. [It's] just constant"* (Barry, Phase 1).

*"It was like being in an abusive relationship. There was no way out. It wasn't until [the head teacher] left that I saw the option to go"* (Wilma, Phase 1).

*"I'm waiting to see where the next blow is coming from. The first time it happened and [the head] said 'consider your position in this school', I was very upset. I was in tears, devastated"* (Shirley, Phase 2).

Common in some accounts is the sense of ill-treatment and poor management. Teachers' language reveals the emotional dimension of being at work and something of the way this impacts on life more broadly. Alongside the other pressures and expectations of teaching a class, the impact of conflict on teachers may unsurprisingly affect the energy, conviction and efficacy of individuals:

*“I still enjoy teaching the children; I love that aspect of it. I was really low on confidence. There were times when I was crying in the cupboard. That’s hard” (Beth, Phase 2).*

Professional identity emerges as jeopardised by strong negative feelings as well as the strain of managing emotions at work. Inherent in various accounts is the impact on personal identity, home lives and family:

*“I think I’ve just shut down a bit. I feel a bit like a puppet at the moment; I’m like ‘just get your head down, just get through this year” (Harriet, Phase 2).*

*“My husband said I [was] completely inaccessible. I wouldn’t say I was depressed but it was more withdrawing into myself. Just stressed all the time, just stressed” (Glenys, Phase 3).*

Talk of depression, stress, feeling ‘shame’, ‘the emotional toll’ and ‘crying in the cupboard’ was common in some accounts which also hinted at experience of counselling and other professional support:

*“I did try and arrange counselling but I’m still on the waiting list. I think I still I want to talk about some of the stuff I went through. A lot of it I feel shame I suppose” (Barry, Phase 1).*

*“I’ve been awful. I’ve been a wreck. I try not to talk about it too much. But it’s definitely taking an emotional toll. I’m a mess. I have actually investigated [counselling] to offload. I can’t do that every night to [my partner]. I think I’m in a place where I need it” (Sara, Phase 1).*

Most teachers express strong sentiments about the work and some accounts are especially negative and emotional. The emotions range from despondency to anger and frustration, with several teachers expressing significant unhappiness at work. The root of the distress is varied, and individual circumstances clearly influence the experience of, and response to, professional malaise. For most, the general context of ‘school-life’ is portrayed as one of conflict and compromise.

In the final section, the findings about teachers' future plans offer some insight into the implications of occupational decisions and aspirations, and of the ways the majority of the teachers in the sample continue to stay in the profession.

### **7.7 Managing and preserving morale: staying or 'shifting'**

The potential significance of over half of the participants changing their job, school or profession over the timeframe of the fieldwork warrants inclusion in the final section. The current context of the 'teacher exodus' generally (1.7) provides a backdrop for teachers in the sample. They have been privy to staff changes in their own, and colleagues', schools and are well aware of the broader context related to retention, but currently opt to stay. The data show fluctuations in the sample which are of note. Taken altogether, the movements may reveal insights into ways of managing those challenges outlined in Chapters 5 and 6.

In Table 7, participants' biographical profiles highlight the proportion of teachers opting to adjust their employment over the course of the year. By the end of the fieldwork, there are some changes afoot which need acknowledging. The table notes teachers who continue to work in their current school as well as the variety in occupational modifications with respect to three main categories – those who change their role in the current school, those who leave to work in another school and those who leave for similar employment (in education).

I use the term 'shift' consistent with research about teacher attrition (Lindqvist et al, 2014) and further explore the implications of these findings in the discussion chapter (8.10).

**Table 7: Participants' occupational modifications**

Professional life phase	Teacher	Occupational profile at the end of my fieldwork
Phase One teacher (0-3 years in teaching)	Eleanor	Shift – NQT recently resigned
	Fiona	Shift – NQT recently resigned
	Barry	Shift – new school ( <i>second teaching job</i> )
	Sara	Shift – part time / composite roles
	Ben	Shift – new school ( <i>second teaching job</i> )
	Lynn	Stay
	Wilma	Shift – new school ( <i>third teaching job</i> )
	Ryan	Stay
	Nina	Stay (change role*)
Phase Two teacher (4-7 years in teaching)	Harriet	Stay (change key stage)
	Verity	Shift- Supply teach and new school ( <i>second teaching job</i> )
	Carl	Stay
	Beth	Stay (change key stage)
	Shirley	Shift – new school ( <i>second teaching job</i> )
Phase Three teacher (8-15 years in teaching)	Jimmy	Stay
	Simon	Shift – new school ( <i>third teaching job</i> )
	Rae	Stay (change role*)
	Tony	Stay
	Alan	Stay
	Glenys	Shift / out (new sector)
	Rose	Stay (change role*)
	Bryan	Stay (change role*)
*Change role (new role/ promotion in current school)		

As noted, in Chapter 3 (3.5), the sample included two participants who had already resigned. In Eleanor's case, she was one of many teachers in her school who were '*jumping ship*' as the school has been assessed as needing 'special measures':

*“Six of us left at Christmas but some people are there because of the money. Those people are stuck there at the moment. They just have to get on with it. It took a lot of guts [for me] to do it. It messed with my head a bit”* (Eleanor, Phase 1).

Frequent in her account is the negativity experienced from the leadership team and the perceived lack of value. For Fiona, in a school graded ‘outstanding’, the experience of school leadership is not dissimilar. The pressure of the highly performing school contributes to her disillusionment with her thwarted aspiration to be a ‘good teacher’:

*“I don’t want to be one of those people who, you know, moan(s) about the hours. I’d love to be one of those people who genuinely loves their job and loves everything about teaching”* (Fiona, Phase 1).

At the point of the fieldwork, both teachers had resigned and were in the process of job-seeking. I now identify three other occupational categories of interest, and together they may reveal ways of existing in the profession despite the challenges to morale and motivation and the overarching climate of instability.

### **7.7.1 Occupational manoeuvres: minor occupational change**

There are several instances of teachers pursuing an internal change to professional responsibilities and examples in all three professional life phases. Perhaps more understandable in phase three as part of a career trajectory in teaching, some of the more experienced teachers appear to change positions internally to reflect additional leadership responsibilities or specialist roles. Although the change of role is significant, it is still within the same school.

Specifically for Rose, the change of role may act to further challenge the demands of teaching but also to energise and motivate her:

*“I didn’t actually set myself any firm aspirations apart from being a really good teacher, so now going into middle leadership is one step up from that. I don’t like standing still but I haven’t got a vision*

*of where I'm going next. I'm not sure I'll stay in teaching after this"*  
(Rose, Phase 3).

The new role and the possibility of resignation appear compatible, a phenomenon evident in other accounts. Similarly, two women in phase two change from working in key stage one to key stage two. Both describe their well-being in quite negative terms and express an interest in leaving their school. Both these women talked of the internal move as being 'good for the CV', still toying with the idea of future job-seeking and actively looking for another job beyond the school. Changing key stages appears to offer a challenge and a 'change of scene'.

Pragmatic reasons, for example, buying a house, getting married and considering motherhood, appear to cement Beth's decision to stay in her school after various unsuccessful attempts to secure a new post, although the aspiration to leave is still evident. Moving from one key stage to another seems to satisfy the urge to move on and may act to rejuvenate her:

*"It might be different in KS2. It'll be nice to have a change of scenery (and) teach different things. Maybe that will come in useful in the future if I do move somewhere else. I think I will continue looking [for another job]. It's second nature to me now"*  
(Beth, Phase 2).

Implicit in her account is a hope that something will 'change', and that working as a teacher further up the school may be more manageable. Similarly, Harriet is up for a 'change' and a 'challenge' and appears to be working out the best career step for her. A degree of uncertainty is evident here

*"I thought I'd go all the way to the top. There's part of me now that's really not sure anymore. I would have said go into leadership, but I wonder if my ambitions are changing"* (Harriet, Phase 2).

The decisions are characterised by an air of doubt, and may illustrate the uncertainty about leaving the profession, regardless of the negativity expressed. In the next section, some teachers are more vehement about

the breakdown in professional relationships which appear to prompt a more major career decision.

### **7.7.2 Occupational manoeuvres: major occupational change**

In this category, of note are the four novice teachers (phase one) opting to leave their schools. Making a major occupational change is a feature across all professional life phases but novice teachers are over-represented here. Unsurprisingly, some of the most pessimistic descriptions of school-life (7.5) seem to correlate with the decisions to leave the school.

Common in Barry and Wilma's accounts is the negative experience of the professional induction, which continues to have consequences for subsequent career decisions and a possible risk to morale. Barry has given it a "*fair bit of thought – I'm desperate not to make the same mistakes*" and his move to a new school is mediated by existing knowledge of staff with whom he has positive, established relationships. Barry's view is of "*jumping ship*", although confused by his experience as a newly qualified teacher, he wonders if his pessimism is about 'him', 'the school' or 'the profession'.

Moving schools can be an emotional experience, at once motivating, daunting and challenging. For one novice teacher, the move to a new school is the third since she qualified. The decision to move on this occasion is borne from fear of the unknown and the imminent departure of the supportive head teacher who had 'fixed' her after arriving from her first school:

*"When she told me she was going I was terrified. I think because she believed in me and supported and helped me and now she's off. Everyone's jumping ship - I don't want to be the last"* (Wilma, Phase 1).

Staying at the school and working with a new head teacher entails a perceived threat to her confidence and well-being. Wilma's morale has been significantly influenced, both positively and negatively by previous head teachers and influences her decision to move to a school with a known head teacher and ex-colleagues.

Like Barry, Shirley accounts for a move as ‘escape’ from the current school after prolonged unhappiness with the leadership. Her move is positioned as part of an ongoing struggle at the school and in the context of large numbers of teachers leaving ahead of her. The move is assigned high significance, and relief is evident in her description:

*“The day that (the new school) said I’d got the job, I fell to my knees and almost wept. I’m looking forward to September. Looking forward and feeling a bit nervous as this is quite a big step” (Shirley, Phase 2).*

Despite the challenges, the move is envisaged as highly positive and potentially a boost to morale. The changes made to the school by the head teacher and her subsequent relationship is portrayed as central to her ambition to leave.

Finally, Simon’s change of school is not unexpected and part of a planned career trajectory to headship. His new role as a head teacher has afforded a *“massive shot in the arm in terms of challenge” (Simon, Phase 3)*. Whilst his morale is not described as ‘at risk’, the promotion is seen as central to his feelings of efficacy.

In the next section, I discuss those teachers who have opted to make a considerable professional adjustment.

### **7.7.3 Occupational manoeuvres: a significant career change**

For three of the teachers, the plan to make a bigger professional adjustment is couched in relation to workload and a general dissatisfaction with main-scale class teaching. The aspiration to teach is evident for these teachers but the prospect of working full-time in a school has become impossible.

In two of the following examples, the individuals enjoy their work as educators but now seek a context that offers more control and potentially a better work-life balance. New to teaching, Sara has opted to teach part-time to accommodate other professional and personal interests although perceives this as a compromise:

*“I’m really sad and really frustrated about how things are but I want to find a way of carrying on being part of this profession because I love working with children. I have considered leaving but I guess it’s just about finding way of not letting go of what is important to you and your philosophy and finding a compromise. What I’m doing is giving me that compromise and the best of both worlds” (Sara, Phase 1).*

A more experienced teacher, Verity makes the decision to leave her school and work as a supply teacher. It appears this is a choice she has not regretted, describing herself as a *“caged bird released”*. The ethos of the school and relationship with the head teacher are construed as fundamental to this decision, and issues of workload and balance are central:

*“There’s lot of reasons [for doing supply]. I’ve gained about 15 hours a week. To see what else is out there and compare other schools. Just come up for air a bit really. I just couldn’t have gone back to do another year where I was; the pressure and the nonsense. I just couldn’t have done it” (Verity, Phase 2).*

She talks of *“getting her life back”*, *“feeling ‘free’* and experiencing more praise than she had as a class teacher, despite the transience of her work. Her self-esteem is renewed to the point she was toying with the idea of committing to a new school in a more permanent role. For Glenys, leaving teaching is unanticipated. She feels *“kicked out”* by the profession which coincided with a *“gradual falling out of love”* with the work. Keen to continue working as an educator in some way, her future plans did not include the context of the primary school.

Perhaps less surprisingly for more experienced teachers, the impetus to ‘shift’ out of full-time class teaching is common across all professional life phases. There are exceptions in the data, and the final section illustrates the contexts where teachers opt to stay put.

#### 7.7.4 The plan to 'stay put'

The data show that six teachers are intent on 'staying put' and with no particular or evident rationale. A closer look at teachers whose professional context is relatively static, reveals a higher proportion of men in this group.

Lynn's experience of early career mentoring and the head teacher's support influences her career aspirations to stay put. Stories from colleagues in other schools appear to have reinforced the idea that her school is a 'good match'. Having contemplated "*jumping ship*" under the previous head teacher in the school, she is clear that the staff are important to her:

*"[The] key players are very nice kind people and not going to catch you out. I feel like I've found a place where the head teacher is supportive"* (Lynn, Phase 1).

For the other phase one teacher opting to stay, the decision appears tenuous. Ryan's experience of staffing and the head teacher appears overtly negative

*"I'd like next year to be a year where there are fresh challenges, some change. In reality, what will probably happen is that I'll start looking for a new role. Probably after Christmas. Which is a shame"* (Ryan, Phase 1).

Working abroad, setting up a business and aspiring for promotion in the current school all appeared to be simultaneous professional goals for Ryan. Having experienced a turbulent induction and having already changed careers, the inclination to try and stay put is understandable.

For some teachers in phases one and two, the decision to stay is expressed in relation to the lack of perceived gains in moving. As Beth (phase two) explained "*I don't think it's a good story anywhere really*". The common adage, "*better the devil you know*" is deployed and projected both fear and complacency. Positive staff relations and the collegiate environment appear to strongly impact on an individual's decision to stay:

*“My friends at school would say ‘you always say you’re leaving’, and then I start to think there’s a real feeling that ‘better the devil you know’” (Jimmy, Phase 3).*

Of those who are staying in the current school and with no evident plans afoot to make any serious adjustments to work, the majority are men. In phase three, Alan’s current trajectory appears in keeping with his role and aspirations. He acknowledges his role to ‘career build’ as well as the opportunities in his current school:

*“I went and visited a couple of schools and my over-riding sense was I wouldn’t have the autonomy or the influence [there] and the only bit of job satisfaction that I really get is being able to influence and drive policy” (Alan, Phase 3).*

For these six teachers, the decision to stay may be mediated by future personal plans or a sense of it not being better elsewhere. Common to them all was the *possibility* of leaving; muted or made explicit and the suggestion of ‘the alternative’ underpinned most accounts.

## **7.7 Summary and conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter illustrate the low levels of morale amongst the teachers in the sample. Despite acknowledging the rewards of teaching, many of the participants exhibit indicators of stress and depression and appear to experience compromise and conflict in their work. The issue of workload and the school’s leadership are recurring themes, but these are coupled with the perception that the teaching profession is increasingly subject to criticism.

