Experiences of teacher stress and the impact on behaviours, health and well-being: a narrative inquiry

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Abstract

The link between stress and the teaching profession is well-established in empirical research (Hamama, Ronen, Shachar and Rosenbaum, 2013, pp731-732; Carton and Fruchart, 2014, p246; Stoeber and Rennert, 2008, p2; Shyman, 2011, p352; Travers, 2001, p130). In fact, stress is now spoken of as a given; as an 'inescapable aspect of teaching' (Smith and Bourke, 1992, p31) with detrimental effects on teachers' careers and health (Klassen, 2010, p342). Regardless of any previous theories, research and interventions, teacher stress is an issue *now* and linked to the high levels of staff absence and the record numbers of those leaving or planning to leave the profession (Espinoza, 2015; Precey, 2015; Lightfoot, 2016).

This research therefore addresses a current issue of relevance and importance regarding the field of Education. It offers a window into the subject and provides knowledge and insight from some of those very teachers who are affected. My research is situated firmly in the qualitative paradigm (Denzin 2008) and uses a narrative inquiry to elevate and prioritise people's stories, voices and subjective experiences. The study explores the relationship between the teacher and their environment in the experience of stress, and how this impacts on teachers' behaviours, health and well-being.

This research project and its findings contribute to the field in a variety of ways. I challenge much of the language and labelling frequenting the literature on stress, teacher stress and coping. I offer a different perspective and non-judgemental terminology to describe and understand stress-related behaviours: 'creative–survival behaviours' (CSB). The research also fills a gap in the teacher stress literature by incorporating the concept of trauma and posttraumatic growth. I explore how it links to my participants' experiences as well as potentially many other teachers both nationally and internationally. In addition, this study illuminates the importance of relationships and the price that can be paid if positive, collaborative relationships are not in place. I introduce the term 'relationship - architecture' to reflect that relationships are the bricks and mortar when building a school. Fundamentally, my research champions the notion that just as every child matters, so does every teacher.

Acknowledgements

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Without my participants, this research would not exist. In the interests of confidentiality I cannot name them here, yet I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to them for sharing their stories with me. For some participants, it was the first time they had spoken openly about their experience so I thank them for their time, strength and courage.

There is no question that I would not have completed this journey without the unconditional love and emotional support shown by my husband and children. They have been with me every step of the way and I am forever thankful.

Glossary

APA	The American Psychiatric Association
ATL	Association of Teachers and Lecturers
BERA	British Educational Research Association
CBT	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
COR	Conservation of Resources Theory
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	Department for Education
EI	Emotional Intelligence
EIS	Educational Institute of Scotland
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
LOC	Locus of Control
NASUWT	National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
NHS	National Health Service
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
PTG	Posttraumatic growth
PTSD	Posttraumatic stress disorder
SMT	Senior Management Team

STS	Secondary traumatic stress
TA	Teaching assistant
TES	Times Educational Supplement
TSN	Teacher Support Network
UKDPC	United Kingdom Drug Policy Commission

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Preface

Before outlining my research and its findings, I would like to present a letter (A) along with a selection of news headlines (B). The former is an open letter from Mrs Alison Utting to Mr Gove, the Secretary of State for Education at the time of her writing. Utting (2014) used social media to encourage people to read and share her letter: the letter was actually shared over 100,000 times. Both Mrs Utting's letter, and the various news headlines, effectively introduce my project and many of its concerns. They also highlight the relevance of my research area, demonstrating how this project is engaging with real, current concerns regarding the field of education.

(A) Open letter from Mrs A. Utting to Mr Gove, Secretary of State for Education

29th April 2014

Dear Mr Gove,

I am writing to inform you of the death of Mr Gareth Utting, a teacher of English at a secondary school in Shropshire.

Gareth died at the age of 37 of a massive heart attack. There were a few contributory factors to his death, but looming large was the word 'stress'. He leaves me a widow with three children, aged fourteen, four and one.

This is not the angry rant of a bereaved person. I haven't got anywhere near angry yet. I am still reeling with shock and wondering if there was anything I could have done to prevent my husband's death. When these thoughts beset me, I keep coming back to the fact that I should have done more to help him get out of teaching. And how can that be right, to think that? I love teaching. In the few weeks since Gareth died, I

have heard and read so many tributes from his students that attest to the positive impact that a good teacher can make. I should be proud that my husband was a teacher. But right at this moment, I'm not. I'm sorry that he was. Because if he had a different job, he might still be with us.

I don't pretend to know the ins and outs of the changes that have hit teachers in the last few years. I qualified as a teacher myself but have been at home raising our young children, so have not been directly involved. But I can tell you what I see around me.

Teachers like Gareth have changed.

Their hopes for the young people in their care have not changed. Neither has their willingness to go the extra mile to help those young people to succeed. But the work-load that they struggle under and the pressures that are applied to them from above have greatly increased. If this led to better education for our children, then I would be supporting these changes. But I don't see better education. I see good teachers breaking under the load. I see good teachers embittered and weary. I see good teachers leaving the profession. I see good teachers never even entering the profession, for fear of what lies ahead. I see pupils indoctrinated with achievement targets, who are afraid to veer from the curriculum in case it affects their next assessment; pupils for whom 'knowledge' is defined by a pass mark and their position within a cohort.

Within this atmosphere, my husband struggled to help his pupils in every way he could. The comments that they have left on social media reflect a teacher-pupil relationship that was honest, helpful and mutually respectful. He taught them English, and they did well at it. But he also taught them about life, and love, and self-esteem. But he did this in spite of, not because of, the current state of the education system.

Gareth is at peace now. But I have some difficult choices to make.

Do I return to a profession that takes so high a toll? When my four-year-old son says he wants to be a teacher, do I smile or try to talk him out of it? When I see Gareth's colleagues, do I congratulate them for being so amazing, or encourage them to explore other career options?

Mr Gove, I don't envy you your job. I don't know the best way to achieve a high standard of education for all pupils,

everywhere. But I do know this: People don't become teachers to be slackers, for the pension or for the name badge.

Here's an interesting theory of mine that I was discussing recently with my husband. If you took away all external inspection and supervision, all targets and reviews, if teachers were left to themselves to teach what they wanted to teach, the way they wanted to teach it, what do you think would happen?

This is what I think: Every teacher that I know cares deeply about their subject and their students. They would teach marvellously. They would share knowledge and encourage each other. They would deal with problems (including less-than-perfect pupils and teachers) with the professionalism that they possess in spades.

Of course we cannot remove all monitoring of teachers and schools. But it seems to me that you have forgotten this basic fact: Teachers love to teach, and they want to do it well.

I don't know what I want to ask of you. All I know is that the situation as it stands is wrong. On behalf of all the teachers and pupils out there, I beg you to go back to the drawing-board. Learn from your mistakes. Gain knowledge.

And please don't send me your condolences.

Yours,

Alison Utting

(B) A selection of news headlines related to teacher stress

Teacher receives record £254,000 payout for stress (The Telegraph, 2000)

Teacher sick days 'stress-linked' (BBC, 2004)

Inspection pressure 'drives teachers to suicide' (The Telegraph, 2007)

Depressed, stressed: teachers in crisis (The Guardian, 2008)

Teachers face fight with stress (BBC, 2010)

Stressed teachers 'considering suicide' (The Telegraph, 2010)

Stress drives teachers out of schools (The Guardian, 2011)

Secret Teacher: stress is reaching a crisis point in schools (The Guardian, 2013)

Teachers say stress is leading to rise in mental health issues (The Telegraph, 2014 a)

Teacher workload at unacceptable levels (The Telegraph, 2014 b)

Stressed teachers - nine out of ten have considered quitting (Manchester Evening News, 2014)

Ofsted inspections and targets harming teachers' mental health, finds survey (The Guardian, 2014)

Teachers report rise in mental health fears (BBC, 2014 a)

Teacher stress levels in England 'soaring', data shows (BBC, 2015)

Four in 10 new teachers 'quit within a year,' union warns (The Telegraph, 2015 a)

'Stress pushing teachers to leave profession,' figures show (The Telegraph, 2015 b)

Teachers live in 'atmosphere of fear' (The Telegraph, 2015 c)

Four out of 10 new teachers don't last a year in the classroom because they are put off by 'exhausted and stressed colleagues' says union boss (Daily Mail, 2015)

Warning over state of teachers' mental health (BBC, 2016)

'Workload, pitiful pay and respect for the profession at an all-time low: no wonder no one wants to be a teacher' (Times Educational Supplement, 2017)

Chapter 1

Introduction to the project and research questions

1.0 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research project in terms of its aims and intentions and how it was inspired. After exploring the characteristics of both quantitative and qualitative research, I situate my research firmly in the qualitative paradigm and explain my reasons for this. Whilst the research questions drove the research process, I also acknowledge the importance of context and provide background to demonstrate how the research area and the research questions were energised and shaped.

1.1 An overview of the project and its aims

The examples used in the preface were only a small selection of a multitude which could have been used. They powerfully demonstrate that regardless of any previous theories, research or interventions, teacher stress is an issue *now*, and the impact it has on teachers' health is of growing concern. Clearly, the issue has not been resolved. Peter Harvey, whose own personal case was in the news (The Guardian, 2010), goes so far as to describe teachers as 'ticking time bombs' because of stress in schools.

I have found that such stories do not simply relate to the news, however. As will be explored further in a personal narrative, I

have met many teachers throughout my teaching career who joined the profession with such enthusiasm and determination, yet either left completely disheartened or stayed on with detrimental costs to their health and well-being. Thinking of these teachers I have known personally, as well as reading the constant distressing news headlines, served to trigger my curiosities, emotions and questions and hence my choice of teacher stress as a research area. I wanted to know: what is happening in schools for teachers to have such stress experiences?; how is stress affecting their behaviours, health and well-being?; and what kind of school culture and environment are the teachers working in? I wanted to hear their voices, their stories, their perspectives. Rather than using 'constraining' quantitative measures (Newby, 2010, p91) that risk cutting teachers off by providing tick box answers and generalisations, I wanted to let teachers talk and to ask, listen and hear their stories in detail.

This research project is thus concerned with teachers' lives, teachers' mental and physical health and teachers' personal experiences when responding to occupational demands, pressures and expectations. It focuses on the nature of the relationship between teachers' experiences of stress and school culture and environment. As will be explored and evident

throughout the thesis, my research is situated firmly in the 'qualitative paradigm' (Denzin, 2008), elevating and prioritising people's stories, voices and subjective experiences. As Denzin (2010, p10) explains, the world cannot be 'captured directly' and so 'we study the way people represent their experiences to themselves and to others.' Hammersley (2012, pp1-9) points out that it is not an easy task to define qualitative research in a simple manner; definitions vary and focus on different features. However, by focussing on many shared aspects, and contrasting with the characteristics of quantitative research, he offers the following, helpful definition:

> a form of social inquiry that tends to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis (Ibid, p12).

This is in stark contrast to quantitative approaches which draw from a philosophical standpoint of scientism and positivism: such studies seek universal truths and value objectivity, hypothesis testing, the use of numerical data and statistical procedures (Hammersley, 2012, p11; Newby, 2010, pp33-35).

It is not my intention to denigrate quantitative research and indeed, both quantitative and qualitative approaches can provide valuable insight. This is demonstrated by Wellington's (2000, p19) helpful analogy of a sports match: he wants a

description of the event and the highlights, but he also wants to know the score. My research however, is placed firmly in the qualitative tradition and welcomes subjectivity. Numbers and statistical procedures cannot answer my research questions (these are set out in the next section). My aim is to illuminate and explore rather than measure and generalise. This project has a narrow and deep focus; it provides a space and platform for important stories and voices to be heard. It is hoped the work will provide insight, engage the readers' emotions and encourage greater empathy and understanding about ourselves and each other. It is likely the stories will relate to colleagues we already know in the teaching profession or those we will meet in the future. This illustrates the educational and informative role the project serves, as well as one of emotional, human interest. Furthermore, I hope the research has an impact in terms of provoking new questions, curiosities and further studies.

1.2 Research questions

Main overarching question:

What is the relationship between the teacher and their environment in the experience of stress, and how does this impact on teachers' behaviours, health and well-being?

Sub-questions:

1. *What are the conditions which promote teacher stress and associated behaviours?*
2. *How does workplace stress impact on teachers' personal and professional lives? What are the wider, broader effects?*
3. *How do the teachers perceive their role within the school?*
4. *How do the teachers view their relationships with colleagues and students?*
5. *Either implicitly or explicitly, how do the teachers view and describe the culture and environment of their school?*

When selecting my main, overarching question, it was important to me that it allowed a focus on the *experience* of stress for the teacher, their own story, and how this impacts on the *whole* person: physically and mentally; personally and professionally. My word choice also deliberately sets the scene for a discussion of *both* person and environment, seeing them as interrelated and of equal importance, rather than taking an either / or perspective. This was also important to me due to engaging with the literature in the field, as well as experiencing teacher training days and staff training materials. I have often found the individual can be pathologized or deemed to be at fault: they are told how to boost their resilience and become 'better' teachers, whilst the teaching environment itself is overlooked. With my questions, I therefore hope to redress the balance and capture a more detailed and complete picture.

My use of the word 'how' in the main question is also important as it opens up a variety of possibilities. It suggests that the impact may not always be seen in an open, overt, quantifiable manner but in much more subtle and interesting ways, but nevertheless there will still be an impact. It also suggests the consequences and effects could be positive *or* negative, rather than automatically negative.

1.3 Definition of key concepts in terms of the study

As teacher stress is the central concept of the study, it is broken down and explored fully in the literature review section. In order to provide clarity for the reader surrounding the research questions at this point, I also present my own definition of *teacher stress* here which evolved for the purpose of the research:

> **When teachers consider their mental and / or physical health to be affected by issues within the school environment, the home environment, or both.**

It is also important for me to highlight that, by *environment*, I refer to both the physical surroundings and architecture of the school building, as well as school culture, atmosphere and ethos.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have outlined the aims and intentions of the research project. With the research placed firmly in the qualitative paradigm, I have highlighted my intention to elevate participants' stories, voices and subjective experiences. The research questions have been presented along with explanations regarding how they were shaped as well as a definition of key concepts. In the next chapter, I turn to a more detailed exploration of context and how my interest in the research area arose. A discussion of researcher positionality, and the implications of this for the project, is provided.

Chapter 2

Researcher positioning and how this links to epistemology, choice of research area and the research questions

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a more detailed exploration of how my interest in the research area emerged. I begin by exploring the importance and implications of researcher positioning in a general sense before turning to my own position with the assistance of a personal narrative. The chapter concludes with an examination of the epistemology underpinning the research project and how this links to researcher positionality.

2.1 The importance of exploring the researcher's position

Researchers need to be both reflective and reflexive. Wellington (2000, p42) clearly defines the former as 'thinking critically about the research process' and the latter as 'reflecting on the self, the researcher'. Reflexivity is affected by the extent to which a researcher is 'part of the researched and shares the participants' experience' (Berger, 2013, p1). As Adkins (2002, p332) illustrates, reflexivity can serve as an index for judgements on 'good' and 'bad' social research and so researchers need to be open and transparent. Being honest about how you approach and interpret data is described by Newby (2010, p47) as 'a moral duty'.

Research which is positivist in nature attempts to 'eliminate' the researcher and their feelings and influences as much as possible

(Morrison, 2007, pp21-32). Yet can this really be achieved? As Morrison (Ibid, p23) points out, very few educational researchers 'subscribe to the view that research can be *entirely* value-free.' Every stage of the research process, even the choice of key words in a literature search, can be affected by the researcher's position and their experiences. The researcher is not, and cannot be, objective and value free: s/he comes from a particular social, economic and political context (Foote and Bartell, 2011, p46; Morrison, 2002, p32). Certain perspectives and assumptions can be held which influence *what* is seen and *how* it is seen. This also explains why researchers may approach exactly the same question using a completely different methodology. The researchers' own life-stories and their experience of particular emotional events can influence their view of the world, the choice of topic, how to research that topic and even the impact they have on participants. Pezalla, Pettigrew and Miller-Day (2012) have revealed, for example, how an interviewer's gender or style of approach has an impact on both *how* participants speak as well as what they speak about.

Researcher reflexivity and transparency is clearly an important process. It demonstrates how you are engaging in the research and how you are positioned within it: the extent to which you

are inside and outside the topic and the implications of this. There is a further benefit and purpose as it can also help the researcher to guard against potential problems. As an example, Milner (2007, p388) points out various dangers (seen, unseen and unforeseen) when researchers do not pay careful attention to their own and others' 'racialized and cultural systems' of experiencing the world. This idea is also alluded to by Ahmed, Hundt and Blackburn (2011, p468). In their study of visually impaired young people in Bahrain, they reveal how reflexivity meant that research methods were altered to meet the 'sensibilities and sensitivities' of particular social groups and settings. Whilst our biases and subjective experiences can guide us, being aware of them can help researchers to 'manage' them, ensuring they are helpful rather than 'detrimental' to the research process (Smith, 2012, p501).

As a result of engaging with such issues, the following section provides a personal narrative to explore my interest in the research area, my position as a researcher and in effect, where the research questions came from. Ambler (2012, p184) champions the use of such vignettes in research, seeing them as a vital starting point and a catalyst for learning. She defines the term as follows:

> Vignettes are short, impressionistic scenes that focus on one moment or give an impression about people, an idea

> or a setting…Characteristically, the snapshots are short pieces of writing that capture a moment, scene or incident that tells a compelling part of a bigger story.

I am sensitive to the guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2011) which are also adopted by The School of Education at The University of Nottingham. Furthermore, engaging with issues of disclosure, Mellick and Fleming (2010, p300) raise concerns about 'persons being put into the public domain through published research to which the persons themselves may not have consented.' As a result of these ethical considerations, I have not named colleagues, students or the school itself. I have also avoided any individual becoming centralised in the narrative and I have presented people without detailed descriptions which could reveal their identities. A more lengthy discussion of ethical issues and research can be found in Chapter 4, section 3.

2.2 A personal narrative: key experiences and observations influencing my perspective as a researcher

Throughout my experience of teaching, I have become increasingly concerned about aspects of the education system and the costs to mental and physical health. I encountered a multitude of distressing issues in one particular school which I shall refer to as 'School X' throughout the narrative: colleagues and students suffering with anxiety and depression; two students committing suicide in the space of a year; students

refusing to attend the school; teachers leaving both the school and the profession feeling they just could not cope; teachers remaining at the school despite detrimental effects to their health; stress-related behaviours in teachers, particularly with regard to alcohol, smoking and extreme dieting. These behaviours both intrigued and troubled me, due to the frequency of incidence I had observed within this same school setting.

Foucauldian and Rogerian concepts are highly relevant to my time at School X and they aid the discussion and analysis of my experience there. They allow me to more effectively describe and illuminate important aspects of the story; to attempt to understand *why* so much teacher stress was experienced in this particular school and *why* there were so many incidences of stress-related behaviours in teachers. Foucault allows me to focus on the *system,* the school as an institution, yet Rogers' ideas allow me to also focus on the *individual.* As will be discussed further in the methodology section, although Foucauldian and Rogerian concepts provide a powerful tool when examining my own story, this does not make them automatically relevant and appropriate for my participants' stories. They speak to my own experience in one particular school in the north of England.

The school building and physical environment

> Each individual has his own place; and each place its individual. Avoid distributions in groups; break up collective dispositions…Disciplinary space tends to be divided into as many sections as there are bodies or elements to be distributed (Foucault, 1977, p143).

Despite describing the birth of the prison, Foucault's words actually mirror my experiences when School X moved to a new build. In this new single building, routine, regularity and control was the pattern. Every corridor (or 'wing') was like every other corridor; every department had its own corridor, separated from the other departments; every classroom looked like every other classroom. There were gaps along the entire length of each corridor so that everything that was said could be heard by those on the corridor above or below. The movements and voices of teachers and students could always be heard. As with Foucault's description, there was a sense the building had been deliberately designed with perpetual surveillance in mind, 'to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them' (1977, p172). Those teachers who were prepared to open up felt that, despite the marketing techniques and discourse, the school had become a dark, soul-less building. It felt oppressive and divisive, creating an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust.

There was no staffroom in the new build; it had been removed. Many saw this as yet a further attempt to divide and rule, preventing teachers from communicating and challenging ideas, or to simply discourage them from taking a break from their work. In this light, the school staffroom resembles Foucault's port: 'a crossroads for dangerous mixtures, a meeting-place for forbidden circulations' (1977, p144). A camera was also installed in every classroom: 'a perfect eye that nothing would escape and a centre towards which all gazes would be turned' (Foucault, 1977, p173). Space, bodies, movement and behaviour were being constantly monitored and shaped. I vividly remember one particular occasion when my colleague resorted to hiding in a stock cupboard in order to cry, as there were no other spaces left where she would not be seen. It was never made explicitly clear who was watching the footage and when. The threat and the power of the gaze, therefore, was enough. The mere presence of the cameras, along with the uncertainty surrounding whether they were switched on or off, was considered by many teachers to be sinister and Orwellian in nature. It was difficult to relax; difficult to be yourself.

The effect of this panopticism was to create a climate of fear and constant judgment; behaviour was modified which had a negative impact on the social aspect of relationships and

opportunities for creativity. School X used its very architecture and physical environment to create 'docile bodies' (1977, p138). There was a notable breakdown in staff relationships in this new build. The very architectural design of School X prevented this process of interpersonal development. The staffroom (as well as staff *room*) had been taken away and teachers were constantly observed and therefore anxious and suspicious. Conflict and division (and in some departments, staff bullying) became the norm rather than a climate of mutual respect, support and shared responsibility. It even became the norm to see members of staff emailing the person sitting right next to them. It appeared that relationships were now secondary to delivering numbers and grades: they got in the way of business and achieving an 'outstanding' grade.

Monitoring, management and judgement

> The examination combines the techniques of an observing hierarchy and those of a normalizing judgement. It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them' (Foucault, 1977: 184).

I experienced School X as being part of a system and a culture which was driven and shaped by results and performance. Categories, numbers and grades controlled the discourse. Ranked scales compared students, teachers and the schools themselves, judging them to be 'outstanding' or perhaps

'failing'. School X, like many other schools, became focused on achieving particular labels and league table positions. It is perhaps difficult to accurately measure the psychological impact for students and teachers in schools labelled as 'failing' or 'outstanding'. From a Foucauldian perspective, however, particularly when considering his description of the scaffold (1977), the idea of public spectacle and public shame is apparent. This is only further intensified when governments declare they will 'name and shame' schools if the top pupils do not make enough progress (Paton, 2012 a). School X itself, as well as the teachers and students, were caught in this network of power and subject to such judgment. Like other schools, School X was therefore taking action to achieve or retain credibility, power and authority.

School X was on a mission to achieve an outstanding OFSTED report. Consequently, every child *had* to know their target grade and working-at-grade. These were displayed on work books, folders and homework diaries: students could not escape them and were both literally and psychologically carrying their judgements around. As with many schools, examination results became the be-all and end-all: the 'gold standard' (Hall, 2005, p140). Emotional development was therefore side-lined whilst the academic curriculum held all disciplinary power and

controlled the discourse. Teachers were also subject to the same techniques of power as their students: they were 'supervisors, perpetually supervised' (Foucault, 1977, p177) and under pressure to teach to the examination. Every teacher knew whether they were an outstanding teacher or not, from persistent lesson observations and performance management meetings. Targets were set so that every teacher understood what they needed to put right about *themselves* before OFSTED arrived. Numbers and grades replaced or re-shaped identities. Ironically, when considering the increased observation and monitoring, along with the cost to the mental and physical health of colleagues and students, the label 'outstanding' became highly questionable.

School X had specific systems of reward and punishment which reinforced the categories, judgements and labels. These were proudly displayed on classroom walls. Students knew exactly which types of behaviour and performance could earn them a house point, a treat, a detention or perhaps a period of exclusion. A token economy was therefore created where everything came with a price. Likewise, staff were encouraged to conform. This was reflected by those teachers who did and who did not get promoted and by the large numbers of teachers who left the school or the teaching profession altogether. As

Foucault (1977, p181) tells us, 'Rank in itself serves as a reward or punishment.' Only by conforming to the school's 'regime of truth' (1976, p131) could the teacher receive reward, promotion and therefore access to power.

Conditions of worth and when the gaze turns inwards

> When self-experiences of the individual are discriminated by significant others as being more or less worthy of positive regard, then self-regard becomes similarly selective. When a self-experience is avoided (or sought) solely because it is less (or more) worthy of self-regard, the individual is said to have acquired a condition of worth…Because of the need for self-regard, the individual perceives his experience selectively, in terms of the conditions of worth which have come to exist in him (Rogers, 1959, p246).

It is here I find Rogers' ideas also contribute to my narrative. The school building itself with its constant surveillance, along with the aforementioned labels, numbers and grades, were not only reinforced and justified by systems of reward and punishment: they imposed conditions of worth. Many colleagues and students of School X were overwhelmed by ifs and buts. They had worth *if*…They may have tried hard *but*…Praise, reward or promotions were only given *if*… In this way, the discourse of School X did not simply reflect the power and goals of the institution, it became all-consuming for the individual. The 'verbal signs' (Foucault, 1974, p81) not only shaped the physical environment but also the inner worlds and identities of teachers. Power produces 'a set of actions upon other actions'

(Foucault, 1982, p341). As the gaze turns inwards, it grows in intensity and power. The relentless pressure to conform, to measure up, can lead to constant self-examination and self–governance.

Such conditions of worth, and feeling that you cannot fulfil them and never escape the gaze, can have a detrimental effect on self-regard, triggering feelings of self-consciousness or even humiliation. As Kaufman (1993, p45) reminds us, in a climate of shame, shame will only 'magnify.' Bradshaw (1990) also vividly points out that feelings of anxiety, shame and humiliation are linked to a range of self-harming, addictive behaviours. Conditions of worth can therefore be harmful to emotional and physical health, preventing the individual from becoming a 'fully functioning person' (Rogers, 1961, p191). Such factors may therefore explain why I witnessed such intense teacher stress, impacting so dramatically on health and behaviours, within this particular school. School X had become a pressure cooker as well as an observatory, where performativity was eroding staff relationships, staff morale and teachers' self-esteem and self-worth.

Witnessing such intense teacher stress at School X, watching friends and colleagues suffer, made me feel closer and more connected to my participants, more sensitive and empathetic.

Thinking of particular teachers at School X who were similarly affected, it made me truly appreciate the courage it must have taken for my participants to speak out and tell me their story, for no extrinsic reward or incentive whatsoever. This made me feel protective of my participants and more inclined to champion them. It is important for me to explain this bias and subjectivity I may have as a researcher, in order to give my research transparency, integrity, openness and honesty (I discuss, in greater depth, the importance of these issues for qualitative studies in the Methodology chapter). Despite a concerted and sustained effort to 'bracket' (see Tufford and Newman, 2012) my experience at School X, I feel my observations would have naturally and inevitably been brought to my analytic lens.

2.3 Researcher positioning, epistemology and implications for the research project

This chapter has thus far outlined the importance of researcher personal positioning, presenting a personal narrative which helped me to explore my connections with participants. It has also served to further demonstrate where the interest in the research area came from and how the research questions were decided upon and shaped. It is important to note, however, that these experiences by no means lead to generalisations and sweeping conclusions. In School X, for example, there will have been teachers who did not suffer with stress and a negative

impact on their health and behaviours, and those who did not object to the various systems of surveillance. Regardless of the research area, there will always be those individuals who buck the trend, those who succeed against the odds and those who have alternative perspectives and interpretations. In the social world, there cannot necessarily be a universal and fixed Truth. People do not fit into neat, divided categories: there is no one size to fit all.

Whilst I do not subscribe to a positivist view of the world and the ontological assumption that there is 'a single, tangible reality "out there"' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p28), I also find myself resisting a completely relativist position at the other extreme, which denies that there is a 'knowable, static reality' (Bleazby, 2011, p455). I favour more of a middle ground. As well as championing the teachers' individual, subjective lived experience, there may also be commonalities and patterns due to the daily experiences that teachers do share. Teachers share the fact that they are situated in a complex network of power relationships with pressures and expectations from all angles: from parents, pupils, school leaders and managers. They can therefore feel that conditions of worth are continually imposed via multiple power sources. Whilst the school environment cannot automatically be held responsible for all cases of teacher

stress and stress-related behaviours, it still has a significant role to play, exacerbating issues for teachers or acting as a catalyst.

As a result of such considerations, my project focuses on the individual as well as the environment, to fully explore the interrelationship between person and context and how that person's 'reality' or 'truth' is constructed. My personal narrative explored how the environment and social influences are just as important as personal agency in shaping the individual. This perspective affects how I approach and analyse participants' stories, encouraging me to question: what is it about *this* individual and *this* particular environment which means the teacher experiences stress and its impact on health and well-being? How do *they* interpret and construct meaning from the setting and how is behaviour affected as a result of this? This project aims to uncover and understand how stories may be similar but also how and why they differ: the nuances, the subtleties and the complexities may provide a more detailed understanding.

The literature on research discusses such a vast range of theoretical and epistemological positions. To add to this, authors do not always use terminology in the same way and can even use one term when in fact they mean another (Crotty, 1998, pp10-11). For this reason I have decided to follow

Crotty's (1998) explication due to his clarity and coherence. From this standpoint, my previous discussion of researcher positioning signals that my epistemology can be classed as constructionism:

> There is no objective truth…Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind. Meaning is not discovered, but constructed…people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon' (Ibid, pp 8-9).

Gubrium and Holstein's (2008, p3) definition of the term concurs with Crotty's and also resonates with my previous narrative, analysis, questions and concerns:

> The leading idea always has been that the world we live in and our place in it are not simply and evidently "there" for participants. Rather, participants actively construct the world of everyday life and its constituent elements.

Constructionism thus stresses the importance of person and context interaction for meaning making. Personal agency means that there is no one fixed Truth. People are social actors: we construct meaning rather than extract it or passively receive it.

I do not want to be overly constrained by labels, however. My theoretical framework and assumptions can guide me and provide tools to illuminate and explore, yet I do not want a limited epistemology. I intend to remain open to new possibilities, interpretations and directions; to retain the

flexibility to grow and develop. It is important for me to continually critique and challenge my beliefs and interpretations. Indeed, Taber (2012, pp126-127) stresses that there is 'no simple way of labelling the philosophical underpinnings of research' and he encourages students to resist adopting labels and models 'wholesale.'

I have demonstrated that my experiences within the teaching profession mean that I am connected to, and entangled in, the research itself. This subjectivity and reflexivity is welcomed in the qualitative tradition (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p615; Morrison, 2002, p32). My experiences and observations have shaped my research interests and drawn me to this particular project. Our own feelings can clearly provide analytical tools and give us 'clues and hypotheses' (Kleinman, 2002, p382). As Usher (1996, p38) also explains, without having something 'in mind' and without 'pre-understandings', we could not even get research 'off the ground'. Researcher subjectivity can therefore be seen as natural and as enabling and fuelling research projects, rather than as problematic. It is still important, however, for me to remain reflexive, transparent and open. My beliefs and assumptions may guide me but they need to be scrutinised or challenged as I cannot allow them to close off possibilities. As a project evolves, new discoveries can be made

which, at the start of a research journey, are hidden. As Miller (1964, p106) explains: 'Writing, like life itself, is a voyage of discovery.'

2.4 Summary

This chapter has offered a detailed exploration of the importance and implications of researcher positioning. A personal narrative was provided which helped to provide further background and context to the formation of the research area. The links between researcher positioning and epistemology were also examined. It was emphasised that my epistemology can be classed as constructionism, however I also stressed my intention to remain open to possibilities and interpretations and not be overly constrained by labels.

In the next chapter the literature in the field is reviewed. I explore and critically discuss the concept of stress before examining, more specifically, teacher stress. I conclude the chapter by discussing the contribution of my own research to the field.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the relevant literature concerned with teacher stress. I begin by outlining how the literature review was conducted and the search terms which were used. The chapter is then divided into three parts. In Part A I consider the nature of stress, how it has been defined and understood, whilst highlighting key researchers, themes and theories. I note that stress is not a stable construct and various perspectives exist. I conclude this section, therefore, by defining the term for the purposes of my own study. In Part B I focus further and take the discussion deeper, examining stress specifically with relevance to the teaching profession. Firstly, I explore its prevalence and the various sources which have been identified. To develop and further the discussion, I then provide an overview of four key themes which emerged in the literature on teacher stress: burnout; emotions; resilience; and coping. In Part C, I outline the contribution of my own research to the field.

Within this critical review of the literature, my own comments and perspectives point towards the contribution of my research to the literature as well as to many themes within the discussions chapter.

3.1 How was the literature review conducted?

The different aspects of my research questions helped to inform key words for the literature search which are presented in Table 3.1. The wider topic search terms from list 1 were also combined with terms from list 2 in order to focus the search further. Boolean operators were used to refine or broaden search results as appropriate, for example 'mental health' *and* 'teachers' and 'emotional well-being schools' *or* 'emotional health schools' to address the different ways of expressing similar ideas.

In terms of researcher transparency and addressing the limitations of the literature review, there is always a possibility that particular studies could have been overlooked. As Evans (2002) notes, the relevance of many studies is not apparent from the title alone. Hawker, Payne, Kerr, Hardey and Powell (2002, p1288) point out that this can also be the case when authors use 'witty' titles. In order to reduce this risk, abstracts were thoroughly scrutinised and the different key word combinations ensured a very broad coverage.

Table 3.1. Key words used for the literature search

List 1 **Key words for the wider topics**	**List 2** **Key words to combine with relevant topics from List 1**
Stress	Teachers
Health	Models
Well-being	Education
Behaviour(s) / Behavior(s)	Teaching
Mental health	Schools
Emotional health	Theory / theories
Resilience	
Anxiety and depression	
Burnout	

When confronted with the large volume of texts retrieved from the search, my first strategy was to prioritise the most recent publications. This allowed me access to the most up-to-date debates and research as well as a review of previous work in the field. I also targeted key writers and texts I was already aware of. The reference lists of these texts were also scrutinised at this stage so that I was able to follow up further works which appeared particularly important for knowledge in the field. I then turned my attention to the remainder of the texts in the corpus. After scanning abstracts, headings, summary of

findings, I deleted many texts which appeared irrelevant or unhelpful.

NVivo software was used to store and handle the texts; I found it helpful to have everything literally in one place. Texts were grouped into various categories or 'nodes'. Nodes included, for example, definitions of stress, coping, resilience and key writers and researchers. This system also meant that I was able to code a text at various nodes and so it ensured I would not forget about its relevance to other discussions and debates. When reading the texts I was also able to highlight important quotations as well as record my ideas or things I wished to follow up, using the 'annotation' and 'memo' features.

I produced a simple grid for the detailed reading of the texts. In one column I recorded the texts' bibliographic details as well as the topics (nodes) it related to. In the other, I recorded important details about the text (for example about methodology) as well as key arguments and important quotations. Much of this was taken straight from the work I had already conducted in NVivo. The notes within the grid were used to structure and develop the literature review. It soon became clear that there was so much overlap and a vast number of potential topic areas to discuss; the constraints of the thesis

word limit would not permit a detailed section devoted to every single topic. As a result, I collapsed certain categories and merged them with others. As an example, for the topic of social support and relationships, which could have been a lengthy section in itself, I integrated key, relevant arguments and issues into other sections. To provide a further example, I combined the categories of perfectionism and workaholism and then included them within the category of 'coping'.

Part A:

3.2 WHAT IS STRESS AND HOW IS IT DEFINED IN THE LITERATURE?

3.2.1 Introduction and the early work of Selye

Stress is a popular topic for writers and researchers and the subject is not merely confined to the field of education; it is addressed in the literatures from a wide variety of disciplines such as medicine, clinical psychology, engineering psychology, and organizational psychology (Beehr, 1995, p4). A key figure in the history and development of stress research is Hans Selye. Kyriacou (2001, p27), a prominent writer in the field of teacher stress, points out that it is because of Selye's pioneering work in the 1950s that the term 'stress' became widely used in the social sciences. Theorell (2001, p34) reminds us that Selye 'introduced the stress concept in medicine' in the 1950s and

Levi (2001, p2) refers to him as the 'father' of the biological stress concept. Selye (1984, pxv) described stress in terms of the 'general adaptation syndrome':

> It is through the *general adaptation syndrome…*that our various internal organs – especially the endocrine glands and the nervous system- help us both to adjust to the constant changes which occur in and around us and to navigate a steady course toward whatever we consider a worthwhile goal.

Selye (Ibid, p1) went on to describe three distinct stages to outline the physiological response to stress: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance and the stage of exhaustion. Cooper and Cartwright (1996, p7) provide a helpful and simple summary of each of these phases:

> 1. **Alarm reaction**: the body automatically reacts to a perceived stressor and prepares for action.
> 2. **Resistance**: the body attempts to adapt and recover. If however, the stressor continues or the defence mechanisms do not work, then the individual will move onto a third stage.
> 3. **Exhaustion**: the adaptive mechanisms collapse.

Although Selye's work is considered pioneering, it has been contested on the grounds that human beings do not react to stress in such a 'uniform' way and that his depiction of stress is merely in terms of 'outcome' (Hobfoll, 1989, pp513-514). Indeed, 'stress' has not been a stable construct over the years; various definitions are offered in the literature rather than a single, unified perspective. Selye (1980, pvii) himself stated that 'remarkably few people define the concept the same way

or even bother to attempt a clear-cut definition.' Chambers and Davies (1999, p11) refer to stress as an 'ambiguous' term. Meanings can also change depending on whether one refers to work-related stress or life stress (Beehr, 1995, pxi).

Despite the wide variety of definitions in the literature, Cox (1993, p8) argues that there are in fact three different approaches to the study of stress: the 'engineering model'; the 'physiological model'; and the 'psychological model'. As Cox (Ibid) explains, the engineering approach locates the problem and cause of ill-health within the environment itself, treating stress as:

> a *stimulus characteristic* of the person's environment, usually conceived in terms of the load or level of demand placed on the individual, or some aversive (threatening) or noxious element of that environment.

The physiological approach, however, received its 'initial impetus' from Selye's work and conceptualises stress as a 'particular physiological response to a threatening or damaging environment' (Ibid, pp8-9). Both of these two models have been criticised, however, due to ignoring the interactions between the person and their environment and for regarding the individual as if they were a 'passive vehicle' (Ibid, p11).

The third model Cox identifies, the psychological model, addresses some of these criticisms by conceptualising stress in terms of a 'dynamic interaction' between the person and their environment (Ibid, p13). Cox highlights two distinct approaches with this model: *interactional*, which focuses on 'the structural features' of the person's interaction with their environment; and *transactional* which is more concerned with the 'psychological mechanisms underpinning that interaction' (Ibid, p13). The latter therefore develops interactional approaches and focuses on issues of 'cognitive appraisal and coping' and 'emotional reactions' (pp14-16).

I now turn to a more detailed examination of some key themes regarding how stress has been defined and understood.

3.2.2 An emphasis on the person and their environment

As alluded to in the previous section, many definitions emphasise the importance of the person and their environment or context. Person-environment theory (French and Kahn, 1962; French, Rogers and Cobb, 1974; French, Caplan, & Van Harrison, 1982) takes into account both the person's characteristics and the demands of their environment, such as their work organisation; stress is seen as a result of a mismatch between the two. According to Lazarus & Folkman (1984) the

demands of the environment can be seen as exceeding a person's resources or capabilities. Person-organisation fit theory (Büssing & Glaser, 1999; Kristof, 1996) continues this theme. Stress is defined in terms of a misfit between 'individual values and environmental opportunities to fulfil those values or from environmental demands that exceed the individual's capacity.' (Bouckenooghe, Buelens, Fontaine and Vanderheyden, 2005, p372). Van Harrison (1978) and Chambers and Davies (1999) also define stress in terms of a 'misfit' or 'mismatch' between an individual and their environment. Not all research results, however, support this definition and theory of stress (Pithers and Soden, 1999).

3.2.3 Occupational stress

Some authors focus specifically on work when defining and understanding stress. Work *stressors* are described as factors within the work environment which lead to 'individual outcomes' collectively known as *strains* (Beehr, 1995, p5). There are numerous models of occupational stress, yet as Shyman (2011, pp340-350) highlights, two of the most 'empirically supported' models are the Job-Strain Model (Karasek and Theorell, 1990) and the Effort-Reward Imbalance Model (Siegrist, 1996). The former focuses on the relationship between job demand, for example volume of work, and decision latitude, defined as 'the

level of autonomy and control that an individual possesses' (Shyman, 2011, p351). Lower levels of job demand and higher levels of decision latitude are therefore associated with the least amount of stress.

Siegrist's Effort-Reward Imbalance Model describes rewards in terms of money, esteem, career opportunities and job security (2001, p 54). The model claims that 'lack of reciprocity between 'costs' and 'gains' (i.e. high cost / low gain conditions) elicits sustained strain reactions at the emotional and physiological levels' (Ibid, p54). This general theory and model of occupational stress is contested by Sparks and Cooper (1999) who favour a more 'situation-specific' approach.

3.2.4 The impact of stress

Other definitions of stress have chosen to emphasise the outcome or impact on the individual. According to Juniper (1991, p1): 'Stress is that range of psychological and physical symptoms, thoughts and behaviours, which occur when the human mind is overloaded'. Here, the author has drawn attention to the fact that stress can impact on both mind *and* body, influencing not only how someone thinks but also how they behave. The use of the word 'range' also suggests that it is futile to attempt to arrive at a narrow, all-encompassing

description of what stress is and how it affects people; people can experience stress in a variety of ways. His choice of the word 'overloaded' also makes the assumption that stress is ultimately a negative experience. This is also the case with Kyriacou's (2011, p28) definition of teacher stress: 'unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression'.

Such definitions of stress, which emphasise the harm to physical and mental health, are supported by a plethora of research. Cosgrove (2000, p4) highlights that stress is a major cause of clinical depression and that it contributes to 'high blood pressure, strokes, heart disease and many other diseases including even cancer'. Pithers and Soden (1999, p51) point out the links made between stress and fatigue, insomnia, headaches, nervous tension and depression. Wright and Huang (2012, p1189) also emphasise the connection between work-related stress and loss of self-esteem, hypertension, alcoholism and illicit drug consumption. As well as confirming all of these examples from research findings, Cooper and Cartwright (1996, p4) also add to the list:

> accidents and unsafe behaviours at work…stomach ulcers, hay fever, asthma, skin rashes, impotence and menstrual problems….marital and family problems.

The authors also add that stress-related illness accounts for 'almost half of all premature deaths in the UK.' A further distinction is found in the literature surrounding the impact or cost of stress. Beehr (1995, pp132-133) argues that there are also negative *organizational* outcomes of job stress, not just individual ones. These are related to absenteeism, turnover, profits, sales, early retirement, employee strikes and grievances filed. Kovess-Masfety, Rios-Seidel and Sevilla-Dedieu (2007, p1177) also remind us that economic consequences have been linked to absenteeism and poor work performance.

