

# Walking with teachers : A study to explore the importance of teacher wellbeing and their careers.

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## **Walking with Experienced teachers: A study to explore the importance of wellbeing and career sustainability.**

Teacher turnover and retention is a global challenge. It appears that in times of teacher shortages, policymakers often focus on how to get more teachers into teaching. Yet, it could be argued that it is as equally important to focus on how to retain experienced teachers. The aim of this interpretive case study was to investigate the desired supports of experienced primary school teachers. 12 teachers, who had taught in English primary schools for more than five years, participated in walking interviews. The main finding from this research is that school leaders are highly influential as to whether an experienced teacher feels supported or not and therefore stays in the teaching profession.

Keywords: word; teachers, leadership, walking, wellbeing, sustainability

### **Introduction**

Teacher turnover and retention is a global challenge (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) and can be expensive for schools, disruptive for students and problematic for both the teachers who stay and for the teachers who leave. Often the experienced classroom teacher's voice is unheard, their workload is unseen and when policy decisions are made, these teachers are frequently unasked. The research outlined in this article set out to examine some experienced teacher's professional lives, and what leaders might consider in order to help this particular staff group thrive leading to sustainable careers. Research from Canada (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018) that was framed within findings from positive organizational research, suggests that positive human capacities are essential and vital to thriving for individuals and groups in organizations. Policy sets the framework for teachers' professional lives but examining

how teachers themselves believe they can be supported, and how those supports are provided, is an important issue for both school leaders and educational policy makers. Marmot *et al.* (2010) argue that the foundations for virtually every aspect of human development— physical, intellectual and emotional—are established in early childhood. When children attend school, teachers are entrusted with their development and wellbeing. Teachers have enormous influence over these children during their most formative years because they play a pivotal role in creating the conditions for learning and the impact, both positively and negatively, teachers have on young people is extremely important and well documented (Coffield, 2008; Riley, 2017; Robinson & Aronica, 2019). English policy, set out by the education inspection framework from Ofsted, states that it will provide excellent schooling for all students (Office for Standards in Education, 2019), however, if there are not enough effective teachers in the profession, schools should anticipate challenges in achieving this goal.

The World Bank (2017) concludes that shortfalls in student learning start early in a child's educational journey, with increasing difficulty to reduce the gap as the student gets older. In agreement, Muijs (2018) argues that children from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are most likely to lack reading or numeracy skills when they enter primary school, an important issue in terms of social justice. Over the last 20 years, there has been significant investment in the UK to improve educational opportunities for all students. Yet, this investment appears to be making little positive progress on student mobility rates. (Atkinson, 2015; Hoskins & Barker, 2019). A further concern is the future teacher supply. In May 2019 'teachvac', a teacher vacancy website, stated that across the English education sector, there were over 40,000 vacancies, an all-time high, with urban schools posting the higher number of job vacancies (Howson, 2019). Alongside this, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS, 2017) published figures which show that applications for teacher training in the UK are declining resulting in initial teacher training programmes are below their intake targets, plus more teachers are leaving the profession before retirement. With a rise in student population numbers, the National Audit Office (2016) is predicting there will be a deficit of teachers which cannot be satisfied by new teachers entering the profession. Sutchter, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2019) argue that high teacher attrition is the most important driving factor of teacher shortage. Although the issue is deeply complex, retaining or reemploying experienced teachers may be a possible solution for

addressing England's teacher turnover and attrition challenge (See & Gorard, 2019). This article will look at research that undertook to highlight experienced teachers' voices and suggest ways in which this area of research can be further developed.

### **The teachers we need to keep**

There is a substantial body of research on the needs of newly qualified teachers and the support that they require to help increase self-efficacy and reduce turnover. Research includes but not limited to: how early career teachers value different types of support (Burke *et al.*, 2015); the experiences of early career teachers (Schuck *et al.*, 2018); how new teachers learn (Shanks, 2018); the impact of induction (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011); the role of professional development in retaining early career teachers (Ovenden-Hope *et al.*, 2018); whole school impact on newly qualified teachers (Sims & Allen, 2018); leadership influences (Thomas *et al.*, 2018); factors that lead to early career teachers leaving the profession (Kelly *et al.*, 2019), and collegial support new teachers receive (Thomas *et al.*, 2019). A noteworthy study by Ryan *et al.* (2017) suggests that early career teachers may not be more susceptible to leaving the profession than experienced teachers. Rather, early career teachers may be more likely to change schools until they find a more suitable school teaching position.