During the period of my fieldwork, over half the participants had made changes to their occupations, although the majority continue to work as primary school teachers. Reasons for these occupational manoeuvres are complex and varied, although the data suggest that for four out of the eight ‘shifters’, an underlying motive to change schools related to the current school’s leadership.

Exploring the perceptions of teachers who continue to work in the profession has enabled insights into the incentives and challenges of remaining. Opting to remain in the profession, those 'staying put' have a clear rationale as to the benefits of such a decision, although this appears tempered by their earlier accounts. For some it suggests a tenuous prolongation in teaching and the spectre of 'leaving' is common in many teachers' accounts.

This concludes the research findings. In Chapter 8, I critically discuss significant themes from Chapters 4 to 7 with a view to explaining how some of my findings reinforce the literature on primary teachers' experience and identity, and how some findings extend the field in this regard. I outline the distinctive findings as they relate to the research questions, and further discuss the implications for the profession, encompassing key concepts detailed in Chapter 2.

## **Chapter 8 – Discussion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret and discuss significant findings in relation to concepts identified in the literature chapter, alongside a critical analysis and interpretation of the possible meanings and implications for primary teachers. The chapter will explore the juxtaposition between perceptions of being a teacher and the daily experience of teaching. Inherent to my findings is the notion of conflict; teachers value and relish particular aspects of the work and are frustrated and compromised by others.

The potentially complex interaction between the idiosyncrasies of primary school teaching and the 2010 White Paper policy reforms underpinned the rationale for the research. My study extends the existing literature about primary school teachers, most notably through the examination of participants' perceptions and experience of assessment and accountability, and the increasingly strategic nature of policy enactment in this regard. In section 8.2, I review my research questions and the ways the findings provide a credible interpretation of teachers' perceptions and experiences and outline the organisation of the chapter.

### **8.2 Research questions and key findings**

Fundamental to the research was an intention to raise questions about policy and practice in primary education (Barone, 2007), and the ways primary teachers experience policy reform (Agee, 2009). Given the interaction between the two research questions, there is some overlap between the findings, so I have opted to broadly demarcate the discussion as follows and will make explicit the relationship between the themes.

#### **Research question 1: How is education policy reform perceived and experienced by primary teachers in England?**

The first research question focused on the changing educational landscape and primary teachers' specific experience of this. The White Paper comprised seven strands of policy reform and three areas were established as potentially significant for primary teachers (2.4.3). The revision of the primary national

curriculum, the reforms to primary assessment and the permutations of accountability were envisaged as consequential for the step-change, purpose and positioning of primary education in England.

Previously acknowledged (1.5), the timing of the initial stages of my fieldwork (October, 2014) coincided with the launch of the revised National Curriculum in England. This was one component of the White Paper reforms which was imagined as potentially influential in teachers' lives at that time, as well as potentially pertinent to the issue of workload.

However, the findings indicate that teachers' engagement with pupil assessment and the associated experience of increased accountability are of greater consequence, and more contentious for perceptions and experience of policy reform (5.2 and 5.3).

Furthermore, teachers' engagement with pupil assessment is better understood as tactical, and as a 'game' to be played, and the data highlight the diversity of tactics deployed to manage expectations for pupil assessment. As reported in the literature chapter, these tactics are better understood as 'gaming', and I discuss the meanings and implications of primary teachers' gaming in section 8.5. This necessitates further reflection on the potential moral predicament of such practices, and the consequences for morale. In addition, my findings suggest that policy reform has evoked a change in workload and that this is also inherent to the experience of gaming.

My findings indicate that working in a primary school in England in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century necessitates a kind of professionalism that is flexible to accommodate behaviours that may not always tally with the assumed attributes of autonomy, principle and collegiality. In that sense, teachers' experience of policy reform may be understood as characterised by compromise and conflict.

The research about 'gaming' is relatively new and my findings contribute to an evolving field. Of note, my findings point to the influence and threat of the pupil progress meeting where the teacher and the head teacher review the children's profiles and overall progress of the class. The literature is negligible in this area

although there are frequent references to such meetings on, for example, primary school websites. This is an area that may warrant further attention and I explain the potential for future research in Chapter 9.

### **Research question 2: What are significant influences on, and threats to, primary teachers' motivations and morale?**

The second research question evolved in response to the recognised and increasing concerns about teacher morale and retention (1.3). Further to the existing literature (2.3), my findings reiterate the positive motivational influence and stability of the underpinning rationale for teaching, expressed as 'making a difference', and this is central to understanding the meanings and experience of primary teaching. Conversely, my findings point to the ways that complicated dynamics between school leaders and teachers are experienced as a threat to motivation and morale. The institutionally-specific context of the primary school setting may further exacerbate the experience of managerialism and contribute to the conflict exposed in mediating the over-arching principles of primary education alongside the ethos of marketisation. It is impossible to overlook the ways that the findings about gaming are also understood as a threat to teachers' identity and morale in this regard.

The perception of reputational decline is another critical, and negative, influence on teachers' morale. The high profile of the 'standards' debate and the ongoing teacher 'crisis' positions the wider profession in adverse ways, and some findings indicate the undermining effect of professional instability and societal distrust. Absent in the literature about teachers, I adopt the term 'miserabilism' to further explore and understand the issue of low morale.

In the next section (8.3), I focus on the motivational influence of altruism and the relative stability of teachers' perceptions of the work in this regard. My findings add to an established field, so I have opted for a relatively brief overview as a consequence. In section 8.4, the influence and threats of assessment and accountability reform are discussed in depth because I consider these findings influential for the evolving literature in this field. The multi-dimensional nature of teachers' 'game-playing' (gaming) and associated implications, are reviewed in section 8.5.

In sections 8.6 and 8.7, I examine two particular threats to teacher motivation and morale and discuss the influence of both the head teacher and the broader societal perceptions of the profession. Teachers' experiences of policy reform may be better understood when further contextualised within a broader cultural malaise about teacher status. Finally, in section 8.8, the discussion develops the premise of the teacher as 'tactician' with a view to gauging the potential advent of the neo-liberal primary teacher.

### **8.3 The motivation to 'make a difference'**

Congruent with the literature (2.3; 2.8), my findings reiterate teachers' aspirations to 'make a difference' and this is construed as an important motivation for the work. Previous studies have highlighted the relationship between teacher retention and positive motives to make a difference, and this continues to be reflected in the most recent research (Heinz; 2015; Chiong and Menzies, 2017; Towers, 2017; Kell, 2018).

The findings in this study show teachers are motivated by working with children and acknowledge the 'reward', the 'pride', the 'joy' and the 'contribution to society' as features of the job. However, common in accounts of 'making a difference' (4.3) is the distinction between what happens within and beyond the school day, and that 'the problem with teaching is not the children'. The rationale to teach, and to be a teacher, is expressed emotively and strongly situated in the context of the relationships and interactions with pupils, and the potential to influence their learning and development.

The White Paper positions teaching as a 'noble calling' (DFE, 2010b), and the reform reflects a mandate for teachers to 'make a difference' in their work (Gove, 2013), although the tenets of child-centred, humanist ideology are positioned in the context of 'raising standards'. The potential dissonance between 'being a teacher' and (the current expectations of) 'teaching' is accentuated in participants' accounts of 'compromise'. In the current context, to teach is to honour a professionalism that both attends to 'the basics' of primary education, and ensuring high pupil outcomes in maths and English, as well as to the broader aims of the work and its 'special moral worth' (Lortie, 1975).

The potential of the underpinning rationale to consistently sustain and support the teacher may be construed as at variance with other feelings about teaching (Secret Teacher, 2017). My premise is that the complex interaction between discourses of altruism, accountability and effectiveness may elicit a profound professional and personal predicament for primary teachers. The literature is redolent with references to the 'moral purpose' of teaching, and 'making a difference' is perceived as integral (Fullan, 1993). The consequence of positioning teaching as a 'moral endeavour' (Fenstermacher, 1990) has implications for the enactment of policy which may challenge a professional sense of duty, care and principles. When notions of teacher effectiveness are institutionalised via pupil performance in maths and English, the potential moral quandary is patent for the individual teacher.

The ethics traditionally associated with primary teaching invariably conflict with the business ethos of the marketised school, and the language of marketisation reconstitutes the emphasis of primary teachers' work. Gewirtz and Ball note the requisite shift in values for the 'new moral environment' (2000, p.266). Here, teachers are "guided by a sense of moral purpose" (DFE, 2010b, p.31), but one which is refashioned to endorse the policy agenda to 'raise standards'. The commitment to the individual child must be achieved within an orientation of practices towards what Burns has described as "satisfying the exigencies of accountability and performativity" (2016, p.1).

My findings reiterate the motivations for teaching, and the experiences which symbolise the appeal and reward of the role. However, other findings suggest that teachers work to uphold the core purpose and moral endeavour of teaching whilst adhering to the 'standards' agenda through increasing levels of professional tactics. In the next section, I focus on findings which illuminate the perception and experience of aspects of the work as 'game playing', and more significantly, of the encounters with assessment practices commonly understood as 'gaming' (DFE, 2010b).

Whilst my findings resonate with existing research as to 'why teach' and tally with traditional discourses about teacher vocation and altruism, the findings on 'gaming' may be viewed as a challenge to preconceived ideas about 'good

teachers'. In some ways, and counter to the fundamental notion of the professional as 'virtuous' or 'principled', the concept of the 'tactical' teacher appears to go some way to disrupt the traditional discourse of the primary teacher. I suggest that teachers have limited options for responding to and managing the loss or compromise of humanism in teaching and that engaging in 'gaming' may offer evidence of teachers' resolve to maintain the moral purpose of the work. I return to this idea in section 8.8.

#### **8.4 The threats of assessment and accountability reforms**

I suggest that the most influential of the 2010 White Paper reforms are those related to assessment and accountability. In this section I demonstrate how and why my findings enable an insight into a specific and dominant aspect of primary teachers' experience of work. I add to an evolving field about 'gaming', currently overshadowed by the context of secondary education, although similar findings about early years' practitioners have more recently further extended the field in this regard (Bradbury and Robert-Holmes, 2017).

Subsequent to my fieldwork, further adjustments to the assessment arrangements in primary schools were with a view to "mitigate the negative impacts of constant change" (HOC, 2016, p. 7). Recent commentary on primary assessment goes some way to further illuminate the themes in my data and confirms both the difficulty and enormity of the ongoing policy reform (DFE, 2018a), with changes in assessment "labelled as 'chaotic' (causing) significant upheaval within the sector" (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017b, p. 18).

In 2017, the Government revealed the latest recommendations on primary assessment (DFE, 2017b). Published subsequent to my fieldwork and analysis, it is one of many since the White Paper and goes some way to confirm the instability of the landscape in this regard. The Government's decision to abolish national curriculum levels as the mechanism for reporting attainment is now appraised as momentous (Roberts, 2018), but demanding for schools. The context for primary assessment and accountability has been in disarray and findings about participants' perceptions and experiences of assessment should be understood in relation to this policy environment.

The section focuses on two aspects of gaming; the first relates to the experience of (fake) marking of pupils' work and the specific kind of workload consequently generated (which I will further explain as 'meta-work'), and the second focuses on the pupil progress meeting as a site of data gaming and, on occasion, manipulation. Section 8.5 expands the discussion on gaming to explore the potential meanings and implications for teacher identity.

Findings point to teachers' experience of the 'charade' of written feedback to pupils. As previously acknowledged (2.6), many schools use complicated 'marking codes' and 'deep' or 'triple marking'. Perceived as unworkable, findings suggest that practices are subsequently 'engineered', and retrospective marking and related 'stage-management' and 'supervised' pupil responses to the marking exists alongside strategic book selection for management scrutiny.

There are three facets to this phenomenon: the teacher's gaming, the head teacher's implied awareness of and/or collusion in gaming, and the generation of 'meta-work'. Underpinning these behaviours is the pressure for 'good data' and the according evidence that pupils are making progress. The onerous expectations for written feedback and the monitoring of teachers' feedback, generates a specific type of workload that only exists to satisfy internal and external surveillance and rarely impacts on the individual learner. Complex marking protocols demand, and reflect, an increase in internal monitoring by the school's senior leadership team, necessitating 'learning walks', teacher observations and associated book scrutiny. Such events were described as tactically engineered by teachers and head teachers but created the image of school compliance ahead of a future inspection.

Evident in my findings is a frustration borne from the demands of this 'meta-work'; a specific kind of workload consequent to increased levels of accountability. This workload is different, and in addition to practices which may genuinely enable pupil progress. Much of this 'meta-work' (Adams, 2017) is understood as separate from, and of little consequence to, the well-being and achievement of the pupils. The term 'meta-work' is useful in this context because it acts as a symbol for accountability and a device instituted to manage teachers to 'show they are working', that is, all work must be rendered visible.

Ironically, the time necessary to fulfil the demands of the 'meta-work' may exceed the time needed for the authentic activity necessary for good practice. Apple (1986) refers to this kind of work as 'intensification' and to denote the growing demands of work specifically resulting from policy directives.

Subsequent to my fieldwork, expectations for written feedback have been recognised as burdensome and serve to demonstrate "teacher performance or ... satisfy the requirements of other, mainly adult, audiences" (DFE, 2016, p.5). Both the Workload survey (DFE, 2016b) and Ofsted (2017d) reinforce the parameters for marking: "Ofsted does not expect to see any specific frequency, type or volume of marking and feedback ... or any written record of oral feedback provided to pupils by teachers" (ibid, np). In some schools, teachers are still known to use a commercially produced 'feedback stamper' which allows them to 'endorse work' where verbal feedback has been provided. Another illustration of gaming and meta-work, these practices exist to "objectify the process of teaching; to make teachers visibly accountable and comparable" (Case, Case and Catling, 2000, p.614). At the same time, they add to an onerous workload which continues to be at the heart of Government's efforts to address ongoing concerns, although latest surveys suggest that recommended strategies to reduce workload have not been implemented by most leaders (Smith et al, 2017).

Both teachers and head teachers 'game the system', and in this section, the discussion orientates to the ways this is also evident in pupil progress meeting. Unanticipated in the findings (5.3), and as noted, the literature about the phenomenon is scant. In a (now) archived Government document, the pupil progress meeting (PPM) is described as a time to "have an open discussion about the progress children are making and to value teacher judgement" (DSCF, 2007, np). Often termly or half-termly, the meetings offer an opportunity to review pupils' progress (specifically in maths and English). There is some acknowledgement in former policy documents (ibid), which clarifies that the meetings have been customary for some time. Teachers are expected to bring a range of documentation to the meeting, for example, "recent tracking data [and] examples of pupils' work" (DCSF, 2007, np), and come prepared to talk about each child's progress and attainment.

This meeting can be conceptualised as positive and productive (Dann, 2016), although this perspective is infrequent in my findings. Teachers across all professional life phases shared experiences about the meeting, and common in the findings are perceptions of this as a game that can involve the negotiation and adjustment of pupil data whilst appearing to honour the professional expectations of moderation and target-setting. The meeting entails a specific set of behaviours and situates the 'pupil progress meeting' akin to a site of contestation.

