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How, if at all, has remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic changed experienced teachers' perceptions of their identity as an educator in England?

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Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Education

School of Education

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Abstract

A secure professional identity is a vital component in keeping a teacher motivated in their career. Not only does it mediate their understanding of their role and reinforces their purpose, but it also enables them to make sense of their work and wider relationships. An understanding of professional identity also has implications for teachers' sense of autonomy and self-efficacy. Experienced teacher identity is much more secure as they have become acclimatised to the culture, ways of working and expectations that their role involves. Yet teacher identity is a fluid and dynamic concept, and changes in work context or role expectations can impact on how teachers see themselves and their work. During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the Department for Education closed schools to all except vulnerable students and key workers and teachers were asked to quickly adapt their teaching to online instruction. This rapid policy change, in the face of a global health emergency, had implications for teachers' professional identities, particularly experienced teachers, who had to adjust their established ways of teaching and pedagogies to continue educating their students. This had profound effects on how teachers viewed their professional identities, which may have implications for teacher retention rates in the years ahead.

This research study ascertains the main characteristics of teacher professional identity through a review of the existing literature. Guided by Stephen Ball's work on policy, it uses a thematic analysis to uncover the way in which the Covid-19 school closures may have shaped this identity. Through two focus groups of six experienced teachers who taught during the pandemic, the study evaluates the extent to which the Covid-19 pandemic shaped teacher identity of schoolteachers in England. Findings suggest that teachers were affected in both negative and positive ways, with some teachers feeling isolated from both colleagues and students, finding that technology was no replacement for the relationships which cement their moral purpose as an educator. The teachers in the study also discussed the feelings of resentment they had experienced towards the government, which was reinforced with negative press coverage about teacher's work, resulting in a trial by media which the general public also joined in with. For other teachers, despite the challenges they faced, their

experiences reinvigorated their passion for teaching, making them feel proud of their work and excited by innovations to their pedagogy.

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Author's Declaration

"I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution."

Printed Name: Haili Hughes

Signature:

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Research focus

The aim of this research is to explore whether the Covid-19 pandemic school closures, and the resultant move to online teaching, may have shaped the professional identity of experienced schoolteachers in England. Research demonstrates that the professional identity of teachers is deserving of study. Much research of professional identity has found that teachers who have a strong sense of professional identity are more motivated to remain in the profession (Brown and Heck, 2018). In addition, teachers who experience a secure workplace context experience different emotions than those who work in a state of flux, and emotions can affect teacher quality (Hargreaves, 2001). This in turn may influence student achievement, according to Coe (2015), as teacher quality has the most significant impact on student outcomes. An effective teacher, who can be responsive and adaptive to student needs, can make as much as three months difference in additional learning progress.

Sachs (2005: 15) states that a strong sense of professional identity provides a 'framework for teachers to construct their ideas of how to be, how to act and how to understand their work and their place in society.' During a teacher recruitment and retention crisis, where one in five teachers plan to leave the profession before they have served five years (The Guardian, 2022), professional identity provides an insight into how policymakers may alleviate issues which arise through work-related change (Beijaard et al, 2004: 109). It also has implications for initial teacher education and continuous professional development programmes for staff working in schools, as resilience and coping strategies can be embedded into curricula.

A significant body of research on teacher professional identity has developed since the 1990s. Beijaard et al (2004) suggest that this research focuses on three differing elements: the formation of teachers' professional identity, its central characteristics, and teachers' perceptions of their professional identity. My research contributes specifically to understanding how experienced teachers perceive their professional identity in the face of systemic institutional and

national policy change. A crucial facet of this research is the tensions between the factors which create professional identity (Passmore, 2019). This approach draws on my own experience as an experienced secondary school teacher, who taught vulnerable students in school, and other students online during the Covid-19 school closures in 2020 and 2021. In exploring experienced teachers' professional identities, I use the work of Stephen J. Ball on educational policy, and his ideas about neoliberalism, as a framework through which to analyse the themes uncovered in the focus groups. This is not a discourse analysis of policy, but rather a way of illuminating the data collected from the focus groups. When beginning to write this dissertation, I had planned to use the work of Bourdieu to analyse the data collected from the focus groups, particularly focusing on teacher's feelings about field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). This theory did not influence the framing of my questions in the focus groups, as this was always to enable me to understand and interpret the teacher's responses more fully. However, after the first focus group had taken place, the theoretical approach was then changed to Stephen J. Ball's writing on policy, as the focus of the conversations during data collection were primarily on thoughts and feelings about Department for Education policies. The theory was never meant to drive the research, so this change did not change the scope and direction of the study.

I use focus groups to investigate the extent to which teachers feel the pandemic shifted their professional identities and the implications it had for their practice. I also explore external factors, such as: teacher's backgrounds, their interaction with colleagues, emotions and teacher guilt, and the portrayal of teachers in the national print media during this time.

When initially formulating a suitable research question for my Ed.D dissertation, one of the key conclusions I drew from an early reading of the literature was that much of the research on teacher identity focused on novice teachers and their emerging identities (Chong and Low, 2009; Beltman et al., 2015; Delamarter, 2019). In addition, although numerous studies have been written about the impact of the pandemic on teachers (Silva et al., 2021; Tsegay et al., 2022; Echeverria et al., 2022), none have focused specifically on experienced

teachers, or analysed their findings using Ball's work on policy. This an imbalance which this study hopes to begin to address.

1.2 Socio-Political Context

While it is not within the scope of this dissertation to explore the education policies of the last twenty years in depth, it would be beneficial to set the scene of key educational changes since 2015, so that the school closures during the pandemic can be situated within a recent history of rapid shifts in teacher's worlds and work. As Ball et al. (2011) assert, policies are enacted in schools by various policy actors or policy translators, who 'plan and produce the events and processes and institutional texts of policy in relation to others who are thus inducted into the 'discursive patterns' of policy' (p. 630). This also suggests that when these policies are translated, they result in teachers having to be compliant, while also needing to reinvent themselves and their pedagogy to fully engage with it. Changing policy can have a huge impact on the everyday work of teachers – particularly curriculum reforms; schemes of work will need to be re-written, new materials purchased and staff may need to be upskilled in terms of subject knowledge to teach the new content. I will now give some examples of relevant policy change in England, which predate the pandemic and illustrate Ball et al.'s (2011) arguments.

GCSE reform policy

One such policy change took place in 2015, when the English and Maths GCSE specifications were changed to reflect a new qualification system. The new GCSEs had additional content and were structured, assessed, and graded differently from the former GCSE qualifications. Students would no longer receive A* to U grades, they would be awarded a Grade from 1-9, with Grade 9 being an equivalent to an A** - a grade which had never previously existed and would only be achieved by around 6 per cent of students from the population (Benton, 2018).

Before the reforms, 60 per cent of the marks for English Language and Literature came from controlled assessment, which was marked by teachers, whose schools were being judged to a significant extent by the results of those qualifications (Ofqual, 2013). Ball and Junemann (2012) see this practice of accountability as teachers becoming policy themselves, as it makes them responsible for the performance of their students and the school as a whole. This leaves them to resolve what can be seen as displaced tensions, situated somewhere between a teacher's intrinsic value and the extrinsic worth of their exam results. This may mean a teacher focuses more on results than their instruction. It perhaps could seem ironic that the Department for Education (DfE) highlighted this as a problem in education, given that since the 1980s, a neoliberal approach had been taken to education, with schools factionalised against one another in league tables, and subjects such as STEM more heavily publicised due to their attractiveness on the international job's market (Davies and Bansel, 2007). The Department for Education claimed that the new qualifications were much more rigorous and so would meet 'Ministers' policy ambitions, to prepare young people better for the next steps in their education or employment in years to come' (Ofqual, 2013: 3). The other GCSE subjects, such as science, history and modern foreign languages would be reformed the year after.

There has been widespread criticism of the reforms, not least the speed in which they were implemented, with an education committee report claiming the changes to be implemented were 'too much too soon' (BBC, 2013). The reforms in English in particular, have attracted widespread concern, with Morby (2014) highlighting the abolition of world literature in favour of an entirely British curriculum. He argued that the reformed GCSE would hinder students from certain socio-economic backgrounds who do not possess certain forms of cultural capital, as the texts contain language which is complex and sometimes archaic. The Literature exams were also changed to closed book examinations which, as Stock (2018) highlights, leaves students 'wrestling with the obligation to remember quotations, thus potentially sacrificing their analysis in the process' (p. 146). These changes coincided with a new way of tracking and measuring the performance of a school, with the old measurement of a percentage of five or more GCSEs at grade C or above being replaced with Progress 8 measures

(Department for Education, 2016). This complex process meant that senior leaders and teachers had to rapidly assimilate to new systems and ways of working, whilst also attempting to articulate the changes to parents and students in a clear and digestible way.

It is not only secondary teachers who have faced rapid policy change related to external assessments in the last five years. In primary schools, there have also been numerous reforms to the SATs exams. Grades were replaced by standardised scores for both Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 in 2016 (Schools Week, 2016), followed in 2017 by the introduction of a Key Stage 1 arithmetic paper (Schools Week, 2019). In addition to the formal assessment reforms in both primary and secondary, the Department for Education has made numerous other policy changes during the period of 2015-2020. These include:

- a new Ofsted inspection framework (2019), which completely changed the way schools were inspected and focused on intent, implementation, and impact across time, rather than a one off snapshot lesson and pupil progress.
- a call for schools to move towards an academisation model (Department for Education, 2015).
- reforms in the way teachers are trained, with a shift from a one year new teacher induction to a three year system with the Core Content Framework (Department for Education, 2018) and Early Career Framework (Department for Education, 2019).

These policy changes could be seen to subscribe to Peck and Theodore's (2015) concept of 'fast policy.' They define fast policies as being 'portrayed as 'silver bullet' solutions enabled by a 'social infrastructure' that seek to codify and apply 'best practice' as part of 'a world that is populated by a mobile class of policy gurus, entrepreneurs, consultants, bloggers, evaluator-advocates, and model peddlers' (Peck and Theodore, 2015: xv). This results in policymaking processes being intensified, which can lead to stress and confusion among teachers who cannot keep up with the pace of change (Hardy et al., 2019). These changes have been briefly outlined in this dissertation to highlight that

teachers may already have been feeling a sense of fatigue from the many changes in their roles, even prior to the pandemic in 2020.

Covid policies and timeline

It was against this backdrop of intense policy shifts and new guidance for teachers that the events of Covid-19 and its implications for schools began to unfold. By the end of 2019, news of a flu-like virus which was prevalent in Asia had begun to be published in the UK news (The Guardian, 2020; Ciotti et al., 2020). On 31st January 2020, the first recorded case of coronavirus was announced as confirmed in the UK (BBC, 2020a; West at al., 2021) but it wasn't until two months later, on the 23rd of March that the Prime Minister at the time, Boris Johnson, announced a UK-wide partial lockdown to contain the spread of the virus and the immediate cancellation of all GCSE examinations. The British public were instructed that they must stay at home, except for shopping for necessities and some outside exercise, and this included the closure of schools for all but the most vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers such as NHS staff, supermarket workers and carers (UK government, 2020). This left schools to create expeditious plans to educate students via alternative methods, distribute paper resources to those students who did not have IT equipment at home and plan ways to ensure that children who received free school meals were still supported.

I was a teacher in a secondary school during the week of the school closures and it was a very stressful and emotional time. I worked in a department with twelve colleagues and in the week that the announcements were made, there was only myself and a newly qualified teacher left. Other staff had tested positive for the virus and were isolating, and two pregnant colleagues were asked to work from home as they were now classed as vulnerable. The levels of stress and exhaustion were exacerbated by the hastily designed and delivered whole staff training course on using Microsoft Teams and navigating teaching lessons from home, alongside a fortnightly rota to teach face to face in school. Alongside this, I had two year 11 classes and a year 11 form who I had been incredibly close to, as one of the form group had passed away tragically when they were in year 7.

The premature school closure meant that they would leave without the usual ceremony afforded to them at the end of their compulsory education, resulting in no time for proper goodbyes. As this cohort would not sit their GCSE examinations, teachers worried about what measures the government might put in place and what role they might have to play in the process.

On Monday 30th March 2020, the new 'normal' began for teachers across England, as online learning commenced. Like many teachers, I needed to balance educating my classes alongside the learning of my own children. Navigating the technology alongside this was also challenging and when Boris Johnson announced that schools would reopen on June 1st, teaching unions expressed their concern, describing the plans as reckless and unsafe for teachers (Independent, 2020; Wise, 2021). This view was challenged by Anne Longfield, the Children's Commissioner for England, as she urged the government and teaching unions to 'stop squabbling and agree a plan' to reopen schools, warning that the closure of schools was having a negative impact on disadvantaged children (BBC, 2020b; Longfield, 2021).

Regardless of the concerns of teaching unions and teachers themselves, Boris Johnson confirmed that schools would have a phased reopening in England from June 1st, with early years, reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils being allowed to return. In addition, he also stated that from June 15th, a quarter of Year 10 and Year 12 students would be allowed some school contact, so that they could have help from teachers to prepare for their exams (BBC, 2020c; Ziauddeen, 2020). Throughout this period, unless teachers were classed as medically vulnerable, they were mostly expected to work in a hybrid model, teaching some lessons face to face and some online. For some teachers, who needed to balance caring responsibilities alongside this, it may have felt like a difficult routine to manage. Many teachers also assisted their senior leadership teams in delivering laptops and food to children's homes during this period. In addition, teachers were also asked to produce teacher assessed grades (TAGs) and then later centre assessed grades (CAGs) in 2021, for their year 11 students. These grades took previous assessments into account, as well as teacher's professional judgement about

what they predicted the student could achieve. Schools were asked to submit evidence of the previous grades, which would be randomly checked by civil servants. On August 20th, GCSE results were published, with 78.8% of papers rated grade 4 or above, compared to 69.9% in 2019 (BBC, 2020d), which resulted in negative press coverage about teachers being overly generous (Daily Mail, 2020), intimating that their professionalism could not be trusted.

In September 2020, students returned to school as normal but were asked to wear masks in classrooms and corridors, with school's minister Nick Gibb announcing that a decision about the 2021 GCSE examinations would be made very soon (BBC, 2020e). As the autumn and winter progressed, confirmed cases of Coronavirus rose, alongside deaths, with many local lockdowns and tighter restrictions being announced throughout England and a tiered restriction system put into place (BBC, 2020f; Smith et al., 2022). During this time, schools also became testing centres for students, where groups of students were sent home to isolate if somebody in their class bubble tested positive. As a teacher during this time, I was witness to the strains that staff and students were facing as the rate of infection became unsustainable. A member of staff in my school also died of Covid, which caused additional distress to staff and students – a situation which was also replicated in many schools. The government then announced a second lockdown, which would commence on November 5th, 2020 (BBC, 2020g). As teachers were more prepared for this lockdown and had systems already put in place, they could perhaps more naturally revert to online learning. At this point however, the government had still not announced whether the GCSE exams would be going ahead and what the contingency plans would be if not, causing anxiety for both staff and students.

When students returned to school on December 2nd, 2020, the government announced that mass testing of secondary school pupils would be greatly increased in January 2021, with the objective of sending fewer people home from school who may have had contact with somebody who had tested positive for the virus. As well as this, the period of isolation would reduce from ten to seven days and teachers would be subject to weekly tests (BBC, 2020h). In my

own school, this caused some anxieties amongst teachers, who felt that they were being put at unnecessary risk. Consequently, over the Christmas period, a new more serious tier (Tier 4) was introduced, with stricter rules about social distancing, and the public were informed that they would not be able to meet up on Christmas day if they were in Tier 4 (BBC, 2020i). Throughout the festive period, the Department for Education continued to release guidance to headteachers, which was often perceived to be contradictory and belated. Vic Goddard, a headteacher in Essex revealed how he felt as if he had little rest during this time and that it badly affected his mental health (Hughes, 2021). He was not alone: other headteachers also spoke publicly about their mental health on both social media and in the news (Jerrim, Sims and Allen, 22).

Some teachers may have spent their Christmas holidays worried about what they would be returning to, with no plans being announced to lock down or close schools. Then on New Year's Day 2021, the UK government announced that all primary schools in London would remain closed for the start of the winter term (BBC, 2021a). This led to teaching unions advising primary school staff that it was unsafe to return to school and urging schools to implement remote learning (BBC, 2021b). Some local councils made the decision to keep their schools closed until the following week and received letters from the Department for Education informing them that they would be fined if they took this course of action (BBC, 2021b). Despite this uncertainty, most of England's primary schools reopened in January and secondary school students and staff returned as normal. Yet the next day, the prime minister announced that there would be another lockdown starting two days later, where pre-schools would remain open but primary and secondary schools would revert back to online learning for all but vulnerable and key worker children (BBC, 2021c). It may have been perceived that schools and their staff were left with scant notice to organise a contingency plan, causing stress and exhaustion to teachers. Gavin Williamson, the then Secretary of State for Education, announced that GCSE examinations would be cancelled in 2021 but that there would be a new procedure teachers could follow to formulate a centre assessed grade (The Daily Mirror, 2021; Kippin et al., 2022).

This short summary of the socio-political context does not exhaustively capture the range of policy changes that all teachers in England have experienced since 2015 and over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, but what it does reveal is how little time teachers have been afforded to become acclimatised to institutional change, before being required to shift and adapt their roles and professional identity. My own experiences as a secondary teacher during this time have been weaved through this summary to highlight how the policy changes also impacted on my own feelings about my professional identity.

1.3 Background and professional context

I entered teaching as a second career and while many teachers do this, the low respect I felt for the teaching profession prior to retraining in 2007 is probably less common. This was due to the treatment I received from some of my own teachers whilst at school and the way I saw other English graduates at my university choosing teaching as something to fall back on, as they did not know what else to do with an English degree. Teaching would have been the last thing I would have applied to do, as my own experiences of being taught had mostly been quite negative.

I am the eldest of eight children and come from a socially and economically deprived background. My mum was only a teenager when she had me and I grew up in a family where education was not really prized or encouraged, resulting in me being the only person to go to university in my family. I was an angry teenager, and I felt the injustices in society deeply. This made me quite hostile to teachers and I vented these frustrations on them, making it very challenging for them to be able to see my potential. Despite this, I achieved well academically and managed to study English at university, overcoming many personal barriers such as homelessness and a lack of parental support along the way. In my third year at university, I was lucky enough to win a graduate scholarship with a national newspaper and I moved to London to pursue a career as a journalist. After several years working at the newspaper, I became increasingly frustrated by the way my sense of right and wrong were being exploited and I decided to move back to the North-West and re-train as a

teacher, as I knew that I loved my subject and wanted to impart this passion to young people. This experience, as somebody who lacked respect for the teaching profession and worked in the national media, gives me an insight into the way that the public sometimes perceives teachers and some of the motivations the media may have when they criticise and deride teachers so publicly.

As soon as I began to re-train as a teacher, it became obvious that the low opinion I had held of them was completely unjustified. I could see how hard teachers worked, often in very challenging circumstances and I felt a deep sense of regret for my former opinions. The differences in the two roles I had worked in were quite stark, although there were some similarities. In both journalism and teaching, I was micro-managed and both roles had a very top-down approach with directives from leadership and little space for creativity or autonomy. In teaching there was also the added role of bureaucracy and directives from policy, which I had not experienced in journalism. The difference in status in the two jobs was unusual, as teaching seemed to be viewed as a respected profession, with journalism being regularly named as one of the least trustworthy professions (Press Gazette, 2022). Yet, people seemed more impressed when I told them I was a journalist, rather than a teacher. This led to me going through a period where I felt I needed to qualify my credentials as a teacher, by mentioning that I was also a former newspaper journalist, demonstrating that I was not yet comfortable with my teacher identity. This began to sow the seed for this dissertation, where I focused on teacher identities and how they might adapt and shift throughout a teacher's career as well as cause discomfort.

Perhaps the greatest shock to me when working as a teacher was the bureaucracy and top-down approach from central government. I had been used to a degree of autonomy and non-interference in my previous career and had been surprised by the micromanagement in teaching. Therefore, it came as no surprise when I witnessed an increase in legislation and policy changes during the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, to quote Foucault, teachers became 'the object and target of power… that is manipulated, shaped, trained, which

obeys, responds, becomes skilful and increases it forces' (Foucault, 1995: 136). Teachers, including myself, were bound to enact and implement these policies, not only for fear of repercussions from leaders in school, but also for fear of the reaction from the public and media. This was a high-pressure environment, where a teacher's actions did not just influence a learner's progress, but could also endanger people's lives, given the pandemic – not a situation any teacher may imagine signing up for. These decisions were made centrally by the Department for Education, passed down to school leaders and in turn, down to teachers, who possessed little agency in interpreting and implementing these decisions. My experiences during this period influenced my decision to pursue this research question, as I had a sense that the professional identity of teachers was potentially shaped by politicised decisions from central government. As this is qualitative research, I have been open about the role my experiences have played but have also outlined the reflexivity I brought, to ensure that as far as possible, my interpretations were supported strongly by participant voice.

My interest in Stephen Ball's work on policy and teacher identity likely related to my multiple different career choices and the way I have had to shift and adapt my professional identities and ways of working to fit the socio-cultural norms in different roles and environments. I came across Ball's work during my Ed.D study and his work, particularly on managerialism, resonated with me. My experiences with deprivation led me to work in schools in socio-economically deprived areas, and now in a post-1992 university that has a strong emphasis on widening participation. My experience of these institutions is that staff are placed under immense pressure for results and student numbers. I feel this was only exacerbated by the policy changes and external pressures during the pandemic, so this has led to my engagement with Ball's work and the use of his ideas to help illuminate the data in my dissertation.

1.3.1 Professional and academic background

Defining teacher professional identity is a complex task and research literature often fails to give a precise definition (Beijaard et al, 2004). This may be due to the constantly evolving and dynamic nature of the job, (Beauchamp and Thomas,

2009) which leads to reconsideration of the professional identity throughout a career. But also, if professional identity is the link between 'self' and the context in which teachers work (Coldron and Smith, 2010), as education has periods of turbulence and rapid change, then professional identities will also go through turbulence, sometimes requiring them to be re-imagined and negotiated to match their contexts. Yet, Flores (2020) explores the idea that our professional identities are not only shaped by our contexts, but are also formed by traits such as expertise, knowledge, values and attitudes, and prior experiences. Reflecting on myself, I acknowledge all these characteristics as contributing factors to my professional identity as a teacher. I recognise that my background as a disadvantaged student led me to want to make a difference to students who come from similar backgrounds, particularly given that deprivation can make educational opportunities seem unattainable. For that reason, I found the pandemic closures difficult as I felt removed from my students during this time and like I almost made less difference.

In terms of my voice and perspective as a researcher, as already detailed, I felt that my own experiences during the pandemic had changed my professional identity. It had been repositioned as I navigated what being a teacher during this time meant to me and my wider place in society. After speaking to colleagues in my school and other teachers more widely on social media, it seemed like they had also felt this same sense of their professional identity being altered. Therefore, I became more interested in how the pandemic had shaped teacher identity and wanted to explore this in more depth. My perspective when undertaking any kind of research is one of curiosity; it became apparent that perhaps experienced teachers had been more influenced by the change in their working conditions, as it was so different from the way they were used to teaching. This piqued my curiosity and directed me towards wanting to focus particularly on experienced teachers, as I wondered whether the opportunity for them to reflect on their tacit experiences both before and during the pandemic would prompt them to consider whether it had altered their professional identities and in turn, what the implications of this were. In this way, my voice is interwoven with that of my participants as I walk alongside them as somebody with similar experiences.

Although I had not been a teacher for over fifteen months by the time I conducted this research, I was still occupying what I would term as a liminal space (Mirana, 2021). I had to get used to evolving realities as a teacher educator in a university while also occupying new spaces which required new professional and social skills. At the time of conducting the research, I very much felt like a novice again, despite having taught for not far off two decades. This reminded me of the way I had felt during the pandemic: a treading water sensation, with all my professional anchors being pulled up. This may have influenced my choices in wanting to explore this feeling more alongside other teachers.

In addition, my positionality as a former teacher, who was left leaning politically and had strong critical feelings about the Conservative government's handling of the pandemic, mean that I already held opinions and assumptions that were impossible to separate from the research process. But as Galdas (2017) states, in qualitative studies, the position of the researcher is integral, if they have been reflexive. Reflexivity is vital as it allows researchers to fully comprehend how the processes they take may shape the outcomes (Hardy et al., 2001), and part of this process involves us questioning our own ways of doing things (Hibbert et al., 2010).

It is also important to note that I did not leave my school after nine years because I was dissatisfied with policies or practice during the pandemic or afterwards. I left for a more positive reason: to pursue my dream of working in teacher education and publishing education texts. Therefore, this research question does not aim to shed a light on practices in my own school or indeed, in any school. School leaders faced unbelievable pressures during the pandemic and are to be commended for their selfless responses during this turbulent time. It is for this reason that I did not interview any of my former colleagues or any other teacher who worked in my local education authority, as I wanted participants to have no former relationship to me, so that they could speak freely and honestly.

Everything I do in my professional life is about making a difference, particularly in areas of disadvantage and with the policy work I am currently undertaking with the Department for Education. Currently, there are many campaigns aimed at recruiting more teachers in England, including offering bursaries and

payments after a teacher has stayed in the classroom for two years. However, there are little extrinsic rewards being offered to more experienced teachers and the problem of their retention may be more complex. I suspect it is about more than just offering them money. There needs to be real recognition of what teachers went through during the pandemic, so my positionality, perspective and voice as a researcher who has had the same experiences as some of my participants, could be powerful in helping me recount their narratives in ways that enable those in power to take notice and hopefully take action.

Finally, considering how teacher professional identity is currently being shaped is always an important field of inquiry, particularly in a climate where teacher recruitment and retention are at an all-time low (Foster, 2018). Teachers who have a strong professional identity and positive self-concept about their role tend to continue teaching longer than those who find a discord between their identities and their day-to-day work (Hennessey and Lynch, 2017; Zhang and Wang, 2022). Other recent studies have acknowledged the effect the pandemic may have had on teacher's professional identities (Kim and Asbury, 2020; Ramakrishna et al., 2022; Cain et al., 2022) but none have explored the idea of how it affected experienced teachers in particular, or included research questions about the portrayal of teachers in the media during this time, as part of professional identity re-formation.

1.3.2 Professional context, significance and research questions

My professional background and life experiences, along with the interaction with ideas explored on the Ed.D course, led me to choose this topic for my dissertation. The module on education policy strengthened my understanding of how policy situates teachers as actors in a neoliberal education system – something I had never really considered until doing this course. My trial study afforded me the opportunity to evaluate my research methods of a focus group and a thematic analysis, when I conducted two focus groups with six 18-year-old students about their experiences of failing their GCSE English exams and the subsequent re-sits which followed. This also gave me the chance to transcribe, code and identify themes, as well as undertake the ethics application process.

Having worked throughout the pandemic and experienced my own feelings of a changing professional identity, I also observed similar feelings and challenges faced by my colleagues in the secondary school I was working in. I was also active on Twitter and witnessed first-hand how many teachers were frustrated with the media coverage of their work during this time, with some teachers taking to social media themselves to refute and answer allegations from both the media and the public. I wanted to research this further as I was noticing that more teachers were articulating frustration about the profession and intimating that, post-pandemic, they were considering leaving. As a teacher, and now a teacher educator, this worries me because pupils in schools deserve to have teachers who feel supported and able to be as effective as they can be.

To explore this area, I created the following research question: 'How, if at all, has remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic changed experienced teachers' perceptions of their identity as an educator in England?' The research question also has the following sub-questions:

1. In what ways, if at all, was participants' sense of their ability to undertake their professional role influenced by media or public opinion during the pandemic?
2. Did participant experiences of teaching during the pandemic influence their decisions to remain in the profession?

1.4 Organisation of the dissertation

This dissertation begins with an engagement and exploration of existing literature on teacher professional identity, including the literature on experienced teacher identity, which is less extensive. I then outline in greater depth the different aspects of teacher professional identity discussed in the literature. Rather than a traditional literature review, I engaged in more of a critical review to explore prior and existing studies. This exploration is more than just a review of the pre-existing literature, as it includes reflections for how the findings link to my own experiences as a teacher during this time,

presenting my own perspectives and allowing me to situate my arguments within a pre-existing body of work.

In chapter 3, I explore Ball's work on neoliberalism and the marketisation of education, policy networks, managerialism, discursive division, and how policy shapes teacher identity. These elements of Ball's work have then been used as an analytical framework to illuminate the focus group findings in the dissertation, rather than as a discourse analysis. Chapter 4 will explain the interpretivist methodology used in the research: two semi-structured focus groups, each consisting of six practising, experienced teachers, who also taught during the school closures. Chapter 5 will present the data from both focus groups, which have been transcribed and coded using a thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) alongside a discussion of the data analysed using some of Ball's work on enactment of policy. Chapter 6 will conclude my own reflections on the findings. Running through this dissertation is a thread that links the extent to which experienced teacher identity may have been shaped by the events during the Covid-19 school closures.

1.5 Conclusion

This introduction sets out the aims and organisation of the dissertation and introduced the positionality of my personal and professional background which led to me choosing to focus on experienced teacher professional identity during this particular time. In the next chapter I outline, with close reference to the existing literature, what is meant by the term 'professional identity' and how experienced teacher identity differs, while also considering the different aspects that make up the professional identity of teachers and conducting an analysis of some national newspaper headlines about teachers in England in 2020 and 2021.

Chapter Two: Engagement with Research

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the literature on teacher identity, particularly what influences teacher identity, such as background and educational experiences. When I first engaged with the research, I began with a more traditional literature review. I then changed to more of a critical review, as rather than just summarising previous studies which this study linked with, this critical review offers more of a reflection and critique of the concepts discussed in previous studies on teacher identity, as it includes analysis and reflections interspersed with my own experiences (Jesson and Lacey, 2006).

I decided to take this approach as some advice we received in the Open Studies module of the Ed.D. resonated with me, where we spoke about our engagement with literature and how we sometimes needed to situate literature within our topics in a more organic and iterative way. In this way, I was able to orientate my research more organically by focusing on what topics resonated with me or challenged me professionally, while still relating to the research questions and area for my research. This also meant that I have needed to organise and structure this critical review in a way that enables me to discuss the key concepts, assert my perspective and locate my arguments within the existing body of work. The exploration leads to spirals of understanding: aspects uncovered here will be revisited during the thematic analysis and conclusions. In this way, this engagement with research is a professionally orientated exploration, which has been a journey of discovery of my connection to the existing literature, much like the whole experience of undertaking a Doctorate.

Teaching as a professional choice?

Teaching has been a popular career choice for young people, perhaps due to what Hargreaves and Fullan (2012: 26) term the ‘ever-present joys’ which can be the outcome of contributing to society and the development of young people. Indeed, in 2019, a study by Fly Research discovered that teaching was then the most popular career choice among young people in Britain (TES, 2019). Interestingly, this contrasts with the recruitment and retention figures, which show that one in three people leave the profession before they have served five years in the classroom (DfE, 2018). Perhaps those who choose to enter the

teaching profession may enjoy working with young people or may want to make a lasting contribution to society. However, motivation to enter the profession is just as likely to be affected by cultural and societal expectations (Watt et al., 2017).