It is important to note that not all authors automatically define stress in a negative way but break the concept down further. Many authors (see for example Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013; Cooper and Cartwright, 1996, pp6-8; Mind, 2005, p10; Selye, 1980, pxi) distinguish between positive stress or 'eustress' and negative stress or distress. Eustress is regarded as beneficial and important for us since it enhances our performance and 'self-efficacy, motivation and creativity' (Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013). As Selye (1980, pxi) points out, it is negative stress or distress which is the 'detrimental variety'. Some also argue that too *little* stress can be just as detrimental as too much stress (Cooper and Cartwright, 1996, p6; Brown and Ralph, 1994, p17). A desirable middle ground is therefore favoured, often

referred to as a 'stress comfort zone' or 'optimal stress level' (Brown and Ralph, 1994, p15).

A distinction is also made between acute and chronic stress; the former is associated with short term stress and the latter with long term, constant stress and risks to health (Mind, 2005, 12). Beehr, Jex, Stacy and Murray (2000, p393) make an important point when they remind us that although acute stressors are considered to be time-limited, their effects might last longer.

3.2.5 A focus on the individual

Other definitions and understandings of stress focus on the individual themselves. The conservation of resources theory (COR) (Hobfoll, 1989, p516) argues that stress,

> is defined as a reaction to the environment in which there is (a) the threat of a net loss of resources, (b) the net loss of resources, or (c) a lack of resource gain following the investment of resources.

Individuals are seen to have different amounts of resources and therefore they react differently to events or threats; those with 'greater resources' are more able to 'cope with stressful events' (Luria and Torjman, p686). Hobfall (1989, p516) gives examples of resources which include self-esteem, employment and socio-economic status. Despite Hobfall's theory, it can be argued, however, that there are many individuals who have

these so-called resources and yet still suffer with stress and mental ill- health. The media, for example, continually portrays how many celebrities from the world of music, sport and television, appear to have it all and yet suffer deeply, despite their wealth, status, contacts and successful careers (Allen, 2010; Winterman, 2007; Time to Change, 2008).

Locus of control (LOC) (Rotter, 1966; Skinner 1996) has also been used to explain stress. Individuals who believe events are a result of 'their own capacities, characteristics and actions' are considered to have an internal LOC; those who 'attribute events to the behaviour of others or circumstantial phenomena such as luck or fate' are said to have an external LOC (Crothers, Kanyongo, Kolbert, Lipinski, Kachmar and Koch, 2010, pp653-654). Those with an internal LOC are judged to be 'capable of effecting change' whilst those with an external LOC see stress as 'beyond their control or as someone else's responsibility' and can therefore 'descend into a state of helplessness, depression or anger' believing that they are 'victims' (Ibid, p654). Both as a reader, and as someone who has listened to my research participants speak of their own stress experiences, such language makes me feel extremely uncomfortable. As with COR theory, it could be argued that the language suggests blame, failure and success lies solely in the hands of the individual and

as such, the environment or context is not judged and evaluated so harshly. By ignoring the wider context, it is possible that important issues in the culture of an organisation, for instance systemic bullying, may be overlooked or excused.

A further critique of LOC theory stems from the fact that the internal LOC which is favoured and promoted is associated with individualism (Ibid, p654). Shilo and Kelly (1997, p253) remind us that 'Individualism generally signifies a worldview that gives priority to individual goals and individual autonomy' as opposed to 'group goals and group interdependence'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, individualism has been associated with characteristics such as 'selfishness, alienation, and divisiveness' (Koch, 2013). It is important to consider, therefore, whether communities and organisations (such as schools) can be healthy, harmonious places where empathic relationships exist, if all members subscribed to such a position. Taken to the extreme, some individual's goals might entail greed, cruelty, ruthless self-promotion and even harm to others.

3.2.6 How I define stress for the purpose of my own research

The previous sections have highlighted that different definitions and understandings of 'stress' exist in the literature and I have

offered a critical discussion of these. It is therefore imperative that I define the concept in terms of my own research project.

Travers (2001, p131) states that when defining the term, 'we must consider the interaction between the objective nature of the situation and individual teacher's subjective appraisal of it'. The use of the word 'objective' appears to suggest that the individual could be misguided, mistaken, perhaps incapable of making an 'accurate' assessment. In contrast to this, my own research regards the participants *themselves* as the experts on their experience of stress. My definition is also grounded in the notion that stressors cannot always be compartmentalised and labelled as originating in *either* the work *or* non-work environment, or in *either* the person *or* the environment. This research project perceives stress to be the result of an *interrelationship* between the person and their environment. I define 'teacher stress' as follows:

> **When teachers consider their health and well-being to be affected by issues within the school environment, the home environment, or both.**

Although it may well have been the case for my participants that all stressors related to the school environment, I did not want to simply assume this and thus close off possibilities at the outset. This stance is reflected in my definition.

Part B:

3.3 STRESS AND THE TEACHING PROFESSION

3.3.0 Introduction

I now turn to the issue of stress specifically within the teaching profession, where my own research project is situated. I begin by noting the prevalence of the issue as well as the major sources which have been identified. I then focus on four major themes and developments within the literature to further the discussion: burnout; emotions; resilience; and coping. Key debates as well as my own perspectives are highlighted, thus signalling the contribution of my own research, as will be discussed further in Part C.

3.3.1 The prevalence of teacher stress

The first appearance of the term 'teacher stress' in the literature, and hence its profile as an important issue, is thought to have been in 1977 with the work of Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (Kyriacou, 2001, p27; Carton and Fruchart, 2014, p246). As Kyriacou (2001, p28) himself points out, the literature on this topic has now become 'voluminous.' The link between stress and the teaching profession is now well-established in empirical research (Hamama, Ronen, Shachar and Rosenbaum, 2013, pp731-732; Carton and Fruchart, 2014, p246; Stoeber and Rennert, 2008, p2; Shyman, 2011, p352; Travers, 2001, p130).

In fact, stress is now spoken of as a given; as an 'inescapable aspect of teaching' (Smith and Bourke, 1992, p31) with detrimental effects on 'teachers' performance, career decisions, physical and mental health, and overall job satisfaction' (Klassen, 2010, p342).

The literature reveals that teacher stress is not just a national issue but is also of global concern (Travers, 2001, p132; Crothers et al, 2010, p643; Parker, Martin, Colmar and Liem, 2012, p503). Evidence does suggest however, that England has a more significant problem when compared to other countries (NASUWT, 2014; Teacher Support Network, 2009 a, p4). Research also suggests that, when compared to other *occupations*, the teaching profession is associated with much higher stress levels (Naghieh, Montgomery, Bonell, Thompson and Aber, 2013, p2; Teacher Support Network, 2009, p4; Parker et al, 2012, p503; Kovess-Masféty, Rios-Seidel and Sevilla-Dedieu, 2007, p1177; Travers, 2001, p132). It has been suggested that this is because the profession is associated with human services, meaning that teachers are 'under the pressure of confronting various types of individuals at their places of work' (Karakus, 2013, p70; see also Grayson and Alvarez, 2008, p1349). This is also alluded to by the Teacher Support Network (TSN) (2009, p4) who state that, 'long-term

responsibility for children's lives and associated emotional demands … are less frequently faced by other professions.'

Before commenting on the scale of the issue, it is important to note how teacher stress has historically been measured, if indeed it is possible to measure. There is naturally room for discrepancy and 'ambiguity' of measures, since stress is a psychological construct, not a physical object (Shyman, 2011, p349 and p360). As Part A of the literature review demonstrated, there is not even a unified perspective and definition of stress in the literature. The most 'widespread measure' of teacher stress, however, has been the use of self-report questionnaires (Kyriacou, 2001, p28). There have also been other approaches which include interview surveys, case studies and physiological indicators of stress, yet 'questionnaire surveys have been the most widely used approach' when exploring teacher stress (Ibid, p29).

Kyriacou (2001, p29) points out that when questionnaires asked teachers to rate their work stress, a quarter regarded the job as 'very or extremely stressful.' Travers and Cooper (1993, cited in Travers, 2001, p132) also revealed that a quarter to one-fifth of teachers were self-reporting levels of mental ill health similar to that of 'psychoneurotic outpatients.' As the TSN (2014 a) also

highlight, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) estimates that in the United Kingdom, 36,000 teachers are affected by stress each year. The TSN also found that 96% of teachers felt their health was negatively affected by job-related stress in a variety of ways: increased alcohol consumption; deterioration of relationships; eating disorders; lack of sleep; suicidal thoughts (Harrison, 2011). The fact that millions of pounds have been paid out to teachers as compensation provides yet more evidence of just how damaging stress can be to teachers' mental and physical health (Mulholland, 2012a; EIS, 2011). The existence of various national support systems may also indicate the worrying scale of the problem. Various websites and helplines have been set up to offer practical and emotional support for teachers, such as those offered by the different teaching unions and also 'teacherline' (TSN, 2014b).

Research has also suggested that stress may be most prominent amongst particular groups of teachers. Shyman (2011, p350) highlights that 30–40 percent of special education teachers leave the profession within five years of teaching due to occupational stress. Devos, Dupriez and Paquay (2012, p206) suggest that stress may be most significant for beginning teachers: 'Their ideas about the profession are confronted with the reality of the classroom, and their emotional well-being can

fluctuate wildly.' The authors argue that this results in 15 percent of them leaving the profession within the first year of teaching and 40 to 50 percent within the first five years. As Carton and Fruchart (2014, p259) point out, however, both beginning teachers and those who are more experienced are susceptible to occupational stress. The literature suggests overall, therefore, that stress does not discriminate within the teaching profession; anyone can be affected. Teacher stress is linked to both physical and mental ill-health and 'reduced teacher commitment and effectiveness' (Smith and Bourke, 1992, p31). Teacher stress explains why so many teachers have prolonged periods of sickness absence, suffer with depression and decide to leave the profession altogether (NASUWT, 2010; Carlyle and Woods, 2002; TSN, 2009 b; DCSF, 2008: 3). Indeed, as Cosgrove (2000, p125) reminds, us, both the individual and the organisation are affected:

> stress and breakdowns cost schools tens of millions of pounds each year. Tens of thousands of teachers have had their careers and their lives disrupted by stress and breakdown in the past decade.

3.3.2 Sources of teacher stress

A teacher's experience of stress will be relevant to their own particular circumstances and environment (Smith and Bourke, 1992, pp31-32; Kyriacou, 2001, p29). Furthermore, current

research 'fails to reach a consensus as to what causes the highest levels of teacher stress' (Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013, p628). Nevertheless, certain themes are cited as the most common sources of teacher stress: pupil behaviour and discipline; poor working conditions; workload; role conflict and ambiguity; relationships at work; coping with change; being evaluated by others, including the pressures of school targets and inspections (Kyriacou, 2001, p29; Cosgrove, 2000, p64; Travers, 2001, p141; Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013, p628; Constantinos, 2007, p230; Pithers and Soden, 1999, p52; Naghieh et al, 2013, p2). As Cosgrove (2000, p64) points out, these 'traditional' sources of teacher stress have been 'getting worse', both nationally and internationally. I now turn to some of these commonly cited sources of teacher stress for further exploration.

An excessive workload is frequently reported as a major source of teacher stress. A poll by the National Union of Teachers (NUT) revealed that 71% of teachers said this would be the 'deciding factor' if they were to leave the profession (Mulholland, 2012 b). As Travers (2001, p139) highlights, workload is linked to time pressures, both in terms of the amount of work teachers must complete during the day, as well as the amount 'they have to take home at night and weekends, intruding into their personal life'. An impossible volume of work is therefore

emphasised and, as Cosgrove (2000, p46) argues, large numbers of teacher breakdowns are 'a consequence of their being set impossible tasks.' The TSN report how the workload demands and long hours can literally take over some teachers' lives; in their list of priorities teachers often put themselves at the bottom or do not even include themselves (Stanley, 2010). This lack of self-care, and its negative impact on the individual, is reinforced when considering Scott Peck's (1993) research into happy and successful people. When asked to list the three most important things in their lives, all participants had put themselves at the very top of the list.

A further psychological stressor commonly cited is teachers feeling constantly bombarded with changes and new initiatives. Smyth (2007), for example, discusses the damaging effects of poorly thought out reforms. Carlyle and Woods (2002, p xi) also demonstrate how teacher stress is caused by 'change overload', the ways changes are introduced and managed and the speed of their implementation. Harris (2007, p25) powerfully communicates this theme with her use of the term *repetitive change injury*. Moriarty, Edmonds, Blatchford and Martin (2001, p33) also point out how constant changes in education can often mean teachers must implement policies which clash with their own 'professional values.' Being repeatedly bombarded with new initiatives has therefore left many teachers feeling

'deskilled and demoralized' and with 'no ownership or control' over the changes (Cosgrove, 2000, p86).

Recent reforms regarding pay and pensions may have further contributed to teachers feeling demoralized and worth-*less.* Teachers must now 'pay more, work longer and get less in retirement' (Paton, 2012 b). According to Dr Bousted, Head of the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL), the new system of performance-related pay creates uncertainty around salaries; this makes the profession even more 'unattractive' and can mean teachers are too frightened to commit to mortgages (Sellgren, 2014 a).

Role ambiguity and role conflict is identified as another major source of teacher stress. The former is linked to changes in methods of working, organizational structure and job requirements (Travers, 2001, p141). The latter can include both *intra-role conflict* due to 'contradictory expectations from parents, pupils and principals' and *inter-role* conflict due to teachers having to assume 'several roles' such as 'diagnostician, guidance counsellor, remediator, evaluator and then finally teacher' (Ibid, p141). Many teachers are also expected to teach more than one subject, even subjects removed from their specialist area: modern foreign languages, physics and

chemistry are most frequently taught by teachers without post-A level qualifications (DfE, 2011, p3). Acquiring such diverse knowledge and skills, and being accountable to the demands of multiple departments and line managers, may significantly add to the exhaustion many teachers already face.

I would like to expand the category of role conflict to also include role *prejudice.* This is because stress can be linked to the role and / or subject teachers are associated with. This has been the case in specialist schools, for example. A study by Birmingham University revealed that teachers who do not teach the specialist subject often feel resentful and 'marginalised' (Bloom, 2008). The Becoming a Teacher Project also found that rather than receiving support and their statutory entitlements, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) were often met with hostility and aggression (DCSF, 2007, piii-iv). Teaching assistants (TAs), despite their critical role in the classroom, can also feel personally and professionally isolated (Milne, 2008). This may indicate that staff hierarchies often dominate the organisation of schools, increasing competition, division and role conflict; your particular role will to some extent determine how you are viewed and treated and your own experience of stress. This may explain why more than two-thirds of teachers have experienced

or witnessed workplace bullying, a further contributory factor to teacher stress (Mulholland, 2012 c).

An emphasis on performance, results and monitoring has also been linked to teachers' stress. Ball (2003, p215) argues that school cultures are now dominated by 'three interrelated *policy technologies*; the market, managerialism and performativity'. He suggests that:

> performativity produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications (Ibid).

Consequently, teachers 'as ethical subjects' often find their values are challenged by the 'terrors of performativity' (Ibid, p216). As Mujtaba and Reiss (2013, p629) point out:

> the most important benchmark used in annual public performance tables in judging schools in England is the percentage of students who obtain five grade A–C GCSE passes including mathematics and English.

The authors argue that this system has replaced 'professional autonomy' with 'public accountability', which in turn has led to increased competition not only between schools but also 'between departments within schools' (Ibid, p629). Prioritising an academic curriculum and seeing examination results as the 'gold standard' (Hall, 2005, p140) has implications for teachers as well as their students. Many teachers feel there is less room

for creativity and flexibility; broader learning is 'sacrificed' as many teachers feel compelled to teach to examination (Jozefkowicz, 2006). The fear of not being able to deliver specific results is shown by the number of teachers who cheat by re-writing students' answers or by giving them the questions in advance (Shepherd, 2012; Newell and Watt, 2011). Day (2002, pp678-679) argues that there is also a negative impact on teachers' identities. Whereas previously, teachers were 'trusted to do a good job', the current emphasis on national, external criteria for measuring the quality of schools and teachers has created a new system: it 'rewards' those who comply with government directives and punishes those who do not. This can threaten teachers' sense of agency, job satisfaction and motivation.

The emphasis on performance and examination results has led to increased internal and external monitoring and observation. External judgements about schools 'lead to internal judgements on departments and individual teachers' and there are often negative consequences (Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013, p629). An NUT inquiry not only found a rise in the number of classroom observations of teachers but also evidence that schools were breaking the annual limit (Stewart, 2009). Many schools go even further with monitoring by installing cameras in every

classroom (Shepherd, 2009). A recent NASUWT survey found that one in 12 teachers have this 'permanent surveillance in their classrooms' with teachers believing they are being spied on by senior management (BBC, 2014 b). It does not seem so surprising, therefore, when schools are called 'frightened organisations' (Watkins, 1999, p74).

Preparing for OFSTED inspections can also be detrimental to teachers' health and well-being. The period before the inspection is often 'more stressful than the inspection itself' and adds substantially to teachers' 'already heavy workload' (Scanlon, 1999, pp26-28). Sleeplessness, emotional ill-health and even drug addiction have been linked to OFSTED stress; the NASUWT found that 40 percent of staff are ill in the two to three months after inspection (Milne and Vessey, 2008; Williams, 1999). The pressure to achieve a certain judgment may now be exacerbated by the fact that 'satisfactory' is no longer satisfactory (Coughlan, 2012) and by government plans to 'name and shame' schools if the top pupils do not make enough progress (Paton, 2012 a). It can be argued therefore that the system has become associated with fear and shame. As Cosgrove (2000, p110) reminds us, 'the price of a poor Ofsted report can be the destruction of an individual's career and livelihood.'

Many researchers argue that student behaviour is the most intense source of teacher stress (Hamama et al, p732; Carton and Fruchart, p246). As pointed out by the NASUWT, teachers are frequently subjected to verbal insults and physical attacks carried out by students (Shaw, 2008). In some cases, student behaviour is so extreme that it is this, rather than pay and pensions, which has caused teachers to take strike action (Shepherd, 2011 a). It is in these particular circumstances when teachers often feel that support from senior management and parents is lacking, that many parents 'abandon their responsibilities at the school gate' (NASUWT, 2011). A study by the Guardian Teacher Network goes further and cites parents as part of the problem and responsible for bullying teachers themselves (Shepherd, 2011 b).

Teacher stress may be exacerbated by the fact that schools do not always prioritise or promote mental health. Government publications encourage staff to seek help from their employers in instances of mental ill-health, reassuring them that because of the Disability Discrimination Act, employers cannot discriminate against them (DCSF, 2008). However, this appears to contradict the reality for many teachers who feel they encounter prejudice rather than support. The General Secretary

for ATL declares that schools are actually 'unforgiving places' and admission of mental health problems can lead to capability proceedings (Stewart, 2008). It can be argued this is damaging to the culture and environment of schools. Indeed, a positive school climate and better school health and welfare services are associated with healthier teachers (Denny, Robinson, Utter, Fleming, Grant, Milfont, Crengle, Ameratunga and Clark, 2011, pp259-260). Yet services and training are not always available, perhaps revealing a lack of sensitivity and understanding regarding mental health issues. Rothi, Leavey and Best (2008) argue that teachers are 'inadequately prepared' to deal with mental health issues. This is corroborated by the research of Bostock, Kitt and Kitt (2011). The authors found that despite being regarded as 'front-line tier one mental health professionals' teachers receive little, if any, training. They conclude that if teachers do not receive training in their Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) year, they will not receive it at all.

3.4. Key themes in the literature on teacher stress: an overview

3.4.1 Burnout

Burnout is distinct from the 'broad' concept of stress in the literature (Watts and Robertson, 2011, p34). The term burnout

appeared in the 1970s in the United States, and was associated particularly with those who worked in the human services (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001, p398). Teacher burnout is regarded as 'a state of emotional, physical and attitudinal exhaustion' which may develop in teachers facing chronic stress (Kyriacou, 2001, p28).

Maslach's (2003, p190) 'multidimensional' model of burnout identified three elements: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. As Kokkinos (2007, p230) reminds us, although they are 'empirically related', the three burnout dimensions are 'conceptually distinct.' *Emotional exhaustion* refers to teachers being unable to 'physically and emotionally provide' for their students because of 'overwhelming feelings of fatigue and stress' (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008, p1350). *Depersonalization* refers to a negative, cynical and 'detached attitude' towards pupils, parents and place of work (Kokkinos, 2007, p230). This attitude may be expressed through 'generalizing, derogatory labels, or physically distancing actions' (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008, p1350). It is this particular dimension which is not found in 'traditional' occupational stress literature and is regarded as the 'hallmark' of the burnout experience (Maslach, 2003, p190). *Lack of personal accomplishment* relates to job performance

and 'a growing feeling of work-related dissatisfaction' (Watts and Robinson, 2011, p33). This is particularly 'pertinent' to the teaching profession where many enter the profession to make a difference to children, rather than for financial reward (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008, p1350).

Research on burnout in the teaching profession has found that secondary school teachers appear to be most affected (Kovess-Masféty, Rios-Seidel and Sevilla-Dedieu, 2007, p1178). Furthermore, it has been connected to a range of negative consequences for teachers' mental and physical health such as anger, low self-esteem and cardiovascular symptoms (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008, p1350). It has also been linked to adverse consequences for the school context such as a negative impact on pupils' learning, behaviour and performance and 'financial burdens' due to sickness absence and teacher turnover (Naghieh et al, 2013, p2). According to Maslach (2003, 191) 'conventional wisdom about burnout is that the problem lies within the person.' Research now, however, takes into account the environment as well as the individual (Grayson and Alvarez, 2008, p1351; Naghieh et al, 2013, p229). It is important to note, (particularly in light of the many stress theories which focus on the individual, as previously discussed) that 'research results have not supported the argument that burnout is related

to a person's disposition' (Maslach, 2003, p191). Other developments in research in this area focus on the 'positive antithesis' of burnout: job engagement (Ibid, pp190-191). Overall, however, effective interventions for burnout 'have yet to be developed and evaluated' (Ibid, p189).

3.4.2 Emotions

Emotions have become a prominent area of interest in the literature since teaching involves 'demands of an emotional and interpersonal kind' (Tuxford and Bradley, 2015, p1006). Whereas research originally focused on 'non-emotional' or 'general job demands' such as workload, in the last twenty years attention has been turned to 'the experience and expression of emotions in oneself or others' (Ibid).

According to Hochschild (1983) stress is experienced as the consequence of 'emotional labour.' This is defined as 'the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display' (Ibid, p7). Zapf (2002, pp239-240) uses the term 'emotion work' and again emphasises how this comes from 'person-centred' work, in other words, professions which deal with clients such as children and patients. As Naring, Vlerick and Van der Ven (2012, p63) explain further, in order to fulfil job demands and control their emotions, staff may use surface

acting and deep acting. The former involves modifying the expression of emotions; the latter is where individuals 'manipulate internal thoughts and feelings in order to actually feel a desired emotion.' Clearly, having to display emotions that are not necessarily felt is an 'effortful' process (Bakker, Demerouti, Oerlemans and Sonnentag, 2013, p91). Naturally this comes at a price for teachers since 'the faking of emotions is stressful' (Ibid, p63). Indeed, links can be found between emotional labour, burnout and emotional exhaustion (Ibid, pp63-64; Arthur, 2004, p159; Carton and Fruchart, 2012, p258). Bradshaw (1990, p24) also describes how trying to adopt 'a false self' leads only to 'apathy and depression'.

Emotion issues can also arise due to the relationship between employer and employee. As Arthur (2004, p159) reminds us, this relationship is a human one: problems can occur if the organization fails to acknowledge this and prefers to 'engage in management rhetoric rather than genuine dialogue'. If the employee feels their 'psychological contract' has been breached, this can lead to powerful, distressing emotions such as betrayal (Ibid, p159). This is significant because trusting relationships at work have been linked to teachers' ability to 'build upon skills and/or rely on social support mechanisms to help them through problematic times' (Ibid, p636). When school leaders do not

offer 'support, understanding and fairness' teachers are 'more likely to experience distress' and the opposite is the case for eustress (Ibid, p636).

These issues are linked to research on social support. Social support can be 'informal' which includes personal relationships both inside and outside of work, or it can mean more 'formal' support systems within or attached to organizations (Hamama et al, 2013, 736). Social support is often classed, therefore, as an 'external coping resource' for teachers (Ibid, p736). Research not only shows that social support can be powerful in alleviating teacher stress, but that lack of it is also associated with high job stress (Beehr et al, 2000, p392; Greenglass, Burke and Konarski, 1997; Devos et al, 2012, p206; Griffith, Steptoe and Cropley, 1999, p517; Hamama et al, 2013, p731).

The concept of 'emotional intelligence' (EI) (Goleman, 1996) has also been developed within the literature. Individuals with 'high EI' are thought to be less susceptible to stress and its effects since they can 'regulate their own and other people's emotional reactions' (Karakus, 2013, p69). Conversely, 'those suffering from the lack of EI do not easily tap into the emotional information and cannot use emotional feedback to solve problems (Ibid, p69). Care needs to be taken here, however, so

that the language is not one of blame where individual teachers are labelled as competent or incompetent, and investigation into the school system within which teachers work is bypassed. Lindebaum and Jordan (2012) also make an interesting point which is relevant here. They suggest we should not be too quick to label emotions as negative or positive and assume a 'symmetrical' relationship with outcomes:

> Positively valenced emotions can have negative outcomes (e.g., colleagues may perceive pride as a sign of arrogance), whereas negatively valenced emotions can have positive outcomes (e.g., an angry leader being perceived as authentic) (Ibid, p1027).

The authors thus encourage a much deeper exploration of emotions and how they can have different meanings and effects upon different people.

3.4.3 Resilience

The notion of teacher resilience has also become popular in the literature, particularly as a way of explaining the high rates of teacher attrition (Le Cornu, 2009, p717; Mansfield, Beltman, Price and McConney, 2012, p357). Resilience is generally defined as: 'a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions' (Brunetti, 2006, p813). Teachers who are perceived as lacking resilience, as 'less able to manage' the

emotional demands of the profession, are considered more susceptible to stress and burnout (Mansfield et al, 2012, p357). In education, research on resilience in children has received more attention than that in teachers (Brunetti, 2006, p813; Gu and Day, 2013, p22 and p25). There is also some debate surrounding to what extent resilience relates to a teacher's 'predisposition' (Brunetti, 2006, p813) and how much relates to contextual 'risk and protective factors' (Mansfield et al, 2012, p357). Gu and Day (2013, p22-25) suggest the quality may not be stable or 'innate' but can be 'learned and acquired.' Indeed, as Agaibi and Wilson (2005, p211) remind us, there is no 'universally defined concept' of resilient behaviour.

Despite the various discussions surrounding how resilience can be defined and understood, it is regarded as an important trait for teachers to possess since it can: 'enhance teaching effectiveness, heighten career satisfaction and better prepare teachers to adjust to education's ever-changing conditions' (Le Cornu, 2009, p717). As a result, there has been a 'growing call' to develop the trait in pre-service teachers (Ibid, p722). Many authors also draw our attention to the argument that, as teachers are role models, they need to possess this quality in order to develop it in their students (Brunetti, 2006, p813; Le Cornu, 2009, p717). Mansfield et al (2012, p357) provide a

summary of the characteristics resilient teachers possess, suggesting they are:

> more likely to persevere…find it easier to adapt to change … less inclined to consider leaving the profession…[have] a strong sense of competence, efficacy and accomplishment…self-insight, professional freedom [and] agency.

In Howard and Johnson's (2004) study, resilient teachers are also described in this manner. The authors go further and provide a visual diagram of how resilient and non-resilient teachers react to various stressors (Ibid, p406). Their diagram displays that resilient teachers 'respond appropriately to violent behaviour' whereas stressed teachers 'need to call on others for assistance in dealing with unruly behaviour.' It is important to consider, however, whether the layout *as well as* the content of this diagram is helpful or whether it apportions blame by setting up a dichotomy where teachers are categorised as: either / or; resilient or stressed; success or failure. Such labels may over-simplify a much more complex situation. I would like to suggest that a teacher, perceived to *outwardly* display the characteristics on the positive side of their diagram, may actually be suffering *internally*. Teachers may feel under pressure to put on a show. Because they are considered to be 'coping', however, this may be overlooked along with a thorough investigation of issues within the school context.

There are also issues regarding Howard and Johnson's methodology. Participants were actually selected by the school principal who identified them as resilient teachers, rather than this judgement being made by the teachers themselves (p405). As well as the possibility that the principal's judgement could be wrong, there are also potential ethical and power issues surrounding *which* voices the principal excluded from taking part in the research and why. In addition, by being selected by their principal, participants lost their anonymity and so this could have had an impact on participants' contributions to the study.

As highlighted, resilient teachers are associated with agency and a sense of control. It is important to consider, however, to what extent this is actually possible when teachers often face educational issues and changes that they have little or no power over. As Gu and Day (2013, p22) remind us, teachers' roles, workloads and levels of autonomy are continually affected by 'the results driven, performativity and new public management cultures of school environments.' Focusing solely on the individual, therefore, is not always helpful. This is reinforced by Arthur (2004, p160) who states that 'employees do not become stressed just because of character flaws' and so we must not ignore the 'context in which people live and work.' Furthermore,

he highlights that a constant emphasis on individual responsibility allows 'stressful practices to continue unchallenged' and will 'deflect responsibility away from the organisation' (Ibid, p160).

To add to this theme, 'support networks' have in fact been associated with resilient teachers (Le Cornu, 2009, p717) and so this indicates that the context, the school environment, must play an equal part and take responsibility. Jordan's (2006) model of relational resilience acknowledges such a position: it is based on relational-cultural theory which suggests that 'resilience resides not in the individual but in the capacity for connection' where there are 'mutually empathic and responsive relationships' (Le Cornu, 2009, p718). It is important to consider, however, whether schools which devote the majority of their efforts to A* to C grades, can actually provide the space and opportunity for such a community to develop.

Focusing solely on the individual may also explain why stress management and treatment interventions have had such limited success to date (Brough, Dollard and Tuckey, 2014, p4; Arthur, 2004, p158). Grayson and Alvarez (2008, p1352) argue that 'a school wide approach' is required to reduce teacher stress and burnout since it is the organizational factors which

'contribute heavily' to the problem. Beehr (1995, p159) also suggests that although a 'two-pronged attack' is required, focusing on both the individual and the organisation, the organisation's responsibilities are 'usually ignored.'

3.4.4 Coping

As previously highlighted, social support is often considered to be an external coping resource for teachers under stress. To add more specific detail to the concept of social support, Kelly and Antonio (2016, p136) define this as social relationships having a positive impact for individuals within their professional lives, with these relationships characterised by 'affect, aid and affirmation.' They distinguish further and identify different types of social support: emotional support (which includes affect, concern and listening); appraisal support (involving affirmation and feedback); informational support (where advice is given); and instrumental support (where help can be given with time or money).

Coping refers to the 'cognitive and behavioural efforts used to reduce or minimise the intensity of stressful situations' (Carton and Fruchart, 2014, p247). A wide range of teacher coping strategies have been reported such as: 'dutiful compliance' or 'defiant risk-taking' (MacBeath, O'Brien and Gronn, 2012,

p431); 'try to relax after work', 'discuss problems' and 'plan ahead and prioritise' (Kyriacou, 2001, pp30-31); drinking alcohol, smoking, unhealthy eating, using substances and shopping (Eason, 2007; Brettingham, 2007; Brown, 2000; Oxtoby, 2010; Stewart, 2008; Stewart, 2009; NUT, 2007; TSN, 2009).

Research on teacher stress and coping has also focused on personality and the characteristics associated with stress and burnout. 'Type A' personalities, labelled as 'workaholics, restless and aggressive,' have been linked to 'negative' coping styles and outcomes; this is presented in contrast to individuals with 'Type B' personalities, labelled as 'calm and relaxed… slower and steadier' (Brown and Ralph, 1994, p12). Travers (2001, p152) suggests that Type A teachers can be identified as those who display the following characteristics:

1. Work long hours constantly under deadlines and conditions of overload.
2. Take work home on evenings and at weekends; they are unable to relax.
3. Often cut holidays short to get back to work, or may not even take a holiday.
4. Constantly compete with themselves and others; also drive themselves to meet high, often unrealistic standards.
5. Feel frustrated in the work situation.
6. Are irritable with work efforts and their pupils.

7. Feel misunderstood by their head teachers.

Many of the items on Travers' list relate to perfectionism and workaholism which are also explored in research on teacher stress and coping. Perfectionism is defined as: 'striving for flawlessness…accompanied by tendencies for overly critical evaluations of one's behavior' (Stoeber and Rennart, 2008, p2). As well as their own high standards, it is argued that perfectionists also concern themselves with the evaluation of others, thus making them more susceptible to stress and burnout and associating them with 'maladpative' coping behaviours (Ibid, p2). The concept has also been broken down into positive and negative strands: 'perfectionist / achievement strivings' are associated with positive actions to achieve goals, whereas 'perfectionist / achievement concerns' are classed as neurotic and maladaptive (Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013, p645; Stoeber and Rennert, 2008, p2). Similarly, workaholism is linked to teacher stress and is defined as when individuals work 'incessantly', leaving them with 'fewer resources to devote to their family and other facets of their non-work life' (Bakker et al, 2013, p88). Such actions are consequently linked to negative outcomes such as 'high levels of exhaustion, anxiety, and depression' (Bakker et al, p88).

Although sometimes referred to as 'problem-focused' or 'emotion-focused' (Parker, Martin, Colmar and Liem, 2012, p506), coping behaviours tend to be classed as either 'direct action techniques' or 'palliative techniques' (Kyriacou, 2001, p30). The former are associated with eliminating the 'source' of stress for example by improved organisation skills or by 'developing new skills'; the latter are mental or physical techniques aimed at 'lessening the feeling of stress', rather than dealing with the source of it (Ibid, p30). Palliative strategies are regarded as less helpful since they can involve 'indulging in avoidance activities' such as smoking or drinking alcohol (Carton and Fruchart, 2014, p247). The use of the words 'indulging' and 'avoidance' here clearly indicates that these are regarded as inferior coping strategies. A similar message is found in the following extracts (my italics):

> some teachers who experience stress, when they use *the right coping mechanisms*… and have *the right frame of mind*… (Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013, p645).

> McCormick (1997) argued that higher stress perception was associated with *'immature' defensive* coping responses…We assessed a broad range of *problem – focused and emotion- focused* responses in order to identify those which might be *adaptive and maladaptive* with respect to teaching (Griffith et al, 1999, p518).

Clearly, coping is often categorised in a hierarchical or dichotomous manner. It is of course important to acknowledge

when coping behaviours could be potentially dangerous or harmful to health, and therefore when individuals may need extra, professional support. I also argue, however, that it is important to consider whether the idea of labelling coping strategies (and therefore perhaps the individuals themselves) as superior or inferior, 'immature' or 'indulgent', is actually helpful. As Beehr (1995, pp154-155) suggests:

> It can be argued … that any way of dealing with stress that has beneficial effects is useful. Having beneficial effects usually means that strain, the aversive outcome…is reduced or is less severe than it would have been without the treatment…the examination of stress treatments [should] proceed without a prior conception of what good, effective or legitimate treatments are. In this way, one might avoid bias regarding outcomes.

Pointing again towards my own findings and discussions later in the thesis, I would argue that the labelling approach assigns a language of blame, guilt and shame to teachers: professionals who already face overwhelming stressors and constant judgements. Indeed, shame itself is known to be detrimental to mental and physical health (Kaufman and Raphael, 1997; Bradshaw, 1990). Furthermore, labels are not always accurate: they can also be unhelpful, misleading and they can fail to reflect the whole picture. An 'outstanding' school Ofsted report, for instance, may not appear so outstanding if the cost to the health and well being of its staff and students has been high. To provide a further example, physical exercise is frequently

labelled as a 'positive' coping strategy, yet other studies reveal that too much exercise can actually be linked to physical and mental harm, inflammation and heart problems (Collins, 2013; Hope, 2014). These thoughts underpin my thesis and they are offered specifically in the discussion chapter. Instead of classifying coping behaviours in such a judgemental manner, as will become clear, my perspective is that they can all be regarded as ***creative****:* the individual survives, adapts and adjusts to their context and environment in a way that makes sense for them.

Part C:

3.5 THE CONTRIBUTION OF MY RESEARCH

As Kyriacou (2001, p32) emphasises, there remains,

> a need for studies to continue to explore the prevalence of teacher stress, the sources of teacher stress and the coping actions used by teachers. Such studies are needed to update our data in this field and to explore trends and changes. In particular, it can alert us to changes in schools that are generating high levels of stress that need to be addressed.

This is exactly where my research project is situated and hopes to make a contribution. In short, my research also contributes to the field in a variety of ways relating to: the definition of teacher stress; choices regarding methodology; sources of teacher stress; and a focus on teachers' coping and behaviours.

I reiterate here how I define stress for the purposes of my own study, as highlighted at the end of Part A:

> **when teachers consider their health and well-being to be affected by issues within the school environment, the home environment, or both.**

Unlike many previous studies which have been discussed (for example Howard and Johnson, 2004 and Bowers, 2004) I position the teacher as the authority on their own experience and they speak for themselves. Howard and Johnson (2004) for example, allowed school principals to judge and identify possible participants; in Bowers' (2004) study, only Head teachers and members of senior management were permitted to complete questionnaires.

My definition is also grounded in the notion that stressors cannot always be compartmentalised and labelled as originating in *either* the work *or* in the non-work environment, or in *either* the person *or* the environment. My research project perceives stress to be the result of an *interrelationship* between the person and their environment. As previously highlighted, even though it may have been the case for my participants that all stressors related to the school environment, I did not want to simply assume this at the outset and thus close off possibilities.

I reflect this stance in my definition. Furthermore, Kyriacou (2011, p28) defined teacher stress as a wholly negative concept: 'unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression.' In contrast, I did not make such assumptions with my definition. As has been demonstrated in section 3.2.4, stress is not always negative and detrimental; certain levels of stress, eustress, can be healthy and beneficial.

Although my study does not adopt a single, strict theoretical framework, it is clear that my position here does draw on the ideas of field theory and in effect, gestalt psychology which is 'closely related' (Cartwright, 1952, pxii). A field theoretical approach looks at 'the situation as a whole' rather than 'picking out one or another isolated element' (Lewin, 1942, pp62-63). The individual, it is argued, cannot be separated from their environment as they are 'interdependent parts of a dynamic whole' (Wollants, 2012, p2). A person's behaviour therefore is expressed as follows: 'behavior (B) is a function (F) of the person (P) and of his environment (E). B = F (P, E)' (Lewin, 1946, p239).

My literature review also highlighted that despite the contributions of quantitative studies to the field, the findings

have been affected by debates surrounding how to define stress, how to measure it and if indeed it *can* even be measured (Shyman, 2011, p360). My study, therefore, is situated firmly in the qualitative paradigm and is a narrative inquiry: I focus on illuminating and exploring as opposed to measuring and generalising. My study has a narrow and deep focus which promotes participants' voices, stories and emotions. It endeavours to provide insight and promote empathy and understanding. It is likely that readers from the teaching profession will encounter colleagues they have already met, or those they will meet in the future. The project thus fulfils an informative role as well as one of emotional and human interest.

My research also breaks with tradition regarding data collection. The most popular tool for data collection on teacher stress has been the questionnaire (Kyriacou, 2001, p28). As will be discussed further in the methodology chapter, I argue that questionnaires can often suggest a pre-determined agenda; they provide or limit responses and so cut off people's voices and the element of discovery. My approach uses qualitative interviewing (Warren, 2002) to elevate and prioritise people's stories and subjective experiences regarding the sources and impact of teacher stress.

My research project contributes further to the literature by focusing on the emotional consequences of stress and the impact it has on teachers' behaviours and coping strategies. This area has clearly been identified as under-researched (Travers, 2001, p153; Watts and Robertson, 2011, p33). As I have argued, studies to date have tended to label coping behaviours in either positive or negative categories, creating a language of blame and an over-emphasis on individual responsibility. My study departs from a tradition of using such judgements and refuses to pathologise the individual. Instead, behaviours are perceived in a more *creative* manner: the individual survives, adapts and adjusts to their context and environment in a way that makes sense for them.

Whereas many studies have tended to focus on particular groups of teachers, such as primary (e.g. Kokkinos, 2007; Carton and Fruchart, 2014), secondary (e.g. Mujtaba and Reiss, 2013), special needs (e.g. Hamama et al, 2013; Shyman, 2011) or novice teachers (e.g. Devos et al, 2012; Le Cornu, 2009), my discussion of the prevalence of teacher stress demonstrated that stress clearly does not discriminate but can affect any teacher, regardless of age or experience. This is reflected in my study where participants are from a *range* of sectors, are at different stages within their careers and are teachers of a

variety of subjects. Furthermore, as Carton and Fruchart (2014, p247) point out, there is also somewhat of a gap in the literature surrounding more experienced teachers and their 'distress' and 'sources of stress'. My study re-dresses this balance by including participants from this group and providing a space and a platform for their voices to be heard.

3.6 Summary

In this literature review chapter, I have examined and critically discussed the various definitions of stress as well as key figures, theories and perspectives in the field. My own definition of the concept was presented for the purposes of my study. I focused the discussion further by exploring stress with specific reference to the teaching profession. Both the prevalence and sources of teacher stress were investigated as well as major themes, developments and debates. I concluded this section by providing an overview of where my own research is situated and the contributions I hope to make. Next, I turn to a discussion and exploration of the project's methodology.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.0 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodology of the research project. I explore my choice of narrative inquiry and the methods of data collection which were used. Additionally, information on the participants themselves is provided: who they are, how they were found and their teaching status at the time of the research. Ethical issues and researcher and participant welfare are also addressed. I end the chapter with a focus on data analysis. After exploring key ideas and influences, I delineate my own approach, step by step.

4.1 Why narrative inquiry?

> Narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself (Barthes, 1977, p79)

Narrative inquiry was used for this study since it flows naturally and effectively from my epistemology and position as a researcher. Moreover, it allows me to address the specific concerns of my research questions, as well as fulfilling the more general aims and aspirations of the project, as set out in the first two chapters.

In simple terms, narratives are spoken or written stories (Bold, 2012, p1). They are also so much more than this. They are powerful tools when communicating and interacting; they can

make us see, feel, hear, imagine or understand and they often leave a lasting impression. They have educational value (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p15). At some point, we have been givers or receivers of important stories which we remember, which have made us smile, laugh or perhaps moved us to tears. This methodology can therefore provide access to the vitally important stories that participants have; it provides a platform and a space to champion *untold* stories. Quantitative approaches and methods (such as questionnaires and likert scales) could not provide this depth, complexity and emotion. Although there is undoubtedly a place for them, particularly when examining the natural world, numbers and statistical procedures cannot answer my research questions. They would cut people off, restrict or silence their responses, rather than hear their stories.