This is significant for the process of 'gaming' for three reasons. The first relates to the uniqueness of the primary context. In contrast to the various tiers of leadership and management in secondary education, where expectations for marking, feedback and target setting are negotiated and filtered through, for example, department heads, the individual primary teacher's interaction with high-stakes data is usually mediated alongside the head teacher. In that sense, the interface with policy is much more immediate than for secondary colleagues. In the context of a private meeting with the head teacher or senior leader, the direction to further review or adjust data may be experienced as intimidating. The meeting has repercussions for staff dynamics and relationships, which might be construed differently as a consequence.

Noteworthy for the culture shift in the individual teacher's accountability, the experience of the meeting is enacted as solitary. I envisage this as paramount for the increasing culture of individualism in schools. The individual teacher is held accountable for pupils' progress as well as for the strategies necessary to enhance both the pupils' performance and their own. The rise in individualism is underpinned by the discourse of performativity making individual teachers wholly responsible. As Torrance argues, "neo-liberalism produces responsabilisation ... and far over-emphasises the individual nature of responsibility" (2017, p.93). The added dimension of performance-related pay may also influence teachers' perceptions of the high-stakes in this context (Forrester, 2011).

Lastly, my findings reveal something of the competitive positioning of teachers in the negotiations about pupil progress. For teachers working alongside

colleagues in the same year groups, the experience of the ‘pupil progress meeting’ can entail an element of comparison. Here, the dialogue between the head teacher and class teacher appears to promote as well as induce competition. Raising questions about data or admonishment for lack of pupil progress can position teachers as threatened and defensive although the variety in the findings was noted (5.4 and 5.5).

As a final point, rivalry between teachers is evident beyond the context of assessment and will be further explored in the subsequent discussion about school leadership (8.6). Feeling ‘pitted’ against each other works to undermine professional values seen as critical for the morale of the profession (Addison and Brundrett, 2008). Understanding the experience of primary teachers must be deliberated alongside that of the senior leaders and head teachers “who are living an existence of calculation” (Keddie, 2017, p.1250) with the attendant pressures and competing demands of ‘good data’.

Common in the examples is the heightened micro-managerialism and accountability measures devised in readiness for internal monitoring or external scrutiny and with the future inspection in mind (Perryman et al, 2017). Assessment and accountability protocols can be seen to de-professionalise and demoralise teachers and in section 8.5 I develop the discussion to encompass possible meanings and implications for identity.

## **8.5 The meanings and implications of gaming**

In this section, I further explore the significance of ‘gaming’ for teacher professionalism and identity. As noted in section 2.6, the term encompasses a variety of intentional tactics which are employed to manipulate and maximise pupil outcomes. Common in the literature about secondary education, the discussion about gaming in the primary sector is far less established. Primary schools have been noted for their strategic management of the curriculum and end of key-stage tests (DFE, 2010b) but my findings illustrate the extent to which primary teachers’ assessment practices are subject to gaming. The findings provide a more extensive and nuanced account of the specific tactics employed, and the ramifications for the teacher. Some of my findings are

consistent with, and add to, research conducted at same time (Pratt, 2016b; Bradbury and Robert-Holmes, 2017).

The discussion centres on the implications of gaming. Having established particular sites of struggle in this domain, I explore the potential ramifications for teachers' experience of work and identity. The behaviour of 'gaming' may reflect and/or necessitate a kind of professionalism that is more flexible and can accommodate behaviours which do not always tally with the attributes traditionally associated with the profession. Gaming can be construed as a coping mechanism in the data-driven climate and as a facet of professionalism. My contention is that in the context of primary education, this may be experienced as running counter to the cardinal notion of the professional as 'virtuous' or 'principled' and disrupt conceptions of the primary teacher.

Perhaps antagonistic to the motivation to teach and teachers' perceptions of the learner, the reduction of children to 'numbers on a page' runs counter to a philosophical position about the learner. In the context of beliefs about 'why teach', talking about children 'in categories', and according to number facts, levels and 'points of progress', or the "transmogrification of students into data" (Thomson et al, 2010, p.653), may work to undermine the primary teacher's responsibility to the individual child. Conceivably, gaming is made tolerable by the lack of repercussion for the pupil. In the main, the child is inconsequential in the process and these enactments occur behind closed doors and separate to 'the core business' of classroom teaching. Indeed, participating in such activity may enable the preservation of the teacher's core aims and values. This may explain how it is perceived as tolerable in that it doesn't wholly jeopardise interactions with pupils.

Further to the notion of 'tolerance', my interest is in the ways that gaming positions teachers as compliant or subversive. 'Gaming' may be viewed as objectionable, and although teachers' accounts appear to reveal their (apparent) collusion with such activity, they are relatively powerless in this regard. Sachs maintains that the context of neo-liberal reform and the associated culture of 'standards' casts teachers as compliant (2014). It is feasible to view the behaviour as 'cynical compliance' (Ball, 2003), although

some insist there is “a high level of compliance amongst teachers working in schools in England with regards to the reconceptualisation of their work and their identities” (Hall and McGinty, 2015, p.3).

It is feasible to understand gaming as indicative of agency, despite the apparent complicity with the school’s senior leaders. The head teacher’s behaviour may also be viewed as strategic and institutionally tactical. Simultaneously influenced by discourses of altruism, accountability and effectiveness, the individual teacher may experience gaming as a necessary professional requirement. These are teachers who continue to work in the profession despite the dilemmas, frustration or disdain about such practices and I now explore a number of explanations or ways of understanding this.

‘Contingent pragmatism’ is “adopted by teachers in oppositional orientations to reform, whereby enforced reactions to policy change take on something of the function of a survival strategy” (Moore et al, 2002, p.551). ‘Gaming’, then, might be considered a coping strategy for teachers. The emergence of the primary practitioner as ‘tactician’ may reveal a particular brand of survivalism necessary for a context that acts to pedagogically and philosophically constrain the purpose of primary education, and thus, primary teachers. Viewed this way, teachers may tolerate and participate in all manner of ‘less desirable’ activities in order to safeguard more valued aspects of the work.

‘Gaming’ might be understood as a strategy to uphold pedagogy and core professional principles. Thus, assigning such ‘gaming’ activities relatively low significance or ‘lip-service’ and executing these in a relatively detached manner may enable the necessary professional and personal distance. Despite this, it is possible to view the impact on identity as more far-reaching, acting to accumulate or powerfully combine with other (as) potent influences, for example, the ethos of senior management (8.6).

Conversely, increasing levels of tactical proficiency at work may act as a mechanism of dissent; the Government has warned of the threats and ramifications of gaming, yet for some teachers it appears accepted and, for others, routine. These tactics perform as subversive in a context which

privileges pupil progress data, with the expected rates of progress positioned as unobtainable and/or unimportant.

Ironically, 'gaming' could be understood as the teacher's tactical enactment of accountability policy and protocols, which may be further construed as a facet of a 'strategic professionalism'. This behaviour may be central to the preservation of the 'core purpose' of teaching as well as to occupational stamina necessary at this time. Souto-Otero and Beneito-Montagut (2016) explore the ramifications of teachers' engagement with data in a similar manner and assert a relationship between gaming and resistance. It could be argued that this is another example of teachers "keeping up appearances of faithful implementation for accountability purposes, while seeking ways of mediating reforms to make them work" (Hoyle and Wallace, 2005, p.11).

Whilst 'gaming' might be construed as unavoidable, necessary or irrelevant, to understand the subsequent implications and consequences, it is also necessary to reflect on the connotations of 'dishonest' practices. The meanings attributed to this kind of 'game-playing' are revealed through the terms evident in the findings. The language appears provocative with terms like 'inflate', 'falsify', 'lie', 'fake' and 'making it up' deployed in both an offhand and indignant manner. The language choice may detract from a more fundamental issue for teachers. Whilst the euphemism 'creative accounting' is often deployed in the context of business to denote an intelligent and tactical practice, the alternative is to define such behaviours as cheating, fraudulent or unethical. As noted, findings reveal a continuum of practice, and the adjustment, manipulation and deflation of pupil data.

Relatively well publicised and high profile, the 'Twittersphere', TES and Secret Teacher editorials and education bloggers (Kidd, 2017) regularly feature articles about 'made up data' and 'cheating teachers' (The Guardian, 2013). This both reinforces and perpetuates the 'discourse of derision' (Ball, 1990) about teachers and fails to situate such behaviours in the wider political domain and, as one participant described, 'the risk of damnation' following unacceptable school test results. At the same time, schools are increasingly recognised as engaging in gaming, as well as monitored and admonished: schools that 'game'

do children a 'disservice' and should be 'ashamed' to "put the interests of schools ahead of the interests of the children" (Ofsted, 2017c, np). Alternatively, "apportioning blame for such practices in a system where the incentives to engage in them are so strong is far from straightforward" (Astle, 2017, p.23). My position is that using the term 'cheating' is insensitive to the complexities of the situation.

'Gaming' may reveal teachers' subversion or collusion. It may prove to be another example of the 'trap of conscientiousness' (Campbell et al, 1991) prevalent in education, or an indicator of 'cruel optimism' (Moore and Clarke, 2016) necessary to enact high-stakes reform. In any, or all, of these ways, fundamental is the incentive to further understand the fluctuating experience of primary teaching in the current context and the ramifications for identity. The notion that "teachers can be easily compartmentalised is difficult to sustain" (Locke, 2001, p. 21) and the nuances of teacher behaviour are better expressed beyond the continuum of compliance and resistance.

The profession may be "characterised by a range of positions, at times compliant, sometimes resistant, often unheard and invariably eloquent when given half a chance of having their voices listened to" (ibid, p.21). Throughout the research, I reflected on the impetus for teachers to share these particular stories with me. Some made explicit their motivation or reward, and this was sometimes couched in therapeutic terms. For some, it offered the opportunity to find expression for the frustrations of the wider system. At the same time, perhaps participation in the research, and the detailed accounting of 'gaming', could be construed as resistance or a brand of whistleblowing.

In the next two sections my discussion attends to the second research question and on two related facets of primary education which appear to potentially combine to threaten motivation and morale. The first is the role and influence of the head teacher and the impact of leadership and management style on the classroom teacher. The second is the influence of the perceived reputational decline and broader professional malaise which may also impact on morale.

## 8.6 The importance of leadership

Central to my study is an interest in the perceived current threats to primary teachers' motivations and morale. Implicit in the previous section is the role of the head teacher and senior leaders to mediate the school's relationship with data. In this section, I focus on a recurring theme that transcends several facets of the findings. Explicit in teachers' accounts about school life is the influence of the head teacher and senior leadership team and the impact of the style and approach of school leaders to motivate and value staff. I explain how teachers' experiences of management and leadership act to threaten motivation and morale. The emotional consequences of perceived 'ineffective' leadership might be construed as the biggest threat, and conversely, when viewed as positive, can influence teachers' professional satisfaction.

The context of policy reform continues to reposition head teachers and the work they do, and the distinctiveness of the primary school is as significant for leadership as it is for teachers. Aspirations to primary school leadership are customarily initiated by primary teachers who originally qualified and worked in education. Like teachers, 62% of head teachers judged their role as offering an 'opportunity to make a difference in pupil's lives' (Menzies et al, 2015).

The metamorphosis to manager has implications for how the work is experienced and viewed, and the demands it makes on the individual and the school staff. The expectation is that "well-functioning teams, rather than 'visionary' individuals ... reflect the reality of how good schools are run" (Ofsted, 2017b, np). Under a revised Ofsted inspection framework, the role of head teacher to act as 'Ofsted-inspector in residence' (Troman, 1997) works to reshape staff perceptions of the mandate of head teacher and the consequent relationships.

NFER research (Worth, Bamford, and Durbin, 2015) revealed the relationship between teacher retention and teachers who feel well supported by management, and school leaders who reward and recognise teachers' work. Subsequent to my research, the Select Committee's comments underline my findings (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017a) and report that "workload is not the only reason teachers appear to be leaving the profession ...

Overall job satisfaction comes out as the biggest driver [for intention to leave], and also things related to whether they feel supported and valued by management” (ibid, p.15).

My study shows that the capacity of the head teacher to establish a positive and collegiate climate in times of policy upheaval should not be underestimated. The impact of professional trust, respect and communication between staff may go some way in enabling a shared vision and offset the broader (and) ideological pressures felt by teachers. The findings indicate the recurring significance of the school’s leadership to affect an individual’s experience of being a teacher and to enhance or diminish morale.

The notion that the challenges of ‘school life’ can be aggravated or compensated by local school culture, and notably the way that an individual head teacher’s philosophy and leadership shapes the school’s ethos and staff relationships, is a feature of the findings. In Chapter 6, accounts revealed insights into ‘feeling supported’ by the management as synonymous with feeling respected, valued and trusted as well as feeling acknowledged and praised.

There were some notable features regarding teachers’ professional life phases. For the novice teachers, the experience of the head teacher, and of management more broadly, appears varied. For the two resigned teachers in this phase, the experience of management is expressed wholly negatively. For teachers in phase two, the perception of management is almost wholly negative. Several of the phase three teachers are middle or senior leaders and the perceptions and experiences of their own head teachers are mixed. In this group, there is acknowledgement of the ways the local authority or broader context positions head teachers as constrained and conflicted. By contrast, other phase three teachers’ accounts of head teachers are personalised and emotive.

The grading of a school may act to influence the leadership style. In schools graded ‘outstanding’, leaders may have “very high expectations, a no-excuses culture and a single-minded focus on making the school a place of learning for all” (Matthews, 2014, p.6), and the burden of this may impact on relationships throughout the school. In my study, of those teachers working in ‘outstanding’

schools, half spoke positively of the leadership and the head teacher. In all cases, the individual capacity of the head to demonstrate support, 'protection' and trust established a more positive impression of working at the school. The context, then, locates the primary role of the head teacher and senior leadership team in relation to school effectiveness and standards, and this has ramifications for the relationships between school staff, as well as between pupils and parents.

In my study, there are some cases where the head teacher is perceived as respected, trusted and supportive and a few teachers 'felt lucky' to have a good head teacher. However, the majority of accounts included slights about the style of leadership, and could be perceived as reproachful (*"he said leadership didn't do very well but that was because the teachers weren't doing what we were supposed to do"*), as unreliable (*"he started to fall through on all the promises he'd made and then I got to see a different side of him"*), as divisive (*"this is one of the issues I have with her. She pits people against each other"*) and as cut-throat (*"for the managers to be successful, they had to show they were cutting off the dead weight of teachers"*). Teachers were cynical about leadership cliques and the ensuing staff divides, and what is noticeable in the data are the high levels of emotion and preoccupation this evokes.