Teaching as a profession has varying levels of status and desirability, dependent on the wider social-economic-political context of a country, which may perhaps suggest that motivations to become a teacher might differ due to geographical location. Yet, there are some core motivations that are shared by those who are attracted to become teachers. A research study by Struyven et al. (2012), identified that motivations to teach could be categorised into three main attractions to the career: intrinsic, altruistic, and extrinsic. Heinz (2015) characterises intrinsic motivation as an innate fulfilment with teacher's work, such as enjoying teaching their subject or the interaction with students. The altruistic motivation is somewhat linked to this, as it positions teachers as viewing their work as a socially worthwhile vocation which was of utmost importance in society, and so leads to fulfilment. Some extrinsic reasons included certain benefits of the profession, such as regular pay rises, or longer holidays. However, these were less commonly referred to as motivations to join the profession than both the more adaptive intrinsic and altruistic motivations, which it could be argued are associated with a deeper, more lasting professional engagement with a career (Canrinus and Fokkens-Bruinsma, 2012; Wong et al. 2014). Other influential factors might include the influence of other people who may have been teachers such as family or friends, or from their own experiences with influential teachers during their own schooling (O'Sullivan et al., 2009; Hennessy and Lynch, 2017).

Wang and Houston (2021: 2) also explore the role of people's perceptions of the teaching profession when deciding to train to teach. In their paper, they claim that the 'preconceptions, expectations, and values student teachers attached to the teaching profession played a critical part in developing their identity as a teacher, motivations for becoming a teacher, and their future teaching roles.' This suggests that there are certain myths or stereotypes which surround the

idea and concept of being a teacher and that those who are entering the profession may have had expectations built on these perceptions. Wang and Houston (2021) then suggest that once teachers are doing the job, they may be faced with a mismatch between the reality of the day-to-day work and their pre-conceived expectations. To take this further, perhaps these expectations and the mismatch between them and their own experiences of teaching may contribute to the teacher retention crisis, as the job may not have ended up being what they expected. Furthermore, the changes to the job during Covid-19 may have once more re-created this discord for experienced teachers, who had to very quickly adapt their pedagogy to meet new demands.

Bullough and Hall-Kenyon (2011) grouped the altruistic and intrinsic motivations under the banner of people having a 'calling to teach' and built upon the work of Hansen (1995: 115), who described teaching as a vocation: 'work that is of service to others and that at the same time provides the person with a sense of identity and meaning.' This calling to teach is marked by strong positive emotions toward a particular subject matter, students, and the act of teaching itself. Individuals called to teach recognise that their work may exert powerful influences on students (Buskist et al., 2005). This calling to teach is a common motivation for teachers entering the profession in England, with reasons cited for becoming a teacher seeming to be largely altruistic – wanting to 'make a difference', wanting to work with young people and a love of their subject (Perryman and Calvert, 2020).

These motivations may have made it particularly difficult for teachers to then change their whole modes and ways of working while schools were closed during the pandemic, as remote teaching may have made them feel that they were not making as much of a difference, as their face to face interactions with students would have been much less. Instead, they may have felt like they were working with technology rather than with young people. For more experienced practitioners, who were used to teaching their subject in particular ways, formulating new pedagogies which transferred the tenets of their subject discipline online may have stripped it of its most enjoyable components. In

music and drama for example, colleagues in my own former context struggled with how to transfer their subject to an online format, when much of their lessons usually consisted of collaboration, experiential learning, and practical activities. The teachers in my former school utilised YouTube videos for activities, but they commented that they were unable to study concepts in as much depth. In addition, the opportunities for collaboration were fewer and more challenging. Some students chose to have their mics and cameras switched off during the live lessons, so engagement and interaction in the online environment was low.

Of course, teachers' work is important work. It matters because they influence the academic achievement of their pupils (Hattie, 2003) and it matters because they have a significant impact upon their pupils' social and emotional growth and their preparedness to live, work, and contribute to their local communities and wider society (Heinz, 2015). It matters because teachers, as noted by Sleeter (1996) and Villegas and Lucas (2001) are expected to be committed to reducing educational disadvantage, as well as the broader inequities of society. Yet as outlined elsewhere, teaching in England is currently undergoing a recruitment and retention crisis and initial teacher training applications are also down by 24 per cent in England, compared with January 2021 (NFER, 2022). With recruitment and retention so low, England is heading towards a deficit in teacher supply, as teacher shortages are likely to intensify over the next few years (Nuffield Foundation, 2020).

2.2 What is meant by teacher 'professional identity'?

The concept of professional identity in the literature, implies that a person working in a field takes on the characteristics of a profession, encompassing both the actions of a profession and the way in which it is done (Fitzgerald, 2020). Halverson et al. (2022:4) state that professional identity can be 'defined as a sense of self that is derived and perceived from the role people assume in the work that they do.' They also refer to Johnson et al.'s (2012) description of professional identity 'as a component of overall identity, augmented by social position, interactions with others, and perception of experiences' (Halverson et

al. (2022:4). Therefore, our professional identities can be complex and shifting, relying on many different facets to shape them.

For teachers, the concept of professional identity may also be related to their concepts or images of self (Bullough et al., 1992). The images of self that teachers possess may determine the way they teach, and their attitudes toward educational policy changes. Yet teacher professional identity may also be shaped by others (Tickle, 2000) through identity formation in social contexts, where each stage has its own characteristics regarding the individual's interaction with his or her environment (Beijaard et al., 2004).

Perhaps since most people have spent a period of their life in school alongside teachers, and the well-defined public role of teachers in England, professional identity formation may be more restrictive and challenging to formulate (Connolly et al., 2018). In my previous career as a journalist and my new career as an academic and researcher, my professional identity has never been as contested as it was in the fifteen years I taught in English secondary schools. There was an implicit expectation that to be an effective teacher, I ought to conform in dress and appearance, while teaching in a particular pedagogical style. This also seemed linked to the political climate of education and the portrayal of teachers in the press, who are often subjected to examination under a magnifying glass of critical society – this is examined in more detail in a following section. It seemed rigid and unchangeable, with the ability to stifle. Sometimes, those who are new to the profession may have struggled to form their teacher persona, as they faced an eternal conflict of multiple subjectivities, shifting contexts and ideological perspectives (Shutz et al., 2018). Even for experienced teachers, whose identities are more secure, changes in educational policy or trends in pedagogical approaches, such as the switch to online teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic, might also have created dissonance (Ball, 2018). However, teaching has been described as a performance profession (Always, 2020) and, like acting, good teaching can sometimes rely on some improvisation. An effective teacher needs to be aware of the unfolding classroom scene, along with the myriad of diverse classroom demands they face,

and improvise by responding flexibly to the situation and withdrawing from what Bernstein (1996) calls their repertoires and reservoirs, to find suitable responses.

Identity is not a singular construct. Changing needs, be they psychological, socio-political, or physiological, all activate development or changes in professional identities (Vignoles et al., 2011). Teaching can be seen as not only a professional identity but a social identity, involving relational roles and group memberships (Tice and Baumeister, 2001). The values that form part of teacher identities are made up of a mixture of formulated and ascribed attributes (Vignoles et al., 2011). Ascribed identities are those assigned by virtue of an individual's cultural group, alongside other factors. This has implications in the formation, development, and maintenance of teacher identity because choosing teaching as a career involves individual expectancies alongside the accommodation of required professional roles, responsibilities, and expectations. These expectations set out the behaviours, norms and values that shape the group identity of teachers and help to shape teacher identity as congruent with others in the group, therefore building a sense of belonging. These ties 'help individuals define who they are both for themselves and for the people with whom they interact' (Eccles, 2009: 79), and the expectations and norms also link to the motivations for becoming a teacher discussed earlier. Altruistic motivations concern how people's actions benefit others, and this can be a challenging task when teachers are facing threats to their own well-being. The connectedness to their colleagues, who may have also entered the profession with similar motivations, and who also understand the pressures they face, can be immensely important (Starzyk et al., 2006).

Being among others who share our professional values creates a sense of belonging. A sense of belonging is a feeling of being included, of closeness with others, of fitting into a group or community, and the need to belong is a basic human need (Maslow, 1962). There is also a growing body of evidence which suggests that teachers need to be situated within their own socio-cultural contexts, such as in supportive departments and schools, to help the development of their professional identity (Brown and Heck, 2018; Day, 2014).

When this socio-cultural context is adapted or diminished, it may have a consequence on teachers' identity formation, as the vital components of identity formation such as the socio-cultural facets of context and interaction are lessened (Vagan, 2011).

Although it can sometimes seem that teacher identity is made up of narrowly confined expectations, Schutz et al. (2018) propose that teacher identity is dynamic and shaped by career choice motivations and goals , as well as how the teacher enacts the roles required of them. Rather than conceiving of teacher identity as static, this suggests that personal and professional identities are entwined in a development over time and may be influenced by wider systemic influences on the profession. Palmer (1993: 13) explains the process here:

> 'By identity I mean an evolving nexus where all the forces constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to others and to myself, the experience of love and suffering-and much, much more… Identity is a moving intersection converging in the irreducible mystery of being human.'

The wider influences which help to shape identity that Palmer mentions, can be read in the context of a school as including: the motivations we came into the profession with, the colleagues we work alongside, the experiences we have as students, the wider education policy remit and any socio-cultural or political events which affect teachers' ability to teach. Therefore, a global pandemic resulting in some school closures, with a shift to online teaching, would be a defining moment which may shape, or indeed, re-shape a teacher's perception of their own identity. This is strengthened by the findings in the research of Day et al. on stable and unstable teacher identities (2007), which suggested that teachers may attempt to construct stable identities, yet outside influences and interactions can interrupt this and cause fragmentation. These conflicting forces suggest that identity is 'never gained nor maintained once and for all' (Sikes et al., 1985: 155).

MacLure (1993) suggested that identity is formed and informed through the interactions in which teachers engage, so that identity is an interactional enterprise, which is influenced by context and policy change amongst other factors. Indeed, MacLure suggested that such variations will also occur 'within the accounts of any single person, according to the concerns of the moment' (p. 316), such as during a global pandemic. Teacher identities, therefore, could be made less stable and more fragmented by outside events – despite teachers' aims to stabilise them, thus creating a tension. Even 'teacher' can be a loaded word. Inscribed in its meaning are the societal expectations about the wider role teachers must play in society: counsellor, purveyor of wisdom and role model, amongst others. In contemporary society, much of our life is taken up by the work we do, so our occupational identity becomes central to our self-worth and a meaningful, healthy life (Ashforth, 2001). Butler (2007) posited that students' and teachers' motivations are uniquely intertwined, in that teachers incorporate the motivation of their students as integral to their own motivations. For many teachers, 'relationships make their curricula vital and real; the human connection gives visible meaning and tangible purpose to their work' (Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam, 2013: 56). Therefore, when some students did not submit any work during remote teaching in the Covid-19 pandemic, and the relationships with students were more distant and less tangible, this may have lessened teacher's feelings of satisfaction in their teacher identities.

In addition, self-constructs of teacher identity can change and adapt during their professional trajectories, this might include their beliefs about theories and attitudes about teaching, learning and assessment on their teaching and assessment practices (Edwards and Edwards, 2017), or even in interactions within schools and broader communities (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). As they experience different events and pivotal moments in their career, these beliefs might shift their identities; they move from novice to expert practitioner and reinvent themselves in the process (Mitchell and Weber, 1999). However, there are many other factors which may influence the way a teacher's professional identity is shaped, and these will be explored in the next section.

2.3 Other factors affecting teacher identity

2.3.1 Background and prior life experiences

The influence of preservice teachers' backgrounds and their attitudes about teaching have been highlighted in numerous studies (Abell and Siegel, 2011; Jones, 2010; Palmer, 2007; Wang, Kao and Lin, 2010). Sometimes, the attitudes they already hold about teachers and their work stemmed from observations and feelings about their own life experiences in school (Lortie, 1975). People's values and ideologies are often informed by their socio-cultural and familial histories (Lampert, Burnett and Lebhers, 2016) and as teaching is predominantly a middle-class profession (Howard and Aleman, 2008), this can sometimes be jarring for working-class entrants to the profession. As set out earlier in this dissertation, I am the first person to study post-18 in my family and come from a working-class background; this meant that when I first became a teacher and now as a teacher educator, I often feel like I inhabit a liminal space (Simmons et al., 2013) where I negotiate and continue to negotiate, my numerous and conflicting identities, while still trying to make a difference to those I teach.

According to Cochran-Smith et al. (2012: 32), 'a teacher's individual life experiences and past personal choices profoundly shape how teacher education is interpreted, curriculum is developed, and instruction is enacted in the classroom.' The backgrounds of teachers and their prior life experiences can be a vital determinant of the teacher they become. For example, ethnicity may be one such determinant of teacher identity. Phinney (1992) defines ethnic identity as a sense of connection in a group of people with common histories, which can be traced to a common place of origin. In this definition, ethnic identity is defined in terms of sameness. For example, in Jeffrey Boakye's book, 'I heard what you said' (2022), he discusses his experiences as a black secondary school English teacher in London. Numerous times he was asked by both students and staff whether he was really a teacher – he attributes this to both his ethnicity and his sex, as English teaching as a profession is dominated by white women (76% in 2019 according to the Department for Education, 2021). This had profound implications for his identity as an English teacher, as he explains:

> 'If I'm technically not supposed to be here, my existence as a black teacher is something of a provocation to the status quo. Sometimes I feel like a drop of ink in a test tube, clouding the issue and staining the waters. At other times I feel like a drop of ink in the ocean, insignificantly small and diluted away without a trace.' (p.7)

This inability to see oneself in the profession you work in, while striving to carve out an identity as an educator, could be exhausting. In a study from 2017, Johnson interviewed black and South Asian headteachers who spoke about having to work hard to change staff perceptions of immigrant families in the school, with one headteacher recounting hearing a member of staff saying all the families around the school were 'inbred' (p. 853).

Similar identity issues prevailed in the gender imbalance for male primary school teachers across all OECD countries, where perceptions exist that teaching in primary school is a woman's job (Mistry and Sood, 2013). The Department for Education (2018a) states that men only make up 25.1% of all primary school and EYFS teachers. This has led to headlines in tabloid newspapers pronouncing that there is a 'crisis in primary schools as almost a million children don't have a male teacher' throughout their whole time at primary school (The Daily Mirror, 2016). This has also been recognised by the Department for Education (2019: 9) who claim that 'increased gender diversity better reflect … wider society [and] enhance children's experiences.' If young men, who embark on a career in teaching, have not had any male teaching role models themselves, then they may have struggled to know their place when they began working in a school (Brownhill et al., 2021). This could have created a tension in professional identity formation and development.

Formulating a teacher identity against the tide of changing policy and expectations is complex enough without the added complications of managing duelling identities, or feeling like an outsider due to race, ethnicity or gender. Reconciling these tensions can also be linked to visions of what constitutes a teacher. Teachers from an ethnically diverse background may face conflicting elements of their identity and encounter marginalisation from the dominant

ethnic majority of the teaching workforce, which is predominantly white. One of these tensions may be linguistic, as representative of teacher identity, non-standard English may be seen as being inferior and delegitimise teacher's claims of being suitably educated and worthy (Haddix, 2010). As Alsup (2006: 4) claimed, becoming a teacher 'involves the integration of the personal self with the professional self, and the "taking on" of a culturally scripted, often narrowly defined professional role while maintaining individuality.' Thus, adopting the perceived attributes of what it takes to be a teacher may mean that teachers from non-white backgrounds sometimes felt that they needed to sacrifice parts of their personality, individuality, and identity to fit in.

A further consideration may be sexual identity or orientation. Coda (2019), a gay language teacher in the USA, wrote a paper in which he explored how he felt he had to keep his identity secret to his students and perform as a cis-heterosexual male. In the paper he discussed that he felt that revealing his non-normative sexual identity may have brought reprisal, as teacher professionalism requires LGBTQ identified teachers to be sexually neutral (Connell, 2015). There have been many explorations of the challenges for LGBTQ identified teachers (Fredman et al., 2015; Greytak et al., 2015; McGovern, 2012) and while it is not within the scope of this dissertation to explore them all, when discussing the tensions a teacher's background and past experiences can have with their formation of teacher identity, it is worth focusing on an emergent theme from much of the literature on LGBTQ teachers: that many felt they are living a duplicitous life and needed to constantly strive to separate the personal from the professional (Haddad, 2019). Sachs (2005) claimed that when considering teacher professional identity, LGBTQ teachers are faced with theories of 'how to be' and 'how to act' as a teacher (p. 15) and that they are forced to negotiate their personal identities to fit in with these expected professional identities, within their school contexts.

In addition, many teachers enter the profession as a second career, after a period of working in another field. As revealed elsewhere in this dissertation, my own path to teaching was not conventional and I worked as a journalist for seven

years before re-training in the mid-2000s. Just as this affected my own constructs and sense of professional identity, the literature discusses and explores how career changing teachers must construct a new professional identity, which may contrast with the professional identity they have already formed, and can be associated with transformation (Williams, 2013). Teixiera and Gomes (2000) posit that people may sometimes change career to 'translate personal self-concept into occupational terms' (p. 80). This was certainly true of my own experience, where I changed career to fulfil a moral purpose of wanting to improve life chances for disadvantaged students, who came from a similar background to my own. Teixera and Gomes (2000) also argued that career changers often attempted to construct their professional identities as more authentic, as they had a 'moratorium' where they took time to re-evaluate their former career choices and chose something which better suited their ideologies. This is also reinforced by Erikson's (1963) idea that people who are unhappy in their careers reflected on whether their job choices portrayed who they really were, and whether what they were doing aligned with their personal goals and values. The stories and experiences that those who have worked in different careers bring to teaching, could be seen to fit in with Kelchtermans' (2009) ideas about a more 'narrative-biographical' approach to teacher identity formation. He suggested that 'people have a personal history...interpretations, thoughts and actions in the present are influenced by experiences from the past and expectations for the future' (p. 260). His ideas suggest that career-change teachers will draw on their former work to understand how they see themselves as teachers, and although this may lead to a deeper understanding, it may also cause 'discomforting dialogues' (p. 270) which create tensions or challenges to their new professional identities. This may include revisiting the reasons they re-trained as teachers and a frustration at the barriers they have faced in enacting some of their initial aims. As discussed earlier, many entrants into the profession may hold pre-conceived ideas of what being a teacher will be like, but the reality may turn out to be different (Wang and Houston, 2021). There is, however, also the implication that teaching is a secure job, with a guaranteed pension and annual salary increases, which in a time of recession, can make choosing to teach a sensible option. In 2020, applications for teacher training surged by 16.7 per cent, reaching their highest level in six years, with experts

claiming that the pandemic increased interest in the profession due to a difficult labour market (Schools Week, 2020).

Teacher professional identity then, can be formed through time in school and interaction with colleagues, but also from the 'fabric of teachers' lives' (Mockler, 2011: 519). Professional identity formation is a complex business and there are many forces at play across a teacher's career, including personal experience such as class, ethnicity and sexuality, as well as professional contexts such as former careers. These factors interplay and overlap to influence the way that teachers see themselves and their professional identity as educators, in unique and dynamic ways.

2.3.2 Interactions with colleagues

Professional identity formation is not a solo endeavour, and teachers may negotiate their identities in order to become members of a community (Wenger, 1998), so that the way they act, the way they speak and the way they think means that they are recognised as successful teachers by other colleagues (Schieble et al., 2015). As teacher identity is evolving and dynamic, interactions with colleagues can allow teachers to investigate to what extent their position aligns or misaligns with other teachers. An example from my own practice is during the referendum to leave the European Union in 2016, when conversations with colleagues around the staff room table demonstrated that most colleagues' opinions aligned that leaving the EU was a bad idea. This stemmed from the fact that teachers in the school believed that it would limit experiences and opportunities for our students, such as studying at a European university or travelling with ease. Goos and Bennison (2007) explore this idea of shared enterprise between teachers and how, as teaching can be a largely altruistic profession, motives and opinions can often link to broader social issues. If any of the teachers in the staff room in this scenario had the opposite opinion, they did not speak up; perhaps this may be because they felt that they had to negotiate their thoughts to fit more seamlessly into the community in that school, what Childs (2017: 539) terms 'swimming with the shoal.' This feeling of being 'partners in the same endeavour' (Childs, 2017: 541) can be a comforting one, as

it positions identity learning and formation as a social participation, a form of ‘learning as becoming’ (Wenger, 1998: 42). There can, however, be issues with internal socialisation - which may be more school specific, dependent on the school’s culture or their mission statement. For example, if a school is focused on results and has a very direct-instruction approach, then teachers who believe in more of an experiential or dialogic position may feel unable to speak up or teach in their own way, due to tensions between individual and school ethos.

Colleagues may also play a role in positioning one another in the teaching community (Vetter, 2012). Childs (2017) spoke about how his new colleagues played a role in supporting his changing teacher identity, after he moved abroad to teach science in Sierra Leone. This form of ‘distributed expertise’ (Childs, 2017: 541) helped him to find and negotiate his place within the staff body, so that he fitted into this new world. With the support and help of his colleagues, Childs was able to pattern the behaviour and knowledge of his fellow teachers, so that he could be recognised as a professional teacher (Gee, 2004). Although this seems supportive and helpful, it also signifies ‘interplays of power among the micro and macro level structures’ in the school (Schieble et al., 2015: 246). Teachers may sense that they must perform in ways which are at odds with how they feel, as they are constrained by the tug of uniform collegiality that everyday interactions with their teams may bring (Moje and Lewis, 2007). Furthermore, these ‘complex ecologies of power’ (Schieble et al., 2015: 246) can be even more dominant in the face of changing work situations or policy modifications, such as when schools were asked to teach majoratively online during the Covid-19 pandemic. When teachers were isolated from colleagues, particularly their departments or close teams who have the most significant impact on identity formation (Liu and Xu, 2013), that creative, communal and reflective environment may have led to what Cohen (2008: 1) terms a ‘discourse of crisis,’ where teachers felt un-tethered and adrift.

Some of the power of interacting with colleagues when constructing a professional teacher identity, may derive from the opportunity for teachers to talk with one another, where they use narrative and storytelling about shared

experiences and endeavours to understand who they really are (Cohen, 2008). In the fast paced, hectic environment of the school day, the school environment can sometimes be more about doing than knowing (Clandinin, 1986) and the opportunities to work in communities of practice and discuss experiences and tensions can be a rich and fertile environment for professional identity formulation (Cordingley, 2008). Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the concept of 'communities of practice' to describe the social dynamics of learning and the interactions we have with others and the world, while taking part in social enterprises. This collective learning results in shared practices, which reflect the learning of the whole community – such as a school. They involve a shared practice, which is created over time, 'through a process of legitimate peripheral participation' (Busch-Jensen, 2014). In the context of a school, this may be teachers working on a new scheme of work as a department team, or even taking part in steering groups on staff wellbeing.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that communities of practice can influence teachers' beliefs about teaching and their own sense of themselves as professionals (MacPhail, 2014; Patton and Parker, 2017; Tannehill and MacPhail, 2017; Yoon and Armour, 2017). This is important in the context of this study, as during the pandemic, teachers may have found their usual communities of practices were disrupted. In research by Deglau and O'Sullivan (2006), PE teachers who joined a community of practice felt that they not only experienced a shift in thoughts about their identity but that they also developed a sense of responsibility toward their community. This led to them feeling a newfound sense of responsibility to contribute to the teaching profession. The stories of our experiences which we narrate to colleagues help to shape our identities (McAdams and McLean, 2013). They encourage us to see meaning in our day-to-day interactions, which may link with our wider ideologies or moral purposes, or even our motivations for becoming a teacher. Interactions within the department are vital, as the areas we work in as teachers are not only 'a physical setting…but also a social and psychological setting in which teachers construct a sense of practice, of professional efficacy and professional community' (Flores 2004: 299).

Researchers have also written about the effectiveness of online communities of practice (CoP) for the last twenty years (Selwyn, 2000; Stephens and Hartmans, 2004; Derry et al., 2004), so schools could perhaps have implemented these to encourage staff to continue to collaborate during the pandemic. Both online and in person, CoP have many similarities, as they 'are formed by people who interact regularly to engage in collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavour' (Sibbald et al., 2022: 2). Although virtual or online CoP do not have the relational aspect of being in person, they are still useful in connecting people who share a common interest in a learning endeavour. Yet, there are barriers and challenges which teachers may face when attempting to engage in online CoP, which are summarised in this table below (Figure 2-1) and are informed by research from Fontainha and Gannon-Leary (2008).

Benefits	**Barriers**	**Challenges**
Enhanced learning environment	Disciplinary differences	Staff not being technologically savvy and having IT provision
Knowledge sharing and learning	Culture of independence	Lack of institutional culture and acceptance of online CoP
Gaining insights from one another	Transactive and tacit knowledge	Difficulty with online communication skills
Feeling of connection	Collegiality and lack of strong physical community	Low trust levels between staff
Ongoing interactions	Shifting membership/attendance	Differing or few common goals
Cyclical and fluid knowledge development	No face to face ice breaking	Lack of a shared understanding
Synergies created	Hidden identities and read-only participants	A differing sense of purpose

Fig 2-1: Benefits, barriers, and challenges for online CoP (communities of practice)

As Figure 2-1 suggests, the benefits of participating in an online CoP are manifold, not only in terms of the sharing, acquisition and deepening of knowledge but also in creating a synergy and sense of connection through iterative interactions. All these aspects were needed during the Covid-19 pandemic, when staff were working in increasingly more isolated ways. However, the barriers and challenges outlined above also demonstrate how online CoPs differ from the more traditional face to face kind. Alongside the more practical challenges, such as teachers not being skilled in using online modes of discussion and communication and a lack of equipment, more deep-rooted issues such as a lack of trust or differing goals may also have meant that the learning in an online CoP may not have been as beneficial. Moreover, if the school culture had not been built around online CoPs and had not developed a sense of these as legitimate forms of sharing and discussing knowledge, teachers may have found it challenging to adjust to this way of working.

However, some schools did create and develop online communities of practice successfully during this period. One of the ways this was done was by using specialised software such as IRIS Connect, where curriculum groups were formed so staff could still take part in networks of professional learning (IRIS Connect, 2021). However, it could be argued that headteachers and senior leadership teams quite rightly focused on the learning of pupils and that this was so all encompassing that less thought may have been given to teachers' learning and professional development. In fact, in a recent survey by Teacher Tapp, over 67 per cent of teachers indicated that their professional development during the Covid-19 pandemic had not improved their teaching (IRIS Connect, 2022). Therefore, just like students who lost learning during school closures, teachers also felt that their development needs were not being met (IRIS Connect, 2022). This may be attributed to the fact that despite improved technological capabilities, as outlined above, many challenges and issues have been identified with online communities of practice. In addition to those already discussed, Selwyn (2000) uncovered that interaction in online forums revolves around quite superficial information giving and that as commitment wanes, contributions dwindle over time. One suggestion for why this may be the case is that once the real environment of the school is removed, colleagues can become quite

'disparate professionals whose sense of community lies elsewhere' (Selwyn, 2000: 774). The school community may have been replaced during the pandemic with local communities, or bubbles, as neighbours looked out for one another, or even with more of a sense of national pride as people took part in nationwide activities, such as clapping for the NHS.

Stephens and Hartmans (2004) identified that, for online communities of practice to be successful, there must be a clear task focus. Again, this is something which may have been challenging during the pandemic, as often guidance was revised and changed at quite short notice, so teachers often had to change what they were doing in the middle of tasks (Kim and Asbury, 2020; Kim et al., 2022). For example, in January 2021, the Department for Education indicated that children would go back to face-to-face teaching as normal after the Christmas break. On the first day back, Monday 4th January, in the middle of the day, the Prime Minister then announced that schools would be closed from the next day, meaning that staff then had to adapt again very quickly to online learning, and distribute any materials students needed in a very limited time (Kim et al., 2022; Express newspapers, 2021). This uncertainty made it difficult for staff to have a clear task focus, and so lowered the chance of online communities of practice being successful. As Rogoff (2003: 4) asserted, teacher identity development can often be understood 'only in light of the cultural practices and circumstances of their communities,' so perhaps teachers may have felt that their identities shifted during this time, as they had limited interactions with their colleagues. In addition to this, teachers also had to navigate the tensions between the union and the government guidelines, with union leaders giving interviews to the press calling the government's plans 'reckless' (Unison, 2021). This press coverage, alongside the heightened stresses of the job during this period could have also added to the anxieties teachers were facing.

2.3.3 School environments

The school environment teachers work in can be an external influence on their professional identity formation. Bullough (2005: 147) calls the intersection of

personal identities and the cultural and institutional contexts of the school the 'situated identity,' and other research suggests that teachers may shift their identities throughout their career due to their school interactions (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). According to Brown and Heck (2018) this may be because the context of the school environment provides powerful messages to teachers about the way they should behave and act, as well as about their beliefs and ideas. There may be a perceived ideal of what a teacher should be like within a school, which can lead to a collective versus individual tension, where it can be difficult to achieve a 'balance between the agency of the individual, as it is given meaning in the light of the work of the collective' (Boaler, 2008). This was highlighted in the study by Brown and Heck (2018), which explored how working in an alternative provision setting influenced teacher identity. Their findings indicated that teachers working in alternative provision may have defined themselves differently and that the communal practices in the school resulted in teachers sometimes adapting their principles. One of the teachers they interviewed revealed that her personal interests in teaching centred around student learning, but that the demands and priorities of the context meant that she often focused on behaviour. This collective professional identity allowed teachers to make sense of their role (Edwards, 2007) and recognise and utilise the resources they have around them in the workplace.

As previously discussed, literature indicates that external factors in the school context sometimes forces teachers to construct professional identities which are different to what they first envisaged when they set out to be a teacher (Passmore, 2019). This change in what it means to 'teach' may lead to them feeling a sense of inauthenticity, but it could also lead to a more dynamic kind of identity development, in the face of shifts in the professional environment. This kind of shift was certainly evident during the school closures, and the resultant adaptations required to teach online during the pandemic. Staff had to develop coping strategies quite rapidly, and this may have led to feelings of isolation or alienation from the organisation and the profession more widely (Beijaard et al., 2004). However, this may also be impacted on by the culture of the school (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009), as issues like performativity measures can also cause feelings of separation, as teachers are judged based on their

contribution to organisational performance (Ball, 2003), rather than their own individual contributions. In turn, this may have had a knock-on effect on teacher's emotional commitment and motivation (Rosari, 2019). This is because professional identity can also be influenced by job satisfaction (Spector, 1997) and by teacher's feelings of confidence (Friedman and Kass, 2002). An organisation can even influence what emotions can be expressed openly as a teacher and which need to be silenced and controlled (Uitto et al., 2015) dependent on what is desirable in that school context.

In addition, schools can also be seen as micropolitical contexts (Uitto et al., 2015) which regulate teachers through their 'conditions, socio-political systems, and power relationships' (Shapiro, 2010: 165). Therefore, when teachers first arrive in a school context, they need to find and negotiate a place of their own within what is often a well-defined and established pre-existing culture (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002). This can be extremely difficult and fraught with challenges, and in my own teaching career, when I moved schools, I experienced a period of cultural incongruence where I failed to understand the way that the school did things. This is not an acquiescent process, rather it is a period of active adjustment, where teachers negotiate their identities by interpreting contextual norms and interacting with them. It is a form of transition from the personal identity to a more collective one, where balances must be sought between the often contradictory facets of teacher identity.

Part of being in a school also means that teachers are surrounded by colleagues who all have collective stories about teaching, defined by Uitto et al. (2015: 167) as 'small stories.' These can take place in many informal settings, such as staff rooms or corridors and give teachers the opportunity to talk about their silenced truths. This need was clear in the study that Uitto et al. (2015) conducted where they concluded that teachers often wanted to discuss challenging situations that they had recently faced with one another, when given the opportunity. When they were not given this opportunity, the teachers interviewed felt lonely and like they faced an emotional burden of going it alone. Few teachers may have had the opportunity to discuss the challenges that

they felt throughout the pandemic, so perhaps this feeling of isolation may have been exacerbated for them.