Narratives help us to understand ourselves, each other, our social world, our past and present and indeed, how we come to construct that meaning (Watson, 2008, p333-334; Bold, 2012, p13; Keats, 2009, p181; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011, 1.1-1.2). They can help us to explore complex problems, just as a story 'unfolds the complexities of characters, relationships and settings' (Webster and Mertova, 2007, p4). Long (2008, p193) also touches on the power of narratives to go beyond the individual, having importance and relevance in a much wider

context: 'opening inward' she says, can help you 'to reach outwards towards understanding'. Our meaning making, our perceptions, can therefore affect our behaviours. In this light, the untold stories of my participants are the key to gaining a richer, more detailed understanding about teachers' stress experiences and how they relate to school culture and environment. This level of understanding, I feel, can more appropriately and effectively come from *hearing* participants' stories (via interviewing), than from observing them within the school setting. Rogers (1980, p12) reminds us of the importance of being heard:

> When I have been listened to and when I have been heard, I am able to perceive my world in a new way and to go on. It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble, become soluble when someone listens.

This empowering and genuine experience of being heard, of being able to tell your story, cannot be achieved quite so effectively with observations or with questionnaires and statistical procedures. From a personal perspective, I also feel that ethnography would have subjected participants to yet more intense surveillance, monitoring and observation: something which jars with my personal narrative, as set out earlier in Chapter 2. Participant observation would also have perhaps meant less of their story, and more of mine, when it is my intention, and the intention of narrative inquiry, to provide a

space to hear and champion participants' 'intensely personal accounts of human experience' (Gray, 1998, p12 cited in Bell, 2005, p22).

There are criticisms of narrative inquiry which need to be addressed. It is often attacked for its subjective rather than objective stance (Bold, 2012, p5). As explored in Chapter 2, however, subjectivity is welcomed in the qualitative tradition and can be seen as fuelling and enabling research rather than hindering it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p615; Morrison, 2002, p32; Usher, 1996, p38; Kleinman, 2002, p382). My research has a phenomenological appreciation of participants' stories, concerned with how participants 'perceive' and 'experience' the world (Newby, 2010, p36). Their meanings, subjectivities and perceptions are crucial for this project and are indeed elevated. Furthermore, as Bochner (2001) powerfully argues, a more personalised approach does not make it a soft option in any way. This is corroborated by Bold (2012, p2) who stresses that narrative inquiry requires 'rigorous' collection and synthesis of data and 'critical' analysis and reflection leading to 'thoughtful and thought-provoking' conclusions. Quantitative approaches are not automatically more scientific and rigorous or even objective (Wellington, 2000, p14). Numerical data can easily be 'manipulated' to support a position (Bold, 2012, p7).

Other criticisms come from terms associated with more quantitative approaches: reliability, validity and generalisability. As Davies (1999, p84) points out, the terms are generally defined as follows:

Reliability:	the repeatability of research findings
Validity:	the truth or correctness of the findings
Generalizability:	how findings can be applied to the wider population

Whether such terms can be used in qualitative studies of this nature has been the source of ongoing, intense debate (Shenton, 2004; Northcote, 2012; Leung, 2015; Cho and Trent, 2006; Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011). If we consider the first two terms, it is my contention that they do not appropriately fit this kind of study. As Webster and Mertova (2007, pp89-90) explain, a personal account is not meant to be regarded as an 'exact' record of what happened and instead researchers need to access 'reliable and trustworthy records of the stories as told by individuals'. The idea of repeatability also falls apart when we consider that people's stories are affected by the context in which they were produced. The physical environment and the emotions and interactions of participants can differ from day to day or even hour to hour. Naturally, this will shape what is and what is not said. Rather than an exact truth, narrative research aims for *verisimilitude* where results have the 'appearance of

truth or reality' and where findings are 'well-grounded' and 'supportable' (Ibid, p4). Cho and Trent (2006, pp319-324) see validity in a *transactional* and *transformative* light. The former term is defined as an interactive process where the researcher revisits and checks facts, feelings, experiences and beliefs to achieve a greater level of accuracy. The latter term is regarded as the impact the research has, defined as 'a progressive, emancipatory process leading toward social change'.

It is also problematic to try to apply the notion of generalizability to this, and many other qualitative studies. As Davies (1999, p86) reminds us, even the most 'homogenous' group will contain varied perspectives. We can only access versions of the truth rather than one authoritative version which can be applied to all people, places and contexts. Personal agency cannot be dismissed. Yet this does not make the narratives any less meaningful and important and indeed, this position helps me to address my research questions. I aim to understand how people perceive and construct their meanings and experiences through their interactions in the social world rather than extract a definitive and universal account. Although the concept of generalizability does not sit perfectly with narrative inquiry, it is important to note that there can be patterns and commonalities in the narratives due to the many shared professional

experiences participants have. This is indeed the case with my own participants, as will be explored in the Account of the Data chapters. As Kluckhohn and Murray (1948, p35) highlight: 'Every man is in certain respects, like all men, like some men, like no other man'.

New checks are therefore appropriate in this kind of research. New perspectives and definitions are offered and summarised eloquently by Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011, 4.4). *Credibility* replaces reliability and the term *verisimilitude* is used rather than validity: the work 'evokes in readers a feeling that the experience being described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true'. In terms of generalizability, the authors state this is tested by readers in terms of whether a story 'speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know'. It is in this spirit that such terms are addressed by my research project. The value of the research can be seen if it forces us to ask questions about the phenomenon, to think, to feel moved. It may also inspire and trigger further research.

4.2 The participants

I deliberately use the term *participants* rather than 'sample' as the latter term, despite appearing in most research textbooks,

seems rather clinical and dehumanising. In order to address my research questions, I was looking for a specific group of people: those teachers who believed their mental and / or physical health had been affected by stress relating to their professional role and environment. I wanted to appeal to those teachers who believed they had an important story to tell. This was a biased rather than a random selection, therefore. I also sought a range of perspectives and experiences in order to: ensure a wealth of important information was available; to explore what factors may or may not be significant; to identify any commonalities or striking differences emerging across the stories. As Warren (2002, p87) argues, to 'discern meaningful patterns within thick description' the researcher can 'minimize or maximize differences among respondents…to highlight or contrast patterns'.

All 16 participants lived and worked in various parts of England, covering rural, urban and suburban settings. Table 4.1 displays the number of participants from various levels of the education system.

Table 4.1. Area of the education system represented by participants

	Number of participants
• Primary education	5
• Secondary education	10
• College of further education	1

n=16

A number of participants also had additional leadership or management responsibilities at the time of their stress experience; this is represented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2. Participants with leadership or management responsibilities at the time of their stress experience

	Number of participants
• Head teacher (Primary)	1
• Head of department (Secondary)	1
• Second in department (Secondary)	1
• Subject coordinator (Primary)	3

n=6/16

One particular participant, Simon, had a double role in data collection and acted as a 'key informant' (see Marshall, 1996, pp92-97). Having previously worked in the teaching profession and experienced stress first-hand, Simon was able to offer his story. In addition, he was able to provide a window to others' experiences. At the time of the research, Simon was working in the NHS around issues of mental well-being. His role meant that

he spoke to teachers from across the school hierarchy, and as such, he also had access to their powerful and moving stories. Simon adhered to ethical guidelines when discussing his patients' experiences.

Due to their stress experience, not all participants remained in their posts, schools, or even in the profession itself. The teaching status of participants at the time of the research is displayed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Participants' teaching status at the time of research

	Number of participants
• Left the profession due to stress	7
• Left their school due to stress	3
Of these participants:	
Switched to new school	(1)
Switched to private sector	(1)
Switched to supply	(1)
• Changed to part time teaching within the school	3
• Undecided about which direction to move in next	3

n=16

My participants were found in a variety of ways. I produced a project information sheet which explained the focus and purpose of the research and invited participants to respond. I promoted my research within The University of Nottingham and details were emailed to teachers on Masters programmes of

study. Furthermore, I promoted my research via teaching unions, by emailing schools, through word of mouth and through the use of personal and professional contacts. A 'snowballing process' (Newby, p249) also occurred where one contact led to a new contact.

4.3 Ethical issues and researcher and participant welfare

Ethical concerns should be at the 'forefront' of all research projects and should 'continue through to the write – up and dissemination stages' (Wellington, 2000, p3). In educational research, however, there is an added dimension to moral and ethical considerations. As Wellington points out (Ibid), the physical sciences deal with 'inanimate, intangibles like point masses', yet educational research deals with human beings and their learning organizations. Care must be taken to protect and guard both the researcher and participants, particularly when participants are from vulnerable groups. The School of Education at The University of Nottingham adopts the ethical guidelines set out by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011). The guidelines clearly emphasise the various responsibilities of the researcher: to participants, to sponsors of research, to the community of Educational

Researchers and to Educational Professionals, Policy Makers and the General Public (BERA, 2011, 5.7). The guidelines have been adhered to throughout the research process and ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Coordinator before any data collection was carried out.

Consent from participants is more than a 'signature on a form' and, as events can change, consent may not apply to 'the entire research programme' (Newby, 2010, p375 and p357). Participants should give their *informed* consent and they should know: the purpose of the research; why they have been chosen; how their information will be used and how identifiable it will be; the limits of their involvement and whether they will be able to comment upon the analysis and conclusions (Ibid, p357). Such issues were made clear on the consent form and project information sheet. It was also made clear that participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the process at any time. Bell (2005, p48) points out how important it is to be clear about how you define 'confidentiality' and 'anonymity' as there can be 'serious misunderstandings' between people. She points to helpful definitions by Sapsford and Abbott (1996, cited in Bell, 2005, p48) which were adopted in my project:

> *confidentiality* is a promise that you will not be identified or presented in identifiable form, while *anonymity* is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondent.

This was stressed to participants. As I conducted the interviews and analysed the transcripts myself, I could not guarantee anonymity in this light but I have presented and reported on the data in anonymised form. After careful consultation with my supervisors, some details have been fictionalised to protect participants' identities. To ensure non-traceability, pseudonyms are used and I have omitted information that could enable participants and their schools to be easily identified. This is a particular problem in ethnographic research (Walford, 2005). As my project was not an ethnographic study, I did not visit any of the schools involved and neither did I visit for the interview process: this distance again helped to protect participants' identities. It is important to remember that it is possible for anonymity and confidentiality to be compromised if technology is used for communications. Blaxter, Tight and Hughes (2001, p160) remind us about the risk of hacking and that data sent by email 'can be easily forwarded and copied'. Participants were also made aware of this risk.

In terms of the interview process, tape-recording only took place if permission was granted: all interviewed participants gave their permission. The recordings were stored in a locked drawer in my home office. The interview space was

characterised by the Rogerian principles of empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard to build relationships and create a safe, non-judgemental space (Joseph, 2003, p305). I also used a de-briefing and 'respondent validation' stage (Bryman, 2004, p274). This gave participants the opportunity to see transcripts of interviews and provide feedback, allowing me to ensure they were happy for me to proceed.

As pointed out by Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2007), the literature regarding vulnerability in research mainly focuses on the participant rather than the researcher. The researcher, however, can also be vulnerable in many ways, for instance, in relation to 'the setting of the research' or due to physical and emotional vulnerability. The authors explain how listening to a person's account of their life and suffering can give us 'a heightened sense of our own mortality and vulnerability' (Ibid, p342). They point out how many researchers can feel uneasy, shocked and surprised at 'the depth of information' offered to them by participants (Ibid, p331). It was therefore important for me to anticipate and be prepared for this, working closely with supervisors and seeking advice and support when necessary. I also followed the authors' recommendation regarding participant welfare and aftercare:

researchers should have appropriate contact details of 'sources of professional advice and support' for anyone who may need 'ongoing therapeutic support' (Ibid, p344). This was an important step due to the potential harm and 'emotional distress' participants could suffer when telling their story (Bahn and Weatherill, 2012, p20).

In summary, issues of risk, personal safety and emotional well-being can apply to both researchers and participants. Self-care, as well as care for others, was vitally important throughout the entire research process. Ethical issues can impact on every stage, from research design to even after the dissemination of the results.

4.4 Method of data collection: qualitative interviewing

While there are no overall rules about narrative approaches to research (Bold, 2012, p2), I felt the most appropriate method for me to elicit stories and perceptions was via interviewing. As Wellington (2000, pp74-75) highlights, there are different degrees of structure in interviews. In a structured situation, the interviewer is little more than a face to face questionnaire and in order to achieve 'consistency', there is no deviation in wording or question order. This approach would not have been

suitable for my project. I needed the flexibility to adapt to the individual needs, discoveries and sensitivities that each participant and each context would bring. A structured approach has a pre-determined agenda and therefore cuts off people's voices and narratives and the element of discovery. It also negatively affects the power balance: the interviewer has sole authority in assuming s/he already knows what there is to know. I also question whether it is even possible to achieve 'consistency' with a structured approach since every interviewer and interviewee brings their own individual personalities, mannerisms and emotions to a situation.

At the other end of the spectrum are unstructured interviews. I agree with Mason (2002, p62) however, who points out that this term is a 'misnomer' and that no interview is completely lacking in some form of structure. Instead, she prefers the term 'qualitative or semi-structured interviewing' which is the method I adopted for my data collection. I have summarised her definition of qualitative interviews as follows:

- There is an interactional exchange of dialogue, whether that is face to face or over the phone.
- They have a relatively informal style. She refers to Burgess's (1984, p102) phrase 'conversations with a purpose.'
- There is a thematic, topic-centred, biographical or narrative approach so there might be certain starting points or 'specific stories' researchers would like the interviewee to tell, but a 'fluid and flexible structure' is

still retained which can allow the development of 'unexpected themes.'
- They operate from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual. Facts are not 'reported' in an interview, rather, 'meanings and understandings are created in an interaction, which is effectively a co-production involving researcher and interviewees.'

This last point, in particular, fits coherently with my epistemological and conceptual framework and so reinforces the appropriateness of this method of data collection for my project. Furthermore, unlike observations within school settings, qualitative interviewing allowed me access to so much more depth and scope since the temporal range of an interview is 'biographical, extending into the past and the future' (Warren, 2002, p85).

During the interviews, I retained a bank of key themes and topics I wanted to cover as well as interview questions shaped and influenced by my research questions. That was not to say however, that I adhered to them rigidly if they did not appear useful, relevant or appropriate to that particular interview and participant. Certain questions were common to all interviews yet I did not want it to become a scripted process where everyone was treated the same, because we are not the same. It was important for me to adapt to each individual's needs, pick up on verbal and non-verbal cues and respond to the unfolding narratives. I tried to avoid leading questions and kept questions

as open-ended as possible as I did not want to steer responses or close down participants' stories. More open-ended questions allowed me to remain open to new possibilities, experiences and interpretations, thus helping me to manage my own assumptions and biases.

There was an element of discovery during the interviews, an evolving process, due to the fact that meaning is co-constructed by the interviewer and participant who are both social actors. Each interview had its own contexts, settings and interactions and it was not always possible to predict the concepts which emerged as a result. As Warren (2002, p98) explains, the perspectives of the researcher and the participant 'dance together.' The qualitative interview is therefore constructionist in nature since participants are regarded as meaning makers rather than 'passive conduits for retrieving information from an existing vessel of answers' (Ibid, p83). The stories may not have existed in that particular form before the interview began, therefore. The very process of articulating our thoughts at that moment can shape our ideas and hence our narrative. The interview process itself may have generated completely new ideas or triggered the memory regarding events that had been forgotten. For some participants, it was also the very first time they had spoken aloud about their story. As Clandinin (2006,

p47) explains, in narrative inquiry the researcher 'lives in the field' with their participants, whether that field is a classroom or meeting place, and a 'field text' is thus created.

Some interviews took place at the University and others at my home or the homes of participants. Although the interviews could not be predicted or standardised, I endeavoured to create a certain type of space which I believed was necessary if participants were going to feel comfortable, able and willing to tell me their stories. The Rogerian core conditions of 'empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard' were adopted to build relationships and create a safe, non-judgemental space (Joseph, 2003: 305). With participants' consent, the interviews were tape-recorded to support the stage of analysis and interpretation.

4.5 Other approaches

For practical, geographical or emotional reasons, a face to face and spoken narrative was not always possible and so written narratives were emailed to me by participants instead. This option not only helped to increase the number of stories available for analysis, but potentially also added a further richness and dimension to the study: some people speak more freely and confidently when they are not face to face.

As well as a spoken narrative, one participant also allowed me access to a range of documents to further support the analysis and interpretation stage of the project. These include: letters of correspondence with the school involved; diary entry notes and other pieces of writing by the participant, both personal and job-related; letters and statements written by the participant to individuals in key, supportive roles. Participants' chosen method of storytelling is displayed in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4. Participants' chosen method of storytelling.

	Email	Face to face interview	Additional documents provided
Rachel	●		
Robert		●	
Hannah		●	●
Simon		●	
Katherine		●	
Stephanie	●		
Sarah		●	
Jack	●		
Jonathan	●		
Amy		●	
Tom		●	
Holly	●		
Matthew		●	
Helena		●	
Ruth	●		
Carly	●		

Throughout the research process, as well as during the interviews, I continued to use a journal. This served as a method of recording information and observations on, for instance, context and environment, non-verbal communication,

what was told and what was avoided. It also served as a powerful tool for critical reflection. As Holly (1989, p71) explains, writing 'taps the unconscious' and 'can make the implicit explicit'. The journal allowed me to consider and re-consider ideas, boost self-awareness and re-visit key moments along my research journey with new ideas and perspectives.

4.6 Data analysis

4.6.1 My position

In the previous section on data collection, I demonstrated how and why personal narratives were elicited via qualitative interviewing and written email responses. In this section, I turn to the issue of data analysis. In narrative inquiry, there is no one fixed, authoritative method of data analysis. As Keats' (2009, p188) demonstrates, a wide range of preferences and approaches can be found within the literature. I wanted an approach that would allow me to analyse and respect the sixteen personal narratives individually, yet also allow me to look across the data set and compare; finding commonalities, patterns, contradictions and striking differences. My coding, I felt, would have naturally been influenced by my own researcher position. It was therefore important for me to remain

as reflexive and critical as possible to ensure I remained open to possibilities and did not miss significant information.

It is important to note here that, as I transcribed the interviews myself, this process can be considered as part of the data analysis stage. Not only did it mean I was continually up close to the story and engaging with it, it also involved interpretation due to the decisions that were made regarding what to include or exclude. As Hammersley (2010, p556) reminds us, 'neither transcripts nor electronic recordings should be treated as data that are simply given, in an unmediated fashion'. I wanted my transcripts to be as full, rich and detailed as possible and so the pauses, silences, false starts and paralanguage were recorded in case they were relevant to the story. I felt that to modify language use or over-edit, would be to remove the participant's voice and emotions.

The main influences on my style of data analysis will be discussed shortly. Essentially, I consider my approach to have both inductive and deductive elements: it is positioned in between grounded theory and the 'a priori' (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p61) approach. My research begins with an area of interest to explore and research questions, rather than with a hypothesis or a rigid theoretical framework. My use of

open coding also reflects an attempt to be led by the data itself to ensure that findings are 'grounded in the data' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p1). A further reason for my rejection of a set theoretical framework is that valuable information may be missed or data may simply be misinterpreted. As Bowlands (1991) demonstrates, using a feminist lens led her participant (her grandmother) to feel that the interpretation of her story was inaccurate, and that the story no longer belonged to her:

> your interpretation of the story as a female struggle for autonomy within a hostile male environment is entirely YOUR interpretation. You've read into the story what you wished to – what pleases YOU (p70).

My approach is not entirely inductive either. I do not hold the belief that it is possible for researchers to completely 'bracket off' previous experience, reading and research: prior knowledge can either implicitly or explicitly shape data analysis. As Miles and Huberman (1994, p8) explain, researchers cannot be detached from their study as they have their own,

> understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations; they too are members of a particular culture at a specific historical moment…they will be undeniably affected by what they hear and observe in the field, often in unnoticed ways.

Combined with prior reading and research, my own experiences and observations within the teaching profession itself will also have consciously or sub-consciously affected how I approached and interpreted data. Furthermore, experiences in early

interviews meant that hunches and assumptions were formed, often shaping my thoughts as I embarked on subsequent interviews; I expected particular topics and themes to emerge.

In summary, I position myself between an entirely inductive and a deductive approach. I endeavoured to be led by the data itself rather than by a prescriptive theoretical framework, yet also acknowledged that I could not switch off previous experiences and approach the data carte blanche. Such a position sits naturally with narrative inquiry which, as Chase (2005, p651) describes, is 'an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods.'

4.6.2 Key influences on my approach

Rather like the 'bricoleur' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p4) who deploys various 'strategies, methods, and empirical materials' and 'pieces together' tools or techniques, I drew inspiration from various key sources when analysing data.

I found Fraser's (2004) model of analysing narratives 'line by line' to be incredibly detailed and influential, particularly with its concern for interpreting each transcript individually before

examining them collectively. Fraser's approach is summarised in Figure 4.1.

PHASE ONE:	Hearing the stories, experiencing each other's emotions
PHASE TWO:	Transcribing the material
PHASE THREE:	Interpreting individual transcripts
PHASE FOUR:	Scanning across different domains of experience
PHASE FIVE:	Linking the 'personal with the political'

Figure 4.1. Summary of Fraser's (2004) seven phases of data analysis

Fraser provides a range of questions and prompts for each phase, many of which I was able to use or adapt when interrogating my own participants' stories.

In Figure 4.2. I provide an example for the reader which demonstrates my own personal line by line analysis. Paying close attention to every word and its impact helped me to immerse myself in the data. In this particular example, Helena, one of my participants, discusses Ofsted and clearly identifies it as a source of stress.

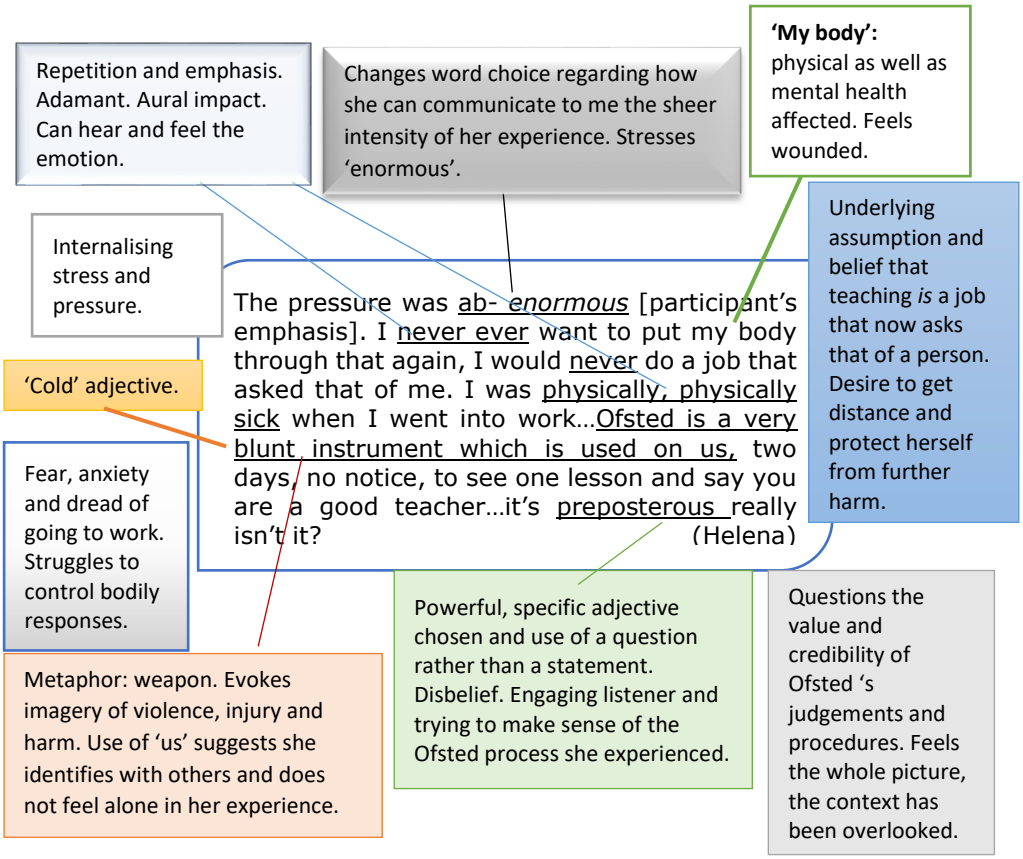

Figure 4.2. An example of my own line by line approach

Webster and Mertova (2007) propose 'a critical events approach' to narrative analysis and provide a set framework (see Chapter 7) for this purpose. The authors argue that narratives,

> detailing place, time, characters and events assist the researcher to identify the critical event…Because events are critical parts of people's lives, using them as a main focus for research provides a valuable and insightful tool for getting at the core of what is important in that research (p71).

As I did not want a rigid, single focused perspective, their framework was not adopted in my approach. It was my

intention to explore and be open to all aspects of the narrative, rather than one aspect which could mean narrowing my perspective and missing important data. Furthermore, many of my participants did not name one specific critical event but several; indeed many alluded to more of a 'drip drip' pattern, a slow build up over time or a domino effect. Nevertheless, I refer to Webster and Mertova's work here as influential since it made me alert and sensitive to critical events in the personal narratives and encouraged me to examine their impact. It also encouraged me to ask participants during interview or via email if they were able to identify and discuss such pivotal, key moments.

My approach is also informed by content analysis. The researcher analyses narratives in an holistic manner identifying themes and sub-themes; where there are several narratives, s/he moves 'from one story to the next, checking the main features; confirming previous accounts; identifying common elements; and developing a collective story' (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007, p84-85). Content analysis, Quinn Patton (2002, p463) explains, involves 'identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labelling the primary patterns in the data' and so 'analyzing the core *content'* of the transcripts 'to determine what's significant'. Hsieh and Shannon (2005,

p1277) break the term 'content analysis' down even further and argue that there are in fact three distinct approaches which they categorise as follows: conventional, directed, or summative. My approach draws from the authors' definition of *conventional* content analysis where researchers 'avoid using preconceived categories' and instead allow them 'to flow from the data' (p1279). Hsieh and Shannon continue to define the approach as follows:

> Data analysis starts with reading all data repeatedly to achieve immersion and obtain a sense of the whole … as one would read a novel. Then, data are read word by word to derive codes… Next, the researcher approaches the text by making notes of his or her first impressions, thoughts, and initial analysis… Depending on the relationships between subcategories, researchers can combine or organize this larger number of subcategories into a smaller number of categories (p1279).

I draw from conventional content analysis not only due to its fairly open and holistic approach, but also because it lends itself to a logical and helpful way for me to present and discuss findings later in the thesis. The headings and sub-headings are utilised to break up the discussion and also reveal how the themes interlink and build up the whole picture.

Miles and Huberman (1994, p11) define data reduction as, 'the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data that appear in written up field notes or transcriptions.' The authors argue that data reduction is *part* of

analysis and they provide various examples of how this might be done. One such example is a 'Contact Summary Sheet' (p51) which summarises the main concepts, issues and questions for each contact in order to get to the 'essence' of the data set. I changed and adapted this idea to suit my own research project and concerns by using something which I decided to call a '*Visual Story Card*' for each of my participants (see Stage 4 of my approach).

My approach has also drawn inspiration from authors who have focused on the relational and interpersonal aspects of narrative inquiry, particularly Riessman (2001) and Sparkes and Smith (2012). Riessman (2001, p697), whose interests lie in analysing narratives as performance, reminds us that:

> Storytelling is a relational activity that encourages others to listen, to share, and to empathize. It is a collaborative practice and assumes that tellers and listeners/ questioners interact in particular cultural milieus and historical contexts, which are essential to interpretation.

She poses many thought-provoking questions which were influential in drawing my attention to this aspect of narrative analysis:

> In what kind of story does a narrator place herself?
> How does she locate herself in relation to the audience, and vice versa?
> How does she locate characters in relation to one another and in relation to herself?

> How does she relate to herself, that is, make identity claims about who or what she is? (p701).

Sparkes and Smith (2012) powerfully highlight the impact that research can have on the researcher, both physically and emotionally, and in turn how this can affect interpretation. Their research was conducted with rugby players who suffered spinal cord injury and became permanently disabled. Sparkes himself was 'a brilliant all-round sportsman' yet his career was terminated due to lower back injury. In addition, his teenage son is a talented rugby player. The authors reveal how these biographical details become tied up in Sparkes' emotional and physical responses when analysing transcripts. He reveals his fears for what might have been for him, and perhaps what could be for his son:

> As I write this, I physically shudder. My stomach churns and I feel a wave of anxiety spread throughout my body. I feel sick and want to block out such thoughts and feelings. I often feel like this when I read part of the interview transcripts (p60).

Although I did not systematically follow the models proposed by Riessman or Sparkes and Smith, their work was influential in that it sharpened my focus on the relational, interpersonal and empathic elements of the interview process and data analysis. The issues filtered into specific questions I asked of each narrative (see Step 3 of my approach). Such areas also became

the subject of reflexive writing in my research journal where I continually noted my thoughts, emotions, concerns and questions.

Finally, although I did not adopt a rigid theoretical framework, I did bring to my analytic lens an awareness of field theory and key Foucauldian concepts such as power and the nature of institutions. Field theory asserts that: 'behavior (B) is a function (F) of the person (P) and of his environment (E). B = F (P, E)' (Lewin, 1946, p239). Importantly, the emphasis is on the *interrelationship* of the person and their environment; they are 'inseparable and interdependent parts of a dynamic whole' (Wollants, 2012, p2). This encouraged me to look at the narratives holistically rather than isolating 'parts' as if they existed in a vacuum. This also had an impact on drawing my awareness to the context, the physical environment and school building, school culture, ethos and atmosphere, as well as issues relating to the participants' behaviours and their lives outside of the school setting. In short, my attention was drawn to the entire 'life space' (Lewin, 1942, p62) of the individual.

I have not conducted a Foucauldian analysis in my research. As my personal narrative earlier displayed, I made sense of my own experiences and observations within one particular school using Foucauldian concepts of power and the nature of

institutions. This helped me to describe and illuminate important aspects of my story; to attempt to understand *why* so much teacher stress was experienced and the impact this had on behaviour. Yet I did not want to simply take and impose this way of thinking on my participants' stories in case it did not relate to their experiences: I wanted to remain as open as possible and not close off opportunities for discovery. In the interests of transparency, however, the process of using a Foucauldian lens when exploring my own experience, may have had an impact on my perceptions when analysing participants' narratives. As discussed, despite the researcher's best efforts, it may not always be possible to completely bracket off our own thoughts and experiences.

In this chapter section I have outlined the influences on my analytic lens: those I was fully aware of, those I consciously drew from and those potential influences which I attempted to bracket off whilst acknowledging this may not always be possible. These influences have been summarised in Figure 4.3.

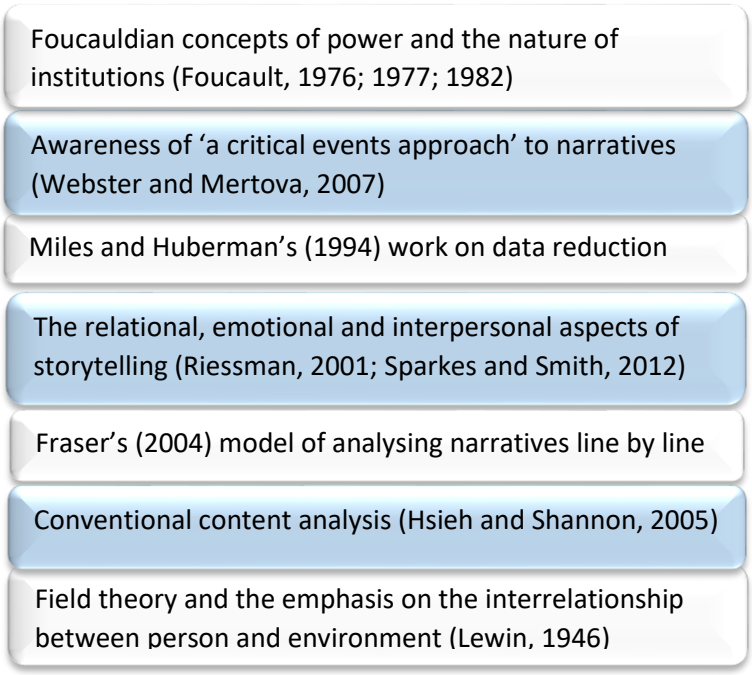

Figure 4.3. Influences on my analytic lens

4.6.3 My approach to data analysis

I now present the various stages of my own data analysis approach.

Stages of my data analysis

1. Personal narratives were collected via qualitative interviewing and written email responses. I transcribed the interviews myself. Participants were invited to read, edit and comment on the transcripts, allowing me to ensure they were happy for me to proceed.

2. Immersion in the data. Interviews were listened to repeatedly; transcripts were read and re-read. The transcripts were annotated in detail, line by line, regarding my impressions, thoughts, feelings and questions.

3. I completed a reflective and reflexive written response in my journal for each personal narrative using the following questions:

    - What major sources of stress are identified in the narrative? How do they relate to life both inside and outside of the school setting?
    - What impact has stress had on the participants' behaviours, health and well-being?
    - Who are the main characters in the narrative and how are they presented?
    - Are there any critical events and why are they so significant?
    - What is striking about language use? Are there any particularly intriguing phrases, or powerful verbs and adverbs, for example? Are stylistic devices used such as metaphor, simile, or personification and what impact does this have?
    - Are there any powerful images?
    - Are there any silences, surprises or contradictions?
    - What *kind* of a story is this? How could it be summarised in one or two key words?
    - How do I relate to both narrative and narrator, particularly when participants are interviewed face to face?

4. At this point in the process, I created something for every participant which I decided to call a 'Visual Story Card'. This is a further example of bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p4) and shows how qualitative researchers

can be innovative and inventive. As someone who likes to be up close to texts, to be able to physically handle them and 'see' them, rather than simply through a computer screen, I created these for myself and my own thought processes. They helped me to capture the essence of each participant's story, generate new ideas and spot major themes and issues. I condensed each lengthy narrative to a single side of A4 paper which I covered with: key words and phrases; important quotes; themes; pictures or symbols to summarise complex ideas and issues. The Visual Story Cards were also grouped together and displayed on my office wall as shown in the image in Figure 4.4. This allowed me to continually 'see' the stories, engage with them, question and compare them. At a glance, therefore, I felt I was able to recall each participant and their story and even quote from the narratives. In Figure 4.5. I provide an example of one of my Visual Story Cards.

Stages 3 and 4 of my analysis not only brought me closer to the narratives, they also helped me to identify themes early on which were then entered into NVivo.

5. Narratives were coded using the software package NVivo. Major themes and sub-themes that emerged in the narratives were identified. Extracts from all narratives were clustered accordingly to aid further analysis and comparison; commonalities and differences with regard to participants' narratives were examined. Codes were adjusted or merged as required; many themes were collapsed into main, broader themes.

Figure 4.4. Visual Story Cards on my office wall

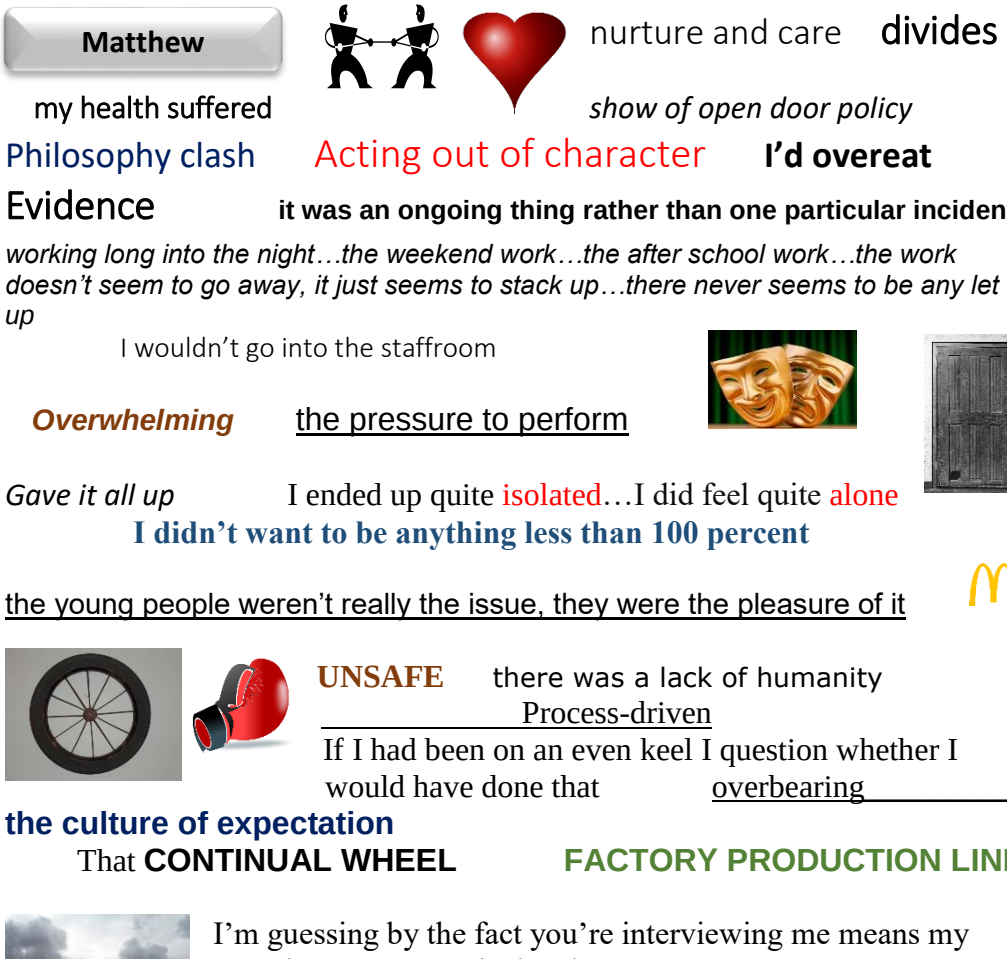

Figure 4.5. An example of my Visual Story Cards

Although the stages of my data analysis are presented here in a linear and chronological fashion, this is for illustrative purposes to clarify for the reader. Many stages were in fact re-visited or they overlapped, with various activities being conducted simultaneously. Whilst transcribing interviews, for example, I would frequently code, interpret and record ideas in my journal. Furthermore, during the interviews themselves (data collection stage), I found myself analysing and interpreting.

Following these stages allowed me to engage with the *whole* story, rather than just specific elements such as critical events. I felt it was also important to ensure that the stages allowed a focus on the narratives individually as well as collectively. I found that the stages complimented each other; earlier stages of analysis prepared for the later stages. The questions I used in Stage 3 were devised to encourage deep engagement with the individual narrative which would then, in turn, support comparisons with other narratives at a later stage. The questions I devised took into account: factors relating to both person and context; use of language; critical events; relational and inter personal aspects. In short, I created questions which covered the what, why and how of the narratives.

4.7 Summary

This chapter has addressed the methodology of the research project. It has explored the choice of narrative inquiry, what it is and how it flows naturally and appropriately from my epistemology and position as a researcher. Information on the participants themselves and a discussion of ethical issues were also provided. Methods of data collection and my own personal approach to data analysis were delineated, and, in line with the qualitative tradition, examples of the researcher as bricoleur were also highlighted. Outlining my data analysis step by step, I demonstrated how I ensured a deep engagement with the narratives, both individually and collectively. It was stressed that with narrative inquiry, participants' stories are not meant to be regarded as absolute truth or an 'exact' record of what happened (Webster and Mertova, 2007, pp89-90). They are meant to be seen as subjective accounts influenced by the context in which they are produced, and this subjectivity is welcomed in the qualitative paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003, p615; Morrison, 2002, p32). In this light, I now turn to the presentation of the account of the data.

Chapter 5 The Account of the Data

The Battleground (Part One): Relationships or Me, Them and Us

5.0 Introduction to the account of the data chapters

Working through the various stages of my data analysis, it soon became clear with the volume of data that an abundance of themes were emerging: far too many to discuss due to the word limit restrictions of the thesis. I therefore had important choices to make to ensure that: I communicated as much of my findings as possible in the space available to me; repetition and overlap was avoided; and that significant issues were not omitted due to editing concerns.

As a consequence of working through these considerations, I collapsed many themes into one larger category and was able to bring in many themes as sub-themes. Figure 5.1 demonstrates how the account of the data is presented. As displayed, the superordinate theme of 'The Battleground' shapes all three chapters which present the account of the data. For some, this may seem an unsettling metaphor to use since it is not perhaps what would automatically be expected when talking about a school and place of education. As will become clear, this metaphor is a relevant and helpful vehicle to reflect participants' emotions and concerns, reflecting both inter and intra personal 'battles' regarding the stress experience. Each of the three chapters focuses on different aspects of experiencing, working within and attempting to survive the battleground. In

this chapter I focus on 'Relationships or Me, Them and Us', the following chapter looks at 'The Impossible Job' and finally I turn to 'Battle Wounds and Survival Strategies.'