In 1993, Brown and McIntyre (p.17) referred to the term 'craft knowledge of teaching' to describe the professional knowledge teachers acquire through classroom experience. Hargreaves (2005a) considers the wisdom and expertise that experienced teachers can provide to the field should not be dismissed. This knowledge cannot be taught pre-service or in professional development but is acquired only by experience and as a result is often invaluable to the effectiveness of the teacher. Smith (2011, p.89) writes: 'Students with the best teachers, in the best schools, learn at least three times more each year than students with the worst teachers, in the worst schools....investing in the quality of teaching and teachers is a must'. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that experienced teachers acquire professional capital, and so are often perceived as committed and capable by other school stakeholders. Indeed, Allen and Sims (2018) highlight numerous research papers which have shown that experienced teachers are superior and more effective than newly qualified teachers. In Podolsky *et al.* (2019) research, which focused on high level critical thinking skills, they demonstrated that experienced teachers were the common factor among 156 California school districts

where *all* students, are scoring higher than expected on tests that measure higher-level critical thinking skills. They argued that providing students with qualified, fully prepared teachers is a critical component for raising student achievement across the entire school system. Yet, many countries continue to experience great difficulty in retaining a core of experienced teachers, especially in disadvantaged areas. It appears that in times of teacher shortages, policymakers often focus on how to get more teachers into teaching. However, Sutcher, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas (2019) argue that it is as equally important to focus on how to keep effective teachers, who are already in the workforce, teaching.

Using data obtained through a freedom of information request, the Liberal Democrats state that in the academic year 2016/2017, 3,750 teachers in England were on long-term stress leave, which was an increase of over 5% from the previous year (Moran, 2018). This equates to over 300,000 days teachers missed due to stress and mental health reasons. Further, recent UK government health and safety statistics (2019), state that public service industries, such as education, reported higher rates of work-related stress, depression, and anxiety when compared to other professions in Britain. The report concluded that workload, lack of managerial support and organisational change were the main contributing factors to these high levels, suggesting that there is a serious issue within the UK education system. This challenge cannot be answered by one piece of research that focuses on retaining experienced primary school teachers, yet it may have the potential to inform the teacher retention strategy, and therefore could prove valuable to various educational stakeholders. We choose to focus on a small set to begin to tease out areas for further research. Hargreaves (2017) argues that schools in England will not improve just by ‘tightening the ship’, or by replacing people; instead, there needs to be a genuine emphasis on transforming teaching and learning within the school. Experienced teachers may be the key.

We concur with Jephcote, Salisbury and Rees (2008) who suggest that the support needs of mid and late career teachers are often ignored, resulting in considerably less research on the needs of experienced teachers. Much in the same way that Carrillo’s (2018) research on experienced teachers’ identity, hoped to generate knowledge contributing to preventing teachers from leaving the profession before retirement age, the research reported here had a similar objective, by identifying professional supports

that may help reduce attrition and turnover. Carrillo's (2018) study echoes Beltman, Mansfield and Price (2011, p.186) in which they argue that there is a desire to generate knowledge to ensure that those who remain in teaching 'thrive professionally' and as a result enjoy a sustainable career.

### **Research approach**

The aim of this interpretive study was to investigate the desired supports of experienced primary school teachers. This study was influenced by the background of one of the authors, who grew up on an outdoor education centre, near the Scottish border and began her teaching career in inner city schools first in the UK then in the US. She experienced first-hand leaders who were supportive and those who were not, and was curious to why some teachers would stay in this profession and why others left. Berg and Smith (1985) conclude that findings are powerfully influenced by the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and so, acceptance and acknowledgment of one's own subjectivity is critical. Context and phenomena cannot be separated (working in urban schools and having been an experienced teacher) but Green, Skukauskaite and Baker (2012) argue that there is a need for researchers to bracket their own point of view, for setting aside the researcher's own perspective and expectations enables them to explore an insider's point of view. However, if researchers themselves are an important part of the research process (Flick 2018), the authors own experiences can enable the asking of appropriate questions and engaging with the participants on a level that a naïve observer would not. As Fayard and Van Maanen (2015) note, the boundaries are unavoidably blurred and indistinct and to make hard boundaries is detrimental to the research. We put the experienced teacher at the heart of this project in order to understand the teaching lives of experienced teachers and the supports they need and desire for them to have a career which is sustainable. Given this focus on experienced teachers, we focused on being 'pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people' (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p.2).