Findings point to the emotional intensity of the relationship between school leaders and teachers, negatively or positively. The interaction and relationship with the head teacher had consequences for the individual's sense of efficacy and well-being. Accounts speculated on the 'profession-specific' incidence of the lack of praise and on feeling under-valued. The notion that it is 'something about teaching' recurred in the data and sometimes transcended the criticism about individual head teachers. For some, the 'whole ethos of teaching' is being told constantly that 'it's not good enough'. Teachers spoke of 'giving their heart and soul' but it 'never being enough'. The influence of Ofsted cannot be overlooked in this regard and I will return to this as part of the discussion on the wider professional malaise in section 8.8.

There is an interesting juxtaposition between the professional honour of the primary teacher to 'care' (for children), and to feel simultaneously undervalued

and experience a lack of care themselves. The institution of the primary school is suffused with traditions of community, family and care and of teachers who are charged to notice and reward individual pupils for effort and achievement. Some teachers' responses appear intensified by the paradox of working in an environment experienced as uncaring. The irony is that schools may "aspire to be caring environments that support and develop teachers, but it is an aspiration undermined by excessive accountability, inspection and ranking, which increases stress amongst teachers and their senior managers" (Bricheno and Thornton, 2016, p.210).

The role of school leaders to sustain (6.6) or, in some cases, inhibit motivation and morale (6.5; 7.5) recurred in the findings in Chapters 6 and 7. Whilst my study has shown the extent of managerialism in primary schools, it is imperative that teachers' commentaries about school leadership and the head teachers are interpreted and sensitive to the specific challenges of headship. As previously noted, whilst the head teacher and senior leaders are positioned to advocate for and enact Government policy, they may also be experiencing similar feelings of fear and anxiety (Thomson, 2009; Keddie, 2017) and low morale.

Findings that highlight negative perceptions about school leadership must be understood in context. Frustration, fear and disdain are consequent to perceptions of school management as ill-prepared, thoughtless or somehow lacking credibility to 'manage' effectively. In Chapter 2 I highlighted the head teacher's role to honour the "dual aims to develop 'good' education as well as meet societal goals" (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2015, p.211), and in the White Paper, these are signalled as the moral duty to raise standards and enhance pupil attainment (DFE, 2010b). Primary school leaders are potentially caught in a crossfire of powerful discourses which demand the setting of high expectations and agendas of improvement, but within the policy context of accountability and the child-centred practitioner. Leaders have recently reported that the scale of change has been "particularly difficult to keep up with" (Ofsted, 2017b, np) and there is no doubt about the levels of pressure and stress experienced by school leaders (Jones, 2016; Keddie, 2017).

The continuing reconstruction of the primary head teacher as 'manager' and one who must prioritise agendas of accountability and performativity has implications for staff politics and morale. Relationships between school leaders and teachers, and those between colleagues are reshaped. The implications of policy expectations for the working environment, the specific context of the primary school setting and the influence of the head teacher and senior leadership team all have an impact on teacher morale.

In the next section, I further explain the contextual parameters for teachers' work and scrutinise the decline in morale. In light of the evidence of gaming, managerialism and subsequent demoralisation, I argue that teachers' experiences of policy reform may be better understood when further contextualised within a cultural shift about teacher status. It is necessary to frame the findings beyond the populist discourse of the 'moany teacher' and to situate this in the wider context of reputational decline. The concept of 'miserabilism' may be useful in further understanding the phenomenon.

## **8.7 The advent of miserabilism**

Central to this study is an interest in the experience of being a primary teacher at a time when the purposes and outcomes of primary education are framed in increasingly essentialist terms. In this section, I explore the implications of both the demise of societal satisfaction and trust in teachers alongside the institutional scepticism about the profession, notably manifest in the heightened remit and prominence of Ofsted.

Internationally, teachers have been reported as feeling undervalued and that the job lacks positive recognition (OECD, 2013). Societal scepticism about the profession, as compared to, for example, professions like accountancy, medicine and law, may be contingent on the indicators of status, for example, pay. For teachers in my study in 2014-2015, the context may be perceived as one of change, criticism and low morale. In the course of reform, "teachers can be left feeling frustrated, angry and/or guilty as they have limited control over their own professional practice and are therefore unable to attain their personal moral objectives" (Farouk, 2010, p.353).

Popular interpretations of what it means to be a teacher are influenced by media representations which frequently reinforce discourses of the 'poor' and 'moany' teacher. It is argued that moaning is a "negative coping strategy" and often in response to stress and burnout (Van Droogenbroeck et al, 2014, p.101), but the caricature of the 'moany teacher' has been propagated by politicians and serves to censure professional complaint. Ball and Goodson acknowledge the ways in which moaning has provided a 'safety valve' in dealing with the pressures of workload (2002, p.39). The image of the 'moany' teacher renders the profession as unreasonably dissatisfied rather than as genuine objectors. I discuss the relevance of the term 'miserabilism' to further explain and understand teachers' experiences of policy reform in primary education. The culture of 'miserabilism' transcends notions of 'teacher stress', low morale and reputational decline and may serve as a useful concept in appreciating the wider issues of recruitment and retention.

In the context of neo-liberal reform, the evolving discourses of 'standards' and 'accountability' may have further shaped public perceptions of the profession. The Government's "lack of esteem for the profession" is a recurring theme in the 2010 White Paper (Braun, 2014, p.258). Research highlights the 'lack of faith' in teachers (Brown and Manktelow, 2016), and the context of a recruitment and retention 'crisis' also informs wider impressions of the workforce and of its professional health.

Made explicit in the White Paper, the issue of educational standards is increasingly linked to economic growth and the future of the country (DFE, 2010b). This is exemplified in the introduction of the revised 'Teachers' Standards (2011) and the concern about professional expectations and under-performance further establish a culture of closer scrutiny. I contend that the period subsequent to the White Paper reflects several critical step-changes in policy reform, parental expectations, and increased media activity which powerfully interact to expose and probe the profession. As a highly political and contested aspect of Government policy and with 8.67 million pupils in English schools (DFE, 2017c), it is unsurprising that education is of public interest. In that sense, the profession, and the issue of 'national standards' is 'newsworthy' and prone to increased mediatization.

In my study, teachers are alert to the judgements in wider society and seem frustrated and aggrieved. Teachers across all phases are troubled by the experience of professional disregard; the public representation of the teacher appears increasingly subject to criticism. For new teachers, intent on managing a positive identity, the impression that the profession is 'bad-mouthed' impacts on feelings about the job. The image of the 'nine-till-three o'clock teacher' was a frustration, as was the perceived 'reputation' of the moaning or 'poor teacher'.

Some discourses about the profession are created and perpetuated by the media. Alhamdan et al (2014) highlight the diverse media representations of teachers and what constitutes newsworthy stories of teachers. These reflect and reinforce societal expectations about 'superhuman' teachers whilst admonishing reckless or 'cheating' teachers. The media are assigned an influential role in generating and perpetuating perceptions of the profession (Alhamdan et al, 2014) and "seductively personalise the policy agendas that produce competitiveness and divided schooling" (Blackmore and Thomson, 2004, p.315). Public expectations may incline to an image of the morally robust, principled and committed profession but notions of 'effective teaching' are governed by the school's results in two curriculum areas which are made public in a variety of ways. Suffice to say, there is a regular and high profile "public revelation of performance in public schools" (Blackmore and Thomson, 2004, p.306).

Implicit in the broader societal conceptions of the profession and the increased mediatisation of education is the influence of Ofsted. The inspection regime continues to shape conceptions of the profession and the expectations and language of Ofsted enables a "public discourse ... and notions of 'good' and 'bad' schools ... and consequently of teachers too" (Ball, 2013, p187). A whole new lexicon is now commonplace, with inspection gradings describing schools as failing, coasting, outstanding and assessed as 'requiring improvement' or inadequate and in 'special measures'. "Where a maintained school is deemed by Ofsted to have serious weaknesses or to require special measures, it is considered to be 'eligible for intervention'" (Roberts and Abreu, 2017, p.9) and the subsequent high levels of publicity or the "savagery of (the) English media" (Blackmore and Thomson, 2004, p.316), can amount to 'naming and shaming'.

Public perception may be influenced by these well-publicised institutional assessments and the high-stakes of the sanctions issued to ‘under-performing’ schools. Schools assessed as inadequate are subject to monitoring and re-inspection within a relatively short time-frame. The Education and Adoption Act (DFE, 2016c) clarifies the necessary actions for schools that are causing concern, including provision for conversion into Academies. Sanctions potentially “threaten the individual head teacher, teachers’ pay, the status, grading and operation of the school, and thus the perception of effectiveness and improvement” (West, Mattei and Roberts, 2011).

The advent of increased media attention and, for example, the ‘Twittersphere’, online editorials and education bloggers, means that the information is in the public domain very quickly, and subject to scrutiny and judgement. Schools, and their daily lives, are now more visible and ‘know-able’ than ever. In the absence of ‘redemption tales’ about teachers, the influential discourses of ‘teacher stress’, low morale and reputational decline serve to underpin public perceptions of the profession. Teachers are also culpable here and “tend to underestimate public respect for their profession” (Everton et al, 2007, p.261). I argue that the concept of ‘miserabilism’ encompasses institutional, societal and personal assumptions about the profession and may better account for teachers’ perceptions and engagement with their work at this time.

The ideological driver in current education reform positions teachers as technicians and as controlled, accountable and powerless in the face of successive changes. Indeed, in recent years, the neo-liberal ideology of education has provoked a ‘discourse of derision’ about teachers (Ball, 1990b). However, the derision is now further institutionalised and publicised and contextualised by a ‘crisis’ in teacher retention. In that sense, the prevalence of ‘miserabilism’ may be explained as a response to the pace and enormity of change. Teaching has been subject to intense reform over the last thirty years and “when reforms are characterised by conflict, change and ambiguity, intense and negative emotional reactions are often the consequence” (Schmidt and Datnow 2005, p.961). This is one way of understanding the long-term consequences of reform, the associated emotional labour and toll and the current ‘crisis’ in recruitment and retention. The term ‘miserabilism’

encapsulates a more widespread phenomenon and one that reflects the wider societal perception of the profession as well as the effect on professional self-image.

The usefulness of the term, 'miserabilism', is as a concept that accounts for a broader (and international) professional malaise. Uncommon, it can be found in literature about 'the arts' and a particular kind of depressive genre. It is sometimes used to describe party political ideology (Hindmoor, 2018), and is occasionally deployed as a broader cultural narrative (Yule, 2015). The German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk (1987) equates 'miserabilism' to "a sense of resignation and fatalism among people who believe that they have no choice but to submit to the absurdity of reality imposed on them" (in Mirvis, 2014, p.441). Teachers' engagement with gaming may be construed as an example of this.

In light of the 'exodus from the profession', signalling teachers as 'hopeless' may not be wholly arbitrary when also considered alongside evidence of absenteeism and long-term sickness consequent to depression and stress (Day et al, 2007; Chang, 2009; Hong, 2010; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015; Lindqvist and Nordanger, 2016; Bianchi et al, 2017) and the rising mental health issues in the profession (Hepburn, 2017). Burnout is sometimes described as a "persistent, negative, work-related state of psychological exhaustion", notably emotional exhaustion (Van Droogenbroeck et al.2014, p. 99). As noted, there are some reports of higher percentages of work-related stress, depression and anxiety in teaching (Health and Safety Executive, 2017; IIAC, 2017). The statistics on suicide and relative figures about primary teachers in this category between 2011-2015 (Office for National Statistics, 2017) may prove inconclusive in theorising cause and effect but are disquieting nevertheless.

One perspective is to view the wider implications of miserabilism as insidious for the profession. Whether teachers adjust their way of working, 'moan' about it or opt out and resign is less problematic than a diminishing and compliant workforce who subordinate their resistance for their altruism. In that sense, the culture of miserabilism detracts from and undermines the profession's appetite for activism.

More broadly, and helpfully for my argument, the sociologist Ken Plummer suggests that to be 'miserabilist' is to "espouse the philosophy of pessimism" (2012, np), and in light of the policy reforms and implied disparagement of the profession, this construction may act as a mark of professional resistance. Indeed, the characteristics of 'miserabilism' may be understood as feelings of despair evoked by the ongoing moral challenges of a system that privileges aspects of education in terms of attainment and numerical outcomes. If teaching is positioned as a 'moral endeavour', redolent with principles of virtuosity, care and commitment, any lack of concern about the policy reforms and the assumed acceptance of the situation may reveal a more troubling acquiescence.

Apparent in my findings, teachers displayed a gamut of emotions when telling stories about their lives at school, and these "emotional reactions ... are intimately connected to the view they have of themselves" (Kelchtermans, 2005, p.996). The disposition to miserabilism may be construed as resistance, and the attendant despair is performed as 'an ethical act' (Carusi, 2017). The overtly negative tenor of the majority of interviews conceivably further exposes the motivation to 'make a difference' and positions altruism as irrepressible and resilient.

Equally powerfully, many teachers intimate strategies for managing the complexities and toll of school life. Farouk's work (2010) implies teachers' limited control over their own professional practice, although my findings allude to participants' tactical professionalism in some domains. Arguably, this is evident in the engagement with 'gaming', as well as in the occupational manoeuvres described in Chapter 7. In the final section, I examine the implications for identity and review the occupational hazards for teachers. The impact of miserabilism is not sufficient to prompt resignation for the teachers in my study but may be reshaping the ways in which teaching is conceived and managed. The tactics employed by teachers in the study may provide alternative ways of 'being' as a teacher and an identity that can better counter feelings of negativity or low morale and cope with feelings of despair.

## **8.8 The neo-liberal primary teacher?**

A central premise of the study is that aspects of neo-liberal reform are experienced distinctively by primary teachers and that this is a consequence of a number of related factors. The ways in which conflicting discourses potentially re-orientate the primary school teacher and the consequences for professionalism and identity have been of particular interest. In this section, I explore another key finding and one which further extends the field of teacher identity and morale. Reiterating the theme of 'tactics', I explore the significance of strategies that appear to support teachers' ongoing engagement in the profession. Like gaming, these strategies may work to maintain engagement with the work, but also reveal an evolving facet of professional identity that helps teachers to 'weather the storm' or what I describe as professional 'hedging'.

The notion that variant discourses of professionalism evolve consequent to the particular context for education is further reinforced by the teachers' biographical data and decision making at work. The image of the committed and 'life-long' teacher is challenged by current employment statistics about retention (NAO, 2017; House of Commons Education Committee, 2017a) and I argue that occupational tactics further substantiate the current enactment of primary teaching. Despite the rising proportions of teachers leaving the profession, the majority in my sample planned to continue in teaching in some way. The way that decisions were couched revealed some as 'last-chance saloons' or the last stop before 'jumping ship' or 'escaping'. The participants' adjusted employment pathways suggest that explanations for retention may be more complex than purely pragmatic. For some, the short-term measures may provide an illustration of tactical behaviours deployed to manage demoralisation and pre-burnout. The experience and consequences of the current policy context may not (yet) be sufficient to prompt resignation but may be re-shaping perceptions about teaching and of being a teacher. This may be further evidenced in the biographies of the participants and the variety of ways that teachers were seen to adjust their work, as well as how they explained the 'shift' in work patterns.