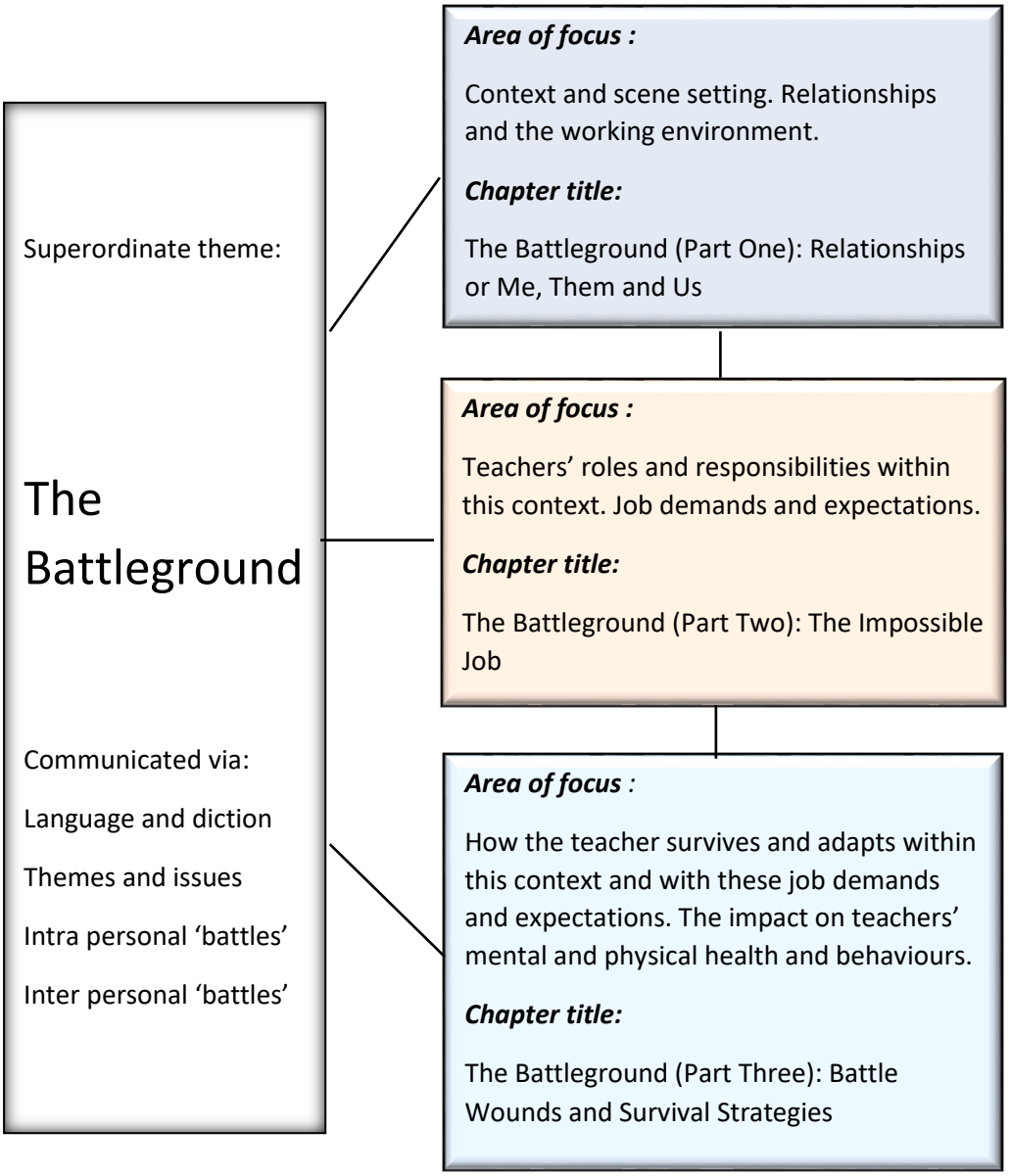

Figure 5.1. Overview of how the account of the data is presented

The overarching, master themes used for these three chapters intentionally sound like story titles. They naturally reflect the use of narrative inquiry underpinning the research and the value I place on stories and voices as a powerful and necessary way of communicating meaning. Additionally, the choice of wording for the titles allows me to tell a story and create a funnel effect: firstly by setting the scene and providing a portrait of the wider context and relationships within the battleground; then by focusing further on the teachers' roles, responsibilities and position within this context; and then finally by examining how the teacher survives and adapts with such roles and responsibilities within this context, in effect, how teachers make a pathway through the terrain. These chapters allow me to bring in a wide range of related sub-themes to further communicate the story.

The account of the data chapters present a co-construction and collaborative activity (Hull and Saxon, 2009): they present my narrative of the participants' narratives. As highlighted in the Methodology chapter, I acknowledge that participants' stories can potentially be affected by the context in which they were produced. For those who were interviewed, the interview process itself may have impacted on what was said, and what was not said.

Due to the very nature of this research topic, negative stories were obviously predominant; it is not a subject which would necessarily entice responses from teachers who felt completely happy and fulfilled in their work. It is important to note, however, that participants' did vary in terms of the intensity of their stress experience and the impact it had on their lives: this is indicated in Figure 5.2.

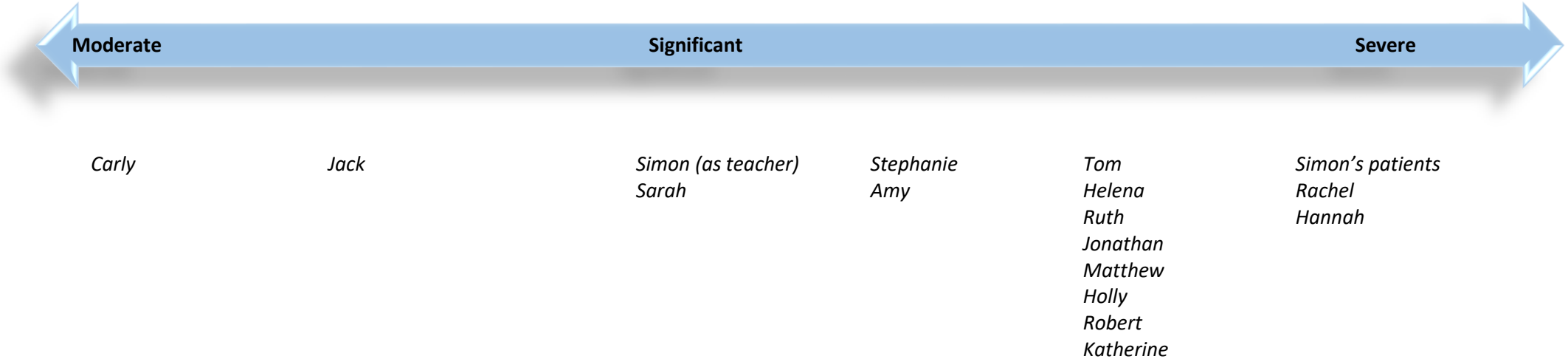

Figure 5.2. A continuum indicating the intensity of participants' stress experiences and the impact on their health and well-being

The decisions regarding where to place participants on this continuum were subjective and instinctive, rather than based on statistical procedures associated with a quantitative study. Indeed, as explored in Chapters 1 and 3, the ability to 'measure' psychological constructs or even arrive at a universal definition is not necessarily guaranteed. The purpose of the continuum is simply to assist the reader and give an idea of the different levels of experience across the 16 narratives. I based my decisions on: participants' descriptions of their experience in terms of not just what was described but also *how* it was described; emotions revealed in the narratives and during the interviews themselves; the impact the stress experience had on their personal and professional lives; the impact the stress had on their health, well-being and behaviours; and the involvement of professionals such as doctors, counsellors and therapists.

It is also important to note that the data relates to my participants' personal understanding and experience: it is quite possible that another member of the same department may have a different view or experience. As outlined throughout the thesis, this research holds that person and environment share an 'interrelationship' (Wollants, 2012).

Finally, to assist the reader, at the start of each of the account of the data chapters I also provide a table. These tables provide an overview of which participants feature in each section of the three chapters, and hence, which themes apply to which participants. This overview for Chapter 5 is presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Participants featuring in the different sections of Chapter 5

	Rachel	Robert	Hannah	Simon	Katherine	Stephanie	Sarah	Jack	Jonathan	Amy	Tom	Holly	Matthew	Helena	Ruth	Carly
5.1 Language and diction associated with the battleground	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
5.2 Adversarial and combative relationships																
• 5.2.1 An exception: harmonious pupil-teacher relationships			•		•	•	•			•		•	•		•	•
• 5.2.2 Issues relating to leadership and management	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	
5.3 Relationship issues across the staff body	•			•	•		•	•		•	•		•	•	•	•

5.1 Language and diction associated with the battleground

To begin, I present a selection of extracts from my participants' narratives which I immediately found both striking and intriguing. When discussing their relationships with colleagues, students or with the school itself, their words instantly painted a very specific picture for me and demonstrate for the reader how and why I chose the metaphor of 'The Battleground'. As shown, participants frequently used language which evoked powerful imagery of war and conflict, aggression, violence, wounds and injuries and heightened emotions of feeling unsafe and under attack:

- Ofsted is a very blunt instrument which is used on us (Helena)
- I used to stick my head above the parapet and I was in the firing line (Katherine)
- They [SMT] will stop and startle you, you are on the spot and suddenly feel threatened and quite vulnerable (Ruth)
- We were not far off North Korea in terms of the lack of autonomy teachers were experiencing (Holly)
- You're always conscious that if you didn't get the results …you'd be thinking actually they'll come gunning for me and I was right (Tom)
- The number of times he threw chairs at me (Robert)
- it's an embattled field (Simon)
- I said, 'Are we being sent to the showers then?' (Sarah)
- it's more about me having to fight, fight back…fight my corner (Amy)
- we were just taking the bullets for our staff (Tom)
- the Ofsted framework beats it out of any teacher to be individual (Matthew)
- He arrived and was very volatile and confrontational… He was aggressive, shouting, swearing and pushing into others… using a range of foul language…I was hit around the head (Jonathan)

- I found the environment difficult and the atmosphere frequently hostile (Rachel)
- It was like being on death row waiting for the person to come and get you (Sarah)
- This [the school] is where I have to battle and struggle (Jack)
- Some ludicrous end of year you know grade that we must slap on students (Helena)
- You're just fighting day to day (Katherine)
- When the Head does a round…if you're not looking productive you feel, you don't feel safe almost you know. I don't feel comfortable unless she's seen me marking or busy (Amy)
- We all banded together you know, the staff together, because it wasn't just me, it was around the school, people feeling pressurised, under threat (Katherine)
- It's a bullying culture in education now (Simon)
- It absolutely breaks me (Amy)
- I can't fight anymore (Sarah)
- you're constantly exposed, constantly being pressured and I also felt that you become marked (Tom)
- I have always remembered a lecture … on stress about placing a frog in boiling water and it jumps out, compared to putting it in cold, heating it gently and it boils to death (Carly)
- People were worried, people were scared …there was the threat of redundancies all the way through, the threat of performance related pay…it was scary, really scary (Katherine)
- I tried to rearrange the room so that I felt more safe – moving things around so that I had more visibility over all parts of the room (Rachel)
- there was a lack of humanity (Matthew)
- all this pressure that was being thrown at us (Hannah)
- It was horrendous, it was awful…it was quite horrific (Sarah)
- I frequently had pupils from other classes banging on my door and shouting abuse or running into my lessons and refusing to move…My classroom did not feel to me like a safe place to work (Rachel)
- The team were fractured (Tom)
- I wanted to try to make a difference to young people's lives through education and inspire people and I felt like a lot of that was knocked out of me (Matthew)
- There have been so many arguments and fall-outs between staff and within departments (Ruth)
- It was horrendous. It was horrible. Now I feel relieved to be out of that situation (Katherine)

- If you don't hit those targets…you know your job isn't safe (Amy)
- I never ever want to put my body through that again (Helena)
- They didn't focus on you as a human being at all (Simon)
- There are a few characters there, particularly in management roles who are basically bullies and relish the power they have within the school. There are many members of staff here who feel they have been bullied by their line manager, including me with the previous Head of department (Ruth)
- you would try to protect and shield your staff (Tom)
- People are on edge (Sarah)
- abuse and swearing from pupils, difficult confrontations (Rachel)
- I've always been like that, fighting against injustice (Simon)
- As soon as you walk in the door you don't want to be seen talking to anyone (Amy)
- you'd get teachers that would be there for maybe the first term and just, and were just beaten down by it… just beaten down into long term sick (Matthew)
- many pupils in the classroom had anger and violence issues and would lash out frequently (Rachel)
- If I didn't jump I was going to be pushed… It almost felt tantamount to bullying what I was getting… It was a case of …they're going to find some way of getting rid of me… My face didn't fit…that's the way it felt, my face didn't fit basically (Katherine)
- The constant battle I have reminding them [that I am part time] (Amy)
- I'd thrown my life into it (Matthew)
- I found the cold shoulder feeling of the staff room extremely isolating and difficult to cope with (Rachel)
- Some of the classes it was almost like bullying, I remember one particular class, girls about 15, 16 who were horrible, nasty to me as a teacher and each other (Helena)
- On more than one occasion, I found myself in a confrontational situation with the group and individuals who took some pleasure in goading me and trying to get a reaction…No one dealt with the threats, no one reprimanded pupils who pushed me, or shouted, or stopped me from moving around the school…I had students deliberately blocking my way down corridors. I had students shouting abuse at me and calling me names. I had students face off to me, asking me 'what I was going to do about it?' I had to time my movements around the

> school very carefully indeed. Not knowing who or what situation was going to be waiting for me around the next corridor (Jonathan)

When performing the content analysis, therefore, I was struck by the impact of language choices when participants discussed their schools. As shown, the content of nightmare-ish battles is frequently communicated rather than a place of safety, harmony and education. Clearly, this is in no way presented by a lone voice but is evoked right across the narratives. Not only do the noun choices such as 'shield' , 'parapet', 'bullets', 'target' and 'the firing line', immediately suggest symbols associated with war, but a wide range of stylistic devices are also utilised. These have been separated out and displayed in Figure 5.3. As demonstrated, the stylistic devices create vivid, powerful imagery of a battleground and deliver tremendous aural impact.

Verbs	firing, threw, beats, swearing, shouting, pushing, hit, battle, struggle, slap, fighting, breaks, boiling, jump, thrown, banging, running, knocked, protect, shield, beaten, lash, pushed, goading, waiting (for the person to come and get you)
Adjectives	volatile, difficult, confrontational, aggressive, foul, hostile, horrendous, scary, marked, horrific, fractured, horrible, nasty, threatened, vulnerable, pressurised, constant, worried, scared, exposed
Simile	➢ It was like being on death row
Metaphors	➢ and I said, 'Are we being sent to the showers then?' ➢ Ofsted is a very blunt instrument which is used on us ➢ I used to stick my head above the parapet and I was in the firing line ➢ they'll come gunning for me ➢ It's an embattled field ➢ We were just taking the bullets for our staff ➢ placing a frog in boiling water and it jumps out, compared to putting it in cold, heating it gently and it boils to death ➢ It absolutely breaks me ➢ if I didn't jump I was going to be pushed ➢ this is where I have to battle and struggle ➢ you're just fighting day to day ➢ I'd thrown my life into it
Sibilance	➢ They [SMT] will stop and startle you, you are on the spot and suddenly feel threatened ➢ Sent to the showers ➢ pupils who pushed me, or shouted, or stopped me from moving around the school ➢ it's very easy to find something that somebody hasn't done
Alliteration and repetition	➢ It's more about me having to fight, fight back…fight my corner ➢ It was horrendous…it was quite horrific ➢ My face didn't fit…that's the way it felt, my face didn't fit ➢ It was horrendous. It was horrible ➢ basically bullies ➢ you feel, you don't feel safe almost you know. I don't feel comfortable ➢ you're constantly exposed, constantly being pressured ➢ people were worried, people were scared ➢ hit around the head ➢ there was the threat of redundancies all the way through, the threat of performance-related pay
Personification	➢ the Ofsted framework beats it out of any teacher ➢ the cold shoulder feeling of the staff room

Figure 5.3. Participants' use of stylistic devices

Such language features powerfully create and sustain imagery of the school as battleground. A place of conflict, violence, fear and aggression is depicted where teachers are even described as broken, fractured bones. The sibilance creates a sinister tone and, when combined with the use of alliteration and repetition, it further amplifies and intensifies the aural impact. This adds to the cacophony of gunfire, swearing, shouting, banging and fighting. It paints an unpleasant picture of noise, chaos, confusion and danger. The heightened emotions experienced by participants are also illuminated: feeling continually on edge, vulnerable and fearful as if in a permanent spotlight; feeling perpetually under threat, unsafe, uncertain and 'under fire'. The highly descriptive use of metaphor, simile and personification continue to reinforce the tension, alert all the senses and intensify the mood and atmosphere of the environment. Within this battleground, therefore, it is clear that the teacher is faced with immense pressures and we are compelled to notice that this must challenge mental, physical and spiritual well-being.

5.2 Adversarial and combative relationships

5.2.1 An exception: harmonious pupil-teacher relationships

All but one narrative presented adversarial and combative relationships within schools which were significant to the

teachers' stress experience. Before focusing closely on these, it is important to note that there were examples where collaborative, harmonious and mutually supportive relationships were highlighted. These will be presented first as not only are they important in terms of what they in themselves reveal, but they also serve as an effective point of comparison: to understand why something is not working, it is often helpful to look at something which *is* working. It soon became clear that when positive relationships were spoken about, it was when teachers were talking about their students:

> The thing I love most about my job is my relationship with my students. I feel very proud when they succeed. When I am in the classroom I am at my happiest (Ruth)
>
> I love the actual teaching, the opportunity to interact with pupils and help them…I believe you are treated with the same level of respect that you show pupils (Carly)
>
> Building relationships with the children and helping them overcome what difficulties they may be facing was always a fantastic part of the job…That part of the job has been over taken now… I have a great relationship with my children and most of their parents. I seem to be the teacher that the children come to if they need some reassurance or they come and give me a hug if they are feeling a bit low (Stephanie)
>
> the young people weren't really the issue, they were the pleasure of it (Matthew)
>
> I knew children liked me and parents perceived me as a good teacher and that affirmation was what I wanted… it's nice to feel appreciated (Holly)

I love the relationship you get with the children and I love the fact that they think you are amazing whatever you do, you're their inspiration for that day. I also quite enjoy the fact that probably for most of my children in my school I'm the one secure thing that they can see and guarantee seeing on that day, at that time, and I'm always there and so that's nice to be a part of their life that's quite important to them …I love it when children are excited about what you taught and they come back and they've made things at home off their own back and they've talked about it to their parents and their parents say they can't stop talking about it, it's just, I love inspiring people (Amy)

I love it when students go, 'Oh wow. Oh yeah!' It's that. I had a student this week and I showed her something on [topic]– a video- and she said, she actually said this in front of the class, she said, 'we've been doing this for four weeks and when I started I thought [first opinion]… but my mind has changed completely'. And do you know I said to her if nothing else happens this year, I'm happy because you've done that (Sarah)

I enjoy…the rapport with the children, when you get that rapport with a youngster and I enjoy being with them because with most of the children I teach there's no, what you see is what you get, basically. There's no face as it were, there's no, they'll tell it as it is…I enjoy seeing kids say, 'Oh *yes*, I remember when' things like that (Katherine)

I got on ever so well with the pupils and parents you know, we had good relationships…If there'd been an argument in the playground, the kids came in, it didn't matter what the lesson was, for me we sat everybody down, let's talk it through and the rest of the kids would, I would take the notes you know I would chair the meeting as it were and you'd get the two kids on opposite sides and we'd listen to what everybody said, then we'd got to find a solution…*they* decided, *they* decided what the behaviour was going to be within the classroom and their behaviour round school...one of the things I did with them you know holding hands, what does holding hands mean? You know caring for people, looking after people, helping

> people, all that sort of thing because we used to have a circle and we'd hold hands, everybody in the circle, and we'd talk about things you know within there but we were holding hands. I'd say that's you supporting each other, you're helping each other, that's what holding hands means (Hannah)

These harmonious teacher-student relationships are clearly linked to the love of the actual teaching itself; when teachers are free to simply teach, to focus on what they have trained to do as opposed to administrative, bureaucratic demands. I find the energy, excitement and enthusiasm on this issue simply jumps from the extracts: the passion for teaching and the desire to inspire and be creative is treasured by these particular participants. Positive emotions such as joy, happiness and pride are revealed through the vocabulary choice and they are also reinforced through the use of repetition, for example of 'I love…' and through the developed sentence length and structure evident for instance with Amy, Sarah and Hannah, reflecting an enthusiastic outpouring of emotion. The positive relationships shared with students are also characterised by there being no suspicion or mistrust, no hidden agenda, or as Katherine referred to it: 'no face.' The relationships are associated with feeling supported, feeling secure and feeling a sense of togetherness as opposed to feeling alone. The extracts also clearly demonstrate that these positive relationships are linked to teachers feeling *valued* and *appreciated*; when teachers feel

like they are making a difference and that this is actually being recognised and acknowledged. It is important to note that the validation teachers report here is given by the students and their parents, rather than by school leaders and managers.

5.2.2 Issues relating to leadership and management

In terms of adversarial, embattled relationships, the most common discussed by participants was undoubtedly those concerning school leaders and managers. In fact, they were portrayed as central to the stress experience in all but one narrative. By 'school leaders and managers' I refer to participants' discussions of Principals, Head teachers and members of the senior management team: in other words, those at or near the top of the school hierarchy. Additionally, I include their discussions of Heads of Faculties and Departments. Henceforth, when the term is used, it will be with this meaning. I would like to stress, of course, that I do not have the voices here of those particular school leaders and managers that participants refer to; indeed, these individuals may well have a different understanding and perspective. As Denzin (2010, p10) argues, however, qualitative studies acknowledge that we cannot directly capture the world, 'we only study representations of it'.

When asked if she could identify a major source of her stress, Hannah stated immediately, without any pause or hesitation: 'the Head teacher.' With their vocabulary and tone, many other participants were this specific, blunt and clear about their feelings on the matter:

> It was definitely the senior management…it almost felt tantamount to bullying what I was getting…it was a case of if I don't go now, either I'm going to go off sick or they're going to make me redundant, they're going to find some way of getting rid of me (Katherine)
>
> Some of the school leaders, in my opinion, seem career orientated and self-serving and don't seem to have the skills or nous for the senior leadership positions they are in. Some have caused real problems for other staff too, so for that reason, I am not too respectful of them (Holly)
>
> I taught at a secondary school for two years where I was bullied by the head of department (Jack)
>
> there are a few characters there, particularly in management roles who are basically bullies and relish the power they have within the school. There are many members of staff here who feel they have been bullied by their line manager, including me with the previous Head of department (Ruth)

In these particular examples, we hear real grievances with even issues of bullying and feelings of persecution being communicated, as opposed to simple, low level, general disagreements. The notion of power and staff hierarchy is also set up, where there are clear divisions between teachers and the school leaders and managers: a separation is expressed, a distinction between 'sides' in a battle as opposed to one

cohesive and supportive team. To explore further why this particular relationship is portrayed as negative, turbulent and adversarial, I have centred the many issues around three key themes which emerged: *Crime and punishment*; *Abandonment*; and *Performance not people*.

5.2.2 (i) *Crime and punishment*

Participants frequently expressed the notion that SMT regarded and treated them as if they were criminals, rather than teachers and professionals. I was initially alerted to this with the language choice of Jack and Jonathan. Jack stated that, 'school leaders are hardly seen…they are there to enforce the law'; and when Jonathan described how he had been treated by SMT following a false allegation made by a pupil, he stated: 'I was made to feel like the guilty party.' The following extracts further communicate the theme of crime and punishment with teachers placed in the role of criminal and school leaders and managers positioned in a policing, disciplinarian role:

> We were micro-managed, we had to account for everything, we were micro-managed. 'Why are you doing that? Why have you done that?' and you're thinking, 'Just let me teach! I'm a professional, I know what I'm doing'…I think the senior management were trying to prove their, prove they were the right people for the job. They were trying to assert their authority… a lot of mistrust built up. You were thinking, 'What's your real purpose for this? Why are you really doing this?'…they were trying to prove their wage packet (Katherine)

> We've got to find evidence…of whether they've [the students] ticked those things (Sarah)
>
> You'd gather the evidence and provide it to them [SMT] (Tom)
>
> There was such an expectation of accountability that … [if] that young person was predicted a grade C but for whatever circumstances their final result was a D, I was then answerable to as to why that young person didn't perform for whatever reason and I had to have paper evidence to then present to my department Head, for them to then present to the Head teacher and I just found the whole thing ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous (Matthew)
>
> I don't think we need to be doing reams of planning because who does it benefit because I can do my planning literally in my head, have a few learning goals and hit it running… I have to produce pages of information but it's not for me, it's to prove to somebody I've done it (Amy)

Chiming with Jack and Jonathan's use of 'law' and 'guilty', these participants use repetition of words such as 'prove' and 'evidence' and thus continue to build the crime and punishment motif. This is developed further in the following extracts, with words such as 'justify', 'spot checks' and 'questioned.' These particular participants also indicate their feeling that school leaders and managers are deliberately trying to catch them out:

> we have to discuss with senior management which children have made progress in maths, reading and writing. We have to justify why children have not made progress and we are questioned on what we are doing (Stephanie)
>
> We had sort of spot checks on your marking (Helena)

> you have to look at evidence for everything you do. Can you prove that little Johnny's progressed by two sub-levels or whatever? And you think, he'll never get there! Look at the two levels of progress – he can't write his name, how is he going to make two levels of progress when he can't write his name? It was over the top, there was no understanding (Katherine)

> She [the Head] would come and say, 'right, I want to see your reading records' and I'd say, 'right, choose any one.' It was obvious it was up to date…I got the classroom sorted out and then the Head started coming again at me again wanting to read reading records – she knew everything was okay but this pressure, this constant pressure coming in and saying 'I want'…she said, 'right I'm coming to see you to see your [subject] lesson,' that's fine, that's okay. She said, 'I want notes on it.' I said, 'you've already got my lesson notes,'… 'I want more detail than that, I need to know what's going on in my school' …So she came in and watched it and it was a good lesson…she couldn't find fault, but it's this constant er, pressure of her being there, coming in at odd times [clicks twice]' (Hannah)

Participants clearly highlight the idea that teachers need to continually provide evidence to prove their innocence, or as Katherine described it to me, as having to constantly 'justify my existence'. Tom also explained his discomfort at 'the level of scrutiny' and where the need to collect evidence filtered down further to Heads of department who had a 'file' on their staff members. The extracts also reveal the hurt and resentment felt by participants that their word is not considered good enough – is doubtful even- as if they have something to hide and cannot be trusted. With Helena and Hannah's comments, the element of surprise is also revealed, as if SMT are trying to catch

teachers out on purpose, deliberately setting out to find something they cannot provide evidence for, almost wanting them to slip up. As a result of such suspicion and mistrust permeating their relationships with school leaders and managers, teachers are presented as constantly nervous and on edge:

> [Staff] were very demotivated because they were under the magnifying glass (Tom)
>
> There are observations happening all the time so people are on edge (Sarah)
>
> as soon as you walk in the door you don't want to be seen talking to anyone, you don't want to be seen getting a cup of tea, it's frowned upon. You need to be in your classroom, you need to be working. When the Head does a round you've either, you know, if you're just not looking productive you feel…you don't feel safe almost you know, I don't feel comfortable unless she's seen me marking or busy or, if I'm just flitting around having a chat I would feel very uncomfortable about that, it's just not the same, whereas years ago we used to go in, get a coffee, say hello, have a nice little meeting, trot off to our classrooms, there's none of that anymore (Amy)

As a result, participants demonstrated how such issues can lead to a frightened staff body where teachers fear approaching school leaders and managers, they fear asking for help, or to use Tom's word, they fear becoming 'marked' in some way:

> everybody would hide behind everybody else (Tom)
>
> they're going to find some way of getting rid of me…my face didn't fit basically (Katherine)

> I feel under pressure to pretend that everything is fine, I have everything under control, I can be relied upon to get on with the job, and I'm not one of those staff members the leadership team need to be concerned about and discussing behind closed doors. I have been praised in the past for not having to use the lesson alert system by the Deputy Head – 'I'm not one of those people' which sent out various messages to me and gave me really mixed emotions – happy that SMT thought I was successful but also filled me with fear of ever having to call on their support in the future, and also found it very divisive as if staff were being put into groups and seen as trouble makers if they asked SMT for support. In the end I thought, what a crafty tactic on behalf of the management (Ruth)

> if you don't hit those targets and you don't meet those requirements then you know your job isn't safe (Amy)

> [Staff are] coping quietly and hidden, because people feel like if they admit it, then they'll be ousted really (Sarah)

The lack of professional autonomy felt by teachers and the suspicion and mistrust they felt was being directed at them, was therefore of great significance to participants' relationships with school leaders and managers. Robert clearly and simply stated that what school leaders needed to do was, 'Trust, trust teachers.' Simon also emphasised his belief that this was the crux of the issue and that they should rely upon 'the professionalism of teachers and their expertise.' Katherine, Holly and Amy continued this message:

> Trust your staff because they are professionals. Yes, people might have difficulties or problems but support them, it's to be supportive not negative because the school ends up feeling very negative (Katherine)

> Accept a teacher's word (Holly)
>
> I think they need to give teachers the respect they deserve as professionals who have worked their butt off to get a degree and get where they are and say, 'You know your children, you go and teach what they need. Don't follow a curriculum, don't sit and plan it like this even though you.' If you came in with a plan on the back of a cigarette packet and it worked and at the end of the day your children knew what they had learned that day then that should be allowed. I think far too much has gone into this uniform of how you should plan, how you should be, how you should deliver and putting us all into this little box and I don't think it works (Amy)

5.2.2 (ii) *Abandonment*

The theme of teachers feeling abandoned by their school leaders and managers was also portrayed. Participants frequently presented school leaders and managers as unapproachable or rarely seen; as different, distant, reluctant to engage with their staff and invest time and emotion in building a relationship:

> I'd go over and say 'are there any senior managers free?' I'd say 'I'd really like somebody to go up to [classroom]. I only want 5 minutes. Just have a walk round, see the work that's going on up there, it's excellent… but they'd say, 'oh, yes, I might do but I've got a meeting and'…The Head never got saw, never seen on those things and SMT they'd be seen for 5 minutes during the day … I just don't think that senior managers actually spent enough time out and about, understanding what was happening in the school, understanding how the staff were…they wouldn't, they didn't necessarily talk to the staff so they wouldn't know and they'd never come and have a conversation with you (Tom)

> the old Head, he used to run a mile when he saw me coming. I used to say, 'Can I have a word? Can I speak to you?' and the current Head, I could never find him when I needed him (Katherine)

> You develop a shield of staff around you as a Head, you then get them [SMT] to do your dirty work, have the difficult decisions, you never actually look anybody in the eye who's going to challenge you (Tom)

> there was a public show of 'my door's always open' but I don't think anybody would actually approach it. I just felt that there was a lack of humanity… there was a show of open door policy, and it just being that, a show, a policy really. I don't feel that I could have easily approached a senior member of staff and just talked to them on a personal level and by personal level I mean to have a, I didn't feel like I was on an equal footing as a practitioner [pause] no, I don't know if that makes any sense at all, but it did enhance that feeling of isolation because there wasn't, there didn't seem to be, I don't know, sort of camaraderie or supportiveness (Matthew)

> there wasn't a feeling of cohesiveness with senior management, they were on their own corridor, they were separate, the doors were shut. If you did go in you'd be, you know, one of them would be always saying, 'I'm really busy, I've got this to do, that to do, this to do, that to do and you'd kind of say, 'I'm sorry, I've come to you about a really important issue,' 'Oh well can't you go to'… you don't necessarily trust them (Tom)

> because I'd been teaching for a while, not feeling able to ask for support with classroom management, feeling that it was expected that you would manage some of those more difficult classes and realising that I wasn't managing them very well (Helena)

Participants communicated that they felt unsupported by their school leaders and managers, even betrayed:

> If a parent complained about anything she [the Head teacher] supported the parent's side against the teacher's side (Robert)
>
> I was regularly crying in my classroom alone at lunchtimes and break times and in the staffroom for a long time before I was signed off work and I was not approached about this (Rachel)
>
> you do always come back to this sort of massive pressure as a teacher – what about the kids? What about the kids? Whereas the staff, the senior management it should be what about the staff? What about the staff? …instead of the pressure coming down it should be the care and consideration coming down, that belief that you're part of a team should be coming down and it never did, it never did…I couldn't rely on my senior managers to actually respond to my needs (Tom)
>
> They've got an agenda here. They're going to fail me whatever I do…The thinking that they want me out, it was obvious, obvious … my face didn't fit…my face didn't fit basically (Katherine)
>
> the Head teacher had initiated disciplinary against me because I wasn't in school, right. There was no mention of er part time, no mention of job share, nothing like that, well, my whole world collapsed (Hannah)

Hannah continued to discuss how not only did she leave the school and the profession due to the Head's management style and its effects, but also many other colleagues followed in her footsteps and so the Head 'lost' many excellent practitioners. Stephanie also expressed her frustration, anger and hurt on having scheduled a meeting with the Head to discuss a grievance she had, something that had been of great importance to her, stating: 'I waited for two and a half hours

and she left without seeing me… I was crying each night at home as I felt so let down by my head.' In the end, this was the final straw for Stephanie; the lack of sensitivity and compassion she felt had been shown towards her, the feeling of betrayal and being unsupported, caused her to resign. Tom also expressed these sentiments when he went to the Head teacher and leadership team regarding an issue with a colleague. He said that there 'wasn't an emotional agenda to it' and it was merely a paper work exercise where it became: 'get it written down and then we can cover our backs…they wanted to show that they'd been through a particular process.'

Three narratives did in fact reveal adversarial relationships between teachers and pupils, where pupil behaviour included verbal and / or physical assault of the teacher. Interestingly, however, the focus was not so much on the students' behaviour, but on the lack of support shown by SMT and the teacher feeling simply abandoned. As Simon explained, poor pupil behaviour is 'sort of like the end of a line' and much easier to cope with if teachers have the support of school leaders, although sadly it is frequently missing. Rachel echoed Simon's message after describing various incidents where she was tormented and verbally abused by a particular group of students:

> This was reported to senior members of staff but was not adequately dealt with, pupils were not disciplined, which

> led to me feeling very unsafe in my classroom. I tried to rearrange the room so that I felt more safe - moving things around so that I had more visibility over all parts of the room – but I was undermined by senior members of staff moving the furniture back.

Jonathan also felt completely let down, abandoned and betrayed by his school leadership team, again causing him to leave. A group of boys had shown poor behaviour towards him, goading him and tormenting him, with one particular pupil (John) making a false allegation against him. Although this allegation was proven to be false, and the pupil himself had a history of poor behaviour in school, Jonathan found that he himself was 'made to feel like the guilty party.' Having been signed off for a fortnight by the doctor, Jonathan said: 'for those two weeks I heard absolutely nothing from [school name] and was just in communication with my union. The school cut me off.' He also felt the contrast of treatment deeply, as whilst he felt labelled, marked, ostracised, the 'student who made the allegation was still in school.' Even when the allegation was proven to be false,

> The boys in the group were suspended for a day. John was also suspended for a day. And that was it… And no matter which member of senior staff I talked to about it, no one seemed to care less. No one dealt with the threats, no one reprimanded pupils who pushed me, or shouted, or stopped me from moving around the school.

Jonathan felt that this sent out a clear message to the other pupils within the group so that on his return to school, Jonathan was subjected to verbal and physical assaults:

> To put it bluntly, I was free game. Any student was able to have a go at me as it was easy and the punishment was minimal…I had to time my movements around the school very carefully indeed. Not knowing who or what situation was going to be waiting for me around the next corridor.

On Jonathan's return to school, he was even given the group of boys, including 'John' in a cover class. Jonathan felt this added insult to injury:

> I didn't even walk into the room when I saw it was them. I went to the cover supervisor and informed her I was not able to do it. The school, in my eyes, was on the side of the student. On John's side. This is something I still believe to this day, that the support structure of the school was so weak, that they did not care what was happening and wanted to brush me under the carpet.

Furthermore, Jonathan expressed his disbelief and sadness that John was later selected by a senior member of staff for a teacher training day activity, and even rewarded for taking part. His opinion, Jonathan stated, 'was more important than mine.' This lack of sensitivity and compassion was also significant to Sarah who discussed how redundancies were handled:

> she was making people redundant that morning when no one, nobody knew and the way she did it, well she walked down the corridor and she got them out of the classrooms, and she walked in high heels and you could hear her [taps on desk] clip-clopping down the corridor and stopping at

> a door and it was like, it was like being on death row waiting for the person to come and get you, and she was telling them to clear the desk and leave that day, it was, it was unbelievable… lots of redundancies. So we're being told by management , when we say we can't do anymore, they say you're lucky you've got a job, that's their mantra which is really de-motivating because they're on 150,000 a year and they're going, you think yourself lucky.

Clearly, participants' feelings of being abandoned by school leaders and managers, contributes greatly to the fractious, adversarial nature of the relationship. Rather than a relationship based on policing and evidence, crime and punishment, participants reveal that teachers crave genuine emotional engagement, empathy and support from leaders and managers yet they are perceived to be missing from this relationship equation. In the narratives of Stephanie, Matthew, Jonathan, Simon, Katherine, Robert and Hannah, it became clear that it is the teaching unions who therefore must fulfil this type of role and fill the relationship gap. Jonathan stated, for example:

> I was in daily contact with my union…I heard absolutely nothing from [school name]…The school cut me off and this included my department. I was helped a great deal by my union rep who even called at almost midnight one day to confirm the meaning of a word I had put, just to clarify.

Hannah also described her union rep as, 'a lovely person…she was extremely supportive' and having been so moved by the support she received, Hannah was determined to also help out with the union and 'put back in'.

5.2.2 (iii) *Performance not people*

Participants' narratives revealed how management style was often regarded as dehumanising: shaped by a desire for performance and results, rather than taking time to focus on the teacher as a *person*:

> They [the students] all had to reach two grades higher than they actually were … they [SMT] didn't focus on you as a human being at all (Simon)
>
> there was a lack of humanity…there was a public show of social well-being and a reality of process-driven , over-bearing target culture (Matthew)
>
> they just ignore or normalise 60 plus hour working weeks (Holly)
>
> [It's the] unrealistic demands from management, which I'm sure you've heard many many times. And for me, it's the lack of value, feeling not valued…our line managers say things like, so they'll say 'oh how are you?' and I'll say, 'Oh, a bit tired, I was up til midnight prepping' and they'll go, 'yeah, well that's part of the job.' And actually, it's not part of the job (Sarah)
>
> if you don't hit those targets and you don't meet those requirements then you know your job isn't safe (Amy)
>
> staff were very de-motivated by the fact that there was always a suspicion that the school wanted the results for the school not for the student and the Head wanted the results for the Head because the Head arrived saying, 'I will get this school outstanding' so anything, absolutely anything that needed to be done would be done to get outstanding so there was a cynical ethos, there was a lack of trust you know (Tom)
>
> I was off sick but the reports came through the door for my class. Half of them were the correct format, the other

> half were incorrect and there was a letter from the Head, 'You are required to do these by law' (Hannah)

> there is almost an expectation that it goes with the job, stress goes with the job and actually there are times when there are high levels of stress and I think it's magnified by the fact senior managers don't appreciate that you need to give staff time before or after what is going to be a predictable stressful process. If you've got coursework to be in, preparing students for exams, maybe you've got reports to be written in that time and parents' evening, it's quite easy, you can sit down on the calendar and colour it up in colour pen and go red for this is going to be stressful, they would fill those other times, they were trying to work staff at 110% all the time …they need to develop the soft skills really, put the policies away and return to the roots – we're dealing with people…and yet the kind of whole ethos of the school is quite aggressive… I think there's also a culture now which is you squeeze everything you can out of the staff and if they decide to leave then the golden kind of mantra is, 'they're just not right for this school' and then they get somebody else in who's got 3 years of enthusiasm and drive and then they slowly, and they just continue to squeeze and squeeze and squeeze and then *they* leave (Tom)

Simon also had a very clear and succinct message about how things should change on behalf of school leaders and managers to improve relationships and retain their staff:

> just deal with things in a humane way, you know, just trying to get – particularly management – who are putting silly demands on people, you know, just look at this as a human being is a good way to do things … it's a humane approach. You know, how are you going to get the best out of this person who has done four years of teaching – four years training - and probably several years teaching, how are you going to get them back on line again? Do you really want to lose them? But some managers just don't care (Simon)

The extracts also vividly reveal participants' distress at what they believe to be a lack of empathy, understanding and compassion demonstrated by school leaders and managers. This idea is discussed further by Sarah:

> management I feel they should, it would be ideal if they did teaching as well. Because they don't know. Unless you do it, you don't know… but until you're doing it every day, and you're planning every night and you've got the pressure to do the paperwork when you get in, and answered the emails and dealt with pastoral work, and all of that, you don't know. Unless you do it. And you can't, I feel, you can't then make informed decisions on how to run an institution because you don't have any experience. Even if it's for one morning a week so that they know, they have to manage that, so they know what it feels like when students say, 'it's really crap here, I hate you' and walk out of the classroom- just so they get that. So they understand, understand what it's like to be working til midnight and it be expected.

School leaders and managers were also perceived as reluctant to invest any genuine time, effort and emotion in to building a supportive, collaborative relationship with staff:

> they [SMT] are afraid of the challenge, they are afraid of having a lengthy dialogue (Tom)

> she [the Head] demanded things off us and when I said to her one day, I said, 'Look, you're not happy with the way I'm doing this, why don't you come and show me?'...'Oh no' she says, 'I haven't got time for that' (Hannah)

> I said if my workload continues like this I think I am going to get ill, I said I think I'm probably going to get ill and probably not going to be able to continue to do my job I said and I don't know when that will be I said but I think it's getting pretty close … And the Head's response was,

> 'well what do you want from us?' So I said actually what I want you to do is *listen* to what my work load is and listen to what my priorities are, I'll explain how I'm managing my work load and then I'd like you to possibly suggest some techniques that I could use to get us to the deadline without me being ill. So I explained it and the Head said, 'I don't know what you're asking me'… what prompted me to leave was if that's how they respond to somebody coming in and going look help me, yeah, help me, I'm going to get ill, I want you as the Head, the person who is apparently the wise one in the school to spot where I am going wrong but the Head couldn't… You're listened to when you're saying to somebody what they want to hear but when you're saying something to them that they don't want to hear… if it doesn't suit what they want ... then they tend not to want to listen to you and provide you with it, they tend to give you the, 'that's your job you need to go away and sort it out yourself' (Tom)

It is apparent that the lack of feeling valued and appreciated by leaders and managers is detrimental to relationships being built. With regard to the latter example from Tom, he reflected on the difference he noticed on this issue when moving to the private sector stating it was an 'absolute transformation.' He added that he felt his 'talents' were now respected, that he was encouraged to share his skills and ideas with staff and that he was allowed opportunities to be autonomous and creative.

Participants' lack of feeling valued and appreciated by leaders and managers is in stark contrast to the relationships outlined at the start of the chapter between teachers and pupils. These relationships were portrayed in a positive light; teachers felt

valued and this recognition really boosted their feelings of self-worth and positive feelings towards the profession. Rather than feeling that their efforts and struggles are valued by school leaders and managers, participants thus communicate that it is simply expected, demanded, at all costs and without any concern for the teacher as a human being. Matthew referred to it as, 'a culture of expectation.' Rather than a person, participants express how teachers can be made to feel like a machine in a process, therefore, expected to simply churn out results. According to Tom, for example, leaders and managers do not want 'strong, independent' teachers with their 'own vision,' they want to 'put a straightjacket on you, you know, and try to turn you into a robot.'