Interviews are recognised as one of the main tools for social science research.

Frequently described as 'conversations with a purpose' interviews enable an exchange between the researcher and participant to take place (Barbour, 2018). They can allow the researcher to get to know the interviewee better and enhance the learning about an individual's experiences and perspectives on an issue, whilst semi-structured interviews

allow for the sequencing of questions to be fluid and responsive to the participant, follow-up questions or probes can then be formulated during the conversation to encourage depth or exploration of a topic (Roulston, 2018). As we investigated traditional settings for interviews, we were drawn to walking interviews because they allow for fresher, less controlled conditions and are more dynamic than stationary interviews.

There is limited published work on the merits of the walking interview. Nevertheless, Finlay and Bowman (2017) do consider five strengths of a mobile interview: the production of place-specific data; access to complex meanings of place; collaborative conversations with participants; ability to build rapport and adjust participant-researcher power dynamic; finally, its ability to produce rich qualitative data. The last three are significant to this study. Walking and talking produces not a conventional interrogative encounter, but a 'collage of collaboration' (Anderson 2004, p.260). Evans and Jones (2011) also add that interviewees tended to talk more spontaneously. Conversely, Macpherson (2016) does warn us that it is important for the researcher to be aware that a 'pleasurable walk' alongside the 'mood lifting' that Miller and Krizan (2016, p.775) mentioned may inject a certain positivity and the increased social contact may lead to an enhanced sense of wellbeing and so the qualitative data collected may be skewed as the participants have the potential to give an upbeat account of their situation. However, it can also release them to talk more freely, which was what we found. Kinney (2017) highlights the guide method which is a participant-led walking interview through broad sites of interest, where the participant is regarded as the expert guide who escorts the researcher, the novice, to and around specific areas in their lives that are significant to them (Chang, 2017).

Recently, mobile interviews have gained popularity amongst researchers (Veselkova, Vandyshev & Pryamikova, 2017). Moles (2008, p.4) states that 'Walking is a wonderful way of gathering data' and in response to social science's stereotypically sedentary approach to interviews, the interdisciplinary 'mobilities paradigm' has grown (Cook & Butz, 2018). Rhys-Taylor and Bates (2017, p.11) argue that throughout history, walking has been described as central to the production of philosophical knowledge, as the mere act of walking provides access to rational and meaningful thought - 'the elements acting as both a form of cleansing and an elicitation device, blowing away the cobwebs of

everyday concerns and prompting reflection on deeper truths'. Merriman (2014) does warn against researchers justifying mobile methods because 'conventional' or 'traditional' methods have failed, he suggests that the power of 'mobile methods' is sometimes exaggerated at the expense of a broader understanding of actual events. Nevertheless, the justification of this method is not that traditional interviews have failed but walking interviews may produce richer data in this particular situation.

Walking interviews have become a mode of inquiry to examine more than just urban landscapes, accessibility issues or the significance of place to become 'vibrant, sensory, material, and transitory intensities beyond the logics of representation' (Springgay & Truman, 2017, p.1). Pink *et al.* (2010, p.3) argues that walking is significant because 'we cannot but learn and come to know in new ways as we walk' emphasizing that moving can generate knowledge production. The anthropologists, Ingold and Vergunst (2008) offer three positive outcomes on walking with interviewees: walking as an action establishes connectivity with the environment; the routes selected allows for a mobile and dynamic understanding of places; and finally walking with others creates a distinctive sociability. This final benefit of creating sociability or rapport would be most beneficial in collecting quality qualitative data, as we noted above even, as. Miller and Krizan (2016) conjecture that walking lifts your mood – even when participants were expecting the opposite.