The school contexts teachers work in are not the only institutional context which may influence their construction and development of professional teacher identity. Teacher's own experiences of being schooled may also have an impact on their identity and may influence their sense of what kind of teacher they would like to become (Edwards and Edwards, 2017). When developing teacher identity, individuals could accept or reject information, based on their visions of what good teaching looks like (Horn et al., 2008). This conceptualisation of what good teaching looks like may even come from their own school experiences (Hahl and Mikulec, 2018) and they may perhaps attempt to emulate certain models or modes of teaching based on things they remember their own teachers doing (Edwards and Edwards, 2017). Consequently, certain types of teacher identities may in fact favour certain types of schools (Rosari, 2019), due in part to the experiences teachers may have had in their own school. I certainly know this to be true of my own experiences where I was schooled in a religious environment and had no desire to work in a faith school as a teacher.

Overall, the literature highlights that the different contexts of the workplace may influence the way teachers define themselves (Canrinus et al., 2011) and that this can impact on professional identity formation. However, having a coherent and anchored sense of our professional selves is also critical, as it allows teachers to make sense of their complex work.

2.4 Teacher identity and self-concept

2.4.1 Agency and autonomy

To be accepted as autonomous, teachers need to be 'allowed to work with their students, free from the pressures of strict standards, external national tests, public league tables, or inspection systems' (Ropo and Välijärvi, 2010: 214). Teacher autonomy can be characterised as 'the perception that teachers have regarding whether they control themselves and their work environment'

(Pearson and Moomaw, 2005: 42). Autonomy is important, because teaching goes beyond technical expertise and includes professional wisdom centred around how students learn and what might be the best ways to facilitate such learning (Cribb and Gewirtz, 2007). This includes dimensions such as work in the classroom, curriculum implementation, participation in decision-making at school level and professional development (Evers et al., 2017), where teachers can act upon their own theories of practice (Genc, 2016). For Salokangas and Wermke (2020), teachers' perceived autonomy is positively correlated with their self-efficacy, work satisfaction, empowerment, and positive work climate, creating conditions for creativity and experimentation. However, high government regulation, such as was seen during the Covid-19 pandemic, can be associated with low school autonomy (Agasisti et al., 2012; Greany and Waterhouse, 2016).

Professional accountability in education and the neoliberal marketisation of education mean that teachers are central actors in an increasingly complex web of accountability relationships based on external controls and professional autonomy (Mattei, 2012: 249). Cribb and Gewirtz (2007) argued that autonomy can be distinguished in three ways. First, around loci and modes of autonomy which considers who are the agents, whether they are individual or collective agents and how they exercise agency. Second, are the domains of autonomy and control, where the agents' spheres of control are identified and delineated. Third, are the loci and modes of control where agents are both subject to and can exercise control (whether consciously or unconsciously). Cribb and Gewirtz argue that these already complex elements work together in different ways to form a more complex picture of autonomy and agency. In addition, Frostenson (2015) outlines three aspects of educator autonomy which include professional autonomy (teachers as a professional/institutional group), staff autonomy (the practice of autonomy by staff as a school unit) and individual autonomy (that held by the individual teacher). Each of these aspects of autonomy may be affected differently by different policy initiatives, and the accountability of schools as institutions is restricted when other external professionals decide on what is appropriate knowledge, and how such knowledge will be evaluated (Ingersoll, 2003; Wermke and Forsberg, 2016). This implies that with the top-

down governmental control exerted during the pandemic, teachers may have felt less autonomy, as they only had agency in relation to deciding how best to meet imposed targets and directives sent from government. Although education policy is centralised in England, teachers do have a certain amount of autonomy in how to enact the central policy. Yet, whilst agency may seem to sit with the teacher, this is impacted upon by multiple others including headteachers, senior leaders and government regulation (Salokangas and Wermke, 2020).

2.4.2 Emotions and teacher guilt

Teacher guilt (Farouk, 2012) is a common emotion and links to the moral purposes of teachers at work (Hargreaves, A. 1998, Hargreaves, D., 1999), playing a role in the way that teachers interact with their students. Research investigating the relationship between emotions, beliefs and teachers' identities during times of educational reform and unrest, such as during Covid-19 school closures, suggest that teachers experience negative emotions such as 'teacher guilt' when there is a mismatch between their moral objectives regarding the care and education of their pupils, and their ability to meet these aspirations under the directive of imposed educational reforms (Kelchtermans, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Schmidt and Datnow, 2005; van Veen and Sleegers, 2006). The emotion of guilt is a self-conscious emotion, as it involves the individual evaluating his/her own thoughts and actions (Lewis, 2008) and realising that they may have fallen short of their own internalised moral codes and standards (Alsup, 2006). With this research in mind, teachers may have felt obliged to respond to students, even when it encroached upon their work/home life balance, due to the guilt they felt if not responding would cause stress, harm, or anxiety. This could include trying to balance teaching commitments with caring for and educating their own families (Dunn, 2020), or the changing interactions with students to a remote rather than face to face relationship, which may have increased workloads (Matias et al., 2023).

'Teacher guilt' may also have been heightened and exacerbated by the press coverage about teachers during school closures, and the negative reporting of how teachers were spending their working days. Teachers witnessed the country

clapping for the NHS, to show their appreciation, yet as fellow public service workers, teachers received little acknowledgement of their hard work (Smith, 2021). Teachers may have also been adversely affected by the portrayal of teachers' work during the pandemic as it caused their stress levels to rise. A study by Shimony et al. (2022) highlighted that those higher levels of anxiety contributed to a reduction in personal fulfilment and commitment to teaching, and increased emotional exhaustion among teachers. This indicates that the stress caused by the negative portrayal of teachers in the press could have made their jobs even more challenging. Similarly, Oxley and Kim (2023) discovered that teachers were adversely affected by negative press coverage and that they were keen for the media to appreciate teachers' efforts to keep schools open and avoid pitting teachers and parents against one another. Other teachers in the study urged the media to instead highlight the good that was happening in school communities.

For more experienced colleagues, the negative press coverage may have added exponentially to feelings of guilt and disconnection from colleagues, as they had previously seen more positive press coverage of teachers earlier on in their career (Brighouse and Waters, 2022). To attempt to understand the effect of this on teacher identity, it is beneficial to explore how the portrayal of teachers in the media, specifically newspapers in England, has evolved. This will be evaluated in a following chapter. It is also important to analyse how experienced teacher identity might differ from more novice teacher's identity.

2.5 Experienced teacher identity

How experienced teacher identity differs

Much of the research on teacher identity concerns identity formation during teacher education or in the early career years (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Rodgers and Schott, 2008; Beijaard et al., 2004;) and, the factors that influence teacher professional identity and development (Coldron and Smith, 2010; Lasky, 2005; Schepens et al., 2009; Hamman et al., 2010). However, if professional identity refers to how teachers see themselves as teachers, based on their interpretations of their continuing interaction with their context, for

Dayexperienced practitioners, the removal from the school environment when schools closed due to Covid-19 on March 20, 2020, may have had a more serious impact. This may be due to the absence of this context as a support, which could have provided additional challenges that less experienced colleagues may not have felt. A vital part of the school context is also the interpretative framework which teachers develop throughout their career (Kelchtermans, 2005). This framework is formed and reformed through interaction between individual teachers, and the different working conditions of their school context. This collaboration and teacher collegiality can include 'almost any kind of working together' (Hargreaves, 2001: 504) and focuses on the relationships between teachers. These interactions play an important role in the professional culture of schools. Hargreaves (1994) identifies two principal forms of collegial cultures. 'Collaborative cultures' are organic, authentic, and often informal, while cultures of 'contrived collegiality' are more formal, often imposed and, as a result, can be inauthentic. For many teachers, the informal collaborative culture in the staff room may not only enhance a feeling of belonging but could also contribute to the co-construction of professional knowledge about teaching and learning.

These interactions shape professional identities, as teachers balance the related aspects of their work: a personal dimension, a professional dimension, and a situational dimension (Day et al., 2007). If one of these aspects is removed, then experienced teachers in particular may feel like the firm foundations they have used to build the identity they have developed across a career becomes unstable (Mahmoudi-Gahrouei et al., 2016). Teachers need the support of other professionals to go beyond the instrumental collaboration of day-to-day actions and move more towards the co-construction of professional knowledge (Little, 1990). When teachers engage in discourse to describe an experience, feeling, or idea, the language simultaneously influences their understanding, therefore talking through beliefs, philosophies, or ideologies with others can be commensurate with increased self-understanding (Alsup, 2006). What is more, strong collegial relations and positive collaborative actions can also build professional capital (Fullan, Rincon-Gallardo, and Hargreaves, 2015) which can contribute towards a more positive self-image of professional identity, as it

makes teachers feel capable and like they are making a valuable contribution to society (Murray, 2021).

2.6 Teachers' identity and the pandemic

As has previously been stated, teacher professional identities build upon events and interactions shaped in the context of life experiences (Day, 2002; Day and Leithwood, 2007; Day and Gu, 2010). There are multiple histories that shape the way teachers understand their roles (Cannata, 2010) and the experience of teaching in unfamiliar circumstances during the Covid-19 pandemic could be one lived experience which may have shaped teacher identity constructs. Researchers have used a variety of different terms to identify these identity-changing events: critical incidents (Miles and Huberman, 1984; Tripp, 1994), peek/nadir experiences (Maslow, 1961; Thorne, 1963), or nuclear episodes (McAdams, 1985). Although these critical incidents may occur infrequently, they have the potential to signal a significant turning point or change in one's identity development (Miles and Huberman, 1984; McAdams, 1985; Tripp, 1994). Critical incidents tend to be significant and important high or low points - what makes these events critical are the meanings assigned to those experiences by the individual (Schutz et al., 2018). These critical events, such as the closure of schools and switch to online learning in 2020, may have the potential to challenge teachers' goals, values and beliefs and may result in adjustments of their professional identity. Alsup (2006: 101) expresses that a tension about professional identities is not always negative, as 'tensions between subjectivities can actually provide the site or impetus for important identity development—a type of transcendence—to take place.' Yet if the tensions are too great for teachers and there is little support for negotiating the dissonance, teachers may not be able to translate these contradictions into identity growth.

As well as critical incidents, shifts towards collaborative professional communities have also forced teacher professional identities to adjust to institutionalised collaboration structures (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Internal expectations of what a teacher role consists of are developed and fostered through interactions with colleagues and observations of

teaching and learning. Therefore, many teachers' ideas about what is considered acceptable behaviour has been constructed by their observations and involvement in their current work settings (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). Once this internal scaffold of the school environment was taken away during the pandemic, this may have resulted in teachers experiencing a misrecognition of their professional identities and a feeling of low confidence (Nilson, 2016).

Feelings of professional confidence have been defined as: 'Judgements about how well one can organise and execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations that contain many ambiguous, unpredictable, and often stress, elements' (Bandura, 1982: 122). Bandura also claimed that sustained effort and perseverance in the face of difficulty is likely to strengthen teachers' sense of confidence and result in a stronger sense of agency and positive professional identity. However, he also emphasised the power of collective efficacy, claiming, that 'the strength of schools lies in teachers' sense of collective efficacy that they can solve their problems and improve their lives through collective effort.' (Bandura, 1982: 143–4). A strong sense of self belief, as part of a professional teacher identity, helps teachers to feel positive about their value in society and can act as a 'form of psychic energy' (Day et al., 2018) and if taken away, may result in teachers finding it difficult to be motivated to achieve organisational goals (Goddard et al., 2004). A sense of collective self-efficacy is inextricably entwined with the emotional concept of belonging and these emotions play a key part in shaping professional identity (Schutz and Zembylas, 2009).

Managing these emotions can sometimes involve the possession of a great deal of resilience, especially when placed in a particularly stressful working environment. Research on resilient teachers and resilient schools (Day and Gu, 2014) identified resilience as a capacity rather than a fixed trait. It found that this capacity fluctuated according to the willingness, commitment, and ability of the individual to successfully manage a number of potentially conflicting forces of different magnitudes, and that they were helped or hindered in this partly by the strength of their inner commitment to teaching, often referred to as 'moral

purpose' (Goodlad and Zhixin, 1992), and partly by the interactions within the workplace. Some teachers may have found that their moral purpose was shaken due to the negative portrayal of teachers in the media and the sometimes dismissive attitude of the public due to school closures. This may have also been worsened by the isolation felt by some teachers from their colleagues, as the usual interactions in the workplace were replaced by the occasional email or message on an online platform.

2.7 Conclusion

Teaching has been seen to be a popular career choice over the last fifty years, yet pre-existing perceptions of what teachers should be and look like create tensions in professional identity formation. Teachers are motivated to train to teach due to various factors, including moral desires to make a difference, their personal backgrounds and upbringing, interactions with colleagues and school environments. This makes exploring teacher identities complex as teacher identities of experienced teachers are also formed through interactions with their peers and critical incidents in their career. Feelings of a lack of agency and autonomy can also be impacted by feelings of teacher guilt, as teaching is an incredibly emotive job. It can be concluded that teacher identities may have been re-shaped and re-constructed during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the changing nature of experienced teacher's roles which may have contrasted greatly with the role they have performed in the decade prior to the pandemic. Teachers may have experienced a range of critical incidents, including the negative portrayal of their career in the national tabloid media, bullying social media content and a lowering of status since more positive stories in the national press about teachers in 2010. These factors may have created a de-stabilisation of experienced teacher professional identity due to their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic which may have led to a questioning of what their place in schools may be post-pandemic.

CHAPTER 3: Portrayal of teachers in the national print media, during the pandemic

Despite teaching sometimes having the reputation of a noble profession, teachers have consistently, over the past 200 years, been 'maligned and unappreciated' (Cohen and Scheer, 1997: 4). Cohen and Scheer (1997) also attribute the low status of teachers to being stereotypically aligned with women's work and with those who lack the skills for success in the business sector. Interestingly, they make the connection between teachers' 'ongoing role as transmitters of one generation's values to the next' (1997, p. 4) with teachers' identity. As they suggest that being a teacher is not only about what teachers do in the classroom, as they are expected to embody their roles and behave in ways which reflect the values they transmit to their students. This can be seen in England, in Part 2 of the Teaching Standards, which states: 'A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct… uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school' (Department for Education, 2023: 1). Perhaps this could be seen as a difficult position, to be constantly expected to be 'on duty' and under public scrutiny in every element of their lives. It could also be harmful as teachers themselves come to represent the 'tensions and values associated with their jobs' (Cohen and Scheer, 1997:4) and can become a scapegoat for both the positive and negative actions of schools and education systems more widely. This was highlighted during the school closures, when some parents were frustrated at needing to work themselves while also educating their children, and a minority of parents took to social media to criticise teachers.

The way teachers' work is described in the national print media can also act as a vehicle for teachers to construct and reconstruct their professional identity, pedagogy, and practice (Kirby, 2016). An important aspect of identity formation is understanding how others see them and the media can serve as a useful lens to view this (Foff and Grambs, 1956). Newspaper coverage then, can have a relevance for teachers' professional life and their constructs of professional identity because it can enhance an individual's understanding their practice and

who they are as an educator. Buckingham (2008: 1) stated that identity is an 'ambiguous and slippery' term as it is unique to each of us and is constantly adapting and evolving. He added that 'the formation of identity often involves a process of stereotyping or "cognitive simplification" that allows people to distinguish easily between self and others, and to define themselves and their group in positive ways' (Buckingham, 2008:6). Therefore, images and depictions of teachers in national newspaper reports could add to existing stereotypes of teachers or construct new ideas in the perception of the public about what teachers' working lives and attributes are, which could in turn impact on how teachers see themselves. As identity formation can be constructed by the understanding of society, negative stories about teachers could become embedded in the values and structures of society, making it difficult for teachers to manage their own image or identity in a public sphere (Goffman, 1959).

The relationship between societal structures, professional teacher identity and an individual's ability to be agentic and reflexive can be complex. If teachers' experiences in a social structure, such as the national print media, are positive, the stronger their agency and reflexivity becomes (Polkinghorne, 1996). If the media are portraying teachers in a negative light and perpetuating dismissive stereotypes of teachers, perhaps teachers may find themselves feeling less positive about their roles and their professional identity. Giddens' research (1991) converges notions about social structure, identity, reflexivity, and media influences to identity. He suggests that reflexivity means that we actively shape, reflect on, and monitor ourselves throughout our professional careers, which allows us to craft our own narratives. He describes identity as a role we play, which needs to be something we work out during our careers; it is also subject to change and influenced by the media in a post-modern society, as information and ideas from the media can contribute to shaping society and thus, are involved in the ways in which people see their own professional identities.

Work on the inter-relativity of micro-level and macro-level activities by both Durkheim (1954) and Weber (1978) illuminate how the daily lived experiences of

teachers (the ‘micro’ aspect) and the media and societal opinion (‘macro’ structures) could shift teacher’s attitude and behaviours. Due to the changing attitude of the national press towards teachers, they may have experienced changes to their professional identity throughout different stages of their career, and some of these changes may be due to macro structures such as media influences. Social roles can become part of the self (Stryker, 1980) and so society could play a part in constructing the self as well as our role identities. A teacher’s professional identity is associated with being a member of a community of teachers and identifying with that role. This can further be associated with identity being influenced by aspects of society and a wider culture. The impact on individual teachers due to these influences can also have negative consequences, which may lead to additional stress on teachers. These might include the digital bullying or harassment of teachers, such as challenging teachers’ authority on YouTube videos (Kyriacou and Zuin, 2014) or the abuse of teachers on TikTok videos (BBC, 2021d; Bovill, 2023). The negative media stories shared on Twitter during school closures, often by tabloid newspapers such as The Daily Mail, were also accompanied by rude and negative comments about teachers, such as the interaction shown in Figure 3-1 below:

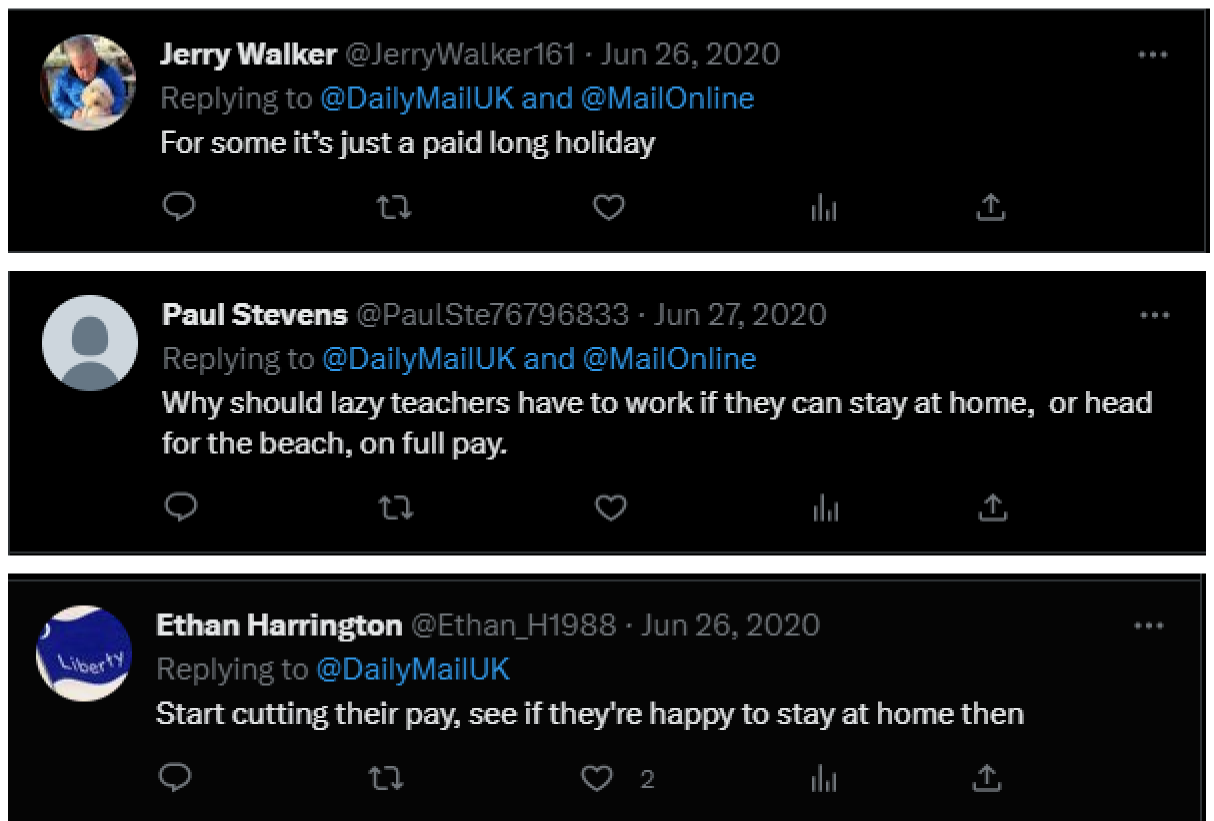

Fig 3-1: Daily Mail Twitter post and comments

This is one such comment thread of thousands that were popular on Twitter during school closures, when many teachers felt that they had never worked harder, planning both online lessons and face to face lessons for vulnerable students. It is easy to see why reading such negative comments, when teachers were already feeling under a great amount of stress, may have had an impact on the way teachers felt about their professional identities.

For experienced teachers, who have been teaching for a longer period, this may have represented a change in the way that society views their profession. This idea is reinforced by the VITAE (Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives, and their Effects on Pupils) project (Day et al., 2006), which outlined the various ways in which teachers' professionalism at different stages of their career were influenced by changes, which then influenced their professional teacher identity (Day and Gu, 2010; Day et al., 2018). This project highlighted that media coverage is not the only factor which may influence teacher identity formation. Reforms and policy changes which impact on teacher autonomy, changes to job

title and roles and responsibilities, as well as personal reasons can all contribute to shifting self-concepts of professional identities. There can also sometimes be a discord between the teacher identity expected by the public and the identity that is experienced by the teacher (Provenzo et al., 1989) and this could be a difficult tension to manage.

This was particularly evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when school closures meant that worldwide, approximately 63 million primary and secondary school teachers (Teacher Task Force, 2020), were asked to remotely educate approximately 1.5 billion students (UNESCO, 2020) online, as well as attend school to teach vulnerable pupils on a rota basis, face to face. To continue addressing the learning needs of children, teachers had to rapidly develop new skills to enable them to deliver remote teaching from their homes, meaning that they needed to implement a variety of instructional strategies which they may have not used previously in their normal classroom based practice. For some teachers, they were asked to record lessons and upload them to an online platform, where students would then upload work for them to provide feedback. Other schools asked teachers to deliver live asynchronous online teaching (Department for Education, 2020), or a hybrid of both scheduled live lessons and recordings. As schools were closed to the majority, teachers who had children of their own were also balancing their teaching timetables alongside educating their own children, which may have resulted in working hours becoming more fluid to balance extensive demands placed on them (Carpenter and Dunn, 2020).

Furthermore, teachers were faced with new pastoral challenges, as some children and young people were at risk due to new or increased social, economic, and welfare problems at home (George et al., 2021). This may have exacerbated teacher guilt and caused stress to teachers, as it meant that they needed to make continual changes in how they operated as the pandemic continued (Reimers, 2022). As a backdrop to the challenges teachers faced, the profession was also subjected to ongoing public critiques, particularly around their response to national decisions about school reopenings, which schools and teachers had no responsibility for.

In England, on 24 May, the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, announced that primary schools would reopen to students in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, ages 4-5), Year 1 (ages 5-6), and Year 6 (ages 10-11) from 1 June and that secondary schools should open to up to one-quarter of students in Years 10 and 12 (ages 14-15 and 16-17) for “some contact” from the 15 June. In response, the National Education Union (The Guardian, 2020a) initiated an appeal to the government to delay school reopenings for teachers’ safety. This led to the profession being widely denigrated as ‘lazy’ and ‘scaremongers’ (Drabowski, 2020). Before the negative depiction of teachers in the national press during the pandemic, many teachers already believed that society did not value their profession (OECD, 2020) and the pandemic, and the way in which teachers have been portrayed during it, may have exacerbated these pre-existing negative beliefs.

A column by journalist Rod Liddle, in The Sun on December 9, 2020, stated ‘Covid has made heroes of many of our frontline workers… but not teachers.’ In the column, Liddle juxtaposed the behaviour of teachers and schools against NHS staff, criticising school closures and intimating that cancelling exams has let our children down – a decision of course which had nothing to do with the nation’s teachers. He prompts readers to consider ‘is there any profession in the country which has had an easier, stress-free nine months than the teaching profession?’ While this would undoubtedly have been upsetting for teachers to read, there may be more implications for how this might shift teachers’ perceptions of their own professional identity. The role of the press has often reflected the concerns of society but has also often shaped them. This means that negative coverage in the press about teachers’ work during the pandemic may have led to a decline in public opinion about teachers, which could have resulted in teachers feeling like they are not valued, thus affecting their identity. Teachers who feel underappreciated and disrespected may lose the motivation to work, especially in times of difficulty, which leads to lower occupational commitment, job performance, and potentially attrition (Carlo et al., 2013).

The need to increase teachers' perceptions of how much they are valued is bolstered by evidence from PISA, that the more highly teachers perceived their profession was valued by society, the higher their students' mathematics scores were (Schleicher, 2018). Therefore, teachers' perceptions of the value of their profession appear fundamental to the quality of educational systems and national economies. The effect of media comments on teachers was explored in a study by Kim and Asbury (2020), who questioned teachers on how the portrayal of teachers in the media during the pandemic had altered their perception of how their profession is valued by society. Teachers in the study felt that the newspaper coverage had caused reputational damage and did not accurately represent teachers' views, with one participant stating, 'teachers are coming across as this whinging, work-shy group, who don't want to go back to work' (Kim and Asbury, 2020: 9). Teachers in the study also objected to the way in which concerns about learning loss and a potentially growing gap between more and less advantaged pupils were presented in the media, and how the 'crisis' narrative implied teachers were at fault for not stepping up to be heroes. This made teachers feel that the press were purposefully being hateful or spiteful to teachers, to point the finger of blame at somebody.

For more experienced teachers, this negative press coverage may have contrasted with some of the more positive stories in the press over the last decade. A search of national newspaper articles in 2010 reveals mostly positive stories about the impact of individual teachers on students, or obituaries of prolific educators, where their work is discussed positively. There was even the launch of a new national award for teachers: 'Today's lesson: brilliant teachers: Awards celebrate the humble talent of those who dedicate themselves to Britain's pupils' (The Guardian, 2010). An analysis of public feeling from the national newspaper letter pages suggests that teachers were enjoying a period of support and validation for their work. The publicity surrounding this may have highlighted the altruistic nature of teaching as a social enterprise and the potential of teachers to change lives.

Other articles in The Daily Mail (2010) stress how hard teachers work, '900,000 toil for ten hours a week unpaid; Teachers and lawyers put in the most overtime' and demanded that teachers are given respect, 'By the way... Why teachers deserve more respect than doctors.' This demonstrates that thirteen years ago, the tabloid media seemed to have more respect for teachers and their work and recognised the incredible contribution they made to society, even equating their contribution to that of doctors who save lives. While The Daily Mail also covered several salacious stories about teachers seducing their students in 2010, an analysis of headlines does seem to highlight a more positive portrayal of teaching as a profession.

Previous studies on changing press representations of teachers, such as Peter Cunningham's (1992) exploration of teacher headlines in 1950, 1970 and 1990, illuminate the fluctuation of public opinion. Cunningham revealed that the press greatly influence the attitudes of the public, and as sometimes stories about teachers are not being documented in a balanced manner, this may illicit extreme reactions in the public towards the teaching profession. This complex relationship between people's opinions and what the press documents, suggests that there is no simple cause and effect relationship. But the negative stories in the newspapers about teachers during the pandemic could provide a foundation for negative public opinion about teachers' work.

More experienced teachers may already be battling against stereotypes and embedded tropes about the veteran teacher, in addition to the negative comments about work rate. McCulloch and Ben-Peretz (2009) explored the portrayal of veteran teachers in British literature and found that experienced teachers are often associated with individualistic features and seen as nonconformists, who are out of touch and outmoded in their approach to teaching. With the reliance on new forms of technology for remote learning, this stereotype of experienced teachers being incapable of change and struggling with innovative teaching strategies, may have worsened the negative messages in the press about teachers being unwilling to adapt and provide an education for students against the odds.

Despite teaching being a socially significant job, where teachers play a vital role in the development of society, the UK does not rank teaching high on the Varkey GEMS Foundation social standing scale (2013). The Varkey Foundation launched the ‘Global Teacher Prize’ in response to these findings and then repeated the research in 2018. Findings indicated that there had been a modest rise in teacher’s social standing but that teachers were still ranked 7th out of 14 other professions. The research also found that there is a correlation between the status accorded to teachers through the Global Teacher Status Index and student outcomes in their country. High teacher status is not just ‘nice to have’ – increasing teacher status can directly improve the pupil performance of a country’s students. Of course, there are many factors that could contribute to the low status of teaching as a profession, including perceived poor pay and excessive working hours (Varkey Foundation, 2018). Importantly, Finnish respondents to the survey have more faith in their education system than respondents in any other country. The survey suggests that Finland is perceived as having a good education system and teachers are given respect for their hard work, as well as teachers in Finland being paid more than their English counterparts, again demonstrating that pay and public status may be linked.

Perhaps the media is one of the cultural factors which has also contributed to this construction of low social status. This finding appears to be confirmed by Hansen’s (2009) research on the portrayal of teachers in the British press and Alhamdan et al.’s (2014) comparative study of the representation of teachers in newspapers in five countries. Hansen investigated the image of teachers in British newspaper headlines between 1991 and 2005 and his analysis revealed a considerable change from a mostly negative to a mostly positive portrayal of teachers. More specifically, it showed that while newspaper headlines in the early 1990s focused on problems in education and teachers’ conflicts with teacher unions and the government, newspaper headlines in the early 2000s carried a much more sympathetic and supportive tone towards teachers. From the brief analysis in this dissertation of press headlines in 2010, this mostly positive coverage seems to have continued until the Covid-19 pandemic, when public support for teachers began to shift, around the same period as the negative stories were printed in the national press. Alhamdan et al.’s (2014)

comparative analysis revealed four different categories of teacher identity constructed across the newspapers they studied: the caring practitioner, the transparent (un)professional, the moral and social role model, and the transformative intellectual. The transparent (un) professional seems to echo some of the headlines in the English press during the pandemic which accused teachers of being paid their full salaries to sit at home and do nothing, often comparing them to workers who had been made redundant or continued to work throughout. These workers were hailed as heroes, making a great sacrifice for their countries, while teachers were painted as shirkers who didn't want to do their duty.

There was also a vilification of teaching unions in The Daily Mail, with headlines claiming the unions were 'callous' (2020a) for fighting for schools to close to keep teachers safe, and that unions were wrong to encourage teachers to 'skip' the queue for the vaccine, as it would mean the more vulnerable were harmed further (The Daily Mail, 2021). The newspaper articles above also accused the teaching unions of having a 'Pitiful "can't do" attitude that puts teachers firmly before pupils', implying that schools and teachers were to blame for lost learning and that teachers should risk their own health for their students. Other headlines denigrated teacher's setting of work, claiming that some teachers gave parents 'only two hours of work' for home learning (The Daily Mail, 2020b) and that teachers were responsible for the deterioration of students' mental health due to being 'kept away from class' (The Daily Mail, 2020c).

A recent study (Kim et al., 2022) questioned both teaching staff and senior leaders in primary and secondary schools and found that teachers were affected by the media portrayal during the pandemic (see Figure 3-2 below):

Primary Teaching Staff	Primary SLT	Secondary Teaching Staff	Secondary SLT
A lack of feeling valued as a teaching profession, due to social media and media portrayals of teachers, was mentioned.	A lack of feeling valued as a teaching profession, due to social media and media portrayals of teachers, was mentioned across all time points.	A lack of feeling valued as a teaching profession, due to social media and media portrayals of teachers, was mentioned. Confidence in government decisions was initially high, but this fell, creating feelings of upset and anger.	A lack of feeling valued as a teaching profession was mentioned across all time points. For some, this led to questioning about whether to quit the profession.