5.3 Relationship issues across the staff body

Three of the narratives provided examples suggesting staff solidarity or mutual support:

> I'm currently very happy with the relationships I have (Carly)
>
> We were determined to have 20 minutes in a day where you were not working so we would just sit and, everyone was tired, everyone was pissed off, but supportive, everyone knew what everyone was going through so [pause] yes supportive but unable to do anything to help each other (Helena)
>
> The staff, we all, if anything we all banded together you know, the staff together, because it wasn't just me, it was around the school, people feeling pressurised (Katherine)

As well as the positive aspects, however, the extracts from Helena and Katherine do also continue the theme of the battleground by suggesting divisions, sides, and being 'banded together' against a common enemy. As a whole, the narratives mainly revealed examples of negative relationships and divisions across the staff body:

> I don't like sitting in the staffroom either as it is quite hostile (Ruth)
>
> there are a few who appear cold and reluctant to mingle outside of their own department. Within my department I feel like I can't trust anyone, it is a very young department and everything you say is repeated and gossiped about behind your back (Ruth)
>
> When entering the staff room, I felt the environment could be unwelcoming and there were clear boundaries on who would sit where in the staff room and it was not easy to initiate conversations with other staff members or even to find somewhere to sit to eat your lunch…I found the cold shoulder feeling of the staff room extremely isolating and difficult to cope with…The feeling of having no-one to turn to for a friendly supportive chat or just a general chat about nothing in particular just as a diversion from the stress of the day seemed to exaggerate everything into a larger problem (Rachel)
>
> I think there was departmental divides within the school and there wasn't, no I don't think there was I don't think there was a camaraderie, I don't think there was a cohesiveness amongst, there was certainly departmental divides there were clearly differences between some department Heads which sounds ridiculously petty and I think it probably was actually but it certainly had an effect on you know I wouldn't go into the main staffroom to work or to socialise… I'd feel like there was somebody's seat or somebody's cup almost like cliquey ... I'm ordinarily a reasonably confident sort of a person, I've no qualms

> about approaching situations, getting up in front of people no worries of that whatsoever so, but it didn't feel universally welcome in that environment (Matthew)

However, participants' narratives revealed that the general hostility, divisions and poor relationships felt amongst staff could actually be linked back to leadership style and the demands and expectations coming down from school managers. As Amy stated, for instance, 'the atmosphere of the school is driven by the leadership' and Simon argued that because the pressure and the demands for results are 'fed down', the teacher is the one 'at the end of the line who picks up the tab.' The following extracts continue to explore this theme:

> it's very pressured, it's very adversarial now it's not there's not a team ethos to it. The good old days of you know everybody getting on doesn't occur now because actually there's, somebody's asking difficult questions all the time you know and they're asking them to do sometimes extremely difficult verging on impossible things to do all the time (Tom)

> It's now a business…the networking has gone. It's not as friendly (Sarah)

> it is a school where you are constantly judged and gossiped about, I presume because it is such a competitive environment and because there have been so many arguments and fall-outs between staff and within departments (Ruth)

> I just felt that there just wasn't time to build relationships (Matthew)

> everyone was tired, everyone was pissed off (Helena)

> [As a part-time teacher] I don't think you get the respect from the staff, I think they forget or I think they forget to tell you or they forget to keep you in the loop (Amy)
>
> we are all so busy it is hard to talk or meet during school or outside. We talk through email mostly…Added to the fact that the school has become so big … we are spread across campus …It's very isolating…The only person I see regularly is the cleaner who comes in twice a day. I have four colleagues around me who are all great but we don't have time to meet and eat lunch (Jack)
>
> the staff are tired and they're quite…they just get on with their job, there's no, there's no jolliness about them, we just haven't got the energy, there's so much work to be done. We're very dedicated and we're very hard working but there's no social side, so there's no, everyone, you'll go in the staffroom at lunch time and there's probably one person there, everyone's just working and eating on the job. So, from a staff morale point of view that's definitely changed in the last few years, there just is no staff morale anymore, no team work … I don't take any of my life into school, I don't really have social conversations, it's about the job (Amy)

The narratives reveal, therefore, the significance of leadership and management style to whole school environment and teachers' emotions, behaviour and retention. Participants convey that an emphasis on performance, not people, sets a tone which creates a ripple effect, shaping the nature of the relationships present within the school. In the earlier stages of data collection I was a little surprised as I expected the physical environment to be discussed much more as an issue linked to the stress experience. It soon became clear that the school is not necessarily created by architectural design or aesthetics,

but by the people and relationships within the building itself. As Simon explains: 'I don't think it makes any difference actually with the school building, because you'd sometimes think with an old school building they'd have more stress, new school building they'd be a bit more you know morale and so on, but it doesn't work out at all'.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has completed the first of three stages, using the metaphor of the battleground and focusing on relationships within the school context. This chapter has shown that:

- The language and diction used by participants is frequently associated with war and conflict.
- Participants link leadership and management style to the whole school environment and the nature of the relationships that can be found within the school.
- A dehumanising management style which focuses on performance, not people, can lead to a divisive, competitive and adversarial environment. This is highlighted further by the many cases participants describe of conflicts, arguments, staff bullying and feelings of loneliness and isolation.
- Participants want empathy, compassion and support from their school leaders and managers yet often feel abandoned

and betrayed; teaching unions are often a lifeline of support here instead.

- Positive, collaborative relationships can suffer due to a lack of time and priority dedicated to developing and sustaining them.
- A management style based on policing and evidence, crime and punishment, is presented. It is shown to foster suspicion and mistrust and to be harmful to building mutually rewarding and supportive relationships.
- Teachers love to teach and want to do a good job. Feeling valued and appreciated is linked to boosting teachers' self - worth and positive emotions about the profession. Participants reveal that this recognition is generally given by the students rather than by school leaders and managers. This may explain, therefore, why teacher-student relationships are presented by participants in a predominantly positive light.

I now turn to the second of the three chapters exploring the Battleground and the teachers' stress experience: The Impossible Job.

Chapter 6 The Account of the Data

The Battleground (Part Two): The Impossible Job

6.0 Introduction

In this chapter I continue to explore the battleground by focusing on 'The Impossible Job'. This title not only echoes many participants' own vocabulary choice, but also reflects their descriptions of an insurmountable and continually expanding workload and their view of many targets and expectations as unachievable. Some participants also referred to an impossible *situation* regarding their moral position and the choices they were often forced to make. I have centred the many issues which emerged under three main thematic headings: A system of negativity; A philosophy clash; A waterfall of pressure, pressure, pressure: the endless workload. The narratives highlight participants feeling completely overwhelmed by relentless demands: no matter how hard they try, they feel they just cannot keep up and they find themselves locked in a battle they can simply never win. The participants featuring in the different sections of this chapter are presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Participants featuring in the different sections of Chapter 6

	Rachel	Robert	Hannah	Simon	Katherine	Stephanie	Sarah	Jack	Jonathan	Amy	Tom	Holly	Matthew	Helena	Ruth	Carly
6.1 A system of negativity	•		•	•	•	•					•	•		•		
6.2 A philosophy clash	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	
6.3 A waterfall of pressure, pressure, pressure: the endless workload	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•

6.1 A system of negativity

Participants wanted to be professional and accountable. They did not object to the monitoring of staff performance and in fact saw it as a necessary process, as demonstrated by this excerpt from Helena:

> I understand absolutely that they have to do it…if it was my child and there was a weak or poor teacher I'd want senior management in there finding out how they could support that teacher, so they have to be in and assessing. I don't really agree with Ofsted but there needs to be some sort of assessment of whether learning is taking place, whether the students are moving on.

What many participants did object to, however, was *how* it was administered and how they were treated. Although with this research I do not propose 'universal truths' or sweeping generalisations (see Chapters 1, 2, and 4), this particular theme was undeniably common and prominent in eight of the narratives. Whether through lesson observations, performance management or other means of monitoring staff, the eight narratives described a system that was perpetually skewed to the negative. Working in the NHS around issues of mental well-being, Simon's role meant that he spoke to teachers from across the school hierarchy, both those with and without management responsibilities. As a result of this umbrella view and his access to such a wide range of experiences, he explained how lesson observations were frequently conducted in a fault-finding manner, describing this as a 'demon' for teachers. Holly's

narrative also highlighted this particular issue, as well as signalling the psychological impact that it had on her:

> Constant nit picking negative feedback took its toll. I never used to be bothered by lesson observations, but again the experience of these really knocked my confidence and I felt, initially, quite truculent about these. I am a reflective person and professional, but I just felt that there was no right to reply or point in saying anything, as the Head was very much, "This is the way I see it, this is what I want" and I felt increasingly bewildered and seriously doubted if I had the most basic teaching ability left! The amount of observations was difficult, both the planned and the insidious 'pop in' ones. There just seemed to be no message, on any level, that I was doing a good job in any area. It was demoralising to constantly hear, "improve on this, improve on this." I can cope with the responsibility of wanting to improve professionally, but psychologically need to hear some positives…I reflected on the fact that in any other job I had done in my life, I have had a varied career path, the longer I had done the job, the more confident I felt. However, the exact opposite was happening… I kept feeling I just didn't 'get it' as my feedback on lesson observations and planning became demoralising… She [the Head] doesn't make me feel confident in myself and my abilities.

Here, Holly suggests a lack of balance in the feedback her line manager, the new Head teacher, was giving her. She displays her frustration that the Head's desire to improve standards in the school led to a single focus on what was *wrong*, with no regard for her as a qualified professional with a wealth of skills and abilities. Holly emphasises that she wants to be a reflective practitioner and develop professionally, yet this experience was counter-productive in that the style and delivery eroded her confidence and left her feeling angry, confused and bewildered.

The phrase 'nit-picking' also suggests Holly believed the comments lacked real substance and benefit, perhaps merely fulfilling a one-way paper work and box-ticking exercise as opposed to a genuine, professional dialogue. I found many of these issues were also conveyed by Katherine:

> Okay, if I'm doing something wrong tell me, that's fine, I'm quite happy to go rectify it. I haven't got an issue with that and that's what observations are about. 'This was good practice but perhaps you need to work on,' that's fine, but it was that the observations were very negative rather than positive. It was a very negative process … They were looking for faults rather than looking for praise… They kept changing the goal posts.

Katherine's phrase, 'they kept changing the goal posts', also highlights that she felt that she could not win no matter what she did; that there were targets for targets' sake. Tom also revealed feeling under pressure to achieve seemingly unattainable standards and targets. He discussed his own views and experience of the appraisal system from the perspective of a Head of department:

> you're expected to pull rabbits out of hats but actually you're not given resources or information or influence … it's very easy to find something that somebody hasn't done you know, especially if you're asking them to do an impossible job.

Stephanie was adamant that lesson observations needed to be a 'far less judgemental' process. She described a particular example which was a major component of her stress experience. Stephanie felt she had been given an inaccurate

and unfair grading for a lesson observation by the Head teacher and her line manager agreed: 'She told me that lesson should never have been graded inadequate and she was 'working on' the Head teacher.' However, her line manager did not in fact defend Stephanie to the Head or try to get the grading changed. When Stephanie arranged a meeting with the Head to discuss it herself, she stated, 'I waited for two and a half hours and she left without seeing me'. Stephanie felt this was disrespectful and demonstrated how she was simply disregarded. This added to her feelings of frustration, anger, injustice and betrayal. Furthermore, the targets Stephanie had been set led to more feelings of confusion and helplessness. They were points she felt she had absolutely no power over since they related to management issues completely out of her control. Like Holly who, as previously stated, felt there was 'no right to reply,' Stephanie felt she just could not win either. Consequently, she lost faith and trust in her relationships with line managers and also with the system itself, feeling she had no other option but to leave:

> I burst into tears for the first time ever at work. It was at this point I decided to leave…I was livid…I was crying each night at home as I felt so let down... I felt really run down, stressed out and just exhausted … I found that I was not the only one who felt utterly stressed out and like I could never be able to meet the expectations… Head teachers could try to teach a lesson to 'outstanding' criteria that Ofsted have created as I am certain hardly any of them could.

I was therefore made acutely aware that for Stephanie, just like Holly and Katherine, it was not a case of objecting to professional development and target-setting, but to the nature of those targets, the manner in which they were delivered and how this had made her feel. Stephanie found the system to be negative, that the system had made a mistake, yet she had no voice and no power to challenge judgements or enter into a professional dialogue. Hannah explained how she also felt that nothing she ever did was good enough; that the expected ideal would always remain elusive and impossible for her to achieve:

> she [the Head] looked at the lesson notes – because we had to hand in at the beginning of every week your lesson plans, right, she came back to me and she said, 'that's no good.' I said, 'why, what do you mean?'… the Head was not [sighs] was not necessarily an easy person in that she demanded things off us and when I said to her one day, I said, 'Look, you're not happy with the way I'm doing this, why don't you come and show me?'...'Oh no,' she says, 'I haven't got time for that'.

Like Stephanie, Hannah also communicates the sentiment here that senior figures place enormous pressure on teachers to achieve particular standards or lesson observation labels that perhaps they themselves could not even achieve. This was also communicated by Katherine along with the theme, again, of feeling inaccurately judged yet having no power to challenge this:

> I was observed and I expected to be observed as I was the only [name of subject] teacher…and the *one* thing they failed me on was my subject knowledge, and I didn't say anything at the time but I checked with other people

> and the observer who observed me. [Name of subject] wasn't her subject knowledge so I thought, 'How on earth can she fail me on my subject knowledge when she's not a,' do you know what I mean? So that, I think, it was the last straw for me. I thought, 'Don't you dare talk me to about.' If it was behaviour or strategies, if it was anything else I can take it but not that, that was the last straw. That made me think, 'You want me out,' and it felt like, 'Yes. You're picking on me now to say something like that, that's not right,' because she said everything else was good and consequently because of that I failed. I failed my observation and I thought, 'No, that's wrong.' That turned my [pause] that has always stuck in my mind… it just felt personal.

Here, the crushing weight of labels and judgements as felt by participants is revealed: the repetition of words such as 'fail', 'failed' and 'failure' signifying the psychological impact. As Hannah explained: 'you're told that you're a failure you know or it's implied that you're a failure.' Such themes were also prominent in Rachel's story:

> I was extremely run down and exhausted, and observed with a class with whom I had reported behaviour problems. The feedback I had on the observation was wholly critical and negative and after this one observation, I was told immediately that this would mean I failed the term, whereas my understanding was that the termly decision was made on the basis of two observations and an overall view of performance including a review of data, student assessment results, etcetera, however none of this was considered and I was taken to the Head teacher's office and told that I would fail. This was the day before half term, so I did not have a rest or a break over half term due to the stress of this and this contributed to me not being able to get well from repeated bouts of illness… Confusing expectations and guidelines related to my performance meant that I never felt as though my performance was adequate, no matter how much work I put in, or how many times I tried to amend or improve my practice, or how many reflective discussions I had about my performance, because my observation feedback was so confusing…[it was] the first time that I had ever

> 'failed'...Feedback on my performance during my induction period was never constructive and supportive from the senior leaders who assessed me. I did not have any observation feedback that focused on any positives about what I had done, all of the feedback that I received was negative, or focused on what I was not doing, or what I was doing wrong or needed to improve. I was given confusing or conflicting feedback from different people, and I was criticised for using exactly the same techniques and activities that my mentor used and given poor feedback on these. Throughout my PGCE, all of my observations had been very good and I had always received positive feedback, and one of the strengths that all of my tutors, mentors and colleagues on my PGCE through my placements and at University had mentioned was my reflective nature and ability to act constructively on feedback and on constructive criticism. During my induction year, I was left confused, highly stressed and pressured by consistent negative feedback but it was also feedback in which I could not identify any specific areas for development because they changed constantly. This left me feeling that nothing I could do was right and left me constantly stressed and anxious about my performance...once it became evident that I was becoming ill, I was managed out of the job… going in to school every day felt like an uphill struggle…as though achievement in this field was still out of reach, if not impossible for me, and feeling ultimately stupid in the classroom.

Rachel's words mirror those of Holly, outlined at the start of the chapter, where she too felt this sense of being utterly bewildered, disoriented and demoralised. The belief that there is a sole focus on the negatives is again emphasised, along with how this is damaging Rachel's desire and usual ability to reflect on feedback and develop professionally. As was the case with Katherine, Rachel also stresses how the goal posts, or expectations, just kept changing making it virtually impossible for her to defend herself against the judgement and label of

'failure'. Simon continued with this theme, showing how he believed it was systemic, or as he described it, linked to 'government-induced bullying' where impossible demands are filtered down to the teachers:

> Ofsted comes up and says you're failing one minute and then it says you're failing for something different the next. And constantly, all the time there's this change of goal posts…And of course Heads then pass it down…[Then] Ofsted comes along and says you're not failing enough people so it puts people into capabilities, you know, and just puts them on monitoring programmes and that's always a tricky one because generally once someone is on a monitoring programme that is it. It takes a long time you know, you go through various seemingly civilised reviews and all that sort of thing but the morale, the morale aspect of it is lost and that sort of cuts teachers from inside … and there are some outrageous things now where people are put into capabilities because the exam results aren't good enough… even though their lessons are outstanding, good to outstanding. Now, that sense of failure is an aspect of teacher stress you know, you can't do right for doing wrong.

Here, Simon clearly highlights his thoughts that the notion of failure has become ingrained in the system. He also explained how teachers feel they simply cannot win due to:

> impossible demands, doing demeaning tasks – that's one of the things, you have to do this and you have to do it by Tuesday next week, you have to fill in all these data and that data and do that and compare it to other data and that sort of thing- and at the end, at the end of the day, you *still* fail – that sort of thing. It's a sort of a classic sort of bullying symptom you know and it's very difficult to cope with.

Simon demonstrated this further by referring to one particular patient, a well-respected Head of Faculty, who was given:

> a thirty page document to read over the weekend to show how he was failing in his department, his faculty, every aspect, failing as a teacher, and his second in command was also failing, and he was told to come in on Monday and talk about it. But he found it hit him so hard that he couldn't go back into the building.

This example conveys the heightened levels of criticism felt by many participants. Continuing this theme, Hannah used a powerful analogy when expressing her unease with what she regarded as a negative system of labelling and shaming: 'They just come in, they criticise and walk out. You can't do that. It's like taking armbands away from a kid.'

To summarise this section of the chapter, the examples from eight narratives describe a system of staff performance monitoring which is permanently skewed to the negative. These participants display their own belief that, in an effort to improve results and strive to 'outstanding' labels, schools can resort to a fault finding mission where teachers' professionalism, skills and strengths are overlooked. Furthermore, feeling voiceless and powerless within this system was also emphasised: not only do they feel unable to challenge judgements on their performance, but they also feel line managers offer targets and a paperwork exercise, rather than offering a professional and meaningful dialogue. The value of the feedback within this negative system they presented was also questioned with many targets described as confusing, contradictory, unachievable, or

'nit-picking'. These participants demonstrated the psychological impact this had on them: negativity led to more negativity, eroding their confidence and making them feel they could simply never win.

6.2 A philosophy clash

Building on numerous issues raised in the previous section, many narratives built up a picture of a philosophy clash in terms of participants' own vision and understanding of what education should be, jarring and battling with what they believed the current education system demands and how it assesses it. For these participants, their experiences with the system's labels and judgements served to trigger cynical feelings, mistrust and suspicion, even mockery, as displayed by Ruth: 'The school is meant to be 'outstanding' and we are therefore meant to be lucky and grateful to be part of this amazing place.' The very meaning and value of the labels underpinning the system are being questioned, therefore. Helena also conveyed these sentiments to me. Despite receiving a successful Ofsted observation, judgement and feedback, she took no joy from this and explained that 'it meant nothing' and could never make up for the stress it had caused:

> There was classes, if they'd have come in I would have failed I know because the behaviour was poor, as it

> happens they came in to one year 11 class which were a brilliant class … I knew it was a fluke, absolute fluke that they came into *that* lesson at *that* time… I just felt utterly drained and like I didn't want to play that game anymore… I just felt lucky, didn't mean anything, 'good' didn't mean anything, it meant nothing…The pressure was ab-*enormous* [participant's emphasis]. I never ever want to put my body through that again, I would never do a job that asked that of me. I was physically, physically sick when I went into work… Ofsted is a very blunt instrument which is used on us, two days, no notice, to see one lesson and say you are a good teacher…it's preposterous really isn't it?

Tom also expressed similar scepticism about the value and meaning of such labels, displaying his grave doubts about their lack of a positive contribution to any meaningful education:

> I think it's a farce. I think the judge of an outstanding school is the students and the parents to be honest. It's not about 5 A to Cs… and it's not about your value added, it's so easy to fiddle, it's so easy to fiddle…I worked at a school in [place name] and … the Head went 'right everybody's doing a BTEC, everybody's doing a BTEC, you've got no choice'. The results doubled the next year, the school went from satisfactory to outstanding! The kids were the same, the staff strategies were the same, the policies were the same, everything was the same…I do know of other schools that pull strokes with special needs students. They will assess a whole year group, trying to find students that they can get extra time or readers and writers for and boost their grades so when obviously friends you know they're looking at schools for their kids 'oh it's an outstanding school.' I say don't believe that, have a walk round absorb the atmosphere and if you think the atmosphere suits then that's an outstanding school or it's not … But an outstanding school can only become outstanding with outstanding results and that's why the game play occurs … outstanding, it's no indicator at all about the quality of a school.

In the above examples, both Tom and Helena highlight the concept of game – playing, something which Jack also referred

to in his narrative, stating that schools are 'forced' to play them if they want to survive. When exploring this issue in the narratives, I was struck by the resonance with Ball's (2003, p215) arguments outlined in the literature review, that:

> performativity produces opacity rather than transparency as individuals and organizations take ever greater care in the construction and maintenance of fabrications.

Initially using an example from his own teaching career, Simon also discussed the lengths he believed schools feel compelled to go to in order to boost or manipulate results:

> My school actually had the brilliant idea of putting all these children, including the ones who find learning difficult, all into one room, I think there were eleven of them in one group… I had one girl, one of the ones who found it difficult to learn, she said, 'Why have I been put in with all these naughty people?' And I thought, 'Yes. Why?' But you know that sort of thing, that sort of thing, was an idea of getting results up, by putting all the 'problem kids' into one group, it's blatantly unfair, again it's losing the point of teaching. Another aspect as well you see, they concentrate on, they concentrated one time on grade Ds at GCSE you know, 'Can you get them up? Can you get them up?' Well, that's not what it's all about, that's just for the school … it sort of makes you lose sight of what teaching is all about… Some of the worst ones [schools] are these high flying ones you know where the Head is determined to become an outstanding school, the Head's on a mission to become a Lord or a Lady something or other and becoming like a Head of Ofsted.

Tom continued this theme, arguing that there is in fact a different story beneath the numbers and labels:

> it's all a number crunching game and it's staying ahead of government policy so actually you can spot how the stats are being generated and the league tables are being generated, if you can stay ahead of their, them closing

> the loop holes you will always be an outstanding school. If you're slightly lethargic and you're not forward thinking then you're a satisfactory or a good school and that was kind of happening, a lot of things were happening in the school which was knee jerk reaction, 'we spied a loop hole, we need these kids, these kids and these kids'.

Tom emphasised this meant you could no longer 'believe that an outstanding school provides outstanding education', only that it produced outstanding results. He discussed the detrimental effect that such questionable labels and number-crunching activities had on teachers, stating that it was linked to, or 'wound up' with their stress. Here, Tom explained to me the negative impact on teachers' motivation, morale and faith in the system:

> if you believe in something you tend not to have negative thoughts you tend to drive at what's going on in front of you, you tend to actually carry it through, but if actually you don't believe in what's happening it's quite difficult to sustain the level of effort that you need to hit that gold standard… the staff didn't know what the school were about … they were very cynical because something would come along and they would think 'oh you're only doing that because you want to get this result or that result'…staff were very de-motivated by the fact that there was always a suspicion that the school wanted the results for the school not for the student and the Head wanted the results for the Head because the Head arrived saying, 'I will get this school outstanding' so anything, absolutely anything that needed to be done would be done to get outstanding so there was a cynical ethos, there was a lack of trust

Tom clearly presents his discomfort with the philosophy underpinning the education system. He portrays it as dehumanising, and about abstract numbers rather than real

students with real needs, particularly with the phrase: 'we spied a loop hole, we need these kids, these kids and these kids'. I was aware here that the dehumanising approach participants felt was used by school leaders and managers towards *them* (see Chapter 5.2.2 iii), was thus being passed further down the school hierarchy. This particular issue, of a dehumanising approach, was of such importance to Matthew that it contributed to him leaving the profession altogether as he was no longer prepared to compromise his beliefs:

> it left such a bitter taste that I just, I resigned…the people element, the person element had really, had really gone from it…I wanted to try to make a difference to young people's lives through education and inspire people and I felt like a lot of that was knocked out of me…I was more interested in the welfare of young people and I didn't see that the system of education as it was, was in any way beneficial to those young people. I don't feel like it prepared them for post–16 life, decision–making, autonomy, *rea*l education…The Head teacher was very driven in increasing the performance and status of the school…he wanted to strive to outstanding, that was his vision…and I think that filtered down into really process and performance led practice as opposed to being an educator and I think that culture of expectation and his personal aspirations had a detrimental effect on education for those young people and for myself and I think the whole culture of the school, I don't think that's unique to that particular school

Matthew therefore found that the reality of teaching within the system did not sit happily with his own beliefs, hopes and values. Robert also shared such frustrations and again alluded to dehumanising aspects:

> They're treating kids like laboratory rats, you know, there is a row of children , you do this this this this this and this to all these children and you test them. Oh, there's the good ones who happen to come from an advantaged background and there's the 'rubbish' ones who happen to come from a socially disadvantaged area…And it's all pressure pressure pressure and nothing to do with the needs of children, everything to do with the needs of business and commerce and profit.

This sentiment was echoed by Sarah who, when asked to sum up her school in three words chose: 'money, business, achievement.' Hannah also voiced her criticism of the system in this manner, stressing: 'you *can't* make a profit out of people.' Simon also stated his view that we have:

> lost the soul of education and it's going down to a sort of factory type thing, tick boxing, impossible demands, doing demeaning tasks…Dehumanizing. Tick box. That's what everybody calls it. Tick box. Yes. Have you got enough A*s?

Robert was able to offer his own perspective as a former Head teacher when faced with Ofsted. He stated that all the 'lovely work' they were doing in school with the children was side-lined, it 'wasn't recognised at all', and his school was placed into special measures:

> I knew from the arbitrary levels they say children should be at by the age of whatever, I knew that our children were below that level because of all the sorts of socio and economic difficulties that those families were going through… If I could take out the bad bits and you read it [Ofsted's report] you'd think this is the best school in the world. They couldn't fault us for behaviour, for respect for the children, for safety, for work with the community and the parents – glowing, glowing, glowing. My school had the best parental satisfaction response of all the schools.

> I was doing a good job in the way that I thought those, well and as the parents obviously thought, those children needed doing.

Robert faced a particular personal and professional battle. He did not believe in the concepts of normativity and performativity he felt were being operationalised by Ofsted and he refused to pass it down to his staff and pupils: 'I would not do a thing that Ofsted wanted…I totally ignored them. SATs? Went straight in the bin. I never even opened it.' However, the negative view of his school offered by Ofsted's labels and judgment, and being placed in special measures, left Robert feeling utterly devastated:

> Well, I just collapsed… I held it together until the Oftsed had said what they'd got to say and the moment they walked out the room I just collapsed in tears…in front of the governors … they said you've got to do what they say or you will be sacked...I said I'm not going to do what they say, I never have done and I never will. I'm here for the needs of the children not for that so I offered my resignation.

Robert compared his own response to the actions of another Head teacher; one he was highly critical of due to the stress he believed she had caused his friend, leading to his friend's breakdown and having to leave the profession:

> she was one of those Head teachers who came in and very very happily did exactly what they were being told to do through the government, through the local authority, through the inspectors…through Ofsted and she did it without any concern whatsoever about the needs of the children…that's what she was being told by Ofsted and the

> inspectors, 'this is what you've got to do' and she did it whereas somebody maybe like myself, didn't.

Robert's actions as a Head teacher, of refusing to 'pass it down' and resigning due to his principles, were a rare occurrence and stood out in the narratives. Most school leaders and managers either spoken to in this study, or referred to by participants, suggested they felt they had no choice but to compromise their beliefs and values in the interest of protecting their job security. Tom, for instance, described an example from his school:

> There was a culture that the managers below, the Assistant and the Deputy Heads, fell into basically two camps: there were those who openly knew what was going on was wrong but were being shall we say controlled and imposed on by the Head and then there were those others who were playing the yes game which probably secretly below the surface didn't actually, didn't actually believe in what was happening or didn't actually feel it was right but actually for their own self-preservation and their own position just went through the, went through with it, you know … one Head of Department just went, 'I'm not doing it, not doing it,' so they took him down the appraisal system until he would do it.

Furthermore, as a Head of department himself, Tom expressed guilt that a member of his own staff was signed off with stress, explaining that 'pressure from the top' means you have no option but to 'hold those below you accountable'.

With regard to these issues, Simon viewed the Head teacher's role in the process as critical:

> Ofsted is a particular source of stress… of course the Heads then pass it down, they don't always react in the same sort of way. I always think that Heads ought to, you know … get some delineation in your own mind so you have the tasks that are really important and the tasks that

> aren't important and don't get them all merged together, because otherwise you're going to lose the ethos of your school and lose the morale of staff.

These examples, by constantly alluding to the notion of 'passing it down', conjured up an image of a waterfall for me: unless stopped near the top, the relentless weight of expectations and demands is continually crashing with full force on to those below. This metaphor will be explored again in the next section of this chapter.

Participants made it clear that a much more rounded, nurturing and 'genuine' education was favoured; one where the personal, the human element has precedence and one where teachers have creativity and ownership of the curriculum and its delivery. Mirroring Matthew's words earlier in this section, Amy passionately explained that teaching should be 'about educating the future generation and inspiring them in their lives and creating well-rounded individuals and giving them skills to go out into the world.' She continued:

> I think far too much emphasis is put on delivering targets and how planning should be delivered, what your classroom should look like, what language you should use bla bla and making a uniform education… Well actually, our school is not the same as every other school, our children's needs are nothing like the school half a mile down the road and I think they need to give teachers the respect they deserve as professionals who have worked their butt off to get a degree and get where they are and say, 'You know your children, you go and teach what they

> need'… I think teachers know their children better than anybody. They should be the ones designing their planning and their assessment for learning and they should be the ones delivering it how they like to deliver it and what would work for the children.

Here, Amy insists on respect for teachers and trust and faith in their skills and professionalism. She also highlights a call for teacher creativity, flexibility and ownership of the curriculum. During Simon's teaching career, he said he tried to focus on these creative aspects in order to survive the stressors, 'but then it finally got too much' and he left the profession. This message was continually repeated:

> When we started our teaching careers it was a lovely, wonderful, exciting job. We started in the sixties which of course was a load of rubbish according to the Michael Gove's of this world, this sort of education that we were doing with children but it *was*, the curriculum was ours. Wherever we were, whichever school we were in, a well - heeled area or a socially disadvantaged area you knew what those children required and you provided the curriculum for them. We didn't need to be told that they needed Maths and spelling and reading and writing, everybody needs that, we don't need to be instructed to do that (Robert)
>
> The creative element has been cut out (Simon)
>
> My philosophy is and always has been, if a kid walks through the door with a carrier bag and says, 'look Mrs [name] what I've got,' seeing there what that kid's brought, your lessons for that day at least go out the window and you, that child, whatever, and you think on your feet and away you go, you know what I mean? That's the way I've worked. I think now, all this sort of…creativity, all the imagination, all the spontaneity seems to have gone… she (the Head) didn't like me sort of coming from the playground and saying, 'right, next ten minutes we're going to be talking about this situation that's arisen'. It was timetabled in like 3 o'clock on a Friday afternoon. I said you can't do that, you have to

> deal with it there and then if it means taking it out of Maths or the Language, that doesn't matter because the children could see that you're dealing with it (Hannah)
>
> Instead of thinking, okay, I want to embrace this moment so we're just going to drop everything and we're going to take what this child said and we're going to go out and prove whatever it was they said or asked about – a soil or an animal or a – you know, something, which you would have done years ago, you'd have gone 'Stop! Let's all go outside and find out about'…there's no room to be inspirational or be off the wall or just go with it, it makes teaching so boring and so restrictive but if you don't hit those targets and you don't meet those requirements then you know your job isn't safe (Amy)
>
> there needs to be room for teachers to inspire, to be able to take a class off course, to be able to be reflexive to what's happening in that class at that moment… I don't think the culture of Ofsted and the cloaked spectre that seems to be over schools and I don't think the national curriculum framework allows teachers creativity, that spontaneity, that spark, I don't think there's room…I think the culture that I experienced stamped out any of that (Matthew)
>
> There seemed less of an opportunity to be led by the children's interests and tangents that arise in teaching and more of a need to 'get through the planned work' (Holly)

These participants therefore reveal their frustration that teacher creativity, in their experience, clashes with the demands of the current education system and is stifled. The philosophy clash communicated by participants, along with the feeling they must compromise their values or leave, seemed yet more sad and unfortunate when considering how many had started their careers with such enthusiasm and hope, seeing teaching as their calling:

> I had always wanted to teach (Holly)
>
> I came to it [teaching] after having kids and I think everyone else said, who knows me said, 'What took you so long?' You know, I think they saw it before I did, possibly, that I was a teacher (Katherine)
>
> I think I knew, probably, that teaching was my thing (Sarah)
>
> From being a little girl I wanted to be a teacher. I always wanted to work with children and throughout my school and college I did all my work experience placements in schools…Teaching was always where I was going to end up. I was so excited to get onto the teacher training course (Stephanie)
>
> I'd gone into it with such high hopes, I'd thrown my life into it, I'd given up my business to do it…I wanted to try to make a difference to young people's lives through education and inspire people and I felt like a lot of that was knocked out of me (Matthew)
>
> It's [teaching] something I'd always thought about doing…I went and did some experience and felt it was much more my calling, much more of a beneficial role in the fact that you are actually providing the future with some skill sets rather than just sitting in an office banging out a load of information (Amy)
>
> I believe education can transform lives and give you opportunities … even more than the subject knowledge you're passing on you're teaching them how to learn which is very important and again, you are a role model, the way you conduct yourself …it is an immensely important job…People don't go into teaching because they want to earn money (Helena)
>
> I would not be fulfilled professionally if I did not teach in some capacity (Rachel)

As well as their initial enthusiasm and excitement, a real sense of pride in their occupation is also communicated: participants reveal their desire to nurture, to care and to make a real, positive difference to their students' lives.

6.3 A waterfall of pressure, pressure, pressure: the endless workload

I introduced the metaphor of the waterfall in the previous section: it again becomes strengthened by participants' descriptions of workload demands as being endlessly passed down the school hierarchy and on to them. The imagery of the downward flow, the unrelenting force and direction of the 'water' was impressed upon me:

> it's fed down, it's government induced bullying basically…particularly with things like Oftsed, structural changes, all sorts of impossible things to do, curriculum changes, everything, it's an embattled field. What's happened is it goes down the line, it goes down to our local authorities and Heads and to Academies and everything else and is fed all the way down and so the teacher at the end of the line is the one who picks up the tab (Simon)
>
> something had come down from senior management…you have a development plan which feeds down to a department development plan (Tom)
>
> I felt that SLT should be undertaking specific tasks that had been delegated to frontline staff (Holly)
>
> it's from top down rather than from bottom up…however, you're the one that's got to deliver it all (Sarah)
>
> attitude tends to filter down from the top so it would be the case that the stress I felt would be coming from senior management level (Matthew)
>
> instead of the pressure coming down it should be the care and the consideration coming down, that belief that you're part of a team should be coming down and it never did, never did (Tom)

In the previous section, Robert explained how refusing to 'pass it down' as a Head teacher, refusing to let the waterfall crash on those below, meant having to resign. Here, in an extract from Katherine's narrative, she conveys that Heads of

departments can also find themselves in a complex, almost impossible situation due to their position along the waterfall:

> my Head of Department … he said he wished he was able to support me better than he did because I'm not blaming him at all. The problem was he wasn't supported himself in order to support me, does that make sense? So I could see that the support structures for them weren't in place to support other people

Tom, who left his school due to stress, also revealed the guilt he had felt as a Head of department having to pass it down to others, especially regarding one particular staff member who was then signed off with stress:

> this staff member…they obviously were fairly stressed which actually you know, you feel really bad that somebody else had been put in that position that they're stressed but actually it's imposed on you because if you don't try to raise the standards of your staff, you are then personally threatened, not it's not somebody comes up and threatens you but you know the system is designed around accountability so if your department results aren't good enough or when they're asking for various aspects of work, schemes of work, reviews, work sampling to come in, student voices, analysis of results, if there are any low points the initial point is, 'where's your action plan? What are you going to do about it?' So you actually have to hold those below you accountable so it's pressure from the top and it's pass it down you know because if you don't pass it down you're accountable, you know, 'sort the problem out'. So you know I've always felt very bad about that (Tom)

To a certain extent, Helena displayed a level of sympathy with school leaders and managers, viewing them as also trapped in this system with little choice but to pass down continuous hefty workload requests. Even though she 'just didn't feel it was achievable what was being asked,' she was aware that they also

had constraints and thus could not say: 'don't mark the class work…don't prepare Ofsted lessons, stick a couple of research lessons in.'

As revealed in Chapter 5.2.2, participants made it clear that they believed work demands were often completely unrealistic, and for some, laughable, in terms of the results they were expected to churn out from the students. The following examples reveal how the majority of participants believe the sheer *volume* of tasks is also unrealistic and impossible: there simply is not enough time to complete everything expected of them and so the job becomes, to use Matthew's words, 'life consuming':

> [The] main pressure is overwork: not having enough time to cover everything and through working long hours, sixty hour weeks, just being constantly knackered (Holly)
>
> I was regularly working 13 hour days, 8am to 9pm, but then would always have the laptop open on my lap browsing work-related things in the evenings when I was watching television until 10 to 11pm at night … which meant I was usually doing some form of work from the moment I woke up until I went to sleep. I felt that I was never away from work and I could never wind down or switch off (Rachel)
>
> The two hours a week we get for PPA are not enough to do all of the planning, preparation and assessment we need to do. I would take home books to mark, assessments and other things which I would spend around three hours on each night. Weekends would be shadowed with the thought that Sunday would need to be spent working (Stephanie)

you're planning every night and you've got the pressure to do the paperwork when you get in, and answered the emails and dealt with pastoral work, and all of that…up til midnight prepping (Sarah)

somebody's asking difficult questions all the time you know and they're asking them to do sometimes extremely difficult verging on impossible things to do all the time (Tom)

even with the holidays it didn't seem any compensation for the work I was doing at weekends and in the evenings and in the holidays… I saw some weeks 300 students, some weeks 400 students … and the idea of assessing accurately where they are, knowing how accurate they are, setting homework every week and actually marking that for that number of students was unrealistic but … I'd be up til 12, 1, ill-prepared for the next day… it was just too, too much …we'd had sort of spot checks on your marking so at any time , any class, so you needed all your books up to date at all times, well that's I would say, pretty much impossible, that to me was an impossible task… I just didn't feel it was achievable what was being asked, teaching too many classes I felt, without enough planning, preparation and assessment time and the only time that came was in your 'home' time so that didn't, that caused stress… I was not able to switch off, I kept trying to do what was being asked… I couldn't have done anymore (Helena)

the amount of paper work as well as the marking and lesson planning I have to do, and as standards and expectations are so high from everyone, including parents, I have to turn it around quite quickly. And as I am part time, I often feel like I am playing catch up when I come in to school too. Unless I am physically there, my department don't always keep me in the loop about things so I often feel left out and in the dark, having to quickly get up to speed on new resources and ways of recording information on paper and the computers…I'm constantly busy and occupied, my mind is always buzzing, whether I am there or not there (Ruth)

the high working hours and the culture of expectation albeit unwritten, to carry on working long into the night, to be doing the weekend work, to be doing the after school work and the time that you'd got set aside within the timetable for planning and preparation was nowhere

> near enough… that switch off , there's that sort of life-balance which I don't think teachers have. I think the work is, I think the difference with education or with teaching as I saw it was that it was totally life-consuming, yes, I think that's the difference (Matthew)
>
> I spent the summer holiday … going through that classroom and emptying stuff, sorting stuff, tidying stuff out (Hannah)
>
> the main point of stress for me is lack of time to do everything we are expected to do … I frequently feel under pressure. I work through every break and lunchtime (Carly)
>
> I'm always thinking about work or that I should be doing work, it's trying to get that cut off point where you walk out the door and in education there isn't one, there's always something to be done…since I've gone into teaching I've never switched off at all…you'll go in the staffroom at lunch time and there's probably one person there, everyone's just working and eating on the job (Amy)
>
> I could never plan a weekend away in term time… planning had to be submitted weekly (Holly)

Jack also described his experience of an endless pressure and endless tasks:

> With the millions of things going through my head it can take a lot to wind down and relax at night...I just want to relax and recuperate…there is too much asked of teachers… The job is far too demanding…When I am at work I literally do not stop for a second, constantly doing one task after another (Jack)

He also described school holidays using religious imagery, calling them 'salvation,' yet described how even then, holidays were always overshadowed by work and 'contemplating the start of an even busier term ahead'.

In these examples, therefore, participants have vividly portrayed an endless waterfall of pressure, an unrelenting amount of tasks to complete: even school holidays, evenings and weekends are consumed with work or worrying about work, blurring any division between home and school life. Participants' words evoke a state of constant panic and heightened anxiety; of feeling frantic, unable to switch off and unable take their foot off the pedal even for a moment. The extracts reinforce Amy's words who revealed that for teachers, it is much more than simply forgoing your lunch breaks; it can feel like 'you've got no life.'

Tom's narrative echoed these sentiments completely when he described the impact that work load demands had on him (this issue of *impact* is the concern of the next chapter and so will be explored in greater depth shortly):

> Basically I was working from, getting to school at half six in the morning, leaving at six in the evening, put the kids to bed, work through to eleven and then, you know, when you got to Easter you kind of just went [makes a noise] and you just thought actually I can't, can't do this anymore…it did get to the situation where I was getting there some mornings just after six in the morning so I could work for two hours without anybody disrupting me and you'd have to shut your office door use a task light so nobody knew you were there so you could just have two hours of doing work… So I went through my timetable, it read something like Monday lunch time this group, Monday after school til five this group, Tuesday lunch time this group. I managed to get Wednesday, half of Wednesday lunch time off because I do a duty so I don't plan anything and I said to them [SMT], 'that's my only

> time during the week where I'm not occupied'. I said, 'I'm even doing Friday sessions,' and I said, 'I did three days during the half term holiday,' and I said you know, 'this is how it's working'. I said, 'if my workload continues like this I think I am going to get ill'… [and] Ofsted's in the middle of all this… she'd [my wife] say, 'come home early tonight,' I'd be like, 'no, if I stay and work with these kids then they'll be sorted for their coursework in four weeks time, that's one group ticked off and out the way,' and then you'd say the same on a Friday night, 'I've got 5 kids coming in Friday night, if I get them ticked off,' you know you're kind of just ticking off problems so it took quite a lot of time but I actually felt that when I was at home I wasn't mentally at home, I was always thinking about work and I wasn't, I'd never quite engage with anybody, you know, I was always distant, slightly off… as soon as I'd wake up it would be like lights were on, right got to get up, get dressed, got to get to work… they [SMT] were trying to work staff at 110% all of the time (Tom)

Interestingly, after he left the school and started a job in the private sector, Tom reflected on the different attitudes he experienced:

> my new environment is totally supportive, it's frowned on if you work at break. Somebody came up to me the other day and said, 'why don't you come over to the staffroom at break?' I said, 'well I do come over, I get a coffee or a tea and I get a biscuit and then I go back and I just work'…so there is kind of a, that concern or care or appreciation about what's going on. You wouldn't get that in a state school.