The importance of place is demonstrated in many studies (Riley & Holton, 2016). In this research study, the intention was to remove the participant from their place, in this case the teacher's classroom and school. Unlike Thomas, Riley and Smith's (2018) work, where the place of the interviews was central to the narratives gleaned, the location of the walking interview is not central or even significant, it is the removal of place that is.

Not all methods of research are appropriate for all studies and participants, and with walking interviews issues such as accessibility, weather, equipment and recording need to be considered. Anxious to warn researchers about the impact of weather, walking methodological literature often cites the weather as a challenge – rain, wind, heat, cold, snow, and ice. Carpiano (2009, p.269) states, 'these factors are undoubtedly some of the biggest 'cons' to a method that is otherwise rich in 'pro's'. Vannini and Vannini (2017,



p.6) counters that weather is not a limitation of the functionality of the walk-along method, they offer that weather is just ‘part-and-parcel’ of it.

Recruited via word of mouth, 12 primary school teachers, who had been teaching for more than 5 years teaching, agreed to participate in a walking interview. These interviews were conducted in a location of the participants’ choice, they were audio recorded, transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. The following chart details the number of years a teacher has been teaching and their current role.

Participant	Years teaching	Current Role
Carolyn	5	FT teacher with SLT responsibilities
Rebecca	5	FT teacher, leaving for maternity, returning PT
Millie	6	FT teacher with SLT responsibilities
John	9	PT teacher
Cathi	10	PT teacher
Jenna	10	FT teacher with SLT responsibilities
Victoria	18	FT teacher but working PT due health
Karen	20+	PT PPA teacher
Carl	20+	FT PPA teacher with a research responsibility
Donna	20+	FT SENCO with SLT responsibilities
Barbara	20+	PT teacher
Kate	20+	FT teacher with SLT responsibilities

Key: PT – Part-time; FT – Full-time; SLT – Senior Leadership team; PPA – Planning, Preparation and Assessment.

## Findings and discussion

The walking interviews were highly individualised and both old and new experiences were explored. It was anticipated that specific themes (drawn from the literature) would surface such as: leadership; professional development; and school culture. Yet, additional themes such as trust, workload, policy and the emotions of being an experienced teacher also emerged. The central theme, which all participants discussed, was the significant impact leadership has on an experienced teacher’s professional experience both positively and negatively. Every subsequent theme was discussed in the light of this. For example, the importance of appropriate, career specific, professional

development for experienced teachers was hugely important yet, if the leader of the school did not value, support or provide the opportunity, teachers are unable to access it. These themes are explored in more detail below.

## **Leadership**

All twelve participants acknowledge that leadership has an enormous influence on their professional experience, especially in relation to supports they are receiving or not receiving. Research by Levin and Bradley (2019) and Riley (2017) show that leadership can impact a teacher's ability to do their job effectively and has a powerful influence on a teacher's overall wellbeing. The decisions that leaders make from resource allocation, to the style in which they lead, often dictate whether a teacher feels supported or not. With a high degree of certainty, it can be stated that leaders play a major role in retaining experienced teachers. This claim is supported by Sutchter, Darling-Hammond and Carver-Thomas's (2019) research where they list competent and supportive leadership as major influences on a teacher's decision to stay in or leave a school. This clearly demonstrates a need for school leaders to comprehend the importance of supporting teachers in their professional roles (Podolsky et al., 2016). Espinoza et al. (2018) add that leaders play a central role in retaining but also in attracting talented and effective teachers. Therefore, how schools are organised and managed plays a part in the operation of a school's performance and as a result the achievement of the school's students. Studies have consistently established the critical role of school leadership (Day et al., 2010; Ingersoll, Sirinides & Dougherty, 2018; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008) and what makes a successful school leader (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2020).