As previously noted (7.7), during the year of fieldwork, over half the teachers had planned or actioned some adjustment to their professional lives. Changing their job, school or profession over the timeframe of the fieldwork may be explained alongside the emerging discussion about employment trends that go some way to explain occupational stamina. The decision to 'stay' or 'shift' (Lindqvist et al, 2014) offers insights into the way the work of teachers is enacted, necessitating a more fluid interpretation of the practitioner.

In section 8.7 I referenced the problems of teacher stress, burnout, attrition and long term sick leave, which continue to be documented (Asthana and Boycott-Owen, 2018). Less common in the literature is the phenomenon of teachers opting to stay in education but 'shifting' roles, either internally or externally (Lindqvist et al, 2014). If the resignation of the teacher is construed as 'resistance' to reform (Hayes and Butterworth, 2001; Smith and Ulvik, 2017) or as conscientious objection to the work and an ethical decision (Santoro, 2016), then the logical inference is of compliance for those who stay. On the contrary, I argue that the decision to adjust working conditions may indicate a tactical commitment to professional regeneration.

During the fieldwork, anecdotal stories about the increasing appeal of non-class-based roles, support roles such as teaching assistants, and supply work, further revealed the instability of the workforce. Relocating from the state sector to independent or international schools, working as supply teachers or moving to private tutoring (Bloom, 2017) and to part-time work (Tidd, 2017) reveals the degree of professional flux. An NFER survey found that "more than half of the teachers that actually leave state schools take up jobs in the education sector" (Lynch et al, 2016, p.4). There is a concern about the 'exodus' from the profession and more detailed data provide insight about teachers' decisions. For example, "part-time teachers are more likely to leave the profession compared to their full-time colleagues, both in the primary and secondary sector" (Worth et al, 2017, p.37). At the time of my fieldwork, in 2014-2015, there were thought to be 100,000 full-time teachers from the United Kingdom working in international schools (Wilshaw, 2016, np).

For those in my study, engineering professional adjustments may act to renew or restore professional confidence, and create a sense of optimism that change would provide appropriate sustenance and appeal to (re)invigorate. The implications of the 'shifters' are most notable for the individual school (rather than the profession) (Lindqvist et al 2014). I maintain that this kind of behaviour is also significant for the individual teacher because of the ways it potentially impacts on how the job is viewed, and thus, the sense of self. Whatever else may constitute the underpinning rationale to adjust the role (e.g. employment location, money, personal circumstances), some optimism about the future in teaching is preserved.

A deliberate decision to 'stay put' (and change roles) is borne from an equally tactical outlook. The mantra of 'better the devil' may act to offset a move out of teaching, and an apprehension of conceding the security of the familiar is understandable. For example, forfeiting colleagues' support for a role in another school where the unknown is hypothetically double-edged may engender both reluctance and stoicism. The option to 'stay put' was expressed in terms of the necessary 'reality check' and with a very real practical rationale underpinning this. Whether this is about personal circumstances and changes, for example, a new family or the projected professional aspiration to a new or different role, for some teachers the decision is pragmatic and tempered with a caveat of some sort.

Engaging in tactical behaviours like this, teachers may 'hedge' to defend identity. I propose the use of the term 'hedging' to better account for a short-term strategy to 'weather the storm' and to protect a professional identity which is expressed as under threat. My use of this definition and interpretation may enable new insights into the complexity of teacher retention and a contribution to knowledge. 'Hedging' can be viewed as a strategy for risk management, and, for primary teachers, may be conceived as a short-term strategy that prolongs employment and engagement with the rich rewards of working with children. It may comprise actions that mitigate losses in other areas or to protect mutual interests. In view of the changes in the professional climate and reputational decline, hedging may be further understood as a necessary approach to navigating the policy 'storm'.

When the discussion about gaming (8.5) is considered alongside this kind of occupational manoeuvring, the extent of professional tactics is evident. Taken together, they may further a particular outcome to remain a teacher/ in teaching. Along with other literature, my findings confirm the ways that teachers continue to “draw sustenance from their ordinary work” (Kitching, Morgan and O’Leary, 2009), and this may strengthen the case for the deployment of tactics to protect the source of professional reward and motivation. I now review the implications for professional identity and assert the evidence in my findings that the transformation to ‘neo-liberal primary teacher’ is not absolute.

Important for the study, some findings may be construed as resistance to the projected neo-liberal primary teacher. Stephenson argues that “teachers wishing to survive, or thrive, within these new forms of control need to reconstitute themselves as ‘neo-liberal professionals’” (Stephenson, 2017, p.10). Commonly associated with the business-world, notions of meta-work, ‘hedging’ and ‘gaming’ might further evidence the primary teacher identity in neo-liberal terms. Whilst there is evidence of “a new kind of teacher, whose value is oriented to markets, management, and numerical performance indicators” (Holloway and Brass, 2017, p.20), my findings suggest that the over-arching and persistent commitment to child-centred primary education acts to dislocate the discourse of the neo-liberal teacher:

*“Far from fully entering into the spirit of reforms, many - perhaps most - teachers go through the motions where required to meet external accountability requirements while adapting contextually insensitive reforms as far as possible to make them work in the contingent circumstances of their classrooms and their schools”*  
(Wallace and Hoyle, 2005, p.4).

The findings are suggestive of an identity able to tolerate a brand of strategic professionalism which includes gaming and occupational hedging. At the same time, the underpinning motivation for teaching and the persistence of altruism couples with periodic low-level subversion to the curriculum and pedagogy and further enables the teacher’s ideological purpose. The “subtle but crucial shift in emphasis from student needs to student performance” (Apple, 2004, p.26)

appears to be tactically dislocated by certain practices. As muted in some findings, teachers are aware of the “immediate resistance ... under their noses” (Sugrue, 2017, p.178) in the form of shrewd curriculum adjustments to ensure the preservation of (some) balance.

## **8.9 Summary and conclusion**

A central premise of this study is that aspects of neo-liberal reform are experienced distinctively by primary teachers. This is a consequence of the particular interaction between the specific organisation, nature and expectations for primary education as well as how discourses of practice position the teacher in particular ways. Appraising the policy context ten years ago, Troman argued that “primary teachers were developing complex identities” (2008, p.630). My findings reveal the conflict and compromise inherent to maintaining a strong moral work ethic in the current policy environment of high stakes accountability and the consequences for professional identity.

My research offers a number of distinctive ideas that enable new insights into the complexity of primary teachers’ work, and a contribution to knowledge in this domain. My study has shown that the tactical teacher is one who ‘games’ and ‘hedges’ to defend and preserve values and motivation. Crucially, the overarching culture of miserabilism permeating professional consciousness may signify hope. I maintain that the teachers did not appear to have succumbed to the increasingly normalised tenets of neo-liberal education, and expressed frustration, anger and cynicism. In some cases, this was akin to acquiescence, but the ‘virtual atmosphere’ generated in the numerous interviews, taken together, depicts a profession positioned to sustain its moral purpose. Central to hopefulness is “belief that something good, which does not presently apply to one’s own life, could still materialise” (Halpin, 2001, p.395) and is manifest in the continuing employment and ‘survival’ of the participants, despite the diversity of occupational manoeuvres. The responsibility to nurture, sustain and galvanise the profession must be shared; “teachers cannot be expected to shoulder the whole burden for restoring their morale – employers, managers and Government each have a role to play” (Halpin, 2001, p.407).

In the final chapter, I reflect on the study and present conclusions in relation to the limitations and strengths before making recommendations for practice, policy and future research.

## **Chapter 9 – Conclusion**

### **9.1 Introduction**

The publication of the White Paper in 2010 was of huge professional interest for me at the time. As a primary PGCE programme leader, I was conscious of the scope of the recommendations and the implications for universities, schools, and, most of all, for teachers. The ‘Importance of Teaching’ (DFE, 2010b) represented something of a turning point because of the highly publicised and well-documented ‘crisis’ of teacher recruitment and retention predicted in the profession (Bousted, 2015; Boffey, 2015; Morris, 2015; Weale, 2015). At the time of writing, it continues to dominate discussion (Allen, 2017; Foster, 2018). It remains to be seen if the ‘crisis’ further develops consequent to, for example, the latest recruitment and retention figures (HOC, 2017a), the Spending Review and the Government’s consultation on strengthening qualified teacher status (DFE, 2018b).

Several studies have pointed to the significance of the White Paper and of the subsequent wholesale change in education (Wright, 2012; Furlong, 2013; Exley and Ball, 2014; Eyles, Machin and McNally 2017; Braun, 2017; Rayner, 2017). I position my findings in relation to a dynamic field about this period of policy reform, and now discuss the implications of my research for professional practice, policy and future research (sections 9.4, 9.5 and 9.6).

This final chapter also reflects on the limitations and strengths of my study (9.2) and summarises my research findings and the contribution to knowledge (9.3).

### **9.2 Limitations and strengths of my study**

In this section I acknowledge how some of the specific characteristics of the study have limited and strengthened the overall quality and outcomes.

#### **Limitations of my study**

In this section, I detail five limitations of the research. Firstly, and further to the earlier examination of reflexivity (3.6.3), I should reiterate limitations in relation to my own shortcomings. A key challenge has been the management of my own professional and personal identity, and the ensuing conflicts and emotional

demands of the research. I employed strategies to enhance my capacity to create distance from the field and to 'fight familiarity' (Delamont and Atkinson, 1995), and my 'assumption hunting' (Brookfield, 1995) and being alert to blind-spots was an ever-present component of the research.

Secondly, my status as a peripheral insider was both advantageous as well as a limitation. As detailed in the Methodology (Chapter 3), some of the ethical challenges were generated by blurred boundaries and my role conflict (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). 'Behaving ethically' was not to deny or brush aside previous relationships and connections, but to respond in a way befitting our association, and my interactions were shaped by a consideration of what was morally appropriate.

Thirdly, the transferability of the research is partially realised through the sample and there are limitations in this regard. The teachers were known to me and only reflected particular professional life phases (1-3), and the absence of the more experienced teacher should be acknowledged. The sample was constrained by geographical parameters and the relative paucity of 'urban schools'. Although the teachers worked in diverse environments, they were less likely to encounter the daily challenges of an inner-city primary school. This may have impacted on perceptions and experiences of policy reform. In addition, the nature of the research may have influenced the decision to participate. Whilst teachers' motivations to participate were wide-ranging and appeared ingenuous, the perceived opportunity to offload or to unburden themselves may have inspired the choice to take part.

Fourthly, the research questions necessitated the exploration of individuals' perceptions and experiences. I recognise that participants' perceptions are inherently subjective and that the complexity of the policy and professional environment encouraged multiple 'truths' and realities which underpinned these accounts. I recognise that the research design is underpinned with assumptions about the advantages of qualitative research to address the research questions.

Finally, a limitation was in the management of relatively large quantities of spoken and written data. Organising the production of transcripts and

subsequent analysis necessitated considerable time and careful systems. Inherent to any qualitative research is the attention to the strategies employed to “rule out specific plausible alternatives and threats to your interpretations and explanations” (Maxwell, 2010, p.281) and the use of peer and member checking and transcript returns could have been more comprehensive in this regard.

### **Strengths of my study**

Evaluating the trustworthiness of the research also necessitates a review of the features that strengthened its overall quality and outcomes. I detail four assets of the study in this regard. Firstly, my relationship with the field and participants was a factor in strengthening the credibility of the research (3.4.3).

Acknowledged in the literature about ‘insider research’, some of the challenges and limitations (noted) may also be construed as strengths. Knowledge of the field and of the issues facing primary teachers supported my position to be a “highly intuitive” researcher (Goodson, 2014 np) and proved positive in establishing rapport, the consequent abundant and rich data, and the overall plausibility of the findings.

Secondly, the use of member-reflections facilitated highly productive discussion and reflection as a precursor to the second interview. Reading their extract prompted responses that reiterated or extended earlier comments and sometimes added additional context to explain perceptions and feelings. Recognising themselves in the transcript (Guba and Lincoln, 1985) further strengthened the credibility of the findings.

Thirdly, the diversity of the participants enhanced the research findings. Participants worked across four local authorities, both key stages of primary education (as well as early years) and a range of year groups. Teachers had varying years of experience, a range of roles and assorted biographies which enhanced the likelihood of transferability.

A key strength of my study is in relation to a context recognised as a “paradigmatic change” in education (West, 2015, p.21) and my findings reveal the particular experience of reform for primary teachers at a time of system instability. This also relates to the contribution to knowledge and is further

explained in section 9.3. The timing of the fieldwork, four years subsequent to the publication of the White Paper, enabled an awareness of some repercussions of the policy changes. The open-ended nature of my research questions enabled a more wide-ranging response to policy reform and performance. The data provide an insight into the “processes of enactment [and the] ad-hockery, borrowing, re-ordering, displacing, making do and reinvention” (Maguire, Ball and Braun, 2012, p. 8) and my study provides an insight into the vagaries of policy enactment at this time. In the next four sections I summarise the findings and reflect on the wider implications of the research.

### **9.3 Summary of findings**

The thesis offers a unique insight into primary school teachers’ perceptions and professional experiences at a time of inordinate change. The intention was to follow an instinct I had about the scale of change fundamental to the proposed reforms - it was impossible to constrain the focus at that time. A key stimulus was the opening gambit of the White Paper and the “vision of the teacher as our society’s most valuable asset” (DFE, 2010b, p.7). Findings confirmed the relationship between the two research questions and the over-arching distinction between the experience of *‘being a teacher’* as opposed to the perception of *‘teaching’*. The findings are summarised along with an overview of my contribution to knowledge as follows:

1. How is education policy reform perceived and experienced by English primary teachers?
2. What are significant influences on, and threats to, primary teachers’ motivations and morale?

In relation to research question one, my findings indicate that pupil assessment and the associated experience of increased teacher accountability are influential for teachers’ perceptions and experience of policy reform. Teachers’ tactical engagement with assessment practices illustrates the rise of ‘gaming’ in the primary context. Findings point to the influence and threat of the pupil progress meeting as a specific site of contestation.

In relation to research question two, my findings reiterate the positive motivational influence and stability of the underpinning rationale for teaching, expressed as 'making a difference'. They indicate that teachers' experience the rise of 'meta-work' as a threat to morale. Findings also point to the complicated dynamics between school leaders and teachers and that these are experienced as a threat to motivation and morale. In addition, the perception of reputational decline serves to destabilise professional identity.

Notable for my contribution to knowledge, the findings have enabled a deeper understanding of the meanings and implications of primary teachers' work and a specific contribution to the field. There are three particular elements that warrant attention and substantiate my contribution.

The first is that of gaming and occupational hedging. Interesting as separate findings, taken together they position teachers as highly tactical. My interpretation of this tactical work is of a resistant professionalism, that is, teachers working out ways to stay in the profession. Findings about the demands of 'meta-work' and the necessary distinction between this kind of professional demand and other workload may be interesting to pursue.

Secondly, and specific to gaming is the 'pupil progress meeting' as a unique site of power and contestation and this may be pertinent for future research about pupil assessment. Simultaneous to my research, Pratt's work (2016a) also points to the variation in primary teachers' assessment practices and this further corroborates my findings.