Many participants expressed their discontent that their role seemed to continually expand due to new initiatives being constantly passed down to them: many tasks were regarded as superfluous, unrelated to teaching itself and even getting in the way of teaching:

> management making bizarre sorts of requests, so we've got this new thing called, I can't even remember the name

> of it … but the amount of time- so the problem is they don't give you time to do it, so for me it's time pressures and adding these things in that they don't actually know what they're running …I got a 2 in my recent Ofsted which was fine, erm, but I know I could get a 1 easily but I can't do it with all the other stuff…teaching is so far down the ladder that it's almost not there anymore (Sarah)

> the amount of work that isn't teaching, outside of the classroom. It takes over you so much…you're under so much pressure …if you ask any teacher, one of the most stressful things is the amount of work they have, the amount of work is just too much and it's nothing to do with the teaching, teaching doesn't even come into it. You know, it's not about teaching anymore in the classroom, it's about delivering targets and meeting being in meetings after meetings and training and you know and then we've got to turn out these outstanding children when actually we've hardly got any energy to teach because of everything else (Amy)

For Holly, she also saw the job as no longer about teaching but described it as a memory test, leaving her with a constant 'lump' in her stomach and 'a feeling of adrenaline trying to get everything done in time':

> The increased test of memory was another issue that I found hard to cope with. Expectations for marking and recording ways forward increased workload. There were daily messages going on the intranet, and issues from staff meetings and I felt more stressed just trying to remember that I needed to do A, B, C by a specific time. More meetings were introduced to analyse pupil progress and expectations were now on individual staff to analyse their own data before the meeting (which, we are not supposed to do, senior leadership should do this). More and more delegated responsibility was being placed on front line staff in a number of areas and, on reflection, a feeling of stress came from a feeling of being overwhelmed: trying to remember it all and having the time to do it.

Participants also viewed some work load demands as completely unfair:

> within the six week holidays before we started, we were writing schemes of work. As NQTs going in to a new school, to already have that expectation, 'right off you go, you're going to be developing what we're all going to be delivering in September' was last minute beyond belief but to, I felt that was an unnecessary amount of pressure and I think that that continued throughout my time there and I felt that I should have been more supported in that. I don't think we should have had the same, I don't think it was nurturing enough, it could have been more nurturing it could have been less, less expectation to take on such responsibility (Matthew)
>
> [On coordinating a subject] I personally feel it's a massive role for me to take on. I do bear a grudge probably with that one…it's an understanding they don't have that I am part time (Amy)
>
> I have additional responsibilities that are not officially on my job description. If these are not carried out there is merely a frown in your direction and generally teachers will perform them on top of the agreed workload …[and] lack of resources in school means we buy our own stuff (Jack)
>
> we have a lot of Polish, a lot of Slovenian, a lot of English as an additional language, probably about 25% now and we get no support as in no one that can kind of translate for us so for example in one of my classes there's 6 children that can't speak any English and I can't speak Polish or I can't speak Russian, so that puts a lot of pressure on us because we're dealing with children that we are trying to teach and they don't understand (Amy)

Stephanie described how she had a small number of children in her class with special needs and disabilities. Despite this, she did not feel the school had supported her or equipped her to deal with many of the situations she encountered. Whilst helping these children with a range of issues, including having to help them go to the toilet and clean themselves, the rest of

the class had to 'get on'. Due to the class TA being part time, Stephanie was often on her own with the group. A medical issue affecting one of the children could prove life threatening, yet as Stephanie explained, 'I have yet to have a nurse come to school to explain to me how to deal with [it] as I have had no training and neither has my TA.'

Tom and Helena spoke of both themselves and colleagues having to teach multiple subjects, including subjects they had no experience of and no academic background in. Tom reported on how 'uncomfortable' this made them feel, yet they had no choice as it was simply 'imposed on you.' Helena explained the panic and extra pressures this caused, both psychologically and in terms of the demands on her time:

> no one can give you that knowledge or give you a lesson plan which will mean you know your stuff , if students asked around the subject, 'well, what do you mean? How does it relate to something else?' – that was, that was no good.

6.4 Summary

Following on from Chapter 5 where the metaphor was introduced and established, this chapter has shown how the 'battle' continues. Participants portray the job itself as impossible in a variety of ways:

- The system of monitoring staff performance is described as perpetually skewed to the negative. A fault-finding mission is delineated where teachers are judged accordingly and where they feel locked in a battle they cannot win. Rather than having their skills and strengths acknowledged, participants describe endless targets and areas for improvement which leaves them feeling, like the system itself, also very negative. Participants show how this system can be counter-productive, causing teachers to feel de-motivated, frustrated, angry, ashamed and bewildered. To quote Holly once more, teachers 'psychologically need to hear some positives.'
- The narratives demonstrate how teachers fear the system's negative labels and judgements becoming attached to them due to the personal and professional implications this has. Should this happen, participants describe feeling disempowered: they feel they have no voice and no opportunity to defend themselves and challenge such judgements.
- Many stories highlight the notion that schools can feel under pressure to manipulate numbers and participate in various 'game-playing' activities to boost results. As demonstrated by the responses of various participants,

this can cause teachers to lose faith in the very labels and judgements underpinning the education system.

- There is often a conflict between teachers' beliefs regarding what education is or should be, with the reality of what the current education system demands and imposes. This can then lead to an internal battle where teachers feel they must either compromise their beliefs or leave the profession.
- Participants call for a more rounded, nurturing and 'genuine' education, where teachers can be creative and take ownership of the curriculum and its delivery. They were highly critical of what they perceived to be a dehumanising, restrictive and number-crunching approach to education.
- Workload was vividly portrayed as the enemy that could not be conquered. Participants described an endless waterfall of pressure and tasks to complete. Regardless of how hard they tried and how much time they committed, they felt that the volume of work was insurmountable. Participants demonstrated how lunch breaks, evenings, weekends and school holidays were overshadowed by work, with teachers struggling to find a switch off point. The division between home and

school life is then blurred and, to use Matthew's phrase, the job becomes 'life consuming.'

- Many work demands were also classed as simply unfair, unrelated to teaching itself or even detrimental to students' education.
- Participants highlighted how they had entered the profession with such energy and enthusiasm, yet the current system, the impossible job, can often destroy this.

Despite the job itself being so vividly delineated as impossible, with teachers feeling locked in a battle they cannot win, participants revealed that teachers nevertheless *try to make the impossible, possible*. It is this subject that the next chapter will address, both in terms of the impact this has and the strategies teachers employ, whether consciously or subconsciously.

Chapter 7 The Account of the Data

The Battleground (Part Three): Battle Wounds and Survival Strategies

7.0 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the many ways that participants presented teaching as an 'impossible' job. Despite this, the narratives also revealed how teachers would nevertheless still strive to make the impossible, possible and continually propel themselves forward. This chapter is concerned with the implications of this for mental and physical health and behaviours. The impact was sometimes visible, sometimes hidden; some participants were conscious of the impact at the time, whilst others were unaware and taken by surprise. As will become clear, by trying to survive and adapt to life on the battleground, participants' behaviours and characters were affected with the battle often turning inwards: intra personal battles as well as external battles began to take place.

I begin by demonstrating how the stress experience was presented as a gradual build up, steadily wearing down the teacher until they were overwhelmed, as opposed to triggered by a specific, individual incident. This section also highlights, importantly, how the narratives revealed anyone could be affected: that it is not a question of being weak or strong. I then provide an overview of the impact on participants' mental and physical health and behaviours, before addressing some of the more prominent themes in greater depth. It is important to note

here that not all participants were affected by their stress experience to the same extent, as was indicated previously in Figure 5.2. Carly, for example, remained relatively unscathed hence she does not feature as much as other participants in this chapter. At the other extreme, however, Hannah and Rachel were completely overwhelmed by their experience and their physical and mental health suffered tremendously.

An overview of the participants featured in the different sections of this chapter is presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1. Participants featuring in the different sections of Chapter 7

	Rachel	Robert	Hannah	Simon	Katherine	Stephanie	Sarah	Jack	Jonathan	Amy	Tom	Holly	Matthew	Helena	Ruth	Carly
7.1 Drip, drip, drip: a gradual build up of pressure			•	•	•				•		•	•	•	•	•	
7.2 The impact on physical and mental health and behaviours																
• 7.2.1 Guilt, shame and fear	•		•	•	•				•		•		•	•		
• 7.2.2 Isolation and the impact on relationships	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•	•	•	•	•	•
• 7.2.3 Perfectionism, workaholism and teacher conscientiousness as self-harm	•		•	•	•	•	•	•		•	•		•	•		
• 7.2.4 A change in character and behaviours	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
• 7.2.5 Intense emotion and further issues relating to physical and mental health	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•		

7.1 Drip, drip, drip: a gradual build up of pressure

Many narratives revealed that rather than there being a single trigger for participants' stress experiences or a specific, critical incident, work-related stress and its impact builds and builds and builds. This means it often happened without participants being fully conscious of it, with some describing it as even catching them by surprise:

> [It's] that continual wheel of [sigh] I don't know how to describe it, almost like a sort of factory production line… you are spinning so many plates… It's difficult to pin point one single factor, I think there are probably multiple factors (Matthew)

> I thought I could cope, you don't realise…I was ill, very ill and I think it's the – things happened to me physically and I was teaching as well so you've got all the pressures of marking, being in the classroom, all these physical things happening to me and of course I thought, being an experienced teacher, 'I should be able to cope with this?' and of course you can't, you don't realise, you get so ill before you suddenly wake up and somebody says to you, 'no, you're ill.' You don't recognise that you're ill, you don't want to recognise you're ill, it's as though you're letting yourself down, you know you shouldn't be ill you know, you're too good for that… It's like being on a hamster wheel, you get on and you can't get off, that's what it was like (Hannah)

> on reflection… stress came from a feeling of being overwhelmed (Holly)

> it got to that point where it was a bit like being on a treadmill and I didn't realise…you just keep doing it all and doing it all, trying to be perfect, but then of course you can't do it anymore (Ruth)

> It was a long, long term sort of thing, week in, term in, year in (Helena)

> I would put it that it was a little bit like a snowball rolling down a mountain, it was slowly collecting, slowly building but reflecting on it I think the more, the longer it went on, the build up to having a very stressful situation, the better I got at dealing with it so you kind of, you become hardened, you become 'this is part of the job', you know, 'I need to develop techniques to manage the stress' but I found it very difficult to manage, to develop techniques to manage… I think that what happened is I was Head of Department, probably kind of a collateral effect happened a long time before that, I think that your tolerance to stress rises… I was operating with stress (Tom)

> It was horrendous. It was horrible…I hadn't realised how tense I was, how stressed I was at the time, until I came out of it, until I came out of the situation…When you're in it you don't get it but when looking back, you get it (Katherine)

> There's a young teacher with some years' experience and I think she was second in command, second in charge of [name of subject], she sort of zoomed up, very talented teacher, everybody recognised it and everything and all of a sudden she just couldn't do things and I don't think there was a trigger for that necessarily, I think she just found that she couldn't do it you know. She suddenly woke up one morning and thought 'I can't do this', extremely conscientious – and that's another problem, if you're extremely conscientious, and doing everything that people tell you, it can creep up on you and hit you unawares (Simon)

As these extracts display, the message of the 'drip drip effect', of a gradually building stress experience, is also reinforced by the imagery associated with continuous, unrelenting movement: the rolling snowball; the treadmill; the spinning plates; the factory production line; and the hamster wheel. Rather like a car, which keeps running and running but will at

some point deplete its petrol reserves, participants describe how they also kept going and going, trying to make the impossible, possible, often unaware of how or when the stress would affect them. This resonates powerfully with the metaphor used by Carly and discussed in Chapter 5: if a frog is placed straight into boiling water 'it jumps out' but 'putting it in cold, heating it gently … it boils to death.'

As has been demonstrated, participants were clear that there was no specific, individual incident which caused their stress experience but rather a constant wearing down and feeling overwhelmed. Participants did discuss important events, however, yet rather than being regarded as a trigger, they are described as the 'end of the line' (Simon) or 'the final straw' (Helena). As described in Chapter 5, Jonathan felt continually unsupported by leadership and management despite highly challenging behaviour from pupils, where one particular student even made a false allegation about him. After a constant build-up of highly stressful experiences, Jonathan stated that 'this was the final thing' and that after 'composing himself' he went home, was signed off sick and he never returned to the school. Similarly, Simon discussed a particular patient who 'just crumpled' due to stress and eventually left teaching due to 'some sort of a dismissive word from one of the management team.' He explained: 'it might be something quite trivial but it

suddenly brings in everything else'. Additionally, other important incidents were presented as a *symptom* of the stress, rather than as a trigger, for example when participants revealed how stress had changed their character in some way. This theme will be explored further in a later section of the chapter.

The narratives also suggested that stress and its consequences can affect absolutely anyone; that a teacher's career experiences or years of service does not make them immune. This is highlighted in the extracts from Simon, Tom and Hannah at the opening of this section and also in the examples which follow:

> In any school, there's always two or three people signed off with stress at any given time … and my line manager, her attitude was basically there go, for the grace of God go I sort of thing you know, it could be any of us at any time (Helena)
>
> I was in my fifties when this all started, been all the way through teaching, teaching career without any problem at all … there was an awful lot of pressure and I thought, 'Oh, okay I can cope with this, all this, experienced teacher.' I'd been a Deputy Head on my own years ago and I'd done the whole range of primary education... I thought I could cope, you don't realise (Hannah)
>
> you know I'm not someone who gets poorly, I've never been signed off before, never had depression before, it wasn't like oh here we are again, I recognise this feeling or sign, never been signed off in my whole working life – I'm 37 and I've worked all of my life so you just go, 'oh crikey, really?' (Helena)
>
> there was nothing that prepared me for it and I went into it with my eyes open (Matthew)

> it could be a main scale teacher, starting teaching, you know two or three years in, it can be someone who's been the Head of a Faculty for years and years. Or it can be any subject, one of the creative arts, it could be Science, it could be Maths or Languages, *absolutely anything*…You can't look at someone and say they are a strong individual and they are a weak individual… it's unpredictable… it cuts across all types of people… the ones that seem okay, the ones that seem strong, it's, it's universal (Simon)

7.2 The impact on physical and mental health and behaviours

Participants' stories illustrated that attempting to survive and adapt to life on the battleground, trying to make the impossible, possible, has so many implications for mental and physical health and behaviours. These could be visible or hidden, with participants conscious or unconscious of them. Before discussing the most prominent of these in detail, I present a brief overview in Figure 7.1.

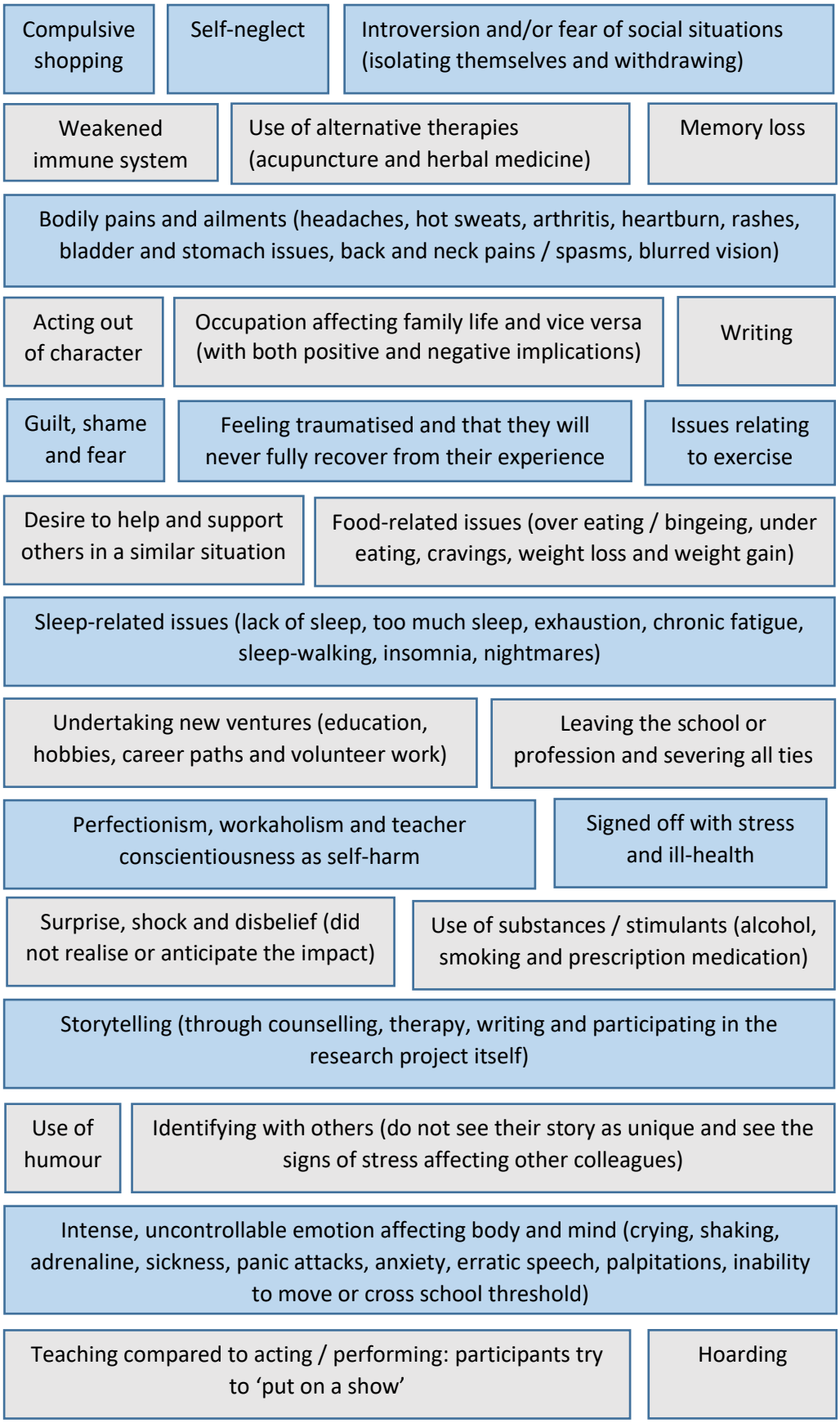

Figure 7.1. An overview of how stress impacted on participants' mental and physical health and behaviours

The reader will notice that I do not separate these out in a simplistic manner into 'mental' and 'physical' categories since they cannot be so easily compartmentalised: the issues interlink and overlap, demonstrating how the stress experience affects the person holistically. I have expressed this interrelationship in Figure 7.2.

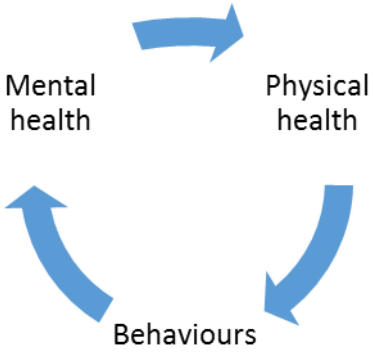

Figure 7.2. The holistic impact of teacher stress

7.2.1 Guilt, shame and fear

Earlier extracts have demonstrated the surprise, shock and disbelief felt by some participants that stress had affected them so profoundly, almost catching them out without them realising or being prepared. For many of the participants, there was also an element of guilt and shame wound up with their stress experience. In one aspect, this was down to some seeing it as mark of failure or weakness. Hannah stated, for example:

> I thought, being an experienced teacher, 'I should be able to cope with this?'...You don't recognise that you're ill, you don't want to recognise you're ill, it's as though you're

> letting yourself down, you know you shouldn't be ill you know, you're too good for that

Simon also revealed this when discussing how a patient he supported, a teacher in his fifties, would breakdown,

> crying…and shaking and just not being able to articulate his words and just apologising all the time, 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry' all the time you know, seeing it as a weakness.

In addition, Tom opened up his interview with almost an apology to me by immediately stating: 'I'm not here to offload emotional baggage.' Perhaps this suggested he was initially feeling quite nervous, embarrassed and uncomfortable. Indeed, as Helena explained with regard to her own experiences: 'it's quite private isn't it'. It is important to note, however, that despite experiencing these initial feelings, Tom went on to be open, honest and relaxed and offered an insightful, powerful and eloquent account of exactly how stress in the teaching profession impacted on his personal and professional life.

Jonathan displayed competing, mixed emotions regarding his stress experience: on the one hand feeling a degree of shame and the need to hide it, battling with a need to talk about it in order to try to move on and make a fresh start:

> Although a change of school made all the difference, it took a while for me to tell anyone about the experience... I spoke to one of the senior members of staff who guided me through the process of joining the [new] school. I felt as though if I did not tell someone, it would have driven

> me insane...He was fine about it but even talking about it made me upset. This was something that I went through a few times afterwards as I found it very difficult to discuss. I felt as though no one *needed* to know at the new school so it took a few years before I told my [subject] colleagues.

As is the case with many other participants, Jonathan also reveals here that it does not matter if the experience was days, weeks or even years ago: the impact is still there and still felt. This theme will be returned to later in the chapter.

For Helena, Matthew and Rachel, guilt, shame and fear were linked to having to take time of work due to stress and how it was affecting their health. An internal conflict is suggested between feeling guilty for being off work and feeling obliged to return, versus a dread and fear of ever returning:

> my mental health suffered hugely and sort of I was signed off for a few weeks and eventually, I couldn't cope with being signed off because of the impact it has on schools, you know teachers are covering for you , you know learning isn't taking place, groups aren't progressing so I resigned and to resign from teaching when your husband doesn't work was a massive decision…it's not like just being signed off from a desk job and someone else will pick that paperwork up, it's, and having to ring in and having to get doctor's notes, it's embarrassing … But the *thought* of going in, so sick, just feel sick, and I didn't feel any better being signed off because I'd feel guilty so you can't sit at home thinking – or you know you've got to go back, and I realised I didn't want to go back. I could have been on full pay for 6 months, gone in for a day and then another 6 months, you literally can – and I was on good money but the guilt and the shame of that, knowing that the school and tax payers are paying your salary while they're getting cover in, I just couldn't cope with that so about three weeks after being signed off I resigned which

> was an enormous decision… I just knew that I couldn't be in that environment (Helena)
>
> Shortly before I left the school, when I was not in school, I felt constantly worried about returning and when I was in school, I felt frequently anxious, extremely tense and uptight, threatened, ignored and unsupported, highly stressed, tearful and vulnerable (Rachel)
>
> I really couldn't face going in. I just didn't want to be there (Katherine)
>
> the thought of going back was just a horrible feeling, I just dreaded going back into school and I suppose when you've been away from any occupation like that, there's bound to be that fear of can I still do it? Will people be judgmental? You know, you walk into a department or a staff room and you become very, there's a heightened sense of awareness, people's eye contact or just you know what are they thinking of me? So you have that hurdle to cross as well when you go back into it [pause] but yes, it was a dark time and I've never been so low and I don't ever want to put myself back in that situation again (Matthew)

For some participants, guilt and shame were also associated with particular behaviours or coping strategies they had adopted due to the stress experience. This theme is addressed later in the chapter.

7.2.2 Isolation and the impact on relationships

The theme of isolation was prominent in the narratives, where participants would either consciously or unconsciously withdraw, hide or isolate themselves in some way:

> I didn't really go out, didn't socialise, didn't see, yes, I think I just really, ended up quite isolated…I did feel quite

alone…I wouldn't go into the main staffroom to work or to socialise (Matthew)

I was regularly crying in my classroom alone at lunchtimes and break times and in the staffroom for a long time before I was signed off work and I was not approached about this. I was tearful and exhausted and was regularly the last person to leave the car park in the evenings and the first person in my block in the mornings. I was very withdrawn and not talking to anyone around me and had cut myself off completely. I began taking time off for minor complaints – stomach problems, colds, laryngitis – until it became difficult for me to be regularly at work (Rachel)

The only person I see regularly is the cleaner who comes in [to the classroom] twice a day (Jack)

I got to the stage where I couldn't go out, because if I saw the next door neighbours, if they sort of said 'oh your plants are lovely Hannah, it's a lovely day,' that's fine but if they said to me, 'Hi Hannah, how are you?' I'd burst into tears. I couldn't go down to the library which [points to books] is you can see is something I like doing, reading, in case I met anybody there or the librarian would say, 'Oh what you doing it's term, in the middle of term?' I couldn't face anything like that, unless my husband was with me, you know, we went shopping, he had to come with me, so this sort of thing so in the end when I went to see the GP and I'd been off an awful long time, he said, 'you need to see a psychiatrist' he said, 'you're not getting any better being away from school'…In the end, we bought a dog … because I wasn't going out. We bought a dog and I used to have a walk …five, six, seven, eight miles with the dog in the morning and that helped me a lot (Hannah)

it did get to the situation where I was getting there some mornings just after six in the morning so I could work for two hours without anybody disrupting me and you'd have to shut your office door use a task light so nobody knew you were in there (Tom)

Somebody did say when he first came, you were just so there and in the moment and open and available and now I've closed off, I've closed down (Sarah)

Helena explained to me that she became 'more private, more withdrawn…very distant' even from her husband. She discussed how her relationship with him 'failed during that time.' Helena felt unable to say this was solely due to the stress experienced in the teaching profession but that it was certainly a factor putting a 'strain' on their relationship meaning they were 'not so intimate anymore.'

Many other participants highlighted how this issue affected their home lives, with different levels of impact being apparent. Carly, who remained relatively unscathed from experiences of teacher stress, explained that in order to try and manage, she had to 'rely more and more on others to do jobs around the house and childcare.' Further along the continuum, however, Tom felt that he had become withdrawn from family and friends due to the stress the job had caused:

> I became very single focused on what had to be done for work because I felt that that would be the solution to my stress or that would relieve the pressure. I think I was saying things to my wife like, she'd say, 'come home early tonight,' I'd be like, 'no, if I stay and work with these kids then they'll be sorted for their coursework'… but I actually felt that when I was at home I wasn't mentally at home, I was always thinking about work and I wasn't, I'd never quite engage with anybody, you know, I was always distant, slightly off … I didn't really want to socialise because I always felt I had to be working. There were occasions when I'd be standing in the kitchen and I'd say to my wife, 'I just feel like crying,' and I did genuinely feel like I wanted to cry and that would be, like a couple of friends would come round, you know we'd organise

> something and I'd just think that'd be quite good, Saturday night, no problems and I'd just sit there and I'd be thinking constantly about what needed to be done and what the students needed to do and who I needed to contact and you'd be thinking, 'God I can't do this, I need to cry,' you know, you'd get home in your car and you'd sit there for five minutes on the drive just kind of thinking, right, just calm down, go in and enjoy your family. So it has quite a profound effect on virtually every aspect of your life and you don't think of anything personal, you only think of work you know you don't sit down and T.V watch something and find it humorous it's just something in the corner of the room that's making shapes and sounds and you're thinking about something all the time. I just didn't want to expose myself to that again or my family to that again which is why I decided to leave.

Katherine, Sarah and Amy described how, despite their best efforts, their mood affected the family:

> I dread going to work so on a Sunday night it's that horrible, erm, butterflies... anxious, grumpy with family. I've tried, but I'm feeling very negative and angry, but then I don't like that about myself … And I'm not one of those people that goes home and takes it out on my family, but you do, even if inadvertently (Sarah)

> I'm sure – I haven't got any medical evidence for this – I'm sure I had depression… and of course that impacts on home life…my own son said [after], 'Mum, you're not so stressed, you're not so ratty.' And I hadn't even realised until I came out of it and even my family noticed the difference…People have seen subsequently and say how much better I look being out of the situation – I don't look stressed and it said it all to me when my son said to me, 'You're not stressed mum,' and I think that said it all to me. That actually shocked me, thinking God I must have been really bad for him to say that to me (Katherine)

Amy actually broke down in tears during the interview when this issue arose. After expressing my concern for her and that I did not want to see her in distress, she reassured me that she was 'fine' and wanted to continue with the interview:

> I'm fine. I don't know why I'm crying…I'm just grumpy on a Monday and probably horrible to my children…I am emotionally and physically shattered … I come home and rather than walk in the door and be like 'Oh hi!' to my children I just think 'Right, come on you can do this.' And if they're tired and emotional as well, I just haven't got the strength or I suppose the patience to give them what they need, and I do, I muddle through but it absolutely breaks me and sometimes my husband makes sure he is home because I will just be drained, absolutely drained...in the back of my mind I've got all this marking and I need to just get them to bed so it does really affect how I am with my children…Sunday nights I get really stressed and it's because I'm going to work Monday and I start to get irritated at my husband and he always says, 'Oh I can tell it's Sunday and you're going to work tomorrow'

With Amy's words, as with the previous examples, we see clearly that for some participants the job can come with a price: a cost to family life and relationships. The narratives demonstrate how it is not always possible to simply leave the job at the door, that there is no cut off point and no clear division anymore between work life and home life. The idea of missing out on family life is also echoed in the following excerpts. A range of mixed emotions on this particular matter were revealed including frustration, isolation, guilt, sadness, anger and resentment:

> I don't have time for a great social life, I am 33 and single. I don't have the time or energy to find a husband and have my own family. This is another reason I am leaving the profession (Stephanie)

> With my family, they impact hugely because, my husband says to me 'I get you back for a couple of days and the holidays are wonderful because we get to have a conversation'… [It's] having to say 'right, I've got to get

> back from the park now because I've got work to do'. So it's horrible. It takes up so much of my time. It takes up more of my time than anything else and that's not okay for me…Missing out on family life, missing out with my husband as a couple (Sarah)

> I'd be very tearful especially on Sunday knowing I had to go into work on Monday. Resentful. My husband at the time would be playing with the children and I wanted to but I had work to do, I had work to do, so perhaps I didn't bond quite as well with the children, I didn't spend as much time with them as I would have liked to. Just distant. Annoyed. Cross. Fractious. Didn't want to be doing it, why am *I* doing it? and resentful as he didn't work and I had to work doing a job I hated, not his fault, there were issues – he had an injury so there were reasons why he couldn't work, it wasn't a question of why isn't he trying or – not that at all, but you can't help feeling a bit maybe resentful (Helena)

It is important to note, however, that not only negative implications were highlighted in the narratives. Some participants demonstrated how their stress experience actually brought them closer to certain people, or how they benefited from key figures supporting them through life on the battleground:

> I know my husband was worried because of my diabetes that I was eating wrongly. He was worried on that, he was worried for my health because of the diabetes, so in that respect but it didn't cause arguments or anything like that but I know it caused him great concern. Luckily he understood what I was going through, he could see why but he did try to help you know. He did all the cooking so I couldn't go over the top, he was very good… I've got an incredibly supportive home life which helps enormously … and I don't know what I'd have done if I hadn't. I think, this may sound dramatic, I think if I'd stayed there I could have had a breakdown I think, if I had and if I didn't have the support network at home. I could see how people

> could have a breakdown easily, if they didn't have that support network (Katherine)
>
> The way I cope with the stress is to talk to my husband. He is unbelievably supportive and we talk everything through (Ruth)
>
> My wife was very supportive, you know we'd have conversations and she'd say it can't go on like this you know, you need to have time off, you need to, you know, you're suffering with stress (Tom)
>
> there's a teacher in his mid-fifties, just crying, you know. He can't talk about it without crying and bubbling up, but when he's at home and he's with his family, and he has the love of his family and so on, you know, then he's okay and he can gear himself up (Simon)
>
> I can have real bouts of tearfulness after a bad day and my husband is supportive in the sense that he accepts it's my response to a bad day and can be good humoured and supportive to bring me round (Holly)

This theme was perhaps most prominent with Hannah and her husband. On meeting and observing them together, as well as on hearing Hannah's story itself, the love, support and empathy in their marriage was so evident. Hannah's husband was undoubtedly a constant source of strength for her: her narrative revealed that he was always by her side, always encouraging and protecting her, helping in any way he could through her stress experience and the long process towards her recovery. When I asked Hannah during our interview about how she coped or tried to cope, her husband simply stated:

> Can I answer that question? Hannah didn't cope… she got more and more ill, more and more depressed, more and more upset, couldn't step outside the door and I

> supported her in the best way I possibly could which was just to be there.

7.2.3 Perfectionism, workaholism and teacher conscientiousness as self-harm

The narratives revealed that many participants, either consciously or unconsciously, displayed aspects of perfectionism and workaholism as a response to work demands and expectations. Rachel explained, for example, that she became 'constantly stressed and anxious' about her performance:

> I was regularly working 13 hour days, 8am to 9pm, but then would always have the laptop open on my lap browsing work-related things in the evenings when I was watching television until 10 to 11pm at night … I was usually doing some form of work from the moment I woke up until I went to sleep. I felt that I was never away from work and I could never wind down or switch off… I didn't have a work - life balance and I became highly critical of myself, to the point where I found it very difficult to start or complete any tasks at all due to crippling self-doubt… I was regularly the last person to leave the car park in the evenings and the first person in my block in the mornings (Rachel)

Matthew echoed such sentiments when stressing: 'I didn't want to be anything less than one hundred percent...it was a not wanting to be anything less than excellent.' The following extracts continue to reflect this theme:

> I've always been very efficient and that's one thing my Head of Department always said about me, 'If I asked you to do paperwork, I knew the next day it would be in.' It's almost OCD, but I've always been like that, that's a trait

> of mine, always been there…Very organised. He always said, 'I can ask you to do something and I know it will be there' (Katherine)
>
> I like to do things well, I'm one of those, so I drove myself into the ground for a year (Sarah)
>
> I have never had an inadequate grading and I was totally gutted. I felt like I had really let myself and my head down - I burst into tears for the first time ever at work (Stephanie)
>
> I'm extremely conscientious so you give me an impossible task and to someone who is conscientious, they will sit up and mark, they will keep trying until they just burn out… someone like me who's a starter – finisher, don't ask me to mark half a class set and take half home, I have to do it in blocks…some teachers can switch off…I was not able to switch off, I kept trying to do what was being asked…well, I couldn't have done anymore (Helena)
>
> again I spent the summer holidays going through that classroom, re-organising it, sorting it out, it was quite funny really because we'd got some work men in and they came into the classroom and said, 'Are you one of the cleaners?'… things had to be done *right* (Hannah)

Participants would clearly go above and beyond, therefore, often neglecting their own health and welfare, with Rachel demonstrating how she became almost paralysed by perfectionism. Jack also explained that some teachers work so hard they can 'dangerously give well over one hundred percent…I didn't realise it but I was burning out.' This was also revealed previously in section 7.1 when Simon discussed the young talented teacher who 'zoomed up' the career ladder, yet had to leave the profession due to stress: 'if you're extremely conscientious, and doing everything that people tell you, it can creep up on you and hit you unawares.'

The idea of self-neglect and self-harm being associated with teacher conscientiousness was vividly portrayed in Helena's narrative:

> I think my conscientiousness was self-harming, I just continued, I have to do it. 'Have a break?' No, I have to do it. That was like self-harm, 'right I'm going to bring these home' and I'll be up til two rather than some teachers who seemed to be able to say, 'you know what, I'm going to stop at seven whether I've done it or not and if it's not done, it's not done and if anyone wants to ask me about it I'll say I did three hours at home last night and the other day and no I haven't done it and what is it you'd like to do about that?' But I couldn't have done that, I was too, got to do it, got to do it, they'll be asking about their homework, it's not been marked… So that was, trying to do the job as well as I could was almost like self-harm because I knew it was impossible (Helena)

The use of repetition ('have to do it…got to do it') reinforces the panic, determination and anxiety. The irony in her words is also clear, however: it will never be enough regardless of the effort and exertion as you can never finish an 'impossible' job.

Even when they were ill or signed off sick, participants demonstrated how teachers can still push themselves, still work and put themselves at the bottom of the list. Hannah was signed off due to the impact stress was having on her mental and physical health. Despite this, she was determined to write lengthy, detailed reports for every single pupil. Her husband, doctor and union representative all advised her against this, and as Hannah stated: 'well I'm stupid and I did…I got them done.' This was mirrored by Rachel's experience:

> When I was becoming ill, I was also under the pressure of writing reports for 130 Year 7 students and 60 Year 8 students within a couple of weeks. I didn't have much guidance on how to write these so put myself under enormous pressure to write a detailed report for each student and set myself up to fail.

The examples clearly portray the notion of teachers' selflessness and the emotional and moral values attached to their behaviours. As Helena explained, 'People don't go into teaching because they want to earn money, they go to a pharmaceutical company or they go to Barclays.' Amy also explained how the job is done out of 'love and care' for the children. It is often the desire to help, nurture and support the pupils, therefore, that pushes teachers in this manner, regardless of the cost to their own health. This was also prominent in Tom's story. He discussed the 'profound' physical and emotional effects of the long working hours and his lack of self-care. When his wife asked him: 'Why, why are you doing this?...they don't care, not the kids but the staff, the senior managers…they obviously don't care,' he replied as follows:

> you get so committed, this is for the kids, this is for the kids, this is for the kids, that actually you do the pay back, you know, you end up putting yourself on the line because it's always for the kids …well actually there's [pupil] and he wants to go and do [subject area] at Leeds, if I don't get him his A Level he won't go to Leeds and there's [pupil] she wants to do [subject area], if I don't get her a B or be there for her to get a B she won't do that. So you kind of impose everybody else's, their dreams and actually you think if you're not there there's 40 kids aren't going to get where they need to be, so that's what kind

> of pressures you, that's what makes you get up and do it which isn't very healthy.

7.2.4 A change in character and behaviours

The narratives highlighted how many participants felt the stress experience had altered or affected their personality in some way. This has been demonstrated thus far in the chapter, and is also revealed in the following extracts:

> Patience is much lower so I react and overreact more and snap more quickly (Carly)

> Since deciding to leave the profession, my mum has told me that she has walked on egg shells around me for a long time as she found me very snappy and my sister said I was horrible. Not what I wanted to hear to be honest. This really upset me as I didn't feel that I had changed so much and it wasn't nice to hear that my family thought I was changing for the worse (Stephanie)

> I am not a teacher who shouts at the top of his voice to be heard, this is often pointless but I found myself becoming something I was not and I started to raise my voice…I felt as though I couldn't manage anything without getting irritated or angry. I developed a very short temper and really did change as a person which I hated. The whole situation made me angry and I took it out on those around me. I had a number of counselling sessions with the intention of dealing with these anger issues. (Jonathan)

> I have always had strengths in the pastoral care side of teaching, but felt increasingly unable and irritable in dealing with listening to children who had issues in school. I just felt it was adding to workload (Holly)

> I think, reflecting on it, I did become more short-tempered in the classroom, I definitely became more… like not being one of those teachers that were forever raising their voices over the top of the noise in the classroom, just having sort of the upper hand on that while keeping the room calm and I'd lost that and young

> people are very savvy and … I think they picked up on the fact that I'd just [pause] I'd lost that element of calm and control (Matthew)

With Matthew and Jonathan this also led to specific incidents in the classroom where they felt they had completely lost their temper and gone too far when reacting to pupils' poor behaviour. These incidents did not involve pupils being harmed in any way whatsoever, yet both participants felt surprise, shock and regret at feeling they had acted so out of character. The incidents were clearly shown to be a symptom of the on-going stress rather than a trigger. Matthew explained how he was 'already frayed', adding, 'that was after my own well-being had started to suffer and I think if I had been on an even keel I question whether I would have done that.' With Jonathan, he had been perpetually harassed and targeted by this particular group of students who had a reputation in school for being 'difficult to manage' and so he felt he had been 'pushed too far'.

A change was also revealed in terms of participants' behaviours; those adopted both consciously and unconsciously. Hannah explained that she was unaware of it at the time, but both she and her husband would 'comfort eat'. Food-related issues as a response to teacher stress were common in the narratives. They often appeared in a polarised fashion, reporting either a lack of food or an excess of food. The behaviours were also linked to either self-neglect or a search for 'comfort':

> the first thing I do [when I get home] is eat because that just gives me some energy (Amy)
>
> I wasn't really interested in eating (Matthew)
>
> I eat less and can get run down and ill (Carly)
>
> I eat more comfort food through anxiety… I feel I am more of an emotional eater now and I definitely eat more rubbish, crave it intensely – chocolate and salty snacks (Holly)
>
> I was comfort eating, that was another thing. That was another strategy to help me get through… I am diabetic so consequently it's, the comfort eating wasn't doing my health any good. I have lost weight since, which is positive, but I was eating the wrong sort of food, you know it was purely comfort just to get me through the day, but it was definitely a control thing (Katherine)
>
> It also had some fairly profound physical effects on me which was I never felt like I had time to eat so I'd get up in the morning and it was I've got to get to work to get all of this stuff done before somebody else arrives so I was basically living on coffee for about six months during the work day (Tom)
>
> I am either completely strict and starving myself and losing weight rapidly, or the complete opposite and not paying attention at all (Ruth)
>
> I have lost my appetite...had some horrendous tummy health issues…so it's affected my food intake…They've put me on some medication for that…The thing is I don't feel very hungry, I have bouts of feeling hungry, so this morning I didn't want anything because I don't feel hungry but then I get starving so I eat but then my stomach hurts and I think I don't want anymore. I get full quickly…I'm just internalising it [the stress] I think (Sarah)

With Sarah the idea of internalising stress from the battleground becomes apparent, the notion of how the battle can turn inwards. She reinforced this when explaining how, when it

comes to coping and escaping the stress: 'I don't have the outlets I had when I was younger.'

Rachel's narrative revealed a particular association between food and exercise: a battle between two excessive and conflicting behaviours, with one undoing the other and highlighting the element of self-sabotage. This not only echoes the polarised behaviour pattern in Ruth's example above, but also again reflects the notion of participants searching for 'comfort':

> I was also keen to keep up going to the gym but instead of being healthy, this became another form of perfectionism and overload, going five to six times a week and at the weekends until I became ill with stress and exhaustion. Although I was exercising a lot, I was also over-eating, for comfort. I began eating hardly anything during the teaching day but then binging on high calorie foods in the evenings as I sat and worked, eating large amounts of pizza, pasta, cheese, anything with a lot of carbohydrates and then binging on large amounts of family-sized chocolate bars

A conflicting relationship between exercise and food also formed part of Robert's story. He explained that due to job-related stress and the time demands of his workload, he 'couldn't continue' with his normal exercise routine: 'so gradually my fitness and running trailed off *but* I continued eating as an athlete.' In contrast to this, exercise was presented in a positive and healing light in Hannah's narrative. As revealed earlier in the chapter, Hannah got to the stage where she was reluctant to even leave her house. Buying a dog helped her to eventually

escape her sense of confinement to the point where she was able to be out of the house and walking up to eight miles per day: 'that helped me a lot…I had to take the dog for a walk so I had to go out… It took me about three years.'