All but one participant had experience of working for different head teachers during their own careers. These experiences enabled the participants to compare and contrast leaders and pinpoint occasions when they felt support or not. Participants talked about many styles of leadership from authoritarian style, '*the first head teacher I had, he was very military, like a sergeant major.... he literally opened the door and threw me in and said, you know, they [the students] will teach you how to teach lad off you go!*' to head teacher who leads from his heart, '*[he] was at the school entrance every morning, greeting each teachers, not judging but assessing – for example does a teacher need an extra teaching assistant today or their playground duty covered?*' One participant

summed the importance of leadership support with the following statement, *'our senior leaders are very open, I know that if I ever needed anything, in any way shape or form, I could just knock on their door'*. However, not all participants felt supported in this way. In contrast, another participant described the effect that her head teacher's closed-door policy, with the use of 'do not disturb' sign along with the recent instalment of locks on his door have made her and her colleagues feel like he doesn't trust them, *'that is because we all can't be trusted since GDPR he might have something sensitive on his desk, that people shouldn't see. And I said you don't trust your own staff, interesting. But that is the sort of atmosphere he creates and the sort of thing he does.'*

One teacher attributes her success in education to the school's supportive environment, *'I'm one of the few people who you will interview who has an amazing deputy head and head teacher above me, who really get it, they get my workload... 'I get loads of support from both of them. I know how fortunate I am, because I know that lots of people in my role are constantly fighting against leadership.... '* One participant summed it up when she said *'Ultimately, it is all about feeling valued and supported!'*

This data clearly reflects the current research in leadership education. Leaders have a huge influence over experienced teachers' professional lives and whether they feel supported or not. Leaders are all individuals, hence they have different leadership styles and competencies. Many head teachers straddle two or more 'labels' depending on the day/the situation/ and the teacher who the interaction is with. Different styles result in leaders approaching situations within a school environment uniquely, often with unexpected consequences on whether a teacher feels supported or not. What can be seen clearly in these extracts is that experienced teachers want to be valued, respected and supported in their professional lives by their leaders and the leadership team. These supports can take many forms, for example access to appropriate professional development.

### **Professional Development**

Van Driel, *et al* (2012) define professional development as the procedures and activities designed to consolidate teacher professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to further improve student learning. This can take many forms including observing other teachers, mentoring and being mentored, attending conferences, courses and workshops. However, for professional development to be effective, it must be relevant to the needs of that individual teacher, there must be opportunities for active learning, collaboration,

feedback and reflection and there must be sustained pedagogical support both in the short and long term. (Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner, 2017). Falecki & Mann (2020) agree with Darling-Hammond, Hyler & Gardner that teachers need regular opportunities to learn, discuss and reflect; they use the acronym HERO to highlight four areas of consideration: hope, efficacy, resilience and optimism. They argue that without access to high quality learning opportunities that responds to teacher stress and develops teacher wellbeing, the challenge of teacher turnover will not be addressed.

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that each teacher's experience of professional development was unique, even if they taught in the same school. Many of the participants alluded to the fact that professional development could be seen as a perk, *'it depends on who you speak to and it also depends on your strength of character as to whether you get it'*. Not surprisingly all participants would have liked the opportunity for more supported professional development on topics they had selected. A commonly voiced opinion was the huge benefit of observing best practises in a classroom setting, *'what I think makes a difference is seeing really good quality teachers teaching in a school that is similar to yours'*. Frequently, the only professional development the teachers in this study received, were mandated by the school e.g. safeguarding, assessment or test related. Due to budgetary restrictions, most teachers had very little outside training, with the exception of a mandatory training course based around safeguarding. One teacher did receive additional CPD but was because her school's SATs results in English were poor and so as a year 6 teacher she was encouraged to attend an external training course. The school did pay for the course but only because they asked her to attend. She mentioned that they wouldn't have paid if it had been a course of her choice. This frustration reflects the work of Ashdown (2002) where she argued that compulsory professional development may have an unintended negative impact on teachers. What does become clear is that the teachers who are receiving opportunities appear to be doing so because their leaders are making the decision to provide and support appropriate and individualised professional development. This was evident by the following teacher's extract, *'Another way [to feel supported] is just putting professional opportunity your way when they listen to whether you want to do X, Y, Z, and letting you be part of the school and part of the schools development.'* This particular school is very proactive as they consider the teachers as individuals in conjunction with the school's needs. They have embraced an approach

called Thrive. By embedding this approach into their school ethos all the teachers, children and stakeholders are educated on the Thrive approach. As teachers are constantly promoting health and well-being with their students, their own stress and anxiety becomes more manageable, she concluded her interview stating that the Thrive approach builds resilience throughout the whole staff and attribute to the positive culture of the school.