Finally, the exploration of the profession via the lens of 'miserabilism' adds to the literature about teacher morale. In Chapter 8 I deliberated the implications that may act positively and negatively for identity.

#### **9.4 Implications for professional practice**

My journey as a doctoral student has had several professional and personal implications.

Working in a University School of Education, my findings have implications for initial teacher education programmes as well as those for qualified teachers.

Whilst these programmes rightly stress the importance of teacher well-being, it is time (again) to make explicit the tensions of being a teacher. New teachers are commonly motivated to 'make a difference' although the challenges of school life can influence the new teacher's sense of efficacy. The politicised nature of the profession might be made more explicit with specific opportunities for students to reflect on, for example, accountability measures and the implications for managing school demands.

The inclusion of broader programmes of study which enable teachers to contemplate 'the bigger picture' of what affects educational success, may afford an increased pragmatism about the work (Väisänen et al, 2018). The centrality of the teacher must be contextualised within other broader societal factors that impede or mitigate against pupil success. At the same time, aspects of school-based training must focus on and celebrate the ways teachers do affect the children they work with (beyond pupil progress in maths and English). Our work with mentors and school-based colleagues should reflect the issues about workload and well-being made explicit in the roles and responsibilities we assign. In addition, helping mentors to gain accreditation for their work will enhance the status of the work and of our partnerships with schools.

One implication for my practice has been the incentive for professional change and my move away from initial teacher education into masters' programmes. Throughout the research I have deliberated the particular ethical dimensions of my study, and this has invigorated my interest more broadly in the process of research and of methodology. Becoming part of a wider research community has been rejuvenating and has further supported my interest in methods and ethics. As the programme leader, and tutor on the MA programme, I am committed to developing the CPD provision in a way that positions teacher learning as high status and agentic, with programmes that reflect, and make explicit the benefits of post-graduate study. Underpinning my work is a heightened capacity for empathy with teachers which has strengthened relationships as well as the support and flexibility of the MA programme structures.

My move away from initial teacher education has been consequent to, as well as necessitated, an identity shift, and my learning and development has been both tested and enriched. More broadly, my identity continues to be affected by the reach of neo-liberal policy in higher education and influences my experience of work. The characteristics of neo-liberal education reform in higher education bear several similarities to those described in the study and invariably serve to shape the nature of my work and notions of professionalism. In that sense, I continue to reflect on strategies to enhance the motivation and morale of my colleagues.

## **9.5 Recommendations for policy**

Further to my findings, at the time of writing in 2018, there are several areas that directly correlate to current policy. The Government is well aware of the need to prioritise issues of workload and retention and the challenges continue to demand scrutiny (NAO, 2017, Worth et al, 2017, DFE, 2017c; Foster, 2018). Further to my findings, I distinguish workload, leadership and the ‘workforce’ (in two specific domains) as areas for policy review.

The relationship between retention and workload is recognised (Worth et al, 2015; NAO, 2017). Despite the considerable resources devolved to exploring issues of teacher retention (Foster, 2018), the National Audit Office reported that “the Department and the schools sector lack sufficient information to determine why an increasing number of teachers are leaving before retirement” (2017, p.25) with a sudden and then continuing rise in numbers from 2012. As already noted, this has been a period of intense change and upheaval and there are several reasons why resignations may have risen in this period and how they are linked to workload. For example, national curriculum and assessment reform (in 2013), the introduction of school-led initial teacher education, (in 2012), the revised Teachers’ Standards (in 2011), performance-related pay (in 2013) and a revised Ofsted framework (in 2012). This exemplifies the issue of ‘workload’ as one that is manifest for teachers on a daily basis within the classroom as well as for the primary school and education more broadly. As previously noted, “there is reasonable consensus that workload is a significant reason why teachers leave the profession” (NAO, 2017, p.25). However, it is not

the only contributory factor, and the role of school leaders should also be reiterated.

My findings illustrate some of the ways that policy reform further positions primary head teachers as managers as opposed to leaders of learning. High profile in my study is the issue of perceived 'mis-management' and the impossibility of the remit for primary head teachers. The House of Commons Education Committee (2017a) underlines my findings and report that feeling supported and valued by management influences the decision to stay in teaching. Indeed, strong leadership can be a motivation to stay in the profession (Heinz, 2015).

Common in teachers' accounts is the despondency of feeling undervalued and overlooked by the head teacher. In that sense, some of the strategies for improving teacher confidence in, and approval of, the school's leadership necessitate greater emotional intelligence. The requirement for, and professional development in, emotional and mental health awareness and management for teachers and school leaders may go some way to enable the much needed "emotional understanding (for) successful leadership" (Leithwood et al, 2008, p.11). The leaders in Keddie's study (2017) are characterised by feelings of fear, insecurity and frustration and the emotional context of leadership and management is one that warrants further deliberation.

A notable characteristic of the profession is the gendered nature of the workforce but one that continues to be disregarded and under-researched also under-scrutinised in policy. 85% of full-time qualified teachers in nursery and primary schools are women (DFE, 2016a), but there is arguably very little strategy to further understand, listen to or maximise the potential of what is inevitably a diverse and complex population. In any wider conversation about 'workforce' 'retention' and 'morale', the subject is invariably female. Workforce planning and succession in relation to leadership warrants critical evaluation.

Research recommends that "career development should not be left to individual women aspirants but should be part of the broader systemic interventions to ensure that support and guidance are formalised and institutionalised" (McKillop and Moorosi, 2017, p.350). Fast-track programmes and targeted mentoring

schemes for student teachers in initial teacher education would serve to position women more positively and pro-actively from the outset. Higham et al (2015) promote similar ideas as a way to encourage interest in leadership. The structures to encourage career-changers into teaching (DFE, 2017) might be further exploited to encourage candidates into leadership.

Given the proportion of women in the profession, more attention might be made to flexible working, as well as to welcoming career breaks as healthy rather than a 'reneging' of commitment to the profession. Within the context of the primary school and the typical budget and staffing costs, viewing opportunities like job shares, including headship may work to refresh traditional models of leadership. Grassroots organisations like 'WomenEd' continue to raise specific issues around women and leadership.

Finally, historically high profile in the research about teachers, the field of early career teachers continues to warrant close scrutiny. The term usually encompasses those who are in the first three years of teaching. Noticeable in my sample, the profile of the 'novice teacher' is invariably a career changer as opposed to a recent graduate, and the age and professional experience can be diverse. In my study these teachers provided vital insights into perceptions of induction support, the role of the head teacher and other mentors. My findings about occupational manoeuvres for those in phase one of their careers may warrant further exploration because the overall instability for early career teachers contrasts with those in other phases. Some teachers had already had more than one job in the first three years of teaching and this does not bode well for longer-term retention. The Government's consultation (DFE, 2018b) about 'strengthening QTS and improving career progression' reiterates the concern about recruitment and retention of early career teachers. Spencer et al (2017) summarise the professional needs and challenges for this group, as well as propose the strategies for emotional support and professional development.

## **9.6 Recommendations for future research**

This research helps to interrogate the motivations and rationale for staying in the profession in a time of flux and challenge. That said, teachers in my sample, like others recently canvassed (NFER, 2016), continue to contemplate

resignation. In that sense the field is one of uncertainty and instability, warranting further attention in post-doctoral research. I have been keen to develop my understanding of the ways that teachers 'story' their experiences at a time of low professional morale (Walker and Taylor, 2013), and indeed, if and how they "use stories as part of their remoralisation" (Frank, 2000, p.355). I continue to be interested in this idea and consider this to be a key principle for future work. I now detail four possible areas of research.

Firstly, my contention is that there is ambiguity about whether or how primary teachers have resisted the increasingly normalised tenets of neo-liberal education. The pace of change and the relatively confined field of research about English primary teachers make this an opportune area for further research, and my study is fitting to further extend. A comparative study about primary and secondary teachers may be further revealing of phase-specific motivations (Menzies, 2015) in relation to the neo-liberal policy drivers.

Secondly, and consequent to my findings on assessment, accountability and gaming, the emerging discourse of gaming is increasingly recognised as commonplace in secondary education although less so in the primary sector. Particular and unique sites of gaming, like the pupil progress meeting, lend themselves to further scrutiny. Given the relative paucity of research in this area, I am eager to contribute further to this field.

Thirdly, teachers' occupational manoeuvres continue to vary, although data about English primary teachers' departure from the sector are less tangible. As noted (8.8), teachers who resign from school posts often stay in the profession but in alternative roles. Part-time teachers are more likely to leave the profession compared to full-time colleagues (Worth et al, 2017), but less is known about primary teachers who opt to leave and work beyond the profession, although there is increasing recognition of the vitality of such data (Foster, 2018). These teachers are noted in the Government statistics but there is little empirical research about the decision to leave (Towers and Maguire, 2017; Kell, 2018). The Government's current consultation (DFE, 2018b) and interest in retaining new teachers makes this group of particular interest.

Finally, over the course of my study I have become increasingly attentive to gender. It was beyond the scope of this research to engage with issues of gender and was not directly relevant. Despite being an “undoubtedly gendered field” (Braun, 2015, p.7), the recruitment, retention and promotion of ‘primary teachers’ rarely attends to gender. This is an area rife with implications for policy as well as for research. My examination of the legacies and traditions about primary teachers (2.3) has prompted further reflection on the politics of primary teaching. In brief, “it is nearly impossible to understand why curricula and teaching are controlled the way they are unless we understand who is doing the teaching” (Apple, 1986, p. 10). Rereading the White Paper, or position papers from Ofsted and education ministers with an eye to the ‘target audience’ of mainly female teachers raises questions about the implied paternalism.

The predicaments of primary teaching should necessitate a greater focus on women because “gender inequality, combined with crushing workloads and attacks on their pay and working conditions, are threatening to drive women out of the profession” (NASUWT, 2016, np). For a sector dominated by women, understanding the diversity of the workforce, and the associated professional challenges would seem timely. Provoked by some of the particularly animated accounts of management relations between men and women in my study, also of interest are the implications of gendered relations between leaders and staff.

Specifically considering my own future research journey, it has been valuable to critically reflect on my experiences as a novice researcher. This has been both personally and professionally rejuvenating and further increased my appetite for research.

## **9.7 Closing comments**

I would argue that the politicisation of primary education (Cunningham, 2012; Mortimore, 2013; Murray and Passy, 2015) has not yet occasioned a politicised profession. It may be that teachers and “busy and overworked head teachers are immunised from thinking politically” (Courtney and Gunter, 2010, p.412). For those in my study, the ‘micro-acts of resistance’ may act as meaningful and agentic as well as a kind of ‘remoralisation’. Having a say and ‘lifting the lid’ on, for example, ‘gaming’ and perceived poor management enables the status of

teacher-voice in a climate where this is under-privileged and overlooked. Reflecting on the participant's rationale to contribute to the study, alongside the research findings themselves, I am minded to "define teachers as professionals not by what they are asked to do but rather by the powerful ways in which they do it" (Stone-Johnson, 2014, p.89).

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## Appendices

### APPENDIX 1: Email to teachers (Summer 2014)

Dear

You may remember me as your programme leader for the PGCE programme here at the University of Brighton, but I am also currently engaged in research with teachers for my Doctorate degree. I very much hope this finds you well and that you have enjoyed a restful summer break.

I am contacting you as I am aware you are working locally as a primary teacher. My current Doctoral research is focused on primary teacher identity (in the current context) and I am enquiring as to whether you would be willing to be part of the study. I would very much appreciate it if you would consider being interviewed and I attach the information sheet that provides some details about this. The research plan reflects an interest in 'narrative' and in hearing teachers' stories; to that end, the interview is open-ended and bespoke to each teacher.

I am keen to interview teachers, on two separate occasions, from various career phases (for no more than 90 minutes per interview and at a time/location conducive to the individual teacher). I am keen to involve teachers in the review of the first interview transcript (which will inform the structure of the follow-up interview). You will be asked to sign a consent form prior to each interview.

I should clarify that my research is as a Doctorate student and separate to my professional role. All interviews are treated as strictly confidential.

It would be hugely helpful if you could email me to let me know (one way or another) if you would consider participating.

My address is [s.sturrock@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:s.sturrock@brighton.ac.uk)

With very best wishes

Soo Sturrock

## APPENDIX 2: Information sheet for participants

### Research Information for Teachers

**Research focus:** Primary teacher identity: narratives of perception and experience

My name is Soo Sturrock and I am enrolled as a research student on the Professional Doctorate: Education. I am engaged in a study about teachers that will culminate in the presentation of a thesis.

I am employed as the PGCE Primary Programme Leader in the School of Education, University of Brighton. I am a qualified primary teacher (BSc, PGCE, MA) and have DBS clearance.

In my research I intend

- Sampling teachers from various professional career phases;
- Interviewing each teacher individually for no more than 90 minutes;
- Transcribing the 1st interview and returning this to individual teachers for review and commentary;

#### **Important points**

1. This research has been granted ethical approval at the University of Brighton;
2. Participation in this research is voluntary;
3. The research plan reflects an interest in narrative and in hearing teachers' stories;
4. The 1:1 interviews are designed to engage teachers in dialogue about experiences of being a primary teacher in the current policy context;
5. My research activity is separate from my paid employment in the School of Education;
6. Interview data is confidential;
7. Interviews will be recorded and one electronic copy of each audio recording will be saved in a password-protected file on a personal computer;
8. As negotiated, teachers' names need not be used in the research and pseudonyms will be assigned;
9. Participants will be invited to read and comment on the 1st interview transcript;
10. Participants have a right to withdraw from the research at any point without prejudice. Unless agreed otherwise, any data collected up to that point may still be used in the thesis;
11. In addition to any data being used in the thesis, it may also be used in support of academic and published journal articles or conference presentations
12. In accordance with the University's 'Code of Good Practice in Research', data will be stored for no more than 10 years;
13. If you agree to participate in the research, it is important that you provide written consent and that you sign and return the attached Consent Form prior to the interview. Please keep a copy for your own records.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my research supervisors if you have any questions or comments

**Research Supervisors:** Professor Andrew Hobson [A.Hobson@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:A.Hobson@brighton.ac.uk)

Professor David Stephens [D.Stephens@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:D.Stephens@brighton.ac.uk)

*In the event of any concerns or a complaint, please communicate with the supervisors direct.*

**Researcher:** Soo Sturrock [s.sturrock@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:s.sturrock@brighton.ac.uk)

Thank you

## APPENDIX 3: Consent form for participants

### Consent Form

**Research focus:** Primary teacher identity: narratives of perception and experience

**Name of researcher:** Soo Sturrock

- I agree to take part in this research, which is to explore what it means to be a primary teacher in the current context.
- I have read the information sheet and I understand what is involved.
- I am aware that I will be asked to participate in an interview; this can be timed and organised to accommodate professional responsibilities and other commitments.
- I understand that any data will be kept in a secure password protected computer file for up to 10 years and then destroyed.
- I understand that my interview and subsequent data can be anonymised and assigned a pseudonym (if preferred).
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.
- I understand that unless agreed otherwise, any data collected up to that point may still be used in the thesis and that it may also be used in support of academic and published journal articles or conference presentations.

Name (please print) .....

Signed.....  
.

Date.....  
.

## APPENDIX 4: Interview 1 questions

**The first interview centres on your journey to become a primary teacher and your current role.**

### **Question 1**

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. To set the scene for the interview please tell me about your current school, year, grp class and role and responsibilities. Is there anything of particular note that is important to include re your current context? (new HT, Ofsted, recent appointment etc)

### **Question 2**

Tell me your story about what led you to be a teacher.

*Prompts* When were you first aware of teaching as a future profession?

*Prompts* What attracted you to teaching at that point specifically? Why was this?

*Prompts* Tell me about the journey to applying and then training to teach.

### **Question 3**

It sounds like (bespoke): Teaching was ... (reflect back). Can you tell me about this?

*Prompts* When did you first think about being a primary teacher?

*Prompts* What specifically motivated you to do this?

*Prompts* What were your reasons for becoming a primary teacher?

### **Question 4**

Looking back to when you qualified as a teacher what aspects of the job did you find most rewarding?

Is this different to how you feel about your job now?

### **Question 5**

Please tell me about how you came to be a teacher at your current school.

What's life like there?

### **Question 6**

Looking back to last week, please tell me about a day or an episode that stood out for you.

Probe: You've selected something that was quite challenging; what made this noteworthy for you?

Probe: You've selected something that was quite positive; what made this noteworthy for you?

**Question 7**

Thinking back to your teaching over the last few years, are there any particular differences in your role now?

Probe Tell me about the aspects of your job that you most enjoy.

Probe Does this differ from, for example, when you started teaching?

Probe Tell me about the aspects of your job that you least enjoy.

Probe Can you tell me a bit more about that / how that feels?

**Question 8**

How has your life as a teacher impacted on your life more broadly?

**Question 9**

How do you feel about being a teacher?

Probe What does it mean to you to teach?

**Question 10**

Please tell me about the process of deciding to participate in this project. What informed your decision?

## APPENDIX 5: Email to teachers ahead of Interview 2 (Spring 2015)

Hello

I hope this finds you well. Time has flown, and further to our interview in the Autumn term, I now enclose a sample of my fieldwork and emerging analysis which I hope you will read as a preparation for our second interview. I hope we are able to make a date for this before the end of the summer term.

I have been listening to your interview and along with the other recordings of teachers' interviews, have clustered recurring and interesting themes into groups. As you may recall, the aim of my research is to explore what it means to be a primary teacher (in the current context) and I am especially interested in how the current policy context is experienced and perceived. In this early stage, these themes provide a tentative framework for the analysis and as preparation for the follow up interview.

I have attached a transcript of parts of the interview and am keen to hear your feedback and feelings about

What you said;

- How this account compares with your general and/or current experience of being a teacher;
- Why I might have chosen these particular extracts from the first interview;
- Anything else that you feel was as or *more* important to you from that interview.

I hope to hear more about this in the second interview.

Any clarification or comment is welcome, and I am keen to have any immediate feedback (of any description) about the extract prior to our next meeting if you wish to share this. If there are parts of the transcript where you feel your anonymity is compromised or if you would prefer I deleted any of your comments, please let me know when we next meet.

It is not uncommon for participants to experience a range of feelings when they read back their commentary and in the second interview I hope that we can explore this to help me gain further insights into your views.

I am hopeful we can make arrangements for the second interview to be completed in this next half term and am happy for you to suggest dates/times- please send a few examples. As you know, I am keen to meet with you in a location/day/time most convenient to you and will fit with your preferences. I can interview in the daytime, evening, at weekends and in half term.

I would very much appreciate it if you could reply before May 8th so I can schedule this ASAP.

With my very warm wishes and really looking forward to speaking with you again soon

Soo

## APPENDIX 6: Example of individual transcript extract for return

<p><i>“No day’s the same. You have a rough idea of what you’ll plan. Running around the hall. I was Humpty Dumpty, I was all the kings’ horses. We had occupational therapy coming in having a look at a couple of kids and they were like, ‘this job is bonkers’. On a Monday morning at 10.15 I’m prancing around saying ‘on your tippy toes’ and then suddenly you’re doing some art and suddenly you’re hearing some reading, and a kid the day before who couldn’t get the blending, suddenly he can now do ‘at’. That’s really rewarding. Little children I can really connect with. Little people are just amazing”.</i></p>	<p><b>“This job is bonkers”.</b></p> <p>This is an early comment about your view of the reward of teaching.</p>
<p><i>“Are the grades inflated when they come to us slightly? I pity that teacher in YR6. That is serious. It’s bonkers. Teacher pitted against teacher. Not sharing resources. Not telling how you’re doing that. Keeping it to themselves. A lot of the teachers are on the UPS so they aren’t going anywhere. But we’ve talked about it openly as a staff. People are quite uncomfortable. They say ‘what job should we do then’? Mine was opening up a café.</i></p> <p><u>Later extract:</u> <i>“Trust in teachers a bit more. Everyone is watching their back. It feels like that anyone could drop you in it at any moment. That’s what it feels like a bit.”</i></p> <p><i>“Do I feel valued? Yeah. Under the old regime there weren’t many ‘thank yous’ or ‘well done’. Which would’ve been quite nice. From talking to other staff members as well I feel that .... but then at the end [when the HT left] she [talked about] all the amazing things that we do. Had I known that I might have worked harder. You need to be told. The children need to be told. We need to be told. My style of management would be ... I know I get the best results from my kids when I praise them even for small things. To be praised a bit more”</i></p>	<p><b>“Teacher pitted against Teacher”.</b></p> <p>I am interested in the culture in school; the ways teachers collaborate and compete and what provokes these behaviours.</p>

*"It's all very different. I've noticed the change. I think the accountability and the pay. People are scared. The amount of work I put in. if I didn't get my pay rise...we care enough about the kids to get them to progress and their attainment. It's not about 'you've got to get 4 sub-levels', It was scary enough in PPR meetings [when the Head said], 'why have they not made progress and what are you doing about it'? That was enough. I wanted to make sure the best was being done for them.*

*"It's another thing [the accountability] is another thing. Maybe I'm too long in the tooth already. I think I'm a bit jaded. This is my 5<sup>th</sup> year. A bit more cynical. A bit less enthusiastic. Once I'm in the classroom that's a different matter. If I was to be that moany teacher that no-one can stand to sit next to in the staff room I'd be out of the profession.*

**"The change"**

Who is the 'moany teacher'?  
What is moaned about and  
what does this tell us?

## APPENDIX 7: Interview 2 schedule

Good to see you again and thank you so much for taking the time to participate in the 2nd interview.

**Check pen portrait** Can I first check that the details on the pen portrait are agreeable. The pen portrait provides contextual information for the reader and is the same for all participants in that it includes (age, 1st degree, context of school and years taught, class, other roles and responsibilities and pseudonym)

**Introduction** As you will remember, my doctoral research focuses on what it 'means to be an English primary teacher in the second decade of the 21st century?' and the purpose of the 2nd interview is to hear about your experiences and feelings since we last met and to further explore some of the emerging themes that relate to my research aim.

**Our 1st interview was in** OCT / NOV / DEC (which was X months ago)

**Q1** Looking back on that interview, what was it like to talk about your work like that? Did anything stand out?

As part of the research, we agreed that I'd send you an extract of some transcript from the 1st interview. I chose this to send to you as I have been interested in understanding some particular emerging themes, so I am interested in your responses to this:

-The ways this made sense to you

-How it compared with your experience and overall feelings about teaching at that time

-Whether there were any aspects of your experience that had been omitted or overlooked?

**Q2** To what extent did you feel your responses reflected your overall and continuing feeling or how much of it was connected to how you felt at that time (OR How common is it for you to feel that way?)

**Q3** What's the 'story' since we last met?

*PROMPT:* I'm interested in knowing more about local and national developments that are impacting on your experience of being a primary teacher.

*PROMPT:* Are there any specific changes that are affecting you? (School specific e.g change of leadership, personnel, new role on the school or Ofsted / More broadly: National curriculum, Assessment, PRP)

**Q4** How confident do you feel to pursue your own professional and pedagogic goals in your current role and context?

**Q5** How do you view your primary responsibility or purpose as a teacher?

Probe: Can you tell me about a 'success story' about this from this year

**Q6** What are aspirations for pupils as the year comes to an end ... have you achieved what you wanted to do this year?

**Q7** One of the areas I am interested in is the 'Professional Life Phases' of teachers and I'd be interested to hear your reflections on this too. According to the work of Day et al (2006) you are in PHASE 1 0–3yrs NOVICE PRACTITIONER (describe) / PHASE 2 4-7yrs EARLY CAREER PROFESSIONAL (describe) / PHASE 3 8-15yrs EXPERIENCED PRACTITIONER (describe)

Probe: What are your reflections on your identity as a teacher at this stage of your career

Probe What or who are the significant influences at this time?

Probe What helps to sustain a commitment to the profession at this time?

**Q8** What do you think you would have missed out on if you hadn't been a teacher (high points) and (low points)

**Q9** Looking forward to this time next year, what are your hopes, feelings, expectations about your work in school?

**Q10** What has this interview been like for you today? Compared to when we met last time, how are you feeling about yourself as a teacher?

*PROMPT* What are your thoughts and feelings about participating in the research? Do you have any other comments about this?

## APPENDIX 8: Interview 2 (Wilma) 19-5-15

<p>She had just come from a school interview and felt hot leaving a stuffy room</p> <p>Her opening gambit was 'like a counselling session' and laughed</p> <p>Pen portrait discussed and checked. Current school as 'good'. She asked for the age to be adjusted. Mid 20's.</p> <p>She made a joke here.</p>			
<p>2.46</p> <p><b>What was that interview like?</b></p>	<p><i>I don't think I've ever cried so much. I just remember that I was in tears. You can't talk to a partner that's not in teaching about teaching that much detail because they don't care after a point. It was probably the first time I'd ever actually like talked about all of it. In some ways, looking back, it was <b>really cathartic</b> but it feels like a different person now.</i></p>	<p><i>Cried and in tears – upset and relief?</i></p> <p><i>Isolated – need to talk about this- 1<sup>st</sup> real time 'all of it' (what was shared with me here that was different?)</i></p> <p><i>it's really cathartic</i></p> <p><i>She's highlighting how much she has changed since then</i></p>	<p><b>Insiders understand teaching</b></p> <p><b>Bottled up</b></p> <p><b>Emotional to talk about work</b></p> <p><b>Change</b></p>
<p>SS Empathised. I felt 'conflicted' asking back to 2<sup>nd</sup> interview.</p> <p>Difficult things to talk about</p> <p>Reminded her of what was hard to hear / hard to say.</p>			

<p>4.06</p> <p><b>Did anything in particular stand out as you recall that interview</b></p>	<p><i>I think the thing that ... <u>pauses...</u> I think the thing that came back most was <b>my lack of confidence</b>. Because I remember starting the PGCE and not being particularly <b>confident</b> and feeling like id 'lucked onto it' and then that final- the big essay- I feel like I'd turned a corner and I'd suddenly got my <b>confidence</b> back and I think I hadn't realised how much that 1<sup>st</sup> job had destroyed it. So I think that was what kept coming back ... (tails off). I was bitter. I think the bitterness as well.</i></p>	<p><b>Key phrase feeling confident</b></p> <p><i>Hard to remember herself this way</i></p> <p><i>'Lucked on' (feeling fraudulent?)</i></p> <p><i>turned a corner (movement motif here)</i></p> <p><i>confidence grown then diminished.</i></p>	<p><b>Confidence (-)</b></p> <p><b>'lucked onto it' Imposter</b></p> <p><b>Confidence (+)</b></p> <p><b>Impact of school life on individual</b></p> <p><b>Bitterness as repeated</b></p>
<p>4.50</p> <p><b>Do you think you were bitter? Does that come through in the extract I sent?</b></p>	<p><i>I'm linking in other things I said. I compared it to a hostage situation at one point. (Laughs.) That bitterness...</i></p>	<p><i>She said Stockholm syndrome - <b>hostage situation</b>.</i></p>	<p><b>Bitterness as repeated</b></p> <p><b>Impact of school life on individual/ unhealthy</b></p>

5.24	<p>Yeah, it's sort of bitterness but well-placed bitterness. I don't think that anything I said was. I've not embellished anything. I've not made it....so I kind of look back and think 'I was really angry'.</p> <p><b>I think it is an emotional job- more than when I worked in Tesco's I didn't cry then</b></p>	<p>I've told the truth</p> <p><b>'I was really angry'</b>. She didn't come across as angry in the 1<sup>st</sup> interview but maybe she is now.</p>	<p><b>Bitterness as repeated</b></p> <p><b>Emotional to talk about work</b></p> <p><b>Impact of school life on individual / anger</b></p>
	<p>It's not how I feel about teaching now. I look back and this was true <u>for then</u> but now I don't ...I don't feel the same way. So it's changed quite a lot.</p>	<p>Teaching as emotional</p> <p>Light-hearted banter here</p>	<p><b>Emotional to talk about work</b></p> <p><b>Impact of school life on individual / emotional toll</b></p>
6.35		<p>Looking at the extract. She seemed lacking in interest here unlike prev participant.</p> <p><b>It's not how I feel now – CHANGE</b></p>	<p><b>Change</b></p> <p><b>Impact of school life on individual</b></p>
<p>7.00</p> <p><b>Is it common nowadays to feel any of those ways/</b></p>	<p>No, do you know what; I actually don't think I've felt any of this at all since leaving. I think I remembered everything that I'd gone through and everything id felt and in the new school I was expecting that to happen again but it just sort of hasn't. I think every step of the way when something could have happened a bit like this (extract) it's gone in the right direction. So in some ways it ...yeah.</p>	<p>How she's changed since she left</p> <p>'expecting it' (still unsure, worried, unconfident)</p> <p>Journey again- every step of the way 'right direction'</p>	<p><b>Impact of school life on individual's emotions/well-being</b></p> <p><b>Positive in school</b></p> <p><b>Change</b></p> <p><b>Expectations of school and colleagues</b></p> <p><b>Lexicon: Journey</b> every step of the way 'right direction'</p>

<p>7.35</p> <p><b>What's the story since the last time we met</b></p>	<p>I think, it's gone well. I think quite early on the Head obviously realised that I had a lot of ... misconceptions let's say. They just put loads of stuff in place so I had all the NQT time again. A maths consultant came in and I worked with him and actually it didn't take very long. <b>By the first half term it was like they'd fixed me. Completely.</b> And my lesson observations were 'outstanding' and ...do you know what? I actually think all I needed was for someone just to tell me 'you can do it'. And so then it was ... enough people were telling it to me who weren't in on what had happened at the last school so I was hearing it from the Head and subject coordinators and the consultants coming in and at that point I just sort of <b>thought oooh</b>. And the way the teaching is at X is just so much more what I expected teaching to be. Because it's really fun and it's really ... like ... purposeful. Whereas I think at the previous school it'd just <b>been sooo ...stale and pointless and without any individuality. I actually think that was probably what affected me more.</b> The way they wanted me to teach, I couldn't, I just couldn't do it. I could never have been an 'outstanding' teacher doing what they wanted me to do. Whereas now it fits in with what I believe education should be. <b>Now they ask me to mentor other people and go and observe other people and give my feedback and team-teach and stuff like that</b> and I just think that's completely different from somebody who was flitting between RI and inadequate.</p>	<p>(this is of transformation, vindication- FIXED ME as key!)</p> <p>Perceptions of management here- positive</p> <p>IT DIDN'T TAKE VERY LONG; so it wasn't such a big deal?</p> <p>'misconceptions let's say'; more than this; a whole host of issues and concerns or worries??</p> <p>Ooh- maybe I'm ok?</p> <p>Needed validation and confidence 'enough people'</p> <p>She's intimating she did need support then.</p> <p>'it' being her progress so there's a sense here of 'if only the prev school had done right by her she might have been ok'</p>	<p><b>Perceptions of management – positive</b></p> <p><b>(supportive)</b></p> <p><b>(healers) (encouraging)</b></p> <p><b>Teacher improvement</b></p> <p><b>Enjoying work</b></p> <p><b>Teacher beliefs</b></p> <p><b>Perceptions of management – negative (coercing)</b></p> <p><b>Conflict /Consensus of opinion</b></p> <p><b>Teacher labelling/grading</b></p> <p><b>Change /improvement</b></p>
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8.40 <b>You've been on a roller-coaster?</b>	<p><i>It's been crazy. But its been ... I've not had any of the 'downs'. It's literally just been like ... everything's just been fantastic. The kids are making amazing progress. I've not had a lesson observation less than good since being there. Everybody who comes in has said how happy they are to work with me and I got asked to apply for a job at another school. that never happens (to me?) but I'd never have expected at this point for people to actually respect me as a teacher.</i></p>	<p><i>The surprise of it all being OK</i></p> <p><b><i>I'd never have expected people to respect me</i></b></p>	<p><b>Change /improvement</b></p> <p><b>Enjoying work</b></p> <p><b>Warranted respect Respected as a teacher</b></p>
10.15	<p><i>I think it was just the way they came about it. At the last place they (pause). I think- I don't know – I think the Head ... it was a sense of control. If she made you feel like you were awful then she could control how you taught. Because you would turn to her for everything. Whereas now nobody really cares what I do in the classroom</i></p>	<p><i>Perceptions of management here- negative (control)</i></p>	<p><b>Perceptions of management – negative (control)</b></p> <p><b>'control' as repeated</b></p>

	<p>as long as the learning and the teaching's good. So it's that kind of ... I've got control back over my own life and social life as well. Nobody cares what time you leave. Before, if you left before 5.30 it was awful. So I think they just- by giving, by trusting me- it's made me want to do well.</p>	<p>They showed they trusted her?</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Autonomy</p> <p>REPETITION: Control</p> <p>I've got control back</p>	<p><b>Autonomy</b></p> <p><b>Trust and motivation</b></p> <p><b>Not Enjoying work</b></p>
<p>11.36</p> <p><b>REMINDED OF EXTRACT. What has it meant to you?</b></p>	<p>I think, now, I feel... I don't feel like a <b>new person</b> in the team because everybody does things in their own way and every classroom looks different. I mean some things are the same but the way we do things looks so different that everybody is impressed and respects other people's differences. Whereas before if you were different it was considered a bad thing. Now, it's just made me feel that actually, I'm not a <b>newbie</b> anymore. And that had definitely improved my confidence a lot and I actually just want to go to work.</p>	<p>Settling in, not standing out?</p> <p>Individual and difference as REPEATED.</p> <p>Difference as good.</p> <p>Respect again</p> <p>CONFIDENCE as repeated</p>	<p><b>Status in staff team/hierarchy change</b></p> <p><b>Colleagues and relationships Outside/different</b></p> <p><b>Respect colleagues/differences</b></p> <p><b>Confidence as repeated</b></p>
<p>12.24</p> <p><b>You're not a newbie anymore</b></p>	<p>No but if I'd stayed at the first school, I think I'd have been a <b>newbie</b> up until another NQT came along. Which could have been years.</p>	<p>- ie she's been qualified 3 years- is this about control too?</p>	<p><b>Status in staff team/hierarchy</b></p>

<p><b>SS reminded her of what we talking about ... Teachers feeling pressured</b></p>	<p>They come in so low that then it's difficult because you're still expected to get them to this floor level but I've got a child (in YR 4) who can barely write her name. That's really difficult. And then – I've got to say every school I've ever heard of - you've always got that push in YR6, of trying to catch up where – especially with the new system of pay-performance-related pay - fails because people lie. You start judging people on the levels they make, of course they're going to make it up. I've been told I've got to get 85% in 'the pink zones' so I will get 85% in the pink zones. White (level) is age related, anything below that is green and above that is pink so they've colour coded the children based on their KS1 results so if they achieved over, then they're pink and they have to be in the 'pink zone', there's a lot of colours. It's also difficult because you've got children who are technically 'black' – because they have a black font because they've just achieved where they should do but you can't refer to them as 'black children'.</p>	<p>Common issue with YR6 and the pressures- 'the push in YR6' means.....ive got to say</p> <p>PRP fails as teachers lie</p> <p>Pupils and levels</p> <p>NUMBERS GAME</p>	<p><b>Pupil progress and pressure YR6</b></p> <p><b>Assessment and adjusted curriculum</b></p> <p><b>Teacher lies</b></p> <p><b>PRP and data manipulation</b></p> <p><b>Colour-coded children</b></p> <p><b>PRP and judging teachers</b></p>
<p>36.37</p> <p><b>SS Are children that become pink at your discretion?</b></p>	<p>I think some teachers see it like that and certainly when we got our classes handed up (from previous year grp) with all the information, we were given this set of data that the school had and then we were told that <b>'that child's not really there but he has to be there otherwise I don't get my pay rise'</b>. That is entirely down to PRP.</p>	<p>NUMBERS GAME</p>	<p><b>Data manipulation</b></p> <p><b>Teacher lies</b></p> <p><b>Staff relations</b></p>

	<p>That's entirely down to PRP</p> <p>It's almost ... We've been told it. Point blank. Up front. We do our assessment in October, March and then May. We were told you need to have made 1.3 points of progress APS. They messed up the Maths so they said to us 'you have to make 1.3 points of progress by October' but what they actually meant was half of that. So obviously quite a few of us made that 1.3 points (laughs) and we've now been hailed as ... to be honest I can quite happily say that I don't think any of my levels are inaccurate. The yr. 6 team</p>		<p><b>The numbers game</b></p> <p><b>levelled children</b></p>
	<p>always say they get kids who come in as like a level 4 and they're actually a level 2. Which is why they make such huge progress in YR6 because they've got to ... they just cut out every other subject.</p>	<p>I'm amazed that t's tell me this----</p>	
37.46	<p>... they just cut out every other subject.</p>	<p>HOW WILLING T'S ARE TO TELL ME THIS</p> <p>'we've <b>been told it, up front</b>' – shes's alluding to the SLT here. (told to manipulate)</p> <p>Hailed as a 'hero'? but she's acted correctly - to be honest I can quite happily say that I don't think any of my levels are inaccurate</p> <p>How common is this?</p> <p>TOLD IT BY THE HT</p> <p>Narrowed curriculum for YR6</p>	<p><b>Perceptions of management –alluding to SLT direction)</b></p> <p><b>Teacher lies</b></p> <p><b>The numbers game</b></p> <p><b>levelled children</b></p> <p><b>Teachers /pupils Narrowing curriculum</b></p>

<p>40.00</p> <p><b>SS PRP – Were you assessed for this?</b></p>	<p>It was difficult because actually hadn't ever had a PRP meeting (in the previous school) so obviously I came to the new school with nothing. She (the HT) got out the sheets, the bullet points of what makes an RI, good or outstanding teacher and we just 'pinked' and 'greened' it. I'll be honest- I lied. Because at that point I thought 'what's the point in telling the truth'. So when she said 'what's your most recent observation' (from the last school) I said 'good'. Because I knew that was a lie that would have no implications on the new place. The only difference was that they'd pay me what they'd agreed to pay me when they interviewed me. But then this year some of it is based on lesson gradings which are all fine. Some of it is based on doing certain CPD, The last part is based on 85% of 'pink' children have to be in the pink zone. That's quite frustrating because I might not potentially get my pay rise because the teacher last year lied. If that took out that blame culture maybe we wouldn't lie.</p>	<p>I'll be honest- I lied. Because at that point I thought 'what's the point in telling the truth'.</p> <p>NO implications for the school in her view</p> <p>If that took out that blame culture maybe we wouldn't lie.</p>	<p><b>PRP and judging teachers</b></p> <p><b>Teacher labelling/grading</b></p> <p><b>Data manipulation</b></p> <p><b>Teacher lies</b></p> <p><b>Staff relations</b></p> <p><b>Colour-coded children</b></p> <p><b>Teacher accountability</b></p>
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<p>42.00</p> <p><b>SS Common in your school? have to do it?</b></p>	<p><i>There are 2 sets of people. Everyone knows levels have to be at a certain place. And then some of us do the extra work and extra push to make sure that's still true for the children whereas then some of them lie. My partner teacher – her levels are the same as mine but her children aren't. So either mine are too harsh but then I don't think hers are accurate. The problem is with moderation is the way it's done, you bring 2 books. It'd be a very brave person that genuinely brought a child you weren't sure about. You still have to give an opinion. If you say it and you're way out then it brings in concerns about the rest of the class. <b>It is playing a game.</b></i></p>	<p><i>Resigned to playing the game</i></p>	<p><b>Teacher accountability</b></p> <p><b>Data manipulation</b></p> <p><b>Teacher lies</b></p> <p><b>Staff relations – 2 sets of people</b></p> <p><b>Playing the game</b> (of colluding? Complying? Quiet life)</p>
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## APPENDIX 9: Harriet Narrative: 'It's that lack of value and appreciation'

13.00	<p><i>Erm, what's happened? So Ofsted in the last week of term; so all Xmas parties thrown out the window; literacy and maths back in. Hysterical. Mania. But I think it was kind of good for us because I think there was this 'this is the most ridiculous scenario' so that you went 'fuck it'. You can't do any more so either It's good enough or it's not. Going back to the books thing, my colleague – in her position - came and collected books and I was really honest and I wasn't that happy with my literacy books but I know my numeracy books were fine so she did a bit* of a 'I'll take your numeracy, I'll show my literacy', that's the yr2 done. <b>We all do it don't we.</b> It was nice that she fed back and – your numeracy books were better than ours and we need to be doing more of this; I felt some validation at that point. It's not a competition all the time</i></p>	<p><b>What's the story since we last met?</b></p> <p><b>1<sup>st</sup> story is about the 'checking of books' – whose books and why and how she was validated by this / her co-worker / SLT</b></p> <p><b>*she says 'I'm not sure I'm allowed to say this'</b></p>	
15.00	<p><i>I don't mind observations; I think I can perform. Not always. I'm quite good at giving a lot of energy and enthusiasm. It was stressful for everyone and 2 days of it (at that time of year). It was really supportive.</i></p>	<p><b>How did you bear up?</b></p> <p><b>Supportive</b></p>	
	<p><i>2 kids have been permanently excluded from my class. I was already being punched at this point. The violence towards me; he completely trashed my class. He was restrained twice by the behaviour manager. He flipped tables from my room. It was very full on. I was told I had to put up with him hitting me. That shouldn't be the case?</i></p>	<p><i>The violence towards me;</i></p> <p><i>The most vulnerable class I've ever had</i></p>	
19.07	<p><i>Since those 2 children have left I'm really pleased with the progress. I am. You don't think it's going to happen because they came up so low. 1c readers, 1b writers and it was just 'wow', how am I going to get ... parents with special needs themselves. My class line in the morning is hilarious as ill have I'll have 8 or 9 kids in line at the beginning of the day. we were doing the phonics test and someone</i></p>	<p><b>Can you call to mind a success this year?</b></p>	

	<p>came to get the ones who had to repeat it and said 'is X in?' and I said 'not yet, they might be later' and they said it 9.45, and I said I know, she might be later! Kids not turning up until 10.30. The vulnerability is huge. But they have really settled. I never thought this would be a class that would day 'I love writing'. That enthusiasm was lovely. They been allowed to do a lot of playing in YR1. It took a while to settle down.</p>	<p><i>Her success with a challenging class. The vulnerability is huge. But they have really settled. That enthusiasm was lovely.</i></p>	
<p>21.37</p> <p><b>One narrative</b></p> <p><i>Uninterrupted and continuous for 5 mins</i></p> <p><i>Particularity</i></p> <p><i>Ordering and sequence</i></p> <p><i>Causality</i></p> <p><i>Teacher effort – achievement – overlooked and</i></p>	<p><i>I find this really hard at our school. If something was to come across strongly for me – in this* - it's I don't think there's a lot of praise in teaching for when things go well. So I won't have a final analysis meeting about the YR2 results with anybody. I will have a meeting with the teacher that I'm passing on to and I'll discuss the kids with them. There's a sign on the board in the staff room that shares ... and percentage-wise we've done fine; I haven't seen the <b>comparison</b>. I'll get emailed the stuff; like the <b>comparison</b> of where the (local) schools are and the percentages. I think when so much pressure is put on YR2 – and I don't know if YR6 gets this because there's more pressure on them but we don't get that 'sit down, did it go well, can we do anything better' but the year when it was really bad, there <u>was a</u> meeting about how bad the results were. (In that meeting they said), 'Are you pleased with the results this year?' (and I said) 'Actually no!' There was a meeting when it was bad but the following year, all of my class got to level 2 in maths, and did anybody say anything? No. Was there any acknowledgement? No. I just think it's really bad management. I'm actually genuinely pleased with what they've done; they've all achieved, their attitudes, their confidence, their self-esteem, and they've made progress. The percentages are all fine, where we are in the tables is all fine but you'll still - on a Monday morning on last week of term – you'll still open your email and it's your final results – and it's like highlighted red, red, red, 'not on track', 'not on track' and it's in the Ofsted terminology as well so it's 'unsatisfactory progress' and the highlights are a tiny bit in green and a bit of yellow but you open it to</i></p>	<p><b>Was that in line with what the school needed them to achieve?</b></p> <p><b>NB her answer * 'in this' refers to being in the research and seems to indicate she's not answering the question here....</b></p> <p><b>Comparing progress with other schools and competition and accountability here</b></p> <p><b>Bad management</b></p> <p><b>Timing thoughtless</b></p>	<p>It wasn't apparent at this point what 'this' related to</p> <p>Orientation / recognisable trigger – she's about to tell me about this</p> <p>The story is of <b>injustice</b></p> <p><b>Repetition: 'it was bad'</b></p>