The use of substances featured in the narratives, predominantly alcohol and prescription medication. Simon himself anticipated this, stating that they tend to be the 'major' substances teachers use to deal with 'the trapped sort of feeling.' He explained how Prozac and similar tablets were often used for 'numbing out the experience and making life easier to control.' He also discussed how some teachers used them initially to just 'get over this blip' but then find themselves unable to function without them which can then create further problems. In Holly's case, she found herself reluctantly turning to medication when trying to adapt to the battleground:

> I had trouble with my nerves. I was pro-active and went to see my GP who offered to sign me off but I rejected the offer saying, 'I just want to feel like I can cope.' He prescribed me beta blockers which I had never used before. They have helped tremendously, but I feel resentful that I am having to take prescription medication solely because of my job.

Hannah used both prescription medication, as her psychiatrist advised, and also turned to herbal medicine. Robert also used alternative therapies during his stress experience.

In terms of alcohol use, Hannah only realised how her drinking habits had changed on reflection:

> having a drink you know, a whiskey or a glass of wine, well you have more than one glass or it's a big glass or whatever and that, you don't realise you're doing it, I think that's the thing, and you don't, you think you're coping, you think you're managing but you're not, are you?

Rachel revealed that as well as smoking heavily, she too would 'drink regularly in the week to wind down after work.' As with previous food-related examples, there is an association with a search and a need for comfort, escape and relaxation. Stephanie also stated: 'I do get in from work and crack open a bottle of wine far more often than I should.' Helena also drank wine most evenings, including during the research interview itself which took place during the evening at her home. She stressed, however, 'that's just something that I enjoy' and that she did not 'think it was excessive.' For Ruth, however, she did believe her drinking had become excessive although it had begun as somewhat of a temporary response to stress:

> I started getting into the habit of having a glass of wine in the evening about seven o' clock, to put the day away, often with my husband whilst we were chatting. That was also when I was being bullied by my Head of department, she was making my life a misery and I had no power to challenge her. She had been there for years, knew everyone, had friends in high places so I had nowhere to go. I had nowhere to take my feelings. I was in tears most nights of the week … I now see that over a period of time I started to have that glass of wine much, much earlier, and sometimes it is now virtually as soon as I get home from work and close the door.

The 'closed door' image at the end of the extract intimates that, for Ruth, there were also issues of guilt, shame and secrecy involved. She became very conscious of how many empty bottles would be in her recycling bag out on the street, whether this was an acceptable amount and what her neighbours might think about this. She also relayed a particular memory of hiding her drink in a cupboard one afternoon when her doorbell rang unexpectedly. This mirrored a further example of closing the lounge curtains so the neighbours would not see her having a glass of wine. As well as guilt and secrecy, there is also clearly her fear of being judged by others and so the desire to cope privately arises. With both Ruth and Helena, they continued to use alcohol after coming out of their stress experience: in Helena's case, after leaving the profession altogether and in Ruth's case, after changing her working hours and when the Head of Department left the school. This raises the question of whether teachers ever fully recover from their stress experience; an issue which will be returned to later in the chapter.

A further behaviour of interest was adopted by Katherine who found herself compulsive shopping; something which she felt she had never done before and was thus totally out of character. She found this behaviour to be most prominent when lesson

observations were approaching and when deadlines were looming for hefty paperwork demands:

> I would spend money as a, what would you call it? As a comfort mechanism I think, I think you could call it, a comfort thing, you know, sort of…possessions or as if something's going to be taken away from me. It didn't cause problems, it didn't get into financial- because I was very, because I kept a handle on it, but I have noticed subsequently… [I'd buy] stupid things…I felt in control, I felt empowered, I did feel in control. Looking back it sounds weird, you know, looking back on it, but yes, I had to take that control because I thought control had been taken away from me

Again, the craving for comfort is foregrounded as well as a desire for control at a time when feelings of being overwhelmed and powerless have become the norm.

Other behaviours adopted as a form of coping and response to stress I grouped under the heading of 'Storytelling.' For Hannah, Matthew, Rachel and Jonathan this was through speaking to a counsellor or psychiatrist; something that none of these participants had ever done before teaching. Matthew explained, for example, that he had previously worked in a fast-paced, pressured industry yet 'had never been driven to anything like that before'. He added that he felt 'wobbly' when thinking about that time and just how 'fragile' teaching had made him. Rachel stressed how beneficial the process had been for her and that 'it helped get me back on my feet.' She valued having the space and opportunity to talk about her experiences and deal with 'complex issues.'

Storytelling also included writing as the vehicle. This was most prominent with Hannah, who found that the stress experience caused, amongst many other mental and physical effects, her memory loss:

> the problem I had is, you know when your mind goes blank? Mine did. I couldn't, didn't know what to say. The fact that I am actually talking to you now – at that time I wouldn't have been able to, I had to write everything down … and the union rep used to take those notes into the meeting with him and also I took them to see the psychiatrist…I have notebooks where I write things down, I have notes, notes all over the place.

Writing therefore helped Hannah to take back a form of power and control, allowing her to articulate and communicate her thoughts and experiences.

Storytelling as a response to stress also related to the research process itself. Whether it was via email or face to face interview, participants told me their stories for no external reward whatsoever. It was regarded as an important part of their stress journey, as a way of helping themselves and / or others. Jack for example, on emailing me his experiences, stated: 'I saw it as a diary of sorts, therapy for stress, so if it reads a little odd I apologise… I think it's an important story to tell.' Katherine also stated at the end of her interview: 'I've never spoken like this before, so it's been good for me actually…So thank you, thank you for that.' For Matthew, he explained how he had 'never really put into words' his feelings and experiences in this

way before. At the end of his interview, Robert also declared with a smile: 'I feel better for having a little rant.' This theme continued with Hannah as the following exchange between Hannah, myself and her husband reveals:

> Hannah's husband: It's always there underneath, that's why, when you [referring to me, the researcher] asked your first question it all came pouring out. [To Hannah] that'll be the first chance you've had to say it for over ten years
>
> Hannah: It's still there inside, as you can see and it probably won't go away. It's just every so often there's the key, opens the door and it comes out
>
> Hannah's husband: And you [referring to me, the researcher] were the key

Storytelling is therefore seen as an important, sometimes momentous part of a stress journey. Participants place great value on having the space and opportunity to be heard: to release and communicate complex thoughts and feelings when trying to cope and to heal.

7.2.5 Intense emotion and further issues relating to physical and mental health

The examples in this chapter have already demonstrated the heightened emotions experienced by participants and the impact of stress on mind and body in both the short and long term. Here, I would like to demonstrate this further in a more specifically, single-focused way. Many narratives revealed intense emotion which participants found impossible to regulate

or prevent. It also became clear that the person was affected holistically. Rather than being separate and distinct, the mental and physical effects of stress overlapped, intertwined and interrelated. Jack revealed that, although he was not conscious of it himself, he was made aware that he had developed a 'vacant expression.' Jonathan recalled being almost crippled by the intensity of his stress experience and at one point found it 'impossible' to walk in to the school building. The following extracts continue to illustrate this theme, with Helena's words showing that although teaching is not considered to be a physical occupation, it does indeed use and impact the body:

> I never ever want to put my body through that again, I would never do a job that asked that of me. I was physically, physically sick when I went into work…just adrenaline just adrenaline, creeping–I don't know whether you've ever had adrenaline? It's a very physical, nauseous, needing to go to the toilet a lot you know like before an interview you have that nervousness before? But constant, for twenty-four hours, creeping up my arms (Helena)
>
> I became depressed… I just, I didn't want to go out. I wasn't really interested in eating. I wasn't sleeping very well. I felt like my nerves were frayed and [pause] it was just a really dark time (Matthew)
>
> When I am there I feel stressed, lump in my stomach and a feeling of adrenaline … Being in the building makes me feel like an inadequate child. I feel physical relief when I leave the building (Holly)
>
> it really was making me ill … I get very bad arthritis in my knee and … I've talked to my doctor about it and he said stress makes the arthritis worse. So it was in fact the stress that was making my arthritis worse and it was because my body was shutting, it felt like my body was shutting down and I was headaches you know, migraines.

> It was making me sick and looking back at it I can see it now, but when you're going through it you're just fighting day to day (Katherine)

Hannah suffered a wide range of ailments relating to her physical and mental health which her doctor classed as '*all* stress-related' and he thus signed her off work. Pain and spasms in her back meant that she could not leave her bed for a considerable period of time. She also suffered head aches, indigestion, heart burn and blurred vision to the extent that it affected her ability to drive.

This all-consuming, overwhelming emotion where participants struggle to control their own bodies was reflected in Simon's narrative. He discussed particular patients who had been affected in the same manner which he identified as: uncontrollable shaking, crying and unable to 'function' when attempting to cross the school threshold. He continued:

> and these are strong people – they're not sort of people where you say 'oh that's a weak person', these are people who have been doing it for years and it just seems to sort of attack them from inside…Like an uncontrolled, immense grief.

For Rachel, she was also already dealing with complex issues in her personal life. Consequently, she felt that this, added together with the stress in teaching, exacerbated and magnified the impact on her physical and mental well-being:

> I began to feel suicidal… I was very vulnerable emotionally and psychologically, and I think that this, combined with the pressures at school, meant that there were a lot of

> vulnerabilities very close to the surface all of the time …the daily stress and pressure of a high workload had much more of a significant impact.

Rachel also revealed how just being at school made her feel tense, tearful and exhausted. She described suffering from chest pains, hyperventilation, severe panic attacks, anxiety and depression. She also explained how her immune system had weakened and she would thus struggle to recover from colds, sore throats and stomach complaints. Consequently, Rachel received a course of therapy designed to deal with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

In contrast to Rachel, Hannah (and her doctors) regarded her stress as entirely job-related. Furthermore, Hannah believed that how she was treated by the Head teacher as a result of her illness led to yet more negative implications for her health, by exacerbating problems, causing additional stress and thus damaging her recovery. Whilst Hannah was signed off with stress, she was left feeling 'devastated' when discovering the Head teacher had started dismissal proceedings without informing her. Hannah emphasised that her own 'needs and wishes' were not consulted and 'alternative options' such as job share or part-time work were not explored. Hannah believed she then entered a downward spiral due to: the prospect of suddenly having no control over her own future; the fact that

her long, successful and happy teaching career was now being dismissed and ignored; the idea that she was being treated as a failed teacher as opposed to one who was ill. Hannah stressed her belief that if the Head teacher had handled things differently, with more sensitivity and compassion, then she would have recovered and continued teaching.

The impact was also seen regarding fatigue and sleep-related issues which were considered out of character. Hannah, for example, started sleep-walking for the first time. Amy, Holly, Rachel and Carly discussed difficulties in being able to get to sleep at night, and a lack of sleep, despite being so exhausted. Other narratives highlighted how some participants slept more than they had previously experienced:

> I'd come home every day and I'd sleep for an hour because I felt I needed to rest because I knew that I would be up until the very late hours so I wouldn't even say hi to the children so I'd go straight away, knew I'd go and sleep. Since starting the, for instance being in different employment for two years I've never ever once come home and had a nap, it just hasn't happened. It was like a way of shutting off and preparing my body for more work and partly being, I think when you're unhappy, when you're a bit depressed you do feel a bit more sleepy (Helena)

> I found myself exhausted…I'd just sleep, I was just so tired all the time … so lethargic all the time…it was a longing to get to the weekend just so I could sleep on a Saturday (Matthew)

The narratives also conveyed the notion that participants may never fully recover from their experience; whether months or

years have passed, the battle wounds are still felt. Robert explained at the end of his interview, 'it didn't take much to get me going' because it is still there 'underneath'. Jonathan also stated: 'Although a change of school made all the difference, it took a while for me to tell anyone about the experience.' Hannah's husband highlighted how it only 'took one question' to show how 'it's still influencing and affecting Hannah… you don't get over it, not when you were as ill as Hannah was.' Hannah herself explained that even after more than ten years: 'it's still there inside, as you can see and it probably won't go away.' Tom continued this theme when saying: 'you never quite get over it. I think I'm still, I'm still getting over it a bit.' This was also demonstrated by the emotions I could see and hear during the interviews, communicated through both verbal and non-verbal language, and notably with Amy whose tears flowed repeatedly and Matthew who felt 'wobbly' even thinking about his experiences. Helena also demonstrated how despite leaving the profession altogether, she still felt the impact:

> I've gone on I think to suffer a little bit with depression or anxiety … your body learns a behaviour and it's very hard to suddenly stop even though the external factors aren't there anymore or it might be that that was always going to happen regardless of the job, I was always going to be someone who suffered a little bit with depression?… it's very difficult to know but I've never had adrenaline before like I did when I was teaching and that creeps in again sometimes but it's different things that will spark it, I think my body learned this strategy – it's not really a strategy- running adrenaline… but it will be daft things

> like 'Oh I need to get those leaves off the garden', *worry*, 'oh I need to -perhaps we're short of milk', rather than, it's an irrational, heightened sense of worry or adrenaline.

The impact was also illuminated, perhaps unsurprisingly, by the number of participants resigning and not wanting to return to the school or the profession. This was also a huge decision since many of the participants had no other job to go to at that time, they had to take pay cuts or they had to take a career demotion. They just simply felt like they had no choice; the following extracts are just a few of the examples which demonstrate this:

> I just realised that I couldn't have continued, my own health was suffering … So I wrote the letter and sat and had a talk with my Head of Department and she tried to ensure that I'd really thought about it because she said, 'you know you've given up a lot to do this,' and I said, 'I know, and I've got nothing to go to, it's not that I've found another job or anything like that, I've no idea what I'm going to do, but I just know that I can't continue doing this' … I just really couldn't stick doing it any longer which was such a shame because I'd gone into it with such high hopes, I'd thrown my life into it, I'd given my business up to do it so yes it was incredibly scary (Matthew)

> I resigned and to resign from teaching when your husband doesn't work was a massive decision … I just knew that I couldn't be in that environment (Helena)

> It finally got too much (Simon)

> I had a long and hard talk and thought with my husband with it being such a major decision and he agreed, he said 'You've got to get out, you're going to make yourself really ill,' and it was a case of if I don't go now, either I'm going to go off sick or they're going to make me redundant, they're going to find some way of getting rid of me. So, I wanted to take that decision into my own hands, of my own doing, so I took back control, it was taking back control, that's why I did it (Katherine)

Seven participants left the teaching profession altogether; three teachers moved to a different school with one of these switching to the private sector and another changing to supply; three participants switched to part time positions; and three remain undecided about which direction to move in next. This proves a stark contrast when considering how all of these teachers entered the profession with such hopes and enthusiasm, as portrayed in Chapter 6. Tom explained how he felt this was now the norm and the 'culture' of the teaching profession:

> you squeeze everything you can out of the staff and if they decide to leave then the golden kind of mantra is, 'they're just not right for this school' and then they get somebody else in who's got three years of enthusiasm and drive and then they slowly, and they just continue to squeeze and squeeze and squeeze and then *they* leave…a merry go round of staff.

Severing all ties with the schools was also apparent, reflecting the psychological need and the effort to break away completely in order to move on. Hannah, for example, no longer kept in contact with colleagues, even those she had worked closely with stating: 'I don't want anything to do with it, I've never been anywhere near the school, never been back to the place at all, I just can't face going back'. Tom, who had worked tirelessly and pushed himself to the limit supporting his groups and preparing them for their assessments said:

> For some reason I've had no [pause] I've not actually wanted to go back and find out how they did… It is the end of a chapter and I am very like that actually but

> actually I kind of think no, I left that and actually it was a pretty dark experience.

The actual act of leaving, either the profession or the school, can also be viewed as a coping strategy and a sign of strength rather than weakness: participants take control and create distance to heal and prevent any further mental and physical harm. Indeed, Katherine described the 'relief' at handing in her notice and how this now meant she could 'move forward.' She stated that, 'Just the physical process of handing everything back' including her name tag made her feel instantly lighter, liberated and like a 'cloud' had been lifted. Similarly, Helena said that as soon as she resigned 'it felt brilliant and I started to feel a little better.' This echoes Stephanie who 'felt like the weight of the world had been lifted' from her shoulders after resigning. Matthew was adamant that it was his best decision and he would never regret it. Tom's wife declared: 'it's the best thing you've done, I've got my husband back.'

As shown, the act of leaving is associated with hope and new opportunities. Indeed, the impact of the stress experience was also seen through life changes and new ventures which were presented in a positive light. It was participants reaching that point where they needed to leave (the school or the profession) that often allowed these changes to occur. Tom explained, for

example, that it 'opened up space in my life … to do other things' whilst Katherine stressed new thought processes revealing hope and determination: 'No. I'm going to get a life now.' One participant started up their own business for the first time whilst three others went in an entirely new career direction. Four participants used education, undertaking new university courses, as an empowering opportunity as well as part of their coping and healing process. Sarah, for instance, described it as an 'outlet' and 'something I love.' Rachel found she could draw on her own experiences through her educational studies, simultaneously supporting her own recovery and also fulfilling her intention 'to help others in some way.' Linking in to this example, four other participants decided to use their experiences within the teaching profession to support others who may also be suffering. For one participant this was, like Rachel, through education, and for the others it was in a voluntary, unpaid capacity via specific organisations. Additionally, one participant was a volunteer for a charity in an area unrelated to the teaching profession. Through the act of telling me their story, it can be said that *all* participants did in fact voluntarily use their experiences to help others as well as facilitate their own recovery.

7.3 Summary

This chapter has completed the last of the three stages exploring the battleground, focusing on teachers' attempts to survive and cope, and the implications for their mental and physical health. Despite portraying the job itself as impossible, participants show effort and determination to make the impossible, possible, regardless of their battle wounds. The discussion of the narratives within this chapter has shown that:

- Participants' stress experiences were not triggered by specific, isolated events. Instead, a steady build up, a 'drip drip' effect gradually overwhelmed the individual. Important events were highlighted, although these were presented as a symptom of the stress or 'the last straw.'
- Teacher stress and its consequences can affect absolutely anyone: it is not a question of being weak or strong, new to the profession or an experienced teacher.
- Participants were affected holistically, with an interrelationship between effects relating to mind, body and behaviours.

- The implications for mental and physical health and behaviours can be visible or hidden, and the teacher may or may not be conscious of them taking hold.
- The battle can often turn inwards as many participants internalise their stress and struggle for outlets.
- Guilt, shame and fear are frequently wound up with the stress experience.
- Teachers can often isolate themselves and withdraw, creating further implications for their relationships, family life and social life.
- Teachers can fall into perfectionism and workaholism, with their conscientiousness often likened to self-harm.
- Participants found themselves acting out of character and revealed changes to their personality and behaviours. Many behaviours were linked to a search for comfort or the desire for control.
- The emotions teachers experienced were powerful, overwhelming and intense, as portrayed for instance by uncontrollable crying and shaking, anxiety, adrenaline, panic attacks and the inability to cross the school threshold.

- As a result of coping with stress and the healing process, often through leaving the school or the profession, many participants revealed positive implications in the form of new ventures and new opportunities.

I now turn to the discussion section where I reflect on the last three chapters which have presented the account of the data. I focus on those prominent themes, discoveries and areas of interest which warrant further exploration.

Chapter 8

Discussion: Implications of the Findings

8.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I focus more deeply on significant themes and discoveries which emerged when presenting the account of the data. The chapter is devoted to three main areas of interest and separated into parts accordingly:

- (Part One) Trauma and teacher stress
- (Part Two) Relationships as the school's bricks and mortar
- (Part Three) The creative survivor: from a pathological to a creative approach when understanding stress-related behaviours

I not only explore how these discoveries relate to my own participants but also illustrate their wider significance. The implications of the findings and their contribution to practice and to the literature in the field is highlighted.

8.1 PART ONE: Trauma and teacher stress

8.1.1 Teacher stress as an inadequate description

When considering the themes which emerged throughout the narratives as a whole, as well as focusing on the stories of specific participants, it became clear that the term 'teacher stress' was sometimes an insufficient and inadequate description. When participants presented their own experience in the teaching profession, or that of their colleagues (and in Simon's case that of his patients), the concept of *trauma* often

seemed much more applicable. The findings of my study reveal that the literature on teacher stress must take into account the concept of traumatic stress; teachers can become traumatised by their occupation. There is currently a gap in the literature and a lack of empirical research when it comes to this issue. When trauma is referred to, it is in the sense that schools need educators or specific professionals with appropriate skills to support *pupils* who have experienced trauma such as abuse, bereavement or becoming a victim of war or natural disasters (see for example Waghorn, 2012; Little, Akin-Little and Somerville, 2011; Mutch and Gawith, 2014; Alisic, 2012). The literature provides guidance for responding to pupils' needs and insight into their traumatic experiences, as opposed to those of teachers. As Caringi, Stanick, Trautman, Crosby, Devlina and Adams (2015, p244) point out, from 2012 onwards there has been an acknowledgement that teachers may suffer from secondary traumatic stress (STS) due to supporting their traumatized pupils. The authors (Ibid) claim their study to be the very first to look into 'the factors that influence STS levels in public school teachers'. However, although this is a step forward in that it acknowledges teachers can suffer from traumatic stress, it is again relating to the pupil and being exposed to their trauma, rather than the teacher's own personal, first-hand experience.

8.1.2 What is trauma and how is it defined?

It is important at this point for me to address the issue of what trauma is and how it applies to my participants' narratives. As Aldwin and Yancura (2004, p99) explain, researchers define trauma in different ways. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) in DSM-IV define trauma as involving 'actual or threatened death or serious injury or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others', with a response of 'intense fear, helplessness, or horror' (cited by Carlson and Dalenberg, 2000, p5). However, the definition is not fixed since in the updates and additions for DSM-5, the APA 'eliminate' the latter description of the individual's response on the grounds of it being 'overly restrictive' (APA, 2013). Carlson and Dalenberg (2000, p6) view the former section of the APA definition as too limited also, stating that defining traumatic events as only those involving injury or death 'erroneously excludes some events that are potentially traumatic.' They argue that evidence to support their view is emerging. The authors themselves identify three defining features which they consider necessary for events to be classed as traumatic: 'a lack of control over what is happening, the perception that the event is a highly negative experience, and the suddenness of the experience' (Ibid).

HelpGuide (2016), an organisation 'dedicated to charitable and educational purposes', also challenge the idea that trauma must include a threat to life:

> Emotional and psychological trauma is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter your sense of security, making you feel helpless in a dangerous world. Traumatic experiences often involve a threat to life or safety, but any situation that leaves you feeling overwhelmed and alone can be traumatic, even if it doesn't involve physical harm. It's not the objective facts that determine whether an event is traumatic, but your subjective emotional experience of the event. The more frightened and helpless you feel, the more likely you are to be traumatized… You're more likely to be traumatized by a stressful experience if you're already under a heavy stress load, have recently suffered a series of losses, or have been traumatized before.

Here, the role of the individual and how they personally interact with events is heavily emphasised. Little et al (2011, p449) allude to this idea when arguing that not all children exposed to traumatic events will develop trauma symptoms. Johnson (1998, p45) also concurs with this positon: 'An experience that is only moderately difficult for one person may be unbearable and traumatic for another.' Friedman (2016) explains this position in further detail. He states that although some events (such as torture and genocide) are experienced as traumatic by 'nearly everyone', individual differences can exist:

> Like pain, the traumatic experience is filtered through cognitive and emotional processes before it can be appraised as an extreme threat. Because of individual differences in this appraisal process, different people appear to have different trauma thresholds, some more

> protected from and some more vulnerable to developing clinical symptoms after exposure to extremely stressful situations.

This perspective may explain why not all of my participants were affected in the same way by their stress experience and why a variety of responses were seen across the narratives. As an example, in my study Carly could be considered the least affected by her experience. This is revealed by her being almost completely absent from Chapter 7 which explored the impact of stress on participants' mental and physical health and behaviours. Carly reported eating less, becoming more impatient and having to distance herself from family and household tasks in order to manage occupational demands. In contrast to Carly and at the other extreme, Hannah was debilitated; she described how her 'whole world collapsed' leading to her self-confinement in the house. Her mental and physical health suffered a wide range of harmful effects and she had to turn to the help of prescription medication, doctors, counsellors and a psychiatrist. Similarly, Rachel's mental and physical health suffered to the extent where she experienced panic attacks, depression, suicidal thoughts and eventually turned to therapy designed for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

When comparing the stories of Hannah and Rachel in my study, definitions of trauma which allow for different experiences and highlight the subjective role of the individual, again seem strengthened and relevant. Whilst doctors declared Hannah's stress-related illness to be purely job-related, Rachel was simultaneously dealing with issues in her past and home life as well as those relating to the teaching profession (see Chapter 7). Rachel felt that she was already vulnerable due to dealing with an original trauma; her experiences in the teaching profession therefore added to and exacerbated her traumatic stress. From a gestalt perspective, it would be argued therefore that Rachel was also dealing with 'unfinished business' which exacerbated her traumatic experience (Kirchner, 2015, pp212-213; Wymore, 2015, p338; Paivio and Greenberg, 1995, p419). Definitions of trauma which thus emphasise the role of the individual and the interrelationship between person and environment, are in line with the ideas of field theory and gestalt psychology (see for example Wollants, 2012, p2).

It is clear that definitions of trauma vary and are frequently contested. Joseph (2012) highlights how the 'elastic nature' of the concept has led to 'public confusion'. He draws attention to the debate over whether the definition should be restrictive and

in line with the APA, or more wide-ranging, defined as a 'deeply distressing or disturbing experience' and thus including 'the stuff of ordinary life such as divorce, illness, accidents and bereavement.' My study takes the latter position, and in this light, the experience of many of my participants can be viewed as traumatic rather than as stressful. The narratives in this study presented teachers who felt completely overwhelmed and debilitated in an adversarial environment where the pressure was simply *relentless*. Despite their efforts and suffering, many participants and their colleagues often felt alone, abandoned or betrayed. Some were lucky to have the support of a loved one or teaching union; many turned to doctors, counsellors and therapists in order to cope and heal. The stories powerfully presented a range of harmful effects on teachers' mental and physical health and behaviours. Indeed, the very metaphor of 'the battleground' which was used to organise the account of the data and was derived from the language use, imagery and themes of participants' narratives, again signals trauma rather than stress.

8.1.3 Responses to trauma: harm

As Hayes and Frederickson (2008, 97) point out, even though it is defined subjectively, 'the "trauma" remains the event' whilst

the concept of PTSD relates to an individual's responses and reaction. According to the NHS (2015 a) PTSD affects '1 in every 3 people who have a traumatic experience.' DePrince and Freyd (2002) explain that the concept has its 'origins in work with Vietnam combat veterans' and that most research on trauma during the late twentieth century focused on the 'specific diagnosis' of PTSD (p72). However, they point out the limitations of this approach since it focuses on the response of 'fear, helplessness, or horror' as stipulated in the APA definition in DSM-IV. They suggest the response to traumatic events may not be related to fear or terror, but related to 'shattered assumptions and betrayal' (p80). They add that the PTSD approach which focuses on fear may close down opportunities to capture 'more of the complexity and heterogeneity of trauma and posttraumatic responses' (p80).

A plethora of research discusses the various responses to trauma and as the NHS (2015 b) point out, symptoms can vary widely between individuals. Drawing on current advice from the NHS (Ibid) as well as the work of Carlson and Dalenberg (2000) and Fisher (2007; 2016 a), I have presented a summary of common trauma symptoms in Figure 8.1.

• flashbacks • nightmares • physical sensations for example chronic pain, dizziness, sweating, nausea and trembling • constant negative thoughts about the experience • avoidance and emotional numbing which may include avoiding people or places that remind you of the trauma • hyperarousal • long term feelings of alarm and danger • irritability • aggression • difficulty sleeping • difficulty concentrating • depression • anxiety	• panic attacks • phobias • self-harming and self-destructive behaviour, such as drug or alcohol misuse • physical illnesses and symptoms such as headaches, dizziness, chest pains and stomach aches • low-self-esteem • identity confusion • difficulties in interpersonal relationships • guilt and shame • feeling emotionally overwhelmed • loss of a sense of the future and a sense of hopelessness • little / no memories or intrusive memories • eating disorders • feeling unreal or out of body • loss of a sense of "Who I am"

Figure 8.1. Trauma symptoms and responses (based on NHS, 2015 b; Carlson and Dalenberg, 2000; and Fisher, 2007 and 2016 a)

One only has to glance at Chapter 7 of this study, and in particular figure 7.1, to see just how many of these trauma symptoms and responses relate to my own participants' experiences. I set out to investigate teacher stress, and then discovered I was often hearing stories about teacher trauma. It is unsurprising therefore that so many of my participants turned to either their doctor for support or to the help of counsellors and therapists. The concept of trauma can also explain why some of my participants struggled to recover from their experience even though they had left the school or the teaching profession and, in Hannah's case, even though years had

passed (see Chapter 7). As Fisher (2016 a) explains, 'trauma's imprint is both psychological and somatic: long after the events are over, the body continues to respond as if danger were everpresent.' She adds:

> the survival response system may become chronically activated, resulting in long-term feelings of alarm and danger, tendencies to flee or fight under stress, debilitating feelings of vulnerability and exhaustion (Fisher, 2016 b).

Just a glance at media articles in the area of education and it suggests that my participants are not alone in their experiences. I have presented a selection of examples of headlines in Figure 8.2.

British Broadcasting Corporation	• Teacher stress levels in England 'soaring', data shows (Precey, 2015) • Teachers report rise in mental health fears (Sellgren, 2014 b) • Stressed teachers 'taking drugs' (Eason, 2007) • Teachers use drink and drugs for stress (BBC News, 2003)
The Guardian	• Secret Teacher: when does a relaxing glass of wine become a problem? (Secret teacher, 2015) • Depressed, stressed: teachers in crisis (Hill, 2008)
The Times Education Supplement	• What keeps me awake at night: the education system is imploding and so are many of those stuck within it (Anonymous, 2016) • Teaching is among the 'top three most stressed occupations' (Wiggins, 2015)
The Telegraph	• Teachers say stress is leading to rise in mental health issues (2014) • Stressed teachers 'considering suicide' (Paton, 2010)

Figure 8.2. Media headlines relating to teachers' mental and physical health

This suggests that traumatic stress may apply to many teachers both nationally and internationally, adding further explanation

as to why almost a third leave the profession within five years (Vaughan, 2016) and why some are even awarded compensation due to the harmful effects the occupation has had on their health (Lightfoot, 2000; HeraldScotland, 2012; Mulholland, 2012 a).

8.1.4 Responses to trauma: healing and growth

Whilst the negative, harmful effects of trauma can be 'serious and long lasting' (Alisic, 2012, p51), trauma has also been associated with positive changes. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) refer to this as posttraumatic growth (PTG). Linley and Joseph (2004, p11) highlight other terminology used to describe these changes: posttraumatic, stress-related growth, perceived benefits, thriving, blessings, positive by-products, positive adjustment and positive adaptation. The authors themselves use the term adversarial growth and stress that the 'common factor' shared by all these labels is 'struggling with adversity'. With regard to the changes that take place, Little et al (2011, p455) emphasise that the individual does not simply return to how they were before the traumatic experience: 'PTG is not simply a return to baseline … it is an experience of improvement that for some persons is deeply profound.' Elderton, Berry and Chan (2015, p2) argue that PTG can 'facilitate new wisdom'

leading to 'psychological well-being and greater life satisfaction.' Growth does not mean that the person is without suffering, however; posttraumatic stress and posttraumatic growth are not 'separate, unrelated phenomena' (Joseph and Linley, 2008, p341). Positive changes can be used as 'foundations' for therapeutic work, 'providing hope that the trauma can be overcome' (Linley and Joseph, 2004, p11). In this light they can be seen as building blocks for future flourishing.

Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004, p1) summarise the variety of ways that posttraumatic growth can be manifested: an increased appreciation for life in general; more meaningful interpersonal relationships; an increased sense of personal strength; changed priorities; and a richer existential and spiritual life. It can be argued that these elements emerged in many of my participants' narratives. In Chapter 7, I drew attention to particular behaviours, life changes, new opportunities and new ventures undertaken by some participants. In brief, those reflecting healing and growth included: starting up their own business; new career paths; undertaking university courses (and in Rachel's case, specifically using her own experience to simultaneously support her recovery whilst helping others); voluntary and charity work; and storytelling. With regard to the latter, this was via doctors, counsellors and therapists to

facilitate their own healing. Additionally, it was via participating in this research project to support their healing process whilst also helping others by increasing awareness. Arguably, participants would not have achieved these things or considered these actions without their stress experience. These behaviours and changes therefore signal rejuvenation, re-birth, forging new identities and the act of taking back power, voice and control. Their actions can also be regarded as 'emotional processing' as they come to terms with their traumatic experiences. Emotional processing involves 'physical, cognitive and affective actions' (Mutch and Gawith, 2014, p55) whereby emotional disturbances are 'absorbed and decline' (Rachman, 1980, p51). It is important to note that for my participants, healing could not always take place within the system itself. Participants reported feeling lonely, abandoned, unsupported and even betrayed within their school environment. It is no wonder, therefore, that so many had to leave their particular school or leave the teaching profession altogether (see Chapter 7), for their recovery to begin. This issue highlights the importance of relationships within schools for staff health and well-being; this issue will be discussed further in Part Two of this chapter. Indeed, relationships and environment can be seen as crucial to buffering stress and trauma (Ungar, 2013).

8.1.5 Summary and further implications

When considering the experiences of my participants and their colleagues (and of many other teachers both nationally and internationally), this section has shown that the term 'stress' is often an inadequate description with the concept of trauma more appropriate. As highlighted, this is currently a gap in the literature on teacher stress: research and guidance is offered concerning educators supporting traumatised pupils or it is related to teachers' STS. It is my contention, therefore, that the literature on teacher stress must accommodate, and can benefit from, the literature on trauma. Furthermore, I argue that the concept of traumatic stress should be placed on a continuum of teacher stress: I have offered such a continuum in Figure 8.3. The literature review pointed out that descriptions and visual representations have been presented to explain stress and to acknowledge both positive and negative levels of stress. As a result of this existing knowledge, and with the addition of my own research findings, what I offer in Figure 8.3 is a summative description of different forms of stress as they relate to teachers, as well as an additional component of traumatic stress.

Lack of stress	Eustress	Distress	Traumatic stress
▪ Boredom, apathy and frustration ▪ The teacher experiences a lack of engagement, inspiration, challenge and motivation ▪ Lack of productivity	▪ Optimal performance ▪ Appropriate degree of challenge ▪ The teacher feels engaged and productive	▪ The tipping point: the teacher's mental and physical health and behaviours are affected	▪ Crisis point: the teacher is completely overwhelmed and debilitated by the stress experience ▪ As well as harm, growth may be seen after the teacher's exposure to traumatic stress

Figure 8.3. A proposed continuum of teacher stress

To explain the Figure in further detail, it is displayed that stress does not necessarily have to be negative. With appropriate levels (Eustress) it can be healthy and productive by challenging us in new and exciting ways, helping us to flourish. Indeed, this shares some overlap with the concept of dynamic disequilibrium which posits that 'discomfort-producing conditions' are needed to attain 'optimal states of growth' (Joyce, 1984, p26). Lazarus also suggests that stress can 'mobilise us to achieve more than we believed could be accomplished' (2006, p20). With too little stress, therefore, such changes and developments and new opportunities are less likely to manifest themselves (Lack of stress). However, there is also a huge difference between

experiencing a little 'discomfort' to experiencing detrimental effects on health and well-being (Distress) and being completely overwhelmed and debilitated (Traumatic stress). This difference is represented by the continuum itself and by the phrases 'tipping point' and 'crisis point.'

My research findings and the gap in the literature also shows that research needs to be undertaken in the specific area of teacher's traumatic stress; teachers are an at risk group due to their occupation. Research would help to identify more of the potential triggers, as well as the impact on teachers and how schools might address the issue. Schools need to be aware that teachers, not just pupils, can be traumatised and be suffering due to stress. They should have awareness of signs and symptoms and have appropriate systems and policies in place in order to respond in a helpful and compassionate manner. In my study, it was this lack of support and compassion (specifically from the Head teacher) that caused Hannah to embark on a downward spiral and it impeded her recovery (see Chapter 7). Relationships and environment are key to buffering traumatic stress (Ungar, 2013). Schools therefore need to pay close attention to their environment, atmosphere and ethos, and prioritise the building of healthy, mutually supportive relationships: every child matters and so does every member of staff. Obviously, school leaders and managers have an

important role to play here in shaping this. This issue will be discussed further in Part Two of this chapter.

8.2 PART TWO

Relationships as the school's bricks and mortar

8.2.1 The power and impact of mutually supportive staff relationships

As the literature review demonstrated, research has shown that common sources of teacher stress include: an emphasis on performance, results and monitoring; preparing for Ofsted; an excessive workload; role conflict and ambiguity; poor working conditions; constant changes and new initiatives; relationships; and pupil behaviour. There is a clear parallel between these, and many of those relayed by my participants. Where my research differs, however, is that *all* sources of stress can be seen as directly related to the specific issue of staff relationships (particularly those with school leaders and managers). In brief, key findings regarding relationships within the school setting were as follows:

- Positive relationships were mostly associated with teachers and pupils. I demonstrated how these relationships were linked to: teachers' love of the actual teaching itself; the absence of suspicion and mistrust; and teachers' feeling valued, appreciated and supported.
- All but one narrative presented adversarial and combative relationships within schools which were significant to

teacher stress. Embattled relationships and divisions across the staff body were seen with teachers often feeling lonely and isolated. The most common of these relationships discussed by participants, however, was undoubtedly those concerning school leaders and managers. They were presented as central to the stress experience in all but one narrative.

- Although three narratives revealed adversarial relationships between teachers and pupils, the focus was not so much on the students' behaviour, but on the lack of support shown by SMT (see for example Jonathan's story, Chapter 5, who believed this exacerbated his stress experience). This was also evident with Hannah. She was adamant that with proper support, compassion and understanding from the Head teacher, she would have made a full recovery from her stress-related illness and remained in the teaching profession. Instead, the Head teacher's actions led to her symptoms being intensified, causing her to embark upon a downward spiral where, to use her husband's words, 'she got more and more ill, more and more depressed, more and more upset, couldn't step outside the door.'
- Relationships with school leaders and managers were associated with suspicion and mistrust and with teachers feeling betrayed, unappreciated and afraid to ask for help and risk becoming 'marked'. Participants presented leaders and managers as unapproachable, reluctant to meaningfully engage and as using a dehumanising approach.
- Participants wanted empathy, compassion and support from their school leaders and managers yet often felt abandoned; teaching unions or spouses were a lifeline of support instead.

Clearly, it was not simply the case that staff relationships were associated with the teacher stress experience, but that they had the power and potential to either exacerbate or alleviate it. For my participants, staff relationships therefore have an umbrella-

like quality, over-arching all other stressors; they have the potential to act as a shield or as a further trigger. I have expressed the positive power of mutually rewarding staff relationships in Figure 8.4.

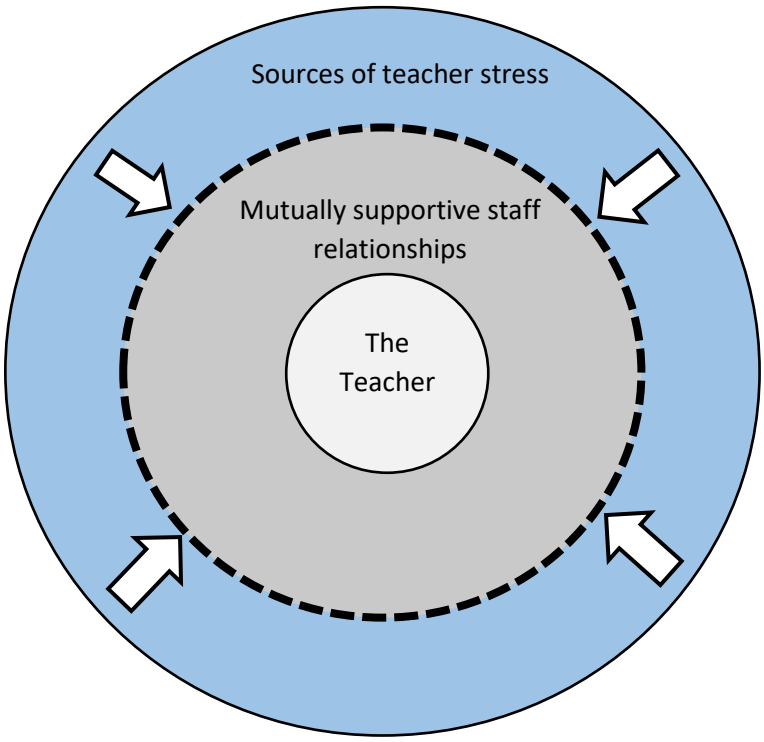

Figure 8.4. Mutually supportive staff relationships as a protective shield against teacher stress

The arrows signify that highly stressful events and experiences will always exist, yet mutually supportive staff relationships can act as a shield, as represented by the thicker, dashed line. This shield can filter and reduce the impact of stress, making the teacher feel stronger, more valued, supported and cushioned from the blow. This Figure and the imagery of the shield and

arrows, again ties in with the overarching theme of the 'battleground'.

As noted in the account of the data, in the early stages of data collection I expected the physical environment of the school to play much more of a role in teacher stress. I emphasised how it soon became apparent that for my participants, schools were not built by aesthetics and expensive architectural design, but by the people and relationships within the building itself: I now describe this as the *relationship-architecture* of the school. Social support in general has been established as a protective factor against stress (Ju, Lan, Li, Feng and You, 2015, p60; Kelly and Antonio, 2016, p139), yet my findings do not simply concur with this, they go even further and indicate that work-based relationships form the very bricks and mortar of the school. In this light, therefore, schools need to be 'built' on solid foundations: relationships come first, and everything can follow accordingly. The school culture, ethos and atmosphere, as well as student and teacher well-being, will be shaped by the relationships within the school. Relationships define, for example, NQTs first work experiences revealing how teaching is not simply a 'technical or cognitive practice' but social, relational and emotional (Aspfors and Bondas, 2013, p243). Human relationships are at the 'core', not just in the act of teaching, but in all communication within the school community' (Ibid).

My findings thus support research which argues for the primacy of relationships in schools. Smyth (2007, p222-224) argues, for example, this can help rescue schools by:

> organizing teachers, parents, communities and students around a different set of values from the managerialized and marketized ones that have been allowed to saturate schools.

Harris (2008) suggests that health messages and supportive strategies are simply not reaching all staff and students and this can be due to clashes with the demands of an academic curriculum. She stresses that an emphasis on relationships is the key to moving schools towards recovery. Fielding (2006, p307) echoes these sentiments by promoting schools as caring 'person-centred' communities where the functional is used for the sake of the personal: teaching subjects and getting results are 'only justifiable insofar as they help young people to become better persons'. It is evident that building mutually rewarding relationships in schools cannot be attempted in a piecemeal manner or viewed as an optional extra: a whole school approach and shift in values is required.

8.2.2 The holistic impact of leadership and management style

As demonstrated, poor relationships with leaders and managers were particularly significant to the teacher stress experience.