## **Culture**

Ingersoll (2001) argues that the characteristics of an educational environment can determine who enters a teaching role and ultimately who remains in teaching. When participants were asked to describe their school, every participant's experience was different and often elicited passionate responses. The themes of culture and colleagues featured often in the interviews. One extreme example was a school that recently received a poor Ofsted report. The report highlighted the leadership, not the teaching quality, as 'needs improving'. In response, the senior leadership team froze the teacher's salaries. The teacher stated, *'we have a lovely staff, colleagues and teachers that only ever do their best and a senior leadership team full of hubris – that's the culture of my school'*. In contrast, several participants described their schools as collaborative where everyone looks out for each other. *'Where I am, there is a fabulous culture, the teachers really look out for one another, they are to help one another regardless'* and *'it is very collaborative...it very much is that there is no 'I' in team – we just work so well together'*. Many participants attributed the culture of the school to the head teacher, *'it is a busy place to work, it is very intense, and she is quite intense. I often think this when I see the children and they can be quite enthusiastic. I think that's because the head teacher is a whirlwind, for she will be doing things endlessly to try and improve and make sure that it is moving in the right direction, sometimes when I reflect upon it, she is the one that creates the atmosphere and you can definitely tell that - so I think it does come from the top on this occasion'*, another teacher stated *'I think that's probably why [school name] is in such a good place because we are consistent in many ways but then every class is different, every teacher is different, it works here. Ever since I've worked at [school name], it is [head teacher's name]. First he was deputy head and now he is head teacher and people say the good culture just happened since he arrived'*. There is a clear connection between a positive school culture and a trusting relationship between the study's participants, their colleagues and the school leaders.

## **Trust**

Some researchers view trust between teachers and their leaders as the cornerstone of school success (Tarter & Hoy, 1988; Tschannen-Moran, 2014), and this appears to be reflected in this research. One participant highlighted this with when talking about her current head teacher; *[he] has a high level of professional trust. The teachers have the freedom, and confidence, to assess, reflect and adapt...not just sticking to a lesson plan*. An additional example of trust was how the head teacher allocated and supervised planning, preparation and assessment time (PPA). For example, one participant said that, *'where I am based each teacher is allowed that time off, and off site, and is fully trusted to do what you see fit'*. Many of the participants equated trust with good relationships and talked about open communication channels between teachers and the senior leadership team. Being a good listening, problem solver, having an open office door policy, and allowing PPA time to be taken off the school site, were all highlighted as being important in building trusting relationships. Equally, when leaders harm a relationship, it appears to be hard to rebuild trust. During a mock Ofsted, one participant described a situation where this occurred. *'In the staff meeting [the head teacher] went around the room and named and shamed every teacher, I was so upset because for me the whole school had been built on relationships and it was the relationship between the children and the staff, and the relationships between the staff and the leadership, and that day he destroyed that'*. For another participant her trust was broken when her head teacher asked her to report on her colleagues' capabilities, she said she would never trust him again. These statements highlight the importance of leaders building trust within their school community - when teachers feel like there is no trust, it would appear to make them feel vulnerable and unsupported.

## **Accountability and policy implications**

Each participant's exposure to policy implication was different. This often depended on how the head teacher and leadership team handled the dissemination of the policy throughout the school. Some were positive as their leadership team and governors were on top of all the government initiatives, they deciphered it and interpreted the implications for the school and staff. Others doubted their own ability to teach because of the changes. When Ofsted was mentioned during the walking interviews, 100% of the responses were negative, not one teacher brightened at the word. *'...nobody likes the*

*O word, it brings that fear of God into everybody!*' One participant talked about their best teacher being 'broken' by Ofsted. *'I have seen during an OFSTED inspection, better teachers than me, one woman who was my mentor, went to pieces and had a breakdown. When you could bet your mortgage on her...how can that be getting the best out of a teacher?'* Sadly, another participant said, *'in 2015 the head teacher in a neighbouring school had a really bad Ofsted and he then committed suicide on the back of his Ofsted.'* Others mentioned a loss of confidence and increased workload with extra box ticking exercises. Clearly, how leaders and their leadership teams disseminate the government requirements has a huge impact on teachers.