Fig 3-2: Research from Kim et al., 2022 on the impact of media portrayal of teachers on teacher's mental health

The deterioration of teacher's mental health outlined in the table above, linked to the changing depiction of teachers in England's national newspapers, could signal a change in the public image and representation of teachers, from a position of respect to one of less status and value (Hansen, 2009).

3.1 Conclusion

Research suggests that newspapers all over the world publish articles about teachers that are 'frequently unfair' and 'partially substantiated' (Pettigrew and MacLure, 1997: 392) and often blame teachers for poor student performance and poor educational outcomes (Ball, 2008). This in turn presents a negative image of teachers (Keogh and Garrick, 2011), creating a crisis mentality towards education and teachers, which teachers themselves cannot help but feel affected by (Alhamdan et al., 2014).

CHAPTER 4: Theoretical framework: Stephen J. Ball

4.1 Introduction

Stephen Ball's work on policy has been influential in critiquing education policies and practices, primarily in the UK, from a sociological perspective. He is particularly well known for his engagement with ideas about the role of the state in shaping education systems, and he has illuminated how educational policies and reforms are tied to broader shifts in governance, societal control, and the construction of subjectivities (Ball, 2008). One of Ball's significant contributions is his critique of neoliberal trends in education. Neoliberalism, as a socio-economic doctrine, emphasises the significance of the free market, competition, and individual responsibility. Over the past few decades, many educational systems worldwide, including England, have been reformed under the influence of neoliberal thinking. Ball has been critical of these changes, arguing that they tend to commodify education, place undue emphasis on standardised testing and performance measures, and erode the professional autonomy of teachers (Ball, 1987).

Another important area of Ball's research is the exploration of how education policies are formulated and enacted at the ground level. He has emphasised that policy is not just a set of directives handed down from the top; rather, responses to policies involve complex process involving interpretation, resistance, and adaptation by various actors, including school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. This perspective on policy as discourse and policy enactment has been widely adopted in the field of education studies and has helped to shed light on the complexities and unpredictability of how policies play out in practice. He has also discussed the politics of policy, wherein he critiques the way policy decisions are often driven by political agendas and ideologies, rather than purely evidence-based considerations. This is an interesting lens through which to analyse whether working online may have affected teacher identity. Teacher identity is not formed in a vacuum, which is why Ball's work on policy will have an inevitable impact, as the shift to remote learning took place within a context of rapidly shifting policy, given the nature of the pandemic.

Through his theories, Ball critically examines the intersections of policy, power, and practice in educational settings. This theory chapter does not have the scope to analyse all his work on educational policy, but instead it will focus on five key areas: Neoliberalism and the marketisation of education; teachers as policy actors; managerialism; and policy as a shaper of teacher identity. These key areas have been chosen as they offer insights into the complexities of educational reform, the challenges of policy enactment, and the profound impacts of socio-political shifts on the world of education and teachers' professional identities, and on the discourse of derision about teachers. The data I collected in the focus groups for my study will be illuminated in the context of the broader constructs outlined by Ball which, to varying degrees, influence the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of teachers across the education sector.

4.2 Neoliberalism and educational markets

Ball has extensively critiqued the neoliberal turn in education policies and practices and critically examined the ways in which neoliberal policies introduce market mechanisms into the public education sector. This includes the creation of competition between schools, choice for parents and students, and the commodification of education. Ball claims that it is impossible to understand the extensive changes in education over the last fifty years without relating them to neoliberalism (Ball, 2021) as it has pervasive effects on teacher's work and professional identity.

It can be challenging to conceptualise what neoliberalism means, but Jones (2016, in Ball, 2021: 2) suggests that it is:

> 'a free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government, that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the competitive marketplace.'

It positions schools as businesses, who due to neoliberal education policy, are in competition with other local and national schools and must perform well to entice students and parents to choose them. It attempts to shape how schools, and the leaders and teachers within them act. These sanctioned ways have then been perceived as common-sense or rational, due to interventions and dictate

from national government. This positions policy as discourse and emphasises that policies are not just technical instruments but are deeply embedded in socio-political ideologies. Neoliberal education policies promote specific values and ways of thinking about individuals, education, and society. In his work, Ball discusses Pasi Sahlberg's (2012) term, Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), as an international spread of neoliberal policies in education, which are characterised by standardisation, accountability and marketisation.

Ball writes about the changes in education policy since 1976 as being vast and profound, but the rationale for neoliberalism in education may have started much earlier than this, with the so-called Black Papers on education in 1969 (Ball, 1987). Ball argues that these papers highlighted teachers as being responsible for a range of social problems, including the decline in academic standards and increase of illiteracy, and a rise in anti-social behaviour. The implications here were that left-wing teachers were indoctrinating children and 'failing the nation' (Ball, 1987: 248) – both accusations are still levelled at teachers by the tabloid press even today. The UK was in the grip of an economic recession, partly caused by the decline of British industry in the face of international competition and this was also positioned as teachers' fault. Britain needed to compete internationally, and the solution seemed to be clear: an increased emphasis on measurable outputs, such as test scores and performance metrics were needed to hold schools and teachers to account. Teachers could no longer be trusted with education (Ball, 1990) and schools were positioned as front and centre of national policy in Thatcher's Conservative government in the 1980s.

Between 1979-1997, under a series of Conservative governments, the options were seen as giving a choice to consumers, (the parents of students) who could choose what school to send their child to. This choice might be defined by performative measures, such as examination results and a school's place in the league tables. This move was underpinned by a Hayekian free-market economics, coupled with a dismantling of local education authorities (LEAs) and devolution, which resulted in fragmented centralisation, where the national

state limited the range of possibilities available to teachers but didn’t exercise absolute control (Ball, 1987). This control came in the form of curriculum and assessment reforms and the new financial management of schools, which were devolved locally. These changes affected how teachers taught, how learners learnt, and the overall ethos of educational institutions, sometimes leading to what is termed as a teaching-to-the-test and a narrowing of the curriculum.

With the election of Labour in 1997, education was inextricably linked with economics, as Tony Blair (2005) suggested that:

> ‘…education is our best economic policy…this country will succeed or fail on the basis of how it changes itself and gears up to this new economy, based on knowledge. Education therefore is now the centre of economic policy making for the future.’

However, unlike the Conservatives (who had focused on market forces, competitiveness and turning schools into businesses), Labour concentrated on outsourcing expertise to assist ‘failing’ schools and dismantle the public sector. Ball (1987) terms these outsourced experts private actors and they include private school management companies and edu-businesses, who offer services such as curricular materials and blur the boundaries between the public and private sectors. This new, more business focused leadership style had a more forensic focus on targets and performance management, which led to performance benchmarks and new financial allocations with targeted funding.

What teachers did in schools was transformed from being controlled at a local level by LEAs, to being re-positioned as a vital component of ensuring that the UK was economically productive in terms of a ‘knowledge economy’ (Ball, 2021: 3). This suggests that policies are formed due to the pressure and necessity to compete globally, rather than what might be best for schools, students, and their local communities. This has led to what Nóvoa (2002:3) terms a ‘global policyspeak’ where education is both economically essential and portrayed as being the active ingredient of social mobility. Education is seen as an asset, which not only serves individual and economic interests, but is also commodified, and offers both quality and options. However, Ball contends that while neoliberal policies often promise increased choice and efficiency, they can

exacerbate social inequalities. For instance, school choice mechanisms might benefit those parents who are better equipped to make informed decisions, leaving disadvantaged students in under-resourced or lower-performing schools.

Under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010-15, schools were once again positioned as key to the UK competing on a global market. However, the then Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove had an intense focus on curriculum reform - led by a mistrust of teachers. In a speech to the Education Reform Summit in 2014, Gove spoke about a need to move towards more traditional pedagogy, ‘rigour’ and ‘the best which has been thought and said’ (Gove, 2014). This move towards more of a pre-war system of schooling was also coupled with plans to force academisation for underperforming schools, as recommended in the School’s Bill (UK Parliament, 2022).

Post Covid-19, although education policy has shifted towards a response to missed schooling for children, recent policy and initiatives still have neoliberalism at their heart. Former Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, outlined that the government were launching a ‘£1 billion Covid-19 catch-up plan’ which would aim to raise outcomes, through targeted funding for disadvantaged students who might fall behind due to disruptions to their education (Department for Education, 2020a). Although this policy may be needed, Ball argues that it can be seen as both ‘moral’ and ‘calculative’ (Ball, 2021: 22) as it is still articulated in terms of performance and rhetoric, legitimising political decisions based on the marketisation of education as being for the public good.

No matter under what government, whether left or right, neoliberalism and marketisation can be said to have had a profound effect on the way that schools are run, governed, and funded and may have also impacted on the professional identity and autonomy of teachers. Under neoliberalism, teachers often find their roles redefined by performance metrics, accountability measures, and

market-driven imperatives, potentially undermining their professional judgment and autonomy. A factor of this is the idea that policy is a discourse, which will be discussed next.

4.3 Policy as discourse

Ball states that viewing policy merely as a set of directives or prescriptions is too simplistic and that understanding policy as a form of discourse that shapes, and is shaped by, wider societal values, beliefs, and power relations is a more nuanced way of understanding the effects it might have on teachers (Ball, 1994). Drawing on the works of post-structuralist thinkers such as Foucault, Ball contends that policies are entwined with power relations and the production of knowledge. They are not neutral or objective, rather, they produce and reproduce certain truths and marginalise others.

Policies, when seen as discourses, frame how problems are understood, which solutions are deemed viable, and who is authorised to speak about them. This framing often excludes alternative viewpoints and reinforces dominant ideologies. They do this through what Ball terms ‘policy ensembles’ which he states, ‘exercise power through a production of truth and knowledge as discourse’ (Ball, 1994: 21). These collections of related policies determine and constitute practices, embodying meaning and displacing and excluding. Again, drawing on the work of Foucault (1974), Ball suggests that teachers face prohibitions from policy, as we take up the positions which have been constructed by policy for us. These might include certain practices, ways of behaving and values and ethics. Policies not only prescribe actions but also establish norms. They produce particular kinds of subjects or 'types' of teachers and institutions. For instance, a policy discourse that emphasises market efficiency and competition in education might promote the idea of the teacher as an 'entrepreneur' or the student as a 'consumer.’ As such, policies do not merely impact the 'external' world, they actively constitute and shape it. Through language, categorisations, and frameworks, policy discourses create specific realities and understandings of educational practice Ball, 2021; Ball, 1994; Ball, 1987). This was visible during the Covid-19 pandemic when policies

on school closures and provision of online learning reshaped the educational practice of teachers, providing new frameworks and systems for teachers to struggle with. As established elsewhere in this dissertation, it also created new ethical dilemmas for teachers, whose working hours and job descriptions changed to accommodate new student needs.

However, Ball also argues that policy as a discourse is not the whole story when analysing policy and that instead, it is vital to focus on the ways in which policy and the surrounding fields of knowledge are sustained and challenged in different contexts. He talks about how the 'struggle, dispute, conflict and adjustment take place over a pre-established terrain' (Ball, 1994: 23) but that there is a moving discursive frame which ultimately governs the way we act and interpret policies. It is here that Ball makes a distinction between policy as text and policy as effects. While policy texts are the written or spoken representations of policy, policy effects are the diverse ways these texts play out in practice, influenced by interpretations, contexts, and resistances. Yet, perhaps as the terrain during the pandemic was not pre-established and the policies were immediate due to the dangerous nature of the virus, teachers were not given the opportunity to properly interpret the policy. This may have led to them feeling powerless. Where schools usually can implement policies in their own ways, within their own spheres of power, there were more constraints and it limited leader's and teacher's responses to change. Here the policy of discourse redistributed teachers' voices, so that as Ball suggests, 'it does not matter what some people say or think' (Ball, 1994:23). This may have led to teachers feeling a sense of 'naïve pessimism' (Ball, 1994: 23), where their concerns and struggles during this period may have felt vain and trivial, when offset against the needs of children in a global pandemic. Teachers may have felt paralysed and unable to speak out, particularly in a climate of media scrutiny and negative comments from the public, as discussed earlier in this dissertation. This may have been why so many teachers used social media platforms such as Twitter to voice their views in some form.

However, policy discourse can also act as ‘a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy’ (Foucault, 1981: 101), which in a time of urgency and danger, may have caused more problems. Aside from social media, there is no public debate space for teachers, where they can make their voice known and instead, policy discourse can become an illusion of choice. Ball terms this ‘steering a ship from a distance’ (Ball, 1994: 56). This was evident when there was no mandate from government about how teachers would deliver lessons – this decision was given to headteachers who decided what was best for their students and teachers. Yet, tabloid newspapers such as The Daily Mail shamed schools with evocative headlines such as ‘How private school pupils still have full timetables while 700,000 state pupils get NO home lessons at all because some teachers are “embarrassed”’ (Daily Mail, 2020d). Here the policy discourse was removed from internal wranglings to national conversation, making teachers again feel frustrated and powerless. Interestingly, this example also highlights that at any given time, multiple policy discourses can coexist, compete, and intersect. Here, a discourse of equity in education, conflicted with a discourse emphasising accountability of teachers, where teachers were portrayed as lazy and letting their students down.

Ball (2021) also explores policies as discursive strategies which speak to wider social operations of a school, such as the purpose of a school and the construction of the teacher. During the Covid-19 pandemic, both social operations needed to be reimagined, as schools not only served as places of education but also of providers of food and IT equipment for families, and psychological supports for struggling parents. Then in January 2021, schools also became testing centres. In addition, teachers also saw their roles transform to encompass that of a social worker, counsellor, and IT support. There was an intersection here of what Ball calls ‘external policy drivers’ with ‘institutional policy dynamics’ (Ball, 2012: 26) where teacher’s actions were determined by not only top-down national directive, but also bottom-up which was driven by contextual need and dependent on what other colleagues were doing in the institution. This may also have been heavily influenced by school culture and ethos, which can also be a site of dissonance.

To conclude, as Ball (2012: 6) writes, 'there is a complex web of interpretations, translations…and the effectivity of policy discourse, that produces particular kinds of teacher subjects.' In the enactment of policy, teachers are subjects, or as Ball calls them, policy actors, which will now be explored in more depth.

4.4 Teachers as policy actors

Ball (2018) suggests that understanding policymaking and policy implementation requires looking beyond just institutional decisions and considering the various actors involved, their interactions, and the roles they play in shaping and interpreting policy. He identifies a broad range of policy actors, beyond the traditional state apparatus of leaders and teachers, including private companies, think tanks, international organisations and consultants, or policy entrepreneurs – who promote specific policies or policy ideas. These actors may have vested interests, which they aim to embed within policy formulations. An example of this is Oak National, who started out offering free online lessons to students and teachers during school closures but have now been funded £43 million from the Department for Education to become a new curriculum quango (TES, 2022). Although there was no mandated use of Oak National's resources during school closures, former Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi spoke about it as being one of the government's greatest achievements (Byline Times, 2022) and it was frequently mentioned by politicians on social media as a way of mitigating lost learning. This illustrates the shift from government to governance, multiple policy actors work in networks, collaboratively or competitively, shaping education policies. Policy is not just an end product, but a process that involves interactions, negotiations, and contestations among various actors. These different policy actors can also influence policies at different stages, from agenda-setting to implementation, as can be seen from the Oak National example.

However, not all policy actors possess equal power or influence. Ball (2012) discusses the dynamics of power in policymaking, highlighting that certain actors, especially those with significant resources, global reach, or specific expertise, may have a disproportionate impact on policy decisions. While policy

actors play a role in shaping policies, they are also involved in interpreting and enacting them, and policies may be reinterpreted based on policy actor's positions, interests, and beliefs. However, even policy actors within one school may enact policy differently. Ball rejects the idea of organisations being single abstractions and entities and states that he agrees with Barr Greenfield (1975: 65 *In* Houghton, et al., 1975), that organisations have 'varied perceptions by individuals of what they can, should, or must do…within the circumstances in which they find themselves.' This makes controlling what goes on in schools very complex and challenging and when teaching took place outside of the school environment, this control became even more diluted. Indeed, the boundaries of control were continually being redrawn during this period, with some teachers on Twitter reporting that senior leaders were conducting online learning drop-ins, marking scrutiny and remote lesson observations to check on their teachers (Paramour, 2020). This highlights the competing goals for the different policy actors. Senior leaders may want to ensure that students are being taught effectively, so that external test results next academic year may not suffer, and teachers may be focused on individual lessons rather than the bigger picture. Ball states that differences can sometimes rest on ideological foundations and can quickly become 'points of contention…lay [ing] bare deep divisions in teaching ideology' (Ball, 1987:14). This can be especially exacerbated in times of crisis or change, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Essentially, policy actors will tend to act with their own individual interests and ideologies in mind and Ball categorises these interests into three broad areas: vested interests, ideological interests, and self-interests (Ball, 1987). The vested interests of teachers include issues such as working conditions, rewards, and control of resources. Whereas ideological interests are more moralistic and philosophical and often link practical issues to wider political or philosophical positions. The self-interests consider teacher identity (which will be discussed in more detail through Ball's theories later in the dissertation), and job satisfaction. It is not difficult to perceive how these three definitions of interest may have been re-shaped during the Covid-19 pandemic, as teachers' worlds, work and roles were redefined. This conflict resulted in a kind of micro-politics which was acted out in teacher's homes, through a new negotiated order.

Ball sees ‘change as an inevitable consequence of conflict within a social system’ (1987: 28) but change in schools usually takes place over time and can take a considerable amount of time to adopt effectively (Rogers and Shoemaker, 1971). Sometimes, as was the case during the pandemic, the teacher could be viewed as a passive recipient of change who must go through an unlearning process to be involved in innovation. For experienced teachers, who are well-established in their pedagogical style, this may have involved a feeling of change being done to them. This is not to claim that experienced teachers are unable to adapt, but innovation might usually be mediated through social interaction with colleagues, which was missing for teachers when isolated at home. Instead, this forced change might have undermined established identities and threatened teacher’s individual self-concepts. The policy changes faced by teachers as policy actors, were not a gradual change but instead required teachers to completely reimagine their role and quickly adapt to a new norm, with a limited understanding of the parameters.

Therefore, in policy analysis, teachers tend to be positioned at the bottom of the policy hierarchy (Ryan and Bourke, 2013), with neoliberalism emphasising a discourse of deficits about teachers (Ulmer, 2016). This situates teachers ‘as powerless agents subject to the will of policymakers’ (Anderson et al., 2015: 359). Yet, policy actors are individuals, who ‘bring their own experiences, scepticisms and critiques to bear on what they see/read/are exposed to’ (Hall, 1997: 153) and will enact change in their own way, inflected by these frames of reference. However, due to the immediacy of the policies formulated during the pandemic, there was little space for creativity and the individualisation of policy enactment, leaving some teachers perhaps feeling disempowered and trapped. These constraints sometimes came from the government, but also from leaders in schools, who enacted policies through a managerialism style of leadership, as detailed in the following section.

4.5 Managerialism

Managerialism refers to the adoption of practices and ethos from the corporate world into public services, including education. This movement has been termed

as ‘New Public Management’ by Christopher Hood (1991: 8) and saw education adopt much more entrepreneurial competitive regimes. Within the broader context of neoliberalism and marketisation of public services, managerialism in schools focuses on efficiency, accountability, and performance metrics, labelled by Ball as a performativity culture (Ball, 2021). This term describes a culture where institutions and individuals are constantly measured and judged based on performance indicators, benchmarks, and targets such as exam results and Ofsted judgements. Teachers could become governed by numbers and this kind of culture may change how educational institutions operate, and how teachers perceive their roles.

Managerialism may also bring with it a heightened sense of accountability, through inspections, evaluations, and assessment data, which often have implications for school’s funding, reputation, and operational autonomy (Ball, 2012). This ideology could also promote competition between schools in the same catchment area, as they are pushed to compete for students, resources, and rankings, which could fundamentally change the nature of educational collaboration and collegiality (Ball, 2018). Ball suggests that under this new style of management, there is a governance of teacher’s souls, as leaders expect to observe a high level of commitment and action from their staff (2021). Ball suggests that they can only observe these attributes through a system of surveillance and measurement, as teachers become governed by numbers and subject to regular lesson observations, data discussions and increased accountability measures. This increase in management surveillance forms part of a wider ideological narrative about teaching, which has been previously discussed in this dissertation and was emphasised during the pandemic. It painted teachers as being lazy and highlighted their need to be agile (Ball, 2021), by responding to a new way of teaching with little training or preparation.

Ball suggests that managerialism has also altered the nature of leadership within schools. Leaders are now often expected to be 'managers' who can effectively navigate market pressures, deliver results, and ensure that their institutions

remain competitive. This sometimes places them in difficult positions, having to balance market demands with educational values. The rise of managerialism came from a view that the issues that arise in the public sector are the same issues faced in business, so therefore the same principles should apply in solving them (Ball, 1994). This new style of management saw prescription replaced by accountability and promoted the appearance that collaboration and autonomy were present. But instead, it positioned a headteacher as the key actor in the process of reform, who alongside the senior leadership team, are separated from classroom colleagues, creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ division and shifting the goalposts of organisational control. Indeed, Ball (1994) views managerialism and the market as being closely intertwined, citing as evidence a UK government policy document from 1988, which discusses headteachers planning their use of resources and highlighting staff as their ‘most valuable resource’ (DES, 1988: 3 in Ball, 1994: 53). Here, teachers are viewed as human resources, possibly denied access to discursive processes on policy and perhaps trapped in a web of policy decisions over which they have no control. The reopening of schools to vulnerable students can be seen as an example of this, as teachers were needed to provide childcare to frontline workers who were keeping the economy going.

Managerialism also heralded the introduction of much more rigid and fixed staff roles and management structures, which positioned headteachers as isolated from their staff. Ball (1987) writes about the realities in schools of teachers now communicating with their headteachers through a hierarchy of other senior leaders, which dehumanises the conception of a school as a holistic system. Teachers are assessed through how well they perform and contribute to the school aims, with bureaucracy acting as a form of domination. Teachers could then feel excluded from decision making, as senior leaders adapt national policy for their own context, with sometimes limited input from them. Yet, Ball claims that the managerialism style of leadership requires this separation (1987), as it positions teachers as the core building blocks to efficiency and working towards the ideal.

Yet, being a school manager of course is not without its own imposed policies, as headteachers have only the appearance of autonomy. Ball describes headteachers as ‘empowered but stressed. Liberated but anxious’ (Ball, 1994: 58). Some leaders shielded staff from the reality of rapid policy change during the pandemic, accepting the burden of their position. However, some heads also spoke out publicly about the stresses and pressures placed upon them and the toll on their own mental health, with charities such as HeadsUp4HTs offering support for headteachers to help them navigate the pressures placed upon them (HeadsUp4HTs, 2020). These stresses may have reshaped teacher identity. The next section of this chapter will describe Ball’s theories on teacher identity, linking where appropriate to issues arising from the pandemic.

4.6 Policy as a teacher identity shaper

Ball’s work often makes the connection between policy and the identity of teachers and seeks to understand how broader policy shifts, especially within a neoliberal and managerialist framework, influence the ways teachers see themselves and their roles in education. As has previously been discussed, policy is not merely a set of directives but a discourse that shapes how educators think and act, as policies carry with them certain values, beliefs, and assumptions. Therefore, when teachers engage with policies, they are also engaging with these underlying discourses, which can either align with or challenge their own beliefs and identities. Linked to this is the need for schools to operate within a market logic, where teachers often find themselves in a competitive landscape. This competitive ethos can influence teacher identity as it prompts some to see themselves more as service providers catering to customers, rather than as traditional educators. Ball's concept of 'performativity' is crucial here, as for teachers, it means that their worth and competence are frequently assessed by student test scores, lesson observations and other measurable outcomes, leading some teachers to internalise these external judgments, or to choose to resist and challenge them.

One way that policy can affect teacher professional identity is through autonomy, which Ball calls ‘a sacred touchstone’ (1987: 121), as a high level of

autonomy stands as a symbol of professional status. Teacher autonomy can be defined as who makes the decisions regarding teachers' work, and who controls the outcomes of the decisions made (da Silva and Mølstad, 2020). These decisions might be made by teachers or other actors within the school, or external controllers such as government. Autonomy regarding teaching work can also relate to different domains within the school setting, such as lesson planning, curriculum, tracking of students or pastoral support mechanisms (Wermke and Forsberg, 2016). Teacher autonomy can also be removed, as it is a privilege granted by the headteacher, if teachers are fulfilling certain terms and conditions – institutional norms and regulations (Ball, 1987). Therefore, autonomy is fundamentally governed by a set of firm rules, it is a pseudo-freedom which is granted but may be withdrawn or reduced if limits are contravened. It acts as a 'cosy illusion' (Ball, 1987: 122) which convinces teachers that they have a sense of professional self-efficacy, but instead reduces teachers to a system of subordinate institutional control.

During the pandemic however, I noticed that teacher's having professional autonomy in the way they delivered their lessons was sometimes constricted, as they were forced to adapt their lessons into lecture style formats, delivered online. Yet in other ways, teachers were given more flexibility and autonomy over how they spent their time, with headteachers having to rely on a degree of professional trust that teachers were fulfilling their roles at a distance, free from the usual managerial quality assurance - such as learning walks or lesson drop-ins. This didn't mean however, that this new sense of autonomy freed up teachers to execute their roles free from the constraints of neo liberalistic policies. In fact, Ball (1987) has also discussed the emotional dimensions of teaching, especially within the policy context. Teachers often experience tensions between their professional beliefs and the demands of policies and navigating these tensions requires significant emotional labour, as teachers try to reconcile their identities with external expectations. This was certainly emphasised during the Covid-19 school closures, as teachers may have felt guilt at needing to educate online and have felt that the approach that their school took to educating students during this time was at odds with their feelings on what might be best for their own pupils. As Ball puts it, the sheer 'amount of

policy, the constancy of change, the welter of criticism and reduction in autonomy…wore away teacher commitments, and increased workloads, anxiety and dissatisfaction' (2021: 102).

Rhetoric from the press during the pandemic and the tight restrictions on teacher's work caused by excessive policy changes led to discussions of the need for teachers to be remodelled and reconstructed, positioning teachers as resistant to change, fatalistic and embracing victimhood. The comments on national newspaper websites and social media attests to this. This may have led to teachers experiencing what Ball terms a 'values schizophrenia' (2003: 218), as they attempted to organise the competing voices around them and reauthor themselves in light of a global pandemic.

4.7 Discourse of derision

As discussed, Ball suggests that performativity is a culture and a form of regulation that judges teachers, while providing incentives and control by using rewards and sanctions. This positions teachers as being encapsulated by their performative worth, through measures of output and productivity within the results-based field of educational judgement (Ball, 2003). Who controls the narrative over the field of judgement is highly contested, as are what performance measures are seen to be valid or more desirable. This performativity does not just come from the government and school leaders but can also come from the national media and members of the public and can result in teachers' professional identities feeling compromised (Ball, 2003). These performativity terrors can contribute not only to the adaptations of professional identities but also the reforming of relationships, interactions with others and ideas about what it means to be a teacher. Ball (2003) labels these discursive interventions (p. 218) and claims that out of these interactions, new roles are created as teachers are reworked in the public forum, causing teachers to feel self-doubt and personal anxiety about their roles, actions, and motivations. Essentially, teachers choose and judge their actions on how they are judged by others. This process of 'exteriorisation' in the public sector, moves teachers towards more of a process of marketing, what Ball (2003) terms a fabrication or

form of cynical compliance that guides their actions and interactions. The pressure to fabricate may come from the coverage of teacher's work in the press and more recently, from comments by the public on social media. Stephen Ball (1990) refers to this as a 'discourse of derision,' where teachers appear to be held culpable by the popular press and in the rhetoric of government policy for several national problems, such as a high proportion of unskilled, unqualified school-leavers, and high levels of national unemployment.

Some of this rhetoric was born from the so-called Black Papers (Cox and Dyson, 1969), discussed above, but New Labour also promoted a discourse of derision in its academisation project, which focused on the need for change and modernisation, implying that schools were old-fashioned and providing a substandard education. In his speech at Bexley Business Academy, Tony Blair stated that Labour was aiming for '…not just better facilities, but a wholly new and better way of delivering education, developing the potential and aspirations of each individual child' (Blair, 2002). This focus on innovation rather than stagnation, not only indicated a neoliberal position of consumer choice but also suggested that teachers needed to improve and make education more tailored and bespoke for the students they served. This signalling of a breach with the past, saw Blair categorise the current education system as a failure which was tolerated (Hardcastle and Yandell, 2018).

The mantle for the derision of teacher's work was then taken up by the Conservative-led administration in 2010, who continued to provide critiques against educators, focusing particularly on their view that schools represented a particular type of progressivism. Sir Michael Wilshaw, who was Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, spoke about his own experiences working in schools and gave a damning critique about the education provided in schools, particularly his old school in Hackney, claiming '…there would have been many others just as bad that never hit the headlines and got away with blue murder' (Wilshaw, 2012: 2). This claim, that without Ofsted to drive up standards, schools would be failing children, is a theme which has featured prominently in national newspaper stories and speeches by politicians such as Michael Gove, who has been the

architect of many of the changes in English education alongside Nick Gibb. Amongst Gove's derisive comments about teachers was a labelling of them as 'Enemies of Promise' (Gove, 2013a) who exercise 'the soft bigotry of low expectations' (Gove, 2013b). These speeches were followed by negative press coverage of teachers, which supported this rhetoric and circulated negative representations of teachers out to the masses. As Foucault (1981: 53) claimed, in 'any society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a number of procedures whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to master the unpredictable event.' Thus, the government and the press have perhaps seemed to work together to popularise and promote a particular view of teachers, which means that the public more freely support their attempts to seem to control and subjugate what goes on in schools. Ball claims that these processes both define the policy field and limit the possibilities of schools and teachers (Ball, 1990). It empowers some groups, such as the media, to be able to speak critically and authoritatively about education, therefore marginalising teachers, and teacher's voices – a process which Cohen (1980) terms casting teachers in the role of 'folk devils.'

Due to some media influences on attitudes to teaching as a profession, sometimes caused by what has been termed 'news framing' (Lecheler and de Vreese, 2019), Gerstl-Pepin (2007) claimed that there is 'a pressing need for educational researchers to systematically examine the media's role in educational politics' (p. 2). News framing sometimes results in subtle messages from the media about groups of people, or educational practices, being framed in ways which select some aspects of perceived reality and present them as objective truths to the public (Entman, 1993). An example of this are the stories about teachers relaxing all day on full pay during the pandemic, with the implication that they were not providing a satisfactory online education for students. This framing has provided the roots for some education crises since, around low GCSE and A-Level results being blamed on poor teaching during the pandemic, with some obvious links here to economy and the marketisation of education. O'Neil (2012) has suggested that media coverage of education becomes located within a narrative of crisis, which portrays education as facing huge challenges and failing to prepare the next generation of workers with the

skills needed. It also pits the UK against other education systems, particularly in terms of their performance, implying that the economy will become further threatened. Teachers themselves are seldom given a voice in this kind of framing, which means that they are often also left out of policy discussions (Tyack and Cuban, 1995). It seems likely therefore, that negative framing of teachers and their work in various media reports over time, may have led to perceptions among some members of the public of unskilled and unmotivated teachers working in a problematic education system. This could perhaps explain the low recruitment rates and teacher wellbeing issues recently highlighted (DfE, 2018a). This discourse of derision may also have affected teacher professional identity, as teachers may have felt ashamed and upset at some of the comments. This could have been even more difficult for experienced teachers who may have been used to more favourable perceptions of their job in the press and from members of the public.

4.8 Conclusion

Ball’s theories on policy are a useful lens to examine how experienced teachers may have had to recalibrate their professional identities in reaction to the policies they enacted during the Covid-19 school closures and the changes to their work these led to. All the theories outlined above will be useful when analysing the impact of the Covid-19 policies on experienced teacher’s professional identities, particularly the ideas about the discourses of derision used by both ministers and the press, which then could act as a justification for writing and enforcing policies. Ball's work underscores the profound ways in which education policies, especially those rooted in neoliberal and managerialist ideologies, shape and challenge teacher identities. While policies often present certain expectations and demands, teachers are not mere implementers. They engage with, interpret and sometimes even challenge policies, leading to a dynamic interplay between policy and identity. Using Ball as a theoretical lens for examining experienced teacher identity during the Covid-19 pandemic will be interesting, as his ideas may illuminate the data collected in the focus group and allow individual teacher’s stories to be anchored in wider, more holistic ideas about policy and practice. As teachers’ practices are part of their professional

identity, this may have impacted on the way that experienced teachers viewed themselves, their role, and their work.

CHAPTER 5: Paradigm, methodologies, and methods

5.1 Introduction

Using an interpretivist approach, I undertook the research in two stages. Firstly, I conducted two semi-structured focus groups online, each with six teachers from both primary and secondary schools in England, who had been teaching for longer than a decade and had taught throughout the pandemic. Secondly, I conducted a thematic analysis, using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework to code and identify themes. Excerpts from the transcript were then analysed using Ball's theories about educational policy, to explore the relationship between teacher's perceptions of their identities and whether the pandemic may have caused any disharmonious relations between them, due to the changed objective conditions of online schooling.

In this chapter, I outline the research process by considering the following: the aims of the study; the research approaches; and the ethical issues, including reflexivity and my own positionality as a researcher.

5.2 Aims and paradigms

This research seeks to define teacher professional identity of experienced teachers before exploring how, if at all, has remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic changed experienced teachers' perceptions of their identity as an educator in England?

To explore the possible effects of the pandemic school closures on experienced teacher professional identity, I created the following research design:

i) Consideration of paradigm and overall theoretical grounding for the research;

ii) Creation of aim and research questions;

iii) A literature review on the professional identity of teachers, the factors influencing the professional identity of teachers and the professional identity of experienced teachers;

iv) A brief exploration of the English national newspaper coverage about teachers from March 2020 to March 2021, compared to some headlines on teachers from 2010;

v) An exploration of some of Stephen Ball's work on policy and how his theories could act as a useful lens to explore the data from the focus groups;

vi) Creation of research design: two semi-structured focus groups with twelve teachers who had taught in England during the school closures in 2020 and 2021 and had been teaching for more than ten years; a thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) to code and identify themes;

vii) An analysis of the emergent themes from the two focus groups using Stephen Ball's work on educational policy.

I decided on an interpretive paradigm for my research. I considered this paradigm to be most appropriate since the focus of my study was on participants' experiences, perceptions, and realities. Perceptions and realities tend to be socially constructed and so objective truth is not possible (Carson et al., 2001).

As an interpretivist researcher, I understood that any meanings I elicited are subjective, as what is perceived as reality is 'complex, multiple and unpredictable' (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). As ontology raises questions about the 'nature of reality' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 183) and the research paradigm is interpretivist, this study has a relativist ontology, where reality is constituted of human experience and the worlds and realities of participants may be very different (Stajduhar, Balneaves and Thorne, 2001). Therefore, it was my job as a researcher to endeavour to explore numerous interpretations of the multiple realities and attempt to understand the many truths of participants in the focus groups.

In terms of epistemology, Denzin and Lincoln (2005), attest that the relationship between the knower and the knowledge, and how they comprehend the world is key. In an interpretivist research paradigm, although the researcher hopes to

develop new knowledge through analysing the findings in a study, there may be an assumption that they enter the field of the study with some prior knowledge or insight (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Therefore, a subjectivist epistemology is appropriate in this study, because as the researcher, I cannot fully separate myself from my contextual knowledge and assumptions. As such, there is a link between myself and the research and how I attempt to interpret and understand the focus group findings; I am part of what is being researched, there is a subjective axiology as I cannot be separated from the research and any findings will be subjective.

The approach for this research sought to go beyond headlines, statistics on experienced teachers leaving the profession and national narratives about teachers, and develop real understanding about the long-lasting effects of the pandemic on experienced teachers and their views of their professional identity. As a former experienced teacher, who also taught throughout the Covid-19 school closures, I am invested in the field that I researched and brought to this my own set of values, beliefs, feelings, and experiences. Following Edwards and Temple's guidance, (2002:8) I sought to approach my methodology to handle this in a responsible manner in terms of my positionality.

5.3 Positionality and ethical considerations

Quality, ethics and project management

From an ethical viewpoint, as a former member of the teaching profession who left to become an academic after the Covid-19 pandemic, I gave due consideration and reflection behind my choice of research question. I felt that my own professional identity had been adapted and re-shaped due to my experiences during this turbulent period of my career. This may have influenced my choices in wanting to explore this feeling more alongside other teachers. As detailed earlier in this dissertation, as a teacher educator and independent consultant, I had been involved in many conversations with experienced teachers who spoke about how the pandemic had been a revelatory period in their professional lives and I experienced a profound desire to explore this in more

depth. Not least, I hoped to ascertain what support experienced teachers may need going forward to inform the Department for Education's retention policies, in a climate of low teacher retention.

I have discussed my positionality, voice and perspective as a researcher earlier in this dissertation, but as a former teacher who also taught during the pandemic and holds strong opinions about the Conservative party's actions during the pandemic, reflexivity was an important part of my process at every stage of this study. Before commencing this study, I used Corlett and Mavin's (2018) self-reflexivity questions to explore my own personal motivations and interests for conducting the research. The personal experiences I have concerning the reality of enacting the guidance during the pandemic and what it may mean for other teachers and their concept of their own identities, could influence the framing of the research questions. However, I also began to reflect on what impact this might have on how I conducted the research and its validity. This more reflexive awareness of my role encouraged me to explore the focus group data and conduct a thematic analysis in a much more thoughtful way.

Using the self-reflexivity questions helped me to become more aware about how my own positioning might affect the research by recording any theoretical assumptions I had about what participants' realities might be and then as the study progressed, I re-visited these and recorded how these initial assumptions had shifted, developed, and changed (Haynes, 2012). This process also made me reflect on how the questions I developed might influence on the themes I decided upon in analysing the focus group data, and whether some questions were too leading, steering my participants towards the answers which may match what I expected to hear. To help with this, I also used Cassell's (2005) questions while formulating and re-formulating them: How have the questions defined and limited what can be found? What insights do I hope to generate from these questions? I also kept reminding myself to 'situate' any knowledge I did uncover 'reflexively' (Rose, 1997: 315) by trying not to over-generalise findings when conducting and transcribing the empirical data.

As also stated elsewhere in this dissertation, this research question does not aim to shed a light on practices in my own school or indeed, in any school. It is for this reason that I did not interview any of my former colleagues or any other teacher who worked in my local education authority, as I wanted participants to have no former relationship to me, so that they could speak freely and honestly. I wanted to be a narrator and communicator of their stories, who could empathise but did not have a starring role myself.

Quality

When conducting the thematic analysis, I followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. As an early career researcher, it was useful to have this framework as a scaffold during this process, although, as Braun and Clarke (2020) attest, just following these steps does not guarantee quality thematic analysis. Thematic analysis should be viewed as a method that researchers can use to produce knowledge and make decisions about what knowledge is meaningful. However, due to the ethical considerations outlined above, my positionality means that I needed to articulate my assumptions clearly and explain how they informed my analysis. Therefore, I employed a reflexive thematic analysis, where I acknowledged that the values I brought to the research were subjective and any explications I made from the data were an interpretation. I attempted to be what Braun and Clarke conceptualised 'a critical, thinking researcher and writer' (Braun and Clarke, 2020: 16). To assist with this, I utilised Corlett and Mavin's (2018) reflexivity questions to explain how my positionality shaped the research outcomes and choices I made.

All dissertation research involving human participants needs to be approved by the University of Glasgow's College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee and must conform to acceptable ethical standards. An Ethics Application Form, Participant Information Sheet, Privacy Notice, and indicative questions were submitted along with the application as mandatory documents, in addition to a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA), as human data was being used and stored in this study. This ethics application was approved in May 2021. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form before they participated and the

participants were informed that their comments would be anonymised with a pseudonym, which is securely stored by the researcher on a password protected document on the researcher's home drive, with the researcher being the only person who holds the password. At the start of each focus group, I read out the information about the study and informed participants that should they wish to terminate their involvement in the focus group, they could do so at any time, without having to supply a reason for their withdrawal.

As previously stated, it is important that the theoretical position of the researcher is made clear when undertaking a thematic analysis and as outlined above, due to my positionality, I constantly reflected on my involvement in the research process by being aware of the reflexivity of my own assumptions. This encouraged me to think carefully about how this influenced the way I interpreted the data. To balance this, I was explicit about the analytical decisions I made throughout and revisited them to ensure they were grounded in evidence from the transcript, with notes on how I had developed the interpretations. To evidence this, I kept prior versions of the template, alongside notes on theme development in the form of a research journal. This was a useful experience and helped me to step back and stop myself seeing themes which I thought ought to be there. As part of this process, I considered how I was managing objectivity and what data I had chosen to include and leave out of my interpretations. These processes are the kinds of activities Stahl and King (2020) refer to as a 'quality and reflexivity checks' and they helped avoid data being distorted by my own preconceptions. This part of the process was the one which heightened my reflexivity, as I considered that this would be a crafted piece of writing (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2011) and that I had to evaluate which parts of the transcript to include and omit.

Project management

The study consisted of two different focus groups of six teachers who had been teaching for more than ten years and taught during the Covid-19 pandemic. These teachers came from a range of different settings, in different parts of England. The focus groups were online and took place in August 2021, lasting for

between 60-90 minutes each. The focus groups were semi-structured, as they included the same four key questions, but also allowed for some sub-questions to aid and allow for interaction and elaboration between participants. I observed, listened, and steered questions, acting as a facilitator by moving questions on and sometimes inviting others to contribute.

Recruitment of participants

Initially, participants were recruited by advertising directly within schools, via emails to the headteacher. I avoided advertising at my former school, as I felt there were ethical considerations about involving former colleagues who I had worked alongside during the pandemic, as discussed in the ethical considerations section of this dissertation. When I had recruited a few participants via this method, I then advertised via social media sites Twitter/X and LinkedIn. Not all the teachers who applied to take part in the research were accepted, as I wanted to ensure that there was a distribution of teachers from different settings, school phases and geographical places in England. 'Experienced teachers' could also encompass a wide range of years of experience, so purposeful recruitment also considered the stage of career that participants were at. However, recruitment did prove to be difficult, as many teachers responded to say that they were interested in taking part in the study, but then were unable to find the time to attend the focus groups. In addition, thirteen teachers consented to take part and then one teacher decided not to join the focus groups.

This table (Figure 5-1) details the phase and career stage of the teachers who took part in the focus groups:

Focus Group 1		
Participant	Phase	Career stage
1	Secondary	12 years
2	Secondary	29 years
3	Secondary	13 years
4	Primary	12 years
5	Primary	19 years
6	Primary	21 years
Focus Group 2		
Particiapnt	Phase	Career stage
7	Secondary	17 years
8	Secondary	16 years
9	Primary	23 years
10	Primary	23 years
11	Secondary	12 years
12	Primary	32 years

Figure 5-1: Table of focus group participants

5.4 Research method: Semi-structured focus groups

Having participants in the focus groups who are still practising teachers, who experienced what teaching was like during the school closures, was essential in exploring what impact, if any, the pandemic may have had on their teacher identity. While I could draw on my experiences as a former teacher who worked during this period and felt her own identity shifting, a deeper exploration of this research question required me to move beyond my own experience (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). By using semi-structured focus groups rather than completely structured ones, I was able to not just explore common experiences, but also to be responsive of differing opinions, feelings, and experiences by allowing for some diversions from the core questions which occurred naturally. In this way, a semi-structured focus group can take a role in 'assessing, confirming, validating, refuting, or elaborating upon existing knowledge and the discovery of new knowledge' (McIntosh and Morse, 2015: 1).

Focus Groups are suitable for pointing out unexpected aspects of a social phenomenon, (Morgan and Spanish, 1984) and are also capable of providing sufficiently detailed information in a short amount of time and at a low cost (Bertrand et al., 1992). Stewart and Shamdasani (1990:53) have asserted that as

people invited to focus groups are usually interested in the topic and are able to discuss it thoroughly in the little time available, the discussions can be incredibly illuminating. They are 'expert, privileged witnesses whose point of view emerges from their familiarity with that phenomenon and from an everyday relationship with it.' The common, shared experiences of the group may also motivate people to take part in the discussion and to interact with each other to discuss the topic more openly and honestly (Acocella, 2011).

Acocella, (2011) and Koskan et al., (2014). recommend that focus groups should create a homogenous group, as when people who have not had similar experience are put together, this may cause inhibitions to emerge and discourage conversation. This sense of shared experiences may also help participants to feel equal, they may get to know each other more quickly, which could help them express their thoughts more voluntarily. Yet, literature also suggests excessively homogeneous groups should also be avoided, to encourage the collection of different points of view (Krueger 1994). This is why, although the recruitment of participants was purposeful, as I appealed for experienced teachers of ten years plus who worked only in England during the school closures in 2020 and 2021, I did not state which phase teachers needed to work in, as I was keen to have a range of different voices and experiences of teachers in this research.

Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

Focus groups as a research methodology have been analysed and deconstructed extensively in literature over the last twenty years (Greenbaum, 1993; Kreuger, 1994; Liamputtong, 2011; Kreuger and Casey, 2014). Before deciding on this research methodology, I familiarised myself with the advantages and disadvantages and have compiled them into Figure 5-1 below.

Advantages	**Disadvantages**
It is a relatively simple and easy form of research to conduct	Focus groups are not based on a natural atmosphere, so participants

	may not feel completely comfortable with revealing their feelings
They allow a reasonably detailed exploration of topics with a group	The following data analysis afterwards can be difficult to interpret outside of the parameters of the focus group
The information generated focuses on a particular topic, which is relevant to the research question	There is sometimes semantic ambiguity in responses which then need to be interpreted by the researcher
It is a low-cost research method	Conformism can derive from the pressure of social conventions, pushing participants to express more socially desirable and stereotypical answers
They encourage interaction between a homogenic group, which may build on existing knowledge about a particular topic.	The speed of interaction and coordination problems among participants sometimes ends up slowing the free production of ideas and inhibits a deeper discussion about the topic.

Fig 5-2: Advantages and disadvantages of focus groups

To mitigate some of the disadvantages of focus groups outlined above, I tried to cultivate a warm, welcoming atmosphere where I encouraged the participants to not be afraid to disagree if their experiences were not the same as their colleagues and to reiterate throughout that there was no expected or set answer or way of feeling about what their experiences had been. To address semantic ambiguity, I also made sure to ask follow-up questions and clarify any answers that I was unsure about before the focus group had finished, so that I was not interpreting answers myself. In addition, there were some questions which I feel were not explored in as much depth as I would have liked due to time restrictions and not wanting to interrupt the participants. As a result of this, I

invited participants to send me a follow up email after the focus group, if they thought of anything else that they would have liked to have added. I included these emails in the transcripts to be coded and have included them alongside the transcript in Appendix 1.

The focus groups were also conducted online in 2023. By this time, teachers were used to working online due to having to deliver lessons and have meetings online throughout the pandemic. Therefore, the participants I worked with were comfortable with this way of working. However, sometimes online focus groups can be stilted, as it is difficult for participants to build on one another's points. To mitigate this, I had a conversation with participants at the beginning of the focus group to explain that they could interrupt one another, so it could be more of a conversational approach. The advantages of performing online focus groups have three main benefits: money savings, time savings and increased research accessibility (Englund et al., 2022). The research accessibility was the main appeal of online focus groups for this dissertation, as they can be implemented in a more flexible and efficient manner and completed under more optimal time periods (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2016). Using an online platform for focus groups also meant that there were no limitations on geographical location, which also helped with recruitment. The potential anonymity of online focus groups allowed by the technical possibility for participants to turn their video off is also another significant advantage; some of my participants did choose to do this. Yet, online focus groups do have some limitations, such as the environment the participants are taking part in not being confidential or being distracting (Englund et al., 2022). In addition, participants' body language is less easy to observe in an online context (Stewart and Shamdasani, 2017). As the moderator, I tried to be mindful of this and stay attuned to participant's mood and reactions.

Focus groups can take a range of epistemological approaches and the positivist approach, which might use just fixed questions to seek external reliability, seemed inappropriate when exploring the authentic stories and lived experiences of my participants. Kvale (2007) uses a metaphor about positivists acting in the role of a miner, seeking nuggets of truth as their gold, hoping to find some precious knowledge to gather. However, as my approach was more interpretivist, with only two focus groups and some scope to adapt and refine

changes to match the natural flow of the discussion, the metaphor to describe this process was less like a miner drilling for truth and more like an explorer, with limited access to a map; there are some frames of reference for exploration, in the form of a few set topics or questions, but also an openness to be guided by curiosity and go off the beaten track if something looks interesting. The aim of this research is not then to find a generalisable truth about how all experienced teachers felt about their professional identity post-pandemic but to create more knowledge through the interactions in the focus groups. Of course, it was important that the focus group stayed sufficiently focused, but it was also vital that it was able to flow, so that depth and rich detail could be uncovered (Dornyei, 2007).

The two focus groups, and the subsequent additions by email, produced a large amount of data, which was transcribed and analysed carefully. Although transcribing all focus group data verbatim was an extremely time-consuming process, it avoided some of the common problems in transcription quality outlined by King and Horrocks (2010), such as missing context or 'tidying up' transcribed talk and subtly changing the meaning or intentions. Given this extensive and difficult task, when it came to coding my data and identifying themes, I was glad to follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework, as a scaffold to help me find the connective threads between the experiences of the differing participants (Siedman, 1998).

5.5 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis has been widely used in qualitative research and provides core skills for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions, as it helps researchers to identify, analyse, organise, and report on themes found within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This method was chosen for this dissertation to help identify and categorise commonalities in experienced teacher's thoughts and feelings about their experiences teaching during the pandemic. These patterns could then help illuminate the effects that

the pandemic may have had on the way experienced teachers felt about their work and professional identities.

In addition, thematic analysis provides a flexible approach that can provide a rich and complex account of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). As an early career researcher, it also offered me a more accessible form of analysis, as there are few prescriptions and procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). King (2004) also argued that thematic analysis is a useful method for examining the perspectives of different research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights. This was particularly attractive to me as I may have had pre-conceived notions of what I thought might be revealed by teachers, as I perhaps had similar experiences during the pandemic as a secondary school teacher myself. Although there are many advantages to using thematic analysis, it is important to also acknowledge the disadvantages of this method.

While thematic analysis is flexible, this flexibility can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Holloway and Todres, 2003). This is why it was important for me to make my epistemological position clear throughout the research, and also to be reflexive while conducting the analysis. It has been recognised that clear guidance is needed on the practical aspects of how to do a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013). As Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017) explain, the lack of focus on rigorous and relevant thematic analysis has implications in terms of the credibility of the research process. This is why I chose to follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework as outlined in Figure 5-3 below:

Braun and Clarke (2006)	**My steps**
Step 1: Become familiar with the data	I created a transcript of the two videos of the focus groups and watched the Zoom recordings twice, ensuring that the transcript matched what the research participants had

	said in the focus groups. I then anonymised the transcripts and read over the responses twice more, making notes and jotting down initial impressions.
Step 2: Generate initial codes	As I read the transcripts, I started to organise my data in a meaningful and systematic way. I coded each segment of data that was relevant or captured something interesting about my research question. I used open coding and developed and modified the codes as I worked through the coding process. After Step 1, I had initial ideas about codes but modified them as I went along, also generating new codes as I came across other patterns. I did this by hand, working through hardcopies of the transcripts with pens and highlighters (See Appendix 1).
Step 3: Search for themes	I examined the codes and some of them clearly fitted together into a theme. So, I collated these into an initial theme, then organised the other codes into broader descriptive themes that seemed to say something specific about my research question. I then produced a table showing all the preliminary themes that were identified, along with the codes that were associated with them (See Appendix 2). All of the codes fit into at least one theme.
Step 4: Review themes	During this phase I reviewed, modified and developed the preliminary themes that I had identified in Step 3. I reflected on whether they made sense, re-read the data associated with each theme and considered whether the data really did support it. I then analysed

	whether the themes were coherent and distinct from each other and whether there were any sub-themes or themes I had missed out. At this stage, I made a few changes to themes to refine them and make the connection between them more discreet.
Step 5: Define themes	Here, I did a final refinement of the themes to '…identify the 'essence' of what each theme is about.' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 92). For each theme I attempted to work out what the theme was saying and how some of the subthemes interacted with the main theme. A final thematic map, which also illustrates the relationships between the themes can be seen in Appendix 3.
Step 6: Write-up	With the themes now outlined, I began to write up my findings.

Fig 5-3: Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for thematic analysis (2006) linked with my actions when analysing the data from the two focus groups.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I framed the research process I undertook for both the focus groups and the thematic analysis. The use of a thematic analysis and the application of Ball's theories on educational policy are key to understanding how experienced teacher identity may have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the work of teachers during this time. The focus groups provided a sense of the extent that experienced teacher's work during this time may have shaped their professional identity and teachers' response to this. In chapters 5 and 6, I present the findings of this research, starting with a discussion of the key themes, analysed using Ball's work on policy, and finishing with a discussion on what these themes may reveal about the impact on experienced teacher identity during this time.

Chapter 6: Thematic analysis: Findings

6.1 Introduction

The findings from the thematic analysis provide a rich account of the experiences of veteran teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic and how they felt about their professional identity both during and after this time. For some responses, I have attempted both a semantic and latent interpretation of the participant's responses, to try and uncover hidden meanings and assumptions detailed in their experiences. While they did not all have the same experiences at the same times, they were able to relate to and discuss both individual and group experiences. However, their voices and stories were clearly influenced by their wider contexts, including their schools and personal lives. This allowed me as the researcher to vividly see and hear their truths, in their own words.

In this chapter, I will present my findings, supported by the voices of my participants, by using extracts from the transcripts of the focus groups which have been sorted and grouped into themes. I will first introduce the participants through their own words, to create a picture of the speakers and their experiences. The value of this is to provide context to the themes and the findings reported in this dissertation. There was a total of 12 participants in this research project. Six participants were from a primary school context, and six were from a secondary school; all the participants had been teaching for a minimum of ten years by the time schools closed in 2020 and all of them were still teaching. Most of the participants were also responsible for young children at home while online teaching or had other caring responsibilities. This meant that all the teachers questioned had complex demands on their time during this challenging period.

I generated four overarching themes from both phases of data collection, which were further refined and added to following the familiarisation and coding stages. The findings discussed in this chapter are the final themes:

- Professional Loneliness: An anchorless boat on a new sea of expectations
- Pedagogy Problems: Starting all over again

- Toxic feelings of teacher guilt
- Depression, demoralisation, and didactic control from others

These themes provide an insight into experienced teacher's thoughts and feelings about their professional identity both during and since the pandemic. The experiences identified in the data discuss the challenges all teachers felt during this turbulent period, but also some feelings to do with routines and public perception which may be more common for those who have been in the profession for a significant time. Some of these challenges resulted in a deep sense of teacher guilt, not just for students but also for family and the public. The other interesting and significant experience that came through clearly in the data was a sense of pride that some teachers in the focus groups felt, that they had been able to overcome challenges and support the country's efforts. Some teachers even spoke about how having to change the way they taught had reinvigorated their teaching. The final theme revolves around the effect that external pressures such as senior leaders in schools, Ofsted and the DfE exerted, alongside some interesting discussions of media depictions of teachers during this time. It introduces ideas that could build upon the understanding of the teacher retention crisis and why some teachers may be considering leaving the profession. They discussed the potential value that change, and flexibility, could bring to the profession, particularly lessons that could be learned from their work during the pandemic. They envisioned this as a catalyst time, which either made teachers appreciate the impact they had and how important their work is, or heightened the issues that teachers already had with their choice of profession, pre-Covid. The themes and data are rich in experience and thought provoking perspectives on experienced teacher identity and the impact their experiences had on how they felt about their role in a post-Covid landscape.

6.2 Theme 1: Professional Loneliness: An anchorless boat on a new sea of expectations

Within this theme there were three sub-themes identified that captured participants' experiences: Lack of collaboration with colleagues, lack of routines and school structures, lack of engagement and relationships with students. My participants described their feelings at being removed from the normality of the

school environment – a professional environment which they had been used to, and how they were then forced to work in ways which were unfamiliar to them. This also meant that their normal ways of interacting and collaborating with colleagues were removed. The teachers also spoke of their experience and the value that they placed on the relationships and face to face engagement with students, which they felt was such an important part of their everyday work. The experiences associated with these feelings were placed under the sub-theme 'lack of engagement with students' and it is a re-occurring motif which was explored in other themes. These three sub-themes allow us to understand how teachers viewed their professional identity and how their experiences during the pandemic may have impacted on this.

6.2.1 Lack of collaboration with colleagues

As previously discussed, the literature on teacher identity frequently cites collaboration and interaction with colleagues as one of the ways in which teacher professional identity can be formed and constructed (Hargreaves, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Hargreaves (1994) explored the different types of communities of practice teachers gain membership to, including the contrived collegiality of professional development, such as working collaboratively on schemes of work and the organic collaborative cultures, such as the informal chats in the staff room. Participants in the focus groups discussed that they often felt lonely due to the limited opportunities to work together during the pandemic, but some had managed to achieve some innovative practice using technology to have some kind of collaboration: 'We even managed to do, like immersive readings of texts like the play War Horse and things that we recorded to share with our students.' (Focus Group 1, Participant 1). This adaptive and flexible process acted as a form of collaborative resistance, which Ball acknowledges as part of the agency of teachers, alluding to the way that teachers may collaborate to resist or reinterpret policies they find problematic (Ball, 2018). Grassroots movements, such as Twitter, or collective resistance to top-down reforms can be seen as collaborative action and the introduction of an immersive reading of a text resists the isolating nature of lockdown restrictions.

The technology available to teachers and their teams also made it possible to still collaborate on specific projects. This allowed teachers to maintain some of the professional dimensions they had in school (Day et al., 2006) and continue to co-construct their professional knowledge (Little, 1990). This made it seem like they were not totally cut off from one another: ‘I didn’t really feel like I lost that sort of contact with my department necessarily because we did have a lot of WhatsApp and things’ (Focus Group 1, Participant 1). This innovative form of collaboration mirrors Ball’s ideas, that policies do not merely impact the 'external' world but instead actively constitute and shape it. The policy discourses created by the specific realities and understandings of online learning meant that teachers needed to work together to reimagine effective pedagogies and ways of keeping in touch with colleagues. This perhaps positively influenced professional identity by demonstrating to teacher’s that they could be highly adaptive and resilient professionals, who were able to learn new skills and ways of teaching despite having taught in a more traditional way for a prolonged period.

Some teachers also looked to wider collaborative networks to replace or supplement their institutionalised collegiate structures (Darling Hammond, 2010; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012). Social media spaces such as Twitter helped to foster the feeling of belongingness (Maslow, 1962) and connectedness (Starzyk et al., 2006):

> I discovered Twitter and um, you know…I had maybe three meetings a week with my team, and then I had kind of meetings, you know, with lots of other people. I felt like I really connected. (Focus Group 2, Participant 7.)

Ball (2021) discusses the role of policy networks, where various actors, including state bodies, think tanks, and private entities, come together. Twitter can be seen as such a network, where collaboration is complex and involves negotiation, power dynamics of numbers of followers, and the convergence and divergence of interests. Twitter, which helped to create a space for a policy network, counteracted the loneliness this teacher felt and allowed them to feel connected. It also opposed Ball’s ideas about managerialism causing traditional forms of collaboration to be overshadowed by performativity measures (Ball,

2018), as the teacher continued to grow professionally despite the isolating power of the policy. Ball also writes about collaborations that transcend borders, in terms of globalisation (2020), including cross-institutional collaboration, which Twitter can facilitate. This may have impacted on experienced teacher identity through a sense of moral purpose and collegiality, where teachers could see themselves as part of a wider group of educators navigating challenging and unpredictable times, rather than feeling an isolating sense of unease in their own context. In a way, this might be reaffirming and energising rather than restricting.

However, it was the removal of the more organic forms of collaboration and informal contact with colleagues that participants in the focus group seemed to find challenging. Although there were online networks, they did not replace the face to face support of colleagues:

> I thought of the word bereft. I've kind of felt left on my own and so used to being part of a, a big school and a big team, and I think it is something that takes a bit of getting used to, because you're left on your own and you, you know, although you, you might get in touch by WhatsApp or FaceTime or whatever, it's having that interaction. (Focus Group 1, Participant 6.)

These feelings of being 'bereft' link to the work of Childs (2017) on teachers feeling a sense of purpose from being involved in the same endeavour. It seems like it was difficult for teachers to feel part of a shared mission or aim when removed from the school environment. For experienced teachers, this may have felt even more jarring, as they may never have worked in situations where they did not have their colleagues around them. This perhaps resulted in a sense of loneliness and isolation, which may have caused teachers to question their purpose.

Teachers also did not have the opportunity to talk through their challenges and experiences. As Alsup (2006) noted, having a shared endeavour helps staff to navigate professional choices. One participant noted: 'It was very difficult not to have the option to vent in a staff room to other people and in a group and, and kind of have that, um, kind of collaborative environment' (Focus Group 2,

Participant 8). This suggests that teachers were perhaps unable to discuss their work and choices with other policy actors in their workplace; if analysed through Ball's ideas on teacher autonomy, teachers were left alone to decide on their best course of action. However, this lack of collaboration also implies that there is little to no policy discourse involved between teachers, so that policy is not shaped by the policy actors, but instead by wider societal values (Ball, 1994) such as the neoliberal need to have schools open so that the economy could remain as stable as possible. This lack of collaboration and discourse perhaps seemed to shut teachers out, as it excluded their viewpoints and voices, leaving them with limited options to discuss these views with colleagues. This may have led to feelings of helplessness and disempowerment, altering teachers' professional identities, as they knew that they had to follow policy dictates with no room for autonomy or professional negotiations with colleagues.

It is not difficult to imagine that this may have caused mental health challenges for teachers, with some teachers hinting that the separation from colleagues may have affected their mental health and increased feelings of loneliness. For example:

> You didn't have those little break bits in the day where you might pass a colleague in the corridor and have a little chat or, you know, a little joke or a laugh or a commiseration about the current situation…you didn't have that kind of thing to lift your spirit as much. (Focus Group 1, Participant 1.)

Participant 6 also felt that they gained validation from colleagues and that this support had been taken away:

> And even if it's an informal chat with a colleague about something, it's having that, that collaborative network that I think disappeared quite a lot when we, we had to work from home. (Focus Group 1, Participant 6.)

It seemed that for the teachers in the focus groups, having the opportunity to discuss things with colleagues, even in an informal way, was part of their professional identity. They used the term 'network' which has connotations of being a system of interconnected people, who are all connected by a shared understanding, moral imperative and enterprise. When that network is suddenly broken, the ways of working may no longer seem to make sense. The metaphor

of a rail system might work well to articulate this here, that if one section of the track is missing, the trains cannot get to their destination. So, perhaps teachers struggled to perform well without that network of support they were used to having – particularly when they were an experienced practitioner and had worked in the same way for a long period of time. This could have impacted on their professional identity if they started to question their own expertise and competence, resulting in a loss of confidence. For an experienced teacher particularly, whose competence in the job has been built over several years, this may have felt very disorientating.

Although Ball has not written extensively on teacher collegiality and collaboration, he has focused on the damaging effects that competition in and between schools, as part of the neoliberal agenda, has on teacher relationships (Ball, 2021). In his seminal paper, 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity' (2003), he suggested that performativity - which 'employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control, attrition, and change based on rewards and sanctions' (2003:216) – could have led teachers to become more individualised and less collaborative. Teachers are judged against one another in terms of their examination results and Ball believes that this terror of performativity means teachers may find that their traditional values of collaboration are displaced.

In addition, for one teacher in the group, her feelings of loneliness were compounded by moving to a different country to teach, just months before the pandemic:

> I was just so, so desperately lonely because I didn't have, didn't have a network here at all…all of those things that you do like, you know, go to the pub on Friday night and, um sit and moan at the, in the canteen or whatever. They didn't exist. And so, as somebody who was very new in a school, it was really, really hard. Very lonely. (Focus Group 2, Participant 10.)

Teachers often feel part of a community when they are working in the traditional school environment. There is a deep sense of belonging which comes from the ordinary routines, such as socialising at lunch times or in the pub on a

Friday evening. When these norms were taken away, the experienced teacher, who was new to this country, struggled to develop that sense of belonging. If our professional identities are constructed by our observations and interactions with colleagues (Beijaard et al., 2004), then this teacher had little opportunity to become acclimatised to a new way of working in a different country, with its unfamiliar systems. As an experienced teacher, albeit in a different school and country, she may have previously developed ways of working with colleagues which shaped her teacher identity. As those interactions were taken away during the pandemic, she may have found it challenging to re-shape and adapt her teacher persona in her new role, as she had no idea what the norms were. She could use her previous experience, but this may have caused even more discomposure, as it may have jarred with new expectations. The school community she was part of felt quite disparate (Selwyn, 2000) and the disappearance of the teacher narratives that emerge from storytelling (Uitto et al., 2015) between teachers just highlighted her loneliness and isolation. This storytelling can increase a sense of belonging for new teachers as it grounds them in the history of the school, former colleagues and the very fabric of school life. Not having this grounding could make the teacher feel like an outsider, looking in.

The teacher's interview data gave a strong sense that due to this isolation and separation from colleagues, they sometimes felt unsure that they were doing the right things. As a result of this sense of confusion, their teacher guilt was exacerbated as they wondered whether they were doing enough for their school communities. However, as a determined group of teachers, they also felt that they had tried to maintain those links with their colleagues, even through informal channels such as social media. However, they felt overall that it was the more organic conversations and forms of collaboration, in the form of face to face interactions, which was the major thing that was missed during this time.

6.2.2 Lack of routines and school structures

Teachers in most schools follow similar routines, which are formed around timetables, school bells and some non-contact time. These routines may also include meetings or other school duties. Due to the range of tasks teachers are assigned to do during their working day, teachers' work has been considered as increasingly complex and intensive (Brante, 2009). Routines are seen as the 'glue of everyday life' (Tolmie et al., 2002: 399), which make everyday actions unremarkable and almost automatic. Dean (2013) and Wood et al. (2002) estimate that half of our daily lives consist of performance of routine behaviours which are habituated and intuitive, so that we do not have to allocate much attention on them. During the Covid-19 pandemic, teachers needed to change the way that they worked, sometimes in an unfamiliar environment, without the tight restrictions enforced on them in the normal environment of the school.

Some teachers in the focus groups found this transition quite difficult, as they were divorced from a system and way of working which had been incredibly familiar to them:

> …every hour of our day is timetabled and suddenly we didn't have that. And that is the bit I struggled with to begin with… (Focus Group 1, Participant 2.)

This was also highlighted by another teacher stating that they 'don't do change,' so this whole new way of working affected their mental health:

> The really challenging part was just managing myself…and just keeping mental health in check…that was the twist for me. It was more about kind of managing self rather than the teaching. (Focus Group 2, Participant 8.)

This removal of rigid timetables and managerialism, which is often the norm in schools, may have affected experienced practitioners more acutely, as for the first time in at least a decade, they had been responsible for managing their own routines during the working day. Their day was not demarcated by the usual school bell and familiar pattern of lessons, duty, and breaks. For some teachers, although constraining, having such a highly structured day represents safety and familiarity. It is predictable and allows them to function efficiently, as they don't have the time to dwell on other matters. It is that time to dwell that

teacher participant 7 struggled with. They spoke about how they felt the strain on their mental health, and that their pre-existing mental health worries grew due to the lack of structure in their working lives:

> I have got high functioning anxiety…I'm kind of all over the place all of the time. So, to suddenly just kind of stop and not have that kind of set structure and you know, kind of that charging around everywhere and, you know, busy, being busy, I found that really, really difficult. (Focus Group 2, Participant 7.)

This teacher spoke candidly about using the nature of conventional teaching in school to manage their anxiety, as the busyness in their working lives helped them to feel in control and organised. The predictable nature of the school day and its constancy helped with this. However, Stephen Ball may see the timetable in the school as a way of the state controlling and managing teachers as a means of raising standards as part of a national policy imperative (Ball et al., 2010). The work of schools and teachers is heavily prescribed by central government, as a way of maintaining economic competitiveness. This way of teaching has now become a weapon of cultural cohesion, endorsed by a litany of policy statements, documents and legislation (Ball, 2008), so that teachers may not even consider another way. However, experienced teachers are familiar with this way of working and may have even entered the profession as they liked the structure and routine that conventional teaching brought. This links with sociocultural views, which recognise the situated nature of learning and the role of context in professional identity formation (Edwards and Edwards, 2017).

The teacher who spoke about this in the focus group presumed that most other teachers felt the same:

> We go into this profession because we like structure, um, because we like blocks of time because we're quite good with routine. Um, and all of that changed and actually that, that will have impacted us and our identity because, so, so much of our life is work. We wouldn't stay in this profession if we didn't, if we weren't happy with those things because, um, we would just go and find something more flexible, wouldn't we? So we, we obviously it suits us and it was taken away. (Focus Group 2, Participant 9.)

It is interesting that the teacher here grouped all teachers together as a homogeneous mass and assumed that they would all feel the same way about a highly structured working day. This may link to professional identity as the

teacher here has worked in schools for such a long time that they presumed that their colleagues were like them. However, Ball might see this as an example of a teacher who is reinforcing dominant ideologies (1994), as they have become so conditioned with the way standard school policy has constituted their practices. Teachers are assumed by this participant to naturally take up the positions which have been constructed by policy for us, with prescribed actions and established norms.

Yet, some teachers in the focus groups enjoyed the flexibility the new way of working afforded them, and it made them realise that perhaps teaching could be more flexible:

> I've got really mixed memories of the time because in a really perverse way it was nice to be at home on the days that I was at home cos I was able to sort of do my work in maybe three or four hours. And then I've got two children…I remember the weather being beautiful and kind of having time to go for walks and things that you just never have time to do, you know? (Focus Group 1, Participant 4.)

This embracing of a new, more flexible style of working for teachers linked to some comments from a teacher who was considering leaving the profession as their current school wouldn't support a 'flexible working request' (Focus Group 1, Participant 1). They also felt that lessons could have been learned from the pandemic but hadn't been and that 'all the negatives of the pandemic' have 'compounded…the negatives in the teaching profession' (Focus Group 1, Participant 1). In this case perhaps, the teacher's experience during the pandemic juxtaposed a little with their pre-existing professional identity, as they saw the potential to still do their job well in different structures and contexts, when they had previously only imagined their role in a traditional school context. For this teacher, it caused them to question their career choice as they felt dissatisfied with continuing in the way they had pre-pandemic, when they had experienced more autonomy and freedom.

These different feelings about the enactment of policy are not surprising. Indeed, as discussed, Ball has written extensively about the 'enactment' and the

understanding that policies are interpreted and 'translated' by diverse policy actors in the school environment, rather than simply implemented. In schools, policy dictates that teacher's working days are heavily timetabled and structured, yet the new way of teaching during the pandemic left teachers with more freedom and options. Although, in some schools, teachers were directed to deliver live lessons all day, which narrowed the options they had to choose from (Ball, 1994). Putting the new policies into practice may have been a creative process for some teachers, which was rooted in their context, such as operating around caring responsibilities. Ball would point to this as positioning teachers as key actors, rather than merely as subjects in the policy process (Ball, 2021), who can interpret and recontextualise their professional identities in the face of change. Therefore, while some experienced teachers felt adrift and uncomfortable at the lack of routines and structure while teaching from home, others embraced it and felt it gave them a work-life balance they may have not previously experienced. This may have altered their professional identity as it could have made them question whether teaching was still the right career for them, after the experience of having more freedom, leading to feelings of dissatisfaction. If they missed the routines however, it may have strengthened their commitment to teaching, perhaps reinvigorating their passion for the job and sense of purpose.

6.2.3 Lack of engagement and relationships with students

Literature on student-teacher relationships has focused on how vital relationships are when teaching students (Dietrich et al., 2021), how they affect teacher wellbeing (Spilt et al., 2011) and how they impact on teacher-parent relationships (Vibeke and Trude, 2019). The idea of relationships with students being an intrinsic motivation to teach has also been discussed in some depth by Heinz (2015) and during the focus groups, it was evident that all the teachers involved valued the relationships with their students very highly. One teacher described being in front of the classroom with the students as the best part of the job (Participant 8), while two other teachers spoke about stepping away from management duties to reinvigorate their teaching with more contact with students (Participant 10 and Participant 6).

Participant 8 discussed the strong emotions they had for their students, which linked with Bullough and Hall-Kenyon's (2011) work on motivations to teach as being influenced by ideology. They saw their role as 'much more about taking a role with the students in a coaching sense…having that approach with the students would, might have been difficult online' (Focus Group 2, Participant 8). This implies that the teacher realised the strong influence he had on his students (Buskist et al., 2005) and worried that these relationships would not replicable online. The term 'coaching' is used by this teacher to describe his style of teaching and Lofthouse (2018) has written about the significance of relationships and dialogue in the coaching process. It is interesting that this teacher does not mention student outcomes or performative measures as his biggest worry, but perhaps his position in further education may mean he is somewhat removed from the performative measures previously discussed in secondary settings, as post-16 education is not compulsory. As Hattie (2003) asserts, teachers themselves make the biggest impact on their students' progress and this was something that all the teachers involved in the focus groups touched upon, as they felt various types of teacher guilt at letting their students down. Teacher guilt as a theme will be explored separately but there were numerous links between this sub-theme and teacher guilt.

Perryman and Calvert (2020) discussed one of the motivations to teach as being that those who choose to enter the profession want to make a difference. This was again something that emerged in this theme:

> I am the teacher that a lot of kids come to when they're having some problems…and so I did find the relationship building stuff that was really important to me, really interrupted during that first year at a new school…suddenly I wasn't able to do that and I felt really lost. (Focus Group 2, Participant 9.)

This teacher explored how she felt that this vital part of her teacher identity, which she had experienced over many years in the classroom, had been taken away. Not being face to face and interacting with the students in the familiar environment of the school building contributed to these feelings. She used the term 'lost' to describe being uprooted from usual routines. Her long experience in the classroom building relationships with students, usually acted as a roadmap

to the academic year. However, with the closure of schools, the roadmap was ripped up and this teacher was left to navigate the unfamiliar terrain themselves. This may have generated feelings of stress and worry, leading to lower confidence in their professional identity and capabilities as a teacher.

Ball (1981) wrote about teacher/student relationships as not being fixed. Instead, they are based on negotiation, what he calls a 'process of establishment' (1981, p. 144), where teachers and students explore one another's boundaries to create repeated, highly predictable patterns of interaction. In the first lockdown, in 2020, most teachers in the focus groups would have had established relationships with their students, as they had been teaching them for half of the school year. This means that what Ball calls the 'knowledge of relevance' (1980: 144), the situational and contextual rules of the relationship between staff and students would have already been developed. However, in the second lockdown, which took place in January 2021, teachers may not have established their relationships as solidly, as students were repeatedly sent home due to positive test results in their bubble. Ball might also suggest that the process of 'mutual testing, cue reading and modification' (1980: 145), which goes on in classrooms, when teachers and students are establishing the parameters and ground rules for relationships, is much more difficult to conduct online. The undefined situation which teachers and students found themselves in during this turbulent period, meant that teachers were unable to predict and routinise the patterns of interaction with their students. Relationships might have suffered here due to unpredictability and unfamiliarity, causing illegitimacy problems for teachers, compounded by the de-professionalised backgrounds of their makeshift home classrooms. Again, this may have influenced professional identity by exacerbating burgeoning feelings of stress, and notions that perhaps they were incapable of doing the job well.

This human connection with students was also mentioned by another teacher, especially when they were forced to say goodbye to their students abruptly when schools were suddenly closed: 'We had a year 11 class that we loved and we were gutted that we lost them and there were just tears and hugs and all

sorts of stuff' (Focus Group 1, Participant 3). When students leave their formal schooling at sixteen in England, there are certain common experiences they have which act almost as a rite of passage of leaving school. These usually include celebration assemblies, proms and signing of school shirts on the last day. The year 11 students in 2020 were denied these rites of passage and this teacher felt a sense of sadness for them. In addition, they were unable to have the time to say goodbye to them in the way they had become used to, from many years of repeating the same cycle in their career. As highlighted in the previous quote, some teachers behaved in ways that would not be representative of their behaviour with students, such as the crying and the hugs mentioned. This blurring of professional boundaries is something that another teacher in the group also mentioned:

> I remember that I tried to always be quite professional at work, but I walked into the year thirteens who were so close to their exams and my exact phrase was as I just stood there looking at them and I actually said "what the actual f**k has gone on?" …Neither of us had ever done anything like that, but we just didn't know what else to say (Focus Group 1, Participant 4).

Obviously, the role of a teacher comes with a certain standard of professionalism and indeed, the 'Teacher Standards' in England (Department for Education, 2023) clearly discuss the way teachers should act and behave. Swearing in front of students would usually not be considered as appropriate professional behaviour – even to 18 year old students, who may be classed as adults. However, this impulse behaviour on the part of the teacher demonstrates the highly stressful and unique situation teachers found themselves in. Students might normally rely on teachers to be the knowledgeable adults, who are able to make sense of complex situations and reassure them. Yet, no teacher has ever lived through a global pandemic and experienced the forced national closure of schools previously in their career. Therefore, this demonstrates the teacher's own humanity and frailty when trying to navigate the unknown. It is telling that the teacher remembered this episode vividly and brought it up in the focus group, as perhaps it contrasted with the notion of professionalism they had been conditioned to throughout their career. This blurring of professional boundaries and removal of teacher's familiar end of year routines may have negatively influenced the teacher's professional identity, by making them feel an uncertainty about the correct ways to act and behave in this new landscape.

This in turn could cause anxieties, as the familiar ways of working were adapted with no time for thoughtfulness about implementation.

In relation to this, Ball and Perryman have written about the sweep of a style of managerialism across schools, where leaders incorporate more of an ethos of the corporate world into the public sector (2018). This movement has changed the way that teachers see their roles, creating a sort of ideological narrative about teaching (Ball, 2021) as a corporate process with fixed staff roles. Another matrix of power used in the corporatisation of teachers according to Ball (1993), is the introduction of market forces into the relationships between schools, pressurising teachers into working within a value context in which image and impression management are as important as the educational process. This means, for schools to compete, teachers need to portray a certain image of being a certain kind of professional, to continue the public relations operation for their school. This may be why the teacher who recounted swearing in front of pupils above, followed it up by quickly adding that she had never done anything like that before. Of course, to some extent, teachers are also playing a role in the familiar environment of their classrooms. Eisner (2002) calls the classroom a context for improvisation and likens teaching to stand-up comedy. Those who teach know that they do not necessarily play the same role in class as they do at home or among friends. The teacher above talked about being 'professional' at work and research from social psychology has investigated how and why people enact social roles, revealing that we adopt roles and define ourselves at work, depending on our understanding of and response to situations (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1982; Zurcher, 1983). Among the reasons for certain personae are people's expectations and understanding of specific professions, which include role expectations for teachers, due to our extended time as students and experiencing what our own teachers behaved like (Lortie, 1975; Perlman, 1986; Weber and Mitchell, 1996). When these role expectations are then reimagined during the pandemic, it could have created a mismatch between teachers' expectations and the reality of their roles.

In addition, one teacher in the focus group spoke about the challenges they found in engaging students when delivering online lessons:

> I found once live lesson teaching started, I found that harder actually in some ways, just because it was so different and that the connection with the kids just wasn't there. A lot of them didn't want to be on camera. A lot of them, the participation and engagement just wasn't there. Even like your, your usual classes that I had a really strong relationship with, you know, you tried to get some banter going with them and it was just like bantering into the abyss basically. (Focus Group 1, Participant 1.)

The teacher felt a separation from their students which seemed insurmountable. In the traditional classroom setting, there were certain expectations and norms teachers had about the way students conduct themselves and they are able to enforce them via school rules or the behaviour policy. For example, if a student is distracted in class, the teacher may bring them back on task by standing next to them and using proximity (Lemov, 2015) or asking them a question to re-engage them in their learning. As the online teaching environment is not imbued with the same conventions, teachers were unable to use the familiar strategies in their repertoires. The students in this teacher's class were reluctant to turn their cameras on and this could have been for a myriad of reasons; lack of technology could mean that some students were just listening in on phones, perhaps also without the option for using a camera. Teachers were very mindful of this and so were perhaps more reluctant to enforce the rule that cameras needed to be on. In addition, some schools insisted on cameras and mics being off for safeguarding reasons, so students were only able to respond and discuss their learning if invited by the teacher. This meant that teachers had to work even harder to keep the attention of their students:

> There was nothing…it just felt really weird and really like draining. Cause you then felt you had to amp up like the energy levels even more like CBBC presenter level, practically and you're still getting nothing. (Focus Group 1, Participant 1.)

Ball (1980) has suggested that in undefined situations such as this, the success of teachers depends upon their previous educational careers and the purpose of the new situation. If the teacher's competence also has a bearing here, perhaps the fact that all the teachers involved in this research are very experienced teachers would have been beneficial, as they have built more complex mental models full

of domain specific knowledge that they can draw upon to solve problems and challenges.

However, student commitment also has an impact and perhaps some students did not want to take part in online lessons, which made it difficult for them to build up any kind of enthusiasm for the lesson or rapport with the teacher. If the experienced teachers involved in the study had previously felt confident in managing student behaviour and participation, this new feeling of not being able to do this as effectively may have altered professional identity negatively, as it may have made them question their own skill. The lack of interaction made it even more enjoyable for Participant 1, when they actually got the opportunity to teach face to face during the hub days. They stated, ‘I actually quite looked forward to it, so it was nice to see the kids.’ Another teacher agreed with this enthusiastically, adding their own experiences of hub days: ‘We actually felt as if you’d had, you know, some kind of engagement with the, with the students rather than it all just being kind of via email’ (Focus Group 2, Participant 7). Being in front of the children in this familiar way was clearly important for teachers and this felt like more of a recognisable part of their role. For experienced practitioners, to suddenly have to change their teaching was a huge challenge, which tested the boundaries of their professional knowledge and relationship building expertise. It perhaps also tested the very fabric of the way they taught, in terms of pedagogy and pedagogic style, which could have had either a positive or negative impact on their professional identity, dependent on their experiences.

6.3 Theme 2: Pedagogy problems: Starting all over again

Again, within this theme there were two main sub-themes that teachers kept coming back to: Lack of equipment and issues with technology and struggles with new pedagogies. More positively though, the innovations which came from a new way of working and thinking about teaching were also discussed. Teachers described their empathy and frustrations at students not having the equipment or quiet places to work in their homes, which sometimes led to feelings of teacher guilt that they could have been doing more to help. The same

frustrations were also felt by teachers themselves as they struggled with their own technology issues. This wasn't due to just a lack of equipment, but also a lack of technological skills, which caused a blurring of boundaries of professional relationships too. Yet teachers also discussed the feelings of pride and satisfaction as they innovated, navigating this new style of teaching by refreshing and adapting their practice in a responsive way. These experiences were placed under the sub-theme 'innovation' as the feelings of having the potential of a new way of working were also mentioned when discussing flexibility in the last theme. These sub-themes paint a mixed picture, dependent on teacher expertise and context, which provide clues to what the effect on their professional identity may have been during this time of policy change.

6.3.1 Lack of equipment and technology troubles

In recent years, in response to a retention crisis in teaching, there have been calls to help teachers become more resilient (Mansfield et al., 2016). However, it could be argued that teachers have always been adaptive and resilient, particularly with the number of changes they have had to navigate with education policy, as detailed earlier on in this dissertation. For some teachers though, whose prior experience did not include the use of technology, the rapid upskilling process they faced may have caused them difficulties. Some teachers may also have not had access to all the IT equipment or books they needed to execute their role well from home. Two teachers in the second focus group, spoke about their hatred of technology and how as early years teachers, PowerPoint was something they rarely even used. This felt almost like starting again and becoming a newly qualified teacher, as their prior experiences and expertise felt irrelevant in the new educational climate. This felt almost like a fear, and a weighty expectation which was placed upon them:

> I was already quite afraid of like the remote access…I was quite used to accessing through like the remote network to access SIMS and contact details, but a lot having to use your own phone…you are just up against quite a lot of barriers and I felt like the expectations…of our SLT with that, you know, it is like a non-negotiable. You must speak to these children. (Focus Group 1, Participant 1.)

The teacher here was uncomfortable with the idea of using her own personal mobile phone to speak to students, as she felt that there was a blurring of professional boundaries, which as an experienced teacher, she saw as sacrosanct. Although she did also understand the importance of checking in on pupils and saw it as one of her pastoral duties. As previously discussed, many teachers enter the profession with an altruistic motive of wanting to make a difference to children's lives, this teacher was experiencing what Wang and Houston (2021) label as a mismatch between the reality of the day to day job and their pre-conceived expectations of what they might be doing in their role. The teacher also mentioned that she felt obligated to use her phone, despite her own misgivings, due to the pressure put on her by the senior leadership team.

It is interesting to analyse this interaction using Ball's concept of managerialism (1987) and its hierarchical staff roles and management structures. Commands coming from a top down hierarchy of senior leaders dehumanises the teacher and her concerns, and positions teachers as a human resource, who need to perform and contribute to the school aims. There seems to be little discursive opportunity to negotiate the school's enactment of the policy and this teacher became a policy actor with no voice. The teacher making the calls is seen as the most efficient way for the school to complete its duties, so excluding the teachers themselves from the decision making process is an easier option. This could both disempower and depress teachers who are used to being given a voice and now are simply following orders with little buy in, but also a fear of not doing what they are asked to do. Again, the teacher's professional identity may have possibly suffered here, as they became technicians following a check list of operational requirements, rather than free-thinking autonomous professionals.

To help persuade teachers to perform elements of their role which they may feel uncomfortable with, managers can rely on a form of teacher guilt. As previously highlighted, teacher guilt links strongly to the moral purposes of teachers at work (Hargreaves, 1998). They may experience this teacher guilt when there is a mismatch between their moral objectives regarding the care and education of

their pupils and their ability to meet these aspirations under the directive of imposed educational reforms (Kelchtermans, 2005; Lasky, 2005; Schmidt and Datnow, 2005; van Veen and Sleegers, 2006). The teacher may have felt obliged to telephone their students using their own mobile, due to this feeling. The same teacher also felt guilt about the situations that some of the students in her school, which is in an area of high social deprivation, had been placed in. This included not having any equipment to join in with lessons, or no quiet space to work:

> …most of our children wouldn't have had like laptop stuff, really. Like we have about 33% of our school is sort of free school meals or pupil premium…for science, you didn't have access to any of your practical materials…a lot of students were in a similar situation in the sense that we would've been sharing like, copies of texts between classes, like Shakespeare and things. (Focus Group 1, Participant 1.)

It was difficult for both teachers and students to continue teaching and learning subjects which relied on pedagogies and resources that were not easily transferrable to an online format. The students in this teacher's school did not have access to laptops and so they made the decision that they would provide students with booklets, not live lessons. This made them feel a sense of guilt that their students were at a disadvantage to other students, but also that the school was not providing the same level of support that other schools were. For experienced teachers, who may have previously felt high levels of confidence about the levels of support they provided to students, this may have been a challenging and caused a kind of turmoil about their professional identity. For a few teachers in the focus groups, these feelings caused them to want to leave the profession – this will be discussed in more depth in the final theme analysis.

However, for several teachers in the study, the negative feelings of guilt were balanced with feelings of pride and a sense of fulfilment at learning new skills and strategies, particularly when using technology. Participant 2, who had been teaching for 27 years by the time of the pandemic, said:

> I quite enjoyed learning new technology, you know, so I was 20 odd years into a career of always doing the same things and suddenly it was like trying something new. The first time I did it, I panicked and thought, I can't possibly

> do this. But actually we got into the swing of it and I liked having my own time to plan something and I felt, I really went back and thought more about what the teaching should be and it took me outta my comfort zone, but actually needed to be done. (Focus Group 1, Participant 2.)

This sense of euphoria demonstrated the adaptability of teachers and the way that they embraced change to improve their teaching. Teaching can be an extremely reflective job (Schön, 1991) and teacher identity can be an ever evolving nexus (Palmer, 1993), so the feelings experienced by this teacher, of being reinvigorated by engaging with new ways of teaching their subject, may be a common one. However, it might also suggest that once a teacher becomes an experienced practitioner, they reflect on their professional identity less, as they take it for granted, until a crisis such as the pandemic arrives to cause them to question it or evolve accordingly. Yet, as previously discussed, self-constructs of teacher identity can change and adapt during teacher's professional trajectories, and this could include their feelings about their own teaching practices (Edwards and Edwards, 2017). This is usually influenced by distinctive events and pivotal moments in their career, such as the experience the teacher discussed here.

The connection Ball makes between policy and the identity of teachers is relevant here, as he states that policy influences the way teachers see themselves and their roles in education. Policy shapes how educators think and act, as policies carry with them certain values, beliefs, and assumptions (1994). Therefore, teachers find themselves in a competitive landscape, acting more as service providers catering to customers, striving towards getting the best possible exam outcomes to help their school secure a desirable place in league tables. If a teacher's worth and competence are frequently assessed by student test scores, lesson observations and other measurable outcomes, teachers may be afraid to be innovative and take risks. Perhaps the cancellation of exams, Ofsted and other performative measures empowered this teacher to take more risks and innovate, to push out of their comfort zone because they were less

afraid to break away from what was expected of them. A teacher in one of the focus groups discussed how brilliant this feeling was:

> …it was sort of teaching philosophically how it should be. There was no exam to work towards, there was no data drops, there was none of the nonsense we all hate. It was sort of right, we'll just teach. And it was quite exciting. (Focus Group 1, Participant 3.)

This experience had shifted some of the teacher's professional identities and helped them to reinvent themselves (Mitchell and Weber, 1999) causing their professional identities to be reinvigorated in more positive ways. Teachers in both focus groups also spoke proudly of other innovations they had been involved in during school closures, which will now be discussed.

6.3.2 Innovation

As has previously been stated, professional identity is often negotiated for teachers to become members of a community (Wenger, 1998). This can affect the way teachers act, speak, and behave, so that they are recognised as successful teachers by other colleagues (Schieble et al., 2015). Yet, as teacher identity is evolving and dynamic, interactions with colleagues result in teachers forming an ideological understanding of a shared enterprise with others in their school or department (Goos and Bennison, 2007). This collaboration was cut off and then reimagined during the Covid-19 pandemic, as teachers adapted their ways of maintaining a level of collegiality, so that they could still teach effectively by pioneering new pedagogies.

For more experienced teachers, who have become accustomed to a particular way of delivering instruction, which has previously been effective, the change to online teaching was a significant challenge. Participant 6 discussed how as a primary teacher, a lot of the strategies in her repertoire became almost redundant in the first few weeks of lockdown:

> …you rely so much on practical modelling and demonstration and trying to convey some concepts that are quite challenging in, in a different format was, was quite hard. (Focus Group 1, Participant 6.)

Other teachers in the groups shared these experiences but spoke about feeling 'some successes' (Focus Group 2, Participant 11) in redesigning the structures of their lessons to better fit online learning approaches. This demonstrated the adaptability and resilience of teachers, who were determined to do the best for their students – even if that meant completely reinventing their style of teaching. This may have impacted on their professional identity in more positive ways, as they felt a sense of satisfaction at their resilience and ability to adapt to external pressures.

For some teachers, this was also an opportunity to reinvent themselves and their role in school and position themselves in a more positive light, by highlighting previously under-utilised skills and talents. Participant 3 spoke about how previously he had felt he lacked credibility in his school as he had very much carved out the identity of being a disorganised joker, who often missed deadlines and was now taken more seriously:

> I had an opportunity to…you know show my innovation and that technological skill sort of. I felt like I was really embracing technology, engaging those kids that were sort of like, well disengaged… It was the opportunity to think well here's a problem, let's look at how you solve it. And it was weird. I sort of carved out a wonderful little niche for myself as like this guru for online learning…it was quite a nice novelty for me to come to terms with. For the first time in my career I was almost credible…it was quite nice to suddenly have that opportunity to go, actually no, I'm really good at this job and I don't think we say that about ourselves enough…I can lead other colleagues, which I don't think I'd have got if it had carried on as normal, it would've just been the same faces doing CPD and the same faces sort of trying out the same nonsense. Suddenly I found myself in a position where I could, you know, I was being asked to lead whole school CPD, and I was being asked to, you know, lead on something which is quite empowering. (Focus Group 1, Participant 3.)

This teacher, once removed from the constrictions of performative measures (Ball, 2021) and the power relations that neo liberalistic education policy wields (Ball, 1993), was reimagined their professional identity and even changed the way their colleagues felt about them. They spoke about the opportunities and professional kudos this brought from other members of staff, who suddenly viewed this teacher in a different light. Vetter (2012) wrote about the way other colleagues play a role in positioning each other in the teaching community.

Therefore, when this teacher's colleagues asked him for help and support, they acknowledged his position as more expert and knowledgeable, and played a role in supporting his teacher identity shift (Childs, 2017). The teacher renegotiated his place within the staff body and settled into a different place in this new shared world (Cassirer, 1961). This also highlighted the 'interplays of power among the micro and macro level structures' in the school (Schieble et al., 2015: 246), which was brought about due to the performative culture Ball discussed. While away from the tug of uniform collegiality that everyday interactions with their teams brought (Moje and Lewis, 2007), this teacher was able to somewhat escape from their usual role.

However, this constant reinvention is not an easy process, particularly for experienced teachers, who have become used to using tried and tested instructional strategies with a level of automaticity. There was a sense of professional fatigue that teachers felt, and Participant 1 spoke about this: 'it was actually exhausting. I found it much more exhausting teaching online than I find it teaching face to face.' This may have been due to the sheer cognitive load of having to draw from pre-existing schemas and mental models to solve new complex problems and finding that there were little familiar experiences to draw upon. It also may have been because, as previously discussed, students' and teachers' motivations are uniquely intertwined, with student motivation affecting teacher's own motivations (Butler, 2007). As Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) suggest, human connections give teachers purpose and once that human connection was diluted through computer screens, making connection seem almost artificial, maintaining that purpose was incredibly difficult. It also seemed clear from the teacher's comments that this exhaustion may have been exacerbated by feelings of teacher guilt, of worries that what they were doing was not working and that they could have been doing more. This was another common theme which emerged from the focus group data and will now be analysed in more depth.

6.4 Theme 3: Toxic feelings of teacher guilt

Some teachers in the study spoke about how they were unable to switch off from their roles as they were constantly evaluating their own thoughts and actions, and these self-conscious actions have been identified as teacher guilt (Lewis, 2008). Nestled within these toxic feelings of teacher guilt were the apprehensions that perhaps teachers were letting students down, what Alsup (2006) labels as falling short of our own internalised moral codes and standards. Within the theme of teacher guilt, three sub-themes were identified: the worries that teachers felt about the struggles of their students and their families; the guilt about their own families as they attempted to juggle teaching commitments and looking after their own families and the guilt caused by the public's perception of them. These three sub-themes were discussed throughout both focus groups, with teachers identifying these as having had a profound effect on the way they saw wrestled with their professional identities during this turbulent period.

6.4.1 Worries about students and their families

As previously alluded to, one of the needs that people need to satisfy to flourish, according to Self Determination Theory (SDT), is relatedness or belonging (Ryan and Deci, 2000). This could involve relationships with colleagues, but also with students. Research has revealed that teachers can be more effective in supporting learning when they actively construct a bridge between children's home and school cultures (Healy, 2019). As all families in England were connected to one another during this time, through the shared endeavour of attempting to limit the spread of the Covid-19 virus, perhaps this bridge between teachers and families seemed more secure. The differences which may usually exist between teachers and the families of the children they teach may have been reduced. This strengthened connectedness meant that teachers in the focus groups seemed to worry more about how their students and carers were coping, as they felt removed from the usual day to day interactions with pupils. They were unable to just check in on them and this created anxious feelings for some teachers:

> …the pastoral side of things was a completely different ballgame because of course it was about, you know, ensuring that our students were safe and that they were accounted for still daily. And that our, you know, our students who were already kind of known to us, you know, for having, maybe being under social services or being a child in need and stuff. Um, and so that felt a lot more stressful having to try and make like daily phone calls. (Focus Group 1, Participant 1.)

For this teacher, having to worry about student wellbeing, on top of preparing for lessons and the stress of living through the pandemic was a difficult burden to carry. Unlike when they were in school, able to see their students face to face and check that they were okay, they were relying on telephone calls to ensure that students were safe. This added an extra dimension of stress to their work – particularly when there had already been previous safeguarding concerns with some pupils. An extra layer of pressure was added when parents didn't pick up the phones and the child was not accounted for.

The same teacher also spoke about feeling both guilt and empathy for families who were really struggling to educate their children and manage with limited technology during this period. These students weren't necessarily on free school meals, so didn't qualify for any government help, such as a free laptop. They described the situation as 'nightmarish' for families and so they didn't mind blurring professional boundaries and responding to students online outside of working hours, as that may have been the only time that the student could use a computer. However, another teacher in the same focus group did find the lack of work life balance difficult to manage. They spoke about some of their students messaging them on Microsoft Teams at half past midnight and because of teacher guilt, they still replied for a while. Yet eventually, this way of working took its toll, and they took steps to manage it:

> There was like literally no work life balance like at all because obviously a lot of kids don't realise how like unprofessional it is, um, to, to be messaging teachers late at night because they've never had that level of access to a teacher's life before. So I had to actually take teams off my mobile, because I was, I was literally being contacted 24 hours a day. (Focus Group 1, Participant 5.)

It seems that this unbridled access to teacher's homes and private lives became common practice during this period, as another teacher spoke about their pets jumping on their keyboard during live lessons and their toddler becoming well known to the students in their classes. These experiences redefined boundaries and relationships, which may have only been possible because it took place outside of the usual school environment. As discussed earlier in this dissertation, the environment teachers work in can be an external influence on their professional identity formation. The school environment, which is constructed and controlled by performativity measures and policy (Ball, 1994) provides powerful messages to teachers about the way they should act and behave (Brown and Heck, 2018) and this includes the professional persona they act out in lessons. The perceived ideal of the consummately professional teacher was shaken during this period, as teachers may have started to define themselves differently, away from the more communal practices in the school.

Of course, external factors in a school, such as high stakes accountability brought from policy can also sometimes force teachers to construct professional identities which are different to what they first envisaged when they set out to be a teacher (Passmore, 2019). No teacher could imagine that teaching online due to a deadly pandemic would be part of their role when they trained to teach. This mismatch of expectations versus reality may have also created feelings of inauthenticity, particularly for experienced teachers, who have been so used to playing a particular role with students over a sustained period. Ball might argue that this mismatch may have come from teachers having more of a sense of autonomy during this period, as they were able to make more decisions about how they conducted their work, free from the institutional norms and regulations of the school (Ball, 1987). If autonomy is fundamentally governed by a set of firm rules, which reduces teachers to a system of subordinate institutional control, then the removal of these familiar rules for teachers, and the redrawing of professional boundaries with students would force teachers into creating a new persona to suit the new context. For some teachers this may have felt liberating, but for others, it could perhaps have caused even more stress and discord in their professional identities, as the struggles they were

experiencing in the pandemic were joined by them not fully feeling comfortable with who they are as a teacher.

The sense of teacher guilt which some educators in the study experienced also related to their own families and trying to juggle caring for their own children alongside their students. Like all parents, teachers found themselves having to home educate their children during this time, but doing this in addition to online teaching proved incredibly stressful. Some teachers in the study spoke about having to rely on parents within their support bubble to provide childcare and delivering lessons from their laptop, balanced on the edge of their bed, to avoid a noisy toddler. One teacher felt that they had neglected their own children: 'My daughter was doing a GCSE…it was incredibly stressful, and I didn't see my own kids because I was working so hard' (Focus Group 1, Participant 5). This suggests that the teacher here felt guilty for prioritising the needs of other people's children above the needs of her own child. Another teacher was relieved when schools were closed, and the country went into lockdown as they had a vulnerable adult child. During normal times, they would be expected to work long hours in an independent school and the partial school closures meant that they were able to spend more time with their own family:

> I have a vulnerable, um, adult son who lives with me. And so the, um, as we were getting sick, people were getting sicker and sicker all around me…I was absolutely crapping myself about going on the Tube and getting on the buses. (Focus Group 2, Participant 9.)

Prior to lockdown, this teacher had been considering leaving the profession due to the excessive demands it placed on their time alongside caring for their son. So, the sense of relief they felt at no longer having to put their child in danger also gave them the opportunity to have some breathing space away from their career and take stock of their options. This feeling of relief did not last long though, as teachers were ordered to return to work, while most of the rest of the country were still on an enforced lockdown and the teacher stated that the prospect of this 'scared the beJesus outta me.' For some, this may have affected their professional identity, as for the first time, they experienced another way to do their job which offered more flexibility for them to spend

more quality time with their families. Having to then return to school and go back to the old ways must have been upsetting for some teachers and maybe led to feelings of dissatisfaction with their jobs, which may not have necessarily been as tangible pre-pandemic.

However, teacher's workload and lack of work life balance has been debated and discussed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, indeed one of the professions with the greatest deterioration in health worldwide was teaching (Travers and Cooper, 1993; Johnson et al., 2005; Li et al., 2020), with studies highlighting high levels of burnout and stress amongst teachers (Arvidsson et al., 2016; Wang and Burić, 2023). More recent studies have indicated that there has been a further decrease in the quality of life of teachers during the pandemic than before (Lizana et al., 2021). The pressure to work beyond prescribed working hours, during the more conventional times of pre-pandemic, may come from the performativity and accountability culture Ball writes about, where teachers are judged by data with effectiveness measured by student examination results in external tests (2021). During the lockdown though, the root of the lack of work life balance may instead have come from the guilt teachers faced at trying to juggle everything and be the most effective teacher and parent simultaneously, in a time of very high stress and unpredictability. For some teachers in the group, these feelings also ran alongside a feeling of guilt for members of the public and the perception they may have had for teachers too.

6.4.2 Guilt at the public's perception

The nationally enforced lockdown was a difficult time for the UK economy, which saw an increase in redundancy rates for working adults, which was even quicker than during the 2008 to 2009 economic downturn (Office for National Statistics, 2021). By the autumn of 2021, over a hundred thousand businesses had gone bust due to Covid-19 related challenges (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Many of the students that the teachers in the study taught would have been affected by this as parents and carers may have lost their jobs and found it much more difficult to provide for their families. As teachers continued to work full time, they were still paid their usual wages and teaching began to look like a

more desirable job, which provided a guaranteed steady income during uncertain economic times (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2021). The perception of the public may then have been that teachers were lucky to still be earning their usual salary and may have led to resentment as they perceived that schools were closed so teachers should not be being paid.

This perspective affected some of the teachers in the group and made them feel guilty about other professions whose livelihood could be affected:

> I was on bus duty on that Friday, the last day of waving the children off and just feeling that…just even looking at the bus drivers who didn't know whether they were gonna have jobs. Um, a lot of them were quite older and quite sort of unfit and so would they even survive it? (Focus Group 1, Participant 2.)

This teacher seemed to feel guilt that they were able to continue with their jobs and still earn the same amount of wages, when so many people had been made redundant, or had needed to close their businesses. Although teachers were juggling the demands of teaching students both in school and at home, while caring for their own families, this sense of guilt and responsibility to students and their families seemed to sustain them. Participant 4 found it difficult not to focus on the adverse experiences their students would be facing, '…some of the things that were going on with the, in some of the children's lives were, that was quite difficult to see and to know.' On top of an already stressful situation, teachers here had their professional identities altered by being unable to switch off their professional lives from their personal lives. This perhaps meant that being a teacher and the challenges that come with it became all encompassing. This might be difficult for anyone to manage and could have resulted in teachers feeling their roles were unsustainable, again leading to a sense of dissatisfaction with their career choice.

Although many teachers may deal with difficult pastoral issues as part of their day to day job, the pandemic offered teachers an unprecedented window into students' homes and lives that had previously never existed and some teachers in the study found that a hard burden to shoulder on top of their own stresses

and anxieties. The same teacher (Participant 4) also spoke about the mixed feelings they had about the second lockdown, when more students were coming into school as 'vulnerable' children. This teacher had 32 students in their class and 26 of them attended school when it reopened. They acknowledged that as the school was close to a hospital, lots of parents were key workers, but that some parents were just unable to cope, '…so many of our families were just like, we can't, we can't do this…I had a parent who was a hairdresser and because she had taught bits of hairdressing, she said she was entitled to send her kid in. So, her son was in school every day.' The teacher was not annoyed about this and acknowledged that parents were really struggling and needed teacher's help but that this added an extra dimension of pressure to teacher's work. They added:

> …we had a lot of very angry parents who just couldn't cope, and it was just impossible getting the balance right. Cause you had parents that wanted that full day, but then you had parents who were like, just leave us alone. We, we can't do it.

As professional identity can be influenced by job satisfaction (Spector, 1997) and by teacher's feelings of self-efficacy (Friedman and Kass, 2002), teachers found this period of intense workload, guilt, and uncertainty difficult to manage and this led to feelings of stress and burnout. Teachers in the study felt a deep sense of responsibility for the parents in their school and that it was their duty to support them. The importance of contact with student's homes and the safeguarding of student wellbeing was being stressed by senior leadership teams and it seemed like teachers in the focus group felt they had to remain strong to support students. This meant being unable to express their own emotions openly, as being strong and supportive was what was desirable in their school context (Uitto et al., 2015). Of course, this placed a huge responsibility on teachers, which was not usually part of their day to day role during conventional school times.

As the wellbeing of the children they taught was so all consuming for teachers, this also led to feelings of teacher guilt about the privileged positions of their own children. One teacher felt:

> a deep sense of guilt that my daughter was able to kind of have anything that she needed and had my support, you know, when I, when I wasn't doing things at work, you know, you've got these children who, like, there's eleven of them in a family, you know, were they able to get the kind of support and attention that they needed? (Focus Group 2, Participant 7.)

As the traditional school environment had been taken away, this made it more difficult for teachers to discuss their concerns with colleagues and utilise their wisdom. The removal of the staffroom and the corridors, the informal communal places of advice in schools, also meant a removal of the opportunities for teachers to unpack these worries with those who understood their experiences. As previously discussed, Uitto et al.'s (2015) study concluded that teachers often wanted to discuss challenging situations they had recently faced with one another, when given the opportunity. When unable to do this, the teachers interviewed felt lonely and like they faced an emotional burden of going it alone. This lack of support may have made it challenging for them to maintain their professional identity and sense of pride in their work they had previously felt. This may have been made even more difficult due to the public perceptions and media stories printed about teachers and their work during the pandemic, which as previously discussed, positioned teachers as lazy and failing students.

Related to this public perception is the work of Stephen Ball, which states that schools, both during the pandemic and in its aftermath, were being portrayed from both a material and symbolic perspective. The deficit talks of catch up has positioned school as the creator of a better society, with more educated and knowledgeable subjects (Collet-Sabé and Ball, 2022). He argued that this is linked to capital, as schools are now attracting huge private sector investment and that profit is now interwoven with the delivery of educational services, what he sees as doing well by doing good (Ball and Grimaldi, 2022). Perhaps when teachers were put under pressure to safeguard student's wellbeing, in addition to the pressure to still ensure that they received a quality education in extraordinary and unfamiliar circumstances, they struggled to cope with this challenge. Another pressure and cause of teacher guilt was the negative portrayal of teachers in the media and the accountability pressures to the

school, both internally and externally. This is the final theme which will be explored.

6.5 Theme 4: Depression, demoralisation and didactic pressure from others

As previously discussed, coverage about teachers in the national print media can lead to teachers reconstructing their professional teacher identity (Kirby, 2016), as an important aspect of identity formation is understanding how others see us (Foff and Grambs, 1956). The newspaper coverage during the pandemic, may have led to teachers questioning their roles and work. However, identity formation sometimes involves an element of 'cognitive simplification' that allows people to define themselves and others (Buckingham, 2008:6). These stereotypes of what teachers were doing during the school closures were sometimes negative and this may have added to existing stereotypes of teachers in the perception of the public, which could have in turn impacted on teachers themselves. As some of the print national media were portraying teachers in a negative light and perpetuating dismissive stereotypes of teachers, teachers may have felt less positive about their roles and their professional identity. Furthermore, external factors in the school context sometimes forced teachers to construct professional identities (Passmore, 2019). This can include directives from government or the expectations of Ofsted. These expectations in turn can have an effect on leaders in a school, who can sometimes create a culture of performativity, where teachers are judged on the basis of their contribution to organisational performance (Ball, 2003).

This kind of internal and external pressure may have made it difficult for teachers to enjoy their job in the same way, and as professional identity can also be influenced by job satisfaction (Spector, 1997), this may have resulted in a change in the way teachers viewed their roles. For experienced teachers who were more stable and comfortable with their professional identities, this could have created dichotomies which may not have previously existed. This seemed to be the case for teachers in this study, who spoke about both the internal and external pressures they faced during this time. Consequently, three sub-themes have been identified in this theme as having had a profound effect on teachers:

the media and social media comments, external pressures and disorganisation by the DfE and Ofsted and finally, the enforcement of unrealistic expectations from senior leaders in the school, who were also struggling to cope with the provocations from government and the public. Of course, all of these sub-themes also link to public perceptions, as the media and the organisations cited above all feed into the way the public see teachers and their work. However, as this was such a recurring subject that teachers spoke passionately about in the focus groups, it has been included as a separate theme.

6.5.1 The media and social media

As Stephen Ball has stated, the demonisation of teachers came from a centring of education policy as being central to economic policy (Ball, 2021). From as far back as the late 1960s, with the publication of the so-called 'Black Papers,' teachers have been positioned as failing society, with falling standards in schools making it impossible for the UK to compete on the global jobs market (Ball, 1994). During the 1980s and 1990s, the Conservative government articulated neoliberal elements of educational policy, where they sought to advocate reforms which positioned teachers as a menace, deprofessionalising them and questioning their politics, as 'extremist teachers' (Thatcher, 1987). As a counter to this, they introduced systems of control and forms of accountability and the press was a companion in this battle, often writing about scandals of failure in schools, led by left-wing teachers. Yet, the 'failing schools' rhetoric was not just a preserve of the Conservative party, in its efforts to marketise education, but was also the subject of policy and media attention during Labour's tenure. The media during this time, was used as a tool of opportunity by government, to influence the public in their drive towards what they felt were necessary reforms and raising standards (Ball, 2021).

As has previously been outlined, there was a spate of negative headlines about teachers during the pandemic and these had profound effects on the teachers in the focus groups. As has become clear in this thematic analysis, teachers felt under pressure from both internal and external forces but were also keen to do the right thing by their pupils and their families, who they felt a great deal of

responsibility for. This meant that some of the newspaper headlines about teachers had an even more negative impact than they may have done previously:

> Some of you know the headlines that were constant ‘Schools are closed.’ We were never closed. You know, I barely saw my own children during the second lockdown…I didn't see my own kids because I was working so hard. And it just, it, I found it really difficult to swallow that perception that the media kept pushing that teachers are lazy and that we were doing the bare minimum. And um, and you know, other people were struggling to survive cause they've lost their incomes, but teachers still have their incomes and they're doing nothing to earn that money…Why didn't they actually speak to a teacher and see what they're having to do? They should come and do it. In fact, yeah, we need new teachers. I'm surprised there wasn't a whole host of people signing up after the press made it sound so easy. (Focus Group 1,Participant 5.)

This teacher found it difficult to reconcile the views of the public and the media about their professional identity with their own knowledge of what they were doing, and this resulted in a lot of anger, even leading them to go on to newspaper forums and engage with people in arguments, as they were so frustrated. This was out of character for the teacher, and it made it challenging to remain motivated. Here, Ball might see this national media discourse as excluding teachers, as they are framed as lazy, which reinforces the dominant ideology from government that teachers need strict control (1994). The media during the pandemic, became part of the policy ensemble, who ‘exercise power through a production of truth and knowledge as discourse’ (Ball, 1994: 21).

Teachers were forced to take up the positions which had been constructed by policy for them, reinforced by negative portrayals in the national media. Teachers were the villains of the pandemic, while the NHS were the saints, and this contrast was noted by some of the teachers involved in this study. Participant 11 (Focus Group 2) spoke about being ashamed of their feelings at the juxtaposition of teachers with other public sector workers:

> …my wife is, uh, a pharmacist for the NHS. Um, she works in Cancer pharmacy and, um, you know, I was, I was a little bit jealous really, because everyone was like, God, the NHS is so amazing and the clapping ‘God, you're amazing. Wow.’ But no one was clapping for us. Um, and I didn't want the claps really. I didn't want applause. I just didn't wanna be dragged, you know, just stop dragging me through the shit, please. You know, because I'm working really quite hard here.

This teacher also found it incredibly difficult to understand how the public could have this view when many people were being placed on furlough, with a large proportion of their salary, to sit at home and not work: '…it's like you're getting 80% of your salary to do nothing. Yes, I'm getting a hundred percent of my salary, but I'm working really, really hard, you know, so it was just a weird, weird situation.'

For experienced teachers, who had been used to teaching being seen as a well-respected profession, being painted now as villains, was difficult for them to comprehend. Two teachers claimed that they didn't want to admit their profession to members of the public: '…do I want to tell people that I'm a teacher because I can't, I haven't got the energy to keep defending our profession' (Focus Group 2, Participant 7). Another teacher in the same focus group (Participant 12) even received negative comments from family and friends, with their stepfather adding '…lorry drivers have been working just as hard, well teachers think they're martyrs.' This trial by media, which then fuelled public perception, is not a new phenomenon for teachers and schools. In his book, 'The Micro-Politics of the School,' (1984) Stephen Ball writes about the negative press stories about schools which permeated the 1980s and situated internal micro-policies of the school as a site of conflict and domination. The four schools he profiled were subject to public scrutiny for 'moving beyond the existing bounds of educational acceptability' (p. 250) which then faced controversies which Ball states then became 'a cause celebre, which could stick in the public eye like a piece of grit' (p. 250). However, he argues that these events were also underpinned by the prevalent ideological issues about schools, such as the issues discussed about teachers failing students. Most of the teachers in the groups felt like the negative headlines had changed how the public viewed their roles and this was often demonstrated by negative and vicious comments on social media, or on national and local newspaper forums.

Several of the teachers, who would usually hesitate to comment on social media posts or forums, felt drawn into defending the profession during this time:

> It was very demoralising reading. I mean, yeah particularly like, you know, um, for me it was more like social media kind of stuff, say like newspapers posting articles…I just, you just used to read some of them and it was just laughable. Mum's Net was just full of school bashing threads. The vitriol that was being directed at teachers and support staff was just absolutely shocking, to be honest. Um, particularly in the second lockdown. There was so much fighting over key worker kids and the special treatment and that we were all key workers. No one's job is more important than another…And I just thought, do you know what, this just sums up society as a whole really, doesn't it? You just can't please all the people all the time about anything. Um, and I do think I just got to the point where I just had to develop a bit of a Teflon skin. (Focus Group 1, Participant 5.)

Ultimately, after this teacher engaged in arguments with members of the general public on social media channels or newspaper forums, they decided that it was detrimental to their mental health and that it wasn’t worth engaging with. Another teacher felt the same pressures and decided to deactivate Twitter, despite missing the network of support it provided. Participant 10 added:

> I didn't need to be told how lazy I was. And, um, how, you know that we were sitting there having had six weeks off and now they've got another eight weeks. It made me so angry, what were they talking about? I mean, I was just beside myself with exhaustion and at the same time reading about how lazy teachers were…and I, um, would sit and watch people banging their pots on a Thursday afternoon or evening and I'd go, I'm over here still working. Woohoo. You know? Um, yes, I'm, I'm, I know the NHS work really hard… but at the same time to, to be just absolutely playing us against each other, like that was just appalling.

Other teachers felt that they just couldn’t win if they commented on social media, as if they tried to argue, they ‘were just seen as moaning teachers’ (Follow-up email, Participant 10). The public were perhaps interested in what teachers were doing during this time because, prior to this, they thought they understood what teachers work consisted of given that everyone has existing mental models of what teachers do inside school buildings from having been to school themselves. The new role of teachers didn’t seem anything like what they had always done, so some people may have felt like they couldn’t be fulfilling their job roles properly.

When the school building closed and the regular means of contact with the school system changed, media coverage seemed to become ‘an even more influential factor impacting the perception of those without direct contact to schools’ (Nerlino, 2023). DfE policies during this period focused on the reopening of schools, stressing the need for this to take place as quickly as possible, so that learning was not missed, and the economy could begin to recover as teachers could provide childcare for workers. Thus, matters of school operations and the reopening of school buildings dominated press stories and captivated a wide range of other stakeholders, such as politicians, parents, and the general public. This interest made the portrayal of schools, teachers, and the teaching profession especially problematic during this period as it had such a substantial impact on shaping public views.

The teachers in my study felt that negative press coverage and social media comments had inevitably impacted on the way they viewed their professional identities, as well as their well-being. The teachers above spoke about the disconnect between what the media said they were doing and what they were actually doing during this crisis. This links to previous studies which have found that there can be misconceptions between the complexity of teacher’s work and the oversimplified images of teaching in the media (Crowther, 1993). The negative media coverage impacted on the teacher’s emotions, on top of feelings of external pressures and caused some of them to question their professional identities. They felt this wasn’t helped by the lack of authentic teacher voices which were included in the reports (Shine, 2020), which only deepened the chasm and disconnect between teacher activities during Covid and the portrayals of teaching. However, the teachers also felt that there was an opportunity for the DfE to stand up for teachers here and unite the profession. Every teacher in the study spoke about how they felt that the government had let them down and the next section of this thematic analysis will analyse those feelings of betrayal and what impact these had on teacher professional identity.

6.5.2 The DfE and Ofsted

As discussed in the last sub-theme, teachers felt upset and angry at the media portrayal of their work during the school closures and the subsequent comments on social media made by the public. This anger also extended to the DfE. Participant 9 felt that the DfE had missed the opportunity to 'stand up for us and say what a good job we have done under the circumstances with the information we were given.' Participant 10 agreed and felt 'the DfE let us…let us down a lot.' Some of these feelings were linked to the late announcements and last minute changes they had been subjected to from fast policy.

In 'The Education Debate' (2021), Ball explored how many policies were published on the Department for Education's website and noted that there were over 7000 documents, 134 of these relating to Covid-19. These included advice, guides, statuary guidance, and action plans which were sent out to headteachers daily during the pandemic. Of course, in a time of unprecedented crisis such as this, governments must act swiftly in what they perceive is the national interest, but these changes were difficult for senior leaders, and in turn, teachers, to manage. Teachers felt that the DfE had not managed the policy announcements well, as they had to rely on 'rumour' (Focus Group 1, Participant 2) that there may be a public announcement. This added to the feelings of uncertainty, that nobody knew what was going to happen.

Participant 9 (Group 2) in particular felt that there was a lack of action from the wider government and compared their experience to that of friends, who were living in Europe:

> …an ex-colleague I used to, to work with, he was, he's working in, living in Italy at the time. And so on Facebook, I was seeing updates saying, why is the UK not doing anything? Why is the UK not listening? And as I say, I'd been promoted to extended leadership at the time and absolutely nothing was coming through from the government. So we were just gonna carry on as normal. Um, and then out of nowhere Wednesday, right, you're closing by Friday. And, and, and it really was, it really was that, um, the naivety on my part was, I had no idea really how serious it was.

This sense of anger at the government's indecisiveness and disorganisation was echoed by other teachers in the study who sometimes felt frustrated that they only found out about announcements to do with schools from scouring social media, such as Twitter or 'sitting down as a member of senior leadership team watching the briefing on the news to find out what we were supposed to lead our teams to do the following day' (Participant 9). This was particularly evident when teachers were attempting to find guidance about how to formulate their student's Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs):

> They started putting things out on Twitter. Um, without talking to schools and colleges first, um, and teachers. So, my students decided they weren't going to do the work or attend lessons because it will all be okay. Um, um, and what really pained me was the fact that I had to then go digging quite, quite back in history and their work to find the evidence by which to get them a grade…I think the problem there was the communication that the DfE had kind of put out through the platforms. So, people thought they knew what was going on when schools haven't been issued stuff, we were getting messages through on Teams saying this is gonna happen from students. And we're like, yeah, but we haven't been issued guidance yet. (Focus Group 2, Participant 8.)

This made the teacher feel disempowered and like they had lost their authority, as they were often being told information pertaining to how they would do their jobs by their own students. This must have been a difficult situation to come to terms with when the teacher in question had been used to occupying a position of knowledge for over fifteen years.

The guidance which was received was not perceived to be consistent and schools were forced to interpret the guidance in their own contexts, which led to teachers and leaders receiving more ire from the public as there was no consistency across schools:

> A lot of it was written in such a way that was so vague that it was left for leadership teams to try to decipher what they meant, which then meant you ended up with one school down the road interpreting it one way. And we would interpret it another way, which then left us open quite rightly to criticism from parents who would talk to each other and would know what was going on, um, in the different schools. I mean, we did, we had a network of schools that would work together. But you're still, you obviously have to interpret it for your context, don't you? So you're still left to defend that. And I feel that that was done deliberately…I don't think the DfE has any grasp of

> what the consequences of their decisions and the situation really was…but Gavin Williamson is there with a knighthood, taking the absolute Mick, like, what was that? I, I just, that is just this absolute slap in the face. (Focus Group 2, Participant 12.)

It was clear that this teacher still feels a sense of fury and frustration about the way that the Department for Education handled the crisis and that the policy changes could have been announced and implemented more sensibly, with schools and their teachers and leaders being informed of changes prior to general announcements on the TV or on social media. Participant 12 and others in my study spoke about the vagueness of the policies and the way that headteachers and their senior leadership teams were forced into interpreting the policies to meet the needs of the staff and students in their individual contexts. Perhaps, cynically, this could be so that the DfE could not be held responsible if things went drastically wrong. But Ball (1987) quotes Barr-Greenfield (1975: 65) to describe this process when he discusses the 'varied perceptions by individuals of what they can, should, or must do in dealing with others within the circumstances in which they find themselves.' These varied perceptions left schools and their teachers open to trial by media and public scrutiny, as their consumer parents compared the goods and services their children were receiving from teachers with what the children of their friends were receiving from other educational providers. Applying neoliberal ideologies to the situation also reminded teachers of the other external accountability measure which dominates their professional lives: Ofsted. Despite the cancellation of examinations, teachers still felt the long shadow of school inspections and the need for excellent data looming over them.

The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was created in 1992 by the then Secretary of State, Kenneth Clarke who devolved £75 million from displaced local education authorities to Ofsted, who were given inspection powers in 1996 (Ball, 2021). Ball's previous work has sometimes focused on the influence of Ofsted in schools (Ball et al., 2011; Ball et al., 2018; Ball, 2021). In a 2018 analysis, he uncovered that: 'the influence of the inspection agenda was strong in the schools; policy decisions were often being made to conform to Ofsted's expectations and the influence on leadership and management was clearly

apparent' (2018: 146). Teachers sometimes feel that Ofsted is a surveillance tool, a powerful mechanism of power which forces teachers to conform to socially acceptable standards of what it means to be an effective teacher. In 2019, the inspection framework changed and emphasised the role of schools in maintaining this accountability gaze, so that the fear of inspection becomes a kind of governmentality itself, which schools can use as a threat to teachers. This results in teachers and schools holding themselves in 'a state of perpetual readiness to live up to their claims' (Perryman, 2006: 611). This malingering threat was also entrenched in some teacher's mind during the extraordinary circumstances of partial school closures in 2020-1. On top of all the pressures from the pandemic, Participant 4 spoke about an impending inspection:

> We had Ofsted in February before the initial lockdown, and they were coming back within 12 months. So we were under a lot of pressure with our data and we, we wanted to do right by our pupils because, you know, our results weren't great (Focus Group 1, Participant 4).

This pressure for progress data, where Ball (2021) suggests students are seen as a commodity to barter on the knowledge economy, meant that schools and teachers were under immense provocations from Ofsted, resulting in the pressure to teach constant live lessons to students, alongside teaching some students face to face. This was really challenging for teachers, who needed to juggle these demands.

For schools who are placed into a category of 'Requires Improvement' or 'Special Measures,' there are additional monitoring visits from Ofsted and one of the teachers in the study worked in a school which fell into this category and were still subject to these monitoring visits during online lessons. Participant 7 commented:

> When we went off again and we were locked down from the January through to the Easter, we actually had, I had an inspector, um, in my remote lesson with me, as did many of my other colleagues on top of going into meetings to go and kind of talk about our data and talk about what it was that we were doing to make progress. Whilst we were doing remote learning. I mean, when I think about it now, it's just nuts. Absolutely crazy. The anger that, that kind of caused in our school and these hoops that we had to jump through and for what, you know, there was no kind of well done, well done for, you know, teaching Romeo and Juliet to bottom set year 11 via a laptop, you know, it

> just was just sheer anger that this was allowed to happen. (Focus Group 2, Participant 7.)

The teacher above felt that there was a lack of understanding from Ofsted about the challenges which teachers were facing and that being subject to the same levels of scrutiny, with no acknowledgment that the goalposts had shifted was ridiculous. They recall the frustration felt from staff that they were still expected to carry on as normal, discussing student data for example, when there were bigger global matters to contend with. In terms of professional identity, this teacher may have felt how trivial some of the things they are asked to do in their jobs are and may have begun to question the impact it really has on children. This may have in turn led to feelings of annoyance about the heavy workload of teaching and how they could be spending their time in more impactful ways.

Another teacher (Participant 9) also shared the view that Ofsted were out of touch, discussing a newspaper headline that allegedly quoted Ofsted Chief Amanda Spielman as stating that schools should have focused on just education rather than looking after student welfare:

> And I was just thought you, how, how can you know so little as if any of them were accessing the education when there were six rounds of laptop, but they'd not, they'd not eaten and they'd not got what they, what they needed. Absolute fool…I just thought, again, just the epitome of mistrust. Um, absolutely disgraceful.

The pressure from Ofsted is not just felt by classroom teachers of course, another teacher spoke about how the pressure of Ofsted also forced senior leaders into ‘last minute panicky changes’ (Focus Group 2, Participant 10). Ball might link this to managerialism, which scrutinises teachers using performativity culture (Ball, 2021). Leaders are forced to measure and judge their teachers based on performance indicators like Ofsted judgements. The heightened sense of accountability was palpable to teachers in this study as they even felt it when not in the school building. It also feeds into the deficit press discourse about teachers being lazy; they are not to be trusted to do their work from home.

Leaders were forced into micromanaging staff and checking up on them, which also caused distress to participants in the focus groups and will be explored now.

6.5.3 Senior leaders

As Ball (2012) writes, 'policy making is a process of understanding and translating' (p. 3) and headteachers and their senior leadership teams are the actors interpreting and recontextualising national dictate, before implementing it with staff. As one participant noted, the policies during the pandemic were vague and it was often left to the leadership teams in schools to interpret how to mandate the policies in their own schools. This sometimes resulted in teachers feeling frustrated with senior leaders, as the visible architect of mandate. As the teachers in the study are all also experienced teachers, Ball has argued that this may also impact on the way they accept and enact policy, as they have seen different waves of innovation and change (2012) For newer teachers, change is something they may have already known but for more experienced staff, policy is only part of what they do, and they may just attempt to go on as before. This may have also added to feelings of frustration with senior leaders from teachers in the study, as they have not agreed with the changes they were proposing.

Participant 6 spoke about the frustration they felt with leaders, who didn't quite understand what was being done by teachers behind the scenes, 'I think they thought, well, you're teaching, that's fine. But they didn't really get all the other stuff that was going on.' Another (Participant 11), said, 'I was deeply frustrated at my school because…I think there were signs this was gonna happen.' This teacher contracted Covid and was quite seriously ill. They felt that the school could have done more to protect colleagues but that instead things were left until the last minute. Others acknowledged that they had felt sympathy for their headteachers and that although they had sometimes felt frustration at the situation they were in, they realised that the DfE was more to blame and that their headteacher was also living under the same uncertainty. Participant 10 spoke about how her headteacher's honesty with staff had broken down boundaries and made them realise the pressure they were under:

> We…had a headteacher that basically came onto a big meeting, cause we still had lots of meetings, but came onto a big meeting and said, this is the, um, this is what we were, we were sent, and I'm gonna be really upfront. I'm gonna tell you exactly what we are told, and I'm gonna tell you when we are told it so that you know that I'm not hiding anything.

This honesty and moments of vulnerability from the leader in the school juxtaposes with the managerialist style of leadership that Ball has written about, where managerialism has altered the nature of leadership within schools, which positioned a headteacher as the key actor in the process of reform, who alongside the senior leadership team, are separated from classroom colleagues, creating an ‘us’ and ‘them’ division. Instead, this honesty minimised the distance between the headteacher and his colleagues, repositioning the leader and their teachers as being against the external stakeholders, such as the press, the DfE and Ofsted. This new closeness could be seen as a positive result of the enforced closures – amongst other surprising optimistic feelings teachers had during this time. These will be discussed in the conclusion to this dissertation, alongside thoughts from teachers in the study about their feelings on remaining in the profession.

6.6 Conclusion

The themes considered in this discussion in relation to the impact on experienced teacher identity during the Covid-19 school closures and analysed through the work of Stephen Ball, have indicated that perhaps there was in impact on the way teachers felt about their jobs. Teachers felt a sense of loneliness from colleagues and that the usual collegiality they had, where they were able to discuss events that troubled them or share ideas for new strategies was largely curtailed when school buildings closed. They also felt removed from their students and they did not enjoy the same kind of relationships they had previously enjoyed; instead, their interactions felt artificial and distant, where they often faced black screens and silence during online lessons. This links to Butler’s (2007) position, that students’ and teachers’ motivations are uniquely intertwined, that teachers incorporate the motivation of their students as integral to their own motivations. Those human relationships matter, and it made teachers work even more challenging when they were not as prevalent.

As we saw from the analysis, when some students did not submit any work or did not contribute to lesson discussions, this may have lessened teacher's self-efficacy and feelings of satisfaction in their work identities, as their impact was diluted and less tangible. Experienced teachers also felt disorientated with pedagogical changes and technology. Those who have been in the classroom for a long time may have become used to the tried and tested ways of instructing students in their class. Getting to grips with new technologies and systems challenged some teachers, while others felt reinvigorated by needing to innovate their practice. The new demands did lead to an increased workload, with some teachers lamenting the lack of work life balance and the teacher guilt this caused, both for the students they were teaching and their own families, as they attempted to juggle their personal and professional lives. This guilt was sometimes exacerbated by external influences such as the media, comments from the public on social media channels and accountability measures such as Ofsted. Teachers also felt let down by the DfE, who they perceived to be disorganised and contributing to pointing the finger of blame at schools and teachers, fanning the flames of the lazy teacher rhetoric in a trial by media. Internal pressures also compounded this, as senior leadership teams cascaded the pressures, they were facing down to classroom teachers, who often felt they might buckle under the strain of enacting policy.

So, what might this thematic analysis reveal about teacher's professional identities and whether the impact of the pandemic has made them think about leaving the profession? It seems to be a mixed picture. Even pre-pandemic, some teachers in the study conceded that teaching is an all-consuming job and that they were already considering leaving teaching. Participant 5 spoke about the 'unrealistic expectations, the workload...the negativity, the endless complaints and vitriol that you get from a small minority,' which makes it very challenging for teachers to fulfil their professional role with any sense of self-efficacy. For one teacher in particular, the pandemic acted as a catalyst moment; they had previously decided that in the future, they would go and try something different but the pride they felt in their job during this time made them fall in love with their job again:

> it made me realise how skilled I was and I've had to do so many things and I managed that and it actually pushed me to want to achieve more for myself and, um, And yeah, gave me more confidence. (Focus Group 1, Participant 4.)

This pride for what they had achieved in the face of adversity was also echoed by others, who despite feeling pushed out of their comfort zones, had risen to meet the challenges. with one teacher even claiming that the pandemic had reinvigorated their teaching:

> I created a place of learning for myself around me because it was such a lonely environment. And I read lots of pedagogical books and I practiced lots of things with my, um, when I was sort of using visualisers and talking my way through and recording my loom lessons and all of that. And I've kept some of those things in place now so that, um, that there's, I just feel a little bit invigorated in the way I've come around back to teaching…I feel that it gave me a new lease on my teaching life, funnily enough. (Focus Group 2, Participant 10.)

Away from the constraints of the school and the classroom, teachers were afforded the opportunity to think about their teaching and be a completely reflective practitioner. Another teacher spoke about the transformative power of this time and space and started studying for a PhD, which also changed some of their values (Participant 8).

Overall, the teachers felt a sense of overwhelming pride in the profession as teachers were able to stand above the challenges and mistakes from government and still deliver a quality education for children. Yet they also acknowledged that Covid-19 had changed not only the world, but themselves and their teacher identities.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

For my dissertation, I outlined the aims and rationale behind my research, which was to explore how the Covid-19 pandemic may have affected the professional identity of experienced teachers. To investigate this, I conducted a thematic analysis and then identified four themes with various sub-themes, which were then analysed using Stephen Ball's theories about educational policy. Prior to conducting my research, I read and discussed fields of work by other researchers in a literature review, which were relevant to my own research question. These included theories on professional identity in general, professional teacher identities and influences on how they are constructed, how experienced teacher identity differs and the depiction of teachers in the media during the pandemic. Within the theory chapter, I outlined the work of Stephen Ball on educational policy, focusing on neoliberalism, policy as discourse, teachers as policy actors, managerialism, and a discourse of derision. I proposed that in my research, teacher professional identity is constructed as a product of both social construction and personal construction, with teacher identities being subject to change and adaptation throughout a teacher's career. Following this chapter, I explained the research design I employed in my Methodology chapter, including how I proposed to use a thematic analysis to identify prevalent themes from two focus groups.

The findings chapter was structured into four themes, with sub-themes within them and the discussions were situated after relevant quotes from the transcript, with further illumination using Ball's work. The discussions of themes and sub-themes included my own interpretations and reflections, as outlined in the Methodology, as somebody who had also taught in schools during the pandemic. This means that my interpretations of the teachers' interpretations of their experiences are discussed. In this final chapter, I will draw conclusions from my research, based on my research question, my professional reflections, and the key contributions this research has made to existing research in this field of study. I will assess my research in terms of its limitations, and finally

propose how this research could be extended or provide avenues for future exploration.

The participants in my study provided a rich description of their working lives during the Covid-19 pandemic and what the impact of their professional identities were due to these experiences. As this is a relatively small sample, this dissertation is not claiming that all experienced teachers' professional identities were challenged and reshaped due to the pandemic. However, it does provide some interesting insights into how the teachers in my study felt about their work during this challenging period. What I had not anticipated was the sense of anger and frustration that experienced teachers involved in my study felt towards external agencies, such as Ofsted and the Department for Education, but particularly against the media and their representation of teachers. This often had an indirect impact on public perceptions of teachers which also then led to negative interactions with family, friends, and strangers on the internet. These feelings of anger could account for some of the feelings of the teachers in the study, who were now looking to leave the profession. This also resonated with my own experiences as I chose to leave the profession post-pandemic and felt many of the same frustrations as the teachers questioned. The teachers overwhelmingly felt that there were lessons which needed to be learnt from this period but that schools had not seemed to adapt or shift their practices to take this into account. For those who were considering leaving the profession, these shifts are necessary if they are to remain, as they now feel a sense of disenchantment with their careers. However, despite these challenges, teachers did find ways to expand their knowledge and hone their pedagogy to adapt to online learning. This sense of pride and excitement was also a feeling I had not anticipated, and it highlighted how resilient teachers were during this period. I will now revisit my research questions and sub-questions to discuss how my findings addressed them and also link the findings back to Stephen Ball's work.

7.2 Research Question: How if at all, did the Covid-19 pandemic influence experienced teacher identity in England?

Overall, my research indicates that the policies which resulted from the Covid-19 school closures did alter experienced teacher's professional identity in both positive and negative ways. Mostly, this seemed due to the fact that both policy discourse and portrayals of teachers in the national media consistently painted teachers in a problematic light and this was sustained throughout the whole pandemic. The consequences of the policy discourse seemed to do this in a range of ways, which included:

1. Alienating teachers from both their colleagues and students, causing them to feel lonely and lose the sense of collaboration they had felt as part of their professional identity over many years. This impacted on how they felt about their jobs as they suddenly perceived their job as being isolated and unsupported.
2. Presenting teachers as lazy and failing their students, which created feelings of teacher guilt, impacting on how the teachers in my study viewed themselves as a professional and what their capabilities as a teacher were. For experienced teachers, who had long felt capable in their career and confident in their teaching expertise, this created feelings of insecurity and lowered their feelings of self-efficacy.
3. Not providing teachers with clear and timely information about what they should be doing, which created more stress and cognitive overload for teachers. This impacted on professional identity as it made experienced teachers feel a sense of fear as the usual predictable routine of school was disrupted. For some teachers in the study this created worries that they were doing the wrong thing, exacerbating feelings of teacher guilt. Even the most experienced of practitioners felt like a new teacher due to the new way of working during this time.
4. Continuing to subject them to accountability and performativity measures. Teachers in the study were disappointed by this and this impacted on their professional identities by making them feel distrusted by organisations such as Ofsted, deprofessionalising them.
5. Not appreciating and acknowledging the work that teachers were doing during this time. Perhaps this impacted on teacher's professional identity

the most out of all the barriers and challenges during the school closures. Experienced teachers felt like they had gone from feeling mostly appreciated by parents, students, and the public to then feeling invisible, especially in the context of mass displays of public appreciation given to other public sector workers such as the NHS. Professional identities were impacted by this, as teachers then felt a dissatisfaction with their work as the number of hours they were working and the dedication they felt they were showing was not matched in the eyes of the public.

To build on these themes and explore them in more depth and detail, I will now address my sub-questions:

1. In what ways, if at all, was participants' sense of their ability to undertake their professional role influenced by media or public opinion during the pandemic?

2. Did participant experiences of teaching during the pandemic influence their decisions to remain in the profession?

In what ways, if at all, was participants' sense of their ability to undertake their professional role influenced by media or public opinion during the pandemic?

As detailed in this dissertation, during the pandemic, the print national media often printed stories about teachers which painted their efforts to educate students during school closures as not fit for purpose. The implication was that this was causing students to fail, leaving them without a proper education for almost a year. This discourse of derision left teachers open to attack from members of the public and positioned teachers as the villains against other public sector workers, such as the NHS, who were lauded for their work. When linked to the work of Stephen Ball, this positions teachers as resistant to reform and highlights the need for more accountability which distrusts teacher's professionalism. By presenting teachers in this way, it took the attention away from the government and the Department for Education, with teachers in my study feeling like this created useful scapegoats for policymakers. Not only did this anger teachers, who found themselves drawn into arguments with strangers

on the internet, but it also led to them having to defend their work and efforts when conversing with friends and family. For experienced teachers, who may have taught through periods when teaching was a highly regarded occupation, this negative coverage caused confusion and led to teachers questioning whether they wanted to continue doing their job in such an openly hostile environment. As discussed in this dissertation, Stephen J. Ball has commented on the role of the media, especially newspapers, in shaping public discourse about education and teachers, labelling the negative portrayal as a discourse of derision (Ball, 1990). He analysed how media coverage can influence public perceptions of teachers and educational policy and this idea has allowed me to analyse the comments about the newspaper coverage in the focus groups more deeply. I did this by being able to understand the links between media coverage and public perception and this was what teachers in the study felt most acutely. They expected the lack of support from the media and the Department for Education, although this still caused them anger and frustration, but the perception of the public seemed to influence their perception of their identity more. This leads me to be able to suggest that teacher's professional identity is tied up with how their work is perceived by others in society and that if experienced teachers have been used to feeling well respected by the public, this change in attitude might perhaps have made them feel a sense of dissatisfaction with their jobs. Ball (1990) also suggested that media representation can often be negative and focus on issues like accountability, performance, and perceived crises in education, which can contribute to a public narrative that undervalues teachers' work and professionalism. Again, this stance enabled me to link some of the headlines, which played into these types of narrative, with the feelings teachers expressed about job satisfaction and their professional identity during this time. It highlighted that due to the negative headlines about student outcomes and lost learning during online teaching, teachers began to question their identity and work, as they knew they were working incredibly hard to ensure students lost as little learning as possible. Teachers might have felt almost gaslighted during this time, as they knew how hard they were working but were being told that they weren't leading to a sense of confusion about their professional identity.

The hurt and anger caused because of the negative coverage and public perception also affected some teacher's self-efficacy in my study. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute the behaviours necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1989). Usually, these performance attainments might traditionally take the form of student outcomes in external examinations. During the pandemic, the rule book in this regard was ripped up, as external examinations were cancelled. However, the new performance attainments may have been the media messages about what education provision effective schools and teachers were providing for students during this time. There was no national standard, with the government leaving it to school leaders to decide what would work for their students in their context. This enabled the media, and in turn the public, to pit schools against schools and teachers against teachers, with parents taking to social media to voice their dissatisfaction with the efforts of their children's teachers. Of course, parents have often complained about some aspect of school, yet the negative coverage of teachers in the newspapers contributed to a new negative national perspective on teachers, which empowered parents to voice their complaints in perhaps more forceful ways. Stephen J. Ball (1990) has written about the 'discourse of derision' in the context of education, which refers to the ways in which certain educational policies, practices, or groups (such as teachers) are discussed in negative terms. This discourse can often be found in media representations, including newspaper coverage, where teachers may be derided for their perceived shortcomings or failures. Therefore, the negative headlines about teachers may fall into this categorisation by Ball and the effects on their identity that teachers mentioned did link to them feeling like failures and that they were not doing enough. Ball has also stated that this discourse of derision might portray teachers as solely responsible for the failings of students or the education system, particularly when exam results are used as the primary measure of success (1990). Again, this helped with the analysis of the change in professional identity as it helped to highlight how teacher's positive thoughts about their own identity may have been eroded over time due to the press discourse, but even more during the heightened stress of the pandemic. Furthermore, the discourse of derision can lead to a public perception which undermines the professional status of teachers and the complexity of teaching, often ignoring systemic issues that impact education. It creates a blame

narrative that focuses on individual teacher accountability rather than addressing broader educational policy or systemic problems.

This study highlighted how damaging teachers found this to their professional identity as they began to question their own expertise and professionalism, when they may have previously felt secure in their own teaching powers. Their levels of confidence in their professional identity may have diminished, as they experienced a discord between the professional behaviours, they felt they were exhibiting, by working long hours and accepting less of a work-life balance. This caused a sense of disbelief and confusion as the teachers in my study did not recognise themselves and their reality of teaching during the pandemic with the portrayal of them in the national newspapers. Clearly, this was upsetting but it also caused them to question why they were putting so much effort in and going above and beyond if public perception just painted them as lazy and workshy. As has been demonstrated in the focus groups, teaching is a difficult job, so to have no acknowledgement of that made it challenging for some teachers who participated in this research to continue to remain positive and resilient.

On the other hand, the negative media portrayals, and public shaming of teachers on social media did increase the resilience and grit of some teachers who took part in my study. This was perhaps because they had a stronger professional identity, which was not shaken by the change in public perception. These teachers had a strong and secure sense of professional identity; they knew that they were doing a great job and were working as hard as they possibly could to adapt and meet the needs of their students. Therefore, the discourse of derision discussed in the focus groups just made them more determined to continue to prove their critics wrong. Many around them were being paid to stay at home on furlough and some teachers in my study were proud that they had continued to work, despite the many challenges. This increased their feelings of self-efficacy as they saw themselves as almost keeping the country going in the face of unimagined adversity. The work of Ball (2016) can help to illuminate how some teachers managed to keep a stable professional identity during this time. Ball claims that teachers struggle with their concept of self, as they grapple with

defining themselves both according to their own judgement and society's views of their worth. The experienced teachers in the study who managed to remain positive about their role, had perhaps more secure feelings on the aesthetics of their professional self, than those who allowed what the public thought about them to change their views on their professional identity.

In response to this sub-question therefore, the media portrayal of teacher's work during the Covid-19 pandemic did alter some participants' sense of their ability to undertake their professional role, and this was influenced somewhat by both the media and public opinion. Whether this was in negative or positive ways depended on how secure teacher's sense of professional identity was and what their contexts were. In some cases, these considerations also influenced whether teachers were now contemplating whether to leave the teaching profession, which leads me to address my second sub-research question.

Did participant experiences of teaching during the pandemic influence their decisions to remain in the profession?

The findings of this sub-question were mixed, with no clear consensus on whether their experiences during the pandemic had made them want to leave the profession more. Participants' feelings about leaving largely depended on whether they already had misgivings about continuing as a teacher prior to the school closures. Teachers in the study who already felt dissatisfaction for their jobs found these frustrations compounded by their experiences during the pandemic. For example, if they'd previously felt frustrated by the lack of flexibility in traditional classroom teaching, when experiencing more flexibility during the pandemic, this impacted on their professional identity by making them feel frustrated when they returned to more traditional ways of working. If they had struggled with high workload, the workload during the pandemic seemed to increase, so this influenced their professional identity by making them feel like they could not cope with the relentlessly high expectations placed on them. Ball and Sabe (2021) have written about school being a rigid form of organising and this helped me to explore why teachers felt trapped by their traditional working conditions, which altered their professional identity, as they

felt more dissatisfaction about their working conditions. In the same paper, Ball and Sabe (2021) also discussed the need for education to move beyond its normative structures and to negotiate more openness and flexibility. Teachers in my study perhaps experienced more flexibility during this time, such as working from home, and managing their own time. For some, this reinvigorated positive feelings about their professional identity as they felt more autonomous, which meant that when they returned to school, they felt more negative about their professional identity.

Yet, some teachers involved in my research had previously considered leaving the profession and found that the challenges they faced during the pandemic almost shook them out of what Kraft and Papay (2014) have described as a teacher stagnation, where experienced teachers sometimes just go through the motions of doing their jobs and not really developing their craft. The problems the pandemic brought provided opportunities for veteran teachers to break away from this stagnation and innovate. Some teachers were able to make some positive changes to their practice by being able to critically assess their own professional identity. This may have been helped by their years of experience and the way they had previously needed to adapt to meet policy changes. This ownership of the wrangling and moulding of professional identities by teachers themselves was also evident in another study by Ball and Olmedo (2013). This meant that a sense of pride grew when the teachers thought about their professional identities post-pandemic, which made them appreciate the role they have in changing student's lives and feel privileged that they can do this.

However, for teachers who had never previously considered leaving the profession, the experiences they had during the school closures did perhaps highlight the other opportunities which are available to teachers; jobs which are outside of the traditional world of classroom teaching but still have moral purpose and perhaps afford more flexibility and opportunity. In these situations, the events of the Covid-19 pandemic did cause some teachers in this study to question whether they would remain in the profession long-term, causing an element of doubt perhaps to creep into their professional identities as teachers.

7.3 Professional reflections and reflections on the findings

7.3.1 Reflection on the findings

As somebody who was a practising secondary school teacher during the Covid-19 pandemic, I began this dissertation with a deep understanding and sense of shared experience with some of the themes raised. Some of the experiences discussed by participants were strikingly similar to situations, complexities and challenges I also faced. In a way, the research also contributed to the reshaping of my own professional identity. Now I have left the teaching profession and moved into higher education as an academic, I feel protective of teachers and was struck especially by the feelings of anger that the negativity in the press caused.

There seems to be a depth of misunderstanding between the government, the press and Ofsted about what it really means to teach during a global pandemic, and this has only been reinforced with my recent secondment to work at the Department for Education, working in initial teacher training policy. I was surprised by the positive comments and motivation to continue teaching which participants discussed, as I had felt the opposite pull towards leaving the profession for something which offers more flexibility and professional autonomy. The communication gap and lack of policy discourse between the government and actual classroom teachers is in desperate need of being fixed, as the DfE continue to create new policies which aim to stem the haemorrhage of experienced teachers from the profession, with little input from teachers on what may stop them from leaving. By engaging with more experienced teachers, the government could see that teachers are just as committed to changing the outcomes for children as they are and that a better way to retain them would be by appreciating the work they do and demonstrating this publicly. There is also a disconnect between teachers and Ofsted. At the time of writing this dissertation, Ofsted were subject to press attention due to their alleged role in the tragic suicide of a primary headteacher, whose school had recently been downgraded. It remains to be seen whether the inspectorate will be reformed, and lessons learnt, however, it was clear from the teacher’s comments in this study that Ofsted still wields a fearful power over their professional lives.

Perhaps the one aspect of the research that struck me most personally was the impact that the negative stories in the media and the social media comments can have on the profession, particularly on the experienced teachers I questioned, who had been used to teaching being portrayed as a well-respected profession. As a former national newspaper journalist, who has probably written negative headlines about teachers it made me consider the role I had played in making teachers question whether they wanted to continue in the profession. I am also in the privileged position of being a public figure in the education world, who is given a platform through magazine columns, books, and conference key notes, as well as a large social media following. This research has made me actively seek out ways to promote positive stories about teachers and their work, to counteract the negativity which is sometimes prevalent about such a hardworking and dedicated profession.

7.3.2 How has the process of becoming a teacher-researcher impacted on my professional identity?

As a result of the EdD process, my working world has shifted from being a teacher to working as an academic and for the government on education policy. This has afforded me completely new insights and perspectives into policy and teacher’s professional identity and has also recalibrated my own professional identity. As I am no longer teaching, the research has not changed me as a teacher but has certainly impacted on the way I feel about the profession. I have become more explicitly aware of the feelings of dissatisfaction in the profession, which was exacerbated by the experiences of teachers during the pandemic. However, I have also been able to critically reflect on the pride that teachers also feel, as well as their resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. The participants I interviewed all inspired me and increased my admiration for those in the teaching profession.

Teaching is an incredibly difficult, all-encompassing career, which can sometimes be described in the toxic rhetoric of being a vocation. This normalises

long hours and stressful days for teachers by gaslighting them into believing that it is just part and parcel of the job and that there is no other way. It has inspired me to seek out schools and multi academy trusts who are taking teacher workload and wellbeing seriously, such as TEAL trust, run by Jonny Uttley, and disseminate what they are doing more widely. These positive examples are important for schools, as they can act as a call to arms for resistance against some performativity and accountability measures, they feel forced into foisting upon their staff. As teachers who have seen many policy changes, experienced teachers also have a role to play in this, particularly in remaining as a voice of rationality and positivity for new entrants to the profession. In addition, reading Ball's work has been helpful in my work with both mentors in my university role and in my secondment at the Department for Education, as it has helped me analyse policy initiatives and understand the origin of policies.

Reflecting upon the research process, there are some things I would look to do differently. As my studies on the EdD took place from 2018-2023, I was subject to online study weekends due to the pandemic. This meant that the sense of support and collegiality with other EdD participants was not as tangible. Although there were semi-regular catch ups online, the research process still felt very solitary, and I only utilised support from the wider research community on Twitter in the latter stages of write-up. I wish I had found the time to engage with other researchers in an informal way much earlier than this, as when I did do this, they challenged my thinking and signposted to relevant research which would have been beneficial earlier in the writing process.

The process of becoming a teacher-researcher has widened my knowledge of education policy, the origins of neoliberalism and the marketisation of education, as well as the formulation of the professional identity of experienced teachers. I gained a much greater appreciation of the complications involved in policy implementation for all the different levels of the education hierarchy, and this has contributed to me now choosing to learn more about policy, working alongside policy makers in The DfE. I also developed an understanding that teachers are affected by the public perception of them created by the media

and the links between these stories and government rhetoric. It has made me more critical of the relationship between the government and the media, as well as creating a desire within me to protect teachers as much as I can, from the inside of Whitehall. I will continue my role as a teacher-researcher by conducting some research on the effective mechanisms mentors employ when guiding early career teachers, which I have managed to secure some early career research funding for. In addition, I have secured a book contract to write about education policy from the 1950s to the present day, which will include an analysis of newspaper headlines from each decade and vignettes of teacher experiences during this time. The book was inspired by my work on this dissertation and in the education policy module of the Ed.D.

7.4 Contribution to existing research and implications for future research

This research contributes to the strength of existing thinking in the field of experienced teacher professional identity, particularly in terms of the roles that external forces such as government policy, the media and public perceptions play in identity formation. The sense of anger that several participants spoke about when referring to the DfE or the newspaper coverage highlights this. What remains key is that teacher professional identity is subjective to individual teachers and that seeing teachers as autonomous beings, not a homogenous 'blob' is crucial to understanding their professional identity. Some teachers felt like they wanted to leave teaching after the pandemic, whereas others had never felt so energised and committed and this stereotyping of what teachers think or feel which is common in policy formulation does not take these individual differences into account.

My research also highlights that policymakers still do not understand teachers and the complexity of their work. There is a long historical pattern of policymakers promoting a deficit model of teachers, where teachers 'are valued for their productivity alone. Their value as a person is eradicated' (Ball, 2003: 224). This means that when teachers do not live up to the targets given for productivity, they are seen as failing their children, the economy and society. Teaching is a much maligned profession and to feel a sense of satisfaction in

their work, teachers need validation that they are doing a great job, as well as the reward of more professional autonomy and trust. To understand teachers and what makes them tick, classroom teachers need to be given a voice and really listened to.

As a result, I suggest that future research should focus on not only the challenges that teachers face in their jobs but also what they love and enjoy. The teachers in my study were full of passion and enthusiasm, despite being over a decade into their jobs. They could not have been further from the stereotypical press depiction of moaning teachers, who lack resilience and are stuck in the mud, unwilling to adapt. Rather than focusing on what makes teachers leave the profession, perhaps time could be spent on examining what makes them stay and what influences these teacher's professional identities to be more positive. Then opportunities could be offered in teacher professional development programmes which give the opportunity for teachers to develop; and cultivate these attributes.

Finally, as stated in the literature review, there has been little research done specifically on experienced teacher identity. Much of the DfE's time and financial resources has been allocated to enticing new entrants to the profession, yet without more experienced colleagues, new teachers will have nobody to support them. Therefore, more research needs to be conducted on experienced teacher identity and how school leaders can help sustain resilient and adaptive practitioners, whose professional identities do not become separated from their core moral purpose.

7.5 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I have addressed the central research question and have argued that the Covid-19 school closures did shape experienced teacher professional identity, but that it was in both positive and negative ways. The research shines a light on the effect that education policy in a global crisis and the resultant press coverage and public perception had on the teaching

profession in England. The teaching profession needs to be built back up after their experiences and congratulated for the role they played in keeping the economy going during this challenging time. The Department for Education must play a key role in this, if they are to win back teacher's trust and keep experienced teachers in the classroom, where they are making the most difference to student's lives. If they do not do this, we will lose them and unfortunately, it will only be generations of children who suffer.

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Appendix 1: Transcripts from focus group 1 and 2 and follow-up emails with annotations and initial coding

Transcript 1.pdf

Transcript 2.pdf

Appendix 2: Tables of preliminary themes and codes

Theme: Loneliness	Theme: Pedagogy Problems	Theme: Technology troubles
Codes Lack of relationships with students Little engagement with students in online lessons Lack of collaboration with colleagues No informal support in staff room or corridor What's App contact groups but not the same Struggling with lack of routines and structure	**Codes** Lack of engagement from students No equipment at home to deliver practical lessons Issues with copies of texts = Teacher guilt Excitement at being innovative, like doing a group read Sense of pride Difficulty with live lessons Change in EYFS from walking round room to being stuck in a box	**Codes** Students having no laptops Some more experienced teachers felt they were technophobes Getting to grips with technological platforms Trouble with asynchronous lessons Late night messages and teacher access 24/7 Using own mobile to call students and parents Exacerbated feelings of wanting to leave profession
Theme: Teacher Guilt **Codes** Bereft at leaving students Worries about students' home life Challenges with parents Forgiving students for disrupting home life Blurring of professional boundaries Missing relationships with students Guilt for own family Guilt for public Guilt for vulnerable colleagues/family	**Theme: Balancing act** **Codes** Teaching in person and online Delivering food packages/resources etc to families Sense of pride as reminded how vital teachers are	**Theme: Demoralised by others** **Codes** Media headlines caused distress and anger Pressures from Ofsted made situation more difficult SLT had high expectations – lack of understanding Anger and frustration at the Department for Education Confusion at attitude from the public Comparisons with the NHS Arguments with family and friends and on social media Wanting to leave the profession or feeling pride

Appendix 3: Thematic map with relationships between themes

Professional Loneliness

Lack of relationships and engagement from students

Lack of routines and school structure

Little collaboration with colleagues (Professional Learning Networks)

Teacher guilt for students

Teaching into the abyss

Enjoyed flexibility.

Mental health issues

Informal chats/rants/ support

What's App groups shallow.

Lack of equipment

Sense of pride/reinvigorates.

Innovation

Change in approach.

No space to work

Issues with technology – students and staff

Pedagogy Problems.

Juggling everything

Delivering food etc

Neglecting own family

Technophobe teachers

Students no laptops

Teacher guilt.

Blurring boundaries with students/ CAGs

Public perception

Worried about students/family

Late night messages

Others lost jobs/survive?

Guilt for vulnerable

SLT

Social media

Ofsted

Demoralised by others.

Pitting against NHS

No support/ last minute guidance

No relaxing of pressure

DfE

High expectations

Media

Depicting as lazy