Creating the conditions to thrive: exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, through narrative inquiry

Catherine Ruth Place

Supervised by Professor Stephen Parker and Dr Catherine Morgan

Submitted in partial fulfilment for the award of the degree of Doctorate in Education

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

2025

Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed   (candidate)

Date 01/11/25

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed   (candidate)

Date 01/11/25

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository.

Signed   (candidate)

Date 01/11/25

STATEMENT 3

Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence

In line with UWTSD guidance, Generative AI has been used in this thesis for the following purposes:

	Tick √	YES	NO
RESEARCH	I used Generative AI to support my research, including searching for bibliography, using tools to summarise, compare and interrogate materials.	☐	√
STRUCTURE	I used Generative AI to support structuring my thesis submission, including creating a draft argument structure, identifying parts and headings, etc.	☐	√
PROOFREADING	I used Generative AI to check my own text/creation for grammatical and syntactical mistakes, including translation and rephrasing of your own work within specific standards.	☐	√
WRITING	I used Generative AI to create text for submission.	☐	√
CREATIVE	I used Generative AI to create creative materials, such as images.	☐	√
PROGRAMING	I used Generative AI to create and check code.	☐	√
NONE	I did not use any type of Generative AI support. This includes research support, structure support, writing/proofreading support and creative support.	√	☐

Signed   (candidate)

Date 01/11/25

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank my supervisors, Professor Stephen Parker, Dr Catherine Morgan and Dr Iain Jones. Thank you for your guidance, advice and constructive feedback at every stage of this journey. Your support has been unwavering, and I quite literally could not have done this without you.

I am very grateful to my school for providing the space and time for me to undertake this research. Thank you to the Governing Body for believing in me and being an incredible source of support as I navigated the world of being a headteacher-researcher. To Sarah, the leadership team and staff - thank you for being the best team any headteacher could wish for, and for showing me every day the value of leading with purpose, passion and care, and for creating the conditions to thrive. And to the children—you are my motivation. When I say never stop learning, I mean it; it truly is a privilege to learn alongside you.

Thank you to the participants for sharing your lived experiences so honestly and candidly. It was an honour to listen to your stories; without you, this study would not have been possible.

To my Mum and Dad, thank you for always being my biggest supporters, I could not have done any of this without your love and encouragement. A special thanks to my beautiful Lola-Rose who has watched her Mummy work tirelessly; I hope I have shown you that with hard work and determination, you can achieve anything. Thank you to Ty, who convinced me to embark on a Doctorate in Education and who has kept me going throughout the whole process. Finally, to my Nana, the best storyteller in the world—I hope this would have made you proud.

Completing a Doctorate in Education is truly a collaborative effort. Through the moments of self-doubt and worry, I have been beyond grateful for the encouragement, support and love from my family, friends and colleagues. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Abstract

This thesis explores the conditions in which teachers can thrive by examining the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, through the lens of particular teachers' experience. Situated within a period of significant educational reform in post-devolution Wales, the study investigates how teachers navigate the implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and shifting professional learning expectations amid relentless policy change, highlighting the need to understand how they thrive within such a demanding context.

Guided by an interpretivist and social constructivist worldview, the research employs narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000), positioning experience at the centre of meaning making. The study captures the lived experiences of teachers in one primary and one secondary school in South-East Wales and reflects my positionality as a headteacher and doctoral researcher. This dual perspective offers an authentic, practice-informed understanding of the conditions that enable teachers to thrive. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was used to interpret the data, which enabled a rich understanding of teachers' experiences within their ecological contexts and emphasised the relational, emotional, and temporal dimensions of professional life.

Findings show that thriving is a dynamic and relational process influenced by intrapersonal, interpersonal, organisational, and policy-level factors. Teachers' wellbeing is shaped by self-reflection and experience, mediated by leadership and collaboration. Cultures characterised by trust, respect, and shared purpose enable teachers to thrive, whereas performative or hierarchical cultures limit autonomy and connection. Leadership emerged as pivotal in cultivating collaborative professionalism and fostering the relational conditions that sustain wellbeing.

An original contribution of this research is an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing, conceptualising thriving as ecological and relational rather than individual. Drawing on ecological (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and bioecological theories (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) alongside interdisciplinary concepts of ecosystem learning (Hannon and Peterson, 2017), the model offers a framework for leaders, policymakers, and practitioners to design and sustain cultures that enable teachers to thrive within and beyond Wales.

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables   **Page**

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview of chapter

This study explores the conditions that enable teachers to thrive, examining links between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. Situated within the context of educational reform in Wales, the research focuses on the lived experiences of teachers from two schools in South East Wales, a primary school and a secondary school. Employing a narrative inquiry methodology, the study seeks to make sense of teachers' lives amid ongoing system change. The research builds on a small-scale pilot conducted in 2022, as part of this doctoral programme, which indicated a relationship between teacher wellbeing and collaborative professionalism. This study also identified that leadership plays a central role in creating the cultural conditions and relational foundations of teacher wellbeing and thriving within a professional context (Murphy and Louis, 2018). The study also reflects my positionality as a headteacher and doctoral student researching within my own professional field. My motivation for this study arose from a personal and professional concern about the wellbeing of teachers within a system I work within daily. As both an insider and a critical researcher, I offer an authentic, practice-informed insight into the challenges and possibilities of creating school cultures in which teachers can thrive. A key contribution of this research is the development of an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing, designed to offer a conceptual and practical framework for teachers, leaders and policymakers in Wales and beyond. This study also contributes to the body of literature on teacher wellbeing and the emerging field of learning ecosystems (Hannon, 2019).

This chapter begins by engaging with the wider debate surrounding 'wellbeing' to provide conceptual clarity and to emphasise the significance of the topic within the teaching profession. I then provide contextual information regarding the Welsh education system, which formed the backdrop to this research. Throughout, I interweave my own perspective as a school leader and researcher, acknowledging how my lived experiences shape my interpretation of the

educational landscape. Following this, I share my personal narrative as both a headteacher and doctoral researcher, situating my positionality and highlighting how my own life story is entwined with this research. I then outline the research aims, objectives and questions that guided the research inquiry process. Finally, I provide an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.2 The 'wellbeing' debate

The concept of 'wellbeing' is widely discussed but often inconsistently defined across disciplines (Jarden and Roache, 2023). The Oxford English Dictionary (2014) defines wellbeing as "the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous", while the World Health Organization (2021, p.10) frames it as "a positive state… determined by social, economic and environmental conditions". Within the social sciences, wellbeing is often associated with a form of human flourishing. Seligman (2011) describes it as a construct that cannot be captured by a single measure, but is composed of multiple interrelated elements. In contrast, work-related and occupational wellbeing are typically framed in relation to the workplace. Van Horn *et al.* (2004) describe it as a positive evaluation of an individual's work environment and healthy functioning within it.

As a headteacher, I have witnessed first-hand how policy definitions of wellbeing often fail to capture the extent of the emotional, relational and ethical complexities of teachers' lived realities. This understanding influenced my choice to frame wellbeing as a dynamic and ecological concept rather than a measurable outcome. My own experience in school leadership has reinforced that wellbeing cannot be mandated or delivered through policy directives; it must be cultivated through relationships, trust and shared purpose. This understanding sits alongside the following theoretical framing, acknowledging that my personal and professional insights have informed my interpretation of the literature.

According to Jarden and Roache (2023, p. 1), one widely cited definition (Michaelson, Mahony and Schifferes, 2012, p. 6) defines wellbeing as "how people feel and how they function both on a personal and social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole". This definition

suggests wellbeing comprises emotional, behavioural, cognitive and relational elements. As such, wellbeing can be considered both diverse and highly individualised (Curren *et al.*, 2024). The debate is further complicated by the use of many other related terms, for example, 'happiness', 'flourishing', 'wellness' and 'thriving' (Jarden and Roache, 2023; Curren *et al.*, 2024).

For clarity, the following terms are used in this study: 'teacher wellbeing', 'wellbeing', 'thrive' and 'thriving'. Acknowledging that there is no universal definition of 'teacher wellbeing' (McCallum *et al.*, 2017), it is important to adopt a definition for the purposes of this research. Ereaut and Whiting (2008, p. 5) argue that wellbeing often functions "like a cultural mirage", appearing meaningful but remaining elusive. In response, this study adopts the following definition:

> [Teacher] [w]ellbeing is diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected. (McCallum and Price, 2016, p. 17)

This definition encompasses the many complexities of life as a teacher and acknowledges the varied lived experiences of teachers, aligning with the focus of this study. It acknowledges the inter-relationship of individual, collective and organisational influences on wellbeing. It supports a positive view of teacher wellbeing, recognising its diverse and fluid nature. It also suggests that wellbeing is not a fixed concept; rather, it is an intent and ambition. In this vein, I propose viewing teacher wellbeing through the lens of 'thriving'—a processual pathway towards wellbeing. The words 'thrive' and 'thriving' are often used to describe positive affect, growth and development (Curren *et al.*, 2024). Tobias *et al.* (2023) discuss teacher thriving in terms of learning and vitality. They suggest that teachers thrive when they develop knowledge, understanding and feel energised. Teachers who thrive are more likely to navigate complex roles and to engage in self-improvent (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005). Hannon and Peterson (2021) advocate the use of 'thriving' to describe an inter-relationship between an individual and their

environment, demonstrating an interconnectedness which is very relevant for the complex demands of the teaching profession. This ecological view aligns with the socio-constructivist positioning of this research, recognising the experiences and opportunities of individuals within collaborative and social experiences. Despite a wealth of research on teacher wellbeing, there is limited insight into how the culture of schools and collaboration between teachers can influence their wellbeing. Studies by Turner, Thielking and Prochazka (2022) and Weddle (2022) have emphasised the need for further investigation into how these relational and structural dimensions affect teacher wellbeing, thus strengthening the rationale for this research.

Further justification for this study comes from increasing concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of teachers across the globe, including in Wales (OECD, 2025). Research has identified the following contributory factors to recruitment and retention issues: teacher burnout (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2021); anxiety and stress (von der Embse and Mankin, 2021); work-related stress (Mc Brearty, 2023); and workload (Department for Education, 2019). Such negative aspects raise concerns for teacher wellbeing. These issues not only impact on the profession but also pupil outcomes, with Schleicher (2018) emphasising the central influence of teachers on pupil learning and achievement. This research responds to a notable gap in the literature, as Shirley, Hargreaves and Washington-Wangia (2020, p. 1) observe: "in comparison to student wellbeing, educator wellbeing has been relatively overlooked". Deepening an understanding of how teachers thrive, particularly in relation to organisational culture and collaboration, offers an important contribution to both academic knowledge and professional practice. Viac and Fraser (2020, p. 8) argue that "[l]ooking at teachers' wellbeing is an interesting angle to better understand current challenges of the teaching profession". The specific challenges faced by teachers in Wales are considered in more detail below.

1.3 Research context

This research is situated in Wales, a relatively small country, and one of the four nations of the United Kingdom (UK). Education in Wales has been devolved from UK parliamentary powers since 1999. Since this time, the Welsh Government, now known as Senedd Cymru, has designed national policies distinct to the Welsh context, seeking to be more responsive to local needs (Hulme, Taylor and McFlynn, 2024). The post-devolution policy landscape can be considered in three phases with distinct positions on (i) accountability (pupil-led performance measures), (ii) standards (expectations on pupils and professionals), and (iii) teacher autonomy/agency (the professional and relational capacity to exercise judgement) (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015; Egan, 2017; Evans, 2022; Davies *et al.*, 2024). Understanding how teachers navigate shifts in policy direction is central to this study's focus on teacher wellbeing and creating the conditions for teachers to thrive.

The first phase from 1999 to 2010 was marked by the powers of devolution and a "license to innovate" (Evans, 2022, p. 373). The most influential policy for education during this period, 'The Learning Country' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2002), provided a ten-year vision for education and was the start of Wales' education system being separated from that in England. 'The Learning Country' posed different challenges for the teaching profession. In the first decade of devolution, those in both the primary and secondary sectors were faced with adopting different pedagogical practices and experienced a decentralisation of power away from central Government and more towards teachers (Evans, 2022). Although this new approach was welcomed, research started to identify challenges and complexities in realising the policy direction. This was further compounded by the publication of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) results in 2009 which were particularly poor when compared to other nations, and significantly lower than the previous results in 2006, across Reading, Mathematics and Science (Davies *et al.*, 2024).

The second phase of education in Wales post-devolution (2010–2015) was therefore dominated by the poor PISA results and a return to stricter accountability and focus on outcomes. Davies *et al.* (2024, p. 27) named this phase "A complacent system?" referring to the political condemnation of the education system and the subsequent development of a bureaucratic approach. The reinstatement of national assessments and testing in primary schools, the introduction of national school categorisation and a reform of GCSE qualifications marked this more draconian and neoliberal phase of education (Evans, 2022). Furthermore, the consolidation of 22 local authority school improvement services into four regional consortia added to the complexity. This move sought to improve the consistency of support for teachers, yet it was also considered as another move in the constantly changing professional learning policy direction (Hutt, Smith and Jones, 2024).

Since 2015, education in Wales has experienced the third phase of devolved policy making, described by Evans (2022, p. 380) as "Curriculum for Wales and a culture of collaboration", the impetus for which started in 2014 with the 'Improving Schools in Wales' report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). This led to a new education strategy 'Qualified for Life' (Welsh Government, 2014) and the publication of 'Successful Futures' (Donaldson, 2015) which presented 68 recommendations for a new 'Curriculum for Wales', all of which were accepted by the Welsh Government. A collaborative 'Pioneer' model was adopted which aimed to support and empower teachers to develop their practices (Arad Research, 2018). The growth of teacher agency and professional autonomy was central to the success of Donaldson's recommendations (Donaldson, 2015) and signalled a move towards a more decentralised approach to education policy. A further policy, 'National Mission' (Welsh Government, 2017a), was published in 2017 which highlighted the need for high-quality education professionals.

A significant factor throughout this phase, up to the time of writing (2025), has been the emphasis on the development of the workforce and "a softening in neoliberal ideology and a more collegiate approach to policy development" (Evans, 2022, p. 380). Through this phase

there has been a continued focus on professional learning, centralising teachers as key to policy enactment. However, even in the last ten years, the evolution of the professional learning policies offered to practitioners could be considered as well-meaning but overcrowded (Hutt, Smith and Jones, 2024). From the 'New Deal' (Lewis, 2015), the 'National Approach to Professional Learning' (Welsh Government, 2018) and the 'National Professional Learning Entitlement' (Welsh Government, 2022a), to most recently, 'Dysgu' (Welsh Government, 2025), the new national professional learning and leadership body, these policy directions have heralded the centrality of teachers, yet could also demonstrate "policy confusion rather than policy coherence" (Evans, 2022, p. 390).

It is within this complex educational context that this research is situated. The challenges faced by all the teachers in this study were related to the period of education in Wales post-devolution. The teachers were navigating the implementation of 'Curriculum for Wales', alongside a significant reform to the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) system with the introduction of 'The Additional Learning Needs and Education Tribunal (Wales) Act 2018' which established a new statutory framework for supporting children with ALN from 0 to 25 years. In addition, they experienced shifting expectations around professional learning. This was all set against a broader policy landscape emphasising the need for a strong commitment to equity and wellbeing, particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. The volume and pace of policy change had been relentless (Griffiths and Jones, 2024). Research studies undertaken during the reform commented that teachers moved from positions of strength to vulnerability regarding their understanding of curriculum, which was further intensified by a lack of coherent professional learning (Evans, 2023). Compounding this position, Morrison-Love *et al.* (2023) highlighted that teachers felt overloaded and ill-equipped to support the new curriculum expectations. Thomas *et al.* (2023) reported that, whilst there had been an increase in teacher autonomy and enthusiasm, these were variably experienced across Wales. Moreover, they noted concerns by school leaders about the wellbeing of teachers when considering the enormity of the reform and subsequent increased demands upon them. Having worked as a teacher and school leader through this policy evolution, I have observed how shifts in

accountability, autonomy and reform have directly impacted upon teachers' emotional and professional lives. Moreover, engaging with the latest reforms as a headteacher and researcher has made me aware of the tensions and possibilities inherent in Welsh education. This dual perspective informs the interpretative stance I adopt throughout this thesis. The aforementioned studies and issues of the recruitment and retention of teachers in Wales (OECD, 2025), highlight the need for an increased understanding of the factors that influence teacher wellbeing. Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study seeks to explore how teachers have navigated the changing landscape and the conditions that have enabled them to thrive, in order to nurture children in their holistic development.

1.4 Research aims and objectives

The overarching intention of this study is to explore the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration, and teacher wellbeing. In support of this, the following research aims are used to define the scope of the study and guide direction:

- To explore the lived experiences of teachers and the impact these experiences have on their ability to thrive;
- To explore how collaboration is understood and how it interrelates with teachers' wellbeing;
- To better understand how organisational culture supports or constrains teachers' ability to thrive.

Whilst these aims provide the overall purpose of the study, the following objectives offer greater clarity and focus, as this thesis seeks to:

- Identify key themes of organisational culture, collaboration and wellbeing in research literature, establishing the need for the study and how this research will contribute to the knowledge base;

- Design a narrative inquiry to explore the life stories and lived realities of teachers within two schools in South Wales;
- Better understand the complex relationship between individuals and the social context in which they work within schools;
- Complete a reflexive thematic analysis of the data through an inductive, open coding process;
- Contribute to the field of research and influence policymakers, school leaders and teachers by providing further knowledge and understanding on creating the conditions for teachers to thrive.

1.5 Research questions

The following research questions were developed to align with the aims and objectives and the emerging need for a deeper insight into creating the conditions for teachers to thrive. They provide a meaningful guide throughout the qualitative research process and shape the interpretative lens through which I attempt to make sense of participants' lived experiences and life stories (Clandinin, 2016).

The questions that guided this study are as follows:
- Research Question 1: What does it mean for teachers to thrive in a professional context?
- Research Question 2: How is the culture of an organisation, and the way it constructs collaboration, experienced by teachers?
- Research Question 3: In what ways does collaboration support teachers' ability to thrive?

1.6 Theoretical and methodological framing

This study was informed by the ontological assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and developed through a social constructivist and interpretive inquiry. In order to better understand the lived experiences of teachers, this research employed a qualitative research design, using narrative inquiry drawing on life stories (Goodson, 2005; Clandinin, 2016). "Narrative inquiry begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 18) and it provides an approach that focuses on understanding such lived experiences through the sharing of personal stories. It considers the social contexts in which people live and is an appropriate approach for exploring the varied and interacting influences on the conditions in which teachers work (Chaaban *et al.*, 2022).

As a narrative inquirer, I have attempted to honour and make meaning of the stories shared with me (Caine *et al.*, 2017; Chase, 2018), acknowledging that this process was complex (Clandinin, 2016). Capturing the voice of teachers and their lived experiences is central to this study. Therefore, adopting narrative inquiry as the methodological frame provided an opportunity to understand teachers' lives in motion (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson and Sikes, 2010; Norman, 2020). The knowledge generated from the inquiry is based upon experience; the individual experiences shared, the experience as a researcher and the relationship between experience and context. Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk (2016) suggest a triadic understanding of temporality, place and sociality, which is explored throughout the study.

This research focused on teachers working in one primary school and one secondary school in South East Wales. Data collection methods were selected based on the principle that they would elicit the voices of teachers, provide a context for each school and support the aims of the study. The selected methods were a documentary analysis of School Improvement Plans, participants' reflections on professional learning experiences, researcher diary reflections and narrative conversations (Ozga, 2000; Clandinin, 2016; Kartch, 2017). A recurring and

interpretative process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was used to make sense of the data.

Drawing on these experiences and analyses, I turn to the theoretical underpinnings for this inquiry, which is informed by both ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and bioecological systems (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) as well as the interdisciplinary work on learning ecosystems by Hannon and Peterson (2017). Building on their work, I offer an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing as a framework for teachers, leaders and policymakers to support an understanding of the conditions required for teachers to thrive.

1.7 A story of positionality

This exploration into the conditions that enable teachers to thrive stems from my long-standing professional interest in how organisational culture and collaboration influence teachers' experiences and development. It is based upon a long-held belief that teachers can make a difference to the lives of others. As a former teacher and now headteacher, I have benefitted from such teachers throughout my own schooling and into my professional life; teachers who have ignited my passion for learning and, through their behaviours and actions, have had a lasting impact on my desire to learn. Looking back, what set these teachers apart from others was their interest in me as a person, their enthusiasm for their role and the way that this encouraged my eagerness to learn too. As a child, I enjoyed the challenges of learning and my schooling experiences shaped my understanding of the world. As the first child and grandchild in my family to attend university, I was guided by a network of people, socially constructing and nurturing my development. Then, as I became a teacher myself, I was captivated by a love for the profession, yet I was struck by the many voices that did not share my enthusiasm.

Schools are complex organisations. The culture of schools often depends upon the headteacher and their interpretation of national policy directives (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). My own

leadership journey started very early in my career and was shaped by a focus on outcomes and external validation, resonating with the national education system at the time. However, through personal growth, supportive mentoring and critical reflection, I now align with a process-oriented, transformational leadership stance (Bellibas *et al.*, 2024).

As a headteacher, I founded a new school in 2017 and prioritised creating a culture that enabled teachers to thrive, underpinned by collaborative professionalism and a commitment to teacher wellbeing. This aligned with the more recent changes in Welsh education (explained in '1.3 Research context'), and reinforced how my identity and lived experiences shaped this research process. I am both the researcher and part of what is being researched (Lewis and Quinnell, 2024). As this study is rooted in my interpretivist worldview, it assumes that reality is socially constructed and knowledge is shaped by interaction and experience (Crotty, 1998). Throughout this study, I embraced reflexivity in order to navigate the ethical, relational and emotional challenges of researching as an insider–outsider researcher (Mercer, 2007; Czerniawski, 2023; Yip, 2023). However, rather than viewing the insider–outsider dichotomously, I adopted Dwyer and Buckle's (2009, p. 60) concept of the "space between", recognising the complexity of research relationships and the need to be constantly aware of my positionality and how it shaped this research. Throughout the research, the influence of my positionality is critically discussed, with particular reference to power dynamics and trust. I reflect on my experiences, values and growth, and on how these have shaped both my identity (as headteacher and researcher) and my research choices. Engagement in diary writing and collaborative networks supported my continual reflection, which maintained my ethical integrity and methodological rigour.

Through critically reflecting upon my positionality, I present a study that honours the relational nature of narrative inquiry and advocates for in-practice research (Czerniawski, 2023). I offer my positionality story to demonstrate myself as a reflective researcher. I demonstrate empathy and an understanding of the experiences shared with me, and I recognise that my own story has influenced this study. My experiences of being a woman, a mum and a headteacher in Wales

intersect with many of the stories shared with me during this research. Through exploring participants' lived experiences, I was able to create unique perspectives and examine my own bias. My lived experiences and relationships with participants fostered open and honest conversations and provided an understanding of power dynamics. Harnessing the feelings of tension and dissonance as "a powerful tool for nurturing professional autonomy, learning, transformation and continuing critical reflective practice" (Czerniawski, 2023, p. 1383), I offer an insight into the conditions required for teachers to thrive.

Rooting this study within my positionality and applying an interpretative lens to better understand the lived experiences of teachers, I offer this introduction as a foundation for exploring why the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing is both crucial and timely.

1.8 Structure of thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters, namely: Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Exploring the Narratives, Discussion and Conclusion. The following descriptions provide a brief overview of the contents and nature of each chapter.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study, outlining my positionality and research motivation. It presents an overview of the research context, rationale, purpose and questions situated within a theoretical and methodological framework.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter provides an understanding of the key elements of the study and explores the relevant literature on teacher wellbeing, organisational culture, collaboration and leadership. It identifies gaps that this study seeks to address.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter details the theoretical and methodological framing of the study. It highlights positionality and methodological dilemmas. It justifies the use of narrative inquiry and the process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Chapter Four: Exploring the Narratives

This chapter shares the narrative accounts of participants, attempting to make sense of their lived experiences within the context of Welsh educational reform and realisation.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This chapter presents an interpretative discussion of the findings, foregrounding the dilemmas of meaning making. It reflects both participant narratives and is grounded in theoretical frameworks. It provides a contribution of an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Finally, this chapter concludes the thesis by presenting the key findings, outlining the contribution to knowledge, methodological and practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research. It proposes a way forward for a culture of thriving.

The structure of this thesis reflects the relational and interpretative nature of the study. It centres around the lived experiences of teachers, and my own reflexive voice, in further understanding how to create the conditions to enable them to thrive.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter provides a review of the literature related to the study. It critically analyses research seeking to illustrate an in-depth view of the strengths and highlighting the challenges and limitations of the research scrutinised. Literature providing an international perspective has been included to demonstrate wider scope and to ensure comparability with other national systems. To further strengthen the review, there is also a critical examination of literature specifically related to Wales, where the research was situated.

The literature review is organised into the following key areas:
- What does it mean for teachers to thrive?
- What is collaboration?
- What is organisational culture?
- An ecosystem for teacher wellbeing

2.2 What does it mean for teachers to thrive?

Building on the 'wellbeing' debate in Chapter One, the concept of 'thriving' is increasingly used within educational research to describe positive and aspirational aspects of wellbeing, yet it remains relatively underdeveloped (Chen *et al.*, 2022). Thriving has been described as a process that involves growth, learning and the capacity to respond to the complexity of being a teacher (Spreitzer *et al.*, 2005; Curren *et al.*, 2024). In this context, thriving is not an endpoint but a fluid, relational and contextual process which is shaped by an inter-relationship between individual and organisational conditions (Hannon, 2021). Therefore, this thesis argues that exploring what it means for teachers to thrive is a valuable lens through which to understand and support teacher wellbeing as situated, relational and dynamic. Moreover, the consideration

of teacher wellbeing by McCallum and Price (2016) (highlighted in '1.2 The 'wellbeing' debate') provides both a definition for the purpose of this study and also aligns closely with the notion of thriving. Further key studies that have influenced this research, and will be further examined in this chapter, include the development of conceptual frameworks (Viac and Fraser, 2020; Hascher, Beltman and Mansfield, 2021); reviews of empirical studies (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; McCallum *et al.*, 2017; Hascher and Waber, 2021); and research into the lived realities of teachers (Cann, Riedel-Prabhakar and Powell, 2021; Weiland, 2021; Hulme *et al.*, 2025). These have been selected as they offer perspectives about what it means for teachers to thrive and teacher wellbeing by exploring definitions, discussing influencing factors and referencing the internal and external factors that add to the complexity of being a teacher. This matters for this study as understanding the concept of thriving provides a more nuanced foundation for exploring how teachers experience, interpret and sustain their wellbeing within the complex ecological realities of their professional lives.

It is broadly agreed that wellbeing should be conceptualised in a multi-layered way which includes individual, relational and contextual features (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; McCallum *et al.*, 2017; Hascher and Waber, 2021). In order to provide clarification and a comprehensive outlook of teacher wellbeing, Hascher and Waber (2021) conducted an extensive review of empirical studies spanning nineteen years, from 2000 to 2019. The review concluded that teacher wellbeing is "a complex construct that needs to be understood through a set of components" (ibid., p. 5). They contend that understanding teacher wellbeing requires a more precise, profession-specific and multi-dimensional framing, which resonates with the ambition of this study. They call for clarity about the elements of teacher wellbeing and the definitions used in research, suggesting that these should be interrelated and integrate both positive and negative aspects. Furthermore, they argue for the acknowledgment of the crucial aspect of social interaction and specific factors associated with the teaching profession, commenting on the need for research to focus on "individuals at a micro level to school systems at a macro level" (ibid., p. 20), thus aligning with the exploration in this study and specifically Research Question 1: 'What does it mean for teachers to thrive in a professional context?'. Aligning

teacher wellbeing closely with thriving, Hascher and Waber (2021, p. 17) propose defining teacher wellbeing "as a positive imbalance", where positive dimensions outweigh the negative. They suggest this could help understand teacher wellbeing as not just being the absence of negative aspects but a dynamic, context-embedded process of thriving. In this sense, thriving is not an absence of negative aspects but suggests capacity to sustain oneself in the face of challenges. This is significant for this study as it reinforces the need for a nuanced, profession-specific understanding of wellbeing. It also aligns with this study's aim to explore how teachers experience and sustain thriving within a complex context. In considering such complexity it is also important to consider challenges to teacher wellbeing.

There are a wealth of research studies carried out over a significant period of time which identify challenges to a positive ideal of teacher wellbeing, such as teacher burnout (Borg, Riding and Falzon, 1991; Zhang and Sapp, 2009; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2021) and stress (Richards, 2012; Carroll et al., 2020; von der Embse and Mankin, 2021). Furthermore, both burnout and stress have been identified as contributory factors to poor recruitment and retention within the teaching profession (Kyriacou, 1987; Travers and Cooper, 1993; Collie, Shapka and Perry, 2012). Recruiting and retaining teachers is a challenge in many countries (UNESCO, 2016; Podolsky et al., 2019), including Wales (Egan, Longville and Milton, 2019; Glover and Hutchinson, 2022). In Wales, retention rates of teachers are of concern. In particular, teachers with less than five years' experience are already considering leaving the profession in the near future, raising questions about the potential longevity of the profession (Connolly et al., 2018; Evans, 2022). Furthermore, Acton and Glasgow (2015) highlight that working in neoliberal contexts can threaten teacher wellbeing. This is interesting for this study, as teachers in Wales are moving out of working in a system governed by neoliberalism and towards a culture of collaboration (Evans, 2022). The impact of this is explored through Research Question 3: 'In what ways does collaboration support teachers' ability to thrive?'. Although Wales is moving away from a neoliberal agenda, the enduring impact of such approaches remains significant. Many teachers continue to experience the residual effects of high-stakes

accountability and competition, with the legacy of neoliberalism still shaping perceptions of wellbeing and professional identity, which was evident in this study.

England, the closest geographical neighbour to Wales where this research is situated, still operates a largely neoliberal education system (Sturrock, 2021). A study by Jerrim *et al.* (2021), based upon the first empirical evidence on trends in teacher mental health and wellbeing in England, concluded that there is little evidence that teacher wellbeing is declining. Any trends that were noted were in keeping with that in other professions and not specific to the education sector. However, in contrast, Adams *et al.* (2023) found that teachers and school leaders reported lower levels of wellbeing when compared to the adult population of the UK. Around half of those who engaged with the study reported that being a teacher negatively impacted upon their mental and physical health. However, respondents only represented 2% of the total number of teachers in England so it cannot be assumed that this is relevant for all teachers. Moreover, due to the differences in the education contexts in England and Wales it cannot be considered that the same results would apply for teachers in Wales.

Despite the limitations of the research by Adams *et al.* (2023), a similar conclusion was reached by Savill-Smith and Scanlan (2022) in their Teaching Wellbeing Index. They reported that, when using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant *et al.*, 2007) to assess mental wellbeing, the wellbeing of education professionals across the UK was consistently lower than the general population. The average was similar across all parts of the UK; however, results from Wales were amongst the lowest. The Teacher Wellbeing Index explores three key findings, those being the challenges, mental health and staff retention. Amongst the challenges assessed, Savill-Smith and Scanlan (2022) present a damning figure that 75% of educators and 84% of school leaders reported work-related stress. They report that the figures of work-related stress have been consistently above 60% for the last six years, thus indicating a serious concern for the long-term mental health of the profession. However, there are limitations as the report is only based on 3082 respondents, representing around 0.5% of the total population of education professionals. Despite this, other research has indicated that the same patterns are emerging in

New Zealand, Australia and the United States of America (Learning Policy Institute, 2018; Cann, 2019; Carroll *et al.,* 2022). For example, Carroll *et al.* (2022) found that high stress and burnout was common amongst teachers in Australia, with those early in their career the most impacted. They concluded that teachers' "emotional regulation, workload and subjective well-being play a role in the degree of stress and burnout they experience" (ibid., p. 465).

Challenges to high levels of teacher wellbeing were further compounded by the coronavirus global pandemic (Savill-Smith and Scanlan, 2020). Research examining the impact of the pandemic on teachers has identified contributory factors towards negative aspects of teacher wellbeing, for example, burnout (Pressley, 2021), increase in stress, anxiety and depression (Alves, Lopes and Precioso, 2021) and negative perception of the profession (Kim, Oxley and Asbury, 2021). Billaudeau *et al.* (2022) conducted a study of 8000 teachers across six countries to investigate work-related factors that impact upon wellbeing during the pandemic. Their findings were synonymous with the very definition of wellbeing; they varied widely. However, despite methodological and contextual differences across the countries, they identified key factors for wellbeing namely safety, autonomy and the quality of relationships within work. They suggest that further research into teacher wellbeing should focus on the interrelation of individual and organisational factors, which resonates with the aims of this study. In Wales, Marchant *et al.* (2021) identified that the Covid-19 pandemic negatively impacted upon many aspects of the lives of teachers, both mentally and physically. Teachers reported an increase in isolation, workload and pressure and a struggle to maintain a work/life balance. In their recommendations, Marchant *et al.* (2021) comment on the need for policies to promote and foster positive teacher wellbeing within schools rather than focusing solely on the negative. Yet, it is important to acknowledge the limitations within the study, namely, that the findings are based on a convenience sample of participants and, therefore, may not represent the full diversity of experiences among all primary school staff in Wales during school closures and reopening. Moreover, while the sample included a broad range of roles and contexts, the participation and perception of participants could have been influenced by variations in school practices, school-level engagement in research and individual circumstances.

Exploring work-related factors and teacher wellbeing further, it is useful to consider the notion of occupational wellbeing. As work occupies a major part of individual lives and wellbeing it is interesting to explore how teaching compares to other professional occupations. Research into the wellbeing of professionals in the UK conducted by Tenaglia (2022) focused on nine major occupations, grouping together those which have similar requirements of qualifications, training, skills and experiences. These were collated as managers, professional, technical, administrative, skilled, caring, sales, operative and elementary occupations. Tenaglia found that people in professional occupations, such as teachers, had one of the highest averages for life satisfaction and happiness, but also reported one of the highest mean levels for anxiety. Managers and directors demonstrated the highest mean of life satisfaction over the ten-year period which correlated job permanence with the highest salary, whereas those in the caring and leisure services reported the highest feeling of worthwhileness and purpose but were at a higher risk of stress and financial instability. Incidentally, over the period 2012–2022, there was a positive trend in wellbeing and no significant differences between all nine occupational groups. Despite no significant difference, the research acknowledges that those in a professional occupation do have higher levels of anxiety compared to other occupations. Yet it is also important to note that the grouping of 'professional occupation' includes a wide span of professionals who require a degree and often postgraduate qualifications. Therefore, the information presented does not solely represent that of the teaching profession. In addition, it is important to note that the results are correlational and should not be used to make inferences about causation (ibid., 2022).

Focusing more closely on the professional occupation of teachers, Van Horn *et al.* (2004, p. 374) in a study of the occupational wellbeing of Dutch teachers acknowledged that "occupational wellbeing comprises more than affect; it manifests itself in employee cognitions, motivations, behaviours, and self-reported physical health as well". This research is relevant for this study as the measures used were specifically designed for teachers. In addition, the education system in the Netherlands is similar to that in Wales, with a history of top-down policy reforms. Day and

Gu (2014) describe wellbeing in the context of education as being centred around trust, belonging, positivity, supportive relationships and job satisfaction. In support, Viac and Fraser (2020, p. 18) define occupational wellbeing as "teachers' responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession". Occupational wellbeing can also be described as operating within an ecosystem consisting of interrelated factors (Ofsted, 2019). However, such ecological influences upon wellbeing may not always be within teachers' control (Price and McCallum, 2015). From the above research it is evident that the occupational wellbeing of teachers is complex and involves looking at working conditions at both an education system and individual school level (Viac and Fraser, 2020). This is echoed by Du Plessis and McDonagh (2021, p.3) who note that "the concept of wellbeing is multilayered with meaning linked to different interdisciplinary contexts".

It is clear from the research discussed that there are many facets to understanding teacher wellbeing. The considerable focus on the challenges to wellbeing could result in a *fait accompli* for teachers. To avoid such a deficit narrative, I believe that exploring what it means to thrive acknowledges the ways in which teachers can flourish as individuals and with others. This perspective not only complements existing research on stress, burnout and professional pressures, but also provides a lens through which to consider how the conditions for teachers to thrive can be cultivated. Acton and Glasgow (2015, p. 100) reported that "compiling knowledge on the factors that support and enhance teachers' wellbeing is important in encouraging greater sustainability within the profession". One of the factors that is positively associated with teacher wellbeing is the importance of relationships with others within the profession. Teachers do not work in isolation as they are part of a wider system of interaction and collaboration (Viac and Fraser, 2020). To understand the social conditions that teachers experience and to provide a deeper understanding of Research Question 3: 'In what ways does collaboration support teachers' ability to thrive?', the notion of collaboration will be explored further.

2.3 What is collaboration?

In support of the research aim, 'to explore how collaboration is understood and how it interrelates with teachers' wellbeing', it is first necessary to clarify the concept of collaboration. Through exploring the different structures of professional collaboration and reflecting on their respective strengths and limitations, I offer a consideration of what collaboration means for teachers.

Collaboration is not a new concept in education. As such, it is open to a range of definitions (Little, 1990; Vangrieken *et al.*, 2015; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018; Bush and Grotjohann, 2020). Little (1990, p. 519) defined collaboration as joint work that relies upon teachers working together based upon a "shared responsibility for the work of teaching" where their collective action provides a sense of belonging. DuFour (2004, p.8) took the definition further by conceptualising collaboration as a "systematic process in which teachers work together to analyse and improve their classroom practice", whereas Kelchtermans (2006, p. 220) viewed collaboration as a description "referring to teachers' cooperative actions (their actual doing things together) for job-related purposes". Common to all definitions appears to be the idea of working together and moving away from what Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018, p. 5) call "contrived collegiality", where collaboration is controlled and mandated, to one that relies upon the quality of mutual relationships (Kelchtermans, 2006).

More recently, Fullan and Edwards (2022, p. 31) have reflected that viewing collaboration as an activity or strategy is limiting; rather, they define collaboration as "organic and the life of it requires continued sustenance of deliberation, reflection and perseverance". To avoid what Vangrieken *et al.* (2015, p. 23) call a "conceptual confusion", for the purpose of this study, I view collaboration as a deliberate act of teachers working and reflecting together on a shared task to improve their own practice and that of others. Acknowledging that there are varying depths to collaboration and the concept itself is not static (ibid., 2015).

It is also important to clarify the difference between collaboration and professional learning, as the two concepts are closely aligned. Professional learning is typically related to the development of teachers' knowledge, skills and professional competence which can occur through a range of individual and collective activities (Mansfield and Thompson, 2017). Collaboration, by contrast, can be understood as a relational and collective process through which teachers engage with others in shared dialogue, inquiry and reflection (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). While collaboration can act as a vehicle for professional learning, it is not wholly synonymous with it. Professional learning can take place in isolation. Moreover, collaborative forms of professional learning are not always meaningful. It is important to clarify this distinction for this study, as understanding collaboration as a relational practice and way of being, extends understanding beyond professional learning to consider how collaborative processes are experienced and understood in relation to the culture of an organisation and teachers' wellbeing.

When considering collaboration, over the years in education there have been many structures within which teacher collaboration can take place. Table 1 provides an overview of the main forms of teacher collaboration influenced by the literature reviews conducted by Vangrieken *et al.* (2015) and Weddle (2022). It is important to acknowledge these, as participants frequently illustrated such forms of collaboration—at times explicitly naming them, and at other times revealing them through their descriptions of collaborative practice.

Form of Collaboration	Key Aspects	Citations
Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)	PLCs can be enacted across the whole school, within school or across school teams. They are characterised by shared values and vision, collective learning, shared practice, supportive conditions and rely upon a	DuFour and Eaker, 1998; Hord, 2004; Stoll *et al.*, 2006; Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Harris and Jones, 2017

	collaborative culture.	
Communities of Practice (CoP)	CoP can take place within or across organisations as they are focused on improvement of practice. Key elements to CoP are practice, people and capabilities.	Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott and Synder, 2002; Brouwer *et al.*, 2012
Teacher Teams	Teams refer to a collection of teachers in varying capacities. They are generally categorised as having a shared vision, commitment, interaction and mutual accountability.	Salas, Burke and Cannon-Bowers, 2000; Katzenbach and Smith, 2005; Horn and Kane, 2015; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018
Lesson Studies	Lesson studies are collaborative groups of usually three teachers who plan, observe and reflect upon lessons together to improve practice.	Lewis and Tsuchida 1998; Fernandez and Yoshida 2004; Dudley, 2013; Cajkler *et al.*, 2014

Table 1. Forms of teacher collaboration

It is clear that there are a number of defined forms of teacher collaboration. Common to all structures are the key behaviours of sharing information, planning and reflecting on practice. There is also a recognition that these forms of collaboration can be applied to different contexts. Such commonalities of practice and the value of collaboration are generally agreed by researchers, yet less focus has been put on understanding the depth of collaboration. This was an important aspect for this research as the construction of collaboration within schools and the way it is experienced by teachers was a key factor which is discussed in Chapter Five.

The construction of collaboration can range from practical and superficial to a deeper and more professional level. Research spanning more than thirty years has identified the benefits of a range of forms of collaboration on pupil achievement (Hord, 2009), as well as teacher professional learning (Mansfield and Thompson, 2017) and curriculum reform (Lewis and Takahashi, 2013). One of the most eminent researchers in the field of educational research, Andy Hargreaves, has spent over thirty years studying collaboration. In his early research in 1994, Hargreaves coined the aforementioned phrase 'contrived collegiality'. He was critical of formal efforts of collaboration controlled by school leaders and fixed to specific agenda. He continued to identify aspects within the education system which negatively impacted upon collaboration, namely high stakes accountability measures and lack of freedom for teachers to use the time afforded to them for collaborative activities (Hargreaves, 2003). In an attempt to remove hierarchical powers of collaboration, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) developed the notion of 'professional capital'. Professional capital consists of three aspects, human capital, decisional capital and social capital. They offer that social capital "is the capital people have together through their networks of learning, strength of mutual support, shared professional learning, and firm foundations of trust" (Hargreaves, 2019, p. 612). This research led to his most recent work in his co-authored book 'Collaborative Professionalism', where Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) claim that collaboration is no longer a debate as to whether it should or should not happen; moreover, it is more important to consider the forms of collaboration and its effectiveness on both teacher and pupil achievement. They use the term 'collaborative professionalism' to identify a deeper form of collaboration. They state:

> Collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together to work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose and success. It is evidence-informed, but not data-driven, and involves deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018, p. 4.)

This definition echoes the concept of collaborative professionalism as described by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2014 during a period of critical education reform similar to that recently experienced in Wales. Their vision for collaborative professionalism focused on valuing

the voice of the profession, developing professional trust, encouraging professional growth and developing leadership capacity (Hargreaves, 2019; Campbell, 2021). This common purpose looked to involve teachers rather than imposing top-down directives. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) propose ten tenets of collaborative professionalism which include collective autonomy, collective efficacy and common meaning and purpose to name a few. In support, Sharratt (2016) described collaborative professionalism as an approach to building collective capacity so that teachers engage in practice that is purposeful and empowering. The intent of collaborative professionalism to enable the conditions for pupil achievement and pupil and teacher wellbeing, could be further described as providing the conditions for teachers to thrive. Consequently, the literature regarding collaborative professionalism is central to this thesis and the research questions.

When examining the concept of collaboration and its impact upon teacher wellbeing, Colmer (2017) found that developing collaborative professionalism fostered positivity amongst teachers and supported the growth of agency and identity. Kern *et al.* (2014) found that collaborative engagement and relationships with colleagues were the most important factors for job satisfaction and feelings of commitment. In a comparative analysis of primary schools in England and Finland, Webb *et al.* (2009) found that teachers' involvement in collaborative practices, including observation and feedback on each other's teaching promoted higher levels of trust, professional learning and job enjoyment. The ability to sustain teachers' motivation and commitment through a collaborative network was crucial for both teacher growth and to improve pupil outcomes. They also highlighted that Finnish education policy recognised the importance of collaboration in supporting teacher motivation and this is "the key to preventing teachers' burn-out" (ibid., p. 412). However, teachers in Finland were also constrained by lack of professional learning opportunities and school leaders were not using collaborative opportunities to move schools forward. Moreover, in England, collaboration was "geared to achieving externally determined performance targets" (ibid., p. 419). There are limitations with the study, most notably that the comparative analysis was based upon 206 interviews with English teachers compared to only 12 in Finland. However, there are challenges of deep

collaboration that Webb *et al.* (2009) identified, including leaders being driven by national political standards, lack of confidence and trust in teachers by the government and a reluctance to acknowledge individual professional identity. These issues raise potential implications for this research as teachers and leaders in Wales have been through a significant period that echoes these challenges.

Further challenges to collaboration have been identified by Vangrieken *et al.* (2015, p. 27) who recognised that "deep-level collaboration inevitably requires touching teachers' underlying beliefs, which will inevitably lead to disagreement and conflict". Deep collaboration requires a level of interdependence and often evokes emotional responses as Datnow and Park (2019, p. 10) argue, teachers are "bound together in professional emotional geographies". Webb *et al.* (2009, p. 419) found that "teachers' perspectives revealed the centrality of relationships and emotions to the atmosphere and stability" of deep forms of collaboration. Conversely such emotion can lead to a breakdown of relationships which can impact on the capacity of teachers to deal with challenging roles, leading to negative emotional and mental wellbeing (Skinner, Leavey and Rothi, 2021). The challenges of collaboration are also relevant for school leaders as Fullan and Hargreaves (2016, p. 20) argue that it can cause them anxiety "because they fear it will undermine their authority, lead to stultifying bureaucracies of procedurally democratic decision making, and threaten their own identity as leaders". They proceed to share that "leaders need wellbeing and a sense of identity too" (ibid.) and that collaborative professionalism does in fact lie at the centre of great leadership. This is further strengthened by Visone (2022) who found that school leaders who prioritise collaborative professionalism promote high levels of collective autonomy, provide the logistical conditions for collaboration to flourish and do the work alongside teachers, rather than micromanaging them. Visone (2022, p. 19) concludes that "leaders are curators of positive school cultures, providing environments that meet humanistic needs for belonging, trust, and safety and include joy and fun".

It could be argued that school leaders have a key role in the development of systems for collaboration. If collaboration is a deliberate act of teachers working and reflecting together on

a shared task to improve the practice of themselves and others and that this can happen at varying depths, then it is important to consider the context in which collaboration takes place. As Weddle (2022) concluded, most studies have focused on the theories of collaboration and less on how it is constructed and how it supports teachers. Weddle (2022) recognises the benefits of research on collaboration including inter-disciplinary elements and suggests future research could focus on schools as organisations and how varied school contexts construct collaboration, thus supporting this research on *creating* the conditions for teachers to thrive and the inter-relationship between the three key elements of teacher wellbeing, collaboration and organisational culture.

2.4 What is organisational culture?

There is a wealth of research into organisational culture across many disciplines, particularly in the fields of business and organisational management. For the purpose of this research the concept of organisational culture is considered in the context of schools as this is where the research was situated. Developing an understanding of organisational culture also supports the research aims and questions, specifically Research Question 2: 'How is the culture of an organisation, and the way it constructs collaboration, experienced by teachers?'.

Torres (2022, p. 2) states that "research into organisational culture in schools has been characterised by phases of expansion (1970s and 80s), consolidation (1990s), stabilisation (turn of the century) and, more recently, a resurgence". It could be argued that such a resurgence has led to an array of definitions with researchers unable to agree on a concrete definition (Atasoy, 2020). Incidentally, this theme relates to the contested notions of thriving and collaboration and strengthens the need for this research to further understand such complex concepts.

When considering the concept of organisational culture many studies refer to phrases such as shared beliefs, expectations, values, norms, habits and attitudes (Hargreaves, 1998; Schein,

1999; Heinla and Kuurme, 2022; Torres, 2022). Van Houtte (2005, p. 77) states "culture is defined as the set of shared meanings, shared beliefs, and shared assumptions of the members of the organisation". Freiberg and Stein (1999, p. 11) offer a more abstract definition where they define organisational culture as the "heart and soul of the school". de Oliveira *et al.* (2023, p. 1) support that "it is not easy to reach a consensus, but the importance of this concept within organisations is clear".

The importance of organisational culture was shared by Edgar Schein (1985) in his earlier seminal work where he defined culture using three levels; artefacts, espoused beliefs and values and underlying assumptions, as shown in Table 2.

Levels of Culture	Description
Artefacts	Structure, physical environment, processes, policies
Espoused beliefs and values	Values, vision and goals
Underlying assumptions	Unconscious, taken for granted beliefs and values

Table 2. Levels of culture according to Schein (1985)

This seminal work is important for this research as each level of culture differs in its depth, complexity and visibility and the descriptions are all relatable to a school context. The essence of the culture of an organisation manifests itself at the level of artefacts and shared values; therefore, when analysing culture, it is important to recognise that artefacts can also be understood as representations of the culture and can be subject to observer bias (Cotter-Lockard, 2016). Espoused beliefs and values are as a result of social validation "confirmed only by the shared social experience of a group" (Schein, 2004, p. 29). Social

experiences formulate collective understanding and work together to support the articulation of vision and values. It is only when such experiences become the norm and seen as reality that they become basic underlying assumptions. These underlying assumptions are at the deepest level of culture. Many underlying assumptions within organisations are so strongly held that "members will find behaviour based on any other premise inconceivable" (Schein, 2004, p. 31). Smith *et al.* (2017) contest that such levels of culture can be difficult in the public sector generally as they are based upon hierarchical systems and often resistant to change. However, they also acknowledge an enabler to cultural change is the role of leadership. Jukić (2022, p. 20) argues that "school culture is also a paradoxical phenomenon because, once created as a process, it is in constant change". According to Schein (2010, p. 7) "understanding cultural forces enables us to understand ourselves better"; therefore, it would be prudent to further explore the importance of culture within the schools that are involved in my research.

The importance of culture within schools is often presumed, but Teasley (2017) argues that it is an area that needs greater focus. Schools are complex organisations and the "notion of culture is intended to explain the character of the school as it reflects deep patterns of values, beliefs and traditions that have been composed over time" (Atasoy, 2020, p. 258). One way of framing the culture within a school could be to describe it as positive or negative. Positive school cultures are linked to high performance, high staff wellbeing, innovation and risk taking (Sergiovanni, 2006; Engels *et al.*, 2008; Atasoy, 2020), whereas negative school cultures are characterised by low trust, disengagement, poor relationships and low expectations (Engels *et al.*, 2008; Teasley 2017). Mannix-McNamara *et al.* (2021, p. 16) investigated 'The Dark Side of School Culture' and found that "workplace culture influences incivility, by affecting the way in which individuals perceive what is valued and how these values become embedded in the daily interactions of the workplace". They use the phrase "toxic cultures" to reference organisations with "dysfunctional values and beliefs, negative traditions, and caustic ways of interacting" (ibid, p.1). In their work, they highlight causes of toxic cultures as relating to interpersonal relationships and deficient leadership.

However, it is also acknowledged that complex school cultures cannot be solely reduced to such a binary positive or negative consideration, especially when considering the individual context of schools and expectations of national policy. Braun *et al.*, (2011) explored four interrelated dimensions of situated, professional, material and external contexts which influence policy enactment. They set each of these against objective and subjective conditions and concluded that policies are written for the best case possible for implementation. However, the reality is that schools are often not able to enact policies in a utopian environment. Policies are shaped by local contexts and enactment is dependent upon many aspects including, values, leadership practices, staff and resources. Although the paper did not focus specifically on leadership, Braun *et al.* highlighted the importance of school contexts and in each of the four dimensions the role of school leaders is evident. Leaders are active policy interpreters who balance external accountability and expectations with the internal culture of their schools, thus supporting the fact that one of the major influences to the development of organisational culture is the school leader (Fullan, 2001; Schein, 2004; Bush, 2021).

In a study on school leaders in Flemish Primary Schools, Engels *et al.* (2008) identified a pattern of leadership features which shape strong school cultures. These features include leaders being achievement-oriented, relentless in the pursuit of improvement, and dedicated to the school. They demonstrate transformational leadership and are driven by a vision and shared goals. They indicate a preference for learning and effective time management prioritising "a considerable part of it encouraging high quality and innovative teaching and learning" (Engels *et al.*, 2008, p. 171). Atasoy (2020) concurs with such features. In a study on the relationship between school leadership styles, culture and organisational change, Atasoy (2020, p. 268) found that transformative leadership is a strong predictor of positive organisational culture. Such transformative leaders provide "psychological and structural empowerment that revitalise the motivation, touch the enthusiasm and invigorate organisational commitment". Organisational commitment has been highlighted by Lee and Louis (2019, p. 91) when describing the concept of organisations as professional learning communities. Such communities focus on "shared responsibility, reflective dialogue, deprivatized practice, and organisational learning". This

collaborative culture can be found to reduce emotionally challenging aspects of the role of a teacher and shape the development of other constructs of organisational culture such as respect and trust, thus validating the work of Lomos, Hofman and Bosker (2011) and Ho, Lee and Tang (2016). Lee and Louis (2019) recommend that further understanding of how a strong organisational culture supports sustainable school improvement is needed. They also argue for more research into school culture as it is experienced by professionals who work within schools, thus providing further impetus for this research. Involving professionals in research to understand organisational culture is crucial, not only because they are the most important resource of an organisation (Jukić, 2022) but also so that we have a deeper understanding of the way they view and value schools (Torres, 2022).

Leadership is consistently identified as a pivotal factor in shaping teacher wellbeing. Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) claim that the practices of successful schools leaders can buffer the effects of policy pressures by fostering trust, providing relational support and prioritising professional growth. Effective leaders also emphasise the centrality of relational trust (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Edwards-Groves and Grootenboer, 2021), whilst Ford *et al.* (2019) argue that leaders who explicitly prioritise working conditions that support wellbeing cultivate more successful and committed staff. This aligns with findings in Wales, where Greenway, Ryder and Eleri (2025) found that strong leaders who value collaboration and prioritise professional learning create strong school cultures that focus on a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing. Yet, this is not consistent across Wales (Welsh Government, 2023a) and signifies the complex and often distinct context of school leadership.

"The unique nature of schools as organisations presents a clear challenge to the theoretical and conceptual models of organisational culture designed in reference to business" (Torres, 2022, p. 12). When considering what organisational culture is, with reference to schools, there is a need to focus on multilayered and changeable factors. Torres (2022) draws on Schein's influential model of organisational culture to examine how leadership interacts with culture at multiple levels of an organisation. This work is situated in a broader systems perspective, recognising

that culture is not confined to the internal workings of an organisation but is also influenced by dynamics at the macro, meso and micro levels. The notion of macro, meso and micro can be linked to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory in which he set out a framework for understanding child and family development. Applying this to organisational culture within schools, Torres (2022) graphically depicted the processes of culture construction in school settings (Figure 1).
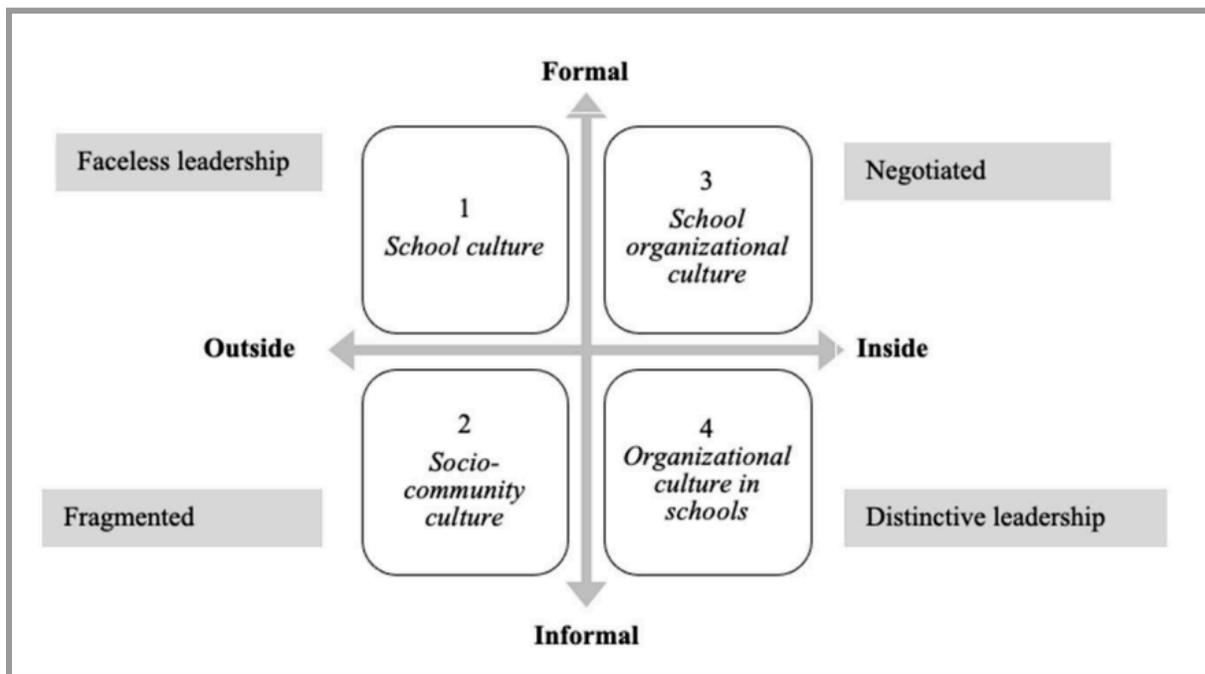
Figure 1. The various faces of the process of culture construction (Torres, 2022)

The model highlights four cultural spheres and describes the processes of culture construction as existing along two intersecting axes depicting location and the degree of formality. It is important to note that "the boundaries between them are fluid and transitory, reflecting the inherently dynamic nature of cultural processes, which are always unfinished" (ibid., p. 9). Using this model, Torres undertook a multi-dimensional analysis to represent the unique nature of schools. The paper identified the inter-relationship between the macro level of education policy pressurising schools to be driven by accountability measures, the meso level of the individual context of schools and the micro level representing the individuals who work and learn within

them. By focusing on the inter-relationship of macro, meso and micro, Torres (2022, p. 13) found "it is possible to escape the essentialist and homogenising approach to culture, and its empirical isolation".

This model resonates strongly with the data in this thesis, which reveal the distinct ways teachers and leaders navigate wellbeing within complex, layered systems. The model's attention to the fluidity between macro, meso and micro aligns with the inter-relationship between policy reform, organisational culture and individual experience evident in the narratives in this study. It is also important to note that Torres (2022) also recognised tension as moving between the levels put pressure on an ease of understanding and tested the ability of comprehending whether one level was more important than the other. This sometimes led to one-dimensional understanding of connections in the reality observed. This is a note of caution for this research as, when exploring the inter-relationship between organisation culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, it was important to remember that there could be different perspectives which may have contradicted each other. This also aligns with my methodological commitment to narrative inquiry, which privileges the multiplicity of personal experience and meaning-making. Using this model to understand the complex cultural nature of schools is helpful for my study as it offers a view of organisational culture as an analytical, multidimensional framework. Moreover, it warns about imposing definitions of the component parts of the study but to "help develop the intellectual *flexibility* essential to the art of linking structural dimensions and cyclical dimensions" (Torres, 2022, p. 13). Such 'intellectual flexibility' also provides a connection to the ecosystem model that underpins this study's conceptual contribution.

2.5 An ecosystem for teacher wellbeing

"Deriving from the field of evolutionary biology, an 'ecosystem' is a community of interdependent organisms acting in conjunction with the natural environment" (Hannon *et al.*,

2019, p. 1). 'Ecosystem' is a relatively new phrase in educational research, driven by the changes in education systems which are moving away from industrialised views of education to being driven by purpose and future oriented. This is particularly relevant for this study as it was situated within a changing climate of education policy in Wales, where reform agendas emphasise collaboration, wellbeing and system learning. Hannon *et al.* (2019, p. 16) suggest that the literature related to learning ecosystems is contemporary and "a mature field of theoretical and empirical research on learning ecosystems has yet to emerge". Taking this into account, this research will contribute to a growing field, particularly within the Welsh context.

Much of the research focusing on learning ecosystems is on the learner (Liljeström, Enkenberg and Pöllänen, 2014; Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista, 2020) and digital technology (García-Holgado and José, 2017; Nguyen and Tuamsuk, 2022). Few studies consider teacher professional learning (Sancho-Gil and Domingo-Coscollola, 2022). However, a report by Global Education Futures authored by Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista (2020) explores emerging approaches to learning ecosystems and considers how these can support society to thrive. They comment that a learning ecosystem can "unite networked stakeholders in an evolving process of learning and positive development that supports us to create desired futures at an individual, collective and systemic level" (Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista, 2020, p. 66). They acknowledge that there is an added complexity with researching interrelated concepts within ecosystems, but that such complexity should be valued. This was a point to note for this study as it aligns with the relational and systemic patterns observed in my data, where wellbeing was shaped by interactions between personal agency, professional relationship and organisational conditions.

More recently, Veliz and Mainsbridge (2024, p. 15) conducted research into the complexity of teacher wellbeing across career stages in Australia and "demonstrated that the well-being of teachers can be affected by numerous personal, interpersonal, organisational, and socio-political factors". However, this research focused solely on teachers and made recommendations for leaders and policymakers, rather than including leaders themselves as

was the case in my study. My study extends their work by examining both teachers and leaders within the same ecological system, allowing exploration of reciprocal influences.

The focus for my thesis was on teachers and leaders themselves. There are limited studies which explicitly focus on both teachers and leaders and their wellbeing within learning ecosystems, as the majority comment on the learner and the system as a whole. It is noted that inquiry into individual narratives and reflecting patterns of our education system will "foster collective benefit and evolutionary viability" (Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista, 2020, p. 127). It would be prudent to further consider literature related to the integral parts of a learning ecosystem and strengthen an understanding of the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. Building on the research of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Hannon and Peterson (2017), a model of an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing was further explored (Figure 2).
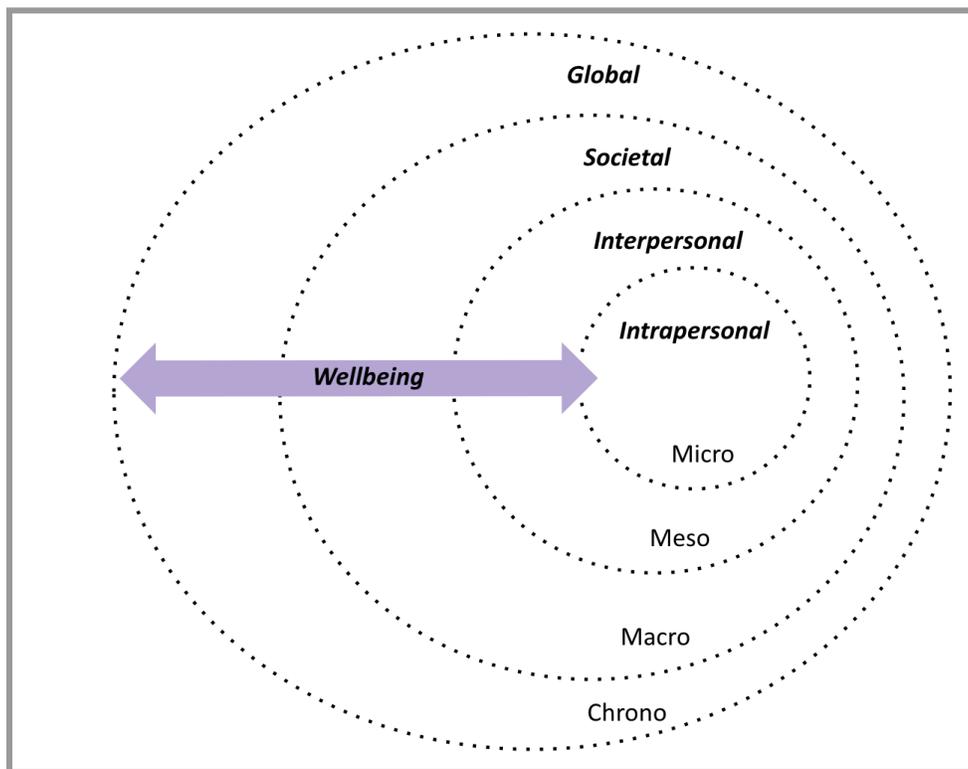
Figure 2. Model of an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing informed by Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Hannon and Peterson (2017)

The model places the teacher at the centre and identifies subsequent layers built on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Hannon and Peterson (2017). Each layer provides consideration for how we create the conditions for teachers to thrive. This holistic approach is used to explore factors that impact upon teachers' wellbeing. The intrapersonal (micro) level refers to the teacher and their individual values, beliefs and capacity which are rooted in past and current experiences (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2015). The interpersonal (meso) level highlights the interactions and connections the teacher has both within school and outside of it, as the value of engaging in and learning from relationships with others is clear (Hannon and Peterson, 2017). The societal (macro) level moves beyond the school environment to the wider system and the many cultural, societal and systemic beliefs that can impact on teachers' wellbeing. This level also sets the conditions in which teachers work from a policy perspective. The outer level represents the global (chrono) influences which can play a critical role in influencing teachers' wellbeing, such as environmental changes and global crises. Informed by the work of Hannon and Peterson (2017), the dotted lines acknowledge the influence each layer could have upon another and the addition of a returning arrow identifies an interconnectedness with teacher wellbeing.

This model was used as a lens to further consider the literature relating to the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. It responds to a gap in the literature as it offers a conceptualisation of teacher wellbeing as emerging from a dynamic inter-relationship within real educational settings. This research explicitly explored the inter-relationship between dimensions of school life and provides an insight into the cultural complexity within the teaching profession without reducing it to a single explanatory level. The application of an ecosystem model extends this contribution by providing a framework to understand how teachers and leaders can thrive.

2.5.1 Global and chrono level

When applying Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model and Hannon and Peterson's (2017) levels of thriving as a lens, it is important to consider the impact of global events on teachers' wellbeing. Price and McCallum (2015, p. 205) found that "natural disasters, worldwide events such as the financial crisis, terror attacks, royal weddings, and international sporting events were also a significant influence on wellbeing". Despite their work solely relating to pre-service teachers, it is supported by research on the impact of the COVID-19 global pandemic which was declared as an international emergency early in 2020.

COVID-19 caused global disruption, and repercussions were felt across education with the closure of school buildings, online learning and hub provisions being provided for children of critical workers (Christie, *et al.*, 2022). Although this global disruption impacted at a micro level, it would be remiss not to reference the pandemic within this chapter. The impact of COVID-19 on teachers' wellbeing was variable (See, Wardle and Collie, 2020). A study on occupational wellbeing of teachers by Stang-Rabrig *et al.* (2022) identified connections between job resources and demand and the ability for teachers to use their own resources, such as resilience, and their wellbeing. They concluded that ensuring teachers were supported by school leaders and colleagues was a key factor for them to be able to deal with global uncertainty. In support, Brooks, Creely and Laletas (2022, p. 8) found that teachers were able to cope when they could connect with social support. They also commented on "the 'need' for strong school leaders who can communicate and problem solve", thus presuming an inter-relationship between school leaders and teacher wellbeing. However, Harris and Jones (2020, pp. 244-245) recognised that during the pandemic, school leaders were working in "demanding and chaotic circumstances" and "managing the emotional responses of others". They proposed that school leaders should prioritise their own wellbeing in order to help others, yet, Marchant (2022) found that the wellbeing of 170 senior leaders in Wales was considerably lower than the average across the UK. Using the COVID-19 School Leadership Survey, developed by the COVID-19 Health Literacy Network (Dadaczynski, Okan and Messer, 2021) senior leaders completed an online survey related to topics such as work-related stress and mental health.

Marchant (2022) concluded that 54% of senior leaders had depression during the study period, based on the criteria in the World Health Organisation's Five Well-being index, validated as a screening tool for depression (Topp *et al.*, 2015). The majority of these senior leaders also reported moderate stress and mental exhaustion. Moreover, they reported lower wellbeing scores compared to other professions in the UK. Even more concerning is the timeframe of the study, as the survey was open from June to November 2021, which included seven weeks of school holiday time. The research by Marchant (2022) is particularly relevant for my study as both studies (my thesis and Marchant, 2022) are based in Wales and include senior leaders. Further research has raised increased concern for teachers following the COVID-19 pandemic. These relate to mental health (Marshall *et al.*, 2024), teacher training and induction (Towers *et al.*, 2023) and teacher identity (Gelir, 2023) with a growing emphasis on the role of leaders and policymakers in supporting teachers.

The need for leaders to support teachers during global uncertainty is evident from the research, yet school leaders are also expected to react and deal with the unpredictability of such events. As leaders set the tone for the organisational culture within a school (Wilson Heenan *et al.*, 2023) then it can be assumed that the way in which leaders react to events at a chronosystem level is interrelated with teacher wellbeing. As Mikušová, Klabusayová and Meier (2023, p. 1) state, organisational culture consists of an "accumulation of experiences passed on to individuals through the socialisation process; it provides continuity, reduces employee uncertainty, and affects their job satisfaction and emotional well-being". There is evidence to suggest that teacher wellbeing is connected to global events and the impact at the chronosystem level can also influence the wider education system at a macro level.

2.5.2 Societal and macro level

The macro level describes the many systemic expectations for teachers and school leaders which are often described by policy. The influence of wider political and social contexts within education policy is evident when looking at the organisational function of schools. As Torres (2022) argues, schools as organisations do not exist in isolation, nor do they merely replicate

policy guidelines as the way they interpret and implement legal policy can vary. Schools are "in a constant dialectic between the *external* and the *internal*, between the imposed and the desired, between norm and action" (Torres, 2022, p. 11). This constant tension and interplay between the education societal policy influences and the functioning of schools undoubtedly impacts upon the culture, structures and individuals within the organisation.

Education policy should not be considered as confined to formal government mandates and legislation (Ozga, 2000). It is much broader and shaped by a range of contexts, including those that are political, social and economic. Ball (1993) describes policy as being both text and discourse. It is not just about what is written but also how this is experienced through processes and outcomes. Considering policy as text highlights the literary functions of encoding and decoding. The interpretation and representation of policy is guided by the individual who is processing the information, although often "texts are never ever read first hand" (ibid., p. 12). Discourse alludes to "what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (ibid., p. 14). In this way it is about the use and meaning of words in policies and how they "speak to wider social processes of schooling, such as the production of 'the student', the 'purpose of schooling' and the construction of 'the teacher'" (Ball, 2015, p. 308). Considering text and discourse in the context of this research is an interesting way to explore how teachers experience the culture of an organisation, the way it constructs collaboration and also how they themselves are products of such construction. Ball (2015) argues that, through the layers of policy translation and enactment, teachers as individuals often result in being the subject of such policy. This manifests as ways of monitoring and evaluating the work of the teacher often led by leaders and fuelled by hierarchical systems which can lead to overcrowding and stress (Ball *et al.*, 2011). This system of accountability is often associated with the neoliberal context of education.

The educational neoliberal context can be defined by features such as "strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade that involves deregulation, privatisation, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (Hamilton, 2020, para. 5). Hannon and Peterson

(2017) state that this societal level of neoliberalism promised freedoms for educators which did not transpire. Moreover, the neoliberal context has led to competition, high stakes accountability, low trust and individuals who are tightly controlled (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Hamilton, 2020; Rogers, Dovigo and Doan, 2020). When considering neoliberalism and the macro influence upon schools, it is interesting to note Ball (2015) who comments:

> We move promiscuously between the creative agency of teachers, a necessary basis for enactment, and the ways in which policy discourses and technologies mobilise truth claims and constitute rather than reflect social reality. (Ball, 2015, p. 307)

It is such policy discourse and technologies of neoliberalism which continue to structure the work and lived reality of teachers and impact upon their wellbeing (Acton and Glasgow, 2015).

In a review of literature related to wellbeing, Acton and Glasgow (2015) established common themes which have been constructed in neoliberal discourse and impose systemic constraints upon teachers. "Teachers' work is inherently shaped by systemic requirements, which are politically and socially driven and based on particular ideological premises" (Acton and Glasgow, 2015, p. 106). The themes of emotions, relationships and contexts were found to have implications for teachers' wellbeing. In relation to emotions, Acton and Glasgow (2015) found that feeling positive emotions and effectively managing and regulating emotions were integral for teachers. Teachers' emotional intelligence, self-efficacy and professional competence enabled them to enjoy their work and thrive. However, they note that the "affective aspect of teachers' professional work is devalued and underestimated within the current political climate" (ibid., p. 105). In terms of relationships, the key role is that of emotion and emotional regulation. Teachers who are able to engage in working communities are supported to develop, have a sense of belonging and trust in leaders identified with higher levels of wellbeing. In contrast, isolation and negative school cultures undermined any collaborative work. Acton and Glasgow (2015) suggest that leaders are the determining element for a positive school culture and a positive climate enhances teacher wellbeing. In support, Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) note that a focus on horizontal relationships rather than hierarchical systems facilitate

collaborative cultures which enables flourishing. However, Acton and Glasgow (2015) warn that the systemic context and political ideology can impact on teacher wellbeing in terms of additional pressure, stress, lack of agency and higher levels of accountability.

The neoliberal context of policy influencing teachers can lead to a focus on a narrow range of data and outputs (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2009) rather than valuing people first. The focus on competition is in stark contrast to the idea of relationships and collaboration being central to policy enactment as "Neoliberal policies limit the opportunities to create cohesion between peoples by focusing on scores, which effectively dehumanises the people working in schools" (Acton and Glasgow, 2015, p. 108). This is further compounded when considering the contextual factors in which teachers work linked to performativity. In 2003, Ball (p. 216) described the "terrors of performativity" and the paradox between valuing initiative and delegating responsibility to implementing forms of surveillance and appraisal systems. Twenty years later, the landscape seems largely unchanged (Hwa, 2022; Proudfoot and Boyd, 2022; Clapham, 2023), yet the lived experiences of teachers in Wales, in the midst of realising education reform, may prove to be different.

The current policy directive of education in the UK continues to be one of flux and the growing disparity amongst the four countries has been further fuelled by devolution. Governed by different political parties, education across the UK differs from high stakes accountability measures defining the work of schools in England to education reform in Wales providing a national framework for schools to adapt at a meso level. The Welsh policy landscape provides an important backdrop for understanding teacher wellbeing. The world's first, Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), enshrined wellbeing as a statutory obligation for all public bodies in Wales, including schools, to work to improve sustainable wellbeing outcomes. In education, policies such as the 'National Mission' (Welsh Government, 2017a) and the 'National Approach to Professional Learning' (NAPL) (Welsh Government, 2018) signified the importance of wellbeing and professional growth. To further support schools, the Welsh Government published additional guidance and support regarding wellbeing, the most

significant of which being the 'Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing' (Welsh Government, 2021). The purpose of the framework being "to develop and embed consistent policy and practice" which is "underpinned by robust processes, procedures, administrative and governance arrangements to ensure continuity and equity for all" (ibid., p. 14). However, a recent study by Greenway, Ryder and Eleri (2025) suggests that more work is needed as they found that despite it being a sound policy, its implementation has been inconsistent across schools. In their study, which was based in South West Wales, the lived experiences of education professionals demonstrated "a complex picture of understanding, commitment, and challenge" (ibid., p. 8). Issues regarding conceptual clarity, staff confidence, accountability pressures, time and resources were noted by participants as barriers to implementation. However, where implementation was considered successful, there were examples of distributed leadership, professional development and collaborative relationships across the wider community. Despite the views captured in this research being only from a small area in Wales, the findings are important for my study; the authors state implications for policy and practice, namely that "[p]riotising staff wellbeing through supportive policies, workload management, and recognition of staff contributions is critical to sustaining engagement and resilience" (ibid., p. 15). Thus, understanding teacher wellbeing requires attention to not only individual and organisation factors but also to the broader statutory and political drivers in Wales and beyond.

Further systemic and policy implications for teachers could be considered in terms of performativity at a macro level related to the inspectorate systems. In England and Wales there are stark differences in these systems. In England, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OfSTED), is a non-ministerial government department that inspects services providing education and skills for learners of all ages. According to Tian (2024, p. 1513), OfSTED's "current inspection practices have made the powerful more powerful at the cost of the powerless" with a rigid way of working, viewed by many in the profession as entrenched in power dynamics and reductionist accountability practices. Tian commented on the fear and anxiety of such an inspectorate model and offers the rebalancing of power

between schools and OfSTED and a more humane and relational approach as possible solutions for the future. Waters and McKee (2023), in an opinion piece, claim that the impact of Ofsted inspections play a significant part in the mental health problems of teachers. Fitzsimons and Smith (2025) examined the psychological impact of Ofsted inspections on teacher educators in Higher Education Institutes and found that the nature of inspections led to stress and burnout and impacted upon retention. In Wales, 'Estyn' is the education and training inspectorate. It is funded by, but works independently of, the Welsh Government. In contrast to OfSTED, Estyn has followed the recommendations from an independent review (Donaldson, 2018) and removed summative grades, providing schools with a narrative on their strengths and areas for development (Tian, 2024). In addition, as an inspectorate, Estyn has reported that it supports school leaders in developing cultures that are self-improving and self-evaluative (Estyn, 2023) and are in line with the wider changes in education in Wales (Griffiths and Jones, 2024). However, Evans (2025) found that school leaders' perception of Estyn inspections highlighted the emotional, professional and systemic consequences of a high-stakes accountability culture. Participants reported fear and anxiety specifically relating to the behaviour of inspectors rather than the judgements made. The research also found that schools with weaker Estyn judgements were prevented from engaging in the same professional learning opportunities as schools with better judgements. This is at odds with the national view of encouraging collaboration amongst all schools. Further contradictions with the notion of collaboration were reported in participants' reluctance to share their practice post-inspection for fear of reputational harm. Evans (2022, p. 910) describes "that inspection makes some school leaders do the exact opposite seems entirely illogical". Although this research provides an insight into the Estyn inspection process and the influence on school leaders, it is important to highlight its limitations. These include a small sample size of only four headteachers and the study related to the inspection cycle of 2016–2022. Following this cycle, Estyn has been through a period of consultation to review the inspection arrangements. Since 2024, the new arrangements aim to create a more focused, supportive and responsive system. Through more tailored and frequent engagement, the new approach seeks to foster collaboration, reduce burden, and direct resources where they are most needed to drive meaningful educational improvement (Estyn,

2025). Although the impact of the reality of the new inspection process is yet to be fully considered, there is a clear steer that Estyn will maintain pace with the changes in education in Wales.

The education system in Wales is undergoing transformational change. Such ambitious changes have been driven by the launch of national policies in an attempt to establish Wales as a 'learning system', thus referring to an education system grounded in collaboration, collective inquiry and continuous improvement with schools, policymakers and professional bodies working together for the wider system (OECD, 2020; Welsh Government, 2023b). An area of policy development specifically related to this research is the aforementioned NAPL (Welsh Government, 2018). The NAPL aims to provide the necessary knowledge, skills and experiences for teachers to thrive in an evolving education system. It presents eight interconnected elements which are in stark contrast to the more traditional delivery/receipt model of professional learning that result in teachers being left in a complex web of isolation and independent practice (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Anderson, 2002). This change resonates across the societal level and macro strata in Wales where "key, influential statements have emphasised movement away from top-down centralism, foregrounding instead the adoption of a distinctive 'collegiate outlook' and 'spirit of collaboration'" (Hutt and Lewis, 2021, p. 471). However, there appears to be paradoxes emerging within the early stages of reform realisation with teachers feeling a sense of anxiety regarding control and accountability. Hutt and Lewis (2021, p.482) identify that "this anxiety is a response to a perceived potential future failure of the professional self to meet accountability expectations". Perhaps this is also indicative of the fear of translating policy into practice, especially when there are such significant changes to expectations placed upon teachers through policy change. Moreover, amongst the landscape of educational change there are no policies from the Welsh Government relating specifically to teacher wellbeing, providing more impetus for this study.

Policy change in education can result in teachers feeling a growing sense of insecurity, a loss of meaning in what they do and why they do it (Ball, 2015). As Creagh *et al.* (2023, p. 2) note "the

enduring problem of teachers' and school leaders' experience of work remains a policy problem". Policy involves a network of power and privilege governed by a consensus that it should "improve access and equality of opportunity" (Ozga, 2000, p. 115). The development of schools through policy enactment and reflection is not a straightforward or linear process (Ball, 2015). Moreover, policy enactment can reflect the "values that are expressed in institutional norms" (Ball, 2015, p. 298). Ozga (2021) comments that policy enactment is led by individuals who translate policies into practice, so they make sense for their organisation and support changes or improvement. It is therefore important to examine such individuals and how they function within the organisation themselves, that is at an interpersonal and meso level.

2.5.3 Interpersonal and meso level

As previously suggested, the interpersonal level represents teacher relationships and the school as an organisation, in and of itself (Torres, 2022). In Wales, there has been a recent drive for schools to work towards realisation of the OECD's Schools as Learning Organisation model (Welsh Government, 2017b). The OECD considers schools that are learning organisations demonstrate "the capacity to change and adapt routinely to new environments and circumstances as its members, individually and together, learn their way to realising their vision" (Kools and Stoll, 2016, p.10), thus articulating the complexity between the organisation and the interactions between the individuals who work within it.

The complexity of the interpersonal level within the ecosystem of teacher wellbeing is highlighted in the OECD's concept of schools as learning organisations. Such a concept requires teachers and school leaders to rethink professionalism so that they can thrive (Kools and Stoll, 2016). Gouëdard, Kools and George (2023, p. 343) found that "transforming schools as learning organisations requires focusing on the professional learning and retention of adequate school staff to establish a sustainable learning culture in schools". Considering research in Wales, where my study was situated, Roy *et al.* (2021) found that although there is a culture of professional learning established in schools across Wales, there is substantial variance amongst school leaders. Furthermore, there is inconsistency in collaboration and in evaluating the impact

of professional learning. Although these are interesting findings, they do need to be noted with caution as there were limitations to the study, namely a very small sample size with schools handpicked to participate by regional consortia.

Further studies in Wales include a review of schools developing as learning organisations. The OECD (2018) reported that "the majority of schools in Wales are well on their way in developing as learning organisations" (OECD, 2018, p. 29). They noted that there needs to be professional interplay between school leaders and teachers both taking responsibility for engaging in dialogue and learning from others. It is school leaders who create the conditions for schools to develop as learning organisations (OECD, 2018). However, Harris *et al.* (2022) note that this review was reliant upon self-reporting and further longitudinal research is required to fully understand the impact of the learning organisation model on schools in Wales. Furthermore, there is a danger that this model in Wales could "remain yet another policy imperative without the adequate infrastructural support, expertise or capacity required for realisation" (Harris *et al.*, 2022, p. 18). Regardless of the danger of the schools as learning organisations model becoming another ineffective policy, the central focus of the model on creating a collaborative learning culture across the organisation is crucial.

Creating a school climate that fosters collaboration relies upon school leaders who create structures and relational trust (Azorín and Fullan, 2022). Moreover, enabling a collaborative environment requires the promotion of openness, positivity, a willingness to engage in communication and a removal of top-down power (Fullan and Quinn, 2020; Harris, Azorín and Jones, 2021). Acton and Glasgow (2015), in their literature review of studies published between 2002–2015, conclude that the creation of non-hierarchical relationships is integral to both collaboration and teacher wellbeing. The role of relationships and trust appears to be crucial for the development of collaboration as these concepts support and enable the demands and challenges of the job to be shared with colleagues, engaging in dialogue and inquiry and embedding cultural change (Webb *et al.*, 2009; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). The notion of trust is "both a moral commitment" and "an emotional disposition of reduced anxiety"

(Hargreaves, 2007, p. 187) in which leaders set the tone for relationships that enable openness, psychological safety, and a culture where teachers feel valued and supported. Trust is central to creating a culture of collaboration where teachers can innovate, take risks and improve (Webb *et al.*, 2009; Harris *et al.*, 2022). Developing teacher confidence in their own self-efficacy requires a supportive climate of trust (Weiland, 2021; Gouëdard, Kools and George, 2023). However, Butt and Retallick (2002) warn of the role between school leaders and teachers being fundamental to professional wellbeing. It could be concluded that successful collaboration is not only dependent upon the willingness of teachers to take risks, to be committed to professional growth and to work together, but also for school leaders to create a positive climate of trust, autonomy and efficacy. Cordingley *et al.* (2019) state that a lack of trust can create low expectation, top-down directives and restrict opportunities. Moreover, many examples of collaboration become ineffective as the culture in which they are being developed is not considered (Webster-Wright, 2017; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018).

The importance of school leaders in developing collaboration and positive teacher wellbeing is clear in the literature. As Hargreaves and O'Connor state "organisations flourish or flounder from the head [teacher] down" (2018, p. 137). If we wish to establish the conditions for teachers to thrive, then leaders need to prioritise professional learning rather than creating cultures of competition (Acton and Glasgow, 2015). Leaders providing professional learning experiences which support collaborative professionalism provide an opportunity for "creating stronger and better professional practice together" (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018, p. 4). Kulavuz-Önal and Tatar (2017) considered the relationship between professional learning experiences and teacher burnout. They suggest that developing a culture of professional learning increases self-efficacy, feelings of accomplishment and decreased levels of burnout. Furthermore, highly effective professional learning focuses on both social and relational elements such as control, trust and collaboration and, as a result, impact positively on feelings of satisfaction and positive wellbeing (Abubakar, Ariffin and Jaafar, 2020; Loughland and Ryan, 2022). In Wales, Jones *et al.* (2023) identified the power of informal collaboration amongst teachers who participated in the national Masters in Education programme. They found that

over 200 teachers have benefitted from networking, which is organic and teacher-led rather than being centrally controlled. Jones *et al.* (2023, p. 5) state that the power of collaboration in the future will be "the result of collective energy, agency and action that makes leadership inherently distributed". Such leadership supports a climate for collaboration and strengthens teachers' contribution to their own professional learning (Çoban and Atasoy, 2020; Lin, 2022). Therefore, exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing is important for the teaching profession.

The interpersonal level of the ecosystem for teacher wellbeing relies upon both leaders and teachers and the reciprocal nature of collaboration. Such a relationship is evident in research; however, it ultimately relies upon the individuals within schools and the intrapersonal level.

2.5.4 Intrapersonal and micro level

All teachers are individuals, with their own attitude, identity, decision-making and sense of self, therefore, the intrapersonal level is a key aspect of the ecosystem. When considering the impact of global events, societal changes, organisational culture and the relationships that exist within schools on teacher wellbeing, it could be argued that the identity of each individual teacher is also fundamental. Sachs (2005, p. 15) refers to the professional identities of teachers as "the core of the teaching profession". Suarez and McGrath (2022, p. 6) argue that professional identity "is made up of their beliefs and perceptions about themselves and their role as teachers". Understanding professional identity is a fundamental aspect of collaboration as the ways in which individual teachers relate to others will impact upon their attitudes and behaviours (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004; Kern *et al.*, 2014). Cordingley *et al.* (2019) identified a relationship between teacher identity and agency which requires teachers to be active participants in their professional growth. They found a causal link between high levels of individual and collective efficacy and teacher wellbeing. In support, a cross-national phenomenological research study conducted by Du Plessis and McDonagh (2021, p. 9) identified "that a teacher's professional identity as a competent educator is essential to the development of their confidence and self-esteem". They found that the emotional wellbeing of

teachers was closely connected to their experiences within school. The qualitative study compared the lived experiences of out-of-field teachers in Australia and South Africa. The phrase 'out-of-field' refers to teachers who are assigned to positions they do not have suitable qualifications or specific training for (Ingersoll, 2001). Du Plessis and McDonagh (2021) concluded that teacher appraisal systems did not take into account the lived experiences of the teachers, and, therefore, caused higher levels of stress and anxiety. They emphasised that the increasing accountability and quality improvement measures upon schools are "channelled through to teachers" (ibid., p. 10) and such challenges have significant impact on teacher wellbeing. As teachers' feelings of stress are linked to their contextual reality (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2015; Andrew *et al.*, 2018), it could be argued that developing collaboration could reduce this impact. For this reason, an approach is dependent upon trust and collective autonomy and not driven by hierarchical accountability. Such accountability may be described as the very antithesis of collaboration, particularly when considering collective autonomy. The idea of collective autonomy has been described by Hargreaves and O'Connor as teachers having "more independence from top-down bureaucratic authority, but less independence from each other" (2018, p. 6). Therefore, the notion of developing a strong individual professional identity will undoubtedly strengthen the development of relationships with others.

Developing teacher autonomy moves away from practices prevalent in schools in Wales and beyond. Such as, top-down evaluation of teacher performance through leaders observing teachers in formal situations and an over-reliance on standards-based assessment of teacher quality aligned to pupil performance (Hallinger, Heck and Murphy, 2014). This level of instructional improvement "can be a source of stress, burnout and ill-health for teachers" and is "positively correlated with teachers' stress and with lower job satisfaction" (Viac and Fraser, 2020, p. 36). In contrast, collective autonomy appreciates the professional judgement of teachers working together, building trust and being open to feedback and support (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). This can also greatly improve individual happiness and feelings of success (Butt and Retallick, 2002).

The literature on teacher identity emphasises the emotional and relational dimensions of teaching, which are integral to wellbeing. However, Kelchtermans (2009) prefers to not use the term 'identity' as it could be perceived as being fixed and unchanging. Instead, they describe professional identity as tied to emotions and shaped by "self-understanding", referring to both an understanding of the self and the impact of experiences (ibid., p. 261). Day and Gu (2010) argue that teachers' sense of vocation and moral purpose sustain them, while Zembylas (2003) highlights the emotional labour involved in aligning personal and professional values. They discuss the importance of emotion in teacher identity and that these "are not just matters of personal dispositions but are constructed in social relationships and systems of values" (ibid., p. 216). These social relationships have a significant influence on how teachers express and communicate their emotions and identity. An interesting area to consider when discussing professional identity is the impact of motherhood. This literature is included as participants in my study report about the impact of motherhood, as discussed in Chapters Four and Five. Baptiste *et al.* (2024, pp. 587-588) highlight the challenges that women leaders in schools face, ranging from "representation and diversity, to workload, progression and pathways to promotion". Through a self-study they shared an insight into the complexity of their personal and professional identities. They offer strategies for supporting the ambitions for leaders whilst protecting motherhood, thus, "addressing the important links between micro and meso layers of working life" (Baptiste *et al.*, 2024, p. 600) and identifying an inter-relationship between identity and relational working. These perspectives reinforce that thriving is not about individual resilience but about sustaining a coherent sense of self within supportive professional cultures.

The way in which teachers navigate and shape their professional contexts can also be related to teacher agency, that being "not something that people can have - as a property, capacity or competence - but … something that people do" (Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015, p. 626). Priestley, Biesta and Robinson (2015) considered an ecological understanding of agency to the professional work of teachers. Applying this understanding, Priestley and Drew (2019, p. 159) argue that the way in which teachers act "encompasses the dynamic interplay between three

temporal dimensions - influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present". In this way, agency can be viewed as an implication of national policy and school level expectations, with individual teachers positioned "as active curriculum makers" (Priestley *et al.*, 2024, p. 2). In Wales, Curriculum for Wales explicitly emphasises teacher agency as central to the reform. However, Priestley *et al.*, (2024, p. 7) undertook a case study by drawing on empirical research, some of which was undertaken in Wales, and found that curriculum making is a "relational practice" that requires a "secure and supportive climate" for teachers to be able to share their voices. They acknowledge the complexity of this and argue that teachers need space and time for relational work to enact new policy frameworks. Through attending to such issues, teachers' agency would be enhanced and they would be more able to engage with complex tasks and situations. This suggests that thriving cannot be disentangled from the degree to which teachers are able to exercise professional judgement, autonomy and collaborative responsibility. Moreover, exploring teacher wellbeing through an agency lens highlights the interaction between identity and the cultural contexts of schools.

Although identity is a key aspect of the intrapersonal level as it encompasses an individual's characteristics, roles and affiliations perceived by themselves and others, for my research it is also key to explore an individual's sense of self. Similar to identity in that it is unique to an individual, a sense of self refers more explicitly to an individual's perception of who they are and their place in the world and involves self-reflection and self-awareness (Robins, 2021). Tang (2003) argues that the development of teacher identity is closely intertwined with an individual's sense of self. In a study with student teachers, Tang found that personal values, embedded within an individual's broader sense of self, significantly influenced how they perceived and enacted their professional roles. Similarly, Arnold (2021) reports on the formation of pre-service teacher's sense of self in a study related to their lived experiences in the journey to teaching. In Arnold's study, pre-service teachers' reflections demonstrated how their identity was negotiated between their personal values and the contextual realities of the classroom. References to inner belief, professional agency and sense-making highlighted that their identities were in a continual process being shaped through reflection, relational

connections and an interaction between the personal and professional self. These findings, though based on the experiences of student teachers, are pertinent to my research given their focus on lived experience and the alignment with the narrative methodological positioning which is central to my study.

Further research related to a sense of self focuses on self-awareness and reflection. Berry (2009, p. 308) discusses that the act of reflection is an integral part of professional learning and improving practice. It can also support "a deeper understanding of the self, including how one acts, what one knows and does not know, strengths and weaknesses". Reflection is therefore integral to teacher development and the ongoing development of self. Crucial to this development is also self-awareness, that is the ability to reflect on and assess behaviours, beliefs and values. Berry argues that this is often an aspect of professional learning that is overlooked, particularly for student teachers, due to its inherently personal nature. However, neglecting this can result in teachers remaining unaware of how their own lived experiences, emotions and values influence classroom dynamics and how they engage with others (London, 2001). In this way, fostering a strong sense of self is not only integral to teacher identity development but also to navigating the relational and ethical demands of the profession. Moreover, Berry (2009) challenges that understanding the self should be a central professional learning activity for teacher educators, as it shapes and informs practice and contributes to teaching being considered as a discipline grounded in reflection, rather than a "simple act of doing" (ibid., p. 316).

In a recent study conducted by Shapira and Amzalag (2025), the self-awareness of teachers was explored through self-reported questionnaires and participation in an online professional learning programme. Findings revealed a significant gap between the self-perception of teachers and the reality of their behaviours when working collaboratively. Most teachers reported they were self-aware and aware of others around them, yet their actions contradicted this. However, the limitations of the study include the nature of the professional learning element being online and potentially restricting opportunities for participants to fully

demonstrate their self-awareness in action; thus, the authors recommend further research to be conducted face to face. Despite this, it raises caution that an individual's reported sense of self should also be considered in a practical context. This is helpful for my study, as it supports the sharing of stories but also the analytical sense making of them to provide meaning.

Taken together, the literature highlights that a teacher's sense of self and identity are not fixed but continually shaped by reflection, relationships and lived experience. These intrapersonal dimensions influence how teachers navigate the profession and interact with others, particularly within the complex organisational culture of schools. Understanding the self is therefore central to teacher wellbeing. Consequently, this layer of the ecosystem plays a crucial role in shaping how teachers experience their work and engage with others, reinforcing the importance of understanding a sense of self alongside professional identity.

2.6 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have critically examined the literature relating to collaboration, organisational culture and what it means for teachers to thrive. Drawing on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Hannon and Peterson (2017), I have developed an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing as a conceptual lens through which to explore these interrelated areas. Although the key areas, in their own right, are vast, there is very little empirical evidence exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, particularly in Wales and the UK. Much of the existing literature adopts a deficit perspective of teacher wellbeing, namely due to global events such as the coronavirus pandemic, issues with teacher recruitment and retention and an increased focus on low levels of wellbeing. Research recognises that teacher wellbeing is multi-layered, yet there is a lack of consideration for macro, meso, micro and temporal dynamics. Moreover, very few studies consider teachers' voices alongside those of school leaders. This study addresses these gaps by using an ecosystem perspective to examine thriving as a relational and evolving process,

grounded in the lived narratives of teachers and leaders. These theoretical and empirical

considerations underpin the interpretivist, narrative inquiry design that follows in the next

chapter.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter presents and justifies the purpose of the study, methodology and research methods employed in this research. It is purposely organised to present a critical narrative of the methodological choices and processes I engaged with through the study. The chapter consists of the following sections:

- Purpose
- Principles of research
- Positionality and the insider-outsider dilemma
- Plot, people, place
- Process of ethical considerations
- Process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The process of organising this chapter was a journey in itself. In the initial drafts, I struggled to convey the essence of my research decisions, alongside the centrality of me as a headteacher and, therefore, an insider-outsider researcher. Through various iterations and frustrations, I decided to write this chapter as a systematic narrative providing both structure and flow to enable the reader to understand the process and research decisions I made. I also endeavoured to share the richness of the methodological process, entangled with my own sense of self as an insider researcher. I have shared both my values and the purpose of this research alongside a recognition and exploration of my own bias and subjectivity (Drake, 2010; Czerniawski, 2023). In this chapter, I have built on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Goodson and Sikes (2010) and Braun and Clarke (2022), and demonstrate the combined use of narrative inquiry and reflective thematic analysis as a distinctive contribution to the field. Throughout the chapter I have demonstrated how my decisions were supported by research literature and guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What does it mean for teachers to thrive in a professional context?

Research Question 2: How is the culture of an organisation, and the way it constructs collaboration, experienced by teachers?

Research Question 3: In what ways does collaboration support teachers' ability to thrive?

3.2 Purpose

Following a long-standing interest in this topic, my doctoral studies provided an opportunity to deepen my understanding. In 2022, I undertook a small-scale pilot study as part of the doctoral programme. In this study I identified a relationship that was present between teacher wellbeing and collaborative professionalism which was dependent upon internal (conceptual understanding, relationships, joint purpose) and external (professional learning and development experiences, time and space, role of leaders) factors. I concluded, as have others (Fullan, 2001; Fullan and Hargreaves, 2016; Murphy and Louis, 2018; Bush, 2021), that the role of leaders is central to the external factors as they make the strategic decisions and set the climate for school cultures. The pilot study was conducted in one primary school in Wales and, despite the local context and small scale, the study presented tentative contributions to the area of teacher wellbeing and provided one of the starting points for this research.

Shirley, Hargreaves and Washington-Wangia (2020, p. 1) note that "in comparison to student wellbeing, educator wellbeing has been relatively overlooked". There are gaps in research which led von der Embse and Mankin (2021) to highlight a critical need to support teachers' wellbeing. Turner, Thielking and Prochazka (2022) found that social support for teachers is closely linked to an increase in feelings of connectedness and a decrease in loneliness; therefore, the impact on teacher wellbeing from social support networks is apparent. However, they did not report on the relationship between the supportive systems in schools and how these specifically relate to wellbeing outcomes. Furthermore, they made suggestions that future studies could involve the sharing of stories, reflective practice and exploring professional learning as a way of supporting

teachers to improve their wellbeing. Weddle (2022) identified collaboration as a supportive system, yet commented on the need for additional research to explore how the context of schools can contribute to the construction of such collaboration.

These studies demonstrate the gaps within the existing research, whilst also highlighting the need for an increased understanding of the factors that influence teacher wellbeing. To further develop these findings, this research explored personal narratives in order to gain an understanding of the interactions between the personal, collective and organisational dimensions of a school. The research took place during a time of mass curriculum, professional learning and additional learning needs reform in Welsh education, which began in 2015 and was still being refined at the time of the research. The aims of the research were:

- To explore the lived experiences of teachers and the impact these experiences have on their ability to thrive;
- To explore how collaboration is understood and how it interrelates with teachers' wellbeing;
- To better understand how organisational culture supports or constrains teachers' ability to thrive.

The aims, in conjunction with a critical reflection on my values and professional interests, served as the purpose for this research. My espoused values, namely that of authenticity, honesty and kindness, guide my behaviour as both a researcher and school leader. Being a doctoral researcher and working within a school in Wales during the current distinctive educational reform provided me with an opportune moment to explore the lived realities of teachers. I explored their life stories to better understand the complex relationship between individuals and the social context in which they work. As Goodson (2013, p. 30) shared; "[s]tories can so richly move us into the terrain of the social, into insights into the socially constructed nature of our experiences". Providing a rich representation of the lived realities and experiences of teachers through sharing their voices was important to me. The best way of gathering these voices led me to using narrative inquiry as the chosen methodology, influenced

by the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Goodson (2005), Goodson and Sikes (2010), Goodson and Gill (2011) and Clandinin (2016).

Undertaking this research in Wales during a period of curriculum reform was distinctive. Emerging research studies undertaken during the reform in Wales comment on teachers moving from positions of strength to vulnerability regarding their understanding of curriculum which was further intensified by a lack of coherent professional learning (Evans, 2023). Compounding this position, Morrison-Love *et al.* (2023) highlighted teachers feeling overloaded and ill-equipped to support the new curriculum expectations. Thomas *et al.* (2023) reported that whilst there had been an increase in teacher autonomy and enthusiasm, these were variably experienced across Wales. Moreover the researchers noted concerns by school leaders about the wellbeing of teachers when considering the enormity of the reform and subsequent increased demands upon them. These studies have employed a range of methods which have included interviews and focus groups with teachers, thus providing teachers with a voice, albeit through a specific lens of curriculum design. There are examples of teachers sharing their experiences of curriculum reform in the context of their life stories. So, Lee and Choi (2024) reported on teachers in South Korea making sense of policy changes through multiple relationships including their life story. Other international studies have explored life stories and how these can promote or hinder curriculum reform (Chimbi and Jita, 2021; Marangio and Heyting, 2023). Whilst there are studies that focus on teachers sharing their experiences in the wider context of their life stories, this area is limited in Wales. Furthermore, very few studies have been conducted by headteachers, also living with and through the realities of curriculum reform. The role I play as a headteacher and researcher was distinctive at this juncture of education in Wales.

The purpose of this study was directly influenced by my learning and curiosity as both a headteacher and researcher. Locating myself in the research was important as I have both an understanding of life in the context of schools in Wales and my own lived experiences. In addition, I wanted to ensure that my values were reflected through the research process and

provided an authentic view of how best to create the conditions for teachers to thrive which will be shared in this chapter and discussed further in Chapter Four. Yet, I also acknowledge that my motivation for this study, my methodological choices and the methods used were bound by my experiences and lived realities and have influenced my research decision making. Therefore, reflexivity is a conscious part of my methodological decision making and is woven throughout this study (Glesne, 2011; Flick, 2018).

3.3 Principles of research

Research in education has been defined as systematic inquiry to understand a problem or an unknown; it is how we develop knowledge or practice within the field (Stenhouse, 1981; Gray, 2018). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p.109) describe it as "a deliberative and reflexive exercise". Through a spiral process of deliberation, reflexivity, growth and deepening complexity, I was able to carefully consider the motivation for this study. From the outset, my personal narrative, views as a headteacher in Wales and my appreciation of existing work (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson, 2005; Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Hannon and Peterson, 2017; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018; Braun and Clarke, 2022) have all influenced my decisions as a researcher.

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, which is particularly well suited to exploring how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences within the world around them (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2018). Acknowledging that the limitations of a qualitative methodology are namely that of rigour, a lack of generalisability, validity and reliability (Gray, 2018), through this chapter, I argue that the strengths of a qualitative research design align with my research aims and questions. A strength of such a design is supported by Pring (2015) who suggests that individuals have their own unique life story and, therefore, bring multiple understandings and interpretations to research. It is this uniqueness of life story and possible implications for schools that I was fascinated by (Goodson, 2005; Goodson and Sikes 2010) and,

consequently, the research employed a qualitative research design and a theoretical perspective of interpretivism. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 19) state that "the central endeavour in the context of the interpretative paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience". This understanding is drawn from assuming that reality is socially constructed and also recognising the need for a strong theoretical framework which enables researchers to identify and critique relationships, connect to existing knowledge and clarify relevance (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). To adopt a critical understanding of the research, the theoretical framework of this study is based upon the learning theory of social constructivism. This proposes that learning is dynamic and co-constructed rather than passive and instructional (Piaget, 1972; Bruner 1978; Vygotsky 1978). Vygotsky (1978) argued that individuals construct their own knowledge through social interaction and use sets of beliefs or mental models to interpret and make sense of the world (Adams, 2006; Flick, 2018). The epistemology of social constructivism promotes learning, which is collaborative, cooperative and interactive (McLeod, 2019), which resonates with this study's research questions.

3.4 Narrative inquiry

The research questions focused on building an understanding of the participants' professional lifeworld and, therefore, there was a need for a natural mode of qualitative research design. Consequently, this research took the form of a narrative inquiry and life stories (Goodson, 2005; Bryman, 2012; Goodson and Sikes, 2010; Clandinin, 2016) and documentary analysis (Ozga, 2000). I suggest the following as a definition of narrative inquiry:

> Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants… An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Narrative inquiry provides in-depth information of personal experiences and how lives are lived in particular social contexts, which also support the aims of this research. It is an appropriate approach for exploring the varied and interacting influences on the conditions in which teachers work (Chaaban *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore "people's narratives can be used to explain the contradictions, confusions and complexities of working within a modern organisation" (Gray, 2018, p. 703). Through employing a narrative inquiry and life story methodology, the complexities of personal and professional experiences of teachers in social contexts can be interpreted and shared. Choosing narrative inquiry as a methodology supported my epistemological belief and encouraged teachers not only to share their experiences, but also to do so in a form that valued their lived experiences. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 18) state, "narrative is the best way of understanding and representing experience". Therefore, for me, narrative inquiry is not just a methodology, but a way of understanding lives rooted in social contexts. This is supported by the work of Goodson (2005) who recommended that stories should be both narrated and located in both specific and wider contexts. Narrative inquiry is also closely aligned with the interpretivist paradigm that this study is grounded in. Within this study, interpretivism provided the philosophical foundation for narrative inquiry and guided my understanding of knowledge and reality. It provided a methodological approach to explore the lived experience and stories of participants. In this way, interpretivism and narrative inquiry combined to offer a rich, situated account of what it means for teachers to thrive in their specific contexts.

Narrative inquiry has been used in many fields such as philosophy, religion, law and medicine (Riessman, 1993). However, it was first described as a research methodology, specifically in the discipline of education, by Clandinin and Connelly in 1990. Heavily influenced by the work of Dewey and his writing on the nature of experience, interaction and continuity, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 2) recognise that "people are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context". As they developed narrative inquiry as a research methodology, Clandinin and

Connelly explored key researchers who had used narrative in their work across the social sciences.

Table 3 provides an overview of the main influences which led to the development of narrative inquiry in education.

Researcher	Discipline	Thinking Related to Inquiry
Polkinghorne (1988)	Psychology	Descriptive narrative to make sense of life events and exploratory narrative to explore causal connections
Coles (1989)	Psychiatry	The power of telling and listening to stories and having a trust in life
Bateson (1994)	Anthropological Inquiry	Learning and improvisation in response to uncertainty in life
Geertz (1995)	Anthropological Inquiry	Importance of observation and making connections
Czarniawska (1997)	Organisational Sciences	Narrative is a heuristic device to understand organisations

Table 3. Early thinking of narrative inquiry according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000)

Through exploring this work, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 17) were able to use both "indigenous narrative concepts and adaptations from other disciplines" when describing narrative inquiry in education. It is this early thinking and subsequent wealth of research which places Clandinin and Connelly as the pre-eminent researchers in this field and why I have chosen their work as the main influence on this research. In 2016, Clandinin offered that narrative inquiry is about living by and in stories; "it is a way of thinking about identities

relationally" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 21). Other researchers have used the work of Clandinin and Connelly and developed the understanding of narrative inquiry from their original thinking.

Caine, Estefan and Clandinin (2013) advanced the consideration of narrative inquiry to include an understanding of relational being and knowing and recognising that people's stories are interrelated. They called for a renewed methodological commitment to the ontological and epistemological grounding of narrative inquiry. Advancing narrative inquiry beyond viewing stories as data to understanding them as a narrative ontology where lives are understood as storied and continuously composed in relation to others. In addition, Hutt (2020) justified the use of narrative inquiry in a study on the trust, autonomy and accountability in the lives of teachers in Wales. Through a reflexive engagement with his own professional narrative and a commitment to relational ethics, Hutt demonstrated narrative inquiry as a relational and contextually situated methodology with a focus on the socio-political domain of Welsh education. These developments provide a snapshot of how the thinking regarding narrative inquiry has developed over time. These studies resonate with my research design and the methodological choices I have made. Yet, I also take heed of Goodson (2005, p. 6) who posed the dilemma of life stories and narrative offering "a way of giving voice to a particular way of being, or should the genre serve as an introduction to alternative ways of being?". Suggesting that life stories and narrative should not just share people's identities, experiences and stories, but should also provide consideration for imagining and enacting different futures. In this way, narrative work supports the socio-constructivist view that individuals construct and reconstruct meaning through experience and reflection. I consciously considered this dilemma for my study and, through the notion of reflexivity, considered the social contextual factors during both the listening to the storytellers and also when interpreting their stories.

This research focused on listening to teachers' stories and collating these experiences and perceptions to make meaning. The concept of narrative inquiry is steeped in experience as described by Clandinin (2016, p. 17); "narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honouring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and

understanding". In this way, this study has allowed me to explore both the experiences and stories of the participants and also to reflect upon my role as the researcher. A relational ontology is fundamental to narrative inquiry and, as a narrative inquirer, I understood that experiences are continuous and relational. I also recognised that my own life story may have served as a limitation and that this was entwined with the lived reality of participants. However, I believe that lived realities are shaped through social interaction and provide people with stories to tell (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1990; Bunjun, 2010). The notion of life stories is clarified by Goodson (2013) who remarked that there is a movement away from the grand narratives witnessed in historical contexts in the past to small individualised narratives. Plausibly, this has further increased in the last ten years. Alongside this, in 2005, Goodson commented on the lack of teacher voice in educational research and a need to hear their stories. Now in an age of educational reform in Wales, I would argue that it is even more important to listen and understand teacher's voices.

"The stories we tell of our experiences matter" (Norman, 2020, p. 3963). One of the foundational purposes of narrative inquiry is to honour the stories told. As the researcher I invested in teachers' life stories and valued the collaborative nature of this methodology so that I could make meaning of the stories told to me (Caine *et al.*, 2017; Chase, 2018). Making meaning of life stories is complex and part of what Clandinin (2016, p. 23) describes as "relational living alongside". At this juncture, it is important to reiterate my position within the research. I am the headteacher of one of the schools in which the research was situated; therefore I was close in proximity to half of the participants in the study and entangled in the areas being explored in this research. I was both the researcher and part of what was being researched (Lewis and Quinnell, 2024). When considering narrative inquiry as a methodology and the nature of stories, I also explored the notion of life history research. According to Goodson and Sikes (2010, p. 1), "life historians examine how individuals talk about and story their experiences and perceptions of the social contexts they inhabit". Life history is a long-established methodology dating back to the early twentieth century (Goodson and Sikes, 2010). Whilst there are many similarities between life history methodology and life story, the

key difference to acknowledge for this study is that I had one narrative conversation with each participant. They were encouraged to share their story, and I acknowledge that this is a subjective view of their past lived events. I agree with Tierney and Landford (2019) that the retelling of a life story is not objective but can provide valuable insights into a person's identity and place within society. Peacock and Holland (1993, p. 368) justify using the term 'life story' instead of 'life history' as it simply means "the story of someone's life". I agree with such simplicity. My role as the researcher was not to construct a life history alongside participants, as Tierney and Landford (2019, p. 9) suggest "life history is a dynamic and recursive process between researcher and participant" which takes place over time; this was not the intention for my study. My role was to listen and make meaning so that the participants' life stories were the "product of the interaction and desire for understanding between teller and listener" (Peacock and Holland, 1993, p. 372). Yet, I also acknowledge that such interaction may also have limitations due to my own life story and the impact I had on participants' experiences. Accepting this interrelated web, and in further developing understanding, it was important that I acknowledged contextual information so that participants' life stories were viewed in the context of time and space (Goodson and Sikes, 2010) and it also meant that I needed to tell the story of my inquiry too. Thus, this was not about life history but rather an intended exploration of participants' stories as an "artefact of history, it tells the stories within a time and place that will never exist again" (Norman, 2020, p. 3965). Through this research, I was interested not only in life stories but also in temporality; that is how life has been experienced on a continuum of past, present and future (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Understanding the methodological components of this research was an important part of my development as a researcher. I acknowledge that there are many similarities between life history, life story and narrative inquiry and I would argue that they all sit on a qualitative research continuum. For me, the key positioning for this research was focusing on "lives as lived and told throughout the inquiry" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 52). The knowledge generated from the inquiry is based upon experience; the individual experiences shared, the experience as a researcher and the relationship between experience and context. Clandinin and Connelly (2000)

developed terms for a 'three-dimensional narrative inquiry space' consisting of interaction, continuity and situation. Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk (2016) extended this work with a conception of experience through a multiple understanding of temporality, place and sociality. Firstly, temporality acknowledges the transitional nature of time and the continuity between past, present and future as a process. As the researcher, I ensured that I focused on the process rather than making judgements based upon fixed periods of time. Secondly, place refers to the concrete location of events including those where the inquiry took place. It was important to note where elements of participants' stories took place and the impact of this on the experience shared. Thirdly, sociality identifies internal personal conditions and external social conditions as well as the relationship between participant and researcher. It is this view of experience that suggests that the ontology of narrative inquiry is transactional (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007) which is in keeping with my ontological beliefs. Furthermore, when considering the epistemological view of experience, narrative inquiry is relational (Caine *et al.* 2017) and in accord with my interpretivist position and principles of research.

Whilst narrative inquiry offers a powerful way to explore lived experience, it is not without criticism. A main concern relates to its subjectivity, although embraced within the design of a narrative inquiry, it is a valid point to note and one that I have referred to throughout this study, particularly when considering my positionality. Another limitation to be considered is that of generalisability. As narrative inquiry focuses on exploring in-depth lived experiences, the sample size is relatively small, therefore, generalising findings to a wider audience is challenging. However, as Pino Gavidia and Adu (2022, p. 2) claim "[g]eneralizability is not the objective of narrative inquiry; rather the approach is to embrace the lived experience as story". Furthermore, Atkinson (2009, p. 100) acknowledged "that narrative inquiry reflects selected interests and representations of teachers' lived experience that are not necessarily representative of every member of the larger teaching community". There was a danger that in my study I could have presented an idealised view of the teaching profession. However, taking heed of this limitation, I have attempted to share teachers' stories which are "indeterminate,

messy, polyvocal, conflicting, ambiguous, and fragmented" (ibid., p. 101), so that the richness of teachers' lives are evident.

As narrative inquiry is an in-depth methodology, this in itself can be viewed as a limitation. The slow and meticulous approach required for analysis can be considered as both labour-intensive and time-consuming (Butina, 2015). This also links to interpretive challenges that may occur. Due to the time intensity and potential volume of data, the interpretation in narrative inquiry can cause issues related to validity and rigour. There is potential that different researchers could interpret participants' lived experiences in different ways; therefore, it is important that researcher positionality is acknowledged and reflexivity is essential (Clandinin, 2016). The role of researcher is critical in narrative inquiry, but could also be viewed as a limitation. As a relational practice, narrative inquiry will change participants' experiences (ibid.). Furthermore, the deeply relational and reflexive process can risk over-identification, where the researcher may inadvertently project their own meanings onto participants' stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Sparkes, 2002). It is the role of the narrative inquirer to uphold ethical practices to ensure confidentiality and manage any emotional distress. Moreover, the researcher needs to ensure transparency, anonymity, demonstrate an awareness of power dynamics and mediate between any potential imbalance, acting "invitational rather than directive" and "demonstrating respectful curiosity about participants' expertise and experience"(Colla and Kurtz, 2024, p. 1218).

Despite these challenges, narrative inquiry remains a rigorous and valuable methodology when conducted with reflexivity, transparency, and ethical integrity. The principles of this research are firmly rooted in the qualitative field of narrative inquiry as I believe that this was the best choice for exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. Using narrative inquiry and life stories not only provided the foundation for eliciting the voices of teachers but also to understand their experiences (Bryman, 2012; Clandinin and Huber, 2010; Goodson and Sikes, 2010). Narrative inquiry provides in-depth information of personal experiences. It is an appropriate approach for exploring the varied and interacting

influences on the conditions in which teachers work (Chaaban *et al.*, 2022). In order to explore such conditions, valuing teachers' stories and the "important connection between life as lived and life as told" (Goodson and Gill, 2011, p. 5), it is important to also consider the term 'lived experience'.

3.5 Lived experience

The term 'lived experience' is central to this study and explicitly stated within the research aims. Narrative inquiry offers a valid and rigorous methodology for exploring lived experience as Connelly and Clandinin (2006, p. 479) define it as "the study of experience as story … [and] first and foremost a way of thinking about experience". Influenced by the work of Dewey (1938) and his conception of experience as an interaction between individuals and their social environment, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasise that individuals' lived experiences are bound by the contexts in which they operate. As Dewey (1938, p. 35) states "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after", thus aligning with the qualitative and social constructivist orientation of this research.

Lived experience has been a recurring focus within qualitative education research, yet often in limited ways. For example, Philipsen *et al.* (2019) examined the lived experiences of teachers participating in an online professional learning programme using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Whilst this provided useful insights into the programme effectiveness, it paid insufficient attention to how such experiences intersect with professional identity, teachers' feeling and their wellbeing. A further phenomenological study by Dadmehr *et al.* (2023) investigated the lived experiences of teachers during curriculum reform and the communication they received from the central government. They found that by exploring lived experience they were able to provide valuable policy-related insights into how to improve communication and collaboration when curriculum planning in a centralised education system.

Yet, they only offer a narrow conception of experience related to processes of information exchange and did not take into account a wider and more in-depth view of teachers' lived experiences. More recently, Chen (2024), in a multiple case study highlighted the influence of lived experience on teachers' perceptions and practices of project-based learning. By focusing on both personal and professional influences, Chen found that the interaction between lived experiences collectively shaped both beliefs and practices. However, this study relied upon a specific pedagogical approach, limiting its capacity to share insights into the broader professional and organisational landscapes in which teachers work. These studies demonstrate the potential of lived experience as an inquiry lens but also reveal a gap as there is limited research which considers teachers' lived experiences across personal, professional, organisational and policy domains, or within the complexity of systemic educational reform. Moreover, the phenomenological or case study approaches provide descriptions of lived experiences but do not always capture the storied, temporal and relational qualities of experience.

My study addresses these limitations by employing narrative inquiry as it explicitly honours lived experience and how they are embedded within social contexts. Applying Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) 'three-dimensional narrative inquiry space' provided a framework for focusing on the complexity of teachers' lives that other approaches often overlook. By situating teachers' narratives within the distinctive context of Welsh educational reform, this research attempted to gain deeper insights into how lived experiences shape teachers' wellbeing and capacity to thrive, thereby extending beyond the narrower focus of previous studies.

When considering the lived experiences of participants in narrative inquiry, it is also vital to acknowledge and explore the lived experience of the researcher. Clandinin (2006, p. 47) argues that narrative researchers "need to find ways to inquire into participants' experiences, their own experiences as well as the co-constructed experiences developed through the relational inquiry process". As Clanindin and Connelly (2000, p. 70) state "[o]ne of the starting points for narrative inquiry is the researcher's own narrative of experience, the researcher's

autobiography". Therefore, to frame my standpoint at the time of the research, I explored my own positionality, values and lived experiences.

3.6 Positionality and the insider-outsider dilemma

Positionality describes a researcher's worldview, the positions assumed within their research and subsequent actions (Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Holmes, 2020). My worldview relates to my ontological assumption and my belief about the nature of social reality (Gray, 2018; Grix, 2019). I take the view of relativism, in that multiple realities exist, and these are derived through social construction (Flick, 2018). The way I view the world also influences my belief about the nature of knowledge. Thus, my epistemological position is that of interpretivism. I maintain that the social world can be understood through multiple interpretations of an event, shaped through individuals' perspectives and interactions (Adams, 2006; Brundrett and Rhodes, 2013; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Such positionality influenced my choices of research focus, participants and the research process (Grix, 2019; Yip, 2023). However, it is important to acknowledge that positionality itself, and the place of reflexivity, are both highly contested concepts (Glesne, 2011; Flick, 2018; Czerniawski, 2023).

The concept of positionality relates to social attributes of a researcher, namely that of gender, race and class (de los Ríos and Patel, 2023). It can also be concerned with the researcher's social and political views (Yip, 2023) and relational position in society (Zhao, 2017). "It acknowledges and recognises that researchers are part of the social world they are researching and that this world has already been interpreted by existing social actors" (Holmes, 2020, p.3). This is not to say that a researchers' positionality is to be viewed as a controversial or fatalistic aspect of their research. Moreover, positionality can be viewed as evolving and can change throughout the research process (Greene, 2014; Barnes, 2021). I agree with the view of Rahman (2023, p. 417) that "researcher's positionalities are products of a complex interaction of agencies of the researcher and participants". As such, it is prudent to further explore my own positionality and

how this relates to narrative research.

My positionality is informed by my experiences as both a headteacher in Wales and as a doctoral student. Through my doctoral journey, I echo the feelings of tension and dissonance, as described by Czerniawski (2023). As a student and a headteacher, I have not considered these feelings as negative but as "a powerful tool for nurturing professional autonomy, learning, transformation and continuing critical reflective practice" (ibid., p. 1383). These aspects are a core part of my personal and professional life and have been shaped by constructivist views. I acknowledge that the reality of the world I have created is bound by my experiences and that these have been framed through an active and social process of learning.

My professional journey to headship started very early in my career. After four years of teaching I became a deputy headteacher in a large infant school. Reflecting on this time, I had to learn how to 'be' a leader very quickly amongst colleagues who were older and more experienced. I was supported and nurtured by the headteacher and he entrusted me to take the lead in many areas of school improvement. His leadership behaviours and the opportunities and agency he provided enabled me to thrive under his leadership. I was a deputy headteacher for 11 years and had a wealth of significant experiences which enabled me to develop as a school leader. These experiences included leading staff through the amalgamation of three schools into one large primary school; a move to a new purpose-built school; being seconded to lead teacher professional learning for the local consortia; and working with Welsh Government during the early stages of the curriculum reform process. I also developed as a person; I became a mother and endured significant life events that impacted upon my worldview and made me appreciate the value of authentic leadership and the power of collaboration. However, I also acknowledge that my perception of effective leadership and my behaviours have changed and evolved over time. I made mistakes and was not always truly relationally focused which is explored further below. Yet, I believe that all my experiences have foregrounded the way that I am now as a headteacher.

My experiences as a headteacher have great synergy with the three main constructs of this study as organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing have been my professional reality for many years. In 2017, I opened a brand-new school which included recruiting staff and creating the culture from the start. My vision principles for the school have guided my decisions and actions and building the foundations for organisational culture, with a clear focus on creating the conditions to thrive, ensured that collaboration and teacher wellbeing were priorities from the outset. Working alongside teachers and prioritising collective autonomy and responsibility has ensured that, as a school, we are a learning organisation (Welsh Government, 2017b). However, this was not always my reality. Considering the words of Phillippo and Nolan (2024, p. 547), researchers should "respond more robustly to the parts of their existence that stand to intersect with their research". Thus, it is valuable to acknowledge my behaviours and attitudes prior to becoming a headteacher as, while some participants knew me for a long period of time, others may have had an impression of me from professional interactions and others may have only known me as a headteacher. For the first part of my leadership development, I was more interested in setting goals and orientating these towards valuing end products. This stemmed from a long-held misconception that an outward image of efficiency and superiority was key to effective leadership. This was further compounded by a need to prove myself as a means for external approval. Ultimately this resulted in an egotistical perception of self and often overlooking the value of people. Through effective mentoring, engaging in professional learning opportunities and the impact of personal events, I began to change and so did my espoused values (Miller *et al.*, 2015).

Cruz-González, Rodríguez and Segovia (2021) note that changes impact upon school leaders and their professional identity. Following a systematic review of principals' leadership identity from 1993 to 2019, they shared that professional identity continually evolves and reflects changes in personal and professional lives. They acknowledge that "professional identity is influenced by numerous factors, which shape the way of 'being' and 'doing' of each professional" (ibid., p. 45). Interestingly, the changes I began to experience were reflected in changes to the context of education in Wales, and it could be considered that my change was synonymous with the policy

direction. My change as a leader was important for this study when considering my research decisions. The move from placing high regard on a product-based solution to valuing the process of learning and reflexivity supports a narrative inquiry approach (Pino Gavidia and Adu, 2022). Developing vulnerability as a leader changed the way I behaved and acted daily. I agree with Brown (2018, p. 30) in that "we need to trust to be vulnerable, and we need to be vulnerable in order to build trust". Being a leader who has developed courage and is working from the heart, has enabled me to create a sense of belonging across the organisation that I lead. In addition, my passion for this research is driven by my strong sense of self, valuing people and their lived experiences, and a fierce determination that the teaching profession should be one in which all of its members thrive. I share Czerniawski's (2023, p. 1380) stance when he argued that "biographical details have influenced not only my conceptualisation of this study but also the ways in which I have carried out and analysed the data".

Acknowledging the influence I have on this study is important when considering the roles I have as both headteacher and doctoral student. The permeable construction of my multiple identities were also determined by my interaction with participants, their perception of me, their agency and the organisations in which they are situated (Rahman, 2023). To clarify, this research was conducted in two schools, a primary school of which I am the headteacher and a secondary school of which I am not the headteacher. As the headteacher of one of the organisations where the research is situated, it is important to explore the concept of me as an insider researcher, although, recognising that this is only valid for part of the study as I was an outsider researcher for the participants in the secondary school.

The role of an insider researcher is reviewed in many studies (Bourdieu, 2003; Unluer, 2012; Saidin and Yaacob, 2016); however, it is not without criticism (Kenny, 2009; Drake, 2010). It is important to recognise the concerns raised by Drake (2010, p. 85) that, although I am in a privileged position of knowing participants and the school, such "closeness may seem to compromise the researcher's ability to engage critically with the data". Furthermore, there may be subcultures within the organisation that I do not understand (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

Despite concerns, there are key advantages of being an insider researcher. I have a different understanding of the school culture, have been able to engage in social interaction in a natural way and have established relationships which promote the telling and judging of the truth (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002). Such knowledge would take an outsider researcher longer to acquire.

In the other research context of this study, I was an outsider researcher as I did not belong to the school to which the participants belong (Braun and Clarke, 2013). It could be viewed that a benefit of an outsider researcher is that I was new to the context and more objective; however, I could also lack understanding (Savvides *et al.*, 2014). I acknowledge that I did have preconceived ideas of secondary teachers as a consequence of a lack of understanding of the context in which they work. These were challenged through the study to a point that my views changed.

I have tried to recognise potential subjectivity through being aware of my own positionality throughout the research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Instead of viewing my positionality as dichotomous roles of insider and outsider, Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) suggest a view of "the space between". As a qualitative researcher I appreciate the "fluidity and multilayered complexity of human experience" (ibid., p. 60). Being the headteacher of the one school in the study does not automatically mean I am the same as the participants from this school. Neither does it mean I am different from the participants who belong to the other school. Such binary considerations do not align with the social constructivist ideals that I believe in. Accepting that there is no single truth and exploring the life stories of participants has required that, as the researcher, I recognise both similarities and differences that exist between the participants and myself. This is the emergence of the idea of 'the space between' which acknowledges that I cannot separate myself from my research. In fact, listening to the lived stories of the participants have had a lasting impact on me, in this senses, I was not a complete insider or outsider during this research (Selleck and Barakos, 2023). My identity as a researcher is "a product of social interaction grounded in specific contexts and at specific moments in time"

(ibid., p. 675). 'The space between' also values the complex nature of being an insider–outsider researcher and what this can bring to qualitative research.

The complexity of being an insider–outsider researcher has been debated in many studies which has presented a multitude of issues regarding power, privilege, interpretation and access (Mercer, 2007; Czerniawski, 2023; Yip, 2023). The notion of power in my situation as a researcher is important to reflect upon. Merriam *et al.* (2001, p. 413) shared that "power is something to not only be aware of, but to negotiate in the research process". I recognise that, in my role as a headteacher, I am in a position of power. These dynamics would have had a bearing on the research process and the way I would have represented the participants. Knowing the exact influence of my role on the research is not feasible; however, I was very aware of my positionality and perceived power throughout the study. To both understand and minimise any supposed power, I reassured participants, both in writing and verbally, that the purpose of the study was for my doctoral studies and that any information shared would not have an impact on their professional roles. I agree with Rahman (2023) who acknowledged that although the power of social structure (for example, my role as a headteacher) can be restrictive, it is the agency that people possess which can be an enabler. The very nature of a narrative inquiry and exploring the lived realities of teachers provided participants with agency. Agency is an active process of doing; it does not reflect the quality of individuals but the inter-relationship between people, space and time, echoing the essence of this study. Furthermore, in this research, viewing the researcher/participant dynamic as a blend of power and agency supports that "humans are able to be reflexive and creative, acting counter to societal constraints" (Priestley, Biesta, Robinson, 2015, p. 3). Ensuring the conditions were right for this to happen was crucial for my research and such conditions particularly relied upon my positionality and the ethical decisions I made.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 306) state that "positionality addresses relationships; it is an ethical matter". Following the latest Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2024), I ensured that all individuals were treated fairly

and sensitively. Through conducting the research, I was prepared for possible tensions that could have appeared including hearing information that I was unaware of regarding both participants and the organisations in which they work (Floyd and Arthur, 2012). Although I was not aware of all the content of the life stories shared during the research, there were no revelations which tested my role as either headteacher or researcher. Moreover, I believe that my prior knowledge of the more personal and emotive aspects of some of the participants' life stories encouraged them to share it more freely during the research. Throughout the research process, I acted ethically and confidentially to safeguard both participants and me, and the openness of participants and willingness to share their stories demonstrated how effectively I was able to navigate the role as an insider–outsider researcher.

As previously acknowledged, the role of being an insider–outsider researcher is complex. It could be argued that such complexity is managed through continuous reflexivity. Glesne (2011, p. 151) states that "reflexivity generally involves critical reflection on how researchers, research participants, setting, and research procedures interact and influence each other". The notion of reflexivity suggests that "the subjectivity of the researcher and of those being studied becomes part of the research process" (Flick, 2018, p. 8). I cannot disassociate myself within this research; in fact, the inter-relationship between myself, participants and the methodological decisions is part of the research process. During the early stages of my doctoral work, I found the notion of being a headteacher and researcher challenging. The tensions that this brought meant that I felt I had to constantly prove that I could be a headteacher researcher. To support the process of reflexivity I have maintained a reflective diary and engaged in collaborative reflection with my supervisors, doctoral colleagues and other professionals throughout my research. Developing reflection and collaboration enabled me to recognise that dissonance and friction is not negative but "a powerful tool for nurturing professional autonomy, learning, transformation and continuing critical reflective practice" (Czerniawski, 2023, p. 1383).

Harnessing such learning and reflection, I challenged my own beliefs and values through the study, and this transformed my role as a researcher. At the start of my doctoral journey I found

taking feedback from my supervisors difficult. As a headteacher, I was confident and competent, however as a student I felt like a novice. This dissonance created inner turmoil and many phases of feeling like I could not be a researcher. However, I was able to move from being a headteacher to feeling like a researcher. A key turning point from 'being' to 'feeling' was following a presentation at a conference in November 2023 where I shared my research methodology and discussed the complexities of being an insider–outsider researcher. Verbalising the methodological decisions I had made and considering the comments by other researchers demonstrated to me that I was actually a researcher. I used the feedback to make amendments and additions to my research; for example, it enabled me to consider how I could ensure that I shared teachers' stories in a meaningful way which could influence practice and policy. The movement out of my comfort zone as an experienced school leader to a researcher prompted continuous reflection which ensured I made informed decisions regarding the research process. I found that the value and methodological benefits of reflexivity are "more likely to generate strong, authentic and credible research outcomes" (Savvides *et al.*, 2014, p. 423). To ensure credible outcomes and reinforce reflexivity, I believe that my voice as the researcher was an important part of the process. The practice of critical reflection supported my research journey as it allowed me "to engage in a thoughtful relationship with the world-life and thus gain an awake stance about one's lived experience" (Mortari, 2015, p. 1). Maintaining a reflective diary throughout the development of my research enabled me to reflect upon my positionality, encouraged me to think beyond my own experiences and develop a sense of criticality (see Figure 3).

Fox Reflection — 06.11.23

I was feeling more apprehensive about this conversation as it was with someone I didn't know. It definitely felt different to being an insider researcher.

It felt good to go to a different setting to conduct the research. I was in a room in the secondary building and could completely focus on being a "researcher" with no thought as to the noise around me!

The participant appeared very at-ease and eager to talk + share his story. This immediately made me feel at-ease too!

I felt that he was very open + honest. He appeared very calm + confident which made me feel comfortable too.

I didn't use many prompts apart

from the main four areas as the participant was very willing to talk at length.

The conversation really opened my eyes to secondary teachers. I think what particularly struck me was the passion for the subject. But also the care + attention for the pastoral side. I think i have been guilty of thinking that secondaries are more like exam factories but saw a different side.

It was a priviledge to hear his story. It left me feeling very proud to be a teacher. I was buzzing!!!!

Figure 3. Excerpt from reflective diary following narrative conversations

Writing reflections during qualitative research added to the trail of reasoning and was used to validate the research and contributed to the notion of researcher subjectivity (Smith, 1999; Mortari, 2015; Bashan and Holsblat, 2017). According to Russell and Kelly (2002), writing a reflective diary facilitates reflexivity and consciously values the experience of the researcher (see Figure 4).
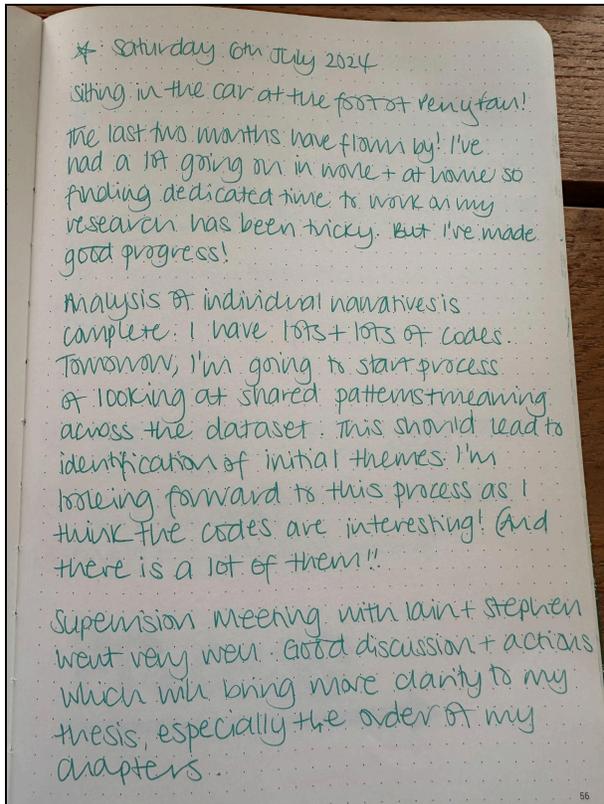
Figure 4. Excerpt from reflective diary during thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that maintaining a reflective diary is one of the most important tools to be able to make sense of a research journey. As the relationship between myself and some of the participants was one of a close nature, reflective diary writing was also used as a method to protect myself from what could be deemed as emotionally challenging responses. In agreeing with Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 102), I found that writing a diary was "a powerful way for individuals to give accounts of their experience". Throughout my research, I was able to use my diary not only to account for my experiences but also to work through my thoughts and feelings. It provided me with a space for the consideration of critical moments and turning points in my research; for example, reflecting upon writing this methodology chapter. I had started in a very formulaic way, and it did not feel like it reflected me or the essence of my research, that being a narrative inquiry. Through advice from my supervisors and reflection I was able to improve my writing and felt more energised in my work (see Figure 5).
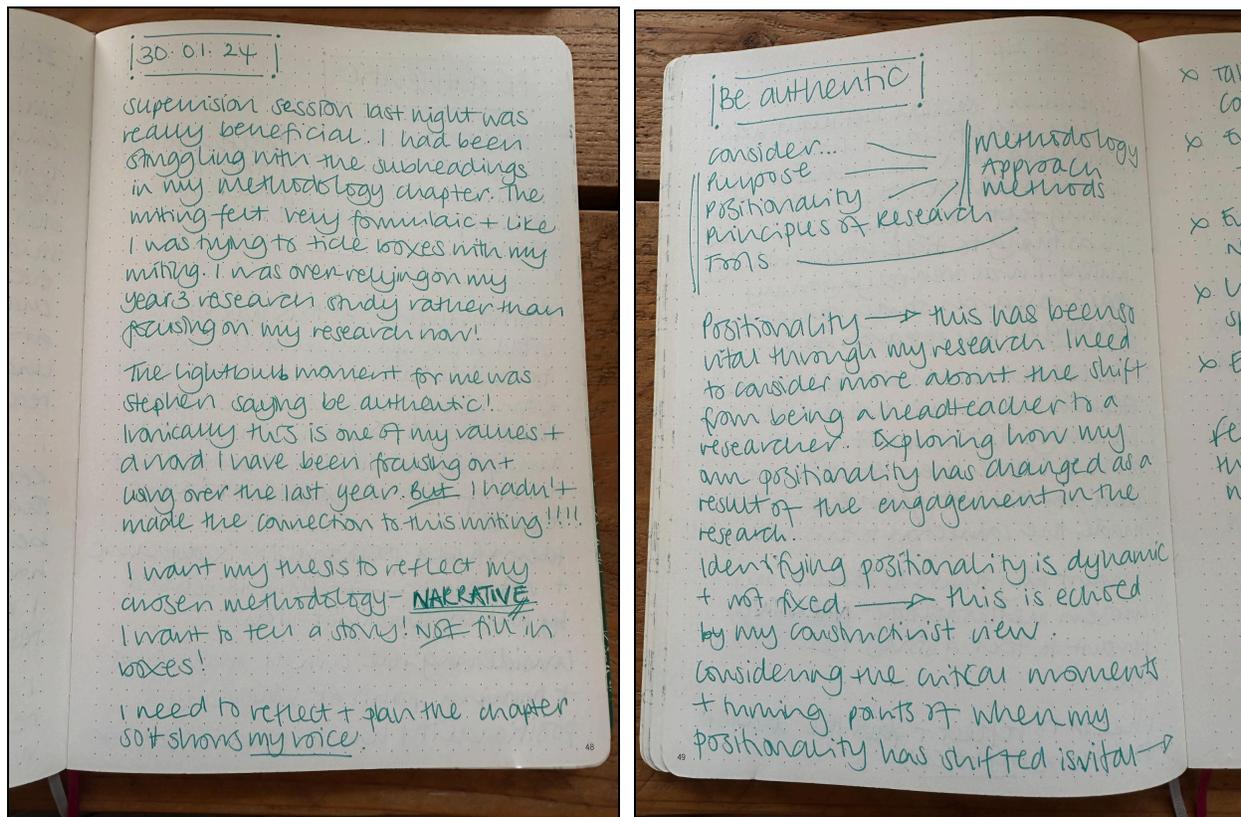
Figure 5. Excerpt from reflective diary during writing the methodology chapter

As a researcher, I value that "it is only through social interaction and communication that certain types of learning occur and certain views of the world are constructed" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 23). This supports my worldview and my interpretivist epistemological position and is further explored through careful consideration of the appropriate methodological processes for this study.

3.7 Plot, people, place

Prior to making the methodological decisions regarding the tools needed, it was important for me to acknowledge what narrative inquiry I wanted to explore (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016; Norman, 2020). Knowing that I wanted to explore the inter-relationship

between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, I began to consider the sequence of events that would define my inquiry, specifically, the people, place and process that would support the chosen methodology.

Identifying the people - the teachers - who would frame this research, was my first decision. I decided to invite participants from the school of which I am the headteacher. The school is a relatively new school, and all members of staff have been involved in its development as a learning organisation. We have implemented specific approaches to collaboration and professional learning, and I was interested in teachers' perceptions of these in relation to exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. The next decision was whether to extend this across the primary range within the cluster of schools in which my school is situated or to focus on the one cluster secondary school. I made the decision to focus on the secondary school, due to several contextual factors. These factors included the different operational and professional expectations between primary and secondary schools. For example, secondary teachers do not teach one class of children for the academic year and professionally teachers are trained as subject-specific. In addition, the different lived experiences relating to teaching in primary and secondary and the potential different offers of collaboration due to the complexity of the size of the staff group were deciding features.

To ensure representation and in support of the research questions, I selected a sample of eight teachers and school leaders using the process of 'maximal variation' (Patton, 2015; Flick, 2018) based on different lengths of service and experiences as a teacher. These criteria sought to avoid what Goodson and Gill call "selective bias" (2011, p. 37). I made this decision as it reflected the different roles and range of professional experiences of the teachers within the two schools. In defence of this position, "there is little benefit in seeking a random sample when most of the random sample may be largely ignorant of particular issues and unable to comment on matters of interest to the researcher" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 219). In support, the sample provided a balance of the characteristics of teachers within the two

schools. To justify the selection, each teacher brought their own knowledge, experience and life story to the inquiry which supported the interpretivist approach that there are multiple interpretations of the world.

Table 4 below provides details as to the categories of maximal variation, determined by me as the researcher, based on length of service and experience as a teacher. At the start of the research, I made the decision that I would select two participants from each category. If there were more than two participants volunteering within a category, then they would be randomly selected through an online name generator. However, this was not required for this study.

Role	Characteristic
Leaders	Working in a paid leadership role within the school, for example, on the leadership scale or in receipt of a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payment
Experienced teachers	Teaching for a total of six years or more
Teachers	Teaching between two and six years
Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT)	In their first year of teaching

Table 4. Purposive sampling of participants

The planned maximal variation did not transpire in reality as there were no NQTs who volunteered to take part in the study. Although this would have provided an interesting insight into teachers' stories at the earliest point of their career, I mitigated against any detrimental impact by maintaining the total number of participants as eight. Narrative inquiry does not require a set number of participants, so being mindful of the potential of rich and complex data, I selected eight participants. As Dahal *et al.*, (2024, p. 3) suggest "for in-depth interviews to explore the rich data, six to ten participants suffice".

As this study was grounded in the belief that knowledge is socially constructed and shaped through a social constructivist and interpretive worldview, this study employed exploratory methods of data collection. The data collection started with a documentary analysis of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for both schools represented. The SIP is the key strategic document within schools, revised on an annual basis, underpinned by statutory guidance and common across all schools in Wales (Welsh Government, 2022b). Research suggests that analysing foci for school improvement will highlight schools' values, purpose for improvement and management of change (Knoff, 2007; Dunaway, Kim and Szad, 2012). Furthermore, examining school improvement can identify aspects of culture and the role of teachers as "part of the context, rather than purely actors" within an organisation (Wikeley *et al.*, 2005, p. 400).

The process of documentary analysis followed the systematic procedure proposed by Ozga (2000). I chose this approach as I agree with Ozga (2000, p. 94) that texts are "a resource for analysis in terms of the messages they convey". Ozga (2000, p. 94) predominantly uses the phrase "policy text" in her work and it is important, for the purpose of this study, to clarify what is understood by this. Ball (1993, p. 10) highlights two key aspects of understanding policy, that being as "text" and as "discourse". However, Ozga challenges this dichotomy in favour of viewing both text and discourse as comparable. I agree with such a relational approach when considering the SIP as a text. A school's SIP could be viewed as a policy text as it identifies priorities and actions for the organisation. However, in my experience, a SIP is more than just text; it is an interactive narrative, socially developed and open to continual negotiation. This aligns with Ozga's (2000, p. 95) view that "it is useful to think about policy texts as carrying particular narratives; that is, they tell a story about what is possible or desirable to achieve". An articulation of the use of Ozga's process for documentary analysis, with key considerations for this study, is highlighted in Table 5 below.

Process of Documentary Analysis (Ozga, 2000)	Key Considerations
Source	What narrative is being presented? Why have priorities been considered? How well do they align with national and local priorities?
Scope	What are the priorities for the organisation? What relationships with other policies are identified? How are teachers developed?
Pattern	What relationships between micro, meso, macro and chrono levels are implied? What developments are required? What outcomes are expected?

Table 5. Process of documentary analysis based on Ozga (2000)

Through the documentary analysis of the SIPs, I focused on the source, scope and patterns within the documents. This started with skim reading to identify patterns. I then engaged in focused reading which enabled me to interpret the narratives within the documents. Ozga (2000, p. 105) identified that such an approach "reveals the reiteration of phrases and key words that encapsulate policymakers' assumptions, while the tone also suggests what is felt about how things should happen". This interpretation provided an overview of both organisations and their priorities. Employing the use of Ozga's process was important as it provided structure for the documentary analysis, without such I could have missed key elements of the SIPs. The information from the documentary analysis was then used as part of the dataset for this study. Along with data from the narrative conversations and participants' professional learning diaries, the information from the documentary analysis was used during the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) which is described in Chapter Four.

I acknowledge that this only provided one perspective of the school as an organisation and its priorities which may impact upon teachers. It was not a method to explore the teachers' life stories; rather, it provided an understanding of the social context in which they work. To further enhance this method and to adhere to the concept of narrative inquiry, I also undertook narrative conversations.

In narrative inquiry, interviews are regarded as the method most recommended to explore participants' stories (Creswell, 2008; Kartch, 2017). However, Clandinin (2016, p. 45) considers that conversations are more suitable as they "create a space for the stories of both participants and researchers to be composed and heard". Therefore, I made the decision to use the phrase 'narrative conversation' rather than 'interview' with the participants. This was a deliberate research decision as I wanted participants to feel that they were in a conversation where they could narrate their experiences, rather than respond in a question-and-answer session. Kartch (2017, p. 1072) supports this view in that narrative conversations "represents a shift in the way roles are conceptualised: from interviewer-interviewee into narrator-listener". This also aligned with my positionality and was designed to mitigate against potential power influences by placing participants at the heart of their story (Kartch, 2017).

In order to demonstrate rigour and to trial narrative conversation, I undertook a pilot conversation prior to the start of the main study. This took place in the school of which I am the headteacher and involved a teacher who had similar experiences and opportunities to those who took part in the main study. This was important as it meant I was piloting an approach which could be relevant to other participants in terms of temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016). The pilot provided me with an opportunity to ascertain whether the prompts were useful or had potential for bias, and provided an opportunity to think, reflect and build trust (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). Likewise, the pilot provided an opportunity for me to reflect upon my role, behaviours and actions as the narrative

researcher and ensure that the advice as to what makes an effective inquirer was upheld (Denscombe, 2014; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018).

My reflections following the pilot are important to note as they have influenced the process of this research and my methodological choices. These reflections also prompted me to consider how narrative inquiry contrasted with my methodological experiences earlier in my doctoral journey. In the small-scale pilot I conducted in 2022, I adopted a case study methodology, drawing on the use of semi-structured interviews. This approach provided important insights into the relationship between teacher wellbeing and collaborative professionalism; however, it emphasised themes and categories rather than the storied, temporal and relational nature of lived experience. Through the process of piloting narrative inquiry, I recognised that a case study design would offer less scope to make meaning of teachers' lives as lived and told and to the inter-related nature of temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016). This shaped my decision to adopt narrative inquiry as the most appropriate methodology for exploring teacher wellbeing, school culture and the conditions that support an ecosystem of thriving.

Further learning from the pilot of narrative inquiry included an understanding of the difference in the narrative conversation compared to previously led semi-structured interviews (in the small-scale pilot study conducted in 2022). Prior to the conversation, I was concerned that the participant may not talk fluently; however, this was not the case, although I needed to acknowledge that such confidence may be relative to this participant or due to a pre-existing relationship between myself and the participant. I made sure that this did not govern my thinking in preparation for the main study. Additionally, I found actively listening for a lengthy period a challenge. This made me reflect upon how I could demonstrate to participants in future conversations that I was listening. The main theme in my reflection was one of depth; it became apparent that I needed to ensure my diary reflections needed more detail regarding my emotional responses. As the nature of a narrative inquiry is co-constructing, I recognised that I needed to record how my feelings were impacted upon. I also found that I needed to be more

aware of, and record, participants' body language, facial expressions, pace and mood, as this would add depth to my analysis. There were no major changes that I needed to make following the trial conversation; however, I did need to further develop my understanding of the theory and practice of narrative inquiry.

In developing my understanding, I considered using a phased approach. Influenced by Jovchelovitch and Bauer's (2000, p. 6) structure for narrative inquiry I used three phases which offered "guidance and orientation for the interviewer in order to elicit rich narration on a topic of interest, and to avoid the pitfalls of the question-answer schema of interviewing". Each phase contained guidelines to support the process of narrative inquiry. Phase 1 focused on preparation prior to the conversations to ensure consistency for each participant. In Phase 2 the focus was on the narrative conversation, and this developed into Phase 3 with more focused prompts and questioning. These three phrases are described in more detail below.

3.7.1 Phase 1 - Preparation

An email was sent to participants which shared the context of the study and included three separate documents entitled Participant Information (Appendix A), Participant Consent Form (Appendix B) and Wellbeing Support Available for Participants (Appendix C). I made the decision to include a document related to wellbeing support available to participants due to the potential sensitive nature of my chosen methodology. The wellbeing support contained information relating to services available at a national level but also those available as employees of the local council. Providing this information at the preparation phase was important as it demonstrated my understanding of potential ethical complexities, the rigour of my preparation and the trustworthiness of myself as a researcher.

Further preparation meant that I ensured I had an understanding of the schools where the participants were from and prepared prompts for the conversations (see Appendix D). The prompts were written in line with the research questions and contained four key areas: life story; wellbeing; school as an organisation; and collaboration. I chose these four areas as they

directly related to the research questions and chosen methodology. Each section started with an open invitation to the participants, starting with the phrase 'tell me'. This is in line with the recommendations made by Kartch (2017) that narrative inquirers should act as a facilitator through invitations to share stories.

3.7.2 Phase 2 - Narrative Conversations

The narrative conversations took place between October 2023 and November 2023 with eight teachers, four from a primary school and four from a secondary school. The narrative conversations with each participant were a maximum of one hour in length. The conversations took place in a setting requested by the participant, ranging from offices, small rooms and classrooms. I felt it was important that the participants had the choice of space and that it was somewhere comfortable for them. Interestingly, all the primary school participants chose my office and all the secondary school participants chose areas within their school building. It is prudent at this juncture to note the place of the narrative conversations, as Clandinin (2016, p. 41) suggests there are many "interconnections between place and experience". The link between place, people and their stories can be viewed as part of the landscape of experience of which I was a part. This adds to the process of narrative inquiry, the framing of "a research puzzle" (Clandinin, 2016, p.42) and sense of wonderment.

Through exploring the puzzle, during the narrative conversation, I used the prompts as described above as a guide to contextualise the stories shared and clarify details. Key prompts included:

- Tell me about yourself and why you became a teacher
- Tell me what is important for you to be able to thrive as a teacher
- Tell me about the culture within your school
- Tell me about your experiences of collaboration

My role as facilitator meant I needed to be an active listener and that I did not interrupt the initial flow of the conversation.

3.7.3 Phase 3 - Questioning

It was important that through active listening I could recognise when I need to prompt further or steer the flow of the story to another key area to find out more information for the purpose of the study. Using the prepared prompts, I was able to ask questions such as:

- What have been the most important life events that have affected your work as a teacher? How did you navigate this?
- What does it feel like to work at your school?
- What factors support/hinder your professional growth?
- What collaborative experiences/activities do you engage with?

Answers to these questions provided more depth and understanding to the stories shared.

These three phases enabled a focus which suited the needs of a narrative inquiry and provided a consistent approach for all the participants. I valued these phases and viewed them as a strength of the methodological choices I made. Further strengths of the choice of narrative conversations were that they provided time and space, not just for the sharing and listening of stories, but also for the inquiry into broader social and cultural contexts. However, challenges to narrative conversations include the potential of deception, non-engagement and bias as, when sharing a life story, participants can share what they want to share, they can make an error or construct a story that is false (Goodson and Gill, 2011). Moreover, an understanding of self is complex and I recognised that "there is always more that could be said or than what has been said" (ibid., p. 15). Recognising these challenges was important, yet they were not to the detriment of further methodological decisions made. I recognised that the narrative conversations only provided a short snapshot of lived experiences captured in the very space and time that the conversation took place. Further forms of narrative inquiry include observational notes and diary writing (Sparkes, 2002) and, as such, participants were asked to maintain a professional learning diary.

Diary methods provide an insight into the lived experiences of teachers and can provide rich, valid data about individual behaviour and cognition (Arndt and Rose, 2022). In this study I refer to professional learning diaries which were maintained by the participants and my own research diary. Diary methods are a valuable source in research as they can capture "life as it is lived" (Bolger, Davis and Rafaeli, 2003, p. 579). They provide an opportunity for individual professional reflection; furthermore, "a sociocultural perspective suggests that this reflection is likely to be socially situated" (Johnson and Coleman, 2024, p. 81). As I explored the conditions for teachers to thrive, it was important that participants had an opportunity to share their written reflections as well as those voiced during the narrative conversations. Often the process of writing and reflection can be beneficial in a cathartic way, an opportunity for celebration and a chance to consider perspective (Kelly, 2023). The process of reflection is also important for wellbeing and exploring the emotions of professional experience (Kelly, 2023; Johnson and Coleman, 2024). Moreover, exploring the reflections of the self, the context and pupil needs provides an interesting insight into the lived experiences of teachers (Minott, 2008). The self-reflective process of diary methods and making sense of experiences is in keeping with the socio-constructivist perspective of this research (Shepherd, 2006).

In order to support the methodological processes of this research, participants were asked to reflect upon the professional learning they experienced in a period of four months, equivalent to a school term. I believe that reflective writing can be empowering for teachers, provide a better understanding of how they collaborate with others and reflect upon a sense of belonging (Clegg, 1997; Bashan and Holsblat, 2017). However, I also acknowledge that it can be seen as an increase in workload and expectations on an already busy profession. In order to mitigate any feeling of increased workload, I did not ask participants to complete this reflection in any set format. Knowing that the two schools prioritised the use of professional learning diaries and reflection, I was already aware that such documentation existed and, for the purpose of this study, participants only needed to be willing to share this with me. I anticipated that, by not providing a template for a diary, that the reflections would be what Clandinin (2016, p. 42)

described as a "puzzle". Such a puzzle provided an opportunity to make further sense of participants' experiences, thoughts and reflections.

This notion of diary methods presenting a puzzle was also true for myself and my own personal reflection. I made the decision that my research diary would be a key part of the reflection of the inquiry process. Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest it is one of the most important tools to be able to make sense of a research journey. The richness of insight into the inquiry process and navigating my emotions, responses and positionality adds to the exploration of the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. Maintaining a research diary provided a space that I could reflect and demonstrate my reflexivity, which is further explored in Chapter Four. It was an opportunity for me to explore the ethical complexities of being both an insider–outsider researcher (Johnson and Coleman, 2024). Moreover, the process of sharing lived experiences is so personal that it was vital that processes of ethical consideration were planned and adhered to.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research design and methodological decisions made. This research undertook a robust process for ethical approval by the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David's Ethics Panel. Ethical consent was granted in April 2023 (see Appendix E). The study complied with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principles. The use of a Data Management Plan ensured the safe use, storage and retention of data (see Appendix F). I agree that "the purpose of research is the production of valid, relevant, worthwhile and significant knowledge" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018, p. 121), but I acknowledge that no research is without risk.

The potential risks associated with the research were namely considered as risk to the participants, risk to the researcher and bound in the importance of confidentiality and

anonymity. Participant selection was undertaken in a fair and ethical manner following the process of purposive sampling and maximal variation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018). No participant was coerced into engaging in the study and they were reassured that they could withdraw from the study at any time (BERA, 2024). Moreover, potential risks to the participants also included feelings of discomfort, feelings that the interviews were intrusive, emotional distress and perception that engagement in the research was an additional workload. In order to mitigate these factors, the timing of the conversations was at the request of participants, all personal information remained confidential, pseudonyms were chosen by participants and signed consent was given prior to the study.

As the researcher and headteacher of a school within the study there was an obvious risk of perceived coercion, misuse of power and bias. This has been explored through my positionality and research decisions as previously discussed in Chapter One. Ethical considerations also extended to myself as the researcher. In order to protect myself, I followed the processes as laid out in the ethical approval granted by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. In addition, my research diary and supervision sessions with my supervisors provided an outlet to discuss, reflect and protect my own emotional wellbeing (BERA, 2024). I agree with Smythe and Holian (2008, p. 38) who suggest that "the trick is to work out how to try to derive maximum benefits whilst minimising the negative side effects of the researcher, the researched and the research outcomes". Such benefits of this research also extend to the process used to analyse the data.

3.9 Process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

It is acknowledged that the researcher is a vital research instrument in both collecting and interpreting data (Stewart, 2010; Shufutinsky, 2020), yet there are many criticisms of the robustness of qualitative research when considering the role of the researcher. These involve claims that the data analysis is less systematic and that there is an increased probability of researcher influence (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2013). However, in an attempt to overcome

such criticisms, Shufutinsky (2020, p.52) comments on the "use-of-self" being vital to ensure valid and credible qualitative research. The use-of-self method is critical in this research as I am not only an insider researcher but also the main author. Therefore, I am an instrument of, and within, the research study. Shufutinsky (2020) offers the use of bracketing to enhance rigour and validity through a range of use-of-self methods. In considering these methods, I have demonstrated ecliptic self-bracketing throughout each step of the research as I have an understanding of, and made transparent, my own personal views and my role as headteacher (ibid.). As I have a strong connection to the research area, there is also transparency from an autoethnographic perspective, that being that my 'self' is inherent within the study (Creswell, 2013). Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) propose points of convergence between narrative inquiry, autoethnography and the study of self. I agree with their argument that, although the notion of stories is a feature of all three methodological approaches, it is the position of self that is critical. The position of my 'self' through the process of analysing data was significant. Throughout my research, I was engaged in conceptual, ethical and performative reflexivity (Fox and Allan, 2014). In selecting the appropriate method to analyse the data I was at the peak of "conceptual turmoil" (Fox and Allan, 2014, p. 109) as I was challenged in both my understanding and confidence. However, in harnessing the 'use-of-self' and in keeping with the qualitative research paradigm, I decided to use reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

The term reflexive thematic analysis was borne out of Braun and Clarke's earlier work on thematic analysis (2006). In reflexive thematic analysis a fundamental characteristic is the role of the reflexive researcher, where reflexivity means to "bend back upon oneself" (Sparkes and Smith, 2014, p. 20). "Reflexivity involves the practice of critical reflection on your role as researcher, and your research practice and process" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 5). It was not just about my positionality as an insider–outsider researcher, it was also about my role "as an active agent in the production of knowledge" (Trainor and Bundon, 2021, p. 707). Thus, through the use of reflexive thematic analysis, I reflected and negotiated the complexity of my 'self' and

I was aware that my interpretations were informed by my assumptions, values and experiences (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Braun and Clarke (2022, p.4) describe reflexive thematic analysis as a research "adventure". It provides flexibility as an analytic method, but it is also systematic and deliberate in its approach. I followed the six phases of reflexive thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2022) and shown in Table 6. The six phases offer guidelines rather than rules to follow, and it was important I recognised that they are not linear, but a "recursive process" (ibid., p. 36). To reinforce this view, Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2020) suggested that data analysis should be a cyclical process, with data collection, data condensation, data display, and drawing/verifying conclusions happening on an ongoing basis. The idea of a cyclical process of drawing conclusions is important to note for reflexive thematic analysis, as a common misconception of Braun and Clarke's work is that themes emerge. In fact, "themes do not emerge" (ibid., p. 233), but "are actively produced by the researcher through their systematic engagement with, and all they bring to, the dataset" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 8).

Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis Braun and Clarke (2022)	
1.	Familiarisation
2.	Coding
3.	Generating initial themes
4.	Developing and reviewing themes
5.	Refining, defining and naming themes
6.	Writing up

Table 6. Six phases of reflexive thematic analysis

Using narrative inquiry in combination with thematic analysis supports a qualitative research design and the theoretical framework of this study, that being social constructivism. Reflexive

thematic analysis does not aim to tell a single truth but recognises that researcher subjectivity is a resource which is dependent upon the researcher's epistemology, social image and research decisions (Lainson, Braun and Clarke, 2019). My personal position as a researcher and headteacher shaped the analytical processes in which I engaged. For example, I had a clear understanding of the context and terminology used by participants, particularly with those from the school in which I am the headteacher, so I could relate to the information being shared. And, as a teacher, leader and mother, I could emotionally relate to many of the stories and lived experiences shared. Furthermore, reflexivity was an important element for trustworthy reflexive analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2023). I have demonstrated in this chapter how my positionality, particularly as an insider researcher, has been a key factor in this study and my research diary further demonstrates my reflexivity. Taking the notion of reflexivity further, Latta and Kim (2011, p. 686) support the use of such an approach to data analysis so that each participant's narratives and the interpretation of them are "marked by repetition". It is this repetition that reinforces the idea of a reflexive process being like a spiral where meaning making is constructed through phases of examination and interpretation of the data. This spiral also included myself through my close proximity and entanglement with the focus of this research.

I applied a spiral process through the data analysis to support and build an understanding of the various layers of narrative data and thinking. The six phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) provided an opportunity to value each narrative conversation on its own basis first. This encouraged depth of understanding of each participant's lived experience. However, remaining true to the aims of the study, it is also important that these lived experiences are also considered together to better understand how the key themes are interrelated. This is supported by Lainson, Braun and Clarke (2019) in their discussion paper about the congruence between narrative informed research and thematic analysis, where they suggest that using such an approach for data analysis enables researchers to remain close to participants' narrative accounts and also illuminate wider experiences. They also argue that the use of reflexive thematic analysis in narrative research supports the "inclusion of rich, nuanced and complex descriptions" (ibid., p. 12).

The spiral process of data collection and analysis was neither linear nor neatly bounded. Interrelating participants' lived experiences with the documentary analysis of the two schools' improvement plans, the professional learning diaries and my own research diary was iterative and, at times, messy. The narrative conversations highlighted storied lived experience; the documentary analysis offered a contextual layer; the diaries provided an insight into the temporal nature of professional learning and participants' reflexivity; and my reflective journal made visible my own positionality. These strands did not function as discrete components but combined to generate an interwoven and multi-dimensional understanding of participants' lives across time, relationships and place. The messiness of this process supports the ontology of narrative inquiry and the purpose of this study – to explore the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing.

3.10 Conclusion

A qualitative research methodology provided me with a process to inquire about the lived experiences of teachers and to respond to my research questions. Through the documentary analysis of each of the schools' SIPs, I was able to gain an understanding of the context, culture and priorities of the organisations. The narrative conversations with eight teachers at different points of their careers, and their professional learning reflections, provided me with a complex web of interrelated factors that influence their wellbeing (Acton and Glasgow, 2015), notably identifying that "professional work cannot and should not be divorced from the lives of professionals" (Goodson and Sikes, 2010, p. 71). The use of narrative inquiry, influenced by the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Goodson (2005), Goodson and Sikes (2010) and Clandinin (2016), provides a significant contribution to the education research field, particularly in Wales, as it offers an understanding of the complex lived experiences of teachers in a period of significant educational reform. The process of reflexive thematic analysis provided a way of navigating the dataset and enabled the construction of themes in response to the patterns

identified in the data gathered. In addition, building on the work of Braun and Clarke (2022) through the use of their six phases of reflexive thematic analysis in narrative inquiry, is a distinctive contribution to the field of narrative inquiry in educational research. The purpose, positionality, principles and processes discussed in this chapter have provided the foundation for a deeper insight into how we can create the conditions for teachers to thrive which will be further shared and explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Exploring the Narratives

4.1 Overview of chapter

This chapter begins with an outline of my positionality and how my 'self' is entwined with the narrative inquiry methodology employed in this research (Creswell, 2013) and the participants who shared their lived experiences. The process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022), used to make sense of the research data, is outlined. The chapter then provides an explanation of how themes and subthemes were refined, named and defined through a recurring process of meaning making. It offers a deepening exploration and critical interpretation of participants' narratives in each of the themes interwoven with my positionality as a researcher. The analytic interpretation offered in this chapter is the story that addresses the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What does it mean for teachers to thrive in a professional context?
Research Question 2: How is the culture of an organisation, and the way it constructs collaboration, experienced by teachers?
Research Question 3: In what ways does collaboration support teachers' ability to thrive?

The purpose of this research has been driven by the review of literature which suggested that there is very little evidence exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, particularly in Wales and the UK. More recently, there is rhetoric of a deficit model of teacher wellbeing predominantly associated with work-related stress (Mc Brearty, 2023), recruitment and retention levels (Hughes, 2023) and workload (Department for Education, 2019). Conversely, there is also evidence for the ways in which teachers can be supported to thrive through effective leadership (Cann, Riedel-Prabhakar and Powell, 2021), professional learning (Kensington-Miller, 2021) and occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser, 2020). In the literature review in Chapter Two, I discussed an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing influenced by the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Hannon and Peterson (2017).

Presenting this ecosystem model was an attempt to contribute to the growing field of study on learning ecosystems (Hannon *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, there is very limited research regarding Curriculum for Wales and the impact on teachers. Given these limitations and gaps in the research, this chapter presents the data, the conclusion of which adds to the knowledge base by sharing and interpreting the lived experiences of teachers as they begin to realise Curriculum for Wales in practice.

4.2 My 'self'

The qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry, chosen for this research, has enabled me to engage in an exploratory process to critically interpret the lived experiences of teachers and accentuate my own entanglement in these processes. As an insider researcher and headteacher I have impacted upon the very essence of what I am researching. Therefore, it has been vital that I acknowledge and critically examine my own reflexivity. Evidence suggests that reflexivity in narrative inquiry is a complex double-edged sword (Macqueen and Patterson, 2021). However, I believe being both a headteacher in Wales and a doctoral student, provides me with a relatively unique perspective to ask how we can understand a critical and recurring process of creating the conditions for teachers to thrive, particularly in a period of new curriculum realisation.

My positionality and values are a central part of this research. These were discussed in detail in Chapter Three and are integral to the exploration and interpretation of the data shared in this chapter. To reiterate, I openly acknowledge that I am shaped by my own thoughts, beliefs and experiences. This study was led by the ontological assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and developed through a social constructivist and interpretive inquiry. Therefore, I journeyed with participants as they shared their life stories and interpreted their realities.

> As individuals live in the world of their personal reality each interprets that reality in
> their own way, leading the researcher towards building a diverse and complex socially

constructed landscape that profiles the collective experience without the presumption of universality. (Boyland, 2019, p. 30)

Adding into this complex, socially constructed landscape was my own sense of self and how I have used this to maintain valid and credible research (Shufutinsky, 2020). I am bound by my experiences and my fascination with the sharing of stories. I agree with Norman (2020, p. 3963) that "the stories we tell of our experiences matter" and, in this vein, I wanted to honour the stories shared with me (Clandinin, 2016). Finding a way to value life stories led to the chosen methodology of narrative inquiry as "a way of understanding experience" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 17). Layering this with reflexive thematic analysis has then provided a meaningful "process of meaning-*making* and meaning-*telling*" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 214).

The use of narrative inquiry for this research was informed by the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Goodson (2005), Goodson and Sikes (2010) and Clandinin (2016). Clandinin (2016, p. 21) offers that narrative inquiry is about living by and in stories; "it is a way of thinking about identities relationally". A relational ontology is fundamental to narrative inquiry and, as the researcher, I recognise that my life story is entwined in the lived reality of participants. As both an insider and outsider researcher, I acknowledge that I have different relationships with the participants, and that this has shaped the research process. I agree with Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 219) that, although I attempt to make sense and explore narratives with interpretative criticality, this is "always going to be partial and imperfect and reflects *our* situatedness".

4.3 Participants

In an attempt to reflect the 'situatedness' of participants within the primary and secondary schools, they were selected through a process of maximal variation (Patton, 2015; Flick, 2018). A brief overview is shared below for each of the eight teachers involved in the study. Participants were organised into primary school and secondary school and identified using

pseudonyms chosen by the teachers themselves. Any direct reference to participants' voices are recorded in purple.

4.3.1 Primary School Participants

The participants from the primary school were all appointed by myself in my role as headteacher of the school. As an insider researcher, I have professional and personal relationships with these participants and have worked closely with them as the headteacher of the school since their appointment to their position.

Dorothy

Dorothy has worked as a primary school teacher for fifteen years. She has worked in a range of schools across South Wales. At the time of the research, Dorothy had worked in her current school for five years as a teacher and leader in a paid leadership position. As a school leader she has additional responsibilities across the school. Dorothy supports teachers from across South Wales in their professional learning and has recently started a Masters qualification. I have known Dorothy for five years in both a professional context and as a friend.

Sparky

At the time of the research, Sparky had worked in his current school for two years. Through his degree, experience of coaching and working as a teaching assistant he decided he would like to be a teacher. Sparky returned to university to undertake a postgraduate qualification and has worked in his current school since qualifying as a teacher.

Romeo

Romeo has worked as a primary school teacher for twenty years in a variety of school contexts across South Wales. She has worked as a senior school leader in two different schools and has been in her current role for six years. Romeo is in a paid leadership position with school improvement responsibilities. From a very young age, Romeo had always wanted to be a teacher. She joined university to undertake a teaching degree straight from school. Romeo

supports teachers from across South Wales in their professional learning. I have known Romeo for six years in both a professional capacity and as a friend.

Victoria

Victoria has worked as a teacher for ten years in two different primary schools in South Wales. She has worked in her current school for six years. From a young age, Victoria had always wanted to be a teacher. She has previous experience of school leadership and has supported newly qualified teachers across South Wales. Victoria is currently employed as a part-time teacher.

4.3.2 Secondary School Participants

All the secondary school participants were unknown to me prior to the research. I had no previous conversations or professional relationships with the participants, thus reinforcing my role as an outsider researcher.

Fox

Fox has worked as a secondary subject-specific teacher for six years. He has experience of working in schools in Wales and England. Fox has been in his current school for one year. Fox has always been passionate about his subject and undertook a postgraduate qualification to become a teacher. He has recently started to experience school leadership as professional learning.

Kate

Kate has worked as a secondary subject-specific teacher for eighteen years in one school. She has always wanted to be a teacher from a young age. Kate undertook a postgraduate qualification to become a teacher and also has a Masters qualification. Kate is both a subject teacher and a leader in a paid leadership position. She supports other subject teachers across Wales and England through examination publications.

Mary

Mary has worked as a subject-specific teacher for seven years across two schools in South Wales. Mary undertook a subject degree and engaged in a salaried postgraduate programme which specialised in teaching and leadership within school settings. She has worked in her current school for three years and is in a paid leadership role.

Sally

Sally has worked as a subject-specific teacher for seven years in one school. She is passionate about her subject and wider pastoral care. Sally undertook a postgraduate qualification to become a teacher and also has a Masters qualification. She has worked as a pastoral leader in a paid role for five years.

All participants shared their lived experiences through narrative conversations and reflections in their professional learning diaries which were maintained over a four-month period. The narrative conversations encouraged participants to reflect upon their life stories and why they became teachers, what was important for them to thrive as a teacher, the culture within their school and their experiences of collaboration. These prompts supported participants to reflect and share their lived experiences. Supporting these conversations were reflections of professional learning and development recorded in participants' diaries. In addition, a documentary analysis was undertaken on the school improvement plan for the two schools represented in the study. These offered further insight into participants' experiences, thoughts and reflections and added to the recurring process of meaning making. Information recorded from these three datasets was then used in a process of data analysis. I acknowledge that I am not truly representing the intricacies of all the lived experiences shared. However, through the recurring process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) I was able to look for patterns and themes to make sense of the complex process, appreciating that it is *my* interpretation of the life stories shared.

4.4 Making sense through Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The purpose and conceptual foundation of reflexive thematic analysis, detailed in Chapter Three, has been employed to make sense of the data and my positionality in an active and recursive process. The six phases of reflexive thematic analysis are detailed along with layers of analysis and interpretation.

4.4.1 Familiarisation

Braun and Clarke (2022) assert three elements to the first phase of reflexive thematic analysis. Familiarisation involves immersion with the dataset, followed by critical engagement with the information with note-making being a key feature both through the phase and at the end of it. The dataset explored during the familiarisation phase included content generated from the following:

1. Documentary analysis of the School Improvement Plans (SIP) from the two schools represented
2. Narrative conversations with eight participants
3. Eight participants' professional learning diaries

4.4.1.1 Familiarisation of documentary analysis of the School Improvement Plans (SIP)

The documentary analysis of SIPs provided me with a contextual understanding of each school, including their current improvement priorities. The application of Ozga's (2000) source, scope and pattern, provided a framework for me to apply during the familiarisation phase (see Appendix G). The framework supported the reading, re-reading and reflection of the narratives presented in the documents. I made the research decision to start with the secondary school SIP as I was unfamiliar with the document and wanted to apply the framework influenced by Ozga (2000) to this one, before I applied it to the SIP I had written as a headteacher.

The process started with skim reading to identify patterns. I then fully immersed myself in reading the document. I critically reflected upon elements such as the phrases used and the scope of priorities. I was able to identify patterns of meaning and use these to understand that the SIP was a relational document reactive to the needs of the school. There was a clear focus on support for staff and working with staff, rather than a process of instruction and demand.

As part of the critical engagement with the secondary school SIP, I decided to focus on the key area of 'Teaching' as it was a significant area for targeting staff development and supported the key areas of this research. As I looked deeper into this area, I was able to identify shared patterns of meaning related to organisational culture and collaboration. For example, there were direct references to various forms of collaboration planned for teachers, such as 'coaching', 'professional dialogue and reflection', 'learning exchanges' and 'Pedagogy Fayres'. Although it could be argued this is surface level information, it provided me with focal points to look for connections between the SIP and participants' lived experiences, thus moving beyond the obvious to critically considering the inter-relationship between these forms of collaboration and teachers' wellbeing.

Through this process, I was conscious of asking myself why I was reacting to the dataset in the way I was, why certain phrases were more interesting to me than others and whether I could make sense of the data in a different way (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I attempted to anchor my reflection and interpretation on the research aims and questions. For example, the reference in the SIP to 'reflective practice' made me firstly consider the culture within the school as somewhere that values reflection and action. However, when critically reflecting on the phrase and the context in which it was written, I questioned whether participants would view reflective practice in a way that supported or hindered their ability to thrive, which resonated with one of the aims of this research.

The documentary analysis of the secondary school SIP, through the familiarisation phase, led me to consider that the social context in which the teachers work is one that is focused on continual

development, is reflective and prioritised professional learning and collaboration. I recognised that at this stage of reflexive thematic analysis this consideration is based upon analysing the SIP. However, I also acknowledge that this is in keeping with my view of the school as a cluster headteacher and from my experiences of working with the school.

My ability to draw upon my own experiences and critically inquire was further challenged as I undertook a documentary analysis on the primary school SIP - a document I had written myself. I was very conscious of how I approached the analysis and found the application of Ozga's (2000) framework to be a valuable part of the process. As I read, re-read and immersed myself in the data, I was able to develop the skill of "analytic sensibility", which meant that I did not just look for surface-level content but noticed "connections between the dataset and existing research, theory and the wider context" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 44).

In developing analytic sensibility, I noticed connections between the SIP, prioritising collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) and an ongoing commitment to developing as a learning organisation (OECD, 2018). I was able to identify the components of a learning organisation from clear references to staff wellbeing, collaboration and supporting the wider education system. As an insider researcher, I wondered whether this would be shared by participants as their lived experience or whether it was merely rhetoric. The process enabled me to further reflect upon the notion of rhetoric. As I undertook the process, it made me reflect upon the language used, whether this was a true representation of the organisational culture and whether all staff could associate with it. As a reflective leader, I have taken this learning and introduced more time for staff to make sense of the SIP, collaborate on the priorities and reflect upon the impact of priorities throughout the school year.

Interestingly, through the familiarisation phase and critically engaging with the SIPs, I identified similarities and differences between them. Both SIPs had a strong reference to professional learning, and this was a key driver for priorities. There were also connections between priorities at a meso, micro and macro levels, with clear reference to the national education agenda set by

the Welsh Government. This resonated with the 'Model of an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing' informed by the work Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Hannon and Peterson (2017) and presented in Chapter Two. There was a definite sense that the two schools were working in a similar direction. Despite this, there was a clear distinction relating to accountability. In the secondary school SIP, there was a priority dedicated to performance measures specifically related to pupil performance in skill development, teacher targets and external examination results, whereas in the primary school SIP, accountability was not linked to performance and was an output of all the priorities; for example, if priorities were successfully achieved then there would be an expected impact on pupil progress. This is synonymous with the different expectations from the Welsh Government of primary and secondary schools. However, I was interested in whether this would be reflected in the dataset, especially considering the impact of performance on teacher wellbeing (Viac and Fraser, 2020).

Through the familiarisation phase I did not view my positionality as a dichotomy of insider or outsider researcher. The use of analytic sensibility enabled me to be in "the space between" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 60). I was able to critically examine both the secondary SIP and the document I had written. I found the process fascinating as it provided a better understanding of the culture and context in which participants work. The framework I developed using Ozga's (2000) source, scope and pattern has since been shared with other schools and is available for school leaders to use across South East Wales, thus contributing to the wider system.

4.4.1.2 Familiarisation of narrative conversations
The familiarisation phase continued with the narrative conversations. The three phase process I used during the narrative conversations, influenced by Jovchelovitch and Bauer's (2000) structure for narrative inquiry, provided opportunities to take notes and record any immediate reflections whilst in the process. My research diary was a useful tool for me to attempt to make sense of what I had heard and to regulate my emotions. All direct extracts from my research diary are recorded in green. The extract below captures my reflection following a narrative conversation as an insider researcher.

Wow! That was an emotional rollercoaster. The participant was quite emotional at the beginning. This was interesting for me as an insider researcher as I know her well. This meant she was very raw and honest in her conversation. She knows she can trust me with her story and I honestly don't think she would have discussed so much information to someone she didn't know…

I found the honesty such a refreshing aspect of the conversation and very powerful. It also reminded me of my 'why' for this research - that our teachers 'deserve' their stories to be heard and valued.

My research diary enabled me to capture my emotions immediately after the narrative conversation. When re-reading the extract, I am drawn straight back to the conversation and the lived experiences shared with me. Interestingly, my reflection directly refers to me being an insider researcher and the impact of this role on the research process (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). On reflection, I believe my status as an insider researcher with this participant was not just because she was a leader within my school, but also because we are close friends. Asselin (2003) argued that this duality of roles could lead to role confusion and a change of researcher behaviour. I was aware of this, and other potential behaviours related to coercion and control, as I became more involved in this familiarisation phase.

Through the familiarisation phase, I reflected on the work of Czerniawski (2023) and Dwyer and Buckle (2009) and critically considered my positionality. I have found that my research diary was a powerful way of reflecting upon how I brought myself into the research. An example of this is in the extract below, written following a narrative conversation with a secondary teacher.

The conversation really opened my eyes to secondary teachers. I think what particularly struck me was the passion for the subject. But also the care and attention for the

pastoral side. I think I have been guilty of thinking that secondaries are more like exam factories but saw a different side.

It was a privilege to hear the story. It left me feeling very proud to be a teacher. I was buzzing!!!!

The process of using a research diary provided me with space to reflect and to write my thoughts in that moment. It captured my immediate feelings following narrative conversations and is a demonstration of the emotive power of sharing lived experiences and narrative inquiry. It also has proved a valuable research tool to reflect upon the detail of the life stories shared.

The life stories were audio recorded and transcribed online using Microsoft Word, via Office 365. To ensure accuracy of the transcription, I listened to each conversation multiple times and made any necessary corrections. This process of re-listening, reading and re-reading enabled me to become so immersed with the data that I knew the participants' stories by heart. This immersion into their lived experiences made me feel connected with their stories. I had emotional reactions to reliving the narrative conversations and it kept reminding me of my reason for engaging in this research. Focusing on the research questions, I made brief notes and highlighted interesting features which started to make sense of the lived experiences shared (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

4.4.1.3 Familiarisation of professional learning diaries

The final dataset in the familiarisation phase were participants' professional learning diaries which provided me with an understanding of the professional learning and development experiences and reflections for each participant.

Similarly to the documentary analysis of the SIP, the process started with skim reading to identify patterns and then a critical interpretation of the information provided. At this point, it is

important to note that all participants provided professional learning diaries that were part of their usual practice as teachers within their schools.

All participants recorded engagement in a range of professional learning activities which demonstrated a commitment to professional learning across both schools. There were clear structures in place and an organisational commitment to learning. Through critical reflection and considering the work of Acton and Glasgow (2015) and Hargreaves and Fullan (2018), it was clear that professional learning was a priority for the leaders in both schools. I can make this claim due to the range of experiences offered and the consistent use of professional learning diaries as a reflective tool by participants. Reflection was a key element to the diaries. Romeo shared:

> *These reflections have forced me to be more patient and consider how to incorporate the changes needed into teaching and planning for our theme development. This has supported transitions and interactions between children.*

And Kate reflected:

> *Engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues allows me to build my confidence in all aspects of my job and create a culture where we support each other and recognise the challenges in our roles.*

Based on the work of Kelly (2023) and Johnson and Coleman (2024) and through critically engaging with the professional learning diaries, I could understand that these were spaces for teachers to be open about their thoughts. This was further demonstrated by Dorothy where she recorded:

> *This is so hard to do as I feel like I am unlearning how I've always planned and sometimes I slip back into old habits without realising it. I find this especially hard when I'm time poor or have a lot of other 'plates spinning'.*

The value of space and time for professional learning was evident across participants' diary entries. In addition, collaboration within school and with external partners was a strong feature across the dataset. Interestingly, this is in contrast to the study conducted by Roy *et al.* (2021) who noted inconsistency in collaboration in schools across Wales. The use of professional learning diaries during the familiarisation phase of reflexive thematic analysis was effective in deepening my understanding of participants' lived experiences specifically related to professional learning. As participants provided their diaries after their narrative conversation, I was able to picture participants in my mind and refer back to the conversations I had with them. This recurring process was helpful and brought to life the diary entries. It felt as though this was the final piece of my research methods puzzle. Moreover, analysing the diaries provided an interesting insight into the lived experiences of teachers (Minott, 2008). The full analysis can be viewed in Appendix H.

4.4.2 Coding

Following the familiarisation phase, I systematically worked through the dataset to engage in a process of inductive coding. The inductive, open coding process allowed me to construct sense of the data. I started the 'first pass' with a process of reading all data independently of each other. I consciously chose to focus on each dataset, particularly valuing each participant's story on their own basis. During this process I made notes of anything that related to the research questions, was of interest or that sparked my curiosity. This was a lengthy process which enabled me to capture concepts and make meaning of the dataset. Figure 6 provides an example of this process. The highlighted colours refer to the following:

Culture of the organisation

Research and Professional Learning

Purpose - why?

Impact of others

So you've got to have that thinking about culture. You've got to know what it is you want. And I think you read about it as well. You know and you research about it and you look into it, it's not just a thing where you think, ohh, I just want a nice culture. It's just going to happen. It's your values driven by your work ethic and what you're reading into and what you're researching into. You know what works and that comes from possibly like your networking and seeing you know what it doesn't look like and how you would focus on it. I guess from that then you know all our professional learning is around it. You know, when you think about, our charter, when you think about our curriculum, when you think about everything really permeate through everything. All our policies, how we conduct ourselves, it's all those things, isn't it, that culture. And I think we just make it simple, because that's at the heart of it. It is never like ohh we're going to do Commando flipping Jo or whatever his name is or something like that. You know. We've got such a strong centre of what we want to achieve that everything kind of moulds around that, I guess, in terms of everything really. The way that we act, the way that we teach, the way that we run all of our systems and procedures, our CAIP, you know, and I suppose that goes back to you and your ego because you're really invested in school being this place where everybody learns and everybody thrives, that goes into the systems and procedures, isn't it? You know, it's like you're always thinking about that doesn't quite fit with how I feel about this school and how I want this school to be. You know, when we talk about performance management, like that doesn't fit with our ethos. So how can we do it better, you know, and it's always with the children in

moral core

**KEY MMT*

⊳ demonstrates inter-relationship!!

Figure 6. Example of 'first pass' analysis

Once I had completed the 'first pass' for each aspect of the dataset I then considered the dataset as a whole. As I engaged in further passes and viewing the dataset in its entirety, I was reminded of Braun and Clarke's (2022) description of coding as an evolving process where code

labels can be changed, they may be repetitive or may only occur once. Through the process, I recorded both semantic and latent codes, semantic codes being those that the participants directly described, whilst latent codes relied upon me, as the researcher, developing a deeper, conceptual understanding (Bowen, 2009; Braun and Clarke, 2022). I made notes of descriptive and interpretative analytical views to demonstrate this understanding. For example, 'professional learning' and 'collaboration' were semantic codes that directly described experiences, whereas, 'change in view after having a baby - empathy' and 'importance of communication - able to talk with leaders' demonstrates a more critical and analytical view.

The codes were produced through a constructive and recursive process (Berger, 2015; Gray 2018). Through this process, and being a reflexive researcher, I asked myself questions such as "what is someone telling me?" and "what would someone else think?". I was conscious of my roles as both an insider and outsider researcher and spent time deeply interrogating the data, trying to not presume understanding. I was careful to consider how my dual role could impact upon my ongoing relationships with participants. I was very aware of my familiarity with the participants and the entanglement of myself with the data. This meant that I had to intentionally consider the meaning and not just accept my first thoughts or reaction to it. I agree with Nadar (2014, p. 26) that "being reflexive means that one recognises that the process of research is as important as the product". Although I adopted a predominantly inductive approach, during the coding process I did employ an element of deductive coding through reflecting on the research questions to ensure that the codes were meaningful (Byrne, 2022). The coding process demonstrated both depth and rigour, as I did not rush this process. Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that researchers work through their full dataset at least twice to ensure the process is rigorous. I took heed of this advice and spent a significant period of time moving back and forth between the narrative conversations and making notes, enabling further refinement. Figure 7 highlights an example of codes that were produced.

Figure 7. Example of coding

To support the process of coding, data analysis and to formalise the operationalisation of the codes, I developed a codebook (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall and McCulloch, 2011; Braun *et al.*, 2019). The codebook recorded the following information:

- Code

- Making sense - code labels

Figure 8 is an excerpt from the code book. The full code book can be viewed in Appendix I.

Role of Leaders					
Leaders					
Leaders treating everyone as equal					
Headteacher					
Toxic leadership - no trust, low morale, bullying					
Impact of leaders on wellbeing					
Time with headteacher					
Genuine leaders					
Understanding from headteacher - not labelling staff					
Life event and compassion from headteacher - positive impact					
Importance of communication - able to talk with leaders					
"Normal" leadership					
Leaders prioritising staff wellbeing					
Leaders lead by example - collaboration and supportive					
Need to know doing a good job - validation					
Leaders approachable and personable					
Treating everyone as an individual					
Make a conscious effort to see school from everyone's perspective					
Use of technology					
Communication					
Demonstrates ethical reasoning					

+ ≡ Codes ▾ Making sense - code labels & thematic map ▾ **Role of Leaders** ▾ Experiences of Collaboration ▾

Figure 8. Example of codebook

This process enabled for the identification of patterns of meaning. It is important to recognise that "coding is a process of interpretation - or meaning-making - and research subjectivity fuels that process" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 55). There is no clear right or wrong way of coding and no prescription or number of codes required before generating initial themes. However, I agree with Byrne (2022, p. 1402) that it is important that "sufficient depth exists to examine the patterns within the data and the diversity of the positions held by participants".

4.4.3 Generating initial themes

In reflexive thematic analysis, a theme "is a pattern of shared meaning organised around a central concept" (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 77). At this stage of the analysis, I started to identify shared meaning through collating codes relevant to each theme in a thematic map (see Figure 9 below). It was crucial that I kept reflecting upon the research questions and, consequently, I added them into the codebook for ease of reference. In doing this, I was able to keep focused on addressing the research questions.

Figure 9. Example of generating initial themes

During the development of themes it was important that I did not just provide a summary of

specific topics (Braun and Clarke, 2022). My approach was more analytical and more about making sense of the dataset rather than summarising everything that participants shared about a topic. Codes were organised into concepts and this clustering approach highlighted both the themes that were being generated and the complexity of the research topic. This process also highlighted the appropriateness of using reflexive thematic analysis for this research. The exploratory nature of the analysis ensured that participants' lived experiences were analysed deeply and relied upon the researcher actively interpreting the relationship amongst the codes (Byrne, 2022). Furthermore, the attention to small elements of meaning (codes) moving to larger patterns of meaning (themes) supported my social constructivist perspective that there are multiple realities that exist within society (Braun and Clarke, 2006; 2022).

As initial themes were generated it was important that I firstly did not become too attached to these themes or view them as finding an answer to the research questions. Based upon my epistemological position of interpretivism, I was cognisant that what was common across the dataset may not necessarily be meaningful for my research (Byrne, 2022).

The initial themes meaningfully communicated the pattern of codes and told a story about the dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2022). They did not represent everything about the dataset but sought to provide an interpretative answer to the research questions. I have drawn on the advice from Byrne (2022, p. 1403) that "themes should be distinctive and may even be contradictory to other themes but should tie together to produce a coherent and lucid picture of the dataset".

4.4.4 Developing and reviewing themes

In an attempt to demonstrate coherence, the initial central concepts were used to make sense of the data. I found this phase the most recursive in nature. Themes were reconsidered against the examples in the codebook and then against the full datasets. Through this process, I recognised that some examples I had initially used to develop the thematic map were not particularly relevant to the focus of this research and, in other places, codes were combined to

strengthen meaning. This process added rigour and depth to the analysis. In developing and reviewing the themes I considered the relationship between the themes, the wider literature and the research questions. Figure 10 below highlights an example of this process.
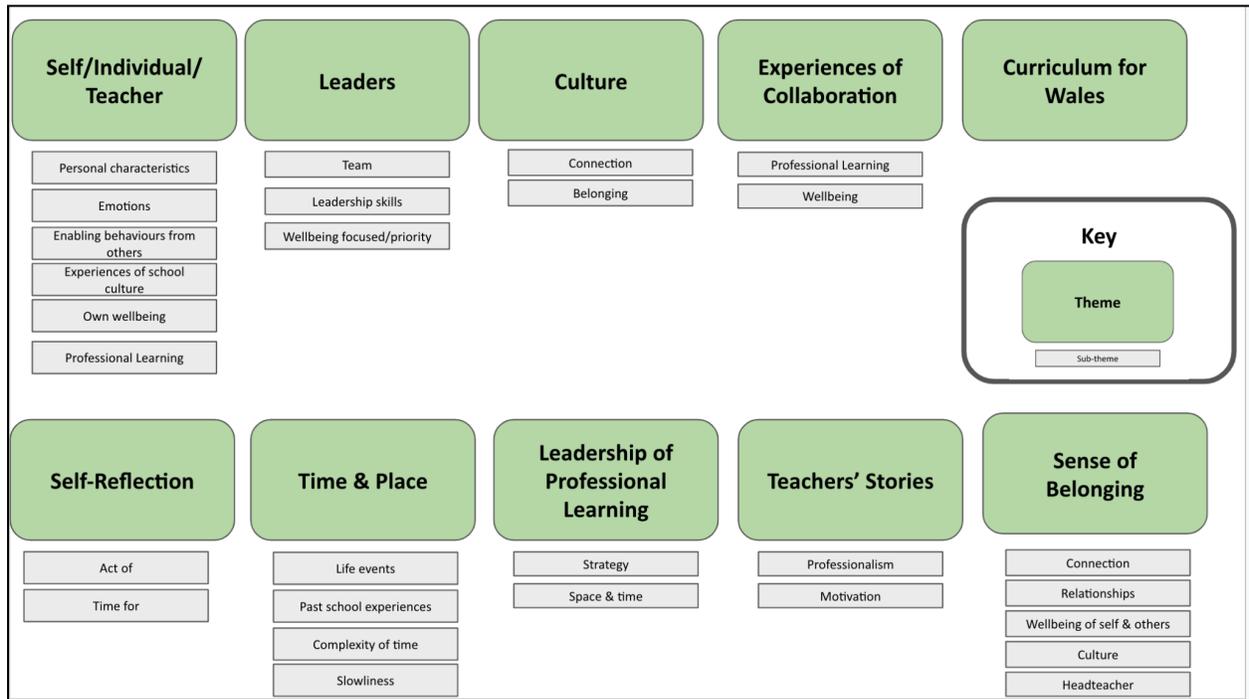

Figure 10. Example of developing and reviewing themes

I then decided to take the initial set of themes and create a thematic map to enable a visualisation of the themes, sub themes and relationships between them. This was a useful process to bring the information together and make sense of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022) (see Figure 11).
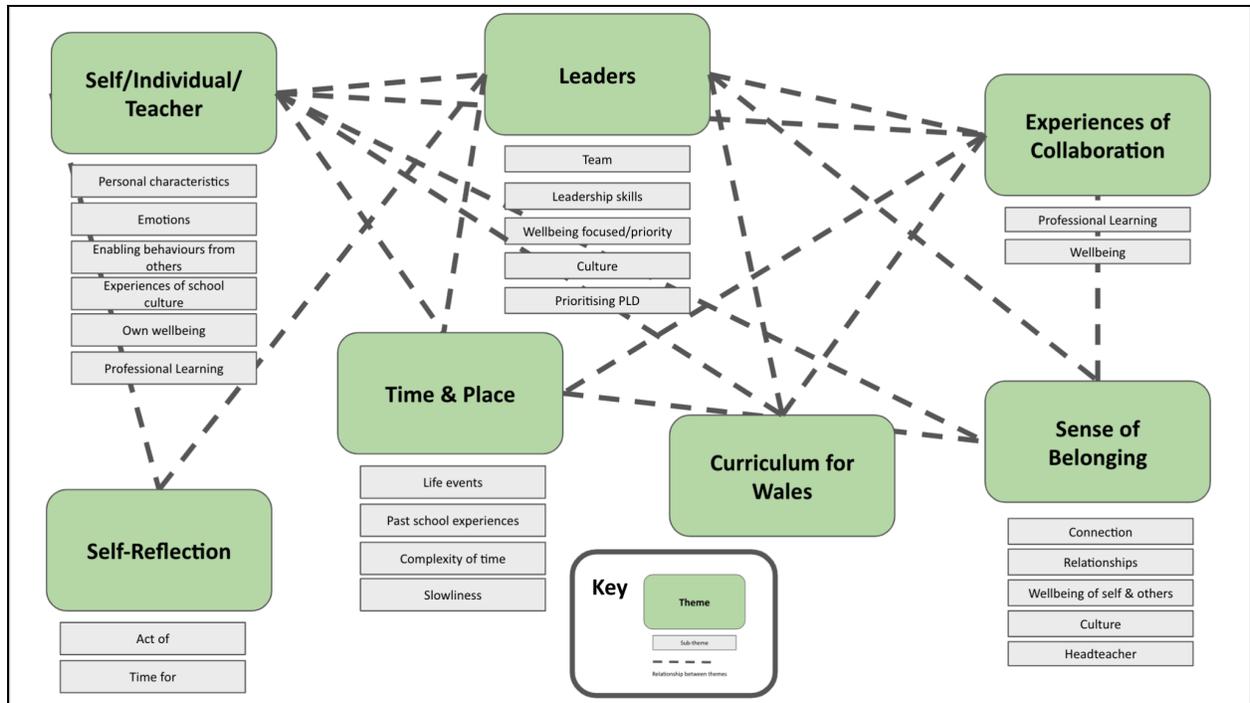
Figure 11. Thematic map

4.4.5 Refining, defining and naming themes

Following the development of the thematic map I further refined the themes. On reflection I could see that 'Self-Reflection, 'Time and Place', 'Curriculum for Wales' and 'Experiences of Collaboration' were all interrelated factors with the other themes, so these were merged. Figure 12 highlights the process of refining themes with those in red being merged with those in green.
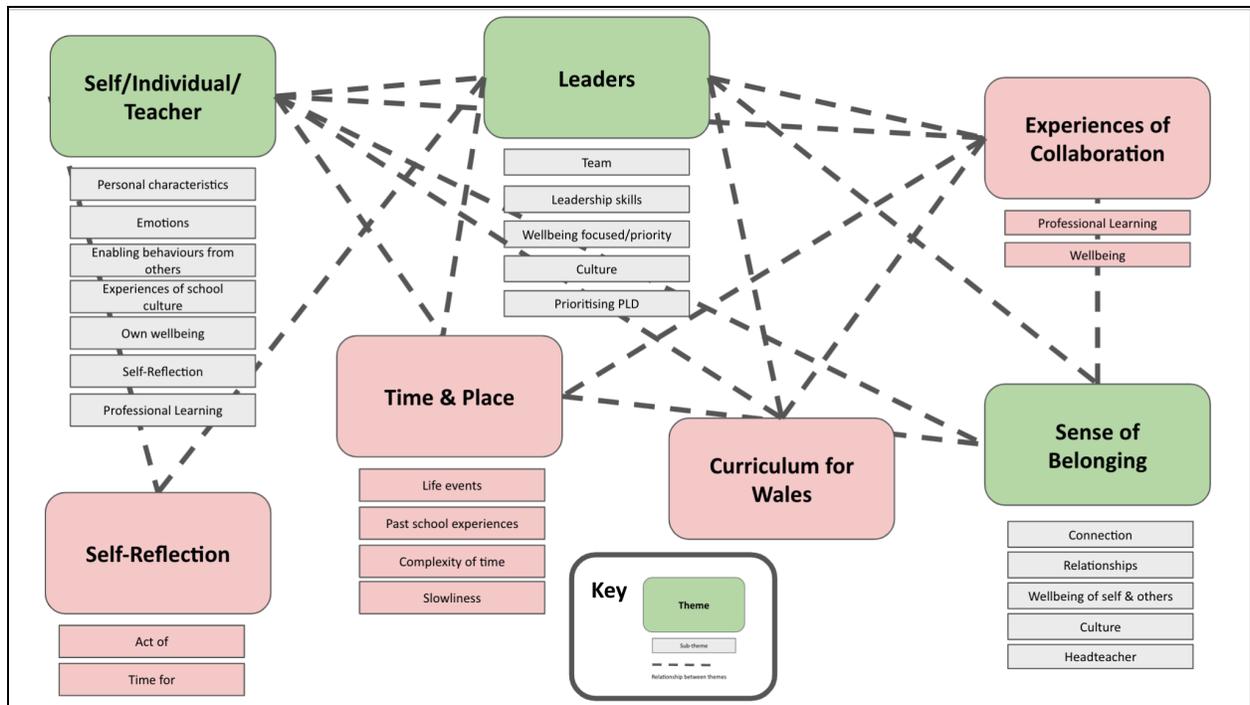
Figure 12. Refining themes

I was then in the position to define and name my themes. Braun and Clarke (2022) offer that writing a definition for each theme is a good way to ascertain the quality of the theme. During this process I considered how I could encapsulate the narrative of the dataset and provide a coherent account of the theme (Patton, 1990; Braun and Clarke, 2022; Byrne, 2022). As a result of this phase of reflexive thematic analysis the themes were refined, defined and named (see Figure 13).
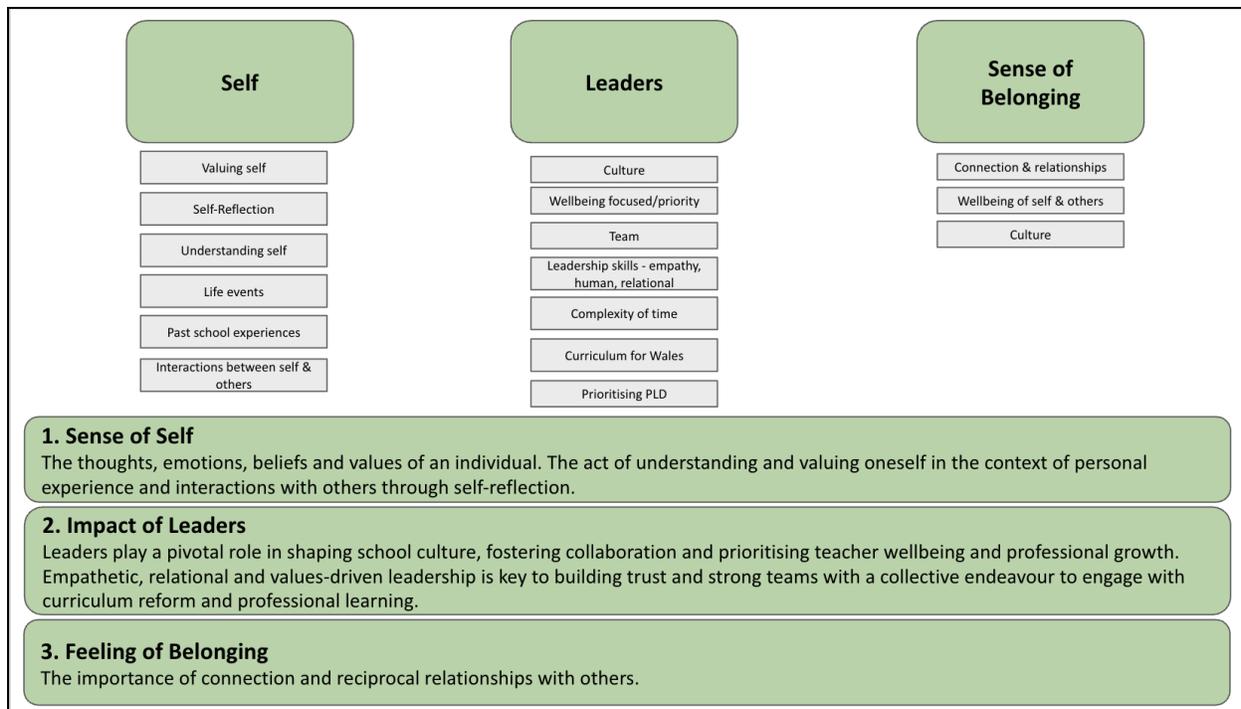
Figure 13. Naming and defining themes

These themes are presented below and discussed further in Chapter Five, with reference to the dataset and the research questions (Byrne, 2022). The rigour in which I engaged with the process of reflexive thematic analysis adds to the trustworthiness of this research. As I became increasingly involved in the process, the physical sense of analysing the data myself was important. I made a conscious research decision that the process of reflexive thematic analysis would honour the lived experiences shared with me. I believe that being able to share participants' life stories and make sense of patterns shared from the dataset, using reflexive thematic analysis, enhanced the exploratory nature of this research. Furthermore, I offer a rich description of a narrative conversation with one of the participants to demonstrate the breadth of 'story' which supports the key findings within the study (Appendix J). In response to the patterns identified, and paying cognisance to the research questions, the following three themes will be explored:

1. Sense of Self

The thoughts, emotions, beliefs and values of an individual. The act of understanding and

valuing oneself in the context of personal experience and interactions with others through self-reflection.

2. Impact of Leaders

Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping school culture, fostering collaboration and prioritising teacher wellbeing and professional growth. Empathetic, relational and values-driven leadership is key to building trust and strong teams with a collective endeavour to engage with curriculum reform and professional learning.

3. Feeling of Belonging

The importance of connection and reciprocal relationships with others.

4.5 Exploring the narratives

It was a privilege to explore the lived experiences of the teachers who participated in the study. They offered personal anecdotes, rich descriptions and an insight into the reality of being a teacher in Wales during a period of curriculum reform and realisation. Through my own interpretation of their stories, I offer three themes for further consideration, as Clandinin (2016, p. 205) shared that "there is no final telling, no final story and no one singular story we can tell". It is, therefore, important to remember that this is a snapshot in time. It is "in the midst" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 43) of a school day, a school year, a national curriculum reform, interrelated with personal experiences, past, present and future. It is my privilege as a doctoral researcher to be able to reconstruct a critical understanding of the retelling of chapters of the life stories of teachers. Furthermore, as the researcher, I too am in the midst of my life story and my lived experiences play a part in both the research and the presentation of the themes. As I attempted to articulate the themes, I was reminded of the work of Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk (2016) and their conception of experience through a multidimensional understanding of temporality, place and sociality. Thus, as I explored the themes I was (and still am) committed "to

understanding lives in motion" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 212). The findings are shared below in three distinct sections to reflect each of the themes.

4.5.1 Theme 1: Sense of self

The definition below was based upon the narrative inquiry with all teachers in the study. I described 'sense of self' as the following:

The thoughts, emotions, beliefs and values of an individual. The act of understanding and valuing oneself in the context of personal experience and interactions with others through self-reflection.

There was an overwhelming sense from all participants that they have purpose and enjoy their role. Participants shared a love of their job, with comments like *"I've got a real purpose. I love coming to work"* (Dorothy); *"I absolutely love my subject"* (Fox) and *"I think I find a sense of that, what do I call it, like ethical satisfaction in it… I know it's also a meaningful job that gives back to people"* (Mary).

Moving beyond what is contained in the data and applying an interpretative lens, there were many examples of participants demonstrating an understanding of themselves through reflection. One story particularly resonated with me and this comment from my research diary captures my thoughts immediately after the narrative conversation.

> *What a conversation! She was so passionate and proud to be a teacher and a teacher at her school too. I felt I had to dig a bit deeper into challenges she had faced. She was so positive that it felt too good to be true!! But genuinely I think that is her. It was a privilege to listen to her story*

The life story was shared by Kate who had taught at the same school for eighteen years. Kate came alive when talking about teaching and the students in her care. She was driven by her

passion for her subject and vision for her team and in her words "I take every opportunity I can". The way that Kate described her experiences and interactions with others reflected her positive sense of self. She did acknowledge aspects of her role that she did not like but was guided by being "sustained by the things… I do enjoy and trying not to be dragged down by the things I don't". There were many reflective statements made by Kate during the narrative conversation which demonstrated her understanding of self and the impact that this has on her wellbeing. For example, she described her work mindset and her attempts at balancing home and work, recognising that these differ to other colleagues. Kate shared a growing sense of self as her career has progressed and how she has learnt to say no in order to remain focused on what sustains her as a teacher. Interestingly, she used the phrase "you have gotta be brave enough to do that". The idea of teachers needing to be brave to say no to something really struck me. It resonated with the model of neoliberalism and accountability that has marked education in Wales where teachers have felt controlled and directed (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Ball, 2015).

In contrast, Kate remarked that the new Curriculum for Wales has helped change such a mindset. Interpreting Kate's life story, through the lens of a sense of self, demonstrated a strong professional identity, thus supporting the work of Suarez and McGrath (2022). Furthermore, Kate's story resonated with me as a researcher as I was able to apply the thinking of the model of an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing presented in Chapter Two to my interpretation. Kate's life story echoed a recurring movement through the micro, meso, macro and chrono levels, whilst she maintained a clear sense of self throughout her experiences which impacted positively on her wellbeing.

The notion of experience was a clear driver for how participants described various behaviours, thoughts and how they understood themselves. A number of participants shared how previous negative school experiences had shaped their sense of self. Emotional comments from Dorothy such as "I genuinely hated my job. I hated going to work. I cried all the way to work. I cried all the way back home and but it was just awful really" brought to life traumatic past experiences.

Similarly, Romeo shared that, because of experiencing a toxic workplace culture, she *"still would probably put myself down a little bit"*, identifying how past experience had a lasting impact on her value of self, despite now working in a different context. Fox likened a previous teaching experience with being *"in the trenches"* and a need to *"stick it out"*, which I viewed as being synonymous with going to war. Hearing these comments, and witnessing the emotional response from participants as they recalled such experiences, caused me to have mixed feelings. Firstly, I felt proud that they trusted me enough to share such vulnerability, but I also felt aggrieved that people in our profession had such negative experiences. This was further compounded by the personal relationships I have with participants as an insider researcher. I found the use of my research diary a necessary support for sharing my own thoughts whilst respecting ethical boundaries. This entry captured my feelings after one of the conversations:

> *At times I felt a mixture of emotions myself. The participant referred to me a lot. She talked about the way I am as a person and leader and how this has impacted on her. I felt overwhelmingly proud of this but also a bit awkward and undeserving of such high praise! This put me in a funny place as a researcher. It was a bit like feeling embarrassed and that I should be proud of the culture I have created. I think I spend so much time thinking about 'we' that when I'm forced to consider 'I' it feels a bit strange!! To think that Dorothy gave up teaching and was very disillusioned by the profession and has turned this around into her passion and 'why' says a lot about her as a person. It also demonstrates the importance of culture! And headteachers!*

The reflection demonstrates the impact of this research on my own sense of self and also the effect of a critical incident as an opportunity for sense making. Halquist and Musanti (2010) argue that a critical incident is not something waiting to be uncovered, but is discovered through interpretation. Adapting their thinking to this study, I have interpreted how participants' past school experiences have impacted their sense of self. This also supports the work of Du Plessis and McDonagh (2021) who found that the emotional wellbeing of teachers is closely connected with their experiences in school.

The notion of experience is an interesting aspect of sense of self and an area that was explored by all participants. Through the narrative conversations it became clear that the role of being a teacher cannot be divorced from a sense of self (Suarez and McGrath, 2022). Interestingly, Sally described how her purpose has changed over time as *"pastoral stuff is my passion now"*, identifying how experiences have impacted upon her beliefs. Moreover, experiences on a personal level, outside of the work domain, had a clear impact upon participants' thoughts, feelings and beliefs as a teacher. Fox passionately talked about his upbringing and what influenced his decision to become a teacher, describing it as the *"main motivator initially for trying to get out of the valley"*. Many participants shared the effect of others on the decision to become a teacher, including parents and their own teachers. There was a definite impression that the participants all had personal reasons for entering the profession, beyond that of pay and conditions.

Sparky shared his own negative experiences of schooling and how this had been his motivation to become a teacher and impact upon the lives of others. He detailed where he took responsibility for his own self through reflecting upon his practice as a teacher. His realisation that his self-belief and emotions were being dominated by a poor relationship with his own self led to collaboration with others. This self-directed collaboration and seeking support from others enabled him to make sense of his own negative beliefs. He also described the importance of personally taking responsibility for his own health and fitness as a key driver for promoting a positive sense of self.

The understanding of personal experiences was further shared by a few participants as they shared the impact of motherhood on their role as a teacher. Victoria candidly shared her experience of teaching before and after having a child.

> *It was very much my life… very much live and breathe it at home, which is a good thing at times, but it just definitely it shifts your perspective of things… I'm still just as*

passionate about my job, still love it just as much. But I think it just puts into perspective that it is a job, ultimately. And yeah, that maybe, I think when you make choices, you make them around your child. Whereas before you definitely didn't have that piece of the jigsaw that you were trying to weigh up all the time. So yeah, a huge shift. And I think in terms of me as a teacher, it's definitely whenever I'm dealing with bits and bobs in school now, I just put my little girl in that situation and just think more as a mum, maybe before a teacher a lot of the time. I think that's made you more empathetic and even I think like giving me more confidence… it's definitely a game changer.

It is clear that Victoria's sense of self had been impacted by a critical life event. Sally agreed with the impact of motherhood on her sense of self, describing returning to work from maternity leave as *"a massive shift"* and that she now considers situations *"from a parental perspective".* In the context of this study, it is important to consider the notion of time with regard to the impact of motherhood. Although it was a key aspect to share for Victoria and Sally, there were other participants, who are mothers, that did not discuss it. This may be due to the timing of the narrative inquiry coinciding with recent and impending maternity leaves, specifically for Sally and Victoria, thus identifying what Clandinin (2016, p. 212) describes as an "understanding of lives in motion" and the significance of motherhood, in that moment, for the two participants. Moreover, as the researcher, processing the importance of motherhood in the context of the theme of 'sense of self' and the research questions, led me to also consider the impact of others on Victoria. She openly talked about her role changing as she became a mum and being grateful for the support from me as her headteacher. She commented *"empathising with, you know, with my situation of like what it's like to be a mum and that, you know that life does change and that's fine and that's normal".* This demonstrated the multiple identities that exist amongst participants and researchers and the complexity of power and relationships when sharing lived experiences (Halquist and Musanti, 2010). Our participant-researcher relationship was not just based upon me being her headteacher. She knows I am a mum too and this understanding created a condition for her to thrive through a significant life experience, thus

supporting the research by Baptiste *et al.* (2024) who call for personal and organisational strategies for supporting and nurturing teachers who are also mothers.

It is clear from the participants' life stories shared that an understanding of oneself in the context of experience and self-reflection is a key theme for creating the conditions for teachers to thrive. Furthermore, it is evident that the experiences that the participants shared are not purely in isolation, they are context specific and relational, thus supporting the second theme to be explored further.

4.5.2 Theme 2: Impact of Leaders

The second theme specifically related to the 'impact of leaders'. The statement below was based upon the patterns identified within the narrative inquiry:

Leaders play a pivotal role in shaping school culture, fostering collaboration and prioritising teacher wellbeing and professional growth. Empathetic, relational and values-driven leadership is key to building trust and strong teams with a collective endeavour to engage with curriculum reform and professional learning.

For the purpose of this study and to reflect the dataset, the term 'leaders' relates to the senior leaders within each school, including the headteacher. At this juncture, as an insider researcher, it is imperative to acknowledge that I am one of the headteachers referred to within the research. Moreover, I have been the only headteacher of the primary school and have developed and co-constructed all aspects of the organisation. I understand that the primary school participants may only have shared specific aspects that they thought I wanted to hear and that would sound positive. Likewise, as an outsider researcher, but closely connected with the school, the secondary school participants may too have only provided one view of leadership. They may also have had perceptions of my relationship with their headteacher which could have influenced their responses. Although this could be viewed as a limitation to the study, it should also be noted that the participants may have been providing an accurate

representation of their experiences and views. I agree with Czerniawski (2023, p. 1383) that "dissonance and discord must not necessarily be viewed negatively". Rather, it provided an opportunity to explore the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, specifically considering the impact of leaders.

The impact of leaders on the culture of an organisation was shared by all participants with direct references to the headteachers and wider senior leadership teams. Participants described the culture as being well thought out and led by the headteachers of the two schools in the study, recognising that their values were intrinsic to the school cultures. Dorothy commented that the culture in the primary schools was *"nurturing", "relaxed", "values driven"* and that there is *"clarity"* and *"consistency"*. Sparky agreed and described the culture as somewhere where *"everyone looks out for each other"* and the *"absolute foundation is relationships"*. Victoria corroborated and described the culture as a *"sense of team"* and *"everybody's a learner"*, whilst Romeo described a culture where *"your wellbeing is paramount"*. The culture within the secondary school was similar with Mary describing the culture as being one that *"cares about other people and cares about those people's lives"*. Fox shared that the culture provides him with space to be *"free to express my own ways"* and that he is *"trusted"*. Sally agreed that the culture encouraged *"autonomy and choices"* and that this was enabled through teamwork. Interestingly, Kate was able to reflect on the change of culture within the secondary school, referring to the present culture being completely different. She described that *"it's it's the feel of you are important, it's the feel of your one cog in a massive machine, but your cog matters. You know without you, the machine isn't going to work."* The description of culture by all participants suggested that both schools are learning organisations (Kools and Stoll, 2016). Furthermore, the cultures within the two organisations have been led by leaders and influenced by the Welsh Government curriculum reform process. This supports the work of Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) who described the significant role that school leaders play in creating collaborative cultures.

The impact of leaders on curriculum reform was notable across the narrative conversations with all participants. They not only referred to school systems and processes, but also the development of curriculum design and the professional learning and development prioritised by leaders. There were a variety of descriptions of professional learning experienced by participants across the dataset. References were made to whole school professional learning and development sessions, time to work in smaller focused teams, subject teams, non-contact time and working collaboratively with partners external to the schools. This wealth of professional learning was noted in both the primary and the secondary schools and further highlighted the schools' position as learning organisations, as Dorothy described *"we are a real learning culture. We've got purpose. We know why we're doing it. Everybody buys into it"*. Dorothy maintains this is because *"you've got a strong why"* (referring to me as the headteacher). Fox shared that *"it's just a process that continues"*, highlighting the strength in the systems across the school.

The benefits of engaging in professional learning, in the wider context of teacher wellbeing, was also evident across the dataset. Kate commented that *"we're looking for different ways of doing that sort of thing which actually helps with your wellbeing and helps with mental health"*, whereas Dorothy found that being able to share her creativity with others, made her feel more passionate about her own work and gave her a sense of pride. Sally viewed the systematic development of collaboration in professional learning as a school *"priority in reducing workload"*. Kate agreed and talked avidly about the way that collaboration within her own team, wider school teams and with external partners maintained her enthusiasm and enjoyment for the job.

The feelings of enthusiasm and enjoyment were evident across all the participants when they were sharing their experiences of professional learning and specifically when describing collaborating with others. Sparky talked about the 'Collaborative Approach to Improving Practice' (CAIP) model within his school. He described the model as removing a top-down bureaucratic form of lesson observation led by school leaders and creating opportunities for

teachers to collaborate and observe each other. He actively shared that after these sessions he *"feels a lot happier"* and *"more informed"*. Dorothy also described the CAIP model and the benefits to her as a teacher and leader. She talked about the process providing a bigger picture of learning and teaching across the school. In addition, the value of CAIP was felt on a personal level and provided space for professional growth.

Romeo described collaboration impacting positively on her professional growth. She candidly shared the opportunities I had directly provided for her and the impact of my leadership on her own development. She reflected upon her own purpose as now widening to a system level due to collaborative professional learning opportunities. Romeo shared *"I think my knowledge of that is down to you and, and the opportunities that I've been given or encouraged to engage in"*. As an insider researcher, the impact of this positively resonated with me and provided me with an appreciation of the value of collaboration and investing in time for it.

Participants across both schools also commented on the dedicated time provided for collaboration and the freedom to engage in activities. Romeo and Mary talked about wider collaboration across the cluster from both a primary and secondary perspective. However, Mary commented on the lack of time for such activities, echoing the study by Hargreaves (2003) who described that poor use of time negatively impacts collaboration. Conversely, Romeo did not agree and felt that appropriate time had been provided and specific time for reflection was beneficial too. The notion of time for professional learning and the impact of leaders was also noted regarding the development of Curriculum for Wales. Fox was the only participant who made a direct reference to the approach to the curriculum in England and in Wales. He shared that in Wales, leaders provided him with time and choice about how to teach and encouraged him to do it his own way. The impact of this was notable as he felt like he could be himself whereas, when he worked in England he had to comply with a set framework for teaching. Sally described that the curriculum reform had further encouraged collaboration as *"it's a real collaborative way of working and which massively helps with planning and workload"*. However, Victoria did not initially agree as she used words such as *"tricky", "scary"* and *"you took away*

my comfort zone" to describe the changes. However, the focus on collaboration and impact of leaders ensured that she managed the shift in thinking and practice.

There was a definite sense that the leaders in both schools had taken advantage of the curriculum reform in Wales and ensured that the trust and agency offered to them as leaders, had also been shared with staff. Romeo openly described this sense of trust.

> *Never once in seven years has trust ever been the question on my lips at all. And I think there's a lot of integrity amongst the staff here as well and and everybody is here for the same goal really and that's for the benefit of the children and and that's very, very hard culture to build in some ways and in other ways it's really simple. It is a very easy to get caught up in external factors that might waiver that culture and we never have and I think that comes back to to you and the team that we've built and coming back to the children all the time.*

In interpreting this description, I cannot escape that what Romeo described was my original vision for the school. I captured my thoughts in my research diary following the narrative conversation:

> *Reflecting on the conversation with Romeo has made me feel really proud of what we have achieved together. It was strange listening to her describe the impact that I have had on the school, but also made me feel very pleased!*

My reflection captures both that sense of pride, as described, but also a slight uneasiness as an insider researcher as I am listening to participants' views of me. Dorothy also shared her views about me with phrases such as *"you're so fair and you're so straight down the line"* and *"because you've got no ego about your role within the school, that permeates".* She described how my behaviour as a headteacher directly impacted upon her and other staff in a positive manner. However, even writing this now feels slightly awkward compounding the tension I felt

as an insider researcher, yet it also supported my own wellbeing through an encouragement of what I am doing is impactful, thus highlighting the spiral reciprocal nature of insider research.

Overall, the interpretation of the narratives highlights the positive impact of leaders on organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. This study extends the work of Weddle (2022) who suggested future research on collaboration could focus on schools as organisations in different school contexts. Furthermore, it supports the work of Engels *et al.* (2008) and Visone (2022) who identified leadership features which shape strong school cultures and prioritise collaborative professionalism. It could be argued that positive cultures are shaped by a feeling of belonging (Visone, 2022), which will be explored in the third, and final, theme of this study.

4.5.3 Theme 3: Feeling of Belonging

The third, and final, theme is related to the feeling of belonging which is described as:

The importance of connection and reciprocal relationships with others.

All participants in the primary school candidly described connections with colleagues which made a difference to their role and work. Romeo shared that *"being surrounded by like-minded people"* makes a positive difference to her role. Victoria said that *"we're good friends"* and *"everyone's in it together"*. Dorothy described *"our trust with people"* and *"nobody is mean… nobody is out to get you"*. Sparky attributed his strong feeling of belonging in the school to *"the absolute foundation is relationships"*. Despite the notable difference in size between the primary and secondary schools in the study, there were similar responses between participants regarding connections with colleagues. Sally talked about the importance of supportive relationships with *"friends as opposed to colleagues"* and that *"they've always got your back"*. Fox agreed and discussed that in all the different teams *"everyone's very supportive"*. Mary also talked about a *"kind of friendship"* that she experiences within school. Kate described an *"acceptance of other people"* and the connections with a wide range of teams. The recognition

of the importance of teams was a key point amongst secondary teachers, highlighting the more complex social grouping of a larger organisation. However, despite the potential of dissonance across a large organisation, the participants all shared a common sense of belonging.

A feeling of belonging was shared in depth by Victoria, a primary school participant. Victoria had worked in the school for six years and described *"feeling part of the team"* as significant for her wellbeing and for her to thrive. However, she continued to describe how a recent change to her role meant she was *"on a journey of figuring out where I fit in"*. This resonated with the concept of temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016), discussed in Chapter Three, and understanding experience as a process. Victoria recognised that her current 'present' was in flux and described the inter-relationship of her role with personal life events, which was impacting on her feeling of belonging within the organisation. As an insider researcher, it was interesting to hear that Victoria felt this way and challenged the perception I had of her. There was a vulnerability to the conversation which I do not believe would have been there if we did not have an existing relationship. Moreover, without this knowledge I could have easily presumed that Victoria, as an experienced member of staff, had a feeling of belonging, without considering how recent changes had affected her. However, the benefit of being an insider researcher and the multiple roles that I have made me reflect upon how I act as a headteacher to support her in regaining a sense of belonging.

A sense of belonging and the relationships with school leaders was referred to by many participants. Kate shared that the headteacher and leadership team encouraged staff to talk to them if they had any issues, recognising that this was part of the ethos of the school. Mary agreed that the headteacher leads a *"massive support system"* and *"it is a school that cares about other people and cares about those people's lives"*. Sally also shared that *"there's not one single member of the SLT (senior leadership team) that I wouldn't feel comfortable saying this has happened. Please help"*, thus identifying an inter-relationship between the processes within the secondary school and a relational focus on wellbeing.

There were similar discussions with the primary participants. However, it is worth reiterating that they were referring to my actions and me as a headteacher, highlighting one of the multiple roles I bring to this research. Sparky shared that he had *"no hesitation to knock on the door and having a bit of communication, a bit of dialogue as to what I'm thinking"* (referring to my office door). He continued that, if he had any concerns about his wellbeing, he felt as though he could speak to me. Romeo openly shared *"I feel that I could talk to you about anything really and both personal and professional"* indicating the strong relationship we have with each other. She continued to describe the school as *"a place where you're encouraged to to grow as a professional and in a personal sense as well".* Listening to Romeo, as an insider researcher, was a privilege as she embodied one of my vision principles for the school. In my research diary I noted *"the friendship between us is a strength"* and on further reflection I think that our reciprocal relationship provided an added depth to the narrative conversation. In my diary, I commented that *"I felt more relaxed starting this conversation"* and *"the pre-existing relationship with the participant I value and consider a strength for this conversation",* thus suggesting that our connection positively impacted upon this narrative conversation.

Considering connection and reciprocal relationships, Victoria recognised that it is *"not left to chance"* and that relationships are prioritised by leaders and all staff are valued. This has created a culture where everyone has something to offer. Romeo shared that the culture of the school *"makes me feel very safe".* Sparky aligned this culture with everyone wanting each other to succeed and that relationships are based upon honesty. Victoria also used the word *"honest"* when describing monitoring systems in the school used to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers. She stated that *"there is never a fear"* and that feedback is *"constructive"* and based upon *"trust".* Taking this further, Dorothy refers to a strong sense of moral purpose to describe the driver behind the systems and processes used across the school. She describes that because she does not act *"in a state of fear"* and *"nobody is working in that fear zone",* she has a strong feeling of belonging and that this school is *"like my safety place".* Dorothy shared previous school experiences where there was not a culture of belonging and the negative impact that this had upon her. She recalled times where she *"was so lost"* and she *"just needed an out".*

This negatively impacted upon her wellbeing as she shared: *"I genuinely hated my job. I hated going to work. I cried all the way to work".* As a headteacher, researcher and someone who is passionate about the teaching profession, listening to this narrative was difficult. This resonated with Czerniawski's (2023) view of feeling tension and dissonance as an insider researcher. I found myself experiencing a range of emotions from feeling saddened and upset to angry and frustrated. I found it hard to comprehend that someone that I view as being purpose driven and fuelled by a feeling of belonging could have felt so isolated.

The feeling of isolation was also shared by Fox when comparing teaching experiences in England and Wales. Curriculum for Wales has provided a sense of freedom and choice, which has supported his feeling of belonging, as he described *"I feel like I can be myself"*. Fox further expressed the impact of the more rigid curriculum structure in England on his declining motivation and that the magnitude of planning and marking led him to feel out of control and *"in a poor place"*. This directly links the impact of the work of a teacher on their wellbeing and the feelings of separability, the antithesis of belonging. Kate also described feelings of disconnectedness which she related to previous education systems driven by accountability, silo working in departments and a focus solely on examination results. She reflected that the changes to curriculum nationally and the impact of collaboration had resulted in improved relationships with others and an increased feeling of belonging. She described:

> *It's the feeling that you are important, it's the feeling that you're one cog in a massive machine, but your cog matters. You know without you, the machine isn't going to work.*

Dorothy similarly felt the impact of collaboration and professional learning. She reflected *"I've got so many nice people around me to support me"* and *"everybody is nice here so that makes a difference for our wellbeing".*

All the participants described moments in their lived experiences where they did not feel a sense of belonging. For each participant, it was related to a specific person, place or time and

interrelated with their own understanding of the experience (Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016). The impact of not feeling as if they belonged was described in various ways but, ultimately, all negatively influenced their wellbeing. Conversely, all participants could describe a feeling of belonging in their current role and the positive impact that this had upon them. Therefore, there was a consensus from all participants, across both the primary and secondary schools, that their wellbeing interrelated with the culture of the organisation in which they were situated and the opportunities they had for collaboration.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented findings from a narrative inquiry undertaken with four participants from a primary school and four participants from a secondary school in Wales, during the Autumn Term of 2023. A process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was used to make sense of the data. Exploring the narratives in this way provided me with an opportunity to consider the lived experiences of both primary and secondary teachers during a period of curriculum realisation following the significant education reform in Wales, thus adding to the knowledge base in Wales, and beyond, with research based upon the teachers' own lived experiences.

When writing this chapter, I found myself spiralling through a messy process of trying to make sense of the patterns and honour the lived experiences shared with me (Mellor, 2001; Fitzgerald, Stride and Enright, 2020). I was conscious that in both engaging in reflexive thematic analysis and when writing this chapter, that I too was "in the midst" of my own lived experiences (Clandinin, 2016, p. 43). Throughout the chapter, I demonstrated how my 'self' was entangled in the narrative inquiry. My dual roles as a headteacher of the primary school used in the research, and as a doctoral researcher, are critically discussed through a reflective lens of positionality and power (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Czerniawski, 2023). This exploration of both my 'self' and the lived experiences of participants through the recursive process of reflexive

thematic analysis emphasised an inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing.

Such an inter-relationship is complex and I grappled with how I could make visible the analytical challenge I faced. Applying reflexive thematic analysis enabled me to make sense of the dataset and present the lived experiences of participants through the three themes of 'Sense of Self', 'Impact of Leaders' and 'Feeling of Belonging'. Exploring participants' narratives through these themes both respected the individual lived experiences shared and also sought to understand the complex lives of the teachers through making meaning of recurring themes. The research questions were also considered and, together with the themes, they demonstrate an inter-relationship rather than providing a discrete answer. Moreover, they amplify the messiness of narrative inquiry and the complexity of exploring teacher wellbeing.

Whilst this chapter has made sense of the lived experiences shared specifically by the participants in this study, the next chapter will focus on the significance and meaning on a larger scale. Chapter Five seeks to discuss the research process and the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing in relation to my research questions. It also aims to provide a rich discussion to contribute to the fields of learning ecosystems (Hannon *et al.*, 2019), teacher wellbeing and Curriculum for Wales.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Overview of chapter

In the previous chapter, I reported the data from the narrative inquiry research undertaken with four primary school teachers and four secondary school teachers in Wales. A process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was undertaken to make sense of the data collected. My intention was to not only honour the lived experiences shared with me but to also interpret these experiences to better understand the complex relationship between individuals and the social context in which they work within schools. In Chapters Three and Four, I openly acknowledged and critically discussed my positionality and my relatively unique perspective as both a headteacher in Wales and a doctoral student (Czerniawski, 2023). My positionality and values are a central part of this research and are entwined with the collection and interpretation of the data. Through the interpretation and disentanglement of lived experiences and based upon the work of Braun and Clarke (2022), I explored the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing and constructed three themes for further consideration: (i) Sense of Self; (ii) Impact of Leaders; and (iii) Feeling of Belonging.

These themes were considered using the lived experiences shared by participants. As previously discussed in Chapter Three, I use the term 'lived experience' to describe the life stories shared by participants, critiquing the simplicity described by Peacock and Holland (1993). Moreover, the terms 'lived experiences' and 'life stories' support the complexity of understanding participants' lives in motion (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson and Sikes, 2010; Norman, 2020). In exploring participants' stories, more than one theme was often present. However, I explored the narratives based upon what I believed demonstrated the most relevance for this study, whilst balancing the need for the authentic voices of participants to be heard. I acknowledge that the interpretation of this narrative inquiry is my view which is both messy and nonlinear; moreover; it is interwoven with my own positionality and life experiences (Mellor, 2001; Lainson, Braun and Clarke, 2019; Fitzgerald, Stride and Enright, 2020). Throughout the

process of narrative inquiry, I have attempted to honour teachers' lived experiences and recognise that "the stories we tell of our experiences matter" (Norman, 2020, p. 3963). In the current period of educational reform in Wales, the stories of these participants matter significantly. While there is a body of research on teacher wellbeing in the UK (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Jerrim *et al.*, 2021), there remains limited empirical evidence specifically examining this through the lens of organisational culture and collaboration within the Welsh context (Kidger *et al.*, 2021; Brown *et al.*, 2025).

This chapter discusses the findings of the study through a narrative and interpretive lens, drawing connections between participants' lived experiences, the theoretical framing outlined previously and a proposed ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing. The discussion aims to highlight the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing in order to contribute to the fields of learning ecosystems (Hannon *et al.*, 2019) and teacher wellbeing, with particular relevance for the context of education reform in Wales. It builds on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Hannon and Peterson (2017) through the presentation of an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing. I made the decision to place the ecosystem model towards the beginning of this chapter to provide a context for the discussion. This chapter also offers a discussion to add to the knowledge base of narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016) through its application in the education sector. It aims to provide a rich discussion based upon the themes shared in Chapter Four, the relevant literature in Chapter Two, research aims and the research questions. However, in an attempt to provide such a discussion and make sense of the interpretative nature of the study, I needed to firstly recognise and discuss the dilemma I faced.

5.2 Discussing the dilemmas of meaning making

Making sense of multiple threads within this study was a complex dilemma. I started the process by reflecting upon the aims of the research and considered how the study's findings

directly addressed them. Through the reflexive thematic analysis of the narrative conversations and documentary analysis I explored the lived experiences of teachers and the impact of such experiences on their ability to thrive. There were many examples of collaboration and how this connected with teachers' wellbeing. Moreover, participants shared ways that the culture of schools can be both supportive and constrain their ability to thrive, suggesting that the study met the aims of the research. However, I agree with Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 124) that "narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem definition and solution". Thus, meeting the aims of the study did not provide an end point; rather, it acted as a catalyst for making further meaning of the stories shared, recognising that this, in itself, was an act of inquiry (Clandinin, 2016). Through such recognition, I was also faced with the dilemma of sharing the messiness involved in the research. As Fitzgerald, Stride and Enright (2020, p. 423) suggest "it is as if research has to be reported in a sanitised manner, hiding any signs of the challenges, failings and dilemmas faced when researching". In maintaining a sense of authenticity and embracing the messiness, I have attempted to share the dilemmas of meaning making through acknowledging and reflecting on the complexities and uncertainties inherent in narrative inquiry in order to provide meaningful insights into the lived realities of teachers in Wales.

During this process of inquiry and acknowledging the interpretation of different roles within the study, I turned to the consideration of voice, signature and audience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2016). The role of these "conceptual commitments" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 205) provided a way of understanding the difficult process of meaning making and the multiplicity of directions I could take for a variety of audiences. As a social constructivist, I considered 'voice' as describing multiple voices belonging to the participants and I which were continually being heard and not heard throughout the study. It was crucial that I recognised whose voices and perspectives were being represented and how I captured the intent and spirit within my writing. I struggled, at times, to communicate how I made sense of participants' stories, whilst balancing the need for discussing these within the expectations of a doctoral thesis. I knew I had something I wanted to say and something to offer the wider education profession that could

support teachers to thrive. However, I found myself struggling to communicate this in a way that honoured the voices within the study and my own researcher's 'signature'.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe a researcher's signature as a reflection of their values and positionality. Therefore, I wanted to ensure that the way in which I authentically engaged in the process of narrative inquiry was evident and that it reflected that I too am "in the midst" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 43) of my life story and lived experiences. One of the key considerations of this study has been my positionality and role as both an insider and outsider researcher. I found the work of Czerniawski (2023) particularly useful in developing clarity about my positionality, as described in Chapter Three. In considering my researcher's signature, I built on the work of Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 60) and their concept of "the space between" through capturing the overlapping identities and experiences between participants and I, rather than considering positionality as an insider/outsider divide. This distinction recognises the fluidity of my identity and supports Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk's (2016) conceptualisation of experience through multiple understandings of temporality, place and sociality. It also captures the spiral nature of inquiry. As I attempted to make meaning, I wanted to ensure my writing reflected my unique way of telling and interpreting and clearly demonstrated my researcher's signature.

Although my researcher's signature brings my own style to this narrative inquiry. The final conceptual commitment that required consideration was 'audience'. Through the dilemma of making meaning I had to ensure that I was cognisant of the audiences of my study. This posed further tension as I considered who the audience would be and how meaningful they would consider this work. Through this consideration, I returned to the research questions, aims and objectives and focused on the contribution this study could bring to multiple audiences, those being teacher wellbeing and, as Hannon *et al.* (2019) describe, the growing field of study on learning ecosystems. Moreover, I considered how it could influence policymakers, school leaders and teachers by providing further knowledge and understanding on creating the conditions for our teachers to thrive, whilst taking heed that:

> If our work is to be accepted and to have influence, we need to shape our texts so that they have a chance to push the boundaries, yet not stretch them beyond audience belief. (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 168)

In pushing the boundaries, balancing voice, signature and audience and recognising the interconnectedness of all three, I was reminded of Goodson's (2013, p. 70) view that "narratives need to be investigated not only for textual and even literary sophistication but also for their potential in the world of human action and activity". In ensuring that this narrative inquiry does not just use the lived experiences of participants as a source of analysis, but uses them to make meaning and as a catalyst to shape understanding and influence action, I offer the following for discussion:

- An ecosystem for teacher wellbeing
- The role of experience and self-reflection in shaping a teacher's sense of self
- Supporting teachers to thrive through processes and forms of effective leadership
- Time and Place: the lived experiences of teachers in Wales

Through the discussion I have attempted to narrate and make visible my own learning recognising that "there is no final telling, no final story, and no one singular story we can tell" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 205).

5.3 An ecosystem for teacher wellbeing

Taking note of the voices within my study, my own researcher's signature and the potential audience described above, I offer an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing. This model explores the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing in an attempt to support teachers to thrive. It builds on the qualitative discipline of narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) which has framed this research. Through the reflexive thematic analysis and further meaning making this ecosystem model provides an

interdisciplinary insight into teacher wellbeing. This is a distinctive contribution to the educational research field and is why I made the decision to start the discussion by introducing the model before exploring the other three themes. This distinctive contribution is grounded in ecosystem learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2006; Hannon and Peterson, 2017; Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista, 2020) and it draws from many academic and practical fields.

Ecosystem learning is an emerging interdisciplinary concept that explores the interconnectedness of learning within broader systems. Rooted in ecological studies, it draws from fields of education, psychology and the social sciences. A key influence on this concept is the early ecological systems work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and his reconceptualised bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) in order to understand the complex and interconnected nature of educational environments.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) suggested that an individual's development is not in isolation but shaped by complex and interacting environmental influences. Such influences were characterised into five interrelated systems, those being the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. A later reconceptualisation by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) reformulated the ecological model into a bioecological model to take into account the active role of an individual in their own development. This model focused on proximal processes, that being, sustained interactions between people and their environments as the primary source of development. The model incorporated the characteristics of an individual, the environmental context in which they are situated and the dimension of time, thus putting more emphasis on the developmental aspect of the model. However, this work is not without criticism.

Christensen (2016) offered a critical reflection of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. Through an analytical lens, Christensen (2016) suggested that Bronfenbrenner's model could provide a wider understanding of an individual's development if it included resilience and entrepreneurship, thus providing individuals with a greater capacity to define and reflect upon

their own development. This is an important point to consider for the development of an ecosystem for teacher wellbeing. Moreover, Tudge *et al.* (2009, p. 199) caution against a "conceptual incoherence" when referencing Bronfenbrenner's work. They advocate for clarity between the ecological model and the bioecological model. They also suggest that any research applying Bronfenbrenner's work does not need to include every aspect of his models, but the focus should be on "proximal processes, showing how they are influenced both by characteristics of the developing individual and by the context in which they occur" (ibid., p. 207). This is further supported by Tong and An (2024) who suggest that adoption of Bronfenbrenner's model should be carefully considered to ensure credibility and robustness in research design and interpretation.

Informed by these critiques, I have drawn on both the ecological and bioecological models to construct an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing. This model is also influenced by the work of Hannon and Peterson (2017) and is grounded in the lived experiences shared by the participants in this study, thus providing a context for the power dynamics and systemic conditions that shape teacher wellbeing in educational contexts.

As I considered the development of an ecosystem model, it was important to deepen my understanding of ecosystem learning. As it is interdisciplinary in its nature it can be framed through systems theory, where educational settings are viewed as evolving, adaptive systems shaped by interaction and context (Pang and Reimers, 2021). This supports the focus of this research which is based in two distinct educational settings and it resonates with the organisational culture element of my study.

In an attempt to define ecosystem learning, Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista (2020) agreed on the following three statements which act as a definition for ecosystem learning:

> Learning ecosystems are webs of interconnected relationships organising lifelong learning. They are diverse, dynamic and evolving, connecting learners and community to foster individual and collective capacity. They have three purposes, dedicated to

> co-creating thrivable futures for people, places and our planet. (Spencer-Keyse, Luksha
> and Cubista, 2020, p. 55)

Through their work they explored three different levels to support ecosystemic learning, those
being personal, place and planetary. Both the above definition and the three levels are further
developed in the ecosystem model I offer for teacher wellbeing.

As I developed my model it became apparent that it needed to reflect the essence of narrative
inquiry and demonstrate the interpretation and disentanglement of both participants and my
own lived experiences. In recognising this 'messy process' (Mellor, 2001; Fitzgerald, Stride and
Enright, 2020), I began to doodle iterations of a model. This thinking was around the same time
that I was in the final stages of the process of reflexive thematic analysis, which supports
Clandinin and Connelly's (2000, p. 167) view of narrative inquirers as "working at the
boundaries", meaning that I did not approach my writing chapter by chapter; instead, I spiralled
between different aspects of my thesis, each stage influencing and overlapping with the other.
The initial stages of thinking of an ecosystem model were developed by building on the work of
Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Hannon and Peterson (2017)
and the model shared in Chapter Two. Figures 14 and 15 demonstrate my thinking and how it
evolved alongside the process of developing the themes in Chapter Four. As I engaged in the
process of refining, defining and naming themes, I also considered how this sense making could
be shared with others in the form of an ecosystem model (Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista,
2020). At first, the reflexive nature of the analysis aligned with the ecosystem model shared in
Chapter Two. The interrelated nature of the four elements of the global and chrono level,
societal and macro level, interpersonal and meso level, intrapersonal and micro level were
evident. Likewise, the layers of influence and behaviour were presented. However, in addition to
this, there was a growing sense of the importance of self-reflection. In an attempt to capture
this, I added a further layer entitled 'Pico' which aimed to demonstrate a 'sense of self' through
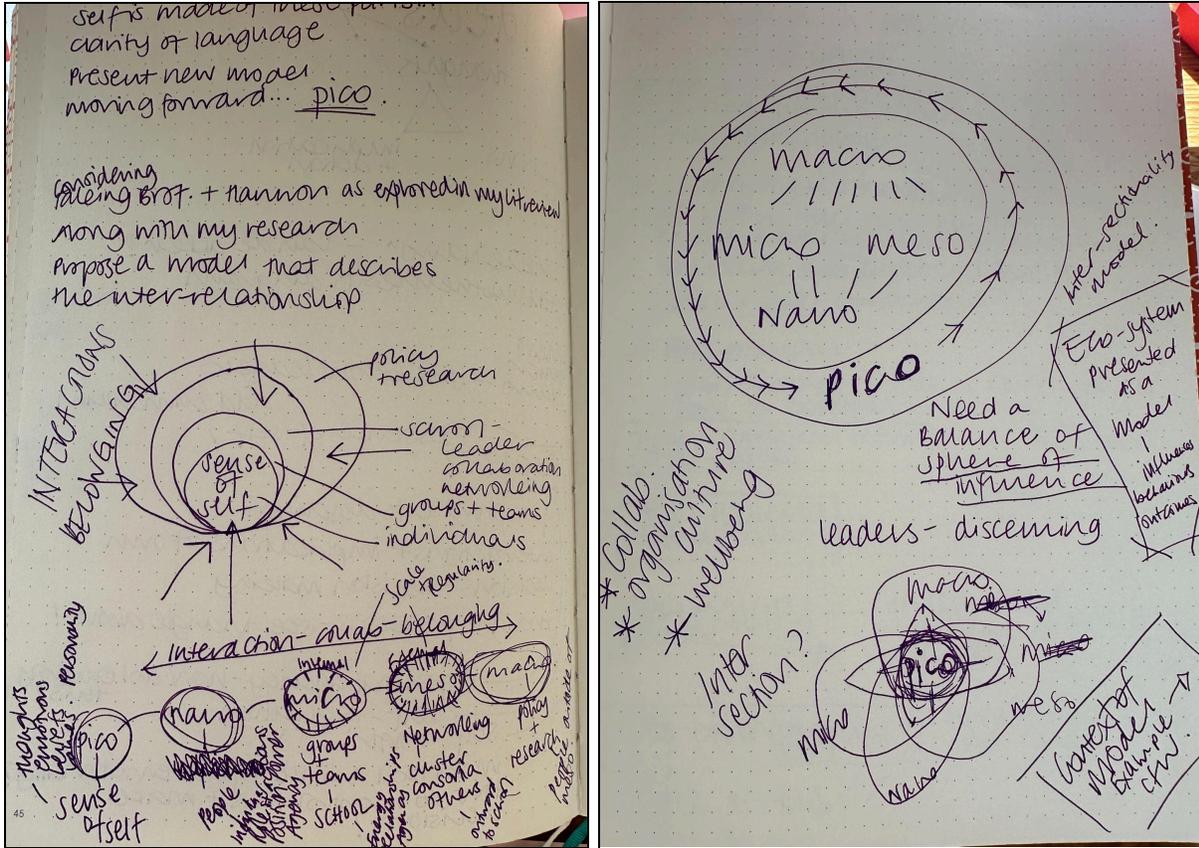the thoughts, emotions, beliefs and values of an individual.

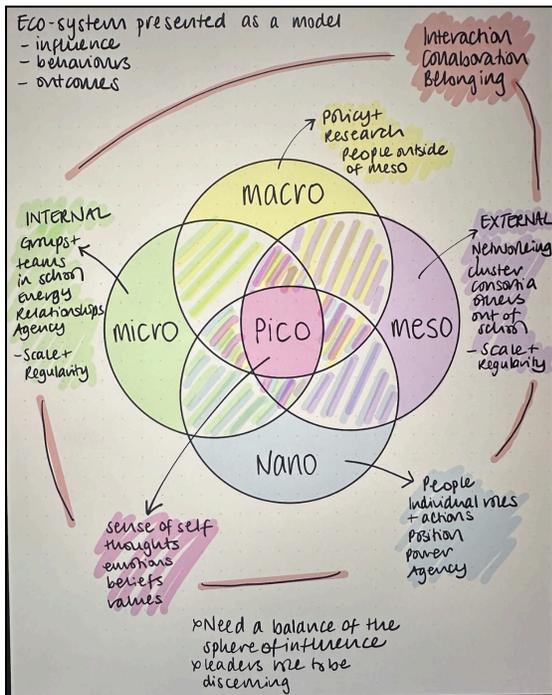*Figure 14. Early thinking of an ecosystem model*

Figure 15. An ecosystem model version 1

At this point, I felt that I could present an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing that was rooted in theory and research (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006; Hannon and Peterson, 2017) and reflected the lived experiences of participants in this study (see Figure 15). However, as my thinking further developed and I had a growing understanding of the "conceptual commitments" shared by Clandinin (2016, p. 205) I recognised that the model needed further refinement. Alongside this, my own learning was further challenged through collaboration with wider professionals both in education and health settings. Opportunities to share early thinking of this narrative inquiry with a community of narrative educational researchers presented many conceptual challenges and reminded me of the need for purpose and clarity through my own reflexivity (Glesne, 2011). Engaging in this narrative network not only enabled me to learn from other narrative researchers, but it also reinforced my belief that "the stories we tell of our experiences matter" (Norman, 2020, p. 3963). A further opportunity to deepen my thinking was through an ongoing partnership and collaboration with the 'Cynefin' team based in Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. The Cynefin team includes clinical and educational psychologists who support school community wellbeing across five local authorities in South Wales. My role within the partnership was to provide an educational voice, to support their work directly in schools and to co-construct professional learning for school leaders as they navigate the complexities of a whole school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing (Welsh Government, 2021). Through this collaboration I had the opportunity to engage in headteacher reflective supervision and support the development of a programme for reflective supervision for other school leaders. Engaging in this work further strengthened my understanding of the importance of developing a sense of self through self-reflection and it made me reconsider how accessible my model would be for school leaders and teachers.

Through my own experiences and positionality, referring to Clandinin's (2016) concepts of voice, signature and audience, and taking into account the critiques of Bronfenbrenner's work, I make the case for a new ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing, which is particularly suitable within

a Welsh educational context (see Figure 16). It was important that through this messy inquiry process I was able to reflect the voices within my study. Moreover, I wanted the model to reflect my researcher's signature and to be accessible to a range of audiences, including teachers, leaders and policymakers. Through consideration of my signature and audience I made a conscious decision to ensure that the language used was relevant to school communities. The model also supports the articulation of the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing.
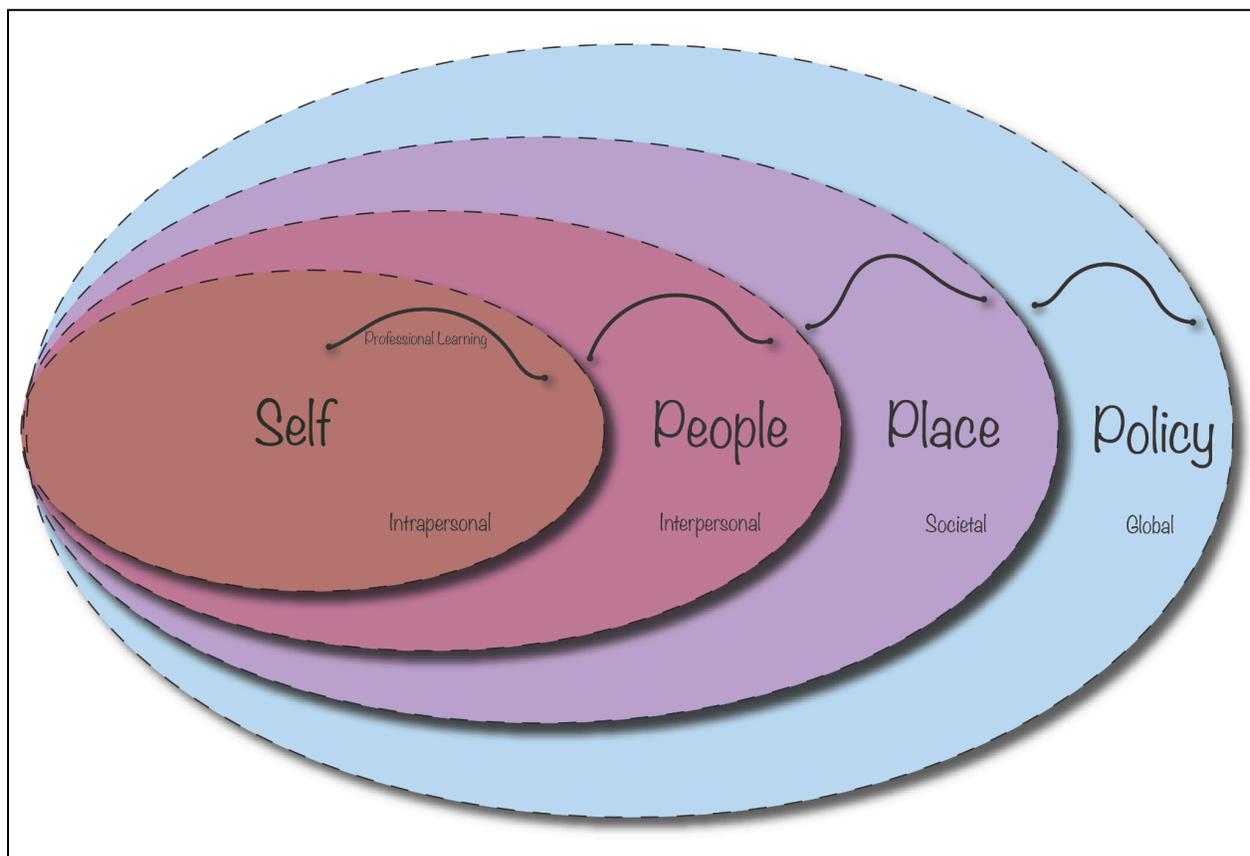

Figure 16. An ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing

This ecosystem model of teacher wellbeing builds on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Hannon and Peterson (2017). It takes into account the developmental aspect of Bronfenbrenner and Morris's (2006) bioecological model which incorporates the individual, the environmental context and the dimension of time. Moreover, it

resonates with the conceptual components of narrative inquiry, those being identity, relationship, place and temporality (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

This model aims to explore how teacher wellbeing is experienced and influenced across intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutional and policy layers, with professional learning acting as a transformative thread across all four.

5.3.1 Self - Intrapersonal

At the centre of the model is the Self. This represents the intrapersonal component, reflecting participants' emotion, identity and purpose. Teachers in this study shared emotional stories of personal growth and conflict that impacted upon their wellbeing. Their ability to navigate experiences demonstrated that they had a growing awareness of who they are and had the ability to respond and adapt to situations (Hannon and Peterson, 2021). The narratives shared echo Goodson and Gill's (2011, p. 9) notion that "the self is multi-faceted" and their inner beliefs shaped their experiences. For many participants, their wellbeing was closely connected to moments where they remained aligned with their personal values despite external pressures, as highlighted in Chapter Four. There was a strong sense of the importance of their own identity and how this was maintained through self-reflection. The centrality of this layer within the model also demonstrates how I took heed of critiques of Bronfenbrenner's work (Tudge *et al.*, 2009; Christensen, 2016). I have ensured that my model includes the 'self' as a way of understanding and reflecting upon an individual's development and how sustained interactions between people and environmental contexts are a source of influence.

5.3.2 People - Interpersonal

The second layer of the model highlights the interpersonal component, demonstrating the relational context of teaching. People, in its broadest sense, were a central theme in all participants' stories. The people narrated ranged from personal friends and family members to colleagues and leaders, all influencing participants' lives in some way. Many participants spoke candidly about school leaders who had impacted upon their wellbeing; therefore, leaders are a

central part of this component and discussed further in this chapter. Relationships with others impacted upon participants' wellbeing, both positively and negatively. Where relationships were positive, participants described enhanced motivation, trust and autonomy. However, where relationships were negative, participants described feelings of fear, mistrust and despair. This research supports the view of Hannon and Peterson (2021, p. 108) that "a thriving life depends on the capacity to form and sustain interpersonal relationships of different sorts".

5.3.3 Place - Societal

The place component reflects the societal and organisational structures in which teachers work. Participants' descriptions of their place of work moved beyond the physical settings to storied environments full of institutional narratives (Craig, 2007; Clandinin, 2016). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) share, school environments have narrative histories which dynamically interact with personal experiences. The notion of place for a few participants was associated with fear, despair and trauma, whilst descriptions of place for all participants in their current roles were similar across both the primary and secondary schools and synonymous with community, safety and trust. Thus, the narrative understanding of place was entwined with teachers' wellbeing, indicating how organisational culture shapes teachers' personal and professional lives.

5.3.4 Policy - Global

The final component in the ecosystem model is a response to the systemic expectations which influence teachers' wellbeing. It represents the national expectations of education policy, accountability and global narratives as to what it means to be a teacher. Such global expectations are often the cause of significant pressure on teachers and impact on their wellbeing (Ball *et al.*, 2011; Rogers, Dovigo and Doan, 2020). In this study, through analysing participants' narratives it could be suggested that policies influence their work and support them in making sense of their roles. Participants referenced national policy reforms, both past and present. They shared periods of conflict where national expectations were at odds with their own teacher identity. However, there was a definite sense that the new Curriculum for Wales reform was positively impacting teachers' sense of self and their wellbeing which was

consistent across both primary and secondary school teachers. The policy component reflects the structural conditions that can enable and constrain teacher wellbeing.

5.3.5 Professional Learning

The thread of professional learning weaves through all components of the ecosystem model, demonstrating it as a narrative process of re-storying (Craig, 2007). Participants described experiences of professional learning as turning points in their stories. They shared moments where collaboration strengthened their professional knowledge and understanding. Collaboration was a strong feature of participants' professional learning experiences, supporting the work of Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018). It was evident from participants that professional learning was not about technical upskilling or working independently (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1991; Anderson, 2002) but about making sense of policy, the organisations in which they worked, relationships and their own sense of self, thus demonstrating that professional learning is both a process and an output to support teachers in navigating the complex ecosystem for wellbeing.

5.3.6 Intentional design

The ecosystem for wellbeing has been intentionally designed to reflect the complexity that teachers experience. The components within the ecosystem have been positioned in an order to demonstrate the sphere of influence that they may have upon a teacher's sense of self. For example, from participants' narratives, it was evident that they had more influence and control over the inter-relationships with others than they did over national policy. However, the policy component encompasses all the factors of the model as teaching is a policy-controlled profession, regardless of how decentralised curriculum may be (Evans, 2022). Moreover, moments of upset and trauma were all related to the actions of others, rather than the place they worked or policy directives, demonstrating that the components closest to the self had more influence than those positioned further away.

The dotted lines for each of the layers of the ecosystem represent the behaviours and influence of each of the layers upon each other. They are intentionally dotted to demonstrate the fluidity, and two-way process, of behaviours and influence. Furthermore, the interpretation of behaviours and influence at each layer provide a sense of belonging. For example, a teacher's sense of self could be influenced by the behaviours of people that they may work alongside. Their headteacher could have spent time talking through a new idea and this, in turn, may make the teacher feel a greater sense of accomplishment.

Together, this ecosystem model reflects the inter-relationship of teacher wellbeing across individual, relational, institutional and systemic components. It attempts to build on the learning ecosystem work of Hannon and Peterson (2017), Hannon *et al.* (2019) and Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista (2020). The narrative inquiry methodology employed in this research has provided an insight into the emotional and ethical work of teachers in two schools in South Wales as they navigate the complex and changing demands of their roles. Hence, the model recognises the complexity of teacher wellbeing and the essence of the lived experiences shared with me, alongside my own lived experiences. It captures the interrelation of individual and organisation factors, suggested as a potential focus for further research by Billaudeau *et al.* (2021). Furthermore it demonstrates an outcome of further research into wellbeing which explored an inter-relationship from micro to macro levels, as suggested by Hascher and Waber (2021).

In development of the model, although I was mainly positioned in a place of supporting teacher wellbeing, I also considered the potential shadow side. Many participants shared lived experiences which impacted negatively upon their wellbeing. These have been documented and interpreted through the study and are further considered in the sections below.

In an attempt to further make sense of the ecosystem model, the following three themes are discussed in the sections below:
- The role of experience and self-reflection in shaping a teacher's sense of self

- Supporting teachers to thrive through processes and forms of effective leadership
- Time and Place: the lived experiences of teachers in Wales

5.4 The role of experience and self-reflection in shaping a teacher's sense of self

The findings of the narrative inquiry highlight the inter-relationship between personal and professional identity, illustrating that a well-developed sense of self, cultivated through experiences and reflection, supports teachers to thrive. Thus, 'self' sits at the heart of the ecosystem model.

The use of a narrative inquiry methodology provided a way for participants to share insights into their experience, supporting the view of Clandinin (2016, p. 38) that "narrative inquiry is a way of studying people's experiences, nothing more and nothing less". Moreover, the chosen methodology enabled thinking about experiences within three commonplaces, that being temporality, sociality and place (Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016). Within these three commonplaces, it is important to note that identity is the focal point of understanding the storied lives we live by (Clandinin, 2016). Further consideration about the importance of identity and narrative inquiry leads to the work of Goodson (2013, p. 70) and his suggestion that "narrativity needs to be linked to identity, learning and agency if we are to understand its complex social significance", therefore, interpreting the life stories of teachers provided an opportunity to make sense of their complex world. Through the sharing of their lived experiences, participants demonstrated how their professional identities were influenced by personal and professional factors. These findings align with those of Cruz-González, Rodríguez and Segovia (2021) who argue that professional identity is influenced by experiences and changes both individually and socially. Although their systematic review was based on the principal's leadership, they call for further studies of a narrative nature to be undertaken to explore how leadership identity is formed and understood. This narrative inquiry supports their work, namely as there were participants in leadership positions who shared their stories that

they live by and how their identity as teachers and leaders has changed over time. Moreover, this aligns with Goodson and Gill's (2011) view that identity is fluid and dependent upon context. They also argue that discussions of identity must consider time, space, and interactions with others. Therefore, through my study it became evident that it is important to acknowledge the impact of significant life events on participants' identity and evolving sense of self.

Life events, such as motherhood or career transitions, were noted to have shifted participants' perspective and affected their sense of self. Although not all participants shared the same depth of narrativity, the findings suggest that these experiences were a crucial part of their identity and what made them into the teachers they were at the time of the study. Descriptions of the impact of motherhood related to positive changes in perspectives and improved skills in working with parents. Participants shared greater clarity about their job satisfaction and enjoyment, along with an improved ability to balance their priorities. They were able to self-reflect upon how they had changed as a teacher through the significant life event of motherhood and how such a personal experience influenced their professional identity and approach to teaching. The findings also suggest that these changes were widely accepted by school leaders and colleagues. Participants expressed confidence that their evolving sense of self was understood and supported within their respective organisations. This adds to the work of Baptiste *et al.* (2024) who undertook a self-study to explore their experiences as leaders and mothers. Their model for balancing leadership and motherhood relates to a certain extent with the narratives shared in this study and recognises that experiences such as motherhood can bring about a positive development to teachers' sense of self when balancing both personal strategies and organisational actions. However, for one participant, despite the supportive organisational culture the desire for leadership had changed since becoming a mum. This emphasises the inherently individual nature of personal experiences. As such, understanding individuals within schools is important for their sense of self and key to supporting them to thrive. At this juncture it is appropriate to acknowledge the role that gender could play in shaping a sense of self. Although gender was not the focus for this study, the concept of motherhood, identity and self could be an interesting concept for a further study.

While positive experiences such as motherhood contributed to identity development, adverse experiences, particularly within toxic workplace cultures, posed significant challenges to teachers' sense of self and appeared to have a lasting negative impact on participants. This links with the aforementioned shadow side of the ecosystem model. Even though participants were no longer working in these contexts, it was evident that they still were exerting an influence on their evolving sense of self. Displays of outward emotion when recounting the stories and articulating the difference to how they felt in their current contexts were examples of the lasting impression on their emotional wellbeing. This supports the claim made by Skinner, Leavey and Rothi (2021, p. 5) that "a teacher's professional identity and their sense of competence and worth, achieved and mediated through interactions with others, are crucially involved in determining well-being". It was the absence of these factors that impacted negatively on participants' wellbeing. Furthermore, this study resonates with the findings of Du Plessis and McDonagh (2021) that teachers' negative experiences of their out-of-field teaching roles are connected to their emotional wellbeing and view of themselves as educators. Although I acknowledge that the contexts between the studies are different, it is still relevant to note. A more relevant study to the context of this research is the work of Mannix-McNamara *et al.* (2021) who undertook a study on the 'dark side' of workplace culture. This study was based upon a self-selected sample of participants who had experienced incivility or bullying within schools. The very nature of the study meant that there was an inherent bias. However, the authors highlight the need for further work in this area, which my narrative inquiry addresses. While Mannix-McNamara *et al.* (2021) identified the negative effects of incivility in schools, my study further illustrates how such experiences persist in shaping teachers' evolving sense of self long after they have left toxic environments. The findings suggest that participants' sense of self, thoughts and emotions were influenced by a "reciprocal dynamic" (ibid., p. 16) that evolved over time but did not fully disappear. However, despite such lasting impact, participants were still able to narrate their passion for the job.

In sharing their lived experiences, all the participants expressed a deep passion and sense of

purpose in their role as teachers. They demonstrated a well-developed sense of self where their values and personal identity interrelated with their experiences and professional identity. Participants articulated that this strong sense of self provided them with direction and purpose. Even during challenging periods, their commitment to the profession and sense of fulfilment sustained them. This supports the research of Suarez and McGrath (2022) who argue that a teacher's sense of self is a fundamental component of teacher professional identity. This is shaped by personal experiences, professional values and interactions with others. They also explore the need for supportive school cultures to strengthen a teachers' sense of self - a theme echoed in this study and a key reason as to why this sits at the centre of my ecosystem model. Suarez and McGrath (2022) also propose that it is crucial to nurture the professional identity of teachers in times of educational change. As this research was situated during a period of curriculum realisation following significant educational reform in Wales, it further reinforces their assertion. However, while Suarez and McGrath (2022) call for studies that establish causal relationships in strengthening professional identity, the findings of this narrative inquiry suggest a more complex, interdependent relationship of factors rather than a direct cause-and-effect model. This complexity is also highlighted in the very nature of the model presented in Figure 16 as an ecosystem, with interdependent factors.

Participants' view of their professional identity and sense of self was further considered through the notion of self-reflection. In conversation with the participants, it was evident that they were all able to reflect upon their own thoughts and feelings and consider their reactions to various experiences. They took both positive and negative experiences as opportunities for reflection and growth. This enabled them to navigate challenges, set boundaries and maintain a strong sense of purpose. Furthermore, there was a demonstration that, through self-reflection, participants had shaped an understanding of themselves and adapted this over time. Recognising the messy process of inquiry and my dual role of headteacher and researcher, it is important to acknowledge that I too have developed an understanding of myself through self-reflection and, specifically, through the doctoral process. My own professional identity and sense of self has been challenged through my research and I am able to demonstrate significant

growth through this experience. Exploring the lived experiences of teachers not only demonstrated the impact on the participants' overall ability to thrive but it also positively impacted upon my wellbeing also.

It was evident from participants that a strong sense of self was an important element to their ability to thrive; however, this did not exist in isolation from relational and contextual influences. Through the narrative conversations, it could be considered that teachers' identities were shaped by their interactions with others and the school cultures they experienced. This resonates with the work of Colmer (2017) who identified that professional identity developed through professional relationships and shared practices created meaning for educators. It also builds upon this work as it provides a different context with the focus of my research being primary and secondary school teachers' lived experiences and it explores the contextual factor of new curriculum implementation in a different country. Moreover, my study is in keeping with Colmer's finding that recognise the importance of relational leadership to support self-reflection and the development of professional identity. It is evident that leaders play an important role in the experiences of teachers and their developing sense of self. This is an ongoing process and context-dependent, shaped by self-reflection and broader professional interactions. This will be further explored in the following discussion point.

5.5 Supporting teachers to thrive through processes and forms of effective leadership

All participants in this narrative inquiry shared lived experiences which involved school leaders, often specifically referring to the headteachers they had previously worked for or were currently working for. At this point, it is relevant to reiterate my dual role as both researcher and a headteacher referenced by half the participants in the study. Therefore, throughout this discussion point I have referred to my own leadership skills and those of others. For clarity, the term 'leaders' and 'leadership' have been used to describe headteachers, other school leaders and myself, as the primary school headteacher (Harris and Jones, 2020). Furthermore, as the

role of leaders was a key factor in this study, 'leaders' is an element of the proposed ecosystem model in the 'People - Interpersonal' layer.

The ecosystem model demonstrates an inter-relationship between the behaviours and actions of school leaders and a teacher's ability to thrive. It is important, at this juncture, to reaffirm the notion of what it means for a teacher to thrive. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the words thriving and wellbeing have both been used throughout this study. As stated in Chapter One, the statement used to describe teacher wellbeing, in this study is taken from the work of McCallum and Price (2016) as they offer that teacher wellbeing is dynamic and a deeply personal construct shaped by individual, social and cultural contexts, which evolve over time and are integral to a sense of identity, thus referring to the interrelated nature of personal, professional and contextual factors on a teacher's ability to thrive. Through adopting a narrative inquiry approach, this study has opened up discussion around the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, highlighting the pivotal role of leaders in shaping and nurturing collaborative school cultures that prioritise trust, agency and belonging (Azorín and Fullan, 2022). These findings resonate with the OECD's concept of the school as a learning organisation (Kools and Stoll, 2016) and align with Harris and Jones's (2023) assertion that such cultures are central to effective leadership.

Effective leaders, as described by the participants in this study, cultivate a positive organisational culture. This supports research on leadership and organisational culture in Wales which advocates for distributed leadership models, collaboration and professional learning as key drivers of school improvement (OECD, 2018; Harris *et al.*, 2022; Griffiths and Jones, 2024). Moreover, the way in which participants in my research described leaders strengthens the work of Butt and Retallick (2002) who found that a positive school climate supported the development of trust and respect between leaders and teachers. They report that a leader-teacher relationship is fundamental to positive wellbeing which is echoed in this narrative inquiry. More recently, a systematic review of international literature on leadership related to staff and culture by Wilson Heenan *et al.* (2023) suggested that transformational

leaders set the tone for the organisational culture within a school. In this study, I found that the way participants described the leaders they worked with could be considered as 'transformational'. I make this claim as transformational leaders are those who inspire and motivate others by creating a vision; they are values-led, encourage personal and professional growth and nurture a culture of trust (Engels *et al.* 2008; Atasoy, 2020; Wilson Heenan, Lafferty and Mannix McNamara, 2024). I acknowledge that there are various leadership styles and a significant wealth of research I could refer to. However, the notion of transformational leadership not only was a key feature of participants' lived experiences but also it "is an approach suited to the demands and responsibilities of adapting to societal change and turbulence" (Wilson Heenan, Lafferty and Mannix McNamara, 2024, p. 1). Ergo, it not only recognises the current educational situation which has been described in this way both nationally and globally (Price and McCallum, 2015; Harris and Jones, 2020), but it also complements the focus of global and societal influences on teachers as described through this narrative inquiry. Moreover, it resonates with my proposed ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing.

Participants' candid descriptions of the leaders they worked with emphasised their feelings of emotional safety and psychological security within positive school cultures. At times, this was even more noticeable for those participants who shared previous experiences of toxic workplace cultures. Feelings of emotional safety as a condition of effective transformational leadership builds on the work of Bellibas *et al.* (2024) who found that transformational leaders support the development of psychologically safe teachers which impacts upon their teaching and innovation. From the self-reported narratives in my study, it was apparent that teachers felt safe and the culture of trust, consistency and care positively impacted upon their ability to undertake their roles. Closely linked to emotional safety is the sense of belonging - another prominent theme identified in Chapter Four.

For this discussion point, the concept of belonging is linked to the role of leadership in how they create inclusive environments. Participants described how leaders, in both the primary school

and the secondary school, intentionally created supportive and inclusive environments where every staff member mattered. This was further acknowledged by participants who experienced specific support for transitional periods in their lives. During these times, participants described leaders as supporting with empathy and care, echoing the work of Taylor and Lambert (2022) who write about the vital need for headteachers to demonstrate empathy. This also adds to the work of Gómez-Leal *et al.* (2022) who identified a strong link between transformational leadership and empathy skills. Further considerations about belonging relate to how leaders were described as building strong and reciprocal relationships across their schools. Participants described many examples of how leaders had an open door and offered personalised support. They prioritised relationships at both an individual and team level and nurtured teacher wellbeing through genuine connection. Acton and Glasgow (2015, p. 105) describe "relational work that supports, invigorates, connects and encourages positive emotions is foundational in establishing and sustaining professional flourishing" and this also articulates the narratives shared by participants in my study.

Further ways that participants were supported to thrive through effective leadership related to the prioritising of professional learning and development and specifically the fostering of collaborative practices. It appears that both schools within the study may exhibit characteristics associated with learning organisations (Kools and Stoll, 2016). This is a key consideration from this inquiry as it adds to the knowledge base specifically about schools as learning organisations in Wales. A review of studies highlighted in Chapter Two suggested that there needed to be further professional collaboration between school leaders and teachers focusing on learning with and from others (OECD, 2018), which this study demonstrates. Furthermore, Harris *et al.* (2022) warn about the danger of the schools as learning organisation model in Wales remaining as an ineffective policy, yet evidence from this study highlights the way that leaders have driven this policy agenda into a lived reality for teachers. Such lived experiences shared by participants also described a wealth of professional learning and development led by leaders and facilitated through structured collaboration. Therefore, the data suggests that leaders may be actively shaping a culture of shared meaning-making and professional learning, with curriculum reform

serving as a contextual tool for collaborative growth. This is at odds with the view of curriculum policy change in the work by Ball (2015) who described a negative impact of change on teachers and their feelings of insecurity and purpose. It could be considered that a reason for such difference is due to the effective transformational leadership behaviours and prioritising collaboration.

Through the narrative inquiry, many examples of collaboration were shared by participants. The way that leaders foster collaborative practices and strengthen teams through within-school and external partnerships was significant for supporting teachers to thrive. All participants talked about at least one example of working with others which made a positive impact upon them. Specific benefits of working collaboratively related to the reduction of workload and increased learning and engagement (Kulavuz-Önal and Tatar, 2017). The shared lived experiences of collaboration, specifically in participants' current schools, suggest that leaders are instrumental in fostering a culture of collaboration. This resonates with the claims made by Acton and Glasgow (2015), Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) and Azorín and Fullan (2022), who state that leaders are pivotal in developing meaningful collaboration for teachers. Therefore, it seems that Hargreaves and O'Connor's (2018) concept of collaborative professionalism was prominent in both schools in which this research was situated.

Evidence of collaborative professionalism was shared by participants through the narrative inquiry. There were contextual differences between the primary school and the secondary school. For example, leaders in the primary school implemented a system to support peer-led learning. The 'Collaborative Approach to Improving Practice' (CAIP) model impacted positively on teachers' wellbeing and supported one of the aims of this study. This builds on the work of Visone (2022) who undertook research on a group of high performing schools in the United States. Visone concluded that "these schools exhibited rich collaboration and manifestations of positive, meaningful social capital and collaborative professionalism, including collective autonomy." (ibid., p. 1). Visone suggests that further research could be undertaken in a wider range of schools, my research contributes to this and also provides a different global context as

it is situated in Wales. Further insights into collaborative professionalism provided by participants in my research related to the notion of collective autonomy. Participants shared that leaders empowered them by providing many opportunities for them to lead their own learning and innovate. This was the same across both schools in the study. Moreover, leaders encouraged professional freedom in curriculum design, which supported them to thrive through valuing and trusting their judgements and decisions (Butt and Retallick, 2002; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). Again, there were very similar stories shared by participants across both the primary and secondary school.

At this juncture, it is important to reiterate my own positionality. The very nature of this discussion point being about effective leadership brings its own tensions for me as the researcher and one of the leaders being referred to. I feel immensely proud of the school I have created and that the reflections from the primary participants echo my original vision for the school. Witnessing the impact of my behaviours, actions and decisions as the headteacher was a privilege and has provided me with an insight that I may never have known if I was not in this dual role. I grapple with these feelings amongst a backdrop of tension related to considerations of what others may think and whether I was just being told what the teachers thought I wanted to hear. In working through these tensions, I referred back to the authenticity of the narrative conversations, the honesty and openness in which participants shared their lived experiences. I was also reminded that many of their lived experiences were from a positive perspective, not just those related to me.

It is interesting to note that participants shared their lived experiences of curriculum reform from a positive perspective. This suggests that there may be an alternative to the performativity issues and feelings of negativity raised by Ball (2015). I agree with Ozga (2021) in that policy enactment is led by individuals. In the context of my research, there is an insight into how leaders have enacted new policies and demonstrated that it is possible to move away from the neoliberal context of high stakes accountability, low trust and control (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Hamilton, 2020). My study offers a significant contribution to the research field on curriculum

reform in Wales and demonstrates how teachers can be supported to thrive through processes and forms of effective leadership which emphasises and supports the dynamic and changing nature of education. These insights lay the foundation for the next discussion point which explores the implications of time and place on the lived experiences of teachers in Wales.

5.6 Time and Place: the lived experiences of teachers in Wales

This narrative inquiry was situated in a moment in time in the context of curriculum realisation following a period of significant educational reform in Wales. The narrative methodology centres the voice of teachers and my own dual voice as a headteacher and researcher. It reflects the emotional, ethical and relational dimensions of the teaching profession in a uniquely Welsh educational context. Honouring the complexity of the chosen methodology I am reminded of Clandinin's (2016, p. 53) view that narrative inquiry "highlights the multiplicity of each of our lives - lives composed, lived out and told around multiple plotlines, over time, in different relationships and on different landscapes". Contextualising the participants' voices within time and place, not only refers to the educational reform in Wales but also relates to broader personal, social and global realities. It also supports the premise of an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing, building on the learning ecosystem work of Hannon and Peterson (2017), Hannon *et al.* (2019) and Spencer-Keyse, Luksha and Cubista (2020).

In considering the ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing, I refer back to the title of this research and the overarching aim to explore the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. The lived experience shared in this narrative inquiry suggest that participants' lived experiences cannot be separated from their own sense of self and the interpersonal, societal and global influences. Likewise, I cannot be separated from my positionality. Together, participants and I were "in the midst of each of our unfolding complex and multiple experiences" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 44). Therefore it is important to recognise the situatedness of both participants and me, specifically relating to time and place

(Clandinin, 2016; Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016). Participants' narratives demonstrated their lives in motion as they presented themselves as individuals who were evolving through time, shaped by past and present experiences. Many experiences recounted were emotionally charged and illustrated the temporality of identity and wellbeing. This supports the chosen definition of wellbeing for the purpose of this study where wellbeing is described as being "diverse and fluid" (McCallum and Price, 2016, p. 17).

Further consideration of time related to the specific moment in which the narrative inquiry took place. This inquiry was positioned within ongoing and recurring personal, societal and global change. It was rooted in a period of significant change in education in Wales, directly impacting upon the lives of teachers and leaders. All the participants referred to experiences of change. An insight into the lived realities of teachers in Wales, during a period of curriculum realisation following mass reform, adds a sense of immediacy and is a significant contribution to the field of education research, specifically in Wales, although, it is important to note that this study took place in only two schools in South Wales. Participants' experiences of curriculum design and growing autonomy signify more than just a professional change. They also reflect the emotional landscape of a system in transition. The narratives shared suggest that the reform may be experienced as more than a policy directive, potentially offering a sense of empowerment to teachers (Evans, 2023). Moreover, it could be viewed as being a driver for professional identity, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. Adding to this time of curriculum change, it is also evident that there is a specific moment for professional learning. The descriptions of professional learning experiences, shared by participants, reflect evidence-informed and teacher centric models of collaboration (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018), thus reflecting a time where professional transformation is gaining momentum (Hutt, Smith and Jones, 2024). This also reflects the intent of Wales' curriculum reform which will be further explored in the context of place.

This narrative inquiry has shared the lived realities of teachers in two schools in South Wales, providing an insight into education reform in a policy context. Previous reference to

neoliberalism and accountability (Acton and Glasgow, 2015; Ball, 2015), in this chapter and in Chapter Two, identified the negative impact of political directives on teachers. However, participants in my study have demonstrated how national policy has also provided an opportunity. Reflections of a growing professional autonomy enabled by the new Curriculum for Wales and an emphasis on trusting relationships has impacted positively on their wellbeing. Participants provided examples of a decentralised and trust-based curriculum, reflecting the values of Curriculum for Wales (Donaldson, 2015; Golding and Place, 2023). This differs from the work of Skinner, Leavey and Rothi (2021) who found that policy developments in education in England and Wales caused an erosion of teacher autonomy which impacted upon their wellbeing. This difference signifies that my research offers an alternative view of the impact of policy development on teachers.

Further education policies related to Wales were referenced through the participants' narratives as shared in Chapter Four. The lived experiences of teachers working in learning organisations demonstrates the distinct cultural settings of Wales (OECD, 2018; Harris *et al.*, 2022). Moreover, the lived experiences align with Welsh policy values around relationships, equity and wellbeing (Department for Education and Skills, 2021; Long *et al.* 2023). This study reflects a strong sense of place rooted in Wales, in both a physical and relational sense. The physical sense is noted through the policy direction in Wales and also through the influence of working in a specific place. All participants referenced the place they work as somewhere where they felt a sense of belonging. This was fuelled by trust, openness, transformational leadership and purpose-driven cultures.

Through this narrative inquiry, the concept of time and place has been an important context for considering how to create the conditions for teachers to thrive. Participants have shared how they have navigated, and continue to navigate, policy change through a sustained commitment to collaboration and their developing sense of self. Building on this, the proposed ecosystem model offers future considerations for teachers, leaders and policymakers in how to navigate a way to create the conditions for teachers to thrive. In creating the ecosystem model, I too have

been able to consider my own approach to supporting teachers' wellbeing within my own school. The timing of my own experiences are integral to this research. This has been demonstrated through my transparency in sharing my emotions, my reflections and the impact of my dual role as researcher and headteacher. This also denotes the relational and reflexive nature of narrative inquiry. My dual role has added both a richness and complexity to this research. As I have immersed myself in "the space between" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009, p. 60), I have appreciated that I cannot separate myself from this research and through embracing such complexity I have been able to share the lived experiences of teachers in Wales.

The lived experiences of teachers in Wales during a period of change and curriculum realisation has provided a unique insight into the day-to-day realities. The findings in this research suggests that there are teachers in Wales who experience a culture where professional learning, trust and collaboration is the norm. This is driven by the processes and forms of relational and transformational leadership and is a key contributor to teacher wellbeing. These bold claims relate to the situatedness of this narrative inquiry in two schools in South Wales. The time and place are relevant and so are the teachers' lived experiences as they provide an insight into how we can promote collaboration and create the conditions for teachers to thrive.

5.7 Conclusion

> Stories are not just told for the sake of telling a story, but for their power to invite us all to call deep on our courage to transform. The research we do is never solely for the sake of theory building but for the sake of community building. (Nadar, 2014, p. 26)

Throughout this discussion, I have interpreted the lived experiences of participants alongside a range of relevant studies. I endeavoured to demonstrate how these discussion points both support and build on the work of others and offer original contributions. The points should be read in the context of the ecosystem model, in an attempt to make visible the meaning of the model and recognise the complexity of the process of inquiry. In grappling with the order of the

discussion points, I made the decision to start with the proposed model so that it would provide a context for the rest of the chapter. This discussion seeks to encourage educators to share their experiences, reflect on their own journeys, and explore strategies for maintaining a strong and positive sense of self.

In this study, the participants are not merely viewed as educational employees; rather, they are represented as they appeared to me throughout the research process, as multifaceted individuals. This inquiry aims to reflect their complexities and the nuances of their lived experiences, acknowledging that such representations are inherently shaped by my own positionality and interpretative lens. Examples of lived experiences shared in the study include individuals whose identities have been shaped by life events, such as their personal upbringing or motherhood and how this is not at odds with their role as a teacher but a part of who they are as a person. The emotional authenticity captured through this research identifies the range of emotions experienced by teachers, from joy and purpose to vulnerability and trauma. The openness from participants recollecting painful memories of burnout and toxic workplaces, along with the visible tears and emotion from participants during the narrative conversations, offers an insight into the emotional toll of teaching. The inter-relationship between different aspects of teachers' lives is a key part of this study, so too is the fundamental role that leaders play in creating a supportive culture for reflection and growth. Furthermore, as this study took place in Wales during a time of policy realisation it provides cultural specificity and shares the real tensions and hopes of policy enactment.

In this chapter, I have also offered my own reflection and personal insight into my lived experiences as both researcher and headteacher. 'The role of experience and self-reflection in shaping a teacher's sense of self' is a key theme in this study and my own sense of self has certainly developed as I have journeyed through my doctoral studies. I have a greater awareness of how my lived experiences have shaped me and my values. I am driven by purpose and a strong belief in collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). My leadership and doctoral journeys are entwined and are in the midst of multiple layers of temporality,

sociality and place (Clandinin, 2016), all of which continue to create the conditions for me to thrive.

This chapter has explored the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing in order to contribute to the fields of learning ecosystems (Hannon, *et al.* 2019) and teacher wellbeing, with particular relevance for the context of education reform in Wales. I acknowledge that there are limitations to this study which will be reviewed in the next chapter. Chapter Six will also provide a review of the research methodology and offer further considerations of how we can create the conditions for teachers to thrive.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 The research journey

This study has explored the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, with a focus on how we can understand the conditions needed for teachers to thrive. The research was developed following a small-scale pilot study conducted in 2022. This initial exploration in one primary school in Wales suggested a relationship between teacher wellbeing and collaborative professionalism. This relationship was found to be shaped by internal factors, such as collective purpose and relational trust and external factors, such as leadership, professional learning and time. This pilot study echoed the work of Murphy and Louis (2018) in noting the centrality of leaders in shaping and supporting collaborative cultures. Recognising that the pilot was context-specific, it provided important insight and impetus for the aims of this doctoral research.

The aims of this thesis were:

- To explore the lived experiences of teachers and the impact these experiences have on their ability to thrive;
- To explore how collaboration is understood and how it interrelates with teachers' wellbeing;
- To better understand how organisational culture supports or constrains teachers' ability to thrive.

The need for this research was also informed by literature presented in Chapter Two, which highlighted a gap in the existing literature with limited exploration of the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, particularly within the Welsh education system. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, the concept of teacher wellbeing is often associated with a deficit model related to work-related stress (Mc Brearty, 2023), teacher recruitment and retention (Hughes, 2023) and excessive workload (Department

for Education, 2019). Moreover, it is also often overlooked in favour of research on student wellbeing (Shirley, Hargreaves and Washington-Wangia, 2020). Although these are genuine concerns for the profession, my research took a positive focus in attempting to draw attention to the conditions in which teachers could thrive. Research has shown that such conditions relate to effective leadership (Cann, Riedel-Prabhakar and Powell, 2021), professional learning (Kensington-Miller, 2021) and a broader understanding of occupational wellbeing (Viac and Fraser, 2020), yet there are still questions relating to the culture of schools and the nature of collaboration, when related to teacher wellbeing. Turner, Thielking and Prochazka (2022) and Weddle (2022) comment on the need for more research to explore these factors and the impact upon teacher wellbeing, providing further rationale for this study.

A key criticism of research into teacher wellbeing is that many fail to define the term (McCallum *et al.*, 2017). As shared in Chapter One, I chose the following statement to define wellbeing as it encompasses the many complexities of life as a teacher.

> [Teacher] [w]ellbeing is diverse and fluid respecting individual, family and community beliefs, values, experiences, culture, opportunities and contexts across time and change. It is something we all aim for, underpinned by positive notions, yet is unique to each of us and provides us with a sense of who we are which needs to be respected. (McCallum and Price, 2016, p. 17)

This statement also recognises the ecosystemic lens of my research. The conceptual underpinning for this inquiry was informed by both ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and bioecological systems (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006) as well as the interdisciplinary work on learning ecosystems by Hannon and Peterson (2017). This thesis makes an original contribution by developing an interdisciplinary ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing that re-centres the intrapersonal 'self' and specifies how collaboration, leadership and culture act as interdependent components of thriving. This is a contribution to the fields of teacher wellbeing and the growing body of work on learning ecosystems (Hannon *et al.*, 2019). In addition, there is a lack of research evidence to reflect the lived experiences of teachers in Wales through a period of educational reform and into a period of policy realisation. This research sought to

address this gap by offering an insight into the lived realities of teachers' experiences in Wales and how the system of reform influences teacher wellbeing, collaboration and organisational culture. This discussion adds to the knowledge base in how policy is experienced in practice by teachers in Wales. Their stories offer an evidence-informed contribution and also highlight the importance of lived experience.

Capturing the voice of teachers and their lived experiences was central to this study. Adopting narrative inquiry as the methodological frame provided an opportunity to understand teachers' lives in motion (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Goodson and Sikes, 2010; Norman, 2020). The recurring and interpretative process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022) enabled me to make sense of the data and offer the following four themes for discussion:

- An ecosystem for teacher wellbeing

- The role of experience and self-reflection in shaping a teacher's sense of self

- Supporting teachers to thrive through processes and forms of effective leadership

- Time and Place: the lived experiences of teachers in Wales

These discussion points were not only shaped through the analytical process but also by an ongoing critical reflection of myself as a school leader and researcher. Throughout my doctoral journey, I have been critically aware of my own positionality and relatively unique perspective as both a headteacher in Wales, living through curriculum reform and realisation, and a doctoral student (Czerniawski, 2023). My researcher's signature (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) reflects my values, socio-constructivist standpoint and interpretative lens. Alongside the participants' lived experiences has been my own narrative, recognising that I have been "in the midst" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 43) of my own life stories throughout this inquiry. The complexity of my positionality was also noted as being both an insider and outsider, drawing upon Dwyer and Buckle's (2009, p. 60) concept of "the space between" to articulate the overlapping identities I shared with participants. Framing my positionality in this way ensured I embraced my dual role and recognised the conceptualisation of experience through multiple understandings of temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016). As I attempted to make

meaning, I was mindful that this is my interpretation. Although I have honoured the voices of participants, it is entwined with my own view and experiences. Together, this messy interpretation makes my researcher's signature visible and is a commitment to honouring teachers' lived experiences, recognising the emotional, relational and cultural dimensions of their work (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Lainson, Braun and Clarke, 2019; Fitzgerald, Stride and Enright, 2020).

This chapter seeks to act as a catalyst for further discussion, inquiry and research into creating the conditions for teachers to thrive. Through the chapter, I offer the key findings of this study, a critical reflection of narrative inquiry, the limitations of this study, original contributions to knowledge, a contribution of an ecosystem model and implications for practice, policy and future research. I end with a hopeful reflection, that there is transformative potential in listening to and learning from the lived experiences of teachers. It is my hope that, in the acts of listening and learning, we can collectively work towards a culture of thriving.

6.2 Key findings

In considering the key findings of this study, I return to the three research questions that have guided the research process. These questions have shaped the interpretative lens through which I have made sense of participants' narratives and constructed the ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing. Table 7 demonstrates how the research questions have been directly addressed. The subsequent key findings reflect the spiralling interplay between the research questions and the insights from participants' stories and relevant literature in Chapters Four and Five. Together, these findings represent an original empirical account of teachers' lived experiences in Wales during the realisation of Curriculum for Wales, demonstrating specific cultural and collaborative components through which leadership influences wellbeing.

Research Questions		Key Findings Sub-Headings
Research Question 1:	What does it mean for teachers to thrive in a professional context?	• Centrality of a thriving self • Interrelated complexity • Tension between policy and practice
Research Question 2:	How is the culture of an organisation, and the way it constructs collaboration, experienced by teachers?	• Leading organisational and collaborative cultures
Research Question 3:	In what ways does collaboration support teachers' ability to thrive?	

Table 7. Responses to research questions

6.2.1 Centrality of a thriving self

Thriving is a dynamic and personal process, deeply connected to a teacher's sense of self. In this study, participants' stories suggest that an understanding and deliberate application of their purpose, values and identity fosters their emotional wellbeing and is connected to their sense of self. In contrast, situations of disconnect lead to tension and demotivation, which can manifest into a sense of helplessness. This emphasises the importance of dedicated time for reflective spaces and professional dialogue to support teacher reflection.

Self-reflection is a critical practice which provides teachers with space and time to navigate the complex reality of life as a teacher. Through reflective dialogue, teachers attempt to make sense of their experiences, both personal and professional, and shape an understanding of themselves in the face of the ever-changing demands of the profession. In this way, self-reflection is key in

shaping a teacher's thriving self.

Thriving is not static, neither is it a means of coping nor performing. It is developed over time through personal and professional experiences and significantly related to relational and contextual factors. Teachers who described themselves as thriving often narrated a clear sense of who they are, were able to reflect on their growth, had agency and a sense of belonging within their school context. This is captured in the ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing with 'Self - Intrapersonal' placed at the centre, thus suggesting that, although thriving is an individual state, it is not in isolation, but is dependent upon interrelated factors.

6.2.2 Interrelated complexity

Through this narrative inquiry, I found that a teacher's ability to thrive is influenced by a dynamic web of interrelated elements. The ecosystem model captures this complexity through the conceptualisation of intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal and global factors. The thread of professional learning weaves through all components of the ecosystem model, demonstrating a process of re-storying.

This study suggests that viewing teacher wellbeing through a bioecological lens demonstrates its dynamic and fluid state. Any changes within the self, relationships, leadership practices or school culture can cause ripple effects on a teacher's ability to thrive. These experiences are not merely events, they are processes of meaning-making that form who teachers are, how they enact their daily roles and how they thrive in the profession. Wellbeing, therefore, is co-constructed over time and interrelated with interactions, cultures and systems. School cultures were shared narratively. Participants storied the organisational cultures they had experienced as places of safety, trauma, threat and transformation. These narratives shaped how participants experienced their work and how this impacted upon their wellbeing. A positive organisational culture, grounded in trust, respect, agency and shared purpose was crucial to sustaining teachers' wellbeing. The ecosystem model demonstrates this dynamic inter-relationship highlighting that a teacher's ability to thrive cannot be separated from the

conditions in which they work.

6.2.3 Leading organisational and collaborative cultures

Organisational culture is experienced emotionally through leadership behaviours, relational climate and shared values. Participants shared experiences of working within cultures of belonging, trust and agency and past experiences which were driven by fear and isolation. The culture of a school was not an abstract entity but a living experience where teachers felt valued, had a voice and where collaboration was cultivated. These cultures supported collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018) and were guided by transformational leaders who prioritised relational trust and psychological safety, enabling teachers to thrive.

Throughout this study, there has been a thread weaving together the vital role of leaders in cultivating collaborative cultures. Where there were authentic collaborative cultures, teachers described leaders who valued and prioritised agency, trust and a sense of belonging. Leadership behaviours influenced how teachers navigated the complexity of their role. Where there was relational connectedness teachers were more likely to thrive, often despite challenging personal circumstances. Conversely, experiences of disconnect between leaders and teachers led to stress and insecurity. Therefore, it can be suggested that leaders play a crucial role in creating the conditions for teachers to thrive. Such conditions are not just structural, but also emotional and ethical and shaped by relational trust. This is reflected in the 'People - Interpersonal' and 'Place - Societal' layers of the ecosystem model, exemplifying how culture constructs the conditions in which collaboration can be meaningful.

Participants' stories revealed that collaboration was not just beneficial, it was essential to their ability to thrive. Engaging in collaborative practices enhanced their confidence, particularly when navigating change associated with curriculum reform. Participants' feelings of isolation were reduced due to shared ownership of their work and increased agency. In addition, a change to top-down directives and an increase in leaders structuring meaningful collaboration provided space and time for teachers to support each other and work together. Therefore,

collaboration was not just a method for professional learning activities but a condition for thriving. It acted as both a way for teachers to learn and grow and also a source of emotional and social support. This is reflected in the ecosystem model which highlights professional learning as a thread woven through all layers, demonstrating the transformative force of collaboration and learning - learning that supports teachers' wellbeing through nurturing relationships and a reflective sense of self.

6.2.4 Tension between policy and practice

In this study, participants' lived experiences were situated within a broader landscape of educational reform and the realisation of Curriculum for Wales. Where national policies aligned with their values and they could understand the wider purpose, they were driven to change. Further support through contextually relevant opportunities for reflection, professional relationships and transformative leaders meant that teachers embraced the policy directives. This was translated into practice in a meaningful way and impacted positively upon teachers' wellbeing, yet, when references were made to the performative nature of school systems, especially when considering previous policy direction, there was clear tension and recounts of stressful situations. This reinforces the need for policy to be responsive to the lived reality of teachers. Through listening to teachers' stories, there is the potential for policy and practice to work together to support teachers to thrive.

Together, these findings highlight the centrality of self, the co-constructed nature of wellbeing, and the transformative role of leadership and collaboration. They reinforce the complexity of teacher wellbeing as a dynamic inter-relationship of personal, relational, and organisational dimensions. These insights inform the contributions, implications, and recommendations that follow in this concluding chapter.

6.3 Narrative inquiry as meaning making

Listening to teachers' stories and valuing their lived experiences provided powerful insights into the education system in Wales and how it shapes teachers' lives. The methodology of narrative inquiry provided space for a deep exploration of lived experience. It valued the teacher and honoured their voice. Moreover, it provided a relational and nuanced view of the ecosystems in which teachers work. Narrative inquiry provided a framework for meaning making. Arguably, other qualitative methodologies may not have provided a foundation to embrace the messy nature of this inquiry, thus demonstrating the value of narrative inquiry as a methodology for embracing self, relational, emotional and contextual factors.

The value of narrative inquiry as meaning making also extended to my dual role as headteacher and researcher. Choosing narrative inquiry provided an opportunity for me to be positioned within the study. Acknowledging my own evolving understanding of narrative inquiry, I recognise that both participants and I were "in the midst" (Clandinin, 2016, p. 43) of our own life stories throughout this inquiry, therefore, this inquiry does not provide a definitive answer as to the conditions teachers need to thrive. As previously discussed, wellbeing is a dynamic and ever-changing concept; in this context, this inquiry provides an insight into the reality of being a teacher in Wales during a period of transformational educational change. My positionality adds to this exploration, as both an insider and outsider researcher I was able to understand, empathise and relate to many of the lived experiences shared with me. This nuanced stance enabled a deeper understanding, but it also brought ethical tensions which are discussed in the limitations section of this chapter.

Narrative inquiry was more than a methodology - it provided a relational stance and a way of understanding the complexities of being a teacher. Methodologically I contribute an account of insider narrative inquiry from a headteacher's perspective, presenting reflexive and ethical ways for researching within one's own professional field. Moreover, my positionality as both

headteacher and researcher enriched the study. Nevertheless, I also acknowledge there are limitations.

6.4 Limitations of the study

It is important to recognise the limitations of this study in a manner that is not intending to undermine the value of the research, but to situate its findings within the methodological and contextual boundaries that shaped the research.

The very nature of narrative inquiry suggests a limitation in terms of its inherent subjectivity. As the researcher, I played a central role in the selection, interpretation and presentation of participants' stories, raising valid concerns about bias and partiality. This is further compounded through my dual role as both an insider and outsider, headteacher and researcher. Throughout the inquiry process I have maintained a critical reflection standpoint to ensure transparency and trustworthiness (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 1993). I agree with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) that limitations and tension within narrative inquiry is inevitable as it is a relational methodology. However, they suggest that *how* researchers deal with the tension is more important than just naming it.

In dealing with the tensions as a narrative inquirer, I maintained an ethical stance throughout the process driven by transparency and reflexivity. Concerns of ethics, anonymity and ownership were considered and foregrounded in open dialogue with participants. As critically discussed in Chapter Three, I am very aware of the perceived power and privilege I held and continue to hold through my doctoral journey. Dwyer and Buckle's (2009, p. 60) view of "the space between" has been a constant guide and reminder that my social constructivist worldview accepts that there is no single truth, but that life is experienced through active construction of reality. Whilst my positionality could be a limitation, I suggest that, in holding 'the space between', I was able to explore the rich and complex lives of teachers which other

researchers may not have been able to do with such depth (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). I also recognise that narrative inquiry is an emotionally demanding methodology. A perceived limitation could be that, through collecting, transcribing and analysing participants' stories, I was in the midst of my own life story. Although I endeavoured to inquire with care, ethics and consistency, the nature of my own emotionally demanding role was a key factor within the study. In an attempt to mitigate this as a limitation, maintaining and reflecting upon my research diary was important. This provided a way for me to embrace being a researcher and to reflect upon the experience, "combining living with self-criticism and growth" (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 82). I also engaged in what Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 182) describe as "wakefulness". Rather than choosing a language of criticism, I chose the language of wakefulness, so that, throughout the inquiry process, I was alert and aware of the potential risks and bias. I am awake to critiques and agree that "ongoing reflection" is essential. As Conle (2000, p. 52) pointed out, "there are no single causes, no predictable effects. Instead, open-endedness pervades all data". Wei (2023, p. 38) agrees, suggesting that "a good narrative inquirer should always be open to different interpretations, leaving readers to fill in the gaps with their own experiences and perspectives". It is through such wakefulness and open-endedness that I suggest that these limitations are noted but not viewed negatively in a way that detracts from the participants' stories or how my own lived experiences enriched this study.

A further limitation may be considered in terms of the sample size. The narrative inquiry was undertaken in two schools in South East Wales. Although the schools were different in context, the small sample size limits generalisability. The sample of participants could be viewed as a constraint as they were of a narrow focus and diversity of teacher identity was limited. Furthermore, the responses from the participants' themselves could be viewed as a limitation as they shared only what they wanted me to hear. However, research into teacher wellbeing suggests that using the voice of teachers is vital and a strength (Hascher and Waber, 2021). Furthermore, in considering the methodological choice, it is not about generalisability but, rather, is about understanding lives that are being lived (Clandinin, 2016).

I have discussed at length the notion of temporality, place and sociality (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, Cave and Berendonk, 2016) and although this inquiry provides a unique insight into the lived experiences of teachers in Wales at a specific time, it is this very time that could be perceived as a limitation. The findings reflect a period of change from curriculum reform through to realisation. This reform context will undoubtedly shift over time and, although the teachers' experiences are interesting, they may be thought of as a mere snapshot within a vast reform landscape. This could be the stance that others take, yet I would argue as to the validity and importance of acknowledging these stories and the possibility that they may be transferable to other contexts.

While these limitations are important to acknowledge, they do not detract from the value of the insights generated through the study. Rather, they reflect the nature of narrative inquiry as a methodology that prioritises depth, relationality, and context over generalisability. Recognising the limitations, the findings and reflexive insights from this inquiry make original contributions to the fields of teacher wellbeing and learning ecosystems.

6.5 Original contribution to knowledge

This thesis makes the following four distinct and original contributions to knowledge: conceptual/theoretical; empirical; methodological and practical.

6.5.1 Conceptual/theoretical contribution of an ecosystem model

This study makes an original conceptual contribution by the development of an ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing (Figure 16). Taking note of the voices within my study, my own researcher's signature, the key findings and limitations, this model contributes to the field of teacher wellbeing. The model explores the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing and contributes to knowledge within theoretical and

practical perspectives.

From a theoretical perspective, I offer the development of an interdisciplinary ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing. This model integrates ecological and bioecological theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), ecosystem learning (Hannon and Peterson, 2017), narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018).

This ecosystem model was not developed in a linear way. Rather, it developed through a spiralling and messy process of engagement with relevant literature, participants' stories, reflexive analysis and personal insight. My initial thoughts, inspired by Bronfenbrenner (1979), Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) and Hannon and Peterson (2017), were entangled with professional dialogue within narrative networks and the Cynefin Team. Adding into this complexity were my own lived experiences as a headteacher and researcher within the Welsh educational context. The model evolved as a visual, theoretical and practice-based framework to support teachers, leaders and policymakers in creating the conditions for teachers to thrive.

The concept of self - the intrapersonal layer - is at the core of the model. This is intentional to reinforce the crucial role of values, identity, beliefs and reflection in sustaining teacher wellbeing. This provides a response to the critiques of Bronfenbrenner's work as detailed in Chapter Five (Tudge *et al.*, 2009; Christensen, 2016). Layered from the centre of the model are relational, organisational and systemic factors, each interconnected and influencing the others. Threaded through all the layers is professional learning, not solely related to skill development but as collaborative sense-making. The model adds to the work of Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) through offering a Welsh context for collaborative professionalism. Moreover, it provides insights into the role of transformational leadership in professional flourishing, contributing to the work within Wales (OECD, 2018; Harris *et al.*, 2022; Griffiths and Jones, 2024) and beyond (Engels *et al.* 2008; Atasoy, 2020; Wilson Heenan, Lafferty and Mannix McNamara, 2024). The intentional design of the model reflects the complexity of teacher wellbeing as lived and

storied.

6.5.2 Empirical contribution

This study provides original qualitative narrative accounts of how teachers in Wales experienced education post-devolution and, more recently, through a period of significant reform into curriculum realisation. It highlights a documented gap of research on teacher and leadership wellbeing in Wales. In addition, it offers an insight into a period of Welsh education which remains under-researched from a positive wellbeing lens.

6.5.3 Methodological contribution

From a methodological perspective, this study contributes to the knowledge base of narrative inquiry from the perspective of a headteacher researcher. It demonstrates the value of narrative inquiry for exploring complexity, emotional and relational concepts. This study contributes to debates about insider-outsider research by building on the work of Dwyer and Buckle (2009), offering a nuanced and reflexive positioning (Glesne, 2011; Flick, 2018) within narrative inquiry. This study also provides a Welsh context for narrative inquiry. Although this is not a novel perspective, it does demonstrate rich evidence about teacher wellbeing in Wales during curriculum reform into realisation.

6.5.4 Practical contribution

As a practical contribution to the field of teacher wellbeing, the ecosystem model (Figure 16.) offers accessible language and a visual structure for teachers, leaders and policymakers to be able to talk about and consider wellbeing in a meaningful and practical way. The model may be used to reflect upon conditions for thriving and inform leadership practices. It provides a school-specific framework aligned with the national wellbeing agenda in Wales.

It is important to acknowledge that the scope and boundary of these original contributions to knowledge are grounded in the narratives from teachers from two schools in South East Wales. However, these contributions advance the conceptual, theoretical and empirical understanding

of teacher wellbeing. They also demonstrate that this thesis is a contribution to the growing field of teacher wellbeing and learning ecosystems in Wales and beyond.

6.6 Researcher's signature and voice

In offering theoretical, empirical, methodological and practical contributions, I also suggest that my researcher's signature and voice is a novel story to share and a distinctive feature of this doctoral research (Clandinin, 2016). My signature and voice have deepened in conviction and clarity throughout the inquiry process. As a narrative inquirer, working with an ecosystemic lens, I found myself working at the boundaries (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) between research and practice, personal and professional, individual and systemic. My own lived experiences, values and collaborations have shaped this study. This is reflected in the ecosystem model, my methodological choices, and the stories I reflected upon and shared.

There has been much tension and dissonance through my doctoral journey. Exemplifying the work of Czerniawski (2023), this study offers an insight into the tensions I have encountered, particularly in terms of my positionality. While Czerniawski (2023) explores the tensions of power and identity in doctoral education, the voices he features are primarily not those of headteachers. As such, this thesis contributes a novel perspective by surfacing the entanglements faced by those in formal leadership roles navigating a dual role as practitioner and researcher. Although Czerniawski's study is small-scale and in no way suggests that everyone embarking on educational doctorate programmes will experience such tension, there is an opportunity for me to add further insights to his work as a headteacher and doctoral student. This positionality, as both headteacher and researcher, represents my "hallmark of uniqueness" that contributes to the richness and credibility of this narrative inquiry (Czerniawski, 2023, p. 1383).

My uniqueness is captured throughout this thesis as I have surfaced the entanglement of my

own signature and voice through the inquiry process. I harnessed any discord and dissonance as "a powerful tool for nurturing professional autonomy, learning, transformation and continuing critical reflective practice" (Czerniawski, 2023, p. 1383). Taking this learning and reflective practice further, I offer implications of my work for practice, policy and future research.

6.7 Implications for practice, policy and future research

6.7.1 Implications for practice

The findings of this study suggest that schools should prioritise relational trust and reflective practices to foster thriving. This needs to be a cultural endeavour, led by transformative leaders, with professional learning at the core of their work. Such leaders should create structures that embed reflective, relational and collaborative spaces, spaces that honour the lived experiences of teachers and value them for who they are as individuals, not just as a collective. My ecosystem model could be used as a reflective tool to support teachers' wellbeing, or, where there is limited understanding and practices for teacher wellbeing, it could be used as a basis for planning a wellbeing strategy. This practical application of the ecosystem model could inform educational practices in schools and beyond and complement national policy directives, such as the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) and the Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing (2021).

6.7.2 Implications for policy

Implications of this study for policy suggest that educational systems should acknowledge and address potential tensions between policy and practice, thus reinforcing the need for policymakers to listen and attempt to understand the lived reality of teachers. I argue for the recognition in curriculum and wellbeing policies of the inter-relationship between personal, relational, organisational and systemic factors. This would build on the current work within the Welsh educational context and provide stability for a profession in the midst of a recruitment and retention crisis (Connolly *et al.*, 2018; Evans, 2021; OECD, 2025). Through embedding the

ecosystem model into the existing Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing framework (Welsh Government, 2021), it would provide a clear signal that the wellbeing of teachers is an important policy directive. Moreover, it would signal that the teachers' voices in this study are being listened to, which could then act as a catalyst for the future design and implementation of teacher wellbeing-focused education policies. Furthermore, I suggest that teacher wellbeing should be a key feature within national professional learning arrangements, especially for school leaders, and led by the eagerly anticipated new professional learning body (expected to be launched in September 2025). These changes are not radical; they are based upon the narratives provided by the teachers within the study and their lived realities. Although I recognise that these voices are small in number, they do provide an insight into the impact of curriculum reform and realisation. They also set the direction for further implications and recommendations for research.

6.7.3 Implications for future research

Building on this narrative inquiry, further research could explore how school ecosystems can be deliberately designed to foster wellbeing and how narrative practices can be embedded in school culture. I advocate the further use of narrative inquiry across more varied school contexts and more diverse teacher identities to add to the lived stories captured in this study. This study has explored the centrality of self, interrelated complexity, leading organisational and collaborative cultures and the tensions between policy and practice. Yet, it does not provide a definite answer to the complexities of organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. This study captured the lived experiences at a specific moment of educational reform, therefore, there was a limited exploration of the temporal aspect of how wellbeing and collaboration shifted over the course of reform implementation, realisation and beyond. A longitudinal study on these concepts would be able to offer more depth over a longer period of time and reveal further insights into how to support teachers' wellbeing.

Moreover, future research may explore teacher wellbeing through distinct lenses such as self-reflection, leadership identity and gendered experience; for example, motherhood. A

long-term study on the impact of transformational leadership on teacher identity and wellbeing would offer valuable insight into the sustainability and depth of leadership influence on teacher wellbeing over time. In addition, research could focus on professional learning as emotional and relational work and how such work contributes to teacher flourishing. Future research could also more explicitly explore the lived experiences of headteachers themselves. This study acknowledges the centrality of leaders, specifically headteachers, in shaping the cultural and collaborative conditions of a school, and I have demonstrated my own positionality and narrative through this thesis. However, further research could explore the lived experiences of headteachers as they navigated the responsibility of leading curriculum reform into realisation. A narrative inquiry could explore how leadership identity intersects with accountability and policy pressures, alongside relational demands, and how these shape headteachers' own wellbeing and capacity to lead thriving ecosystems. Extending the focus beyond teacher wellbeing to include headteacher wellbeing would provide a more balanced understanding of wellbeing across school systems, recognising that those who lead collaborative cultures also require support and reflective spaces so they too can thrive.

These suggestions build on the findings of this study and offer further exploration for the research field of teacher wellbeing. In addition, building on this study, the ecosystem model could be applied and evaluated across different experiences of education; for example, in early years, or further education. Moreover, it could be applied in different countries to explore how contextual differences shape teacher wellbeing. Exploring the application of the model in different cultural and policy settings would provide a rich insight into the differences across educational systems and expand the growing field of research into learning ecosystems and the conditions to support teachers to thrive.

6.8 Final words: toward a culture of thriving

This study began with a deep concern for the wellbeing of teachers and a recognition of the relational, cultural and structural factors that shape their professional lives; therefore, my ambition for this study was to explore the conditions that enable teachers to thrive. Situated in a period of educational change, the lived experiences of teachers provide a nuanced view of curriculum reform and realisation in Wales. The voices within this study represent both primary school and secondary school perspectives and are entwined with my own voice as both a headteacher and researcher. In narrating my research journey, I return to a simple but powerful idea that "the stories we tell of our experiences matter" (Norman, 2020, p. 3963). They matter because they reveal the emotional, relational and complex nature of teaching. The openness, vulnerability and significance of the teachers within this study have illuminated the often-overlooked emotional and relational dimensions of teaching in the Welsh context. It is my hope that, in attempting to understand their stories through the offer of an ecosystem model, we can support teachers to thrive.

My contribution to the field of education, particularly to the study of learning ecosystems and teacher wellbeing, is the development of an ecosystem model. This model is offered as a framework that embraces complexity and possibility, rather than as a fixed or prescriptive solution. It invites application, reflection and ongoing dialogue, signalling that teacher wellbeing is not a programme or policy but a relational, dynamic and deeply human process.

This study has shown that wellbeing flourishes where teachers have a voice, agency and are supported within a relational and collaborative culture. Exploring teacher wellbeing through an interdisciplinary and ecosystemic lens has deepened understanding of the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. Framing this study within a narrative inquiry enabled a commitment to honouring the lived experiences of teachers and to share the emotional, relational and contextual dimensions of the profession. Within this inquiry, I have also honoured my own story. As a headteacher and doctoral student my own

lived experiences have helped to shape this study. I have mirrored the themes of self-reflection, collaboration and professional growth and attempted to ensure that my own reflexivity was consistently and critically entwined throughout the research process. I acknowledge that my positionality influenced the construction, interpretation, and representation of participants' narratives. My ultimate aim has been to deepen understanding of teachers' experiences. I am hopeful that this understanding will support other teachers to develop an awareness of their sense of self and how their interactions with others, the environment in which they work and the policy direction impact upon their ability to thrive. Moreover, this study may encourage school leaders and policymakers to better understand what impacts upon teacher wellbeing. In turn, the ecosystem model for teacher wellbeing could be used to broaden the discussion of teacher wellbeing and identify ways to create the conditions for teachers to thrive. My commitment to teacher wellbeing remains.

Teacher wellbeing is not an individual responsibility; it is a collective and ethical imperative. Supporting teacher wellbeing requires listening; listening to the stories teachers live by, the systems they work within and those they journey with. This study offers that, through valuing a sense of self, meaningful collaboration and transformational leadership, we can have a more reflective, relational and humane education system which can then create the conditions for teachers to thrive and children to learn.

References

Abubakar, A. M., Ariffin, T. F. T., and Jaafar, F. M. (2020) 'Connecting Teacher Professional Development, Wellbeing and Effectiveness', *European Academic Research*, 7(12), pp. 6053-6063. Available at: https://euacademic.org/UploadArticle/4301.pdf (Accessed: 3 May 2024).

Acton, R., and Glasgow, P. (2015) 'Teacher wellbeing in neoliberal contexts: A review of the literature', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(8), pp. 99-114. DOI: 10.14221/ajte.2015v40n8.6

Adams P. (2006) 'Exploring social constructivism: theories and practicalities', *Education 3-13*, 34(3), pp. 243-257. DOI: 10.1080/03004270600898893

Adams, L., Coburn-Crane, S., Sanders-Earley, A., Keeble, R., Harris, H., Taylor, R. and Taylor, B. (2023) *Working Lives of Teachers and Leaders - Year 1*. Department for Education. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66f673e03b919067bb482842/Working_Lives_of _T eachers_and_Leaders_-_Year_1_Core_Research_Report.pdf (Accessed 6 June 2025).

Alves, R., Lopes, T., and Precioso, J. (2021) 'Teachers' well-being in times of Covid-19 pandemic: factors that explain professional well-being', *International Journal of Educational Research and Innovation*, 15, pp. 203-217. DOI: 10.46661/ijeri.5120

Anderson, S. (2002) 'Working together to develop a professional learning community'. *Research and Development in Higher Education 25: Quality Conversations.* Available at: http://www.herdsa.org.au/publications/conference-proceedings/research-and-development-hi gher-education-quality-1 (Accessed: 2 May 2022).

Andrew, K., Richards, R., Hemphill, M. A., and Templin, T. J. (2018) 'Personal and contextual factors related to teachers' experience with stress and burnout', *Teachers and Teaching*, 24(7), pp. 768-787. DOI: 10.1080/13540602.2018.1476337

Arndt, H. and Rose, H. (2022) 'Capturing life as it is truly lived? Improving diary data in educational research', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2022.2094360

Arad Research and ICF Consulting. (2018) *Formative Evaluation of the Pioneer School Model: Final Report.* Cardiff: Welsh Government, GSR report number 47/2018. Available at:

https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/formative-evaluationpioneer-school-model/?lang=en (Accessed 8 August 2025).

Arnold, J. (2021) 'Preservice teacher mindshifts: artful stories and transformations', *Reflective Practice*, 22(5), pp. 627-640. DOI: 10.1080/14623943.2021.1948824.

Asselin, M. E. (2003) 'Insider research: Issues to consider when DOIng qualitative research in your own setting'. *Journal for Nurses in Staff Development*, 19(2), 99-103. DOI: 10.1097/00124645-200303000-00008

Atasoy, R. (2020) 'The Relationship Between School Principals' Leadership Styles, School Culture and Organizational Change'. *International Journal of Progressive Education,* 16(5), pp. 256-274. DOI: https://DOI.org/10.29329/ijpe.2020.277.16

Atkinson, B. (2009) 'Teachers Responding to Narrative Inquiry: An Approach to Narrative Inquiry Criticism', *The Journal of Educational Research,* 103(2), pp. 91-102. DOI: 10.1080/00220670903323461.

Azorín, C., and Fullan, M. (2022) 'Leading new, deeper forms of collaborative cultures: Questions and pathways', *Journal of Educational Change*, 23, pp. 131-143. DOI: 10.1007/s10833-021-09448-w

Ball, S. J. (1993) 'What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes, Discourse', *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 13(2), pp. 10-17, DOI: 10.1080/0159630930130203

Ball, S. J. (2003) 'The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity'. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 18(2), pp. 215-228. DOI: 10.1080/0268093022000043065

Ball, S. J. (2015) 'What is policy? 21 years later: reflections on the possibilities of policy research discourse', *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 36(3), pp. 306-313, DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2015.1015279

Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., Braun, A., and Hoskins, K. (2011) 'Policy subjects and policy actors in schools: some necessary but insufficient analyses discourse', S*tudies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), pp. 611-624, DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2011.601564

Baptiste, J., Choudhury, L., Giubertoni, E., and Sum, N. (2024) 'A balancing act: successfully managing senior leadership roles and motherhood', *School Leadership and Management*, 44(5), pp. 586-604. DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2024.2414255

Barnes, G.- J. (2021) 'Researcher positionality: the Liquid Inbetweener', *Practice*, 5(1), pp. 21-28. DOI: 10.1080/25783858.2021.1968280.

Bashan, B. and Holsblat, R. (2017) 'Reflective journals as a research tool: The case of student teachers' development of teamwork', *Cogent Education*, 4(1). DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2017.1374234

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., and Verloop, N. (2004) 'Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20(2), pp. 107-128. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001

Bellibaş, M. Ş., Ryskulueva, F., Levin, J., and Pietsch, M. (2024). 'A safe space and leadership matter for innovation: Exploring the role of psychological safety in the relationship between transformational leadership and innovation radicalness in Kyrgyz classrooms'. *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 0(0). https://DOI.org/10.1177/17411432241264696

Berger, R. (2015) 'Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research', *Qualitative Research,* 15(2), pp. 219-234. DOI: https://DOI.org/10.1177%2F1468794112468475

Berry, A. (2009) 'Professional self-understanding as expertise in teaching about teaching', *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(2), pp. 305–318. DOI: 10.1080/13540600902875365.

Billaudeau, N.; Alexander, S.; Magnard, L.; Temam, S.; Vercambre, M.-N. (2022) 'What Levers to Promote Teachers' Wellbeing during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond: Lessons Learned from a 2021 Online Study in Six Countries'. *International Journal of Environmental Research Public Health*, 19 (15). DOI: 10.3390/ijerph19159151

Bolger, N., Davis, A., and Rafaeli, E., 2003. 'Diary methods: capturing life as it is lived', *Annual Review of Psychology*, 54, pp. 579-616. DOI: 10.1146/annurev.psych.54.101601.145030.

Bonner, A., and Tolhurst, G. (2002) 'Insider-outsider perspectives of participant observation', *Nurse Researcher*, 9(4), pp. 7-19. DOI: 10.7748/nr2002.07.9.4.7.c6194

Borg, M. G., Riding, R. J., and Falzon, J. M. (1991) 'Stress in Teaching: a study of occupational stress and its determinants, job satisfaction and career commitment among primary school teachers', *Educational Psychology*, 11(1), pp. 59-75. DOI: 10.1080/0144341910110104

Bourdieu, P. (2003) 'Participant objectivation', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 9 (2), pp. 281-294. DOI: 10.1111/1467-9655.00150

Bowen, G. (2009) 'Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method', *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9, pp. 27-40. DOI: 10.3316/QRJ0902027

Boyland, J. R. (2019) 'A social constructivist approach to the gathering of empirical data', *Australian Counselling Research Journal.* Available at: https://www.acrjournal.com.au/resources/assets/journals/Volume-13-Issue-2-2019/Manuscript 5%20-%20A%20Social%20Constructivist%20Approach.pdf (Accessed: 21 April 2024).

Braun, A., Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., and Hoskins, K. (2011) 'Taking context seriously: towards explaining policy enactments in the secondary school discourse', *Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education,* 32(4), pp. 585-596. DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2011.601555

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2013) *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic Analysis A Practical Guide.* London: SAGE.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., Hayfield, N., and Terry, G. (2019) 'Answers to frequently asked questions about thematic analysis'. Available at https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/psych/about/our-research/documents/Answers%20to%20frequently%20asked%20questions%20about%20thematic%20analysis%20April%202019.pdf (Accessed 8 June 2022).

British Educational Research Association (2024) 'Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (5th Edition)'. Available at: https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024 (Accessed 10 February 2025).

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. and Morris, P.A. (2006) ''The bioecological model of human development'', in Lerner, R.M. (ed.) *Handbook of child psychology: Vol. 1. Theoretical models of human development. 6th edn.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

Brooks, M., Creely, E., and Laletas, S (2022) 'Coping through the unknown: School staff wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic', I*nternational Journal of Educational Research Open,* (3), 100146. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijedro.2022.100146.

Brouwer, P., Brekelmans, M., Nieuwenhuis, L., and Simons, R. J. (2012). 'Fostering teacher community development: A review of design principles and a case study of an innovative interdisciplinary team'. *Learning Environments Research*, 15, pp. 319-344. DOI: 10.1007/s10984-012-9119-1.

Brown, B. (2018) *Dare to Lead.* London: Vermilion.

Brown, R., Anthony, R., Eyre, O., Lennon, J., Powell, V., Haslam, Z, Rowe, A., and Moore, G. (2025) 'A qualitative Exploration of Contextual Factors Within Schools Impacting the Introduction of the New Statutory 'Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing' in Wales'. *School Mental Health,* 17, pp. 486-494. DOI: 10.1007/s12310-024-09740-z

Brundrett, M. and Rhodes, C. (2013) *Researching Educational Leadership and Management Methods and Approaches.* London: SAGE.

Bruner, J. S. (1978) 'The Role of Dialogue in Language Acquisition', in Sinclair, A., Jarvelle, R. J., and Levelt, W. J. M. (eds.), *The Child's Concept of Language*. New York: Springer-Verlag.

Bryk, A., and B. Schneider. (2002) *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bryman, A. (2012) *Social research methods (4th ed.)*. Oxford: OUP.

Bullough, R. and Pinnegar, S. (2009) 'The happiness of teaching (as eudaimonia): Disciplinary knowledge and the threat of performativity', *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice,* 15(2), pp. 241-256. DOI: 10.1080/13540600902875324

Bunjun, B. (2010) 'Feminist organizations and intersectionality: Contesting hegemonic feminism'. *Atlantis,* 34(2), pp. 115-126. Available at: https://atlantisjournal.ca/index.php/atlantis/article/view/338/319 (Accessed on: 6 August 2024).

Bush, T. (2021) 'School leadership and culture: Societal and organisational perspectives', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership*, 49(2), pp. 211-213. DOI: 10.1177/1741143220983063

Bush, A. and Grotjohann, N. (2020) 'Collaboration in teacher education: A cross-sectional study on future teachers' attitudes towards collaboration, their intentions to collaborate and their performance of collaboration', *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 88, 102968. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2019.102968

Butina, M., (2015) 'A narrative approach to qualitative inquiry', *Clinical laboratory science*, 28(3), pp. 190-196. DOI: 10.29074/ascls.28.3.190

Butt, R. and Retallick, J. (2002) 'Professional well-being and learning: A study of administrator-teacher workplace relationships', *The Journal of Educational Enquiry,* 3(1), pp. 17-34. Available at: https://www.teachersity.org/files/PDF/Principals%20and%20teachers.pdf (Accessed: 15 May 2022)

Byrne, D. (2022) 'A worked example of Braun and Clarke's approach to reflexive thematic analysis', *Quality and Quantity*, 56, pp. 1391-1412. DOI: 10.1007/s11135-021-01182-y

Caine, V., Estefan, A. and Clandinin, D. J. (2013) 'A Return to Methodological Commitment: Reflections on Narrative Inquiry', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research,* 57(6), pp. 574-586. DOI: 10.1080/00313831.2013.798833.

Caine, V., Murphy, M. S., Estefan, A., Clandinin, D. J., Steeves, P., and Huber, J. (2017) 'Exploring the purposes of fictionalization in narrative inquiry', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(3), pp. 215-221. DOI: 10.1177/1077800416643997

Cajkler, W., Wood, P., Norton, J., Pedder, D., and Xu, H. (2014) 'Teacher perspectives about lesson study in secondary school departments: a collaborative vehicle for professional learning and practice development', *Research Papers in Education*, 30(2), pp. 192-213. DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2014.887139

Campbell, C. (2021) 'Partnership working and collaborative professionalism for educational improvement in Ontario, Canada', *Die deutsche Schule*, 113 (1), pp. 74-84. DOI: 10.25656/01:22076

Cann, R. F. (2019) *Positive School Leadership for Flourishing Teachers.* Master of Educational Leadership. University of Auckland. Available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rachel-Cann-4/publication/338571908_Positive_school_leadership_for_flourishing_teachers_Leadership_actions_that_enhance_teacher_wellbeing/links/5e1d93864585159aa4ce96a9/Positive-school-leadership-for-flourishing-teachers-Leadership-actions-that-enhance-teacher-wellbeing.pdf (Accessed 3 April 2022)

Cann, R. F., Riedel-Prabhakar, R., and Powell, D. (2020) 'A model of positive school leadership to improve teacher wellbeing', *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, 6, pp. 195-218. DOI: 10.1007/s41042-020-00045-5

Carroll, A., Flynn, L., O'Connor, E. S., Forrest, K., Bower, J., Fynes-Clinton, S., York A., and Ziaei, M. (2020) 'In their words: listening to teachers' perceptions about stress in the workplace and how to address it', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 49(4), pp. 420-434. DOI: 10.1080/1359866X.2020.1789914

Carroll, A., Forrest, K., Sanders-O'Connor, E., Flynn, L., Bower, J.M., Fynes-Clinton, S., York, A., Ziaei, M. (2022) 'Teacher stress and burnout in Australia: examining the role of intrapersonal and environmental factors'. *Social Psychology Education*, 5(2-3), pp. 441-469. DOI: 10.1007/s11218-022-09686-7.

Chaaban, Y., Abu-Tineh, A., Alkhateeb, H., and Romanowski, M. (2022) 'A Narrative Study Exploring Content and Process Influences on Male Teachers' Career Development', *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *23*(2), pp. 354-369. DOI: 10.1080/15700763.2022.2134803

Chase, S. E. (2018) 'Narrative inquiry: Toward theoretical and methodological maturity'. In N.K Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.) Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Chen, J. J., Li, Z., Rodrigues, W. and Kaufman, S. (2022) 'Thriving Beyond Resilience Despite Stress: A Psychometric Evaluation of the Newly Developed Teacher Stress Scale and Teacher Thriving Scale', *Frontier Psychology,* 13, 862342. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.862342

Chen, S. (2024) 'During the Reform: How Teachers' Lived Experiences Influence Their Beliefs and Practices of Project-Based Learning', *International Journal of Educational Reform,* 0(0). DOI: 10.1177/10567879241265096

Chimbi, G. and Jita, L. (2021) 'Teachers' Life-history Narratives and Reform Policy Implementation at Classroom Level', *New Challenges to Education: Lessons from Around the World BCES Conference Books,* 19. Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED613986.pdf (Accessed: 5 January 2024).

Christensen, P. (2016) 'Critical perspectives on the ecological model: Resilience and entrepreneurship in child development', *International Journal of Early Childhood,* 48(2), pp. 135-150. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2959.7681

Christie, H., Hiscox, L. V., Halligan, S. L., and Creswell, C. (2022) 'Examining harmful impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures on parents and carers in the United Kingdom: A rapid review'. *JCPP Advances,* 2(3), e12095. DOI: 10.1002/jcv2.12095

Clandinin, D. J. (2016) *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry.* Oxon: Routledge

Clandinin, D.J., Cave, M.T. and Berendonk, C. (2016) 'Narrative inquiry: a relational research methodology for medical education'. *Med Educ*, 51, pp. 89-96. DOI: 10.1111/medu.13136

Clandinin, D. J., and Connelley F. M. (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D. J., and Huber, J. (2010) 'Narrative inquiry'. In B. McGaw, E. Baker, and P. Peterson (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed., pp. 436-441). Elsevier. Available at: https://DOI.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-044894-7.01387-7 (Accessed: 5 January 2024).

Clandinin, D. J., and Rosiek, J. (2007) 'Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry: Borderland spaces and tensions.' In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology* (pp. 35-75). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Clapham, A. (2023) 'Examining Teaching for Mastery as an instance of 'hyperreal' cross national policy borrowing', *Oxford Review of Education*, 50(3), pp. 366–383. DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2023.2229549

Clegg, S. (1997) 'A Case Study of Accredited Training for Research Awards Supervisors through Reflective Practice', *Higher Education*, 34(4), pp. 483-498. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/3448141 (Accessed 21 April 2024).

Çoban, O. and Atasoy, R. (2020) 'Relationship between distributed leadership, teacher collaboration and organizational innovativeness', *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 9. 903. DOI: 10.11591/ijere.v9i4.20679.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2018) *Research Methods in Education (8th ed.).* London: Routledge.

Colla, R.H. and Kurtz, C.F. (2024) 'Storying Research: Exploring the Benefits of Participatory Narrative Inquiry as a Methodology for Wellbeing Research', *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology,* 9, pp. 1-20. DOI: 10.1007/s41042-024-00147-4

Collie, R. J., Shapka, J. D., and Perry, N. E. (2012) 'School climate and social–emotional learning: Predicting teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy', *Journal of Education and Psychology*, 104(4), pp. 1189-1204. DOI: 10.1037/a0029356

Collins, P. H. (1990) *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* New York: Routledge.

Colmer, K. (2017) 'Collaborative professional learning: contributing to the growth of leadership, professional identity and professionalism', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(3), pp. 436-449. DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2017.1308167

Conle, C. (2000) 'Narrative inquiry: research tool and medium for professional development', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 23(1), pp. 49-63. DOI: 10.1080/713667262

Connelly, F. M., and Clandinin, D. J. (1990) 'Stories of experience and narrative inquiry', *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), pp. 2-14. DOI: 10.2307/1176100

Connelly, F. M., and Clandinin, D. J. (2006) 'Narrative inquiry'. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, P.Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed.,pp. 477 - 487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Connolly, M., Milton, E., Davies, A. J., and Barrance, R. (2018) 'Turning heads: The impact of political reform on the professional role, identity and recruitment of head teachers in Wales', *British Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), pp. 608-625. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3450

Cordingley, P., Crisp, B., Johns, P. Perry, T., Campbell, C., Bell, M. and Bradbury, M. (2019) 'Constructing Teachers' Professional Identity, Education International Research'. Available at: http://www.ntrp.org.uk/files/publication/%5Bsite-timestamp%5D/2019_EI_Research_Constructing_Teachers_Professional_Identities_final.pdf (Accessed: 16 May 2022)

Cotter-Lockard, D. (2016) 'Edgar Schein's Organizational Culture and Leadership, as seen through the lens of Ken Wilber's AQAL Framework (and the author's eyes'). DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.2585.3680.

Craig, C. J. (2007) 'Story constellations: A narrative approach to contextualizing teachers' knowledge of school reform', *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 23, pp. 173-188. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2006.04.014

Creagh, S., Thompson, G., Mockler, N., Stacey, M., and Hogan, A. (2023) 'Workload, work intensification and time poverty for teachers and school leaders: a systematic research synthesis', *Educational Review*, *77*(2), pp. 661-680. DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2023.2196607

Crenshaw, K.W. (1989) 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics.' *University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989,* 1(8) pp.138-167. Available at: http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8 (Accessed 15 March 2024).

Creswell, J. W. (2008) *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Pearson/Merrill Prentice Hall.

Creswell, J.W. (2013) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (4th ed.).* London: SAGE.

Creswell, J. W., and Creswell, J. D. (2018) *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (5th ed.).* Los Angeles: SAGE.

Crotty, M. (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process.* London: SAGE.

Cruz-González, C., Rodríguez, C. L., and Segovia, J. D. (2021) 'A systematic review of principals' leadership identity from 1993 to 2019', *Educational Management Administration and Leadership,* 49(1), pp. 31-53. DOI: 10.1177/1741143219896053

Curren, R., Boniwell, I., Ryan, R. M., Oades, L., Brighouse, H., Unterhalter, E., Kristjánsson, K., de Ruyter, D., Macleod, C., Morris, I., and White, M. (2024) 'Finding consensus on well-being in education', *Theory and Research in Education*, 22(2), pp. 117-157. DOI: 10.1177/14778785241259852

Czerniawski, G. (2023) 'Power, positionality and practitioner research: Schoolteachers' experiences of professional doctorates in education', *British Educational Research Journal,* 49, 1372–1386. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3902

Dadaczynski K, Okan O, and Messer M. (2021) 'COVID-19 Health Literacy School Principals Survey (COVID-HL: School Principal): Questionnaire and Scale Documentation'. *Public Health Centre Fulda (PHZF) at Fulda University of Applied Sciences and Interdisciplinary Centre for Health Literacy Research (IZGK) at Bielefeld University.* DOI: 10.4119/unibi/2952552

Dadmehr, M., Karami, M., Mahram, B., and Izadi, S. (2023) 'Teachers' lived experiences of communication in curriculum planning and implementation in a centralized educational system', *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 0(0), pp. 1-20. DOI: 10.1177/10567879231211269

Dahal N., Neupane B. P., Pant B. P., Dhakal R. K., Giri D. R., Ghimire P. R., Bhandari L. P. (2024) 'Participant selection procedures in qualitative research: experiences and some points for consideration', *Frontiers in Research Metrics and Analysis,* 9, 1512747. DOI: 10.3389/frma.2024.1512747

Datnow, A., and Park, V. (2019) *Professional collaboration with purpose: Teacher learning for equitable and excellent schools.* New York: Routledge.

Davies, B., and Bansel, P. (2007) 'Neoliberalism and education', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(3), pp. 247-259. DOI:10.1080/09518390701281751

Davies, A., Morgan, A., Connolly, M. and Milton, E., (2024) 'Education in Wales since Devolution: Three Waves of Policy, and the Pressing and Reoccurring Challenge of Implementation', *Wales Journal of Education,* 26(2), pp. 23-38. DOI: 10.16922/wje.26.2.3

Day, C., and Gu, Q. (2010) *The New Lives of Teachers (1st ed.).* London: Routledge.

Day, C. and Gu, Q. (2014) *Resilient teachers, resilient schools: Building and sustaining quality in testing times.* London: Routledge.

de Oliveira, P. H., Antonio, M., Paschoalotto, C., César, F., Santos, A., de Sousa, T. B., and Nagano, M. S. (2023) 'Systematic literature review on organisational culture and strategic management in the public sector and school management', *School Leadership and Management*, 43(3), pp. 210-237. DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2023.2176483

DeCuir-Gunby, J. T., Marshall, P. L., and McCulloch, A. W. (2011) 'Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: An example from a professional development research project', *Field Methods,* 23(2), pp. 136-155. DOI: 10.1177/1525822X10388468

Denscombe, M. (2014) *The Good Research Guide: For small-scale social research projects. (5th ed.).* England: Open University Press.

Department for Education (2019). *School and college staff wellbeing: evidence from England, the UK and comparable sectors.* Available at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5fbbe98d8fa8f559da0f168e/Wellbeing-literature-review_final18052020_ap.pdf (Accessed 21 October 2021)

Department for Education and Skills (2021) *Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being.* Available at:
https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2021-03/framework-on-embedding-a-whole-school-approach-to-emotional-and-mental-well-being.pdf
(Accessed 21 October 2021)

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

de los Ríos, C. and Patel, L. (2023) ''Positions', positionality, and relationality in educational research', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, pp. 1-12 DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2023.2268036

Donaldson G (2015) *Successful futures: Independent review of curriculum and assessment arrangements in Wales.* Wales, UK: Crown.

Donaldson, G. (2018). *A learning inspectorate: Independent review of Estyn.* Wales: Estyn.

Drake, P. (2010) 'Grasping at methodological understanding: a cautionary tale from insider research', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 33(1), pp. 85-99. DOI: 10.1080/17437271003597592

Dudley, P. (2013) 'Teacher learning in Lesson Study: what interaction-level discourse analysis revealed about how teachers utilized imagination, tacit knowledge of teaching and fresh evidence of pupils learning, to develop practice knowledge and so enhance their pupils' learning', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 34, pp. 107-121. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2013.04.006

DuFour, R. (2004) 'What is a professional learning community?', *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), pp. 6-11. Available at: https://www.scirp.org/reference/referencespapers?referenceid=1818223 (Accessed: 21 August 2022).

DuFour, R., and Eaker, R. (1998) *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement.* California: Solution Tree Press.

Dunaway, D. M., Kim, D., and Szad, E. R. (2012) 'Perceptions of the Purpose and Value of the School Improvement Plan Process', *The Educational Forum,* 76(2), pp. 158-173, DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2011.652490

Du Plessis, A. and McDonagh, K. (2021) 'The out-of-field phenomenon and leadership for wellbeing: Understanding concerns for teachers, students and education partnerships', *International Journal of Educational Research,* 106, pp. 1-12. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijer.2020.101724

Dwyer, S. C., and Buckle, J. L. (2009) 'The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), pp. 54-63. DOI: 10.1177/160940690900800105

Edwards-Groves, C. and Grootenboer, P. (2021) 'Conceptualising five dimensions of relational trust: implications for middle leadership', *School Leadership and Management*, 41(3), pp. 260-283. DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2021.1915761.

Egan, D. (2017). *After PISA: A way forward for education in Wales.* Wales: Bevan Foundation.

Egan, D., Longville, J., and Milton, E. (2019) 'Graduate recruitment: Teaching and other professions.' *A Research report for the Education Workforce Council. Wales: Cardiff Metropolitan University and Cardiff University.* Available at: https://www.ewc.wales/site/index.php/en/documents/research-and-statistics/research-reports

/published-research/2030-graduate-recruitment-teaching-and-other-professions-e/file.html (Accessed 3 March 2022)

Engels, N., Hotton, G., Devos, G., Bouckenooghe, D., and Aelterman, A. (2008) 'Principals in schools with a positive school culture', *Educational Studies,* 34(3), pp. 159-174, DOI: 10.1080/03055690701811263

Ereaut, G. and Whiting, R. (2008) 'What do we mean by 'wellbeing'? And why might it matter?' *Research Report. UK: Department for Children, Schools and Families and Linguistic Landscapes.* Available at: https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/8572/1/dcsf-rw073%20v2.pdf (Accessed 5 February 2022).

Estyn (2025) Developing our new inspection process. *Available at: https://estyn*.gov.wales/developing-our-new-inspection-process/ (Accessed 18 July 2025).

Estyn (2023) *Annual Plan 2023-2024*. Cardiff: Estyn.

Evans, G. (2022) 'Back to the future? Reflections on three phases of education policy reform in Wales and their implications for teachers', *Journal of Educational Change,* 23, pp. 371-396. DOI: 10.1007/s10833-021-09422-6

Evans, G. (2023) 'A new dawn or false hope? Exploring the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales', *Education Inquiry,* pp. 1-15. DOI: 10.1080/200045 08.2023.2297506

Evans, G. (2025) 'An inspector calls! School leaders' perceptions of inspection in Wales', *Policy Futures in Education,* 23(5), pp. 895-915.DOI: 10.1177/14782103251320826

Fernandez, C., and Yoshida M. (2004) *Lesson Study: A Japanese Approach to Improving Mathematics Teaching and Learning.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Fitzgerald, H., Stride, A., and Enright, E. (2020) 'Messy methods: Making sense of participatory research with young people in PE and sport', *European Physical Education Review,* 27(3), pp. 421-435. DOI: 10.1177/1356336X20953462

Fitzsimons, S. and Smith, D. S. (2025) '''Don't do anything special for us coming': the mental health impact of Ofsted inspections on teacher educators in England'', *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 55(1), pp. 93-111. DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2025.2451280.

Flick, U. (2018) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research (6th ed).* London: SAGE.

Floyd, A., and Arthur, L. (2012) 'Researching from within: external and internal ethical engagement', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 35(2), pp. 171-180. DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2012.670481

Ford, T. G., Olsen, J.J.,Khojasteh, J., Ware, J. K. and and Urick, A. (2019) 'Effects of Leader Support for Teacher Psychological Needs on Teacher Burnout, Commitment, and Intent to Leave', *Journal of Educational Administration,* 57(6), pp. 615-634. DOI: 10.1108/JEA-09-2018-0185

Fox, A. and Allan, J. (2014) 'Doing reflexivity: moments of unbecoming and becoming', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education,* 37(1), pp. 101-112, DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2013.787407

Freiberg, H. J., and Stein, T. A. (1999) 'Measuring, improving and sustaining healthy learning environments'. In H. J. Freiberg (Ed.), *School climate: Measuring, improving and sustaining healthy learning environments (pp. 11–29).* Philadelphia, PA: Falmer Press

Fullan, M. (2001) *The new meaning of educational change (3rd ed.)*. New York and London: Teachers College Press and RoutledgeFalmer.

Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (1991) 'Working together for your school: Strategies for developing interactive professionalism in your school' *Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Administration.* Available at: https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED342128.pdf (Accessed 21 February 2023).

Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (2016) *Bringing the profession back in: Call to action.* Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Fullan, M. and Edwards, M. (2022) *Spirit work and the science of collaboration.* Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Fullan, M. and Quinn, J. (2020) *How do disruptive innovators prepare today's students to be tomorrow's workforce?, Deep learning: Transforming systems to prepare tomorrow citizens.* DOI: 10.18235/0002959

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales (2015) *Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015).* Available at:

https://futuregenerations.wales/discover/about-future-generations-commissioner/future-generations-act-2015/ (Accessed 13 August 2025).

García-Holgado, A., and José, G. P. F. (2017) 'A Metamodel Proposal for Developing Learning Ecosystems'. In *Learning and Collaboration Technologies. Technology-Rich Environments for Learning and Collaboration,* edited by P. Zaphiris and A. Ioannou, 100–109. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-58509-3_10.

Gelir, I. (2023) 'The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on preschool teachers' identity', *Early Years,* 44(3–4), pp. 751-764. DOI: 10.1080/09575146.2023.2236324

Glesne, C. (2011) *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction (4th ed.).* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Glover, A., and Hutchinson, S. (2022) 'Delivering education reform in Wales: a flexible route into teaching', *Education Inquiry,* 14(4), pp. 442-457. DOI: 10.1080/20004508.2022.2051822

Golding, T., and Place, C. (2023) 'Curriculum design: Purpose, process and agency', *Buckingham Journal of Education,* 4(1), pp. 21-27. DOI:10.5750/tbje.v4i1.2138

Gómez-Leal, R., Holzer, A. A., Bradley, C., Fernández-Berrocal, P., and Patti, J. (2022) 'The relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership in school leaders: a systematic review', *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 52(1), pp. 1-21, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2021.1927987

Goodson, I.F. (2005) *Learning, Curriculum and Life Politics: The Selected Works of Ivor F. Goodson (1st ed.).* Oxon: Routledge.

Goodson, I. F. (2013) *Developing Narrative Theory: Life Histories and Personal Representation.* Oxon: Routledge

Goodson, I. F., and Gill, S. R. (2011) *Narrative Pedagogy: Life History and Learning.* New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Goodson, I. F., and Sikes, P. (2010) *Life History Research in Educational Settings: Learning from Lives.* Berkshire: Open University Press.

Gouëdard, P., Kools, M., and George, B. (2023) 'The impact of schools as learning organisations on teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction: a cross-country analysis', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 34(3), pp. 331-357. DOI: 10.1080/09243453.2023.2196081

Gray, D. E. (2018) *Doing Research in the Real World (4th ed).* London: SAGE.

Greene, M. J. (2014) 'On the Inside Looking In: Methodological Insights and Challenges in Conducting Qualitative Insider Research', *The Qualitative Report*, 19(29), pp. 1-13. https://DOI.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1106

Greenway, C. Ryder, N. and Eleri, S. (2025) 'From policy to practice: Education practitioners' engagement with Wales' framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental health and well-being', *Pastoral Care in Education*, pp. 1-17. DOI: 10.1080/02643944.2025.2540429

Griffiths, J. and Jones, G., (2024) 'Educational Leadership in Wales Since Devolution', *Wales Journal of Education,* 26(2), pp. 153-170. DOI: https://DOI.org/10.16922/wje.26.2.11

Grix, J. (2019) *The Foundations of Research.* London: Macmillan International.

Hallinger, P., Heck, R. and Murphy, J. (2014) 'Teacher evaluation and school improvement: An analysis of the evidence', *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, 26(1), pp. 5-28. DOI: /10.1007/s11092-013-9179-5.

Halquist, D., and Musanti, S. I. (2010) 'Critical incidents and reflection: turning points that challenge the researcher and create opportunities for knowing', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 23(4), pp. 449-461, DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2010.492811

Hamilton, M. (2020) 'Resisting Neoliberalism in Education: Resources of Hope'. Available at: https://wp.lancs.ac.uk/literacy-research-centre/2020/01/24/resisting-neoliberalism-in-education-resources-of-hope/#:~:text=We%20understand%20the%20defining%20features,responsibilities%20(Olssen%2C%202009) (Accessed 6 November 2024).

Hamilton, M. L., Smith, M., and Worthington, K. (2008) 'Fitting the Methodology with the Research: An exploration of narrative, self-study and auto-ethnography', *Studying Teacher Education*, 4(1), pp. 17-28, DOI: 10.1080/17425960801976321

Hannon, V. and Peterson, A. (2017) *Thrive: Schools reinvented for the real challenges we face*. London: Innovation Unit.

Hannon, V. and Peterson A. (2021) *Thrive: The purpose of schools in a changing world.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hannon, V., Thomas, L., Ward, S. and Beresford, T. (2019) 'Local Learning Ecosystems: Emerging Models'. Available at:
https://www.wise-qatar.org/app/uploads/2019/05/wise_report-rr.1.2019-web.pdf (Accessed: 13 August 2024).

Hargreaves, A. (1998) 'The emotional practice of teaching', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 14(8), pp. 835-854. DOI: 10.1016/S0742-051X(98)00025-0

Hargreaves, A. (2003) *Teaching in the knowledge society.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Hargreaves, A. (2007) 'Sustainable professional learning communities'. *In Professional learning communities, divergence, depth and dilemmas,* Edited by: Stoll, L., and Seashore, L, K. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hargreaves, A., and Fullan, M. (2012) *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school.* New York and London: Teachers College Press.

Hargreaves, A. (2019) 'Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects', *Teachers and Teaching,* 25(5), pp. 603-621. DOI: 10.1080/13540602.2019.1639499

Hargreaves, A. and O'Connor, M. (2018) *Collaborative Professional When Teaching Together Means Learning For All*. California: Corwin.

Harris, A., Azorín, C., and Jones, M. (2021) 'Network leadership: a new educational imperative?', *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 26(5), p. 919-935. DOI: 10.1080/13603124.2021.1919320

Harris, A., Elder, Z., Jones, M. S., and Cooze, A. (2022) 'Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales: Exploring the Evidence', *Wales Journal of Education*, 24(1). DOI: 10.16922/wje.24.1.3

Harris, A. and Jones, M. (2017) 'Professional Learning Communities: A Strategy for School and System Improvement?', *Wales Journal of Education,* 19 pp. 16-39. DOI: 10.16922/wje.19.1.2

Harris, A. and Jones, M. (2020) ''Exploring the leadership knowledge base: evidence', implications, and challenges for educational leadership in Wales', *School Leadership and Management,* 41(1–2), pp. 41–53. DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2020.1789856.

Harris, A., and Jones, M. (2023) 'The importance of school leadership? What we know', *School Leadership and Management,* 43(5), pp. 449-453, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2023.2287806

Hascher, T. and Waber, J. (2021) 'Teacher well-being: A systematic review of the research literature from the year 2000–2019', *Educational Research Review,* 34. DOI: 10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100411

Hascher, T., Beltman S., and Mansfield, C. (2021) 'Teacher wellbeing and resilience: towards an integrative model', *Educational Research*, 63(4), pp. 416-439, DOI: 10.1080/00131881.2021.1980416

Heinla, E., and Kuurme, T. (2022) 'The impact of school culture, school climate, and teachers' job satisfaction on the teacher-student relationship: a case study in four Estonian schools', *Research Papers in Education*, 39(3), pp. 439-465. DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2022.2150883

Ho, D., Lee, M. and Teng, Y. (2016) 'Exploring the relationship between school-level teacher qualifications and teachers' perceptions of school-based professional learning community practices', *Teaching and Teacher Education*,54, pp. 32-43. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.005.

Holmes, A. G. D. (2020) 'Researcher Positionality - A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research - A New Researcher Guide', *Shanlax International Journal of Education,* 8(4), pp. 1-10. DOI: 10.34293/ education.v8i4.3232

Hord, S. M. (2004). *Learning together, leading together: Changing schools through professional learning communities.* Teachers College Press.

Hord, S. M. (2009) 'Professional learning communities', *Journal of Staff Development*, 30(1), pp. 40-43. Available at: http://www.ecap-videos.ca/ecap/resources/Hord2009.pdf (Accessed: 5 May 2022)

Horn, I. S., and Kane, B. D. (2015) 'Opportunities for professional learning in mathematics teacher workgroup conversations: Relationships to instructional expertise', *The Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 24(3), pp. 373-418. DOI: 10.1080/10508406.2015.1034865

Hughes, S. (2023) 'Teaching matters'. Available at: https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/teaching-matters/ (Accessed 14 October 2024).

Hulme, M., Beauchamp, G., Wood, J., and Bignell, C. (2025) 'Workload intensification and wellbeing among primary school teachers in Scotland', *Education 3-13*, pp. 1-14. DOI: 10.1080/03004279.2024.2448509

Hulme, M., Taylor, L. and McFlynn, P., (2024) 'Devolved education policymaking in the UK: a four jurisdictions perspective', *Wales Journal of Education,* 26(2), pp. 4-22. DOI: 10.16922/wje.26.2.2

Hutt, M. (2020) *Status Anxiety: Secondary Teachers' Narratives of Trust, Accountability and Autonomy.* PhD Thesis. University of South Wales. Available at: https://pure.southwales.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/10398763/Portfolio_Final_Combined_MHT.pdf (Accessed: 14 August 2022).

Hutt, M., and Lewis, N. (2021) 'Ready for reform? Narratives of accountability from teachers and education leaders in Wales', *School Leadership and Management*, 41(4-5), pp. 470-487, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2021.1942823

Hutt, M., Smith, K. and Jones, K., (2024) 'Professional learning in education: policy and practice in Wales since devolution', *Wales Journal of Education,* 26(2), pp. 39-53. DOI: 10.16922/wje.26.2.4

Hwa, Y. Y. (2022) ''Our system fits us': comparing teacher accountability, motivation, and sociocultural context in Finland and Singapore', C*omparative Education*, 58(4), pp. 542-561, DOI: 10.1080/03050068.2022.2102754

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001) 'The realities of out-of-field teaching', *Educational Leadership*, 58(8), pp. 42-45. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/234770615_The_Realities_of_Out-of-Field_Teaching (Accessed: 14 August 2022).

Jarden, A. and Roache, A. (2023) 'What Is Wellbeing?', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health,* 20(6), 5006. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20065006.

Jerrim, J. Sims, S., Taylor, H. and Allen, R. (2021) 'Has the mental health and wellbeing of teachers in England changed over time? New evidence from three datasets', *Oxford Review of Education,* 47(6), pp. 805-825. DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2021.1902795

Johnson, M., and Coleman, V. (2024) 'Teachers' research diaries - reflection and reconnection in times of social isolation', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 47(1), pp. 79-92. DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2023.2231857

Jones, M., Azorín, C., Chapman C. and Harris, A. (2023) 'Leading professional networks: different perspectives', *School Leadership and Management*, 43(1), pp. 1-7, DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2023.2175564.

Jovchelovitch, S. and Bauer, M. W. (2000) *Narrative interviewing*. London: LSE Research Online. Available at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/2633 (Accessed 16 August 2024).

Jukić, D. (2022) 'The role of teacher and organizational culture in school management', *Strategic Management,* 27(0), p. 7. DOI: 10.5937/StraMan2200009J

Kartch, F. (2017) 'Narrative interviewing'. *In The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods (Vol. 4, pp. 1073-1075)*. London: SAGE Publications.

Katzenbach, J. R., and Smith, D. K. (2005) 'The discipline of teams', *Harvard Business Review,* 83, pp. 152-170. Available at: https://hbr.org/1993/03/the-discipline-of-teams-2 (Accessed 16 August 2024).

Kelchtermans, G. (2006) 'Teacher collaboration and collegiality as workplace conditions: A review', *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik,* 52, pp. 220-237. DOI: 10.25656/01:4454

Kelchtermans, G. (2009) 'Who I am in how I teach is the message: self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection', *Teachers and Teaching,* 15(2), pp. 257-272. DOI: 10.1080/13540600902875332.

Kelly, L. (2023) *Reimagining the diary: reflective practice as a positive tool for educator wellbeing.* Woodbridge: John Catt Educational Ltd.

Kenny, J. (2009) 'Work-based research in a large organisation: the transformation from change agent to researcher', *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 14(4), pp. 369-385. DOI: 10.1080/13596740903360943

Kensington-Miller, B. (2021). 'My attention shifted from the material I was teaching to student learning': The impact of a community of practice on teacher development for new international academics. *Professional Development in Education,* 47(5), pp. 870-882. DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2019.1677746

Kern, M., Waters, L., Adler, A., and White, M. (2014) 'Assessing employee wellbeing in schools using a multifaceted approach: associations with physical health, life satisfaction, and professional thriving,' *Psychology*, 5, pp. 500-513. DOI: 10.4236/psych.2014.56060

Kidger, J., Turner, N., Hollingworth, W., Evans, R., Bell, S., Brockman, R., Copeland, L., Fisher, H., Harding, S., Powell, J., Araya, R., Campbell, R., Ford, T., Gunnell, D., Murphy, S., and Morris, R. (2021) 'An intervention to improve teacher well-being support and training to support students in UK high schools (the WISE study): A cluster randomised controlled trial', *PLoS Med,* 18(11). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pmed.1003847.

Kim, L, E., Oxley, L., and Asbury, K. (2021) 'My brain feels like a browser with 100 tabs open: A longitudinal study of teachers' mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, pp. 1-20. DOI: 10.1111/bjep.12450

Knoff, H. M. (2007) *Best practices in strategic planning, organizational development, and school effectiveness.* Little Rock, AR: Project Achieve.

Kools, M. and Stoll L. (2016), "What Makes a School a Learning Organisation?", *OECD Education Working Papers, No. 137.* Paris: OECD Publishing.

Kulavuz-Onal, D., and Tatar, S. (2017) 'Teacher burnout and participation in professional learning activities: Perspectives from university English language instructors in Turkey', *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies,* 13(1), p. 283. Available at: https://eric.ed.gov/contentdelivery/servlet/ERICServlet?accno=EJ1140607 (Accessed: 5 May 2022)

Kyriacou, C. (1987) 'Teacher stress and burnout: An international review', *Educational Research,* 29(2), pp. 146-152. DOI: 10.1080/0013188870290207

Lainson, K., Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2019) 'Being both narrative practitioner and academic researcher: A reflection on what thematic analysis has to offer narratively informed research.', *International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. Available at:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341025176_Being_both_narrative_practitioner_and _academic_researcher_A_reflection_on_what_thematic_analysis_has_to_offer_narratively_inf ormed_research (Accessed: 17 August 2024)

Lanford, M. and Tierney, W. (2019) *Life History Methods*. London: SAGE.

Latta, M. M., and Kim, J. (2011) 'Investing in the curricular lives of educators: Narrative inquiry as pedagogical medium,' *Journal of Curriculum Studies,* 43(5), pp. 679-695, DOI: 10.1080/00220272.2011.609566

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Learning Policy Institute. (2018) *Understanding teacher shortages: 2018 update.* Available at: https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/understanding-teacher-shortages-interactive (Accessed 5 February 2022)

Lee, M., and Louis, K. S. (2019) 'Mapping a strong school culture and linking it to sustainable school improvement', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 81, pp. 84-96. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2019.02.001.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A. and Hopkins, D. (2019) 'Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited', *School Leadership and Management,* 40(1), pp. 5-22. DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077.

Lewis, C. and Takahashi, A. (2013) 'Facilitating curriculum reforms through lesson study', *International Journal for Lesson and Learning Studies,* 2(3), pp. 207-217. Available at: https://DOI.org/10.1108/IJLLS-01-2013-0006 (Accessed: 5 May 2022)

Lewis, C., and Tsuchida, I. (1998) 'A lesson is like a swiftly flowing river: Research lessons and the improvement of Japanese education', *American Educator,* 14(17), pp. 50-52. DOI: 10.1177/136548029900200117

Lewis, H. (2015) *Written Statement - New deal for the education workforce.* Available at: https://www.gov.wales/written-statement-new-deal-education-workforce#:~:text=We%20will% 20establish%20career%20long,core%20to%20the%20New%20Deal (Accessed 13 August 2025).

Lewis, M. J., and Quinnell, R. (2024) 'Telling tales out of school: considerations of 'insider' research in higher education', *Teaching in Higher Education*, 29(7), pp. 1832-1844. DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2024.2354263

Liljeström, A., J. Enkenberg, and S. Pöllänen (2014) 'The Case of Design-oriented Pedagogy: What Students' Digital Video Stories Say about Emerging Learning Ecosystems', *Education and Information Technologies,* 19, pp. 583-601. DOI: 10.1007/s10639-013-9284-6

Lin Q (2022) 'The relationship between distributed leadership and teacher innovativeness: Mediating roles of teacher autonomy and professional collaboration', *Frontiers Psychology*, 13, 948152. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.948152

Little, J. W.. (1990) 'The Persistence of Privacy: Autonomy and Initiative in Teachers' Professional Relations', *Teachers College Record*, 91(4). DOI: 10.1177/016146819009100403.

Lomos, C., Hofman, R. H., and Bosker, R. J. (2011) 'Professional communities and student achievement - a meta-analysis', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement,* 22(2), pp. 121-148. DOI: 10.1080/09243453.2010.550467

London, M. (2001) *Leadership development: Paths to self-insight and professional growth.* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Long, S. J., Hawkins, J., Murphy, S., and Moore, G. (2023) 'School health and wellbeing and national education system reform: A qualitative study', *British Educational Research Journal,* 49, pp. 674-692. DOI: 10.1002/berj.3861

Loughland, T., and Ryan, M. (2022) 'Beyond the measures: the antecedents of teacher collective efficacy in professional learning', *Professional Development in Education,* 48(2), pp. 343-352. DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2020.1711801

Mannix-McNamara, P., Hickey, N., MacCurtain, S., and Blom, N. (2021) 'The Dark Side of School Culture', *Societies 2021*, 11(87). https://DOI.org/10.3390/soc11030087

Mansfield, C., and Thompson, G. (2017) 'The value of collaborative rounds for teacher professional learning in Australia', *Professional Development in Education,* 43 (4), pp. 666-684. DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2016.1216883

Marangio, K., and Heyting, E. (2023) 'Teachers' experiences of support for curriculum making a new subject, Psychology', *The Curriculum Journal, 2023,* 34 pp. 633-650. https://DOI.org/10.1002/curj.203

Marchant, E. (2022) *COVID-19 School Leadership Study Full Report: Wales 2022.* Available at: https://happen-wales.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/FINAL-COVID-19-School-Leadership-Study-Full-Report-1.pdf (Accessed: 29 March 2024).

Marchant, E., Todd, C., James, M., Crick, T., Dwyer, R. and Brophy, S. (2021) 'Primary school staff perspectives of school closures due to COVID-19, experiences of schools reopening and recommendations for the future: A qualitative survey in Wales', *PLoS ONE,* 16(12). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0260396

Marshall, D. T., Smith, N. E., Love, S. M., Neugebauer, N. M., and Shannon, D. M. (2024) '"At Some Point We're Going to Reach Our Limit": Understanding COVID-19's impact on teacher burnout and subjective mental health', *Psychology in the Schools,* 61, pp. 793-812. DOI: 10.1002/pits.23084

Mc Brearty, S. (2023) *Teacher Wellbeing Index 2023.* UK: Education Support.

McCallum F. and Price D. (2016) *Nurturing wellbeing development in education.* New York: Routledge.

McCallum, F., Price, D., Graham A. and Morrison, A. (2017) 'Teacher Wellbeing: A review of the literature'. *Association of Independent Schools of NSW: Sydney.* Available at: https://apo.org.au/node/80304 (Accessed 2 May 2022)

McLeod, S. A. (2019) *Constructivism as a theory for teaching and learning*. Available at: https://www.simplypsychology.org/constructivism.html (Accessed 28 May 2022)

Macqueen, S. and Patterson, C. (2021) 'Reflexivity in a longitudinal narrative inquiry: in pursuit of clarity of interpretations', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education,* 44(2), pp. 125-134, DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2020.1724279

Mercer, J. (2007) 'The Challenges of Insider Research in Educational Institutions: Wielding a Double-Edged Sword and Resolving Delicate Dilemmas', *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(1), pp. 1-17. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/4618693 (Accessed 13 August 2024).

Mellor, N. (2001) 'Messy method: the unfolding story', *Educational Action Research*, 9(3), pp. 465-484, DOI: 10.1080/09650790100200166

Merriam, S. B., Johnson-Bailey, J., Lee, M., Kee, Y., Ntseane, G., and Muhamad, M. (2001) 'Power and positionality: negotiating insider/outsider status within and across cultures', *International Journal of Lifelong Education,* 20(5), pp. 405-416, DOI: 10.1080/02601370120490

Michaelson J., Mahony S., Schifferes J. (2012) *Measuring Wellbeing: A Guide for Practitioners.* London: New Economics Foundation.

Mikušová, M., Klabusayová, N., and Meier, V. (2023) 'Evaluation of organisational culture dimensions and their change due to the pandemic', *Evaluation and program planning,* 97, 102246. DOI: 10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2023.102246

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., and Saldana, J. (2020) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook (4th ed.).* Los Angeles: SAGE.

Miller, P., Potter, I., Bennett, K., Carter, T. S., Hylton-Fraser, K., WilliamsonTeape, K., and Nelson-Mayne, S. (2015) 'Crossing the Border: Reconstructing and Re-Aligning Teacher and Principal Identities through a Study Tour', *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education*, 21(1), pp. 31-47. DOI: 10.7227/JACE.21.1.4

Minott, M. A. (2008) 'Valli's Typology Of Reflection And The Analysis Of Pre-Service Teachers' Reflective Journals', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education,* 33(5). DOI: 10.14221/ajte.2008v33n5.4

Morrison-Love, D., Singh, S., Makara-Fuller, K., Evans, G., Farrar, J., Patrick, F., Ryder, N., Borquez-Sanchez, E., Sharpling, E., Valdera-Gil, F. and Wiseman-Orr, L. (2023) *Camau I'r Dyfodol. Curriculum for Wales: Evolving Understandings of Progression in Learning.* University of Wales Trinity Saint David. Available from: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/media/2445/download?attachment (Accessed: 15 August 2025).

Mortari, L. (2015) 'Reflectivity in Research Practice: An Overview of Different Perspectives', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 14(5). DOI: 10.1177/1609406915618045.

Moustakas, C. E. (1994) *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Murphy, J. F., and Louis, K. S. (2018) *Positive school leadership: Building Capacity and Strengthening Relationships.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Nadar, S. (2014) '"Stories are data with Soul" - lessons from black feminist epistemology', *Agenda*, 28(1), pp. 18-28. DOI: 10.1080/10130950.2014.871838

Nguyen, L. T., and Tuamsuk, K. (2022) 'Digital learning ecosystem at educational institutions: A content analysis of scholarly discourse', *Cogent Education*, 9(1). DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2022.2111033

Norman, T. (2020) 'Methods of a Narrative Inquirist: Storying the Endured Teacher Identity', *The Qualitative Report*, 25(11), pp. 3962-3975. DOI: 10.46743/2160-3715/2020.4320

OECD (2018) *Developing Schools as Learning Organisations in Wales, Implementing Education Policies.* Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD (2020) *Achieving the New Curriculum for Wales, Implementing Education Policies.* Paris: OECD Publishing.

OECD (2025) *Constructing Scenarios for the Future of Teaching in Wales, Educational Research and Innovation.* Paris: OECD Publishing.

Ofsted (2019) *Teacher wellbeing at work in schools and further education providers.* Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/819314/Teacher_well-being_report_110719F.pdf (Accessed 10 May 2022)

Ontario Ministry of Education (2014) *Achieving excellence: A renewed vision for education in Ontario.* Available at: https://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/UserFiles/File/Policy_Monitor/ON_01_04_14_-_renewedVision.pdf (Accessed 10 May 2022)

Oxford English Dictionary (2014) Available at: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/well-being_n?tab=meaning_and_use#14893302 (Accessed 10 May 2022)

Ozga, J. (2000) *Policy Research in Educational Settings: Contested Terrain.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Ozga, J. (2021) 'Problematising policy: the development of (critical) policy sociology', *Critical Studies in Education,* 62(3), pp. 290-305, DOI: 10.1080/17508487.2019.1697718

Pang, M.F. and Reimers, F.M. (2021) *Learning to build better futures for education: Lessons from educational innovation.* Cham: Springer.

Patton, M. Q. (2015) *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods, (4th ed.).* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Peacock, J. L., and Holland, D. C. (1993) 'The Narrated Self: Life Stories in Process', *Ethos*, 21(4), pp. 367-383. DOI: 10.1525/eth.1993.21.4.02a00010

Philipsen, B., Tondeur, J., Pynoo, B., Vanslambrouck, S., and Zhu, C. (2019) 'Examining lived experiences in a professional development program for online teaching: A hermeneutic phenomenological approach', *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology,* 35(5), pp. 46-59. DOI: 10.14742/ajet.4469

Phillippo, K. L., and Nolan, J. L. (2024) 'White-on-white research: a study of white qualitative researcher positionality among white participants', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education,* 37(2), pp. 545-563, DOI: 10.1080/09518398.2022.2061728

Piaget, J. (1972) 'Intellectual evolution from adolescence to adulthood', *Human Development,* 16, pp. 346–370. DOI: 10.1159/000271225

Pino Gavidia, L. A., and Adu, J. (2022) 'Critical Narrative Inquiry: An Examination of a Methodological Approach', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* 21. DOI: 10.1177/16094069221081594

Podolsky, A., Kini, T., Darling-Hammond, L., and Bishop, J. (2019) 'Strategies for attracting and retaining educators: What does the evidence say?', *Education Policy Analysis Archive*, 27(38), pp. 1-47. DOI: 10.14507/epaa.27.3722

Price, D. and McCallum, F. (2015) 'Ecological influences on teachers' well-being and "fitness"', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education,* 43(3), pp. 195-209, DOI: 10.1080/1359866X.2014.932329

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., and Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach.* London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Priestley, M. and Drew, V. (2019). 'Professional Enquiry: an ecological approach to developing teacher agency'. In D. Godfrey, and C. Brown (Eds.), *An eco-system for research-engaged schools. Reforming education through research*. London: Routledge.

Priestley, M., Alvunger, D., Hizli Alkan, S., Philippou, S. and Soini, T. (2024) 'Understanding Curriculum Making by teachers: implications for policy as text and as practice'. In D. Wyse, V. Baumfield, N. Mockler and M. Reardon (Eds.), *The BERA SAGE International Handbook of Research-Informed Education Practice and Policy*. London: Sage.

Pressley, T. (2021) 'Factors contributing to teacher burnout during COVID-19', *Educational Researcher,* 50, pp. 325–327. DOI: https://DOI.org/10.3102/0013189X211004138

Pring, R. (2015) *Philosophy of Educational Research (3rd ed.).* London: Bloomsbury.

Proudfoot, K. and Boyd, P. (2022) 'Teachers' constitutive motivations for professional learning in England's context of high-stakes accountability', *Professional Development in Education*, 51(2), pp. 353-367.DOI: 10.1080/19415257.2022.2151038

Rahman, M. S. (2023) 'From fried egg to mashed potato and lentils: navigating positionalities in ethnographic research in a global south context', I*nternational Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 46(4), pp. 408-420, DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2023.2182876

Riessman, C. (1993) *Narrative analysis: qualitative research methods*. Boston University: SAGE

Richards, J. (2012) 'Teacher stress and coping strategies: A national snapshot', *The Educational Forum,* 76(3), pp. 299-316. DOI: 10.1080/00131725.2012.682837

Robins, R. W. (2021). 'Naturalizing the self'. In O. P. John and R. W. Robins (Eds.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (4th ed., pp. 561-586). UK: Guilford Press.

Rogers, M., Dovigo, F., and Doan, L. (2020) 'Educator identity in a neoliberal context: recognising and supporting early childhood education and care educators', *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal,* 28(6), pp. 806-822, DOI: 10.1080/1350293X.2020.1836583

Roy, S., Cordingley, P., Nusche, D., and Timperley, H. (2021) 'Teachers' professional learning study: Diagnostic report for Wales', *OECD Education Policy Perspectives,* 33. DOI: 10.1787/caf912c7-en.

Russell, G. M., and Kelly, N. H. (2002) 'Research as interacting dialogic processes: Implications for reflexivity', *Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3). DOI: https://DOI.org/10.17169/fqs-3.3.831

Sachs, J. (2005) 'Teacher education and the development of professional identity: Learning to be a teacher'. In PM Denicolo & M Kompf (eds), *Connecting Policy and Practice: Challenges for Teaching and Learning in Schools and Universities.* London: Routledge.

Saidin, K. and Yaacob, A. (2016) 'Insider researchers: Challenges and opportunities', *International Seminar on Generating Knowledge Through Research, Universiti Utara Malaysia,* Malaysia, 25-27 October. DOI: 10.21070/picecrs.v1i1.563

Salas, E., Burke, S. C., and Cannon-Bowers, J. A. (2000) 'Teamwork: Emerging principles'. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 2, pp. 339-356. DOI: 10.1111/1468-2370.00046.

Sancho-Gil, J. M. and Domingo-Coscollola, M. (2022) 'Expanding perspectives on secondary education teachers' learning ecosystems: implications for teachers' professional development', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 45(3), pp. 414-434, DOI: 10.1080/02619768.2020.1832985

Savill-Smith, C., and Scanlan, D. (2020) 'Teacher Wellbeing Index 2020', *Education Support.* Available at: https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/yfrhfjca/teacher_wellbeing_index_2020.pdf (Accessed 3 March 2022)

Savill-Smith, C., and Scanlan, D. (2022) 'Teacher Wellbeing Index 2022', *Education Support.* Available at: https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/zoga2r13/teacher-wellbeing-index-2022.pdf (Accessed 3 March 2022)

Savvides, N., Al-Youssef, J., Colin, M., and Garrido, C. (2014) 'Journeys into Inner/Outer Space: Reflections on the Methodological Challenges of Negotiating Insider/Outsider Status in International Educational Research', *Research in Comparative and International Education,* 9(4), pp. 412-425. DOI: 10.2304/rcie.2014.9.4.412

Schein, E. (1985) *Organizational culture and leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E. (1999) *The corporate culture survival guide.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E.H. (2004) *Organizational Culture and Leadership. 3rd Edition.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schein, E. H. (2010) *Organizational Culture and Leadership. 4th Edition.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Schleicher, A. (2018) *Valuing our teachers and raising their status: How communities can help.* Paris: OECD.

See, B., Wardle, L., and Collie, P. (2020) *Teachers' wellbeing and workload during Covid-19 lockdown.* Available at: https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/1169019 (Accessed 13 April 2023).

Seligman, M., E., P. (2011) *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being - and How to Achieve Them.* London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

Selleck, C. and Barakos, E. (2023) 'A reflexive approach to researching bilingualism in Wales: language, legitimacy and positionality', *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development,* 44(8), pp. 672-688, DOI: 10.1080/01434632.2023.2195382

Sergiovanni, T.J. (2006) *The principalship: A reflective practice perspective.* New York: Pearson Education.

Shapira, N. and Amzalag, M. (2025) 'Do teachers promote social-emotional skills? The gap between statements and actual behavior', *Cogent Education,* 12(1). DOI: 10.1080/2331186X.2025.2465919.

Sharratt, L. (2016) 'Setting the Table for Collaborative Professionalism', *Principal Connections,* 20(1). Available at: https://coeleveld.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/collective_professionalism.pdf (Accessed 10 May 2022)

Shepherd, M. (2006) 'Using a learning journal to improve professional practice: a journey of personal and professional self-discovery', *Reflective Practice*, 7(3), pp. 333-348, DOI: 10.1080/14623940600837517

Shirley, D., Hargreaves, A., and Washington-Wangia, S. (2020) 'The sustainability and unsustainability of teachers' and leaders' well-being', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 92. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2019.102987

Shufutinsky, A., (2020) 'Employing use of self for transparency, rigor, trustworthiness, and credibility in qualitative organizational research methods', *OD practitioner*, 52(1), pp. 50-58. Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/340539936_Employing_Use_of_Self_for_Transparency_Rigor_Trustworthiness_and_Credibility_in_Qualitative_Organizational_Research_Methods (Accessed 2 June 2022)

Skaalvik, E. M. and Skaalvik, S. (2015) 'Job Satisfaction, Stress and Coping Strategies in the Teaching Profession - What Do Teachers Say?', *International Education Studies*, 8. DOI: 10.5539/ies.v8n3p181

Skaalvik, E. M. and Skaalvik, S. (2021) 'Teacher burnout: relations between dimensions of burnout, perceived school context, job satisfaction and motivation for teaching', *Teachers and Teaching*, pp. 1-15. DOI: 10.1080/13540602.2021.1913404

Skinner, B., Leavey, G., and Rothi, D. (2021) 'Managerialism and teacher professional identity: impact on well-being among teachers in the UK', *Educational Review*, 73(1), pp. 1-16. DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2018.1556205

Smith, B. A. (1999) 'Ethical and methodologic benefits of using a reflexive journal in hermeneutic-phenomenological research', *The Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 31(4), pp. 359-363. DOI: 10.1111/j.1547-5069.1999.tb00520.x

Smith, M., Cree, V. E., MacRae, R., Sharp, D., Wallace, E., and O'Halloran, S. (2017) 'Social Suffering: Changing Organisational Culture in Children and Families Social Work through Critical Reflection Groups - Insights from Bourdieu',*The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(4), pp. 973-988. DOI: 10.1093/bjsw/bcw087

Smyth, A., and Holian, R. (2008) 'Credibility Issues in Research from within Organisations'. In P. Sikes and A. Potts (Eds.), *Researching education from the inside* (pp. 33–47). New York: Taylor and Francis.

So, K., Lee, S. Y., and Choi, Y. (2024) 'Teachers' sense-making of the decentralizing curriculum reform policy: A comparative case study in South Korea', I*nternational Journal of Educational Research*, 125. DOI.10.1016/j.ijer.2024.102331.

Sparkes, A. (2002) *Telling tales, in sport and physical activity, a qualitative journey.* Leeds: Human Kinetics.

Sparkes, A. C., and Smith, B. (2014) *Qualitative Research Methods in Sport, Exercise and Health: From Process to Product.* London: Routledge.

Spencer-Keyse, J., Luksha, P. and Cubista, J. (2020) *Learning ecosystems: An emerging model for the future of education.* Paris: OECD.

Spreitzer, G. M., Sutclife, K. M., Dutton, J., Sonenshein, S., and Grant, A. M. (2005) *A socially embedded model of thriving at work,* Organization Science, 16, pp. 537-549. DOI: 10.1287/orsc.1050.0153

Stang-Rabrig J, Brüggemann T, Lorenz R, McElvany N. (2022) 'Teachers' occupational well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic: The role of resources and demands', *Teach Teach Educ*. DOI: 10.1016/j.tate.2022.103803.

Stenhouse, L. (1981) 'What counts as research?', *British Journal of Educational Studies,* 29(2), pp. 103-114. DOI: 10.1080/00071005.1981.9973589

Stewart, D. L. (2010) 'Researcher as Instrument: Understanding "Shifting" Findings in Constructivist Research', *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 47(3), pp. 291-306. DOI: 10.2202/1949-6605.6130

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M. and Thomas S. (2006) 'Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature'. J*ournal for Educational Change* (7), pp. 221-258. DOI: 10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8

Sturrock, S. (2021) 'Primary teachers' experiences of neo-liberal education reform in England: 'Nothing is ever good enough'', *Research Papers in Education,* 37(6), pp. 1214-1240. DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2021.1941213.

Suarez, V. and McGrath, J. (2022) 'A balancing act: successfully managing senior leadership roles and motherhood', *School Leadership and Management,* 44(2), pp. 1-19. DOI: 10.1080/13632434.2024.2414255

Tang, S. Y. F. (2003) 'Challenge and Support: The Dynamics of Student Teachers' Professional Learning in the Field Experience in Initial Teacher Education', *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 19(5), pp. 483-498. DOI: 10.1016/S0742-051X(03)00047-7

Taylor, M., and Lambert, S. (2022) 'The need for empathy in school leadership', *Impact: Journal of the Chartered College of Teaching, 15.* Available at: https://chesterrep.openrepository.com/handle/10034/626765 (Accessed 3 April 2024).

Teasley, M. L. (2017) 'Organizational Culture and Schools: A Call for Leadership and Collaboration', *Children and Schools*, 39(1), pp. 3-6. DOI: 10.1093/cs/cdw048

Tenaglia, S. (2022) 'Subjective wellbeing in different occupations in UK 2012-2022'. *What works centre for wellbeing.* Available at: https://whatworkswellbeing.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Subjective-wellbeing-in-different-occupations-2012-2022-full-report.pdf Accessed 3 April 2024).

Tennant, R., Hiller, L., Fishwick, R., Platt, S., Joseph, S., Weich, S., Parkinson, J., Secker, J. and Stewart-Brown, S. (2007) 'The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS): development and UK validation', *Health Qual Life Outcomes*, 5(63) DOI: 10.1186/1477-7525-5-63

Thomas, H., Duggan, B., McAlister-Wilson, S., Roberts, L., Sinnema, C., Cole-Jones, N., and Glover, A. (2023) *Research with schools on the early implementation of curriculum for Wales: Wave 1 report.* Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Tian, M. (2024) 'Embracing complexity: rethinking education inspection in England', *Educational Review*, 77(5), pp. 1500-1516. DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2024.2325660.

Tobias, V. Y., van Woerkom, M., Meyers, M. C., Runhaar, P. and Bakker, A. B. (2023) 'Thriving on Strengths: Effects of a Strengths Intervention for Younger and Older Teachers', Journal of Happiness Studies, 24, pp. 1121-1144. DOI: 10.1007/s10902-023-00638-2

Tong, F. and An, H. (2024) *Applying bioecological models in education research: Considerations for validity and credibility.* London: Routledge.

Topp, C. W,, Østergaard, S. D., Søndergaard, S. and Bech, P. (2015) 'The WHO-5 Well-Being Index: a systematic review of the literature', *Psychother Psychosom*, 84(3) pp. 167-176. DOI: 10.1159/000376585

Torres, L.L. (2022) 'School Organizational Culture and Leadership: Theoretical Trends and New Analytical Proposals', *Education Science,* 12(254). DOI: 10.3390/educsci12040254

Towers, E., Rushton, E. A. C., Gibbons, S., Steadman, S., Brock, R., Cao, Y. and Richardson, C. (2023) 'The "problem" of teacher quality: exploring challenges and opportunities in developing teacher quality during the Covid-19 global pandemic in England', *Educational Review*, 77(1), pp. 100-116. DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2023.2184771.

Trainor, L. R., and Bundon, A. (2021) 'Developing the craft: reflexive accounts of DOIng reflexive thematic analysis', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 13(5), pp. 705-726. DOI: 10.1080/2159676X.2020.1840423

Travers, C. J., and Cooper, C. L. (1993) 'Mental health, job satisfaction and occupational stress among UK teachers', *Work and Stress*, 7(3), pp. 203-219. DOI: 10.1080/02678379308257062

Tudge, J.R.H., Mokrova, I., Hatfield, B.E. and Karnik, R.B. (2009) Uses and misuses of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development, *Journal of Family Theory and Review,* 1(4), pp. 198–210. DOI: 10.1111/j.1756-2589.2009.00026.x.

Turner, K., Thielking, M., and Prochazka, N. (2022) 'Teacher wellbeing and social support: A phenomenological study', *Educational Research*, 64(1), pp. 77-94. DOI: 10.1080/00131881.2021.2013126

UNESCO (2016) T*he world needs almost 69 million new teachers to reach the 2030 education goals*. Available at: http://uis.unesco.org/en/files/fs39-world-needs-almost-69-million-new-teachers-reach-2030-education-goals-2016-en-pdf (Accessed 18 October 2021)

Unluer, S. (2012) 'Being an insider researcher while conducting case study research', *The Qualitative Report*, 17(29), pp. 1-14. DOI: 10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1752

Van Horn, J., Taris, T., Schaufeli, W., and Schreurs, P. (2004) 'The structure of occupational well-being: A study among Dutch teachers', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* 77, pp. 365-375. DOI: 10.1348/0963179041752718

Van Houtte, Mieke. (2005) 'Climate or Culture? A Plea for Conceptual Clarity in School Effectiveness Research', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement,* 16, pp. 71-89. DOI: 10.1080/09243450500113977.

Vangrieken, K., Dochy, F., Raes, E., and Kyndt, E. (2015) 'Teacher collaboration: A systematic review', *Educational Research Review,* 15, pp. 17-40. DOI: 10.1016/j.edurev.2015.04.002.

Veliz, L., and Mainsbridge, C. (2024) 'Insights into longevity and the professional lifespan of early and mid-to-late career teachers: perspectives of teacher wellbeing', *Educational Review*, pp. 1-19. DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2024.2409321

Viac, C. and Fraser, P. (2020) 'Teachers' Well-Being: A Framework for Data Collection and Analysis', *OECD Education Working Paper No. 213*, Paris: OECD Publishing.

Visone, J. D. (2022) 'Collaborative professionalism in US National Blue Ribbon Schools', *International Journal of Leadership in Education,* DOI: 10.1080/13603124.2022.2107240

von der Embse, N. and Mankin, A. (2021) 'Changes in Teacher Stress and Wellbeing Throughout the Academic Year', *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, 37(2), pp. 165-184. DOI: 10.1080/15377903.2020.1804031

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978) *Mind in Society: the Development of Higher Psychological Processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waters, S. and McKee, M. (2023) 'Ofsted: a case of official negligence?', *BMJ 2023*; 381, p. 1147. DOI:10.1136/bmj.p1147

Webb, R., Vulliamy, G., Sarja, A., Hämäläïnen, S. and Poikonen, P. (2009) 'Professional learning communities and teacher well-being? A comparative analysis of primary schools in England and Finland', *Oxford Review of Education,* 35(3), pp. 405-422. DOI: 10.1080/03054980902935008

Webster-Wright, A. (2017) 'Reframing professional development through understanding authentic professional learning', *Review of Educational Research*, 79(2), pp. 702-739. DOI: 10.3102/0034654308330970

Weddle, H. (2022). 'Approaches to Studying Teacher Collaboration for Instructional Improvement: A Review of Literature', *Educational Research Review,* 35, DOI: 10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100415

Wei, L. (2023) 'Narrative Inquiry: A Research Method in the Education Field', *World Journal of Education*, 13, pp. 25042-25042. DOI: 10.5430/wje.v13n6p35.

Weiland, A. (2021) 'Teacher well-being: Voices in the field', *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 99. DOI: https://DOI.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103250.

Welsh Assembly Government (2002) *The Learning Country: A Paving Document. A Comprehensive Education and Lifelong Learning Programme to 2010 in Wales.* Cardiff: Welsh Assembly Government.

Welsh Government (2014) *Qualified for Life: An education improvement plan for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales.* Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Welsh Government (2017a) *Education in Wales: Our national mission. Action plan 2017–21.* Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Welsh Government (2017b) *Schools in Wales as Learning Organisations*, Welsh Government Avialable at: http://gov.wales/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales/curriculum-forwales-curriculum-for-life/schools-in-wales-as-learning-organisations/?lang=en (Accessed 30 July 2025).

Welsh Government (2018) *The National Approach to Professional Learning.* Available at: https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-learning/planning-and-designing-professionallearning/national-approach-to-professional-learning/ (Accessed 30 July 2025).

Welsh Government (2021) *Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Wellbeing.* Available at: https://www.gov.wales/framework-embedding-whole-school-approach-emotional-and-mental-wellbeing (Accessed 30 July 2025).

Welsh Government (2022a) *The National Professional Learning Entitlement.* Available at: https://hwb.gov.wales/professional-learning/leading-professional-learning/national-professional-learning-entitlement. (Accessed 30 July 2025).

Welsh Government (2022b) *School improvement guidance: framework for evaluation, improvement and accountability.* Available at: https://hwb.gov.wales/school-improvement-and-leadership/evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/school-improvement-guidance-framework-for-evaluation-improvement-and-accountability/#improvement-priorities-and-school-development-plan:-expectations-for-schools,-local-authorities-and-regional-consortia (Accessed 30 July 2025).

Welsh Government. (2023a) *Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing: Research bulletin: Part one.* Available at: https://www.gov.wales/whole-school-approach-emotional-and-mental-wellbeing-research-bulletinWG (Accessed 17 August 2025).

Welsh Government (2023b) *Our national mission: high standards and aspirations for all.* Available at: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2023/3/2/1679399634/our-national-mission-high-standards-and-aspirations-all.pdf (Accessed 17 August 2025).

Welsh Government (2025) *A fresh approach to teacher development in Wales.* Education Wales. Available at: https://educationwales.blog.gov.wales/2025/07/07/a-fresh-approach-to-teacher-development-in-wales/ (Accessed 17 August 2025).

Wenger, E (1998) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Wenger, E., McDermott, R., and Snyder, W. (2002) *A guide to managing knowledge: Cultivating communities of practice.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Wikeley, F., Louise Stoll , Javier Murillo and Rob De Jong (2005) 'Evaluating effective school improvement: Case studies of programmes in eight European countries and their contribution to the effective school improvement model', *School Effectiveness and School Improvement,* 16(4), pp. 387-405, DOI: 10.1080/09243450500234617

Wilson Heenan, I., De Paor, D., Lafferty, N., and Mannix McNamara, P. (2023) 'The Impact of Transformational School Leadership on School Staff and School Culture in Primary Schools - A Systematic Review of International Literature', *Societies*, 13(6) p. 133. DOI: /10.3390/soc13060133

Wilson Heenan, I..; Lafferty, N., and Mannix McNamara, P. (2024) 'An Applied Approach to Transformational Leadership for Whole School Communities: Perspectives of Primary School and System Leaders', *Societies,* (14), pp. 275. DOI: 10.3390/soc14120275

Wong, Y. H. P (2010) 'Kindergarten teachers' perceived school culture and well-being: a comparison of non-profit-making and profit-making kindergartens', *Early Child Development and Care,* 180(3), pp. 271-278. DOI: 10.1080/03004430701769019

World Health Organization (2021) *Health Promotion Glossary of Terms 2021.* Geneva: World Health Organization.

Yip, S. Y. (2023) 'Positionality and reflexivity: negotiating insider-outsider positions within and across cultures', *International Journal of Research and Method in Education,* 47(3), pp. 222-232. DOI: 10.1080/1743727X.2023.2266375.

Zembylas, M. (2003) 'Emotions and Teacher Identity: A poststructural perspective', *Teachers and Teaching,* 9(3), pp. 213-238. DOI: 10.1080/13540600309378.

Zhang, Q. and Sapp, D. A. (2009) 'The Effect of Perceived Teacher Burnout on Credibility', *Communication Research Reports,* 26(1), pp. 87-90. DOI: 10.1080/08824090802637122

Zhao, Y. (2017) 'Doing fieldwork the Chinese way: Returning researcher's insider/outsider status in her home town', *Area*, 49(2), pp. 185-191. DOI: 10.1111/area.12314

Appendices

Appendix A - Participant Information

Participant Information

I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide to take part you need to understand why the research is being undertaken and how you can be involved. Please read the following information carefully. If you require any further information or clarification please contact me using the details provided.

The research is part of my Professional Doctorate in Education studies. I will be the main researcher.

Purpose of Research Activity

In a pilot study conducted in January - July 2022, I identified a relationship between teacher wellbeing and collaborative professionalism which is dependent upon internal (conceptual understanding, relationships, joint purpose) and external (PLD experiences, time and space, role of leaders) factors. The findings of this research showed that the role of leaders was central to the external factors as they make the strategic decisions and set the climate for school cultures (Murphy and Louis, 2018). The research was conducted in one primary school in Wales and, despite the local context, the study presented tentative contributions to an area that is limited within educational research.

To further develop these findings, this research seeks to explore personal narratives in order to develop an understanding of the interaction between the personal, collective and organisational dimensions. Using a narrative inquiry and life stories will enable the personal and professional experiences of teachers in social contexts to be shared. There is little research which explores such a relationship in Wales, particularly in light of the current distinctive education reform.

This research seeks to contribute to the knowledge base, both within Wales and beyond, to provide a perspective of the impact of policy upon teachers from their point of view. This should support both school leaders and teachers in how we can create the conditions for our teachers to thrive.

Title of Research Project:

Creating the conditions to thrive: exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, through narrative inquiry

Research Aims & Objectives

Aims

The aims of the research are:
- To explore the lived experiences of teachers and the impact these experiences have on their overall ability to thrive
- To explore how collaboration is understood and how it interrelates with teachers' wellbeing
- To better understand how organisational culture supports or constrains teachers' ability to thrive

Objectives

The research objectives are:
- Identify key themes of organisational culture, collaboration and wellbeing in research literature, establishing the need for the study and how this research will contribute to the knowledge base
- Design a narrative inquiry to explore the life stories and lived realities of teachers within two schools in South Wales
- Better understand the complex relationship between individuals and the social context in which they work within schools
- Complete a reflexive thematic analysis of the data through an inductive, open coding process
- Contribute to the field of research and influence policymakers, school leaders and teachers by providing further knowledge and understanding on creating the conditions for our teachers to thrive

Who can take part?

Teachers and school leaders at any stage of their career are invited to participate. If there are multiple participants volunteering, then they will be randomly selected.

What does the research involve?

The research activity will take the form of a narrative interview which will be conducted at a time and venue convenient for the participant. Participants will also be asked to maintain a diary for a period of one term. The diary will take the form of reflective journaling so participants can consider professional learning experiences. Participants may select any method they wish to use. In addition I will analyse the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for each school represented to provide a wider perspective of the organisation in which the teachers are situated.

What are the benefits of taking part in the research study?

The purpose of the research is to explore the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. The views and contributions from the participants will not be judged or impact upon their professional role. There is very little research which explores this inter-relationship in Wales and across the UK. Therefore the data gathered seeks to add to the field of research and may influence leadership and teacher knowledge, understanding and practices in the future.

What are the possible risks of taking part in the research study?

The research study poses few risks. Participation in the research is voluntary. The information collated from the narrative interview will not reference you as an individual. The interview will be recorded and transcribed verbatim. In order to mitigate against the risk of loss of anonymity, due to the small sample size, a pseudonym will be used. I will be the only individual with access to the data. All research activities will be undertaken during a time and venue convenient for the participant. Participation in this study has no influence upon the participant's role within their school or any professional decisions that are made in the future.

What will happen to my contributions to the study?

The narrative interview will be recorded and transcribed. This data will be stored securely on my Hwb account. This account is protected by password, encryption and multi-factor authentication enhanced control. All data will be stored for the duration of the research study and until successful completion of the EdD programme. All storage of data complies with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act (DPA). All diaries will be kept confidential and returned to participants at the end of the study. The data will be used for research purposes and to support the development of the main study. It may be published in the final thesis which will be publicly available.

The right to withdraw from the research study

Participants have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation. They will not be forced or coerced into participation.

You have the right to withdraw from the voluntary narrative interview at any time. If you would like to withdraw your involvement in the narrative interview following the collection of data you can contact the researcher and request removal of your anonymised contribution from the transcript. However, following final analysis and writing of the report, you will not be able to request removal of your anonymised contribution.

What if I do not want to take part?

It is up to you whether you wish to take part in this research study. Deciding not to take part will have no impact upon your role within your school.

What if I need any support following the study?

Please see additional information regarding wellbeing support available:

Wellbeing Support Available for Participants

What do I do if I have a complaint?

If there are any concerns or complaints about this research study, please contact:

Dr Jane Waters-Davies

Associate Professor, Applied Research Lead (Education)

Institute of Education and Humanities: Yr Athrofa Centre for Education

███████████████████████

Who do I contact about the study?

Catherine Place

███████████████

Appendix B - Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Title of Research Project:

Creating the conditions to thrive: exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, through narrative inquiry

Name and Contact Details of Researcher:

Catherine Place

███████████████████████

Consent **Please tick each box to provide consent**	
I have been given a copy of the *Participant Consent Form* and the *Participant Information.*	
I confirm that I have read and understood the *Participant Information* for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw from the research study at any time.	
I agree that, should I take part in a narrative interview, my contribution will be recorded and the recording transcribed and used as data. The recording and the data will be stored for the duration of the research study and until successful completion of the EdD programme. The data will not be used for purposes other than as part of the study.	
I agree that I will maintain a diary for a period of one term. I understand that the diary will take the form of reflective journaling to consider professional learning experiences I have engaged in.	
I agree to take part in the above research study.	

Name of Participant	
Signed	
Date	

Appendix C - Wellbeing Support Available for Participants

Local Authority Wellness at Work Policy

Mind

Our Services - ▮▮▮▮ Mind

Local Authority Care First
0800 174319
www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk
Care First login for employees
Username: ▮▮▮▮
Password: ▮▮▮▮

Wellbeing Support for Teachers

CYMORTH I FENYWOD
CYFANNOL WOMEN'S AID

03300 564456
https://cyafannol.org.uk/our-services/

Education Support

Welsh Government funded Wellbeing Support & Development Services and Wellbeing Advisory Service
08000 562561
https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/get-help/help-for-your-staff/staff-wellbeing-service-in-wales/

Cruse Bereavement Support

0808 808 1677
https://www.cruse.org.uk/

Local Authority Care First

0800 174319
www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk
Care First login for employees
Username: ▮▮▮▮
Password: ▮▮▮▮

Care first provides confidential, impartial advice and support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The service is free for you to access whenever you need. You don't need to ask permission from your manager or organisation before contacting Care first.

Through Care first you can access a number of services.

Telephone information and advice

Our Information and Advice specialists are here to help you find practical ways forward when you feel overwhelmed by problems. Sometimes, having the information to make a sensible plan, and some support in doing so, is all it takes to feel better.

Our advisors are highly trained to quickly find what you need and help you get back in control of your life.

Common subjects include -

Family and Personal: Relationships, Divorce, Child Support, Domestic Violence, Childcare, Eldercare, Community Care, Changing a Name

Debt: Credit, Debt, Banks, Loans, Consolidation

Workplace: Bullying and Harassment, Maternity Rights/Pay, Sick Pay, Health and Safety at Work

Online services

Care first Lifestyle is an online resource containing information, advice and articles for issues occurring in every-day life.

At Home Balancing home life with work can be challenging, especