Project Title:

What strategies can be utilised to maintain the well-being of teachers to prevent them leaving the profession as a result of stress and subsequent burnout?

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List of abbreviations:

AWL	Areas of Work Life Model
BCU	Birmingham City University
CREC	Centre for Research in Early Childhood
CPD	Continued Professional Development
COR	The Conservation of Resources model
DFE	The Department for Education
ECT	Early Career Teachers
EECERA	European Early Childhood Education Research Association
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectors
HSE	Health and Safety Executive
JD-R	The Job-Demands-Resources model
LMT	Leadership and Management Time
MBI	Maslach Burnout Inventory
NEU	National Education Union
OFSTED	The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PPA	Preparation, Planning and Assessment
WHO	World Health Organisation

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1. Abstract

Statistics from the National Education Union (NEU) (2022) and within the media (Martin, 2022; Weale, 2022) currently point towards a teaching retention crisis in England, and within my own experiences I have known practitioners leave the profession due to stress and subsequent burnout. Teacher mental health and well-being are part of the revised Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) (2022) inspection framework but how effective are well-being strategies within English schools? The purpose of this research was to further understand the phenomenon of teacher burnout and the impact it has on the mental health and well-being of teaching practitioners. In addition to this I explored the availability and impact of well-being support. I conducted the study within a phenomenological methodology with sixteen active-teachers and six practitioners who are no longer teaching, who agreed to share their experiences and reflections to inform this study. Conclusions demonstrated that the participants are deeply committed to their roles as teachers, and the altruism of practitioners was a significant theme. Workload, increased accountability and reduced autonomy were predominant factors which heightened stress and, in some cases, led to the burnout of practitioners. Activities that positively influenced teacher well-being, like productive time with children and supporting the progression of learners, are becoming more infrequent in favour of high accountability - low trust working practices. Well-being strategies are not effectively employed within schools and most participants felt little or no impact from these. In the limited cases where well-being practices were embedded into school ethos, participants had higher levels of happiness and were more likely to remain in the profession. Only 25% of participants were sure that they would still be teaching in five years' time. The current model of 'responding to stress' is not working within the English education system and I propose that a model which embeds well-being into school ethos and practices would support teacher retention.

2. Introduction

According to recent statistics, the national figures for teacher retention are bleak: 44% of polled teachers in England intend to leave the profession by 2027, citing lack of trust, workload, accountability and pay as the main reasons (NEU) (2022). The Teacher Well-being Index (2021) completed by the Education Support Charity reported as many as 72% of participants describing themselves as stressed, with 54% having considered leaving the profession within the last 2 years. Only 39% of participants felt that they received sufficient support for their mental health and well-being at work. The media have also turned their focus to the teaching crisis. The Guardian reports that one in four primary school leaders left their post within the first five years of the role (since 2015), with this rising to nearly half of all middle leaders leaving their roles within the same time frame (Weale, 2022). These statistics are mirrored within my own experiences. Within the past five years, six of my close friends have made the decision to leave the teaching profession due to workload, stress and burnout. Similarly, I faced a career altering burnout in late 2020 which led to the resignation from my decade held leadership role. Conversations I have had with fellow teachers have indicated that feelings of stress, exhaustion and inadequacy seem to be part of a daily cycle for others within the profession.

Empirical research into burnout began with the work of Freudenberger (1975), and since then myriad studies have detailed the specifics of teacher burnout, which although useful for understanding the phenomenon, often only define the causes of burnout, with limited suggestions for long-term sustainable improvements (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Beltman et al., 2011; Burrow et al., 2020; Mack et al,.2019). Many studies focus on those leaving within the early stages of their career but recent figures (NEU) (2022) demonstrate that more experienced teachers are also considering leaving the profession. OFSTED's apparent new focus on well-being within schools (OFSTED) (2022) would seem to have the mental well-being of practitioners at its heart, but I wanted to further explore what practitioners' real experiences of well-being support were.

The intent of my research was twofold. Firstly, to study and further understand the phenomenon of burnout through the experiences and reflections of both active teachers and those who have left the profession. Secondly, to gain a deeper perspective on the availability, impact and effectiveness of well-being strategies within the current education system. My intention of further understanding burnout was to develop strategies that could be used by practitioners to avoid it in the future. Then, by understanding the true picture of well-being strategies, work alongside practitioners to analyse how effective these are, and how they could be improved. My viewpoint is optimistic and the aim was to find workable and pragmatic strategies that can be used by settings and individuals to avoid burnout and promote and sustain high levels of teacher well-being. The phenomenon of teacher burnout and well-being is well documented in empirical research and within institutional reports, I shall explore this further within my literature review.

3. Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

When reviewing the literature for this study I narrowed the search to include studies that only involved teachers or teaching, with the intention of maintaining focus and relevance to my study topic. I have reviewed the literature in two sections - firstly, the teacher *well-being* literature and the contribution it has had towards an understanding of the complexity of well-being, how to measure it, and what can be done to sustain it. Then secondly, the teacher *burnout* literature, looking at the measurement models, causes, and impact of stress and burnout. I refined my reading by selecting studies that were UK based or directly comparable to the UK, had been peer reviewed, and fell within the last 5 years, other than in the case of seminal, pioneering or long-standing texts.

Review of Well-being Literature: Complexities of Defining Well-being

The World Health Organisation – (WHO) (2020: 1) uses well-being to define health: "…a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity," and the Oxford English dictionary defines well-being as "…the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous; physical, psychological, or moral welfare" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005, p. 1179). With this definition comes the complexity of how one can quantify or detail the broad concepts of psychological or moral welfare, and happiness. This is a thread that runs through the literature of teacher well-being; there is not one unified way to define and measure well-being, therefore it is difficult to compare teacher well-being studies as procedures differ so greatly across the literature (Bricheno et al., 2009; Hascher and Waber, 2021; McCallum and Price, 2016).

Accompanying a societal shift towards an understanding of job-related stress came the examination of well-being; studies scrutinising teacher well-being specifically have grown in number over the past two decades (Bricheno et al., 2009; Cumming, 2017; Hascher and Waber, 2021), and within educational policy there has been an increased focus on mental health in the workplace (Department For Education) (DFE) (2021); (OFSTED) (2019), which has added to the discussion about the welfare and emotional comfort of teachers. In their review of teacher well-being research (dating between 2000 and 2019), Hascher and Waber (2021) discuss the complexity of the theoretical understanding of well-being due to the lack of a clear definition. They observe that studies ranged from examining well-being through job-demands contextual models, socio-psychological models, to mental health models. The lack of a central, agreed measurement system for well-being means that studies are rarely comparable and lack transferability. Despite this, they present a helpful critique of using a deficit model of measurement for well-being, and the dismissal of using low stress levels as an indicator of high well-being; which is agreed by Bricheno et al. (2009) and Cumming (2017). Hascher and Waber (2021) allude to a lack of research into the correlation between the *causes* of stress and their *impact* on well-being, indicating that although low stress is not an accurate indicator of high well-being, low well-being can be an indicator of burnout. Within my inquiry I felt that the correlation between well-being levels and stress and burnout needed to be carefully examined from the perspective of teachers.

From Hascher and Waber's (2021) recommendations for future practice I selected two key elements to inform my research: firstly, to clearly outline the definition and model of well-being, using a consistent data collection and analysis method linked to said model, thus providing a more accurate set of data, improving the transferability and trustworthiness of the research (Shenton, 2004). Secondly, avoiding the oversimplification that well-being is merely the absence of stress or burnout, ensuring that I worked with practitioners to identify the predictors, indicators and outcomes of *both* stress and well-being, informing the alignment of influencing factors with interventions put into place to support these.

Review of Well-being Literature: Teacher Well-being

Cowley (2019) highlights the need for teacher well-being to be broadly and robustly embedded into school culture rather than as a tokenistic gesture which may become side-lined or forgotten about over time. Well-being approaches need to be considerately planned as to not add to teacher stress, workload or at the detriment of time. Multiple studies found significant evidence that supportive relationships in school, either with senior leaders or with other teachers, have a distinctly positive impact on well-being; the themes of teacher autonomy, trust, communication and community were prevalent (Bricheno et al., 2009; Cumming, 2017; Gourd and Luke, 2018; Hascher and Waber, 2021). This fostering of a supportive working environment emerges as a key indicator of well-being for teachers (Cumming, 2017; Gourd and Luke, 2018) and appears as a thread within the teacher well-being literature. Cumming (2017) also suggests that job-satisfaction should be used as one of the measures of teacher well-being as certain studies demonstrate a correlation between practitioner satisfaction and the well-being of children, a point that seems obvious, but is not always referred to in the literature. Teacher well-being and the development of a safe and nurturing environment is pivotal to the well-being of children who may enter classrooms with multi-layered complexities within their personal lives (Gourd and Luke, 2018). Cowley (2019: 40) succinctly states "…we must never lose sight of the fact that the wellbeing of children and staff are closely and inseparably related." Within the parameters of this study, I am unable to robustly investigate the link between children's and teacher's well-being, however it is key for future practice to ask *how* teachers are going to be able to support children if their own well-being is low.

Within the literature is the discussion around well-being intervention within schools and how effective these are. Kidger et al. (2021) conducted a well-being baseline of U.K. based secondary school teachers and then arranged a training program grounded within mental health support. They reported no significant impact on well-being or stress levels from the teachers who participated. The limitations to their approach were useful in informing my data collection and analysis methods. Firstly, a mental health approach was used for the intervention alongside a baseline and measure from a mixture of

psychological and health backgrounds. Given the complexity of teacher well-being as discussed by Hascher and Waber (2021), a more definitive and consistent approach may have given a clearer indication of the impact of the intervention. Secondly, my concern was whether a 'one-size-fits-all' training program takes into account the complexity of teacher well-being and the multitude of factors that influence it. It raised questions for me about what types of interventions teachers feel are effective for well-being, the readiness and availability of these in English schools, and whether teachers think that a more personalised approach to well-being would be more effective than a large-scale training program. Zarate et al. (2019) found mixed results when they studied the impact of mindfulness interventions on the stress and well-being levels of teachers. In their analysis they found evidence to suggest that mindfulness training could support staff in identifying and managing the challenging emotions linked to stress and burnout. Alongside this they found a correlation to suggest that mindfulness interventions had a positive impact on well-being in some settings, however, they were unable to identify *which* types of mindfulness interventions were the ones that had a positive impact. There were also limitations due to the potential bias of the materials used and the extraction of responses from participants that were either null or negative - thus creating an inaccurate overview. One point I did agree on was their suggestion that settings need to make practitioners more aware of the indicators of burnout, recognising the symptoms as they escalate may be a way to help avoid a full burnout if the correct support and intervention is provided.

Chiong et al. (2017) suggest that longer serving teachers remain in the profession due to a combination of intrinsic and altruistic motivations, with evidence to suggest that external drivers like pay and holidays have a limited influence on practitioners. In some cases, Chiong et al. (2017) found that extrinsic motivation, for example a salary rise, could counteract high-stress-low-job-satisfaction but generally it was the love of the job, mastery of a subject, and the quality of leadership alongside school culture that had the greatest impact. Influencing factors differed depending on the number of years teachers had been in the profession. This theme of teacher's professional identity and motivations changing over time is another commonality within the teacher well-being literature (Bricheno et al., 2009; Chiong et al., 2017). Issues around self-perception and how others perceive us, (culture, race, level of

qualification, years of experience) and the impact that this has on well-being appears alongside the evolution of what inspires and drives teaching professionals at different points in their careers. This is an area that also appears within the teacher burnout literature (Räsänen et al., 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017) but needs more research as other than Cherniss (1995), robust longitudinal studies into this area are limited.

Review of Well-being Literature: Government Response and Policy

The OFSTED paper on *Teacher well-being at work* (OFSTED) (2019), clearly outlines the love that teachers have for the job, the positive impact of relationships with children, and the reward of seeing learners making progress. In addition to this they recognise the disappointment that teachers feel towards the profession that has them feeling significantly over-worked, under-resourced and undervalued. As a response to teacher mental health concerns, the DFE produced reports into reducing workload for teachers (DFE) (2016; 2019). These outline practical strategies to reduce workload in consultation with teachers but are not without their disadvantages. Although predominantly pragmatic, they seem to oversimplify the issues, or provide sweeping general applications for whole-school improvement. To illustrate this point, one suggestion is the *purchasing* of effective and high-quality curriculum schemes, or pre-made resources and textbooks (DFE) (2019). In recognition of the negative impact that a lack of autonomy and control has on well-being (Cumming, 2017; Hascher and Waber, 2021, Maslach and Leiter, 2016), what impact does this suggestion have on teacher independence and creativity? If schools adhere tightly to these recommendations, then the impact on individuals within settings could be quite detrimental. The other issue as noted by Cowley (2019) is the extent to which this information has, or has not, been disseminated into schools and school systems.

Published in May 2021, the *Education Staff Wellbeing Charter,* is a non-compulsory commitment to improving staff well-being within education settings (DFE) (2021), informed by a range of associations including OFSTED, multiple education unions and the Education Support Partnership. The charter

covers nine specifications for the DFE, and three for OFSTED aimed at improving well-being and lowering stress within English schools. It then outlines eleven organisational commitments that schools should embed into daily practice. The charter shows that the positive impact of well-being strategy is being considered by policy makers. Unfortunately, at the risk of sounding cynical, within a climate that already sees most school leaders over stretched, embedding the charter would create a lot of additional work, and relies on leaders who are really committed to improving well-being. As far as I am aware the DFE are not offering any compensation for time, or incentive for schools to sign up to this charter.

The teacher well-being literature points to a range of influencing factors including career stage, personal and professional identity, working environment and social communities within the workplace (Bricheno et al., 2009; Cumming, 2017; Hascher and Waber, 2021; Kidger et al., 2021), and there are commitments within the Government well-being charter that reflect the findings from empirical research. These include, better communication, teacher's ownership of their well-being, heightened organisational presence, flexible working conditions, and support for professional development. Government reports show that policy makers are aware of teacher welfare issues, but proposed solutions appear to be tokenistic, and overlook the personal nature of teaching. There is much progress to be made towards embedding sustainable, practical well-being strategies into the current education system.

Review of Burnout Literature: The Burnout Phenomenon and its Measures

Unlike well-being, burnout and its outcomes are well defined. The psychologist Herbert Freudenberger studied the phenomenon of career related stress and professional fatigue, and published pioneering work studying 'burnout'. His research focused on what he referred to as 'the alternative institutions' which primarily focused on those who worked within voluntary clinical, or therapeutic settings. Freudenberger (1975) documented a complex balance of influences at work for individuals within these

caring professions. He defines this as a three-fold pressure of; enduring societal issues, meeting the needs of individuals who seek assistance, and the struggle of one's own personality and identity. This 'tri-factor' of influences impacting on the caring professions is one that has lasted within the burnout literature, used by and built upon in longitudinal studies by researchers like Maslach and Leiter (2016) and Cherniss (1995). In his early work, Freudenberger (1975) refers to the dedication and hopeful expectations of these carers and the psychological consequences that happen when their professional ideology and reality are mismatched. This is a repeating theme within teacher burnout literature and his work laid the foundation for research into burnout that led to more modern and contextually appropriate explorations into its causes and impacts. Freudenberger's work, although not recent enough to provide a model for this study, certainly contributes towards the theoretical lens of 'principles' versus 'practicalities' through which I can analyse both literature and data collected. His work is significant as he sought to study burnout with the aim of providing sufferers with ways to alleviate their symptoms and create a more manageable, sustainable outlook, and this optimism is mirrored within my research.

One of the key figures within modern burnout literature is Christina Maslach, a protégé of Freudenberger, who built on his work and studied burnout within the wider 'caring' professions, teachers, nurses, lawyers. She determined the definitions of the three elements of burnout; exhaustion, cynicism and reduced self-efficacy (Maslach and Jackson, 1981), terms that have been refined over decades, and are recognised by the WHO (2019). Maslach's work underpins this study due to its relevance and durability, her research has transcended the changing historical, political, and social contexts which have been the backdrop to the 'caring professions'. In more recent work, Maslach and Leiter (2016) framed burnout and the stressors linked with work within the *Areas of Work Life Model (AWL).* This defines six key areas of potential job-person imbalance; *workload, control, reward, community, fairness, values,* which can be used as a measure of burnout. These six areas are reoccurring themes within burnout literature, and are also distinctly prevalent in the teacher well-being literature (Bricheno et al., 2009; Cumming, 2017; Hascher and Waber, 2021; Kidger et al., 2021; Mack et al., 2019; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Towers and Maguire, 2017). The relevance of this model and its

validation by other short term and longitudinal studies provides a theoretical lens through which I have collected and analysed literature and data.

There are other significant burnout models which I have chosen not to use within this study. Hobfoll (1989) created the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), which explores how individuals respond to stressors and the potential threat to their ability to cope, defined as 'resources'. The burnout literature that denotes individual characteristics and the likelihood of burnout refers to the depletion of resources inhibiting a practitioner's ability to do their job. (Parrello et al., 2019; Maslach, 2017; and Kariou et al., 2021). For the purpose of this study, which is to find workable solutions that can be applied in educational settings, I needed to reach further than the COR model in order to understand the *correlation* between stressors and responses, and how practitioners overcome these. Another important stress measurement theory is that of Bakker and Demerouti (2007; 2017) and their Job Demands Resources model (JD-R). Theirs is a comparative model used to measure the physical and mental effort required within a role (job demands) against the processes available to manage the demands of the job (job resources), either enabling or disabling functionality, and personal or professional growth. Bakker and Demerouti (2007; 2017) adapted their model to become a predictor of both negative and positive outcomes, 'burnout' against 'job engagement'. The JD-R model is an important measure in terms of its critical status within burnout literature. The flexible nature of this model allows for easy application and understanding of demands versus resources, however the causality between these is undefined. Neither the COR or the JD-R models gave me the robustness of the AWL model in terms of measuring the impact of stress, burnout and well-being upon teachers and how these can be managed in a workable and pragmatic way.

Review of Burnout Literature: Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout literature falls into two categories: firstly, the causes of burnout due to contextual, environmental, and policy influences. Then secondly, from an individual perspective, focusing on personal responses to stressors, stress management, and coping strategies used to prevent burnout. Arguably, both perspectives are important, however a huge body of the burnout literature argues that individual resilience and stress management alone are not solutions to burnout. Much of the literature explores the contextual and environmental challenges faced by teachers and suggests that improvements to these, rather than personal stress management tactics could hold the key to teacher well-being (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Mack et al., 2019; Madigan and Kim, 2021; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017).

Self-efficacy, stress management, and resilience are key themes within the burnout theories that centre around individual stress responses (Ainsworth and Oldfield, 2019; Kariou et al., 2021; Saloviita and Pakarinen, 2021; Zee and Koomen, 2016). Unpicking burnout through the lens of emotional labour, Kariou et al. (2021) examine the intense daily circumstances that teachers face, and the impact these have on their ability to cope within the profession. They use COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as a model to explain how daily challenges (workload, difficult working conditions, challenging behaviour) cause teachers to 'surface act', presenting an outward emotional response mismatched to their true feelings. If this is maintained for a prolonged amount of time, Kariou et al. (2021) suggest it can lead to burnout. This is a useful perspective to understand the correlation between emotional response and burnout but doesn't give a detailed enough indication of which factors of teaching most influenced burnout and how these could be effectively managed. Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) found significant evidence to demonstrate that strategies which solely target an individual's capacity to manage stress, without considering detrimental environmental factors, were unlikely to succeed. They suggested that contextual factors such as leadership strategy and school environment had a greater impact on well-being, stress and likelihood of burnout. They raised tangible arguments that highlight the importance of emotional resilience and adaptation to stressors, however found that unless this is done alongside

purposeful intervention to improve working conditions, it is not enough to avoid burnout. Similarly, Leiter (2021) proposes that the causes of burnout lie at an institutional rather than an individual level, with too much societal emphasis being placed on trying to 'fix' a stressed-out employee. He suggests that managerial and environmental changes to support professionals will have a sustainable impact when combined with work-life balance and self-motivated hobbies and interests away from the workplace.

In their meta-analysis, Madigan and Kim (2021) provide a review of teacher burnout literature with the intention of proposing the potential causes of teacher attrition. They found a correlation between high burnout and intent to leave, proposing that burnout was a more significant indicator of teacher attrition than other factors such as low job satisfaction. Significantly, teachers who experience stress and burnout are more likely to leave the profession now, than research had indicated in past decades. Madigan and Kim (2021) use the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) to frame their study. They suggest that high-demand-low-resource teaching experiences leads to burnout and impacts negatively on teacher attrition. Their conclusions were that greater job satisfaction may lead to teacher retention but this alone was not enough to avoid burnout. They outline that the key to avoiding teacher attrition is to examine the causes of burnout and seek to avoid it. Although this is an important study in terms of understanding causes of burnout for teachers, I found its implications for practice were minimal. Madigan and Kim (2021) provide some initial ideas of *what* could be done to minimise burnout, for example - 'reducing workload', but give a limited depiction of how this could be done practically within schools.

Towers and Maguire's (2017) investigation into the experiences of inner-city London teachers and their intentions to leave was of great relevance, and the reflections of the professionals they worked with have parallels with my own experiences. They explore the professional and personal identity of teachers in relation to burnout and intent to leave the profession. They depict the negative impact of heightened accountability and mis-matched ideology causing a crisis of identity for teachers, which echoes key themes from burnout researchers like Freudenberger (1975) and Maslach (2017). Their work focuses on more experienced teachers, a key element that I explored further within my study, as

the retention crisis is impacting on longer serving teachers in addition to early career teachers (NEU, 2022; Räsänen et al., 2020). Towers and Maguire's (2017) study has parallels with Perryman and Calvert's' (2020) research into why teachers leave the profession. This includes details as to *why* participants became teachers and how this *actually* compared to the reality of the role. Again, the theme of the principles of teachers being clouded by the practicalities and realities of the job became apparent. The views that Perryman and Calvert (2020) collected from teachers cited the same repeating reasons for leaving the profession, workload, feeling undervalued, lack of trust, and a lack of support from senior leaders. This discussion links back to Maslach and Leiter's (2016) AWL model, specifically the *workload, reward, fairness, and values* elements. They also noted the negative impact of policy changes over recent years including increased accountability and performability, concluding that the undeniable outcome of these is a lack of professional trust which has a resoundingly negative impact on teacher's well-being. Towers and Maguire (2017) and Perryman and Calvert (2020) reaffirm the importance of correlating the link between the expectations of teaching compared to the reality, and the impact of this on well-being and stress.

Mack et al. (2019) explore teachers' intent to leave from an occupational health perspective, across a broad and well-represented sample size. As with Towers and Maguire (2017) and Perryman and Calvert (2020), they found that organisational factors had the highest influences on both the levels of stress felt by teachers, and their intentions to leave. They noted a worrying lack of recent research into the impact of teacher's mental health citing the parallels between theirs and prior research which illustrate that teachers with higher levels of stress and poor mental health are much more likely to leave the profession. From their analysis, they suggest that organisational changes such as reduction in class sizes, increased teacher autonomy and greater support for inclusion would reduce stress over time and have the greatest impact on teacher's decisions to remain in the profession. Within the current educational climate in England these are not entirely simple or practically applicable strategies, however, this study highlights the importance of gathering detailed information from teaching professionals about what directly impacts their daily well-being and stress levels, in order to match intervention and strategies that are sustainable and pragmatic. Räsänen et al. (2020) and Beltman et

al. (2020) also found that organisational culture, workload, and lack of professional support were predominant reasons for teacher attrition. As non-UK based studies, these findings are not directly transferable, but they do provide a sound backdrop of the experiences of practitioners who undeniably face the same type of pressures within a restrictive system.

Review of Burnout Literature: Government Response and Policy

In 2018, the DFE launched a qualitative study into teacher retention (DFE) (2019), interviewing a sample of former teachers. The study found the predominant reasons for leaving the profession were workload, lack of autonomy, lack of support from leaders, and poor working-conditions, alongside other influences such as; performance related targets and behaviour management. As echoed within the burnout literature, the report illuminates the ideology teachers had upon entering the profession, but that sadly the practicalities of the role fell significantly short (Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017). Interestingly, the '*teacher recruitment and retention in England'* report by Long and Danechi (2021) states that teacher recruitment figures have risen recently and are above target for the first time since 2012, however this is not enough to counteract professionals leaving and the shortage of teachers in the UK. The report outlines the many strategies that the Government are proposing to recruit new teachers but details very little that could be done to support those already within the profession. They cite multiple 'workload reduction initiatives' that the Government have put into place since 2016 and present data that claims that teachers were spending on average four hours less time working each week in 2019 than they were in 2016. Interestingly, the NEU (2021) response to this was that the data was skewed as it included part-time teachers, when accurately measured teachers were still working on average fifty+ hours a week, and there had been no significant change in the type of workload, for example planning, marking and assessments. This is also reinforced by the OFSTED well-being report (OFSTED) (2019) which states that teachers work *on average* fifty-one hours per week, with this increasing to fifty-seven hours per week for those in leadership.

In their report into Work-Related Stress, Depression and Anxiety, the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) (2021) noted that teachers and educational professionals had statistically significantly higher rates of work-related stress, depression or anxiety compared to the rate for other occupations, recognising the welfare of teachers within statistical data. In their *Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy,* the DFE (2019) detail key areas that they will be developing to address both recruitment and retention of teachers. This is a positive step but sadly in the most recent NEU poll (NEU) (2022), 52% of teachers surveyed found their workload unmanageable and 44% intend to leave the profession by 2027. These reports demonstrate that the Government is acknowledging the problem of teacher attrition, however many of the 'solutions' proposed are weighted more towards initiatives to recruit more teachers rather than cemented policy guidance on how to truly support those currently within the profession. This reinforces the observations from multiple burnout studies that the profession is losing more of its longer serving and experienced practitioners (Madigan and Kim, 2021; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017). It is worrying that the Government numbers and statistics do not match those of the NEU and Teaching Well-being Index, and as the 2021 public sector pay freeze demonstrates, teachers may not be able to rely upon the on-going support of the Government.

The burnout literature (Beltman et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2019; Towers and Maguire, 2017) denotes the 'top-down' approach to policy making and system level decisions that have negatively impacted on workload and practitioner well-being. Within this is the accountability and pressure that schools face through the scrutiny of Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) and OFSTED. In their report into well-being, (OFSTED) (2019) state that inspections are a source of stress for teachers but attribute this to mis-management by senior leadership teams. They highlight their dedication to the well-being of teachers, outlining strategies such as the use of 'well-being questionnaires' during inspections but define no clear strategy for the outcome of these and what impact they will have on future inspections. Unfortunately, it seems that policy put into place at the highest level to support teachers, is not effectively filtering down the system and positively impacting on daily practice and well-being.

4. This Study

The teacher burnout and well-being literature provides a comprehensive insight into the causes of stress and burnout, the difficulty of measuring and conceptualising well-being, and illustrates the current challenges faced by those within the teaching profession. Much of the literature suggests that environmental and organisation level factors, influenced by national policy, remain the fundamental causes of burnout (Beltman et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2019; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Räsänen et al., 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017). Well-being strategies and policies have a long way to go before they begin to have a tangibly positive impact on teachers (Chiong et al., 2017; Cumming, 2017; Hascher and Waber, 2021).

I have investigated what causes teaching practitioners the most stress, alongside what positively and negatively impacts their well-being. From this I can begin to answer the questions of:

- What are the fundamental reasons behind experienced practitioners burning out or leaving the teaching profession?
- Principles vs practicalities- is it possible to achieve work-life balance as a teacher and still thrive within the profession?
- What are the pragmatic and sustainable strategies that can be utilised by practitioners and implemented in settings in order to maintain well-being and to retain staff?

5. Research Design and Methodology

Research Design: Paradigm and Methodology

There is a deeply personal aspect to my research, having suffered my own career altering burnout in 2020, I wished to understand the phenomenon further, with an active interest in supporting those within the teaching community. It was crucial that I designed the project with a transparency of my own positionality and within a clear context in order to raise the trustworthiness and transferability of the study (File, 2016; Shenton, 2004). Theory into qualitative research suggests that rather than being a limitation to a project, researcher positionality and the motivation behind conducting a study, alongside reflexive practices, are integral to understanding how we interpret data and reach conclusions (File at al., 2016; and Mustafa, 2019; Reich, 2021). My bearing is one of believing in social justice and the right for every child to receive a purposeful and enlightened education. I firmly believe in developmentally appropriate practices and would generally question 'one-size-fits-all' large scale teaching strategies or approaches. In my career I have witnessed the autonomy of teachers being steadily side-lined to make way for large scale 'whole-school' approaches, and academisation teamed with rigidity of strategy and agenda regardless of school context. Finally, I deeply disagree with the commoditisation of children and believe that some of the responsibility of the heightened accountability of teachers is linked with this model and the 'league-table' comparisons within the U.K education system. My professional experiences indicate that one's values upon entering the teaching profession may not always be mirrored in the practicalities of the job and this is certainly a recurring theme within the burnout literature (Maslach and Leiter, 2016; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017).

Braun and Clark (2018) and Reich (2021) both argue that it is our positionality as researchers that brings a richness of interpretation and a closeness to both the participants within the study and the area being studied. This was my central focus when I designed this project within an interpretivist phenomenological paradigm. Given my closeness to the subject I chose phenomenology as it bridges the crucial link between an individual's experiences of a phenomenon, in this case 'burnout', and the

influences that this has on their interpretations, actions and feelings (Mohajan, 2018). Mohajan (2018) defines phenomenology as the interpretation of the lived experiences of the participants involved, with the aim that it may produce a deeper understanding or insight into how individuals make sense of their experiences. The phenomenon of 'burnout' is to be central, but more specifically, the impact it has and how it can be prevented are the foci. This methodology will allow me to gain deep contextual and authentic information about the subject, whilst also enabling me to explore future implications on practice.

There are advantages and disadvantages to using phenomenology. It provides a solid foundation to study the individual and collective experiences of a specific group of practitioners, and with careful and considered interpretation, may reveal clues as to how we can understand burnout and its causes at a deeper level. Conkbayir and Pascal (2014) highlight the importance of the researcher as an interpreter of the information that they seek, avoiding trying to generalise findings, instead using robust methods with the intent of further understanding a subject or phenomena. Shenton (2004) builds on previous constructs (Guba, 1981; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) suggesting strategies to maximise the 'credibility' of research. He suggests that a pre-existing relationship or rapport with the participants of the study will increase the level of trust and is likely to produce more honest data. This is true within my study as the participants are all known to me through either personal or professional capacity. Shenton (2004) further suggests the employment of strategies to ensure the honesty of responses from participants and I have done this through stating my intent by way of letter of invitation to participants, a robust ethics statement, and outlining the right to withdraw at any stage. This hopefully reassured participants, ensuring a transparency and integrity of response. The anonymity of participants can also lead to greater honesty of answers (Kara, 2019), and responses to the questionnaire will be anonymous unless participants wish to be further involved. A negative aspect of this type of research is the low level of transferability (Shenton, 2004), so to ensure accuracy, I have triangulation and member checking approaches in place, which involves a multi-sourced approach to data collection and analysis which I will detail further below. I am aware that the sample size used within this type of small-scale study creates a limit to transferability, however, the themes and commonalities within the shared experiences

of the practitioners within the sample will have applicability. A final point to note, when working within a phenomenological methodology is the importance of keeping the study focused and systematic, with clear dimensions avoiding it becoming too unmanageable or broad (Robson, 2016). With this in mind, I intend to stick tightly to my research question and desired outcomes outlining the most relevant and useful data.

Research Design: Data Collection

To gain a multitude of perspectives into the complexities of burnout, I gathered experiences from practitioners in the field of teaching, enabling as many participants as were willing, to share their views and experiences. I began with an online questionnaire, with an advantage of this method being that a large proportion of information can be gathered from a range of participants in a relatively orderly and fast fashion (Bell and Waters, 2018; Kara, 2019). As suggested by Bell and Waters (2018) and Kara (2019), the questionnaire needed to be piloted in order to confirm the appropriateness and consistency of the questions for all participants. Four participants who were not part of the final study piloted the questions and I made adaptations according to their suggestions, including making definitions clearer, removing repetitive questions and re-wording to ensure that the questions asked what I intended them to. Robson (2016) suggests that data obtained will be invalid unless contextually appropriate and unambiguous questions are used. The piloting of the questions raised their reliability, and I went on to check the questions using Shenton (2004) as a basis, ensuring the use of a range of question types including, open questions, frequent opportunities for discussion, and rating using the Likert scale, with opportunities to elaborate if needed. Rugg and Petre (2007) suggest that allowing participants to write freely increases the validity of the responses obtained and encourages an openness of expression, so I made sure that this was frequently an option. (See figure I)

Section	Overview	Theoretical basis
Section one: Introduction & Ethical Statement.	Ethical statement depicting overview of study and what participant involvement will look like. Included right to withdraw, anonymity and storage of data guidelines. Reassured participants about lack of detriment regarding information supplied and withdrawal.	(EECERA) Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers- Bertram et al. (2016) Gorman (2007)
Section two: Teaching	Includes number of years teaching, year group, geographical area, additional responsibility and reasons they chose the teaching profession. Section based on the evidence that the ideology of those entering teaching may be mismatched with the day-to-day reality.	Freudenberger (1975) Maslach (2017) Perryman & Calvert (2020) Towers and Maguire (2017)
Section three: Stress & Burnout	Section uses questions which are a range of ranked, (five-point Likert scale), yes or no, and longer written answers. Here I ask participants to explore the frequency and causes of stress and the impact of this on both their professional and personal lives. I also ask participants to elaborate on experiences of burnout and how they were able to manage it.	Maslach (2017) Maslach & Leiter (2016) Rugg & Petre (2007)
Section four: Areas of Work Life	3 well-being questions linked to AWL, then centred around the 6 areas of workload, control, reward, community, fairness, values. Participants rate their experiences (5-point Likert scale) and then elaborate with a written response.	Maslach & Leiter (2016) AWL model
Section five: Well-being	Section asks practitioners to share their experiences (both positive and negative) of well-being strategies and enquires as to what actually works across three areas: strategies used by employers; maintaining well-being whilst at work; and maintaining well-being outside of work.	Cherniss (1995) Cowley (2019) Hascher & Waber (2021)
Section six: Other Information	Section provides participants with the opportunity to add anything else that they wish to, and provide contact details if they wish to be further involved in the study through focus group participation. This was an opportunity to ask about the impact of Covid-19- arguably a very influential topic in regards to stress but not one that I wanted to centre my project around.	Robson (2016) Rugg & Petre (2007) Shenton (2004)

Figure (I) Questionnaire design

I acknowledged the limitations of the richness of data produced by a questionnaire and addressed this by using a multi-method approach, with a second data collection process in the form of focus groups based upon the themes arising from the questionnaire data, and for member checking. My aim was that the initial questionnaire was directed at obtaining first hand experiences and reflections from current, or past, teaching professionals about the phenomena of burnout. I then thematically analysed this information, coding responses, constructing and reviewing themes from the data set, alongside the examination of patterns linked to research from my literature review (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2018;

Clarke, 2017). The information produced from the thematic review was used to inform the topic and discussion within the focus groups. Sixteen participants gave their consent to be further included in the study after the questionnaire. In addition to this, I completed a member checking exercise with Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) participants where I shared a small section of my data and discussed the key points that I felt it had raised, my interpretation thus far was agreed on. In accordance with my multi-method approach I then held three sets of focus group discussions involving a total of eight of the original participants. I emailed the points for discussion to them in advance so that they would have time to prepare their thoughts and responses, and as per Shenton's (2004) suggestions for raising trustworthiness, I also fact-checked with participants to ensure that their meaning and experiences are accurately re-counted by my interpretations. All participants of focus groups received copies of transcripts to read and check

interpretation.

My data collection stages overlapped each other with the intention of increasing the trustworthiness of my research by using four different methods (see figure II- research timetable).

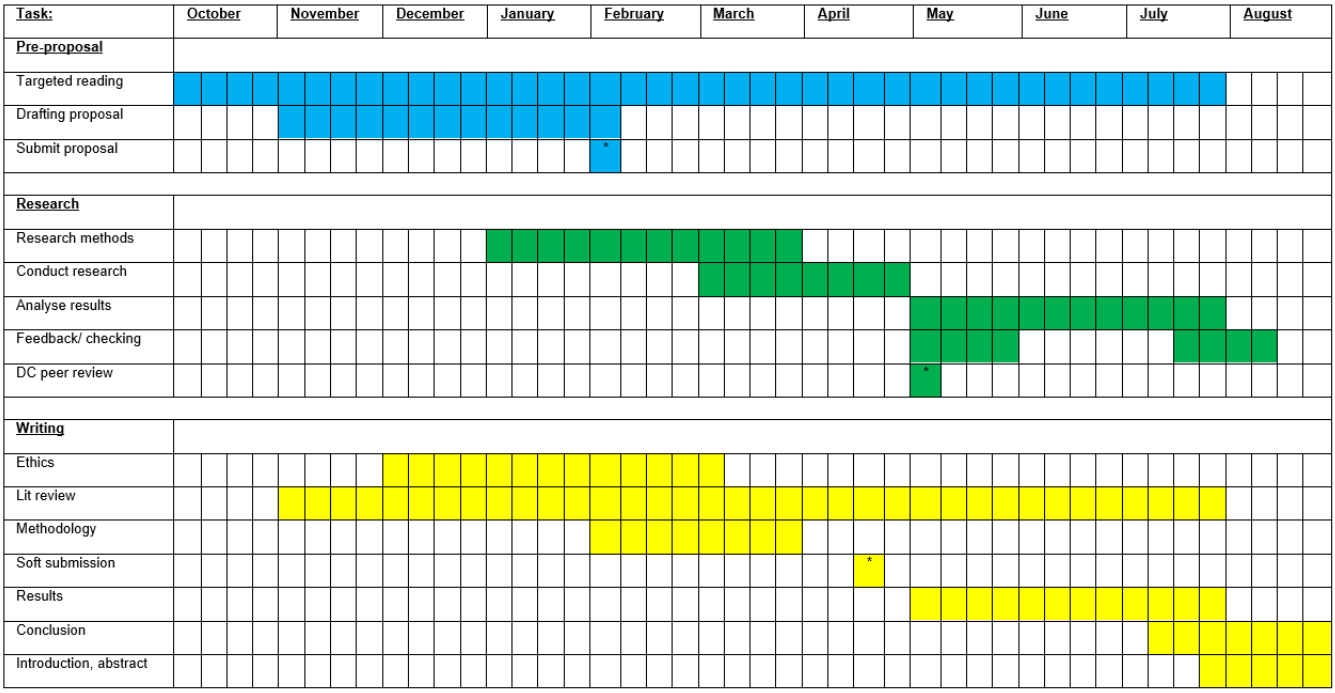


Figure (II) Research timetable

As defined by Flick (2009), triangulation can occur when multiple approaches are used and complement each other, thus creating a richer more reliable set of data. I utilised the following strategies: Firstly, combining two different data collection methods, a questionnaire and focus groups, which were completed at different points within the research timetable. Supported further by my professional journal, a useful methodological tool, with all points of the research process recorded and reflected on within this, enabling the scrutiny of the project over time, revealing any potential bias and acting as a record of conversations and adaptations. Finally, theoretical triangulation; the documentary analysis I have conducted including podcasts, reports (Government and independent) media articles, academic journals and books.

Research Design: Sample

Robson (2016) raises the issue that a generic, disengaged or disinterested sample will not provide deep, rich or reliable data, also, that a chosen sample in the wrong context may produce information that is not necessarily generalisable, and in which case may negatively impact on the trustworthiness of the data set. On this basis, I decided that contributing practitioners needed to be qualified teachers who were either actively working within the field of education or those who have left the teaching profession for reasons other than retirement. These professionals were already known to me; friends, current and past colleagues, and CREC students. With the aim of raising the transferability of the data (Denscombe 2017), I chose to focus solely on qualified teachers, and not others who work in education such as teaching assistants or head teachers. As the national statistics point towards a ‘teaching crisis’ and the basis of my experience and understanding lies within teaching, I felt that the control of the study was greater with a focus exclusively on teachers. I included middle and senior leaders on the grounds that they still have or had weekly teaching responsibility. One of the advantages of using an online questionnaire is that I was able to involve participants from a diverse range of education settings across a range of Local Authorities; this added to the richness of the data collected.

Research Design: Ethical Considerations and Care

Given the highly sensitive nature of the information I am asking participants to share, I wanted to ensure that the ethical procedures of this project were sound, therefore I used multiple sources to inform these considerations. The broader ethical guidelines of my study have been formulated based on information from the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) Ethical Code for Early Childhood Researchers by Bertram et al. (2016). Alongside this I have utilised the 4 pillars of ethical research as presented by Gorman (2007) which are autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. Figure (III) demonstrates how I have adhered to each of these four principles throughout the project.

Gorman's principle:	**How I addressed this ethical consideration:**
Autonomy	Letter detailing intentions of project; Ethical statement; Consent letter; Right to withdraw and anonymity; Focus groups and member checking; copies of transcripts to participants; copies of final study to participants.
Beneficence	Outlined in Letter detailing intentions of project; consultation within focus groups.
Non-maleficence	Right to withdraw without detriment; Letter detailing intentions of project; Offer of additional support (e.g. charity) if needed.
Justice	Ethical statement; Consent letter; Sharing of project aims and outcomes with participants.

Figure (III) Ethical considerations

Bell and Waters (2018) refer to researchers needing to abide by the guidelines provided by an institutional or organisational ethical committee. In this case, I had my research proposal and ethical considerations approved by the Birmingham City University Faculty Academic Ethics Committee prior to engaging in any data collection (appendix 1). When being asked to provide informed consent, participants should have time to process what it is they are being asked to do and make an informed decision based upon this (Bell and Waters, 2018). In adherence to this, and Gorman's (2007) principle of participant autonomy, I wrote a covering letter to all practitioners involved in the study (appendix 2). This outlined the project and its intentions and gave participants a detailed account of their involvement. This provided the opportunity to consider their role and the impact of the research, before agreeing to

participate. Participants were then requested to give written consent to take part, with a clear outline stating how their contribution would be used and the right to withdraw, without consequences or detriment at any point. As the data collection relies on the individual views and experiences from friends who are teachers, former colleagues and professionals from the CREC community, I was not required to gain consent from settings, although impact of setting policies and context will of course be a consideration within the data. I had an awareness of the pressure to participate that my friends may have felt due to the nature of our relationship and not wanting to let me down. I attempted to reduce this by making it explicit that there was no obligation to be involved with the study and that their decision would not have an impact on the research. In accordance with Gorman's (2007) detailing about beneficence and non-maleficence I made the outcomes of the research clear to participants - this is an information gathering exercise with an optimistic outcome which hopes to enhance the future lives of those involved in the study and beyond. A positive to consider here is, due to the casual nature of my current supply working practices, I am not asking anyone to participate who is a member of a team that I lead, therefore eliminating the element of any professional or power struggle within the work place (Bertram et al. 2016).

The sensitive and emotional components of this type of research needed careful ethical consideration. To ensure non-maleficence (Gorman, 2007), I presented questions relating to stress and burnout carefully so that participants could choose the level of information they shared. With the awareness that the data collection may induce the reliving of painful experiences, I had organisations to hand to offer further support to practitioners if needed (MIND, The Mental Health Foundation, and the Education Support team). An important factor was to avoid adding to the stress or workload of any of the participants; this would have been counterproductive given the focus of my study and would raise ethical concerns. As per my research timetable (figure II), and with the aim of obtaining the highest quality information, I sent the questionnaire to participants in April falling in line with the Easter holidays, and conducted focus groups in the summer holidays, therefore giving participants the time and mental space to give their full attention, whilst avoiding the pressure of term time. Finally, as per Birmingham City University (BCU) guidelines, participant's identities, settings and any other revealing or personal

information was anonymised and all data collected (which is predominantly electronic) is stored on a password protected hard drive for the maximum period of 2 years. I limited the use of hardcopies, and reassured participants that their data would only be shared amongst them as a community, with my CREC tutor and other CREC or BCU staff in accordance with university policy.

6: The Investigation

My original research question was; '*What strategies **do experienced teachers use** to maintain well-being within their role that prevents them leaving the profession as a result of stress and subsequent burn-out?'* From the reading that I conducted within the literature review, and the discovery that predominantly contextual and environment factors influenced stress and well-being, I felt that the question was weighted too heavily on placing the responsibility on teachers. I adapted the question mid-project to; '***What strategies can be utilised** to maintain the well-being of teachers to prevent them leaving the profession as a result of stress and subsequent burn-out?'* Thus, taking the emphasis away from the teachers themselves, and broadening the scope of the project. Sub-questions and methodology remained unchanged.

From the questionnaires, I obtained twenty-two detailed responses, sixteen from practitioners currently teaching, and six from those who had left teaching to pursue other personal or professional avenues. The range of responses reached across eight different English educational authorities, plus one participant who now teaches in Ireland. The participants who are currently teachers ranged in years of experience from two to thirty years, and of those who had left teaching all bar one participant had been working between ten and fourteen years. All the participants who had left teaching had some form of additional responsibility, and in the active group of teachers, eleven of the sixteen had some form of additional responsibility. (See appendix 3 for this data).

The questionnaires provided a broad and detailed range of data which I analysed using three methods. Firstly, the numerical data covering percentages in relation to stress and burnout were initially analysed and presented in tabular form. Next, thematic analysis according to the structures set out by Braun and Clark (2006). Finally, semantic analysis for questions where I felt that there were further patterns or links within the language used. When I began the coding and analysis of the questionnaire data, I was using a deductive approach, intending to construct codes and themes according to pre-existing theory

from the well-being and burnout literature, for example, reduced self-efficacy, job-satisfaction. As I reflected on the process it seemed to have become quite repetitive, reductive and I felt unable to see the true picture within the data, I was losing the voice of the participants. Reflecting on phenomenology, and the importance of emergent data analysis (Mohajan, 2018), I paused the process. With further study into thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2018; Clark, 2017), I realised that I had begun to create a domain summary, in effect a simplified overview of the data which limits the depth of analysis. I restarted the analysis process using an inductive approach with the intent to unlock the richness of the data. I reflected upon this in my professional journal:

… this will limit my data analysis … won't unlock the potential of the lived experiences of practitioners – it is too narrow a perspective- I will miss some of the depth and true story of the data. Revisit data, recode according to what is emerging from the data, then revisit and adapt codes…

C. Malcolm- Professional journal 17/06/2022

… actively reading the data that I am able to find some clear patterns/ links that I couldn't see before… altruism, personality and how others perceive teachers and their working practices are clearly significant and impact both W-B and burnout.

C. Malcolm- Professional journal 22/06/2022

As my analysis progressed, I discovered that the depth of the data surpassed the initial codes I had been using and I was able to re-visit and redefine the codes a number of times through active reading, open interpretation and with the intention of capturing the depth of experiences that the participants were sharing. Before, where I had over-simplified codes, such as '*cynicism',* I now had a range of information emerging like, '*fear of failure', 'importance of providing the best', 'over-whelmed by non-teaching responsibilities', 'over accountability', 'unsuccessful hierarchy structures'*. I could feel the voice of the participants coming through from their responses, which was a very moving process given the sensitivity of the subject.

During these cycles of thematic analysis, I kept a record of interesting links or patterns within the data, using this to inform a 'focus group discussion' document. This also served as a record of any queries or points for further development that I wanted or needed to share with participants (for 'focus group discussion' document see appendix 4). An example of this was that I needed participants to define 'teaching'. The question I had asked participants to rate, *'I am happy when I am teaching'* produced a broad range of answers but with many participants stating yes and referring to when they were *'actually teaching'*. I needed to define more clearly what this meant, and what this entailed, in order to increase the accuracy of the data set. This highlighted a limitation of the wording of this question but prompted a sound discussion that was informative. The focus groups also provided an opportunity to further examine the key themes of 'altruism' 'accountability' and 'self-perception' with participants. Eight participants took part in the focus group sessions and answered questions in the form of a discussion, either in person or over zoom. Appendix 5 provides an example of an extract of one of the transcripts with key points outlined. Transcripts, with key points from discussion, were sent to participants for checking and approval. All transcripts have not been included in appendices as although anonymised, I felt that some participants were identifiable through their speech patterns and by specific references within the discussion.

For the purposes of data analysis, I refer to the sixteen participants who are currently teaching as 'active-teachers', and the six participants who have left the profession as 'no-longer teaching'.

7: Results and Discussion:

Results and discussion: Stress and Burnout

All of the participants felt stress as a teacher, this was not unexpected, Figure (IV) shows the frequency that participants felt stress due to teaching. Although not directly comparable, these results are not dissimilar to those of the NEU (2022) who found that two thirds of working teachers felt stressed 60% of the time.

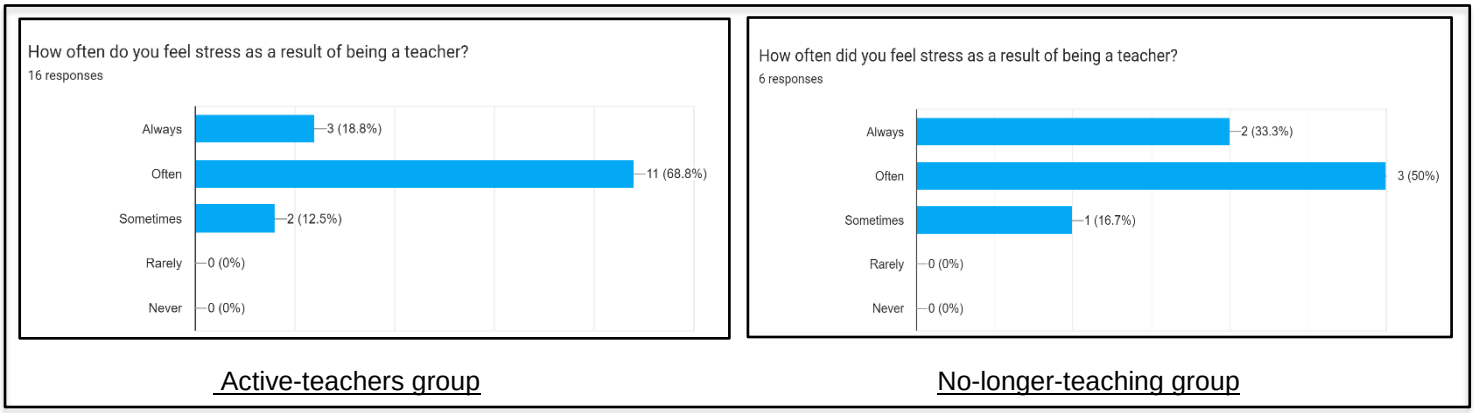


Figure (IV) How often do you feel stress as a result of being a teacher?

87% of the active-teachers group and 88% of the no-longer-teaching group either often or always feel or felt stress as a result of teaching. These figures are the beginning of a worrying set of parallels between the active-teachers and those who have left the profession. In order to create causality participants were asked what caused them the most stress, this was an open answer question, which I then coded, creating eleven different areas. Figure (V) shows the range of factors which caused the most stress for both sets of participants. I have colour coded these according to the frequency by which they were referred to by participants, with red being the most frequent and yellow being the least. Those in the active-teachers group most frequently referred to the areas of workload, accountability, and school culture as the causes of the most stress, which is in line with NEU (2022) retention statistics. This also mirrors findings within the teacher burnout studies (Beltman et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2019; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Räsänen et al., 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017).

Active-teachers

Workload inc paperwork	Accountability	School culture/ context	Pupil Behavior	Lack of trust /appreciation	SLT	Support- SEND	Mis-matched Ideology	OFSTED	Autonomy	Parents
• Workload • The list can sometimes feel endless! • 'Conveyor belt' of lessons/ sessions • lack of capacity/time to do tasks well • Paperwork • Paperwork, too much focus on assessment • Generally, an unrealistic workload for staff and children • The most stress is caused by all of the administrative tasks involved in the job • Pressure of a long list of priorities, that I am unable to get through • The lack of time to achieve the expectations put on us as teachers • Workload • Paperwork and online portals • Unnecessary paperwork • The curriculum • Number of emails	• Constant pressure to meet unreachable targets- • being constantly monitored by senior management • I feel stress when I feel the children are not achieving well enough • I feel the KS2 SATs cause me stress as the school will be evaluated on these results • The expectations put on us as teachers • constant monitoring conducted by SLT, for example; book looks, lesson observations etc... • classroom observations, regular book scrutinies • To be seen to be excellent all the time	• Area with high deprivation factors • Negative working environment • difficult conversations within the school • other adults needing support to do their job • Too many changes, too soon with a lack of clarity • learning new initiatives whilst managing current methods • Constant changes in approach and focus • the 'busyness' of the timetable	• Deal with the extreme behaviours. • managing challenging behaviour • behaviour • student behaviour	• Not appreciated for all the hard work that is put in • distrust by the Gov't and working parties • I don't feel trusted to do my job	• Senior leaders (the wrong style of leaders) • Senior leaders • general negative feedback but no suggestion of where to improve practice	• Complex needs and no help • Lack of additional adults to support children in class	• There is evidence to suggest that children can only give their full attention for one minute per year of their life • the feeling that increasingly what is expected of the youngest children may not be good for ~~their~~ confidence and self-esteem	• OFSTED • pressure of ensuring we are meeting Ofsted's expectation curriculum and outcomes	• Lack of autonomy in the classroom • I find lack of autonomy very stressful	• Parents- feels like there is no cut off

Leavers

Workload inc paperwork	Accountability	Mis-matched Ideology	School context	OFSTED	SLT	Support for SEND	Parents	Autonomy	Lack of trust /appreciation	Pupil Behavior
• Marking undoubtedly took up the most time • Unable to have a work-life balance • Marking	• The overwhelming feeling that whatever I did was not good enough • Management pressures and unrealistic expectations • meeting targets set	• The need to 'put children in boxes' • Being forced to follow a pedagogy /ideology that I could see was not good for some of the children in my care	• The excessive number of meetings • constantly changing methods to present planning and do marking	• Ofsted • Ofsted	• Forced by management who had no professional educational or child care qualification	• The lack of support for SEND pupils	• The pressure from parents			

Figure (V) What creates / created the most stress for teachers

Twenty-one of the twenty-two participants felt that they have suffered from burnout, or burnout symptoms at some point in their career, with some participants suffering the on-going effects of this. Questionnaire responses *described* the interchangeable elements of burnout; exhaustion leading to reduced-self efficacy, reduced self-efficacy leading to cynicism and exhaustion. In reference to Zarate et al. (2019), I questioned practitioners in focus groups about their knowledge of the symptoms of burnout and whether they thought that burnout could have been avoided had it been more widely discussed within settings. Participants were unaware of the three indicators of burnout and all felt that

a greater awareness of the elements of burnout would have helped them understand their experiences at the time. Participants shared that a deeper understanding of burnout within schools was needed, but stated that this needed to be alongside a shift in school culture. Participant F, used the example of having received coaching training which acknowledged the elements of burnout, but described how coping strategies were lost as she and her colleagues fell back into their unmanageable daily workload. Practitioners in the 'no-longer-teaching' group felt that it would have had an impact on them if they had realised that they were heading for burnout. Participant Q stated; "*I think a heads up would be invaluable…I must have had say 20 different people leading me at some stage or another… no one ever ever mentioned it and even when you've gone to them and said I'm struggling, I'm exhausted, I feel like I'm doing a rubbish job, no one at any point has ever said do you think that you're experiencing burnout."* This also suggests that senior leaders would benefit from burnout training in order to be able to identify it happening and understand how to support colleagues.

Of the three areas of burnout, cynicism was the least referred to by participants, exhaustion and reduced self-efficacy featured highly. There were many codes that indicated 'Reduced Self-efficacy' and it is one of the key themes of the data set, which I divided into 'Personal Factors' and 'External Factors', as illustrated by figure (VI). My reasoning for this was although it is an *indicator* of burnout, there were many references within participant responses that signified a culture that *created* reduced self-efficacy. This indicated that 'Reduced Self-efficacy' was not singularly a signifier of burnout. 'Not doing a good enough job' and 'wanting to provide the best' were repeating codes across the data set as a whole, not just within the burnout questions. There was a distinction between when reduced self-efficacy was caused by feelings of burnout, and when practitioners felt reduced self-efficacy due to other reasons, although a limitation here is that I had no accurate way of measuring this. As a result of this further analysis, I created an additional theme of 'Perception of Self as a Teacher'.

Reduced Self-Efficacy		Perception of Self as a Teacher
From Personal Pressure	**From External Pressure Negative impact of environment**	
-Unable to problem solve -Change in attitude -Reduced aptitude -Ineffective practice	-Over-whelmed by non-teaching responsibilities -Situational circumstances adding to stress **-Too much expected** -Predetermined teaching approaches -Undervalued or under supported by leadership -Lack of appreciation leading to demotivation -Negative impact of management decisions -Over accountability -Unsuccessful hierarchy structure -Time wasted on unnecessary work -Box-ticking and/or u**nmanageable workload**	-Not doing enough -Not good enough -Fear of failure -Keeping up appearances -Importance of providing the best -Direct impact on students -Reduced productivity -Lack of focus **-Unable to switch off** -Feeling successful -Making learning more engaging

Figure (VI) Reduced self-efficacy codes

The pressure that the participants put themselves under and the standards that they held themselves to, was a cause of great stress at all times, not just when they had been feeling burnout. Where the 'Reduced Self-efficacy' codes were caused by a range of factors, the perception that participants had of themselves was a distinctly different thread within the written responses. Participant O, from the active-teachers group stated that the greatest cause of her stress is *"…to be seen to be excellent all the time…"* with Participant F saying burnout created *'…the feeling that you are not doing the best for the children..."* In the focus groups, I asked practitioners where these feelings came from and what practitioners felt they were measuring themselves against. For some participants it was the feelings of failure associated with unmanageable workload and never being able to get everything finished. Some also said that the external pressure of OFSTED fed down school hierarchy systems and was placed onto them. The combination of additional workload due to heightened accountability added to stress levels, but also meant time away from the elements of the job that they enjoyed or felt that supported their well-being. The perception of teachers was an interesting discussion and most of the focus group participants felt they were constantly having to prove how effective they were, rather than being trusted to do the job. Participant Q summarises this; *"… it's almost like the default is that you're rubbish and you've got to prove that you're not rather than the default is that you're good… it's a backwards way round isn't it…".* A lack of trust in the profession was highlighted within the burnout literature (Mack et al., 2019; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017) and although it wasn't one of the most frequently

referred to causes of stress for participants, the lack of trust as a result of heightened accountability was often referred to in questionnaire responses and within the focus groups,

Further thematic analysis led to codes which I used to construct three key themes for the data set as a whole. 'Altruism', 'Perception of Self as a Teacher' and 'Ethos versus Accountability'. 'Altruism' was a strong theme, and within the data set I felt that there were two branches of this, 'Self-Sacrifice' being the first and 'Professional Love' being the second. At the beginning of the questionnaire, I asked all participants why they went into the teaching profession - everyone responded with altruistic reasons, 'making a difference' was the most common reason, along with a passion or drive to work with children. This love of working with children was clear within the rest of the data, see figure (VII) for codes.

Altruism		**Ethos vs accountability**
Self-sacrifice	**Professional love**	
-Exhaustion at key times -Unable to cope -Extreme exhaustion -Impact on homelife -Significant detriment to health -Surviving not thriving -Impact on work life balance **-Unable to switch off** -Impact on sleep and eating -Feeling guilty	-Professional love -Enjoyment of job -Job satisfaction -Engagement with children -Progress of learners	-Misaligned ethos -Struggle against non-developmentally appropriate practice **-Too much expected** -Accountability impacting on time management -Lack of SLT awareness/ understanding -Opinions, experience and professionalism undervalued -Commoditisation of children

Figure (VII) Coding leading to predominant themes

The self-sacrifice codes include those of extreme exhaustion and exhaustion at key times. A limitation of the analysis here is that I was unable to measure the level or type of exhaustion. I am unable to fully correlate here whether exhaustion is an indicator of burnout or an indicator of self-sacrifice. For the 'exhaustion at key times' code this was when practitioners had particularly demanding workload or was at set times within the year like the end of term. There is a causality to be explored here, that when discussed within focus groups, teachers agreed that they will exhaust themselves for the children in their care, this includes sacrificing work life balance and taking the mental and physical strain that this causes. However, there is also the reverse of this that teachers feel exhausted due to demanding

workload and high stress levels, this then becomes an indicator of burnout. Alongside this, through discussion with participants, I felt that exhaustion could be used as an example of the self-sacrifice and altruistic nature of teachers, and not singularly as a burnout signifier. Exhaustion needs to be carefully monitored by settings.

Literary exploration into the 'reward' of teaching rarely cites salary or holidays, and Chiong et al. (2017) denoted the intrinsic and altruistic rewards of teaching. To explore this further I asked participants how content they were within their current role and analysed this alongside responses to how happy they were when teaching, see Figure (VIII) for responses.

Figure (VIII) *Happiness* and *contentment* participant responses

Some of the patterns within the data here were not unexpected. When asked if they were happy when they were teaching, 62% of the active-teachers group acknowledged that they were often or always happy, (31% were sometimes happy), with most of the responses in this section being coded under 'job satisfaction' 'interactions with the children' and 'professional love'. The word 'love' and phrases that referred to 'enjoyment' were repeated in practitioner responses and were consistent with the reasons why teachers chose the profession. In their responses, many practitioners referred to the happiness they felt when they were *"actually-teaching"* and I used focus group sessions to clarify what they meant by this. Participants defined 'actual teaching' as purposeful time with the children, and time spent on activities, assessments and resources that benefit the children in their care.

In contrast to the happiness question, were the responses to how content the active-teachers felt with their current working situation. Only 25% felt that they were often or always content, (50% stated they sometimes felt content, and 25% felt this rarely or never). The reasons for this shift compared to the happiness section were much broader and more personal, however school context and leadership were most frequently referred to:

Participant C (sometimes content)- *"I am currently in a school that has a warm, welcoming and supportive Senior Leadership Team who encourage professional conversations and dialogue."*

Participant G (sometimes content)- *"…school is based on a trust model."*

Participant K (often content)- *"I am fortunate enough to have established great working relationships with my colleagues… furthermore, I feel that I (am) well respected by SLT and truly believe they value my contributions to the wider school."*

Participant L (often content)- *"I moved to a school where leadership is less micromanaged and my experience is valued."*

For those who rarely felt happy or content, reasons were 'a lack of alignment with ethos' (specifically non-developmentally appropriate teaching practices), 'lack of support', and 'reduced self-efficacy'. I correlated responses from questions asking 'what makes teachers happy' with 'what causes the most stress' and further clarified this within the focus group sessions. Practitioners stated that shared experiences with the children and being able to teach effectively, with autonomy, creates happiness and raises well-being. Unnecessary or unmanageable workload and over-accountability creates stress. Over-accountability, participants defined as having to *constantly* prove your impact because you are not trusted; through over-marking, high-stakes testing, evidence collecting and so on. Participants felt this was to the detriment of time with the children and they saw this as creating a downwards spiral towards burnout. In the focus group session, participant T summarises this;

"…it was almost like you had to you spend the majority of your time trying to prove that you weren't crap at your job like it wasn't enough that you had your degree and you've done your training and you know you've taught for

ten years or whatever and you know what you're doing… you have to go that extra bit just to prove that you're doing it…you feel like you are just in that constant battle of proving that you are capable of doing your job…",

The altruistic reward of supporting children and watching them progress and flourish is important to practitioners, but is often over shadowed by the negative aspects of the job. Responses to the stress and burnout questions showed the length that teachers will go to in order to ensure that they are providing the best learning experiences for those in their care. Being 'unable to switch off' and 'feeling overwhelmed' were present for many of the participants, and every participant agreed that teaching had a detrimental impact on their home life. Participants then felt that the impact of this stress made them into worse teachers and thus had a negative impact on the children in their care.

Within responses from the 'no-longer-teaching' group, workload and accountability were the most cited causes of stress, but other more personal reasons also emerged. Participant S stated that the greatest cause of stress for her was *"…the overwhelming feeling that whatever I did was not good enough."* Based on these findings I went back to this group's data for stress and burnout and explored the links between why they left teaching, their causes of stress, and what their experiences of burnout had been. The use of language within their responses represented the depth of their feelings of exhaustion, guilt, failure, and self-blame. This is represented in figure (IX) below.

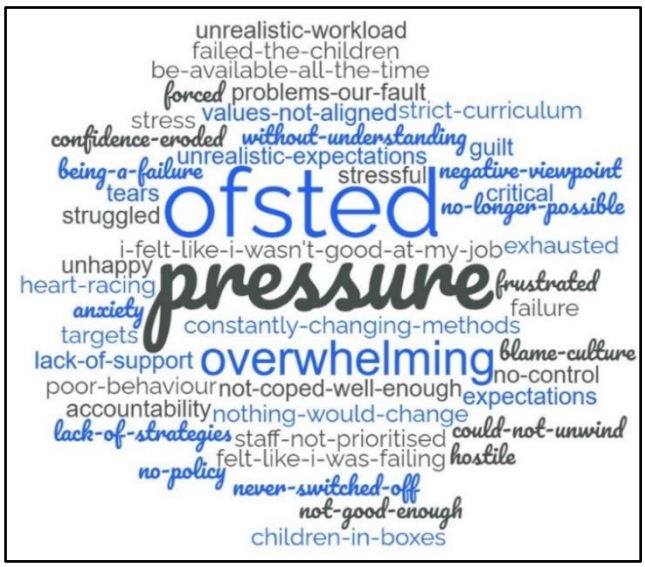


Figure (IX) The language of leavers

The language use of these practitioners demonstrates the impact that stress and subsequent burnout has had. Participant R, T and U had all been teaching for at least a decade, they were self-proclaimed experienced, confident teachers but the profession had a massively detrimental impact on their self-belief and identity as teachers:

Participant R- "…*my confidence in even the things I was good at eroded…nothing would change unless I stopped teaching*."

Participant T- "…*I am a passionate teacher, but the pressures put on me by management made me feel like I was failing at my job*."

Participant U- "…*I started my maternity leave early due to the anxiety (teaching) was causing me*…"

Participant V, who had been teaching for two years became so ill through stress that it impacted her mental and physical health, she states "…*only leaving the setting relieved this but it left me with a lot of guilt and feelings of having failed the children and being a failure myself for having not coped well enough to continue*". None of the practitioners in this group had left teaching because they no-longer loved the job, one of the recurrences within the data was that these professionals left when they became physically and mentally unable to do the job any more, they had reached a point where they felt their only way to recover was to leave the profession.

In comparison to this figure (X) shows the language used in responses about the physical and mental impact of daily stressors on the 'active-teachers' group. The use of language and shared experiences between the two groups is indicative of the closeness that the 'active-teachers' are to potential burnout. When examining the stress and burnout data for the 'active-teachers' group, where 75% of the group had definitely experienced or were experiencing burnout with a further 18% having experienced symptoms of burnout, it is clear to see how the profession is in a precarious situation.

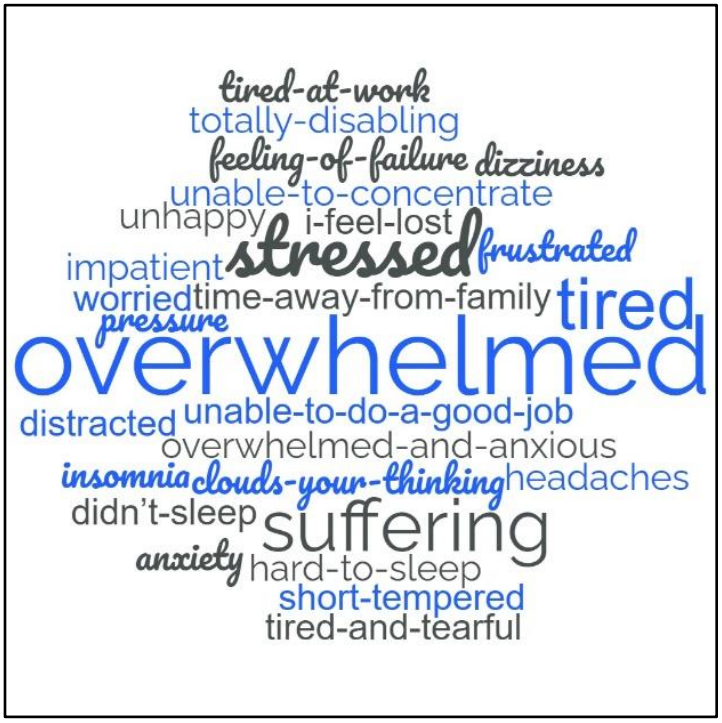


Figure (X) The physical and mental impact of stress on teachers

Results and discussion: Workload

The stress caused by an imbalanced workload is prevalent within the well-being and burnout literature (Beltman et al., 2020; Mack et al., 2019; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Räsänen et al., 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017), and is represented within Maslach and Leiter's (2016) AWL model. Similarly, within this study, workload features as the most stressful, and the most time-consuming element of the job.

Figure (XI) T*ime* and *workload* participant responses

As demonstrated in figure (XI) only 18% of active teachers find their workload manageable with only 12% satisfied that they have the time they need to do the job. Three practitioners felt that workload was either manageable or not an issue for them, but only one participant stated that their workload was fair and they had the time to satisfactorily do their job. Sadly, this participant is not currently at work due to stress, and has since left teaching. A combination of a lack of alignment of ethos with senior leaders, developmentally inappropriate practices, and no well-being support or strategy, had extremely negative consequences for this participant and would point again to the argument that 'fixing' one element of teaching i.e., workload, is not a robust solution to burnout. Many practitioners were in agreement that workload fluctuated across the year and was very unpredictable, however the detrimental impact of unnecessary workload was a repeating theme within this data set:

Participant G - *"…I know my lessons could be a lot better, but I spend so much time doing other jobs which take up time…"*

Participant J - *"…I often find myself spending a substantial amount of time on tasks that actually have no relevance and impact to my teaching. As a consequence, I often find that I don't have enough time to complete the tasks I would like to…"*

When commenting on their unmanageable workload Participant L states - *"…It is really noticeable this year that OFSTED etc is back…"*

It is too general a statement to say that reducing workload will keep teachers in the profession. As indicated by these responses, it is clearly a huge issue within England, (statement based on the participants being based across eight local authorities) but it is not a singular issue. As Maslach and Leiter (2016) explore, a combination of misaligning factors within the areas of work-life can have a hugely detrimental impact on well-being and greatly increase the chances of burnout. One of the key themes that emerged from the focus group discussions is that teachers do not mind working hard, it is the *type* of work that they are being asked to complete which is causing stress. Unnecessary paperwork and 'box-ticking' was often referred to, and participants noted that this was to the detriment of both their well-being and the quality of their teaching. Participant C summarises this: *"…I think it's fair to say*

that you could spend 24 hours a day and seven days a week 'catching up' on all of the things you need to do! I will very often work of a night time and at the weekends. With this being said, I am not the type of teacher who is a 'worksheet warrior' and I will spend time making, creating or researching a particular concept to make it practical, exciting and accessible for all types of learners…."

The conversation and responses about workload often lead back to school ethos and the trust that senior leaders have in their staff. Staff voice being heard, feeling valued and the type of teacher you are, were other key points raised by practitioners.

Results and Discussion: Control

A lack of autonomy was cited within some of the teacher burnout literature (Beltman et al., 2020; Towers and Maguire, 2017) as a cause of stress, and this was reflected within participant responses. Only six participants agreed that they had autonomy (see figure XII) but with a range of responses when explaining why, these are detailed in figure (XIII):

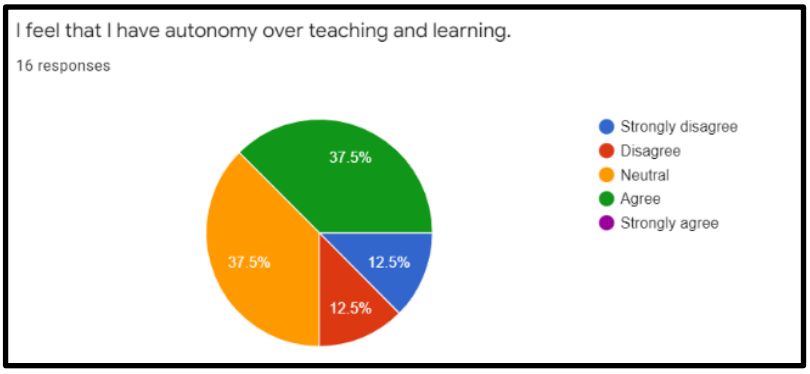


Figure (XII) *Control* participant responses

The personal nature of teaching means that ***what*** participants felt was autonomy varied greatly. None of the sixteen participants had total control over their own teaching practices, and where participants had disagreed, this was due to prescriptive teaching approaches, pressure from senior leaders and department heads, and the accountability of preparing children for the next stage in their learning.

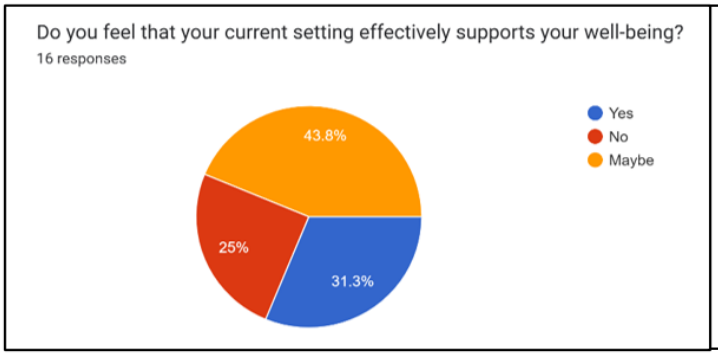
Agree	"It's never quite autonomous but it's much more **closely matched** to my style of teaching and learning."
Agree	"As Director, I lead a lot of the initiatives but also **give teachers chance to experiment** which I feel is very important."
Agree	"In NZ and Ireland, I had autonomy over teaching and learning. **I did not feel this way in the UK."**
Agree	"Potentially N/A as I am a member of SLT."
Agree	"One form entry so I have **total control over my teaching and learning** but **within the constraints of the whole school curriculum overview** for each subject (**but I like having this structure to follow**)"
Agree	"My suggestions are **always taken into consideration** and more often than not implemented."

Figure (XIII) Participant responses to *autonomy* question

The misunderstanding of Early Years practices by leaders, and the pressure to formalise learning came out strongly within this data set. The misalignment of ideologies in schools between senior leaders and practitioners within EYFS and Year 1 was a recurring theme across the questionnaire data. Often, experienced Early Years practitioners were being asked to set aside their professional expertise in favour for whole-school approaches and 'brought-in' schemes for phonics, literacy and maths. Practitioners felt that this left little room for continuous provision and learning through play which they felt was developmentally appropriate. This daily struggle is one that multiple participants felt had a detrimental impact to their well-being and was a cause of great stress. With the post Covid pressure of the 'catch-up' curriculum and the revised guidance around the teaching of phonics in schools, these are policy maker pressures that have massive implications for teachers if not effectively managed by senior leadership teams.

Results and discussion: Well-being

Within the 'active-teachers' group only 31% of participants felt that their current setting effectively supported their well-being. Figure (XIV) demonstrates this alongside the responses from practitioners who answered 'no' to this question.



Key practitioner responses- no support for well-being:

"No focus on staff well-being or mental health at all"

"It seemed that SLT had been out of teaching for so long that they no longer understood factors that caused stress and negative well-being and could never understand why teachers were struggling."

"I am currently suffering from work-related stress and have not been at work for a number of weeks. I feel this situation could have been avoided."

"…no budget for well-being."

Figure (XIV) How well do settings support well-being- active teachers

Cowley (2019) highlights the importance of embedded well-being practices and the avoidance of tokenistic well-being activities which could actually be more detrimental to mental health than intended. This theory is reflected in some of the participant responses:

Participant L states; *"The well-being bolt-ins to be honest make me more stressed. Compulsory early morning social coffee and having to get treats for the staff room."*

Another participant stated that the 'well-being' mornings held by their setting meant that she had to miss taking her own child to school, an activity that she relished doing, therefore she felt negatively about this particular strategy. Of the participants who responded with *maybe*, the well-being support came either from an individual person (an understanding Head-teacher) or their team, but that well-being strategies were not embedded within school culture. Four practitioners felt that their settings effectively supported their well-being and within their responses there was a definitive split between

gestures to promote well-being, and where well-being was effectively *embedded* into the ethos and working practices of the setting. These are illustrated in figure (XV).

What can settings do to positively support well-being? -Participant responses.

Well-being embedded within ethos	Well-being gestures which are effective
• "Working group to look at well-being strategies across the school" • "Well-being committee that makes suggestions/puts on events, giving staff TIME to do tasks." • "Weeks at the end of terms to have no meetings to allow for people to use the time as they see fit." • "Actual check-ins with members of the school community, including SLT, where people genuinely care." • "Clear communication - with as much notice as possible." • "Feeling of team success rather than individual success." • "Just the ethos and the positive leadership." • "Supportive and approachable staff, well-being officers in place and visible within school, staff trained in emotional first aid."	• Time off to attend personal events, • Social gatherings • Staff shout out board • Friday treats • well-being afternoon once a week, • PPA taken at home • no emails to be sent between 8 am and 6pm • Dedicated well-being days - taken during term time - no questions asked.

Figure (XV) What can be done to support practitioner well-being

These practitioners signalled that a combination of embedded practice, alongside gestures that are well considered, had a positive impact on their well-being. I wanted to examine what the *impact* of the well-being strategies were for these practitioners and looked at their responses to other questions. There were interesting patterns within the 'Areas of Work Life' section of the questionnaire; Figure (XVI) shows practitioner responses for questions about *happiness* and *contentment,* alongside their *trust of leaders*, and the *values shared* by their employers.

I feel happy when I am teaching.	I am content with my current working situation.	I trust senior leaders and think that they are fair.	My values are aligned with my employer.
Often	Often	Agree	Agree
Often	Often	Agree	Agree
Often	Always	Agree	Strongly agree
Often	Often	Agree	Strongly agree
Always	Sometimes	Agree	Agree
Often	Sometimes	Agree	Agree
Often	Sometimes	Agree	Agree
Sometimes	Sometimes	Agree	Agree
Often	Rarely	Agree	Neutral
Often	Sometimes	Neutral	Strongly agree
Often	Rarely	Disagree	Agree
Often	Sometimes	Neutral	Strongly agree
Sometimes	Rarely	Neutral	Neutral
Sometimes	Sometimes	Neutral	Neutral
Sometimes	Sometimes	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Rarely	Never	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Figure (XVI) Table illustrating *happiness, contentment, trust* and *values* comparison

There is a correlation between those who often or always feel happy and content, and the trust and alignment with senior leaders and school values. The most often cited reason for this was when practitioners felt that decisions were made with the best interests of the children at heart, which supports the link between well-being and the altruism of practitioners. For the questions that covered trust, community and ethos alignment, these participants all agreed or strongly agreed that they trusted senior leaders, had a strong community at their setting, and felt their values were aligned with their employer. Of these participants, two had felt symptoms of burnout, one felt that they possibly had earlier in their career, but had since changed schools, and the other participant had never felt burnout. These practitioners still felt the same time constraints, still felt high levels of stress within the role, but indicated high levels of happiness, contentment and all wished to remain in teaching (other than one case of a near retirement age teacher.) This tri-factor of well-managed well-being strategy, avoiding or recovering from burnout, and having high levels of contentment have led these practitioners into wanting to stay in the profession.

Community had the most positive responses from the AWL section. 87% of participants within the active teaching group felt part of a strong learning community and the repeating codes in this section were support, understanding, commitment, and reflection.

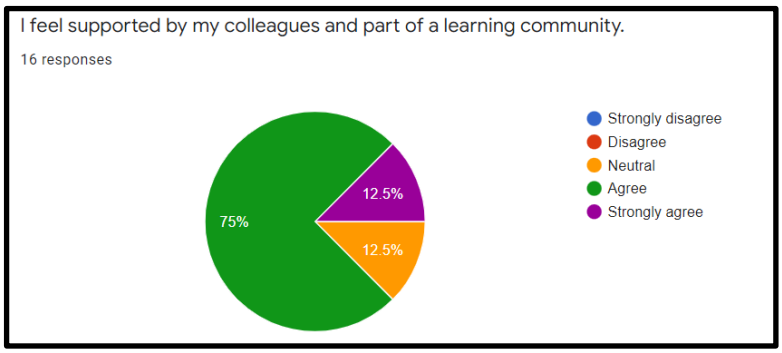


Figure (XVII) *Community* participant responses

Participant E states, *"…the power of good colleagues can make such a difference…*" and this is very much reflected in the other comments, with another practitioner questioning whether she would have

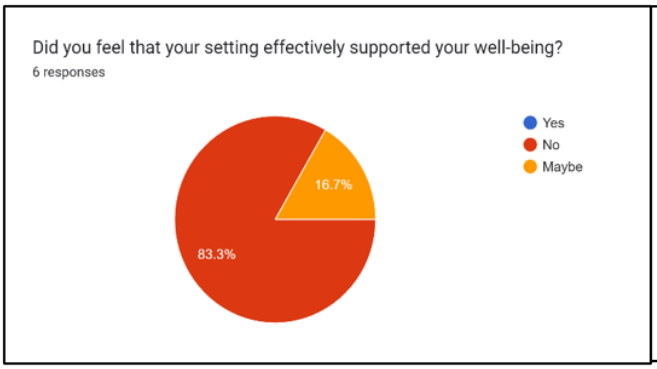
remained in the profession if it wasn't for the support of her colleagues. The other unifying aspects of this section are shared values and aligned ethos. Participants within the 'no-longer-teaching' group also agreed that there had been a strong community within their settings, with one practitioner describing her colleagues as a "lifeline" during troubled times.

The 'no-longer-teaching' group responses showed a clear imbalance between the Areas of Work Life and this is illustrated in figure (XVIII).

I felt happy when I was teaching.	I had the time I needed to do the job to my satisfaction.		I found the daily workload manageable when I was a teacher.	I had autonomy over teaching and learning.	I found teaching fulfilling.	I felt supported by my colleagues and was part of a learning community.	I trusted senior leaders and thought that they were fair.	My values were aligned with my employer.
Sometimes	Never		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree
Sometimes	Never		Strongly disagree	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral
Often	Never		Disagree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Neutral
Sometimes	Never		Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree
Sometimes	Sometimes		Disagree	Strongly disagree	Agree	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
Sometimes	Rarely		Disagree	Strongly disagree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Disagree

Figure (XVIII) 'No-longer-teaching' group AWL responses

As with the 'active-teachers' responses, these practitioners enjoyed the time they spent with the children, supporting them to make progress. Workload, autonomy and time feature the heaviest imbalances and had the greatest effect on stress levels. Trust in leadership was low, and of those who disagreed, participants felt unsupported, under-valued and were treated poorly by senior leaders. In addition to this, 83% of the 'no-longer-teaching' participants felt that their well-being was unsupported by their setting. Figure (XIX) demonstrates this alongside some of the responses from practitioners:



Key practitioner responses- no support for well-being:

- "Leadership would ask for feedback at intervals on how wellbeing could be supported, but none of the ideas were ever implemented."
- "Staff were not prioritised. Staff opinions, no matter how qualified were never sought. Weekly or bimonthly meetings would have been great."
- "It was not a consideration/ not discussed/ no policy"
- "It was often said that the problem was our fault."
- "Targets were always pushed over the wellbeing of the staff. So many people I know have left the profession because of this."

Figure (XIX) How well do settings support well-being- 'no-longer-teaching' group

Participants left the profession due to a combination of factors, but ultimately, they felt unable to function as a teacher any longer. Phrases such as 'broken', 'eroded' 'destroyed' and 'failure' were used by those in the 'no-longer-teaching' group. These responses are in line with Maslach and Leiter's (2016) theory that sustained imbalances in many areas of work life can lead to burnout, and supports the theory that unresolved burnout will lead to practitioners leaving the teaching profession. The correlation of mis-alignment within the Areas of Work Life and a lack of effective support for well-being for those who have left the profession is unmistakable, even within a sample this small.

The review of well-being literature had raised questions for me about what types of interventions teachers felt were effective for well-being and the readiness and availability of these in English schools (Kidger et al., 2021; Zarate et al., 2019). Participants had a list of 'well-being' activities that they had felt unable to, or had not wanted to engage with, figure (XX) demonstrates these. When discussed in focus groups, participants felt that often these tokenistic 'well-being' strategies were a 'box-ticking' exercise to appease OFSTED requirements, and rarely had a significant impact on actual stress or well-being. This reinforces what practitioners said previously that unless well-being strategy is embedded and based on real conversations with practicing teachers then the impact of these is negligible.

Have there been well-being measures put into place in your setting that you have not wanted to/ been able to engage with? Can you explain why?
• The only well-being measure put in place is a well-being calendar that is stuck around the school that nobody promotes or talks about and it is basically ignored. • Our Emails end with a generic message saying 'wellbeing is a priority at our school' and there are posters on the toilet doors with a telephone number to call if we need confidential help or support (outside agency). It's just not enough is it! On paper, we are probably ticking all of the criteria that OFSTED want, but in reality, are we really protecting people's well-being? • There have been some social events planned such as bowling that I have not engaged with. Partly because it has not fitted around my family schedule and partly because I have not been in a place where I have felt like I have wanted to socialise. • I know that we have access to an EAP counselling scheme - I have not engaged with this as I feel that there would be a lot of personal information I would need to share and would not want to. • Early morning social stresses me out as can't drop my daughter off and get in and set up • There was a staff well-being group, but I didn't feel this was very helpful as really talking about things doesn't help me. • They had a staff meeting only once per term and everyone was terrified to discuss anything. The manager was very hostile, critical, narcissistic.

Figure (XX) Inaccessible 'well-being' strategies

Well-being literature has highlighted the link between practitioner well-being and the well-being of the children in their care (Cowley, 2019; Cumming, 2017; Gourd and Luke, 2018; Hascher and Waber, 2021). Although unable to measure the impact of this within the parameters of this study, there was a correlation between high-practitioner well-being and quality time with the children. Coding from questions about direct teaching, happiness, and contentment all indicted a professional love felt by participants and the highest levels of well-being when they were working directly with children. In comparison to this, when participants' stress levels were high, they perceived this as having a negative impact on the children, and signified feelings of 'letting the children down' and 'not being the best they could be'. This indicates that altruistic reasons play a significant role in teacher's well-being, which when discussed within focus groups included interactions with children, child-led learning, making

memories, supporting learners and other practitioners, enjoyment, providing care, making a positive contribution, and creating success. Although specific answers varied, the thread of happiness, enjoyment and progression for learners was very clear. The level of experience and number of years teaching did not seem to have an impact on this and thirteen of the sixteen 'active-teachers' directly mentioned the children when asked what positively impacts on their well-being whilst at work. All of the six participants in the 'no-longer-teaching' group said that it was time with the children that had positively impacted on their well-being.

Self-driven well-being and the positive impact of activities or occupations outside of work feature in the burnout and well-being literature (Cherniss, 1995; Freudenberger, 1975; Leiter, 2020; Maslach and Leiter, 2016). Not only do teachers need to be able to focus on things other than teaching, but they need the brain capacity and time to be able to do this. The participants within the active-teachers group all had many ways that they managed their own well-being both within the workplace and at home. Whilst at work, sustaining 'Healthy Habits' and 'Calming Strategies' were used by many practitioners, but predominantly it was 'Community' and 'Working Practices' that participants felt had the greatest impact, as shown in figure (XXI). Again, this strongly indicates that school culture has a significant influence on staff well-being. One of the interesting things here is that participants see 'eating lunch' or 'having a break' during the day as well-being strategies rather than just a basic requirement of employment. This was also raised in focus groups, participant Q, who is no-longer teaching, discussed the inadequacies that she had seen within her setting:

Participant Q- "…*effectively our well-being lunch was like making sure that about once every six months people actually sat down and ate something and you know that kind of thing like eating and sitting down for me don't really fit in with well-being, they sort of fit more with human rights it just doesn't really add up…"*

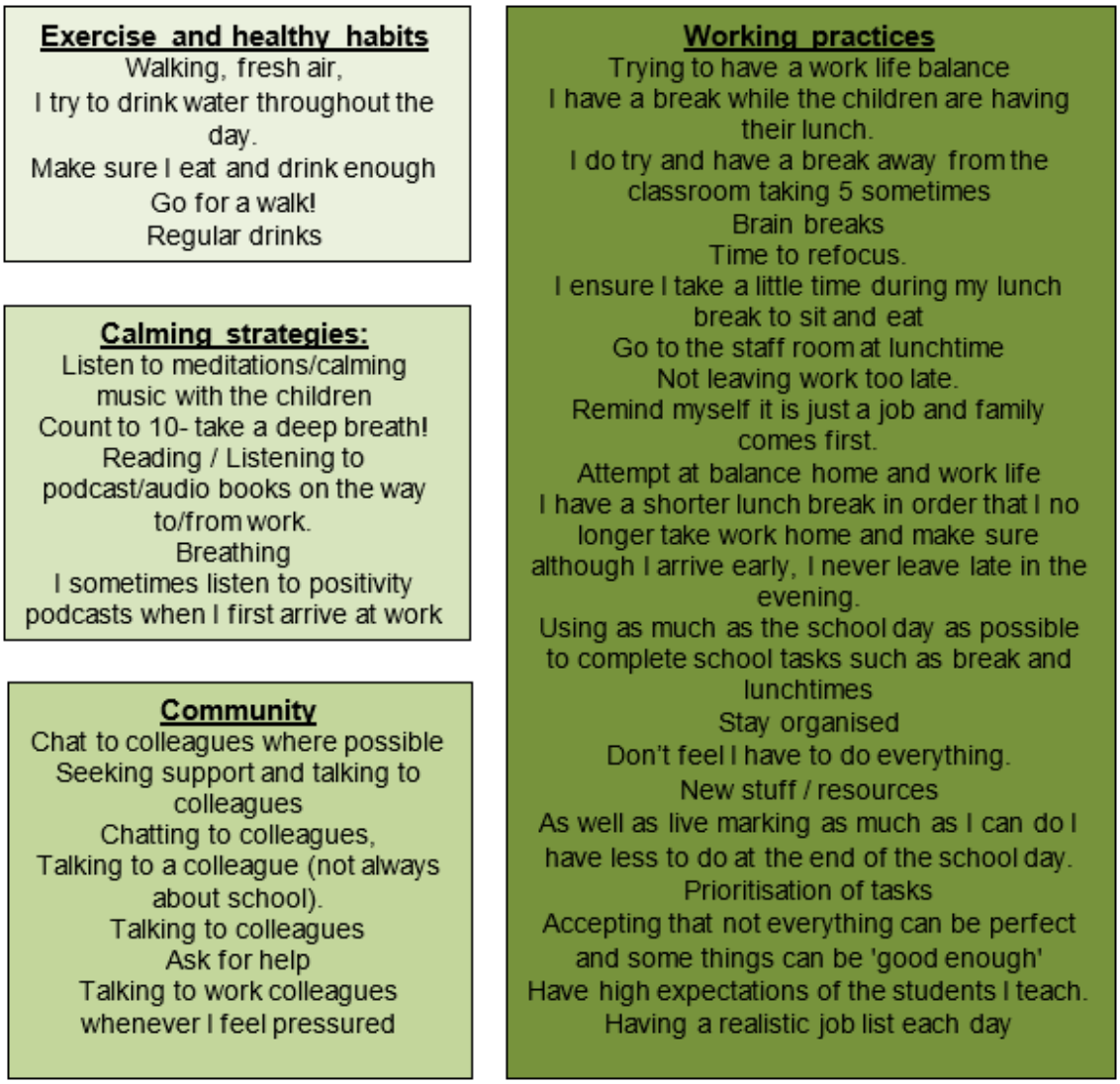


Figure (XXI) Strategies used to promote well-being at work

For all of the teachers who participated, well-being strategies were an important part of their life outside of teaching. 'Hobbies', 'Self-care' and 'Work-life Balance' featured in many responses but the most frequent responses were coded under 'Exercise' and 'Socialising'. Relationships with family and friends hugely influenced how participants were feeling, and how they were able to manage the demands of teaching. Figure (XXII) shows the participant responses coded under 'Exercise' and 'Socialising' and indicates how important these relationships are to practitioners. Unfortunately, all participants felt that teaching negatively impacted their home life, predominantly due to detrimental impact that having to work from home had on their relationships with others.

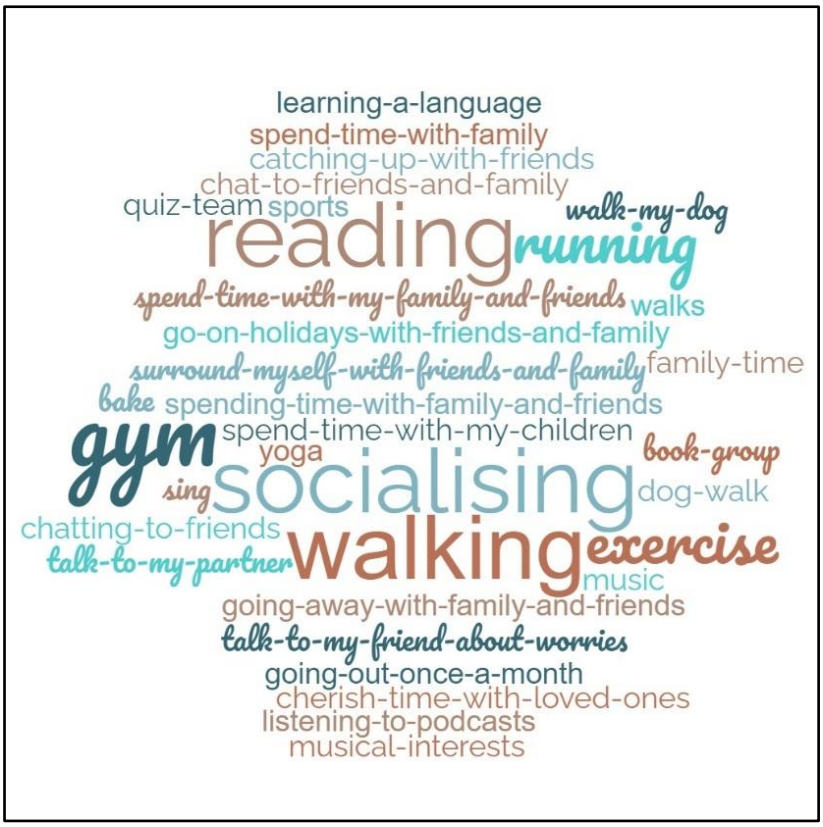


Figure (XXII) Maintaining well-being outside of work

This is important because without the balance of work and life practitioners are more likely to burnout (Maslach and Leiter 2016). Activities and relationships that heighten well-being are arguably essential in sustaining professionals within teaching.

8. Study Limitations

Although the small scale and sample size of this study limit the transferability of the conclusions (Shenton, 2004), the participants were from eight different local education authorities, and worked across a mixture of mainstream, special, private and academy trust settings, therefore it could be argued that the results represent a broad range of experiences of working within the English school system. The limitation of the sample is that it is not representative of both genders as participants were predominantly female. Additionally, I did not ask about the ethnicity of participants so I am also unable to clarify whether the responses embody the experiences of a broad range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Many of the participants had children of their own and although some participant responses alluded to the impact on family life and guilt about the impact on their own children, I did not have the scope within this project to explore this further. This is possibly an important aspect of burnout and well-being for practitioners who have families and this area needs further study.

The coding of exhaustion and reduced self-efficacy need to be considered as a potential limitation to the accuracy of the results. As discussed previously, they are indicators of burnout but also appear widely within other themes and responses within the data. There is a difficulty to measuring and quantifying these, and also the issue around whether these were symptoms of burnout, or indicators of teachers working practices and on-going issues within the education system. Avoiding getting too embroiled in technicalities and wishing to remain true to phenomenology, I have attempted to keep the interpretation of results authentic to the voice of the participants through member checking and focus group discussions.

9. Conclusions and Reflections

The findings from this study highlight the deeply personal nature of teaching and how dedicated teaching professionals are. The commitment and care shown by the participants was to the detriment of their mental and physical health and at times their home lives and relationships also. Analysis demonstrates that environmental and contextual factors have the greatest impact on the likelihood of burnout and intent to leave the profession. High stress, caused by unmanageable or unnecessary workload, over accountability, and unsupportive school cultures, is not being effectively managed by settings. In addition to this, most participants felt that strategies to support the emotional and mental welfare of teachers were not robustly embedded into school practices or ethos. Where this was the case, there was a positive correlation between the happiness and contentment of practitioners, and a greater likelihood that they would remain in the profession. For the argument of 'principles against practicalities', a small number of the participants felt well supported by their settings, had an aligned ethos, and were able to maintain relatively high levels of well-being both inside and outside of the workplace. Their responses to the stress and burnout questions would indicate that they were not currently flourishing within the teaching profession, but were able to maintain a work-life balance some of the time, and were more likely to remain in the profession for the foreseeable future. None of the participant responses gave an indication that they were thriving within their current working practices.

The four key themes within the data build on each other: - the challenge of 'Ethos Versus Accountability' which heightens stress; 'Internal' and 'External' factors reducing 'Self-efficacy' which leads to negative 'Self-perception' and creates feelings of failure. Then, the 'Professional Love' and 'Altruism' of practitioners which is intrinsic, and can boost well-being, is being sacrificed for accountability and workload. I have found that burnout and well-being are interchangeable aspects for the practitioners within this study and it is apparent that many participants are working within a high-stress, low well-being model. The elements of the role that positively impact their well-being are over-shadowed by activities that cause heightened stress. I have illustrated this in figure (XXIII). For the practitioners who

have left teaching, the combination of sustained high stress and limited or no well-being input caused them to leave teaching.

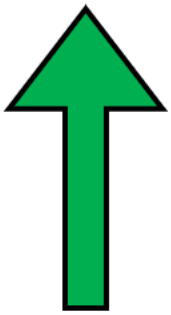
<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Participant reflections</th><th>My interpretation</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">High well-being
 
Low well-being
High stress</td><td>• “Actual teaching”- purposeful time with the children
• “Being trusted to teach in the style that suits you best”
• “Teacher led assessments and activities that inform daily practice”
• “High quality interactions with children”</td><td rowspan="2">Professional love, positive self-image, aligned ethos, high levels of trust
 
Unnecessary workload, high accountability, reduced self-efficacy</td></tr>
<tr><td>• “Unfair accountability to coordinators and senior leaders”
• “Creation of unnecessary workload and assessments”
• “Box-ticking for OFSTED”
• “Teaching in a way that is not developmentally appropriate”</td></tr>
</table>

Figure (XXIII) Well-being-stress model

Most participants indicated that their settings only responded to stress when practitioners were already facing symptoms of burnout, this was alongside limited or no well-being intervention, this interpretation was agreed within focus groups. I have created a ‘stress model’ of teaching to represent these findings. This is illustrated in figure (XXIV) and demonstrates the cyclical nature of burnout as described by the participants in this study. The ‘stress model’ demonstrates the key stressors as defined by participants, combined with the lack of robust well-being strategy. These are detrimental to the health and home life of professionals. As this cycle continues participants noted the negative impact on their work-life balance, relationships outside of work, and their self-care strategies. Working like this for a sustained period caused burnout for some participants, and for six of them caused them to leave teaching.

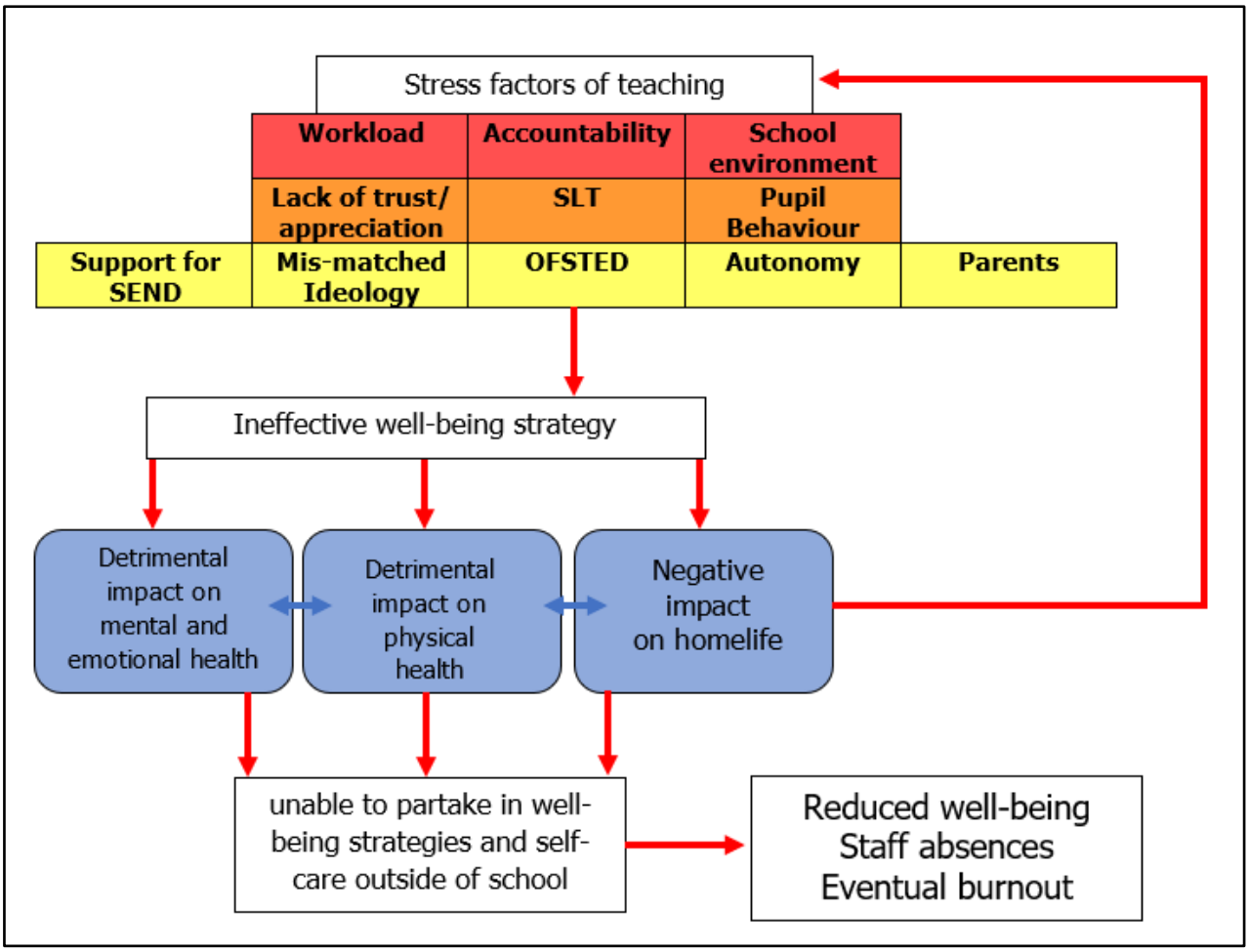


Figure (XXIV) 'Stress model' of teaching

In opposition to the 'stress model' of teaching, and using the Areas of Work Life model (AWL) (Maslach and Leiter, 2016) as a basis, I have created a sustainable 'well-being' model using the information shared by the participants in this study. Stressors are not removed, as this would be unrealistic, rather the approach to stressors is changed and I have embedded the eleven areas of stress within the AWL model. This model relies on communication with teachers, and effective, embedded well-being strategy. This also values the need that practitioners have to conduct their own self-care and well-being outside of the workplace. This is demonstrated in figure (XXV).

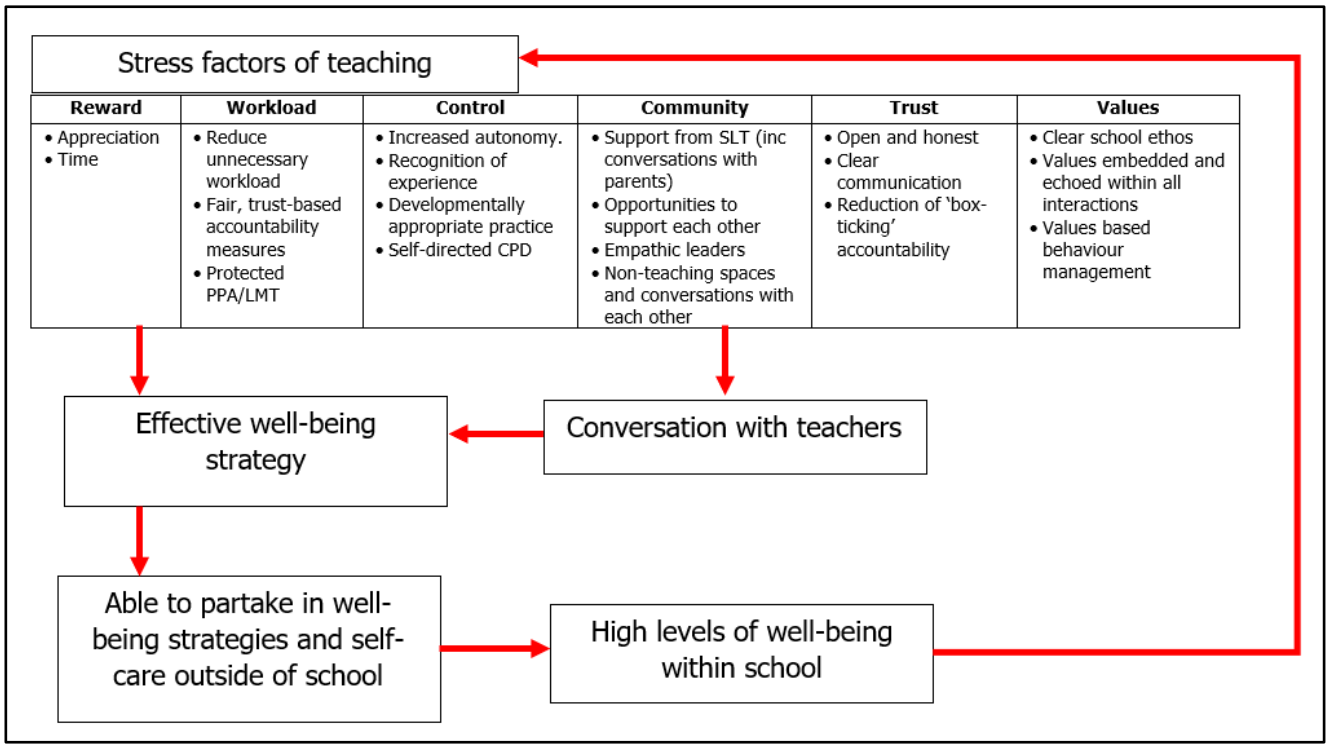


Figure (XXV) Sustainable well-being model

From the information collated from the participants of this study I have developed steps that settings could take to ensure the sustainability of well-being practices.

1) Define well-being: In conversation with all practitioners, settings should develop and build upon their own definition of well-being, depicting what a high level of well-being looks like for their staff. This should include measures to identify the early signs of burnout, with all staff receiving training on how to support each other, plus when and how to seek assistance.

2) Manage Workload: There is no easy solution to workload within a high pressure, high accountability system – however, although participants stated there was not enough time to do everything they needed to do, many were more upset by the *type* of workload. Perceived 'box-ticking' and having to complete tasks that had no significance or impact for themselves or the children were at the detriment to well-being and heightened stress levels. A useful solution could be a cycle of communication with practitioners about which jobs were beneficial and which weren't; this could include the exploration,

with leaders, of non-negotiable aspects and a shift away from a one-size-fits-all approach. This would rely on trust from senior leaders and a confidence within the setting based upon an ethos that centres around the children and what is best for them.

3) Empathic Leadership: Practitioners who had the highest levels of contentment had a respectful and trusting relationship with school leaders, and in all cases, this was due to the shared ethos of child-centred learning. Embedding the practice of open channels of communication with leaders could support sustained well-being but for this to be effective empathic leadership is crucial. None of the participants had an issue with working hard and the 'active-teachers' were absolutely willing to give teaching their all, they just wanted this to be appreciated and recognised through non-tokenistic gestures like autonomy and trust.

4) Communication: Effective and on-going communication is crucial to retaining teaching professionals. Participants in this study wanted to feel heard and have a voice within their settings. For many of them, their lack of voice left them feeling isolated, frustrated and dis-engaged. The vocational and altruistic elements of the profession shows the deeply personal connection that teachers have to their roles, and in settings where this was recognised, practitioners had higher levels of well-being. Responses from more experienced practitioners suggests that schools need well-being measures that are appropriate and effective for teachers of differing backgrounds and at varying stages in their careers, and this relies upon conversations between practitioners and leaders.

5) Flexibility of Working Practices: Basing the 'well-being' teaching model on a high level of trust between teachers and leaders provides the opportunity to explore different ways of managing staff accountability and providing autonomy. Focus group discussions signified the positive impact that teacher independence and control had on well-being. Conversations in settings about *how* practitioners work best, and the adoption of working practices to support this could be a solution to high stress levels and would build trust.

6) Self-care: Having meaningful activities and hobbies outside of the workplace was important to participants, and these had a positive impact on sustaining well-being. Developing an ethos of not working at home, or reducing work taken home, relies on a change to workplace practises, and heightened practitioner autonomy. This also places some of the responsibility onto practitioners and how they manage their workload and self-care.

It is my hope that the findings from this project will support practitioners and settings to identify the symptoms and causes of burnout with the intention that this may help them to avoid it in the future. This is alongside providing robust and long-standing well-being strategies that can be utilised to support teaching professionals for years to come.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1: Approval of research proposal and ethical considerations by the Birmingham City University Faculty Academic Ethics Committee:

The Centre for Research in Early Childhood
St Thomas Children's Centre
Bell Barn Road
Birmingham
B15 2AF
DATE: 28.02.22

Dear Catriona Malcolm,

ETHICAL APPROVAL DISSERTATION 2022/23

Your ethical application has been reviewed for the above module in relation to the approval acquired from BCU FAEC (Birmingham City University Faculty Academic Ethics Committee).

You have approval to carry out the research under the conditions which were outlined on the application.

This approval is conditional on:

- Do ensure your research supervisor has had sight of relevant correspondence ie. permission of access and consent.
- Do also ensure letters of consent maintain the BCU logo and contain your supervisors contact details.
- Do contact your supervisor should any of the details of the research design need to change.
- The use of 'trustworthiness' would be preferable to 'validity', essentially a word associated with quantitative studies.
- The issue of representativeness of the respondents can be by-passed if the intention is to raise universal issues from analysis of the broader questionnaire which stimulate deeper discussion in the more selective focus groups. So, the focus group respondents are clearly not representative but the issues they raise and discuss have universality and so have transferability. Maybe include something on those lines in the final ethical write up?

Keep a copy of this letter as evidence of your authorisation.

We wish you every success with your research,

Yours sincerely

Helen Lyndon Chris Pascal Tony Bertram

Appendix 2: Ethical Considers and Consent Letter:

Dear Participant,

I am currently undertaking an MA in Education (Early Years) at CREC (in conjunction with Birmingham City University) and as part of my studies I am undertaking my dissertation module in which I am researching the causes and impact of stress and/or burnout on professionals within the education sector, and what strategies practitioners use to effectively promote well-being.

For this study I will be gathering the experiences and views of practitioners across a variety of settings, using questionnaires, interviews or focus groups through the platform Zoom/Microsoft Teams and Google Forms. The interviews and focus group will be recorded with participants' permission which will aid in future analysis and write-up.

Given the highly emotive and sensitive nature of the subject of stress and burnout it is important that you enter the study with a full awareness of what it entails. Part of the questionnaire will be related to practitioners' experiences of stress and/or burnout and the impact that this had for them, both professionally and personally. This may cause participants to relive painful experiences, or for some, be relative to their current professional situation. I would like to reinforce that if at any point the process of question answering or group discussion becomes too painful, it will be ceased, participants can withdraw at any point without detriment being caused.

I am hoping you will agree to be included in this study. Participation in the questionnaire will be completely anonymous, however there will be a section within the questionnaire where you can indicate your interest and agreement to take further part in the project by consenting to an interview or to be part of a focus group- in this case- your identity will then become known to me as I will need your details. Throughout the write up of the study I will **ensure** that participants and settings remain anonymous. Your contribution **will not** include your name, your setting or any other information through which you could be identified.

All data collected and associated information will be securely stored on an encrypted hard drive or on a password protected laptop. The data will be stored for two years and then will be destroyed.

You will be able to withdraw your consent **at any time,** up to the 31st July as I will then be preparing my dissertation for submission. Any refusal of consent (or later withdrawal of consent) will not have an impact on the way in which I maintain my personal or professional relationships; **there is no detriment to not taking part**. I will be sharing the findings of my project via the circulation of copies to all participants and through electronic submission to the CREC online portal.

Should you wish to ask any questions or gain further information, please contact me at cat_malcolm@hotmail.com. Should you wish to validate any information I have provided or have any concerns about this research you may contact my supervisor, **Christopher Ludlow**, at CREC, St Thomas Children's Centre, Birmingham B15 2AF, enquiries@crec.co.uk

Many thanks for reading this and I do hope you can help me with my studies. Yours sincerely,

Catriona Malcolm

Participant Consent:

Your name: _____

☐ I agree to take part in the study outlined above. I understand that my data will be anonymised and that I may withdraw my consent at any time.

OR

☐ I **do not** agree to take part in the study outlined above.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3: Information About Practitioners:

Year group	Years teaching		LEA	Additional Responsibility
Active-teachers				
Nursery and Reception	20 years		Stoke	Yes
Nursery	10 years		Birmingham	No
Reception Year 1 and Year 2.	10 Years as a Teacher.		Birmingham	No
n/a	25		Birmingham	Yes
Year 2	15		Warwickshire	Yes
EYFS/ Primary	26		Birmingham	No
Year 3 and Year 5	11		(Ireland)	Yes
DHT EYFS, KS 2 and Year 6	19		Birmingham	Yes
Year 4	12 years		Warwickshire	No
Year 1	11		Birmingham	Yes
Early Years	10 plus		Birmingham	No
Years 3-6	30		Birmingham	Yes
Year 2	3		Birmingham	Yes
Nursery up to Year 6	13		Birmingham	Yes
Year 1	17 years		Birmingham	Yes
Year 2-6	21		Dudley	Yes
No-longer-teaching				
Year 4/5/6 / Across age 11-19 in special education	10		Birmingham and Sandwell	Yes
Year 2-11	I taught for 11 and a half years and left in December 2021		Worcestershire and Staffordshire	Yes
KS2	14		Birmingham	Yes
Nursery - Early Years	12		Northamptonshire	Yes
Year Rec-Y6	10 (with 3 maternity leaves within that time)		Sandwell	Yes
3-5 and also 5-7	2		Worcestershire	Yes

Appendix 4: Focus Group Discussion Document:

Section 2: About you as a teacher:

- Additional responsibility- those who had an additional role within school would they say this had an impact on stress/ well-being and how?

Section 3: Stress and burnout:

- The data demonstrated that participants had experienced different burnout elements and these linked into each other- (Exhaustion…cynicism (loss of interest and mental motivation, thinking the worst) …reduced self-efficacy (feeling that you are no longer are good at, or able to do your job))
  How aware were participants about the elements of burnout?
  Can participants discuss whether they think burnout could have been avoided if they were more aware of what burnout looked like / if settings were more aware?

- 'Not feeling good enough' and 'not able to do your best or give your best' are common themes.
  Where do these feelings come from? This is based on what measure?
  Why is it that so many respondents feel or felt like they are/ were failing, what is it specifically that makes them feel this way?
  Where does the pressure to 'be your best' come from?
  What reinforces this perception that we have to be the best all of the time?

- How we are perceived as teachers (by ourselves and by others) was a key theme.
  It is important for me to further explore where this perception and pressure comes from?
  How do participants wish to be seen as a teacher…how does this match up to reality?
  Why do teachers care so much about how they are perceived by others and how does this manifest within daily teaching?
  What impact do parents, SLT, TA, GOVs, OFSTED etc have?
  Is this established by environmental factors- in which case do participants think that leaderships teams understand the pressure that teachers are putting themselves under?

- [Responses from Q- What causes the most stress as a teacher] talk about accountability and autonomy.
  What makes you feel like you have greater of both of these. What do you think schools could do to improve this?

Section 4: Areas of Work life-

- ***I am happy when I am teaching-***
  Define what *actually teaching* means to practitioners and what the fundamental aspects that make them happy are. Unpick when teachers feel that their well-being as a practitioner is at its highest.

- ***I have the time I need to do the job to my satisfaction-***
  Significant recurring theme- there is not enough time to do the job satisfactorily
  Why is this? How could this be improved?
  Participants state that their time is taken up by unnecessary jobs and could be spent better.
  What jobs do they feel are worthwhile, which are not, how could time be better spent?
  What happens when you don't get everything done? Why is this such a concern?

- **I have autonomy over teaching and learning-**
  Many responses cited predetermined teaching approaches and lack of ethos alignment with teaching a learning to be a determining factor in how autonomous teacher's feel- *do you agree?*
  What importance do you feel that autonomy/ control of teaching and learning plays?

- **My values are aligned with my employer + I trust senior leaders and think that they are fair.**
  How do you get the balance right between providing the best care for the children and prioritising staff well-being?
  How do you feel that SLT can address the issue that some teachers find them disconnected from the daily pressures of classroom teaching?

Section 5: Well-being-

- *How would you define well-being?*
- *Do you think that teachers' well-being should have its own definition? What would this entail?*
- *How do you think that your well-being is linked to the children's? Is their well-being linked to yours?*

Appendix 5: Extracts from transcripts with Key points:

Transcript 2, Group 2.

Cat- The data demonstrated that participants had experienced different burnout elements and these linked into each other- (Exhaustion…cynicism (loss of interest and mental motivation, thinking the worst) …reduced self-efficacy (feeling that you are no longer are good at, or able to do your job) How aware were you about the elements of burnout? Do you think burnout could have been avoided if you were more aware of what burnout looked like / if settings were more aware?

X- I think for my setting it would have been maybe mentioned in a staff meeting once a year or something like that but as far as the physical side of it and feeling exhaustion and the mental health side then no the management don't really do anything and as staff we didn't know about it, I wasn't aware that those were the elements no, and that one staff meeting or whatever I think that's as far as my school would go with it.

XX- Yeah I've never been to a school, I've never worked in a school that has had, that has given you any heads up about it. I think a heads up would be invaluable if you knew that it was coming, or knew that it was a possibility but I'm literally like racking my brains I must have I must have had like say 20 different people leading me at some stage or another, all those mentors all those you know that in inverted comments mentors no one ever ever ever mentioned it and even when you've gone to them and said I'm struggling I'm exhausted I feel like I'm doing a **** job no one at any point has ever said that do you think you're experiencing that burnout it's quite common for teachers like I think that would have been so helpful to know that actually you're not ****, you're normal and everyone is going through it at different points yeah

Cat- yeah I think um it, one of the biggest things is like teachers put a lot of pressure on themselves and this kind of not feeling good enough was something that came out through the data, the wanting to be your best all the time and not feeling good enough, so just wondering where do you guys think that those kind of feelings come from, that that reflection that some days you are just not doing a good enough job or you have to kind of match up to kind of expectation where would you say that that came from?

X- I just think that in the teaching profession, you'll never ever have everything done, the workload is immense and it will never be done you'll never sit there and think I'm on top of my game today, everything is done, there's always something playing in the back of your mind you know, then add back into things in your personal life as well it is quite immense it's just the work it's just it's just a heavy workload and it's not ever possible have it all done yeah pressure something else something else that's thrown at you thrown at you and actually it's constant

XX- yeah it's exactly what X said but I also think that everyone in order to kind of do you know do like the swan who's treading water like you know frantically underneath the water I think everyone has to play the game and that includes the people that are leading you it includes like most likely your deputy headteacher had teacher etc everyone has to play this game where it looks like they're all on top of things and they all think that all the ******** important so you never ever get that like reprieve where you need where you you don't know who you can switch off in front of and obviously we've got now each other that the vast majority of workplaces it's like everyone is putting a front on like the the girl that I would say I'm friends with her the girl that was in the classroom next door to me teaching but I knew that she was doing it to me and I would be like like what are you doing about this new maths curriculum or whatever but Oh yeah yeah I'm just gonna keep it simple blah blah blah and I knew she was flying by the seat of her pants same as I was but everyone felt like they had to put this front on because yeah it's almost like you're someone's gonna realize and thier gonna pull the rug from under you and you never know, where ever is that empathy for the fact that everyone really exact same way

Cat- Do you think that comes from school culture, or do you think it's just the pressures of teaching, where do you think that comes from?

XX- Both, like it's definitely to do with the fact that the workload is never ever ending like it's just a constant spiral I think it comes from the fact that the pressure everyone who is in the kind of the link of the chain has got their own pressure above them yeah so the person who's managing you has got a heap of pressure put on them because the person who's managing them has got his heap of pressure put on them no one in the chain is kind of sitting there without pressure it's just it all gets

pushed down and down and down um I also think you only really get a certain type of person who's teaching like I would imagine similar to nursing it's the kind of profession where people care so if you don't if you I don't know I'm I'm just picking a job out of like random but maybe if you're I don't know like a mechanic or an IT person maybe you don't have that same level of like I care for these people I care for what I'm doing so that you don't I think I think the people who go into teaching most likely probably in like a character profile would come out as like caring conscientious and not that not like that I don't give a **** type people yeah which then would that pressure added on is like a recipe for disaster in a way
X- yeah, and I think it's caring about, you know, you've got a lesson observation, a book look, wanting to do really well in that, caring so much about those things as well. Then the anxiety that that causes and having to constantly prove your worth

Cat- that's it isn't it that's another thing, it's like our perception of ourselves as teachers and how we want others to perceive us, where does that pressure come from and we've kind of looked at it coming down the chain but what impact do you think say policy has or Ofsted has on that do you think there's a greater kind of pressure coming from

X- ultimately I think that the school leaders are all driven towards that OFSTED grade, so I think ultimately it is OFSTED, however it's how Head's interpret it as well you know, and how they choose to kind of put the pressure on the staff you know for example my school, OFSTED have moved away from a lot of paper evidence based stuff but my school, we're still quite dated so staff at my school still spend a substantial amount of time creating all these documents written documents, which aren't relevant to our job, just to be filed away for where we do get that visit

**XXX joins chat

Cat- So we've kind of talked about, one of the big things that came out of the data is about is not feeling good enough and that constant feeling that your not kind of good enough, so we were just talking about where does that kind of pressure come from, like the way that we're perceived as teachers that was sort of where we were up too wasn't it gals

XXX- I always got the feeling that it was it was almost like you had to you spend the majority of your time trying to prove that you weren't crap at your job like it wasn't enough that you had your degree and you've done your training and you know you taught for ten years or whatever and you know what you're doing you always have that pleasure that you and you have to go that extra bit just to prove that you're doing it you have to you have to stay the latest you have that you know go above and beyond with everything and you feel like you just in that constant battle of proving that you are capable of doing your job I think if that makes sense?
XX- yeah like XXX said like pretty similar but it's almost like the default is that you're **** and you've got to prove that you're not rather than the default that you're good, like obviously you're qualified and you've been doing it for however long then you have to do something that's **** to prove that you're not good, it's a backwards way round isn't it…
XXX- …and it's the constant fear that you're gonna get you know caught out isn't it even though you're not doing anything wrong or you're not doing anything you shouldn't be doing it's just that constant…
X- …that something's always not done isn't it, for me it's always that something's not done and I'm like **** I hope they don't find out that's not done and it's that constant anxiety until I've got it done

Cat- and where do you think that comes from that feeling that you have to prove yourself?

XXX- yeah, I think the school culture, it's the schools fear of OFSTED and the school I'm sure at that higher level and you'll probably know more cat about that pressure on themselves that they're having to prove to Ofsted all of this stuff and we're basically just that you know the minions or the parts of the cog in that in that awful system but I think yeah I think that's ingrained into you and if you remember back to I don't know everybody's first observation nobody or your first observation at a new school let's say you never get Oh yeah it's good or like it's always like not quite good enough here are the things that you can do because it's like they need to prove that they're doing their job by giving you feedback to improve so they're kind of pushing it onto you so I always feel like you know even when I took on the role of like a mentor and I took on the role of early years lead I felt that in order to prove myself I had to give those around me targets and points to improve and I couldn't just say even though I tried to be as positive as possible I felt that I couldn't just go oh God you know what that was absolutely brilliant, keep doing what you're doing you've got to prove yourself by passing things on to other people so

I think it is just that packing pressure down into other people and I think everybody in that school system feels it in some way and is like a top down thing then
XX- yeah, but I do think that the trigger for it all and the catalyst for it all is OFSTED and I know it's easy to sort of say we'll take away OFSTED they would just put something else in place but it is you know if they just said right OK post COVID we're not gonna have any OFSTED for two years I think there would be like a really physical difference in all levels, all the hierarchy levels and I think it would be a totally different it would be like a really interesting experiment…
XXX- …You can feel the buildup when OFSTED's due or OFSTED's looming there's like a tangible difference in the vibe of the school in the you know in the mindset of the teachers in the mental health of everybody as to you know post OFSTED said if it's gone well there's almost that overwhelming sense of relief it's like you can see it's seeing and of course it ramps up again with good is never good enough and out-standing needs to be maintained and you know if you've been deemed unsatisfactory or whatever the terminology is now you know that's another hell in itself which obviously I've been through in a school myself, but yeah I think it's just it's a cycle and it's like an emotional rollercoaster and uh a rollercoaster of yeah it's just stress pressure and yeah people's mental health suffers doesn't it massively and your well-being

Cat- So the areas of work life, I'm happy as a teacher, where you guys rated it from one to five, the one thing that came out from both the group that had left teaching and the active teachers was that everyone felt happy when they were actually teaching and that word *actually* teaching came through a lot so what I needed to clarify what is the actual teaching, what do people mean by that and what elements of the job does that with that encompass

XXX- I think from my perspective now and what I do now and I've taken out that whole school system in work, and when I'm actually you know on my own with the kids or the parents or you know whoever you're actively I don't wanna use the word teaching because that's what you're trying to get to the bottom of that you're you know passing information on your you're seeing what they can do you're exploring their learning then that part of it is the rewarding part but that part to me is it when you're in a school situation is not even 20% of your job and it's ironically you know you're paid to be a teacher but the majority of what you do is not we don't go home and worry about what you're teaching the next day or that your resources are, one of the things that I never used to stress about was if not if I'm ready for the kids I knew that I could you know you can, not wing-it but yeah you know your job you can teach your kids, it's everything else and that's yeah and yeah so for me it's just when you left alone to do your job basically
XX- I think there are times where I can literally be sitting with the task and I can ask myself like who does this benefit like does this benefit the kids or does this just benefit the adults and that would be like a clear distinction for me you know like that actually teaching part would be that when I'm doing something that I know is for the kids yeah but I don't know if that's no part of me ever resented like sitting spending hours like you know making my classroom engaging or going buying stuff, like I'd happily step set stuff up all the things that I knew was helping the children was absolutely fine but when we sat in front of a spreadsheet or database or whatever and you know that there's very very very little impact the actual children and it's for some adults sitting in an office who may potentially never even look at it
XXX- yeah I completely agree XX, even when I was working in the nursery there was so much of the actual teaching that I felt wasn't benefiting the kids like the nursery children we had to you know argued and argued it as we know but they all had a Maths Book they all had a literacy book and we had to sit for like there were 60 kids in the nursery it took out one teacher for the most painful two days and you had to sit and call each one up and get them to you know make make marks and describe what they're writing no half time to say look like scribble on the book I'll you know do it and it wasn't for them they weren't learning anything for it but they have to for their data how how many words they could do at the start of term count how many words they could do at the end of term so that they could do that tangible percentage and it was completely pointless completely pointless and so you felt like you were wasting their time your time it was frustrating just to get this you know this percentage of children could do at the start turn this percentage of the of the end and it was completely pointless completely pointless and so you felt like you were wasting their time your time it was frustrating just to get this you know this percentage of children could do at the start turn this percentage of the of the children couldn't and below for Nursery, that's not the way it should go, as we know, should it.

Cat- yeah thank you do you think you're like your settings you worked at had a definition that they could use of well-being did they know what proper well-being looked like and do you think it was embedded in the culture
All- No

X- no they'd throw the word out there, make it seem like they care…
XX- …a buzzword…
XX- … no definition, no implementation to check on staff well-being to check in on staff well-being and on a few occasions where staff have gone to kind of management and said they were really struggling and they were just kind of managed out you know, then the workload is was piled on even more and more observations or how can we "support you" with more time spent in your classrooms…
XXX- …with the "support plan" basically telling you how best to do your job, oh yeah we're supporting you because you're on a plan. Ours used to send out these horrendous Google surveys which they said were anonymous but you have to put the area that you worked in the school you had to put your job or we had to put the number of days you work so it's very easy to see who you were and you have to you know right on a scale of naught to five of how supported you felt by the management team blah blah blah and nobody dared to say the truth and those people that did say the truth as you said XX very very quickly went through the support plan and really yes we support you but yeah towards the end of when I worked there I was given the task and I'm sure it was you know it was it it was a grand old push for me as well but I was given the task of supporting a member of staff, who yes had her issues but did need to be supported and nurtures and supported with her mental health, but the system and you know, the wording used by SLT was basically get her out use this suppport plan to get her out and and that's where I couldn't hope at the end of it because that pressure on me to do to somebody else which was so wrong, was just too much but it very much was yeah we are we are supporting her look at this plan that's in place that we're checking in on her every single week there's nothing physical to make her feel better that plan made her feel 10 times worse I imagine
XX- my school, my last school had a very very surface level approach like the word well-being was like we used to kind of daily basis they would do things like yoga sessions they would do like they would do these well-being lunches and you know when you kind of ask yourself like if they so they effectively our well-being lunch was like making sure that about once every six months people actually sat down and ate something and you know that kind of thing like eating and sitting down for me don't really fit in with that thing that well-being they sort of fit more with like human rights it just doesn't really add up
XXX- and that would still stress you out you'd have to stay for an hour to get your stuff done
XX- yeah but they love that word well-being and they use the I mean I'm assuming they still do it now that they use it all the time and it's all about your well-being well you know like I said if essentially someone is still like cattle prodding you while they're while they're telling you to make sure you do feel better
XXX-… **(redacted due to anonymity issues)**
XXX- … **(redacted due to anonymity issues)**

Key points-

- Burnout symptoms need to be more widely discussed in schools and staff/ leaders need to know what to look for
- Unnecessary workload adds to stress and pressure on teachers
- Box-ticking for OFSTED is counterproductive as it adds to an already unmanageable workload and detracts from time with children which is actually good for staff well-being
- Keeping-up appearances/ a school culture of having to seem to be coping all of the time is hugely detrimental
- The personality type of teachers contributes to the feelings of 'not being good enough' and self-reflection/ self-criticism
- Teaching currently feels like proving your worth constantly rather than being trusted as a professional- over accountability- this pressure leads up the chain of command to OFSTED
- 'Actual teaching' when practitioners feel trusted to do what they feel the children need, time with children and the creation of learning opportunities (again, strong link between unnecessary workload and low well-being)
- Teachers don't mind a high workload if what they are doing is purposeful for the children
- Well-being needs to be robustly implemented into school culture and routines- practitioners can see through it very clearly if it isn't