Participants expressed a ripple effect and a holistic impact, linking leadership and management style to the whole school environment and the nature of all relationships that were found within the school. As Sheldrake (2012, p146) explains:

> It is relatively easy to break things up and analyse the parts. The problem is to understand the whole; not just the parts but also their interactions need to be understood. And these interactions are not contained in the parts themselves.

All parts reflect the whole and have an interrelationship. Tom, for example, who left his school due to stress and moved to the private sector, explained his guilt at doing to others what was done to him. As a Head of Department working within a system of accountability, he felt responsible that a member of his department was signed off with stress. In the account of the data I presented the metaphor of the waterfall and the notion of 'pass it down'. Again this implies the notion of movement, the waves of consequences and implications as stress is passed down the staff hierarchy. All issues are therefore interconnected and underpinned by relationships; they are not separate random facts. A reductionist view would simply fragment such events and issues within the school and fail to see how they are all interrelated. As Oberski and McNally (2007, p941) explain, 'dividing plants into root, stem and leaf, is arbitrary in terms of the plant's true nature.'

My study was micro level and provided a detailed exploration of the impact that stress had on the individual. It addressed the staff hierarchy from school Head teacher or Principal at the top, down to the teacher delivering and responding to occupational demands. However, there are of course further tiers above the school leader which were not the focus of this particular research. School leaders also have pressures and demands passed down to them via government directives and educational policy; their hands are tied to a certain extent. Bell and Stevenson (2015, p146) demonstrate, for example, that the environment school leaders and teachers work in is 'shaped by educational policy' and that policy itself is affected by 'dominant political ideologies.' Coldron, Crawford, Jones and Simkins (2014) also discuss the re-structuring of schools following the 2010 coalition policy to encourage schools to become academies. They remind us that if they want their schools to survive, leaders 'have to play the game' with whatever resources they have available; this can mean making choices and forming alliances which may not always sit well with their values. Studies which address a macro level focus can therefore add further insight into the holistic nature of the education system. Furthermore, there was not space in this study to also investigate how the teacher then passes it down to the students and the implications of this from the students' perspective. Such

research would also be fruitful in the light of recent statistics offered by Young Minds (2016). Describing schools as 'exam factories,' they state that 'three children in every classroom have a diagnosable mental health disorder'.

The account of the data revealed how it was rare to not 'pass it down' as a leader. Robert, however, was the exception (see Chapter 6). As Head teacher, he objected to the concepts of normativity and performativity he felt were being operationalised by Ofsted and he refused to pass it down to his staff and pupils. This came with a cost to his health and career. Robert was devastated as refusing to compromise his beliefs and sense of 'moral purpose' (Hargreaves, 1998) meant he had to resign. Robert's vulnerability and his attempts to protect his staff come to mind when contemplating Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski's (2004) discussion of 'the wounded leader' concept. They see wounding as 'an important source of emotional and social learning' for leaders, however in Robert's case it meant the end of his leadership altogether: he took the wound himself in order to avoid wounding others. Robert's efforts here, have much in common with Frost and Robinson's (1999) description of the 'toxic handler' who they view as both organisational hero and casualty. Such individuals work predominantly at the top of an organisation; they attempt to absorb and soften 'emotional pain' in order to protect others within the organisation. As has

been noted, however, the findings revealed that most leaders and managers tended to pass the stress down, and thus, such toxicity was also passed on, negatively affecting relationships and staff health.

Participants objected to a dehumanising management style which focused on performance, not people, and which they believed did not value teachers. The need for affirmation, to feel valued and appreciated, was shown to be of great importance to participants. Indeed, its presence was linked to teachers' positive relationships with pupils. This dehumanising approach that participants described, and to use Matthew's words, this 'culture of expectation', was linked to a divisive, competitive and adversarial environment. Participants described conflicts, staff bullying and feelings of loneliness and isolation. Indeed, as much as work-related support may be required, Rachel described how she just wanted someone 'to have a friendly supportive chat' with or 'just a general chat about nothing in particular.' Loneliness is much more than an emotional state, with scientists linking it to illness and early death (Knapton, 2015). It is thus imperative for schools to prioritise building mutually rewarding staff relationships, in both a professional and social sense. The school should have a duty of care for its staff as well as its pupils; no teacher should feel so alone. Changes made in 2015 meant that Ofsted added criteria to its

framework to address pupils' mental health and well-being (Ofsted, 2016). However, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR, 2016) object to how this is being used as merely an option:

> Ofsted inspectors are not routinely assessing schools' mental health provision, despite recent changes… Just one third of a sample of Ofsted reports published since the changes were introduced make explicit reference to pupils' mental health and/or emotional wellbeing.

Furthermore, even if this is addressed, it is still focusing on the *pupils'* mental health rather than recognising that staff are part of that environment and community too. The concept of nurturing staff is a component which should also have prominence. Clearly, more needs to be done to ensure that relationships and mental health are at the forefront of schools and nurtured in a holistic, whole school approach: every child matters, and so does every teacher.

8.2.3 Building relationships within the school setting: summary and further implications

In this section I have demonstrated that relationships and teacher stress are inextricably linked. For my participants, relationships overarch all other stressors and can either exacerbate or alleviate their stress experience. I have used the term relationship-architecture to show the importance of relationships in 'building' a school; how they are the bricks and

mortar. It was stressed that leadership and management style had an impact on the whole school community and a holistic perspective on the education system was addressed. It was emphasised, therefore, that relationships should take centre stage in a school's agenda. A whole school approach to building mutually supportive and rewarding relationships would benefit not only students' health and well-being, but also that of the staff. Although my study was small scale and involved participants from various parts of England, the findings are applicable on a wider scale: 'Teaching, irrespective of its geographical location, is fundamentally a relational practice' (Orchard, Heilbronn and Winstanley, 2016, p42).

School leaders have a key role to play in promoting and developing positive relationships within schools. As Ackerman and Maslin-Ostrowski (2004, p312) explain, leaders who are 'insecure about their own emotional capacity and identity will create organizational settings, which tend to deprive others of theirs.' Leaders therefore need to be aware of how their style and approach can set a precedent and have an holistic impact across the school; how their language, behaviours and attitudes affect staff health and relationships. This is a key issue which should be addressed in research and practice, since whilst the educational leadership literature has offered various models on how to lead and manage schools, the same attention has not

been given to how to develop 'leadership capability' (Bush and Crawford, 2012, p543).

Crawford (2012, p614) explores the differing approaches of solo and shared leadership and, citing Ogawa and Bossert (1997), she also draws our attention to the idea of leadership 'as a quality of organizations rather than individuals.' This latter perspective opens up the possibility that all members of staff could have the potential to lead on developing relationships, irrespective of seniority. Furthermore, the professional development of all staff should not simply focus on a technical level and on improving students' academic performance; a technical expert does not necessarily make a good leader or create a healthy school environment. Relational and emotional skills also need to be prioritised. Schools may benefit from sharing best practice with other schools or even organisations in different industries. Relational factors should be enshrined in the school ethos with school policies, practices, mission statements and mottos acknowledging their importance for staff as well as students. Every member of the school community can not only benefit from such a shift in values but also help to create it. No one is simply 'just an individual … because human beings always exist within systems of relationship' (Parlett, 1997, p16).

8.3 PART THREE

The creative survivor: from a pathological to a creative approach when understanding stress-related behaviours

8.3.1 A Rejection of Negative Language and Labelling

As a result of hearing my participants' stories of stress, I found much of the language and labels used in the literature to be inappropriate and judgemental. My perspective on this was made clear when I provided a critical review of the literature on stress, teacher stress and coping (see Chapter 3). I argued that coping behaviours are often categorised in a hierarchical or dichotomous manner presenting positive versus negative options; I challenged such labels as 'maladaptive', 'neurotic' and 'non-resilient'. It is my contention that such labels point the finger and suggest the individual lacks something or is flawed in some way. By suggesting superior versus inferior coping, a language of blame and shame is used. The harmful effects of shame have been well-documented (Kaufman and Raphael, 1997; Kaufman 1993, p45; Bradshaw, 1990) and indeed, shame was detrimental to the well-being of many of my participants (see Chapter 7). I suggest, therefore, that using terminology which could inflict further shame by making someone feel like a failure, is unhelpful and counterproductive.

Using the concept of resilience, I now provide more detailed examples to demonstrate why I take this position. Resilience has been defined thus:

> a personal characteristic that enables individuals to 'stay the course' despite the difficulties that they encounter…a quality that enables teachers to maintain their commitment to teaching and their teaching practices despite challenging conditions and recurring setbacks (Brunetti, 2006, p813).
>
> a quality of character, personality, and coping ability. Resiliency connotes strength, flexibility, a capacity for mastery (Agaibi and Wilson, 2005, p197).
>
> successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Masten, Best, and Garmezy, 1990, p425).
>
> using energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adverse conditions (Patterson, Collins, and Abbott, 2004, p4).

Although there is no universal definition of resilience (Agaibi and Wilson, 2005, p211), it is clear that what these examples share is the notion that people who are considered resilient are regarded as superior to those who are not (stronger, successful, more flexible). This judgment is also reflected in Howard and Johnson's (2004, p406) diagrammatical representation of how teachers display 'resilient and non-resilient behaviour'. With the actual layout of their diagram, as well as the content, they compare and contrast teachers' behaviour and set up a dichotomy of positive versus negative and the notion of success versus failure. As an example, they state that resilient teachers 'demonstrate effective strategies for working with difficult

students' whereas non-resilient teachers 'have difficulty working with unmotivated, non-compliant students'; resilient teachers 'respond appropriately to violent behaviour' but non-resilient teachers have to call for assistance. They also state that teachers who lack resilience 'blame students or colleagues' for their 'perceived failure to cope' and they 'need to take leave to deal with work-related stress.' The latter point appears to imply that taking time off sick is a sign of weakness and may signal prejudice in the area of mental health. Would this judgement have been made if the illness was related to a physical injury, such as a broken arm? In addition, we must also remember that the judgment and identification of resilience is 'partly an artefact of the researcher's bias' (Ungar, p256).

As well as the focus on character qualities, these definitions of resilience also focus on the individual's responsibility: it is their job to change, to possess or acquire the necessary skills and characteristics whilst the environment avoids blame and responsibility. This echoes many perspectives of stress which focus on the individual such as conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and locus of control (Rotter, 1966; Skinner 1996). Some definitions of resilience, however, do acknowledge that 'particular contexts offer risk and protective factors' which may impede or promote a person's resilience (Mansfield et al,

2012, p357). In addition, Ungar (2013, p256) tries to redress the balance by offering an ecological definition:

> Rather than defining resilience as the individual's capacity to succeed under stress, I defined resilience as the capacity of *both* individuals and their environments to interact in ways that optimize developmental processes … This ecological definition purposely decenters individuals to avoid blaming them for not flourishing when there are few opportunities to access resources. Though personal motivation to adapt is still an important factor in positive development after exposure to traumatic events, the social ecology is responsible for constraining or liberating people's choices with regard to coping strategies that result in prosocial behavior or pathological adaptation.

Although his definition does incorporate the nature and responsibility of the environment, Ungar still chooses to keep the term 'resilient'. It is my belief that, despite his shift in focus, the term still signals a focus on the individual: we are surely more likely to refer to a person as resilient rather than a place?

Engaging with the narratives and meeting the majority of my participants face to face, I *heard* their story and could see and feel the emotion and the impact their experience had on them. In this light, when presenting the account of the data I rejected such terminology which would categorise and label their behaviours in a judgemental, insensitive manner. Instead, I intend to offer a different way of explaining and describing their stress-related behaviours. In Chapter 7 I discussed the implications of participants' stress experiences for mental and physical health and behaviours. I noted that these could be

visible or hidden, with participants conscious or unconscious of them. In Figure 7.1 I provided an overview of these. Examples of participants' stress-related behaviours included compulsive shopping and issues relating to food, exercise, smoking and alcohol. Some researchers may argue that these activities could be called addictive behaviours, which West (2006, p10) defines as 'impaired control over a reward-seeking behaviour.' Webb, Sniehotta and Michie (2010, pp1879-1880) state that:

> Behaviour is termed 'addictive' when it meets two conditions: (a) the strength of its reinforcement (e.g. reward- seeking or withdrawal avoidance) makes self-regulation of the behaviour very difficult and (b) the failure to regulate prevents the achievement of the person's or society's goals—in other words, the behaviours are maladaptive.

However, I also reject this terminology as an appropriate explanation and description: again, words like addictive and maladaptive signal pathology and appear to blame the person, failing to take into account the context and bigger picture. Furthermore, the concept of addictive behaviour would not appropriately explain many of my participants' other behaviours such as writing, storytelling, helping others via charity and voluntary work and embarking on university courses. Many of these particular examples have more in common with the idea of emotional processing, a concept which was discussed in the previous section. Furthermore, it could be argued that those behaviours relating to helping others who are suffering, reveal

an element of proflection: 'doing to others what we would like others to do to us' (Ginger, 2007, p136).

Participants told stories of their experience, both verbally and in written form, in a variety of ways: to me via the research project; to their union representatives; as part of university studies; to others who may be suffering via voluntary work; to counsellors, doctors and therapists. This behaviour of using their experience to help both themselves and others, shares many elements of autoethnography. Sparkes (2000, p21) defines the term thus: 'highly personalised accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author / researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding.' The notion of a ripple effect, that changes can happen when we share our experience, is also suggested by Holman Jones (2005) who argues that autoethnography can make the personal political. She presents the personal text as a vehicle which can 'tell, teach, and put people in motion…creating space for dialogue and debate that instigates and shapes social change' (p763). Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) point out how writing personal stories (and I would also add sharing them verbally) makes witnessing possible. This is where both participants and readers observe and, consequently, 'better testify on behalf of an event, problem, or experience.' For my participants, sharing their stories led to feelings of affirmation, connecting with others and

knowing that they were not alone in their experience. Even when the reader / listener is not a therapist, the therapeutic aspect of storytelling is still evident. After telling me their story via the interview process, many participants experienced a positive sense of empowerment, re-gained control, relief and emotional release. This is also mirrored by Frank's (2016, p10) work on illness narratives. He correlates speaking for oneself with reduced suffering and being spoken for with increased suffering. He also reasserts the idea that telling our story may help others: 'some people encounter a story at a moment in their lives when it puts into words what has been felt but could not yet be said' (Ibid, p11).

8.3.2 A Different Perspective

After thus working through such considerations, I offer a perspective on my participants' stress-related behaviours (and those of other teachers) which focuses on and fuses the ideas of survival and creativity. When discussing responses to traumatic experiences, for example, Fisher (2016 b) explains that we do not survive by 'conscious decision –making':

> At the moment of life threat, humans automatically rely upon survival instincts. Our five senses pick up the signs of imminent danger, causing the brain to "turn on" the adrenaline stress response system. As we prepare to fight or flee, heart rate and respiration speed oxygen to muscle tissue, and the "thinking brain," our frontal cortex, is inhibited to increase response time. We are in "survival mode," in our "animal brains"… the survival response system may become chronically activated, resulting in

> long-term feelings of alarm and danger, tendencies to flee or fight under stress, debilitating feelings of vulnerability and exhaustion, or an inability to assert and protect ourselves.

Fisher encourages the view, therefore, that rather than labelling and stigmatising people for their stress-related behaviours, their responses actually make complete sense in their context. This stance is also shared by HelpGuide (2016), again relating to the field of trauma:

> People react in different ways … experiencing a wide range of physical and emotional reactions. There is no "right" or "wrong" way to think, feel, or respond, so don't judge your own reactions or those of other people. Your responses are normal reactions to abnormal events.

In this light, teachers' behaviours can be seen as logical, instinctive and relating to human nature as they attempt to survive and adapt to their challenging surroundings. This notion of survival also resonates with the metaphor of 'the battleground' which I used to shape and organise the account of the data and was derived from themes and language use in the narratives. It must be stressed, however, that I do not view this attempt to survive and adapt as a one-way process. Rather than either the environment influencing the person, or the person influencing the environment, there is instead a dynamic interrelationship. This is in line with field theory and gestalt psychology which recognises that the different components of a person's life space do not exist in isolation but are

'interdependent' (Lewin, 1952, pxii). An either / or approach is resisted in terms of person and environment. As Wollants (2012, p4) explains, the individual is not a 'mere physical entity, but the subjective, phenomenal person who behaves and invests the world with meaning'. Further, he reminds us that forces may not 'emanate from the person himself' but are part of the environment, influencing the individual's experience and behaviour (Ibid, p8). Parlett (1997, pp19-20) summarises this holistic way of understanding human experience:

> breathing and the presence of air are so interlinked that to separate them is an academic abstraction; yet few people recognize this. The same goes for eating in relation to food or driving in relation to roads and gas stations. Neither pole exists without its accompaniment.

I now turn to the application of 'creativity' to an understanding of my participants' (and other teachers') stress-related behaviours. This approach allows me to view their responses as intuitive, instinctive, imaginative and again, relating to survival, as opposed to the blaming and shaming labels frequenting the teacher stress and coping literature. Hennessey and Amabile (2010, p570) acknowledge that no universal definition exists in literature relating to creativity, although they describe it as 'the distinctively human capacity to generate new ideas, new approaches and new solutions.' With regard to empirical research, the authors show how the study of creativity is fragmented, appearing across a multitude of disciplines and

with a variety of different emphases. In their literature review, for example, they highlight research relating to: the creativity of products; the creativity of persons; the neurological / biological basis of creativity; creativity in relation to affect, cognition and training; creativity and individual differences / personality; and a progression from the creative individual to creative groups.

We can also see creativity in research on arts, health and well-being. Stickley, Parr, Atkinson, Daykin, Clift, De Nora, Hacking, Camic, Joss, White and Hogan (2016, p3) draw our attention to health trusts, arts organisations and charities 'working together to promote individual, professional and community health and well-being through the arts.' The authors highlight a variety of examples including the use of dancing, singing, music, and visual arts. Examples of creative expression used in the therapeutic relationship include poetry, drama, photography, art, play therapy and the use of sand trays, story telling and guided imagery activities (Reynolds, 2005, p158 ; Green and Drewes, 2014). From a gestalt perspective, Amendt-Lyon (2001, p227) explains that such variety is necessary since 'no two brains function identically.' She argues that therapists must explore 'the sensory strengths' of their patients and also acknowledge that the actual process is just as important as the product of creative expression (Ibid, pp225). In gestalt therapy

there is also the specific concept of creative adjustment which, as Sabar (2013, p14) explains, refers to 'the changes we make in the organization of our lives when we are affected by disturbances in our situation.' All creative adjustments are made in order to 'function as well as possible under the circumstances' (Ibid). Ferguson and O'Neill (2001, pp89-90) add to the description by stating that people work with the environment, rather than acting upon it, and they 'make use of what is available to them in the interpersonal world.' This supports Aylward's (1999, p109) reference to the person as 'active and innovative.'

Whether music, art, drama or dance, these examples, linked to both clinical and non-clinical settings, mirror many of my participants' behaviours. This can be seen perhaps most prominently with the following: storytelling; writing; helping and supporting others; starting a new business; exercise; and undertaking university courses to learn and grow (using their experiences as a springboard for writing and research). These behaviours reveal creative expression and emotional release, the effort to survive and adapt and a process of healing and recovery.

8.3.3 Summary and further implications

As shown in Chapter 7 and Figure 7.1., my participants' stress-related behaviours were varied and they were conscious or unconscious, visible or hidden. In this section I have demonstrated how and why I rejected much of the language and labelling frequenting the literature on stress, teacher stress, and coping. Such labels I found to be inappropriate or insensitive. They did not fit my participants' experience or represent the bigger picture. I argued that they appeared dichotomous or hierarchical in their approach, pitting teachers against each other by offering positive versus negative examples. I explored how and why I hold a perspective on their stress responses which focusses on both survival and creativity. For these reasons I now offer new terminology to describe my participants' behaviours (and those of other teachers): creative-survival behaviours (CSB). CSB takes away the language of blaming and shaming whilst also refusing to portray participants as victims. It is an all-encompassing term which describes the behaviours holistically and does not categorise. Whether it is the use of exercise for example, or food, shopping, writing, voluntary work or storytelling, the focus is on the teachers' conscious or unconscious efforts to develop their own resources in order to adapt and survive their challenging environment. In this light, rather than as simply giving up, the very act of leaving

the school or the profession can be viewed as a proactive step to create distance from a harmful environment in order to heal. This is not to suggest, however, that all behaviours are as safe as others in the long term. As an example, the prolonged use of smoking or alcohol may have negative health consequences and that individual may require professional help. Instead, my point is relating to a non-judgemental and sensitive way of discussing teachers and their stress related behaviours: avoiding language which appears derogatory; avoiding terms which appear to blame the person and overlook the environment; avoiding terms which fail to see how teachers' responses often make complete sense given their circumstances. In essence, CSB displays more compassion, empathy and understanding and refuses to simply point the finger.

8.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has focused on the research findings and their implications. Three prominent areas of interest which arose in the account of the data have been explored in depth. With regard to Part One, it was noted that 'teacher stress' can often be an inadequate description of teachers' experiences, with the concept of trauma more appropriate. It was highlighted that this is currently a gap in the literature on teacher stress. I argued, therefore, that the literature must accommodate, and can

benefit from, the literature on trauma and in Figure 8.3 I offered a continuum of teacher stress to accommodate the concept. It was emphasised that my research findings and the current gap in the literature demonstrated that research now needs to be undertaken specifically in the area of teacher's traumatic stress. Teachers are an at risk group due to their occupation with media headlines suggesting that outside of this research project, many other teachers, nationally and internationally, could be affected. It was argued that research in this specific area would help to discover more of the potential triggers along with possible interventions at school level and national level in terms of government policy.

Regarding Part Two, I highlighted how relationships and teacher stress were inextricably linked. For my participants, relationships overarched all other stressors with the power to either intensify or alleviate their stress experience. I used the term 'relationship-architecture' to demonstrate the importance of relationships when 'building' a school. The impact of leadership and management style on the whole school community was emphasised and a holistic perspective on the education system was addressed. Relationships, it was argued, should be central to a school's agenda with the power of benefiting not only students' health and well-being, but also that

of the staff. It was stressed that this was applicable to all schools, regardless of location.

Finally, in Part Three I focused closely on my participants' stress-related behaviours, noting how they were varied and could be conscious or unconscious, visible or hidden. I revealed how and why I rejected much of the language and labelling frequenting the literature on stress, teacher stress and coping. Such labels, I argued, were frequently inappropriate or insensitive and they did not fit my participants' experience or represent the bigger picture. I demonstrated how they appeared dichotomous or hierarchical in their approach, setting teachers against each other by offering positive versus negative examples. I presented a different perspective on their stress responses which focussed on both survival and creativity and I offered new terminology: creative-survival behaviours. CSB rejects the language of shaming and blaming and displays more compassion, empathy and understanding.

I now turn to the conclusions chapter where I reflect on the project as whole and, in the light of the findings and their significance, I address the research questions specifically.

Chapter 9

Conclusions and reflections

It is astonishing how elements that seem insoluble, become soluble when someone listens (Rogers, 1980, p12).

9.0 Introduction

In this final chapter, I reflect on the research project as a whole and its aims and intentions. I address each of the research questions in turn using a bullet point approach for impact, to really focus and get to the essence of each question. I then turn to the contributions and limitations of the study.

9.1 Reflecting on the aims and intentions of the research project

Inspired by my own observations in the profession, particularly during my time at School X, this research set out to gain a deeper understanding of what was happening in schools for teachers to have such stress experiences. I wanted to know how stress affected their behaviours, health and well-being, what kind of school culture and environment the teachers were working in and how this related to their experience. Importantly, I wanted to hear from teachers first hand: their voices, their stories, their perspectives. I wanted to explore the interrelationship of person and context.

Despite beginning with some assumptions based on my own observations and experiences as a teacher, I worked hard to keep an open mind and not close off possibilities. I resisted taking theories and models 'wholesale' (Taber (2012, pp126-127) and was led by the data. The research was situated firmly in the qualitative tradition and a narrative inquiry was used to elicit participants' experiences. People's subjective responses were thus prioritised and welcomed.

The research project aimed to answer the following, specific questions which I now address, at the end of the research process and in the light of the findings. I wish to emphasise here that the answers relate to the findings of this research and I do not claim universal truths and sweeping generalisations: they address the stories of my participants and how they related to their own environments. The reader will also notice overlap in the responses to the different questions, again highlighting the holistic nature of teacher stress and its impact.

The research questions:

Main overarching question:

What is the relationship between the teacher and their environment in the experience of stress, and how does this impact on teachers' behaviours, health and well-being?

Sub-questions:

1. ***What are the conditions which promote teacher stress and associated behaviours?***

- The sources of stress were overwhelmingly identified as relating to the school itself. There were two exceptions where pressures already originated outside of the school gates: Rachel was dealing with issues in her personal life and already felt 'vulnerable'. She felt that the stressors associated with teaching were therefore intensified for her. For Helena, her husband was ill and out of work at the time of her stress experience. She described how her relationship with him 'failed during that time.' She felt unable to say whether this was solely due to the stress experienced in the teaching profession, but that it was a factor putting a huge 'strain' on their relationship.
- Participants felt that the needs of the school in terms of examination grades and league table positions, often supplanted human needs. Staff relationships (particularly with school leaders and managers) and staff health and well-being suffered in a school's quest for examination results.
- Many of the demands placed on teachers, in terms of workload or specific tasks, were considered to be unrealistic and impossible.
- Workload demands, due to their volume, spilled out from the school environment and into home life. Participants often felt

therefore, that there was no division between work and home and little opportunity to switch off, relax and unwind.

- Poor staff relationships and in some cases, bullying, particularly with regard to school leaders and managers. Participants described feelings of loneliness and isolation in school as well as feeling betrayed and abandoned by school leaders and managers.
- Lack of practical and emotional support from school leaders and managers with regard to stress. Participants often felt they were simply dismissed with the message: 'that's part of the job.' Participants described having family members or a union representative to support them, but they felt they could not rely on their schools in this way. To provide a specific, detailed example, Hannah had enjoyed a long and happy career, dedicated years to supporting pupils and colleagues, yet when she became ill with stress she felt the support was not there for her in return. She believed the way she was treated by the Head teacher exacerbated her symptoms, causing her downward spiral. Hannah was dismissed and she felt she was regarded as a 'failed' teacher rather than one who was ill. She was adamant that if she had, in contrast, received support and empathy from the Head teacher, she would have recovered and returned to teaching.

- Participants felt their professionalism was not respected and trusted. Their descriptions created a theme of crime and punishment with teachers placed in the role of criminal and school leaders and managers positioned in a policing, disciplinarian role.
- Some instances of poor pupil behaviour were identified, however the focus was not so much on the students' behaviour, but on the lack of support shown by school leaders and managers.
- In the quest for an 'outstanding' school label, participants often felt worn down by a system which they believed was skewed to the negative when monitoring and observing them. Rather than focusing on any positives or any of their strengths and achievements, participants felt they were subjected to a fault finding mission: continually set targets about what was *wrong*, what they needed to improve, what they were *not* doing.
- Participants felt restricted with no time or opportunity to be creative, flexible, imaginative, and spontaneous. They felt under pressure to simply teach to the examination and 'get through the planned work' (Holly). A more rounded, nurturing and 'genuine' education was craved, where teachers could take more ownership of the curriculum and its delivery.

- Many participants experienced a conflict between their beliefs regarding what education is or should be, with the reality of what the current education system demands and imposes. This often led to an internal battle where teachers felt they must either compromise their beliefs and sense of moral purpose, or leave the profession. The dehumanising nature of the system, and the concepts of performativity and accountability, were displayed as continually passed down the school hierarchy. Refusing to pass it down, as was the case with Robert for example, meant the end of his career. As a Head of department, Tom expressed his guilt at doing to a member of his own staff what was done to him.
- A dehumanising leadership and management style was a prominent source of participants' stress. It was not simply the demands and expectations, but also the delivery which troubled participants. Participants did not feel valued and appreciated and they felt that the priority was performance, not people. In contrast, many participants felt valued by their pupils and pupils' parents. This was linked to the positive and harmonious relationships which existed for participants and students.
- My findings revealed that positive, supportive relationships in school had the potential to act as a shield against the sources of teacher stress.

2. *How does workplace stress impact on teachers' personal and professional lives? What are the wider, broader effects?*

- Participants experienced different levels of impact, as summarised in Figure 5.2. Carly, for example, remained relatively unscathed by her experience. At the other extreme, however, Hannah and Rachel were completely overwhelmed with the concept of traumatic stress more accurately describing their experience.
- The impact of stress can be visible or hidden, conscious or unconscious. A wide variety of stress-related behaviours were seen, as explored in Chapter 7. They included, for example, the use of substances, medication, storytelling and issues relating to food. Departing from the literature on teacher stress where many negative and shaming labels are used, I offered a different perspective and non-judgemental terminology: 'creative-survival behaviours.'
- In a school's mission to create the perfect data in terms of examination results and Ofsted labels, teachers found themselves in a competitive and adversarial environment. Divisions in the staff body and even within departments occurred; the notions of business, performance and achievement often superseded the time, inclination and opportunities to develop mutually rewarding staff relationships.

- The divisions within staff as a whole can be related back to school leaders and managers in terms of their demands and management style: a ripple effect is created and a holistic impact seen.
- The pressure and volume of work demands can lead to teachers spending excessive hours in a solitary fashion on the school premises. They frequently forgo break times and lunch times, avoid the staff room, hide away in their classrooms and thus spend an excessive amount of time in solitary work. This led to further feelings of loneliness and isolation for many participants. Again, this prevented schools from fostering positive staff relationships.
- The division between home life and school life, personal and professional worlds, is blurred as teachers attempt to keep up with an ever-increasing and demanding workload. Participants felt they could not keep up, they could not get off the treadmill. This had negative implications for social lives, family time, relaxation and self-care.
- Many teachers (most notably Rachel and Helena) can fall into perfectionism and workaholism as they attempt to make the impossible, possible.
- Teachers' physical and mental health can suffer leading to medication, sickness leave, counselling and therapy and in

some cases, having to leave the profession altogether due to the severity of the impact.

- Having to take time off due to stress-related illness and having to leave the profession altogether, has implications for schools in terms of 'a merry-go-round of staff' being experienced (Tom). This leads to economic costs for the school in terms of employing cover teachers and can also be disruptive to pupils. For some participants, particularly Helena, guilt and shame were also attached to having to take time off work due to stress.
- Many participants felt there was no time for creativity, fun and imagination anymore with Simon declaring the purpose and 'soul' of education had been lost. Even 'listening' to pupils' problems (Holly) got in the way of ticking boxes and striving for specific academic results.
- There was shock, surprise and even resentment from participants regarding how their stress experience had changed and affected them. Holly, for example, resented having to take prescription medication 'solely because of my job'. Jonathan had to deal with anger issues relating to his experiences. Many participants turned to counselling and therapy: something they had never had to do before entering the teaching profession.

- As explored in Chapters 7 and 8, some participants experienced flourishing and personal growth after their stress experience. Particular behaviours, life changes and new opportunities were seen and they included: new career paths; undertaking university courses (and in Rachel's case, using her own experience to simultaneously support her recovery whilst helping others); and voluntary and charity work. Storytelling also reflected healing and growth and this was via doctors, counsellors and therapists and also by participating in this research project. For my participants, healing could not always take place within the system itself. Distance from the school, or from the profession altogether, was required for recovery to begin.

3. How do the teachers perceive their role within the school?

- They feel their role is restricted and stifled; they love teaching but feel they are not permitted to take creative control and ownership of the curriculum. They feel unable to be spontaneous and flexible. They want to prioritise the provision of a more nurturing, rounded and genuine education for pupils. They feel, however, that churning out data, and providing specific examination results at all costs, has in fact taken priority.

- The teachers' role often includes a philosophy clash in terms of what they believe education should be versus the reality of working in a school. Their role can therefore mean that personal beliefs and sense of moral purpose must be compromised if they wish to remain in the teaching profession. Despite their enthusiasm and hopes on entering the profession, they feel they enter a business rather than a school and that they are a small cog in a larger machine.
- Participants felt their role is now automatically linked to stress and this is normalised by school leaders and managers. Their efforts and excessive working hours, even to the extent where teachers become ill, are demanded and simply expected, regarded as simply 'part of the job' (Sarah). They can feel they are not even seen as a 'human being' (Simon). Whereas participants felt their efforts and professionalism were not always recognised and valued by school leaders and managers, they felt the appreciation and affirmation was often provided by pupils and their parents. Consequently, relationships between teachers and pupils were presented in a predominantly positive manner.
- Teachers feel they are at the bottom of the stress waterfall, 'the end of the line' and so they are the ones who must 'pick up the tab' (Simon) and do 'the payback' (Tom). They are the ones who actually have to produce the desired results for

the school and adapt to the constant changes and new initiatives which are filtered down.

- Participants also presented their role as overloaded and ever-expanding, where teachers are expected to go above and beyond: losing lunch breaks, evenings, weekends and summer holidays to work; completing tasks unrelated to their job description; teaching subjects they have no academic background or experience in; and, as was the case with Stephanie for example, dealing with SEN issues without appropriate support and medical training.
- Participants described how in their role as teachers, their professionalism and their word was not accepted or trusted and they were continually scrutinised and interrogated. Teachers wanted to do a good job and to be accountable; they did not object to the monitoring of staff performance and in fact saw it as a necessary process. What they did object to, however, was the level and intensity of it and how it was delivered in such a dehumanising and negative manner.
- Participants communicated that their role is often to complete relentless, irrelevant tasks which are unrelated to teaching itself and even get in the way of teaching.
- The teachers' role was presented as one which often entails loneliness and isolation and one where it often means feeling

powerless and voiceless against school leaders and managers. Holly exclaimed, for example, there is 'no right to reply' and Tom emphasised that you are only listened to when telling them 'what they want to hear.'

- Teachers were perceived as being in a one-sided relationship: their role was to give but not necessarily receive. Despite the extent of their efforts to support the school, teachers did not necessarily receive support in return from school leaders and managers when they needed it. This often meant turning to a family member or union representative instead.

4. How do the teachers view their relationships with colleagues and students?

- Teachers' relationships with pupils were presented in a predominantly positive light. These relationships were associated with participants' love of the actual teaching itself (as opposed to bureaucratic demands) as well as with pupils' appreciation of them. Where negative examples did exist with instances of poor pupil behaviour, the emphasis was in fact more about participants feeling unsupported by school leaders and managers.
- Divisions were seen in general across the staff body with relationships presented as adversarial, fractured and competitive: participants used language of war and conflict.

The narratives revealed, however, that the general hostility, divisions and poor relationships felt amongst staff could actually be linked back to leadership and management style and the demands and expectations that filtered down the staff hierarchy. Tom, for instance, who was eventually signed off with stress and left his school, expressed his regret at doing to a member of his own department what was done to him. He explained that as the system was designed around accountability, he felt he had no choice but to also hold those below him accountable in such a manner.

- Teachers often felt lonely and isolated and that they did not come into contact with other teachers in a social context. Rachel, for example, felt she had no one to turn to even for a 'friendly supportive chat…or 'just a general chat about nothing in particular'. The staffroom itself was also presented by some participants as a hostile environment.
- As teachers were so busy tackling their workload, this often prevented them from socialising and communicating with other members of staff during the school day. When they were not on duty, teachers worked before the start of school and worked through their breaks and lunch times, in order to get things done. Tom even reported hiding in his classroom from six o'clock in the mornings, using a task light

so that no one would know he was there and he could work undisturbed.

- Participants' relationships with school leaders and managers were negatively affected by what they saw as a dehumanising management style which focused on performance, not people. Participants wanted empathy, compassion and support from their school leaders and managers yet often felt abandoned and betrayed. A management style based on policing and evidence, crime and punishment, was shown to foster suspicion and mistrust and to be harmful to building mutually rewarding and supportive relationships.
- It is important to note here that Head teachers and school leaders and managers are also subjected to scrutiny and accountability and they have their hands tied to a certain extent. As displayed in Chapter 6, refusing to 'pass it down' can mean compromising job stability and security.
- In essence, the research revealed that relationships and teacher stress were intertwined. For my participants, relationships overarched all other stressors with the potential to either exacerbate or alleviate their stress experience.

5. *Either implicitly or explicitly, how do the teachers view and describe the culture and environment of their school?*

- When participants described their schools and their experiences there, a vivid picture of a battleground emerged. This became the superordinate theme and shaped all three chapters presenting the account of the data. Rather than presenting the school as a place of safety, harmony and education, participants described a site of both inter and intra personal battles. Language use evoked powerful imagery of conflict, aggression, violence, wounds and injuries and heightened emotions of feeling unsafe and under attack. I was struck by the range and impact of the stylistic devices used; how they alerted the senses, delivering tremendous visual and aural impact. When listening to and reading their stories, therefore, the pressures that teachers face and how this must challenge their health and well-being, was powerfully communicated.
- The school was presented as a site of relentless pressure and expectation where demands are continually passed down the school staff hierarchy. Participants described the school as a place where teachers were often lonely or isolated and where they were frequently judged, scrutinised and interrogated.
- Competitive and adversarial environments were described and seen as linked to an emphasis on performativity and accountability.

- It was vividly clear that happiness in the school environment was associated with participants' love of *teaching* and being able to help, support and inspire their pupils.
- In the early stages of data collection I expected the physical environment and architectural design of the school to play more of a role in teacher stress. The narratives soon made it clear, however, that schools were built by the relationships within them.

9.2 The contributions and limitations of the study

In Chapter 3.5 and throughout Chapter 8, I outlined the contributions of my research. I now pick up on key examples here, as part of my reflections.

As displayed throughout the study and particularly emphasised in the preface and Chapters 1, 3 and 8, this research has addressed a current issue of relevance and importance regarding the field of education. Teacher stress is an issue *now* and linked to the high levels of staff absence and the record numbers of those leaving or planning to leave the profession (Espinoza, 2015; Precey, 2015; Lightfoot, 2016). This research has therefore offered a window into the issue and provided

knowledge and insight from some of those very teachers who are affected.

Participants' stories, voices and perspectives have been elevated and given a platform by this research. This is particularly important since so many participants felt they had been ignored, dismissed and abandoned by their schools. Participating in the research project had a therapeutic quality and helped provide closure for many participants. They also spoke for themselves rather than others speaking for them and making judgements on their behalf. As highlighted in the literature review, this is in contrast to many other studies on teacher stress (for example Howard and Johnson, 2004 and Bowers, 2004). I position the teacher as the authority on their own experience and this was also reflected in my personal definition of teacher stress which I offered in Chapter 3.

This study has challenged much of the language and labelling frequenting the literature on stress, teacher stress and coping. I have offered a different perspective and non-judgemental terminology to describe and understand stress-related behaviours: 'creative–survival behaviours' (CSB). This research has also filled a gap in the teacher stress literature by incorporating the concept of trauma and posttraumatic growth.

I explored how it linked to my participants' experiences as well as potentially many other teachers both nationally and internationally. Additionally, this study has highlighted the importance of relationships and the price that is paid if positive, collaborative relationships are not in place. It was made clear that relationships have the potential to either exacerbate teacher stress or act as a shield. I introduced the term 'relationship - architecture' to reflect that relationships are the bricks and mortar when building a school.

This research has raised questions about how we define a school's success and what particular labels and performance data really reflects. The 'game play' and manipulation of numbers was addressed and the notion that an 'outstanding' school may not be so outstanding if the costs to the health of those within the school community is considered. Participants described schools as battlegrounds; as the site of competition, adversarial behaviour and often cold, ruthless business. Consequently, the research has advocated and promoted schools as nurturing contexts of growth and development, where the school also has a responsibility for staff health and welfare as well as that of its pupils. This research has championed the notion that just as every child matters, so does every teacher.

This study has shown that no teacher is immune to teacher stress; to use Simon's words, it is not a case of being weak or strong. My participants provided a cross section and considerable overview. They came from various school contexts around England, they were at different stages in their career and they taught in different phases of education. Regardless of a teacher's experience or length of service, teacher stress can have a tremendous impact, even on those (for example, Hannah) who believed it could never happen to them. The study therefore speaks to, and can relate to, teachers we already know or those we may meet in the future. It encourages empathy, compassion and a deeper understanding of teacher stress.

As this is a small scale and qualitative study, my findings cannot necessarily have 'generalisability' which is a marker of testing the worth of quantitative studies (Davies, 1999, p84). Personal accounts are meant to be regarded as subjective rather than an exact record (Webster and Mertova, 2007, pp89-90). As such, they cannot simply be applied to all people, places and contexts. Certain differences existed between participants' stories and also in terms of the level of impact they suffered from their stress experience. However, common themes were shared across the narratives and, when considering the many headlines

in the media relating to the teaching profession (see for example the preface and Figure 8.2), it is clear my participants' experiences may not be unique.

This study was micro level and offered an in-depth exploration of the impact that stress had on the individual. It addressed the staff hierarchy from school Head teacher or Principal at the top, down to the teacher delivering and responding to occupational demands. There are further tiers above the school leader which were not the focus of this research. School leaders also have their own pressures and demands which are passed down to them via government directives and educational policy. Studies which address a macro level focus could therefore add further insight. As a Head teacher during the time of his stress experience, Robert was able to offer this perspective first-hand, yet I would have liked more Head teachers to respond and offer their voices for this research. There was not space in this study to also investigate how the teacher may pass stress further down the school hierarchy onto their pupils. Research into the experience and the implications of this, from the *students'* perspective, would also be of great value and continue to shed light on the holistic nature of the education system.

On a personal level, this research had impact and value. My knowledge of the field of stress and teacher stress was significantly strengthened and developed. Additionally, the act of analysing the data and preparing the discussion chapter allowed me to acquire knowledge of new and sometimes unexpected concepts, for instance trauma and posttraumatic growth. I feel that meeting participants, hearing and engaging with their stories has made me an even more sensitive, empathic and emotional person. My participants shared their personal experiences with me for no extrinsic reward or incentive whatsoever. I was moved by their stories and feel incredibly grateful to them for their time and their courage.

9.3 Summary and key messages

In this chapter, I have reflected on the study as a whole and responded to each specific research question in light of the findings. The contributions of the research have been emphasised as well as the limitations of the study.

With this project, I have confronted and addressed a current issue of relevance and importance in the field of Education. If the troubling statistics surrounding teacher stress are to be

reversed, then continued research is needed in the area of teacher stress. Using a narrative approach, I hope my research has demonstrated the value and importance of listening to teachers, allowing the time, space and empathic context for them to share their experiences and perspectives. Stories reveal how people 'view and understand their lives' (Josselson, 2011, p225). As Scherff (2008, p1321) reminds us, teachers' stories in particular, are 'significant teaching and learning tools for teacher education programs, teacher educators, administrators, and other teachers.' Whether it is personally, professionally, as an individual or as a group, by listening to people's stories of experience we can begin to connect, learn and grow.

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