### **Emotions associated with being the experienced teacher**

One of the themes that could be further developed in research emerged from the data, and centred on emotions. In Perryman and Calvert's (2019) study they highlight the discourse of disappointment that hangs over English teaching, driving those who might have a significant contribution to make, away from the profession, and these emotions are clearly reflected in this research. We know from the work of Hargreaves (2000, 2005b) that emotions play a significant role in a teachers' professional lives.

Hargreaves talks of teaching as having a set of specific emotional expectations. In 2005 he also looked at age-based responses to educational change and noted that older more experienced teachers became more questioning outside the classroom. The data from this study reflects this and also demonstrates that experienced teachers experience different and additional emotions just *because* they have been teaching for several years, thus adding complexity to the emotional context. Oplaka and Arar (2018, p138) agree with Hargreaves that emotion is central to the processes of teaching and learning, but also suggest that "during the last two decades, (...) research on emotions in organizations began to deal with the question of why and how employees may display or manage particular emotions". Elsewhere (2009) Oplatka argues that many factors influence emotional management in teaching e.g. the school culture, gender, seniority and the role of the leader. This can be seen in the data from this study of experienced teachers, and there is more work to be done on understanding the spaces in schools for teacher emotion to be handled in ways that benefit both the individual and the organisation. This can be seen in the teachers' comments. For some it was fear that they would lose their job at the next round of budget cuts because they were more expensive

than newly hired teachers. One participant stated, *'experienced teachers sometimes feel trapped because they can't move sideways and because they are expensive – new job openings are usually looking for a deal – cheaper NQTs – so you might have to go on the SLT – experienced teachers have nowhere to go or might be seen as not achieving if they just stay in the classroom'*. For others, it was frustration and resentment.

Frustration at the number of school changes they encounter over their careers, alongside, resentment at being the experienced teacher and always have to mentor the new teachers, take on the harder classes and assume management responsibilities on top of their classroom responsibilities, just because they were experienced. Fredrickson and Le Nguyen's (2017) research suggest that positive emotions serve a diverse range of essential human needs and increased an individual's overall wellbeing. They offer that positive emotions encourage prosocial behaviours and build long-term personal resources, both psychological and biological. In contrast, the teachers in this study focused on negative emotions and without further research it is unclear how these negative emotions contribute to turnover in the teaching profession. Research on why and how leaders affect teachers' emotions, is new in the field of educational leadership (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015; Crawford, 2018b), but clearly it does impact a teacher's professional life and therefore it appears plausible that emotions teachers experience do influence wellbeing and as a result career sustainability.

Finally, one notable feature of this research study was that all of the teachers concerned with this project showed that they were serious about improving the lives of their students, and clearly, the teachers cared a great deal about the children they worked with. They all had a strong sense of loyalty towards the children. What is of note is that their loyalty did not always stretch to the schools within which they worked, especially if they perceived their leaders or leadership team to be unsupportive, and perhaps not understanding the depth of emotion felt by the teachers.

## **Conclusion**

The main finding from this research is that leadership and its influence on working conditions play a significant role in whether a teacher feels supported or not. These supports can be in the form of appropriate professional development, trusting relationships, the culture of the school or the teaching assignments leaders assign to their teachers. All of these actions can have a long-term impact of a teacher's



perceptions, their overall wellbeing and their retention rate in the profession. This research clearly reflects Shirley, Hargreaves and Washington-Wangia (2020) recent study where they concluded that educators' wellbeing is likely to prosper in positive environments where they have control over roles, are able to collaborate professionally and are able to respond confidently to their students' needs. They argue that teachers can have a sustainable career 'when teachers are given the supports that enable them to be inspiring and effective teachers for all their students' (p.10). Ultimately, every perceived support provided, or not, is a consequence of a leader's decisions and actions. Leader support is fundamental to the professional life of an experienced primary school teacher; this in turn has ramifications on leaders and how they themselves are supported, which could be the focus of further research.

A less researched area is the different difficult emotions associated with being an experienced primary school teacher, including but not limited to, frustration, fear and resentment. These findings appear to be significant and therefore future researchers may wish to investigate how widespread such feelings are amongst experienced teachers, alongside ways that these feelings can be acknowledged and potentially mitigated. New knowledge in this area could lead to an increase in sustainable careers for experienced teachers resulting in a reduction of teacher turnover.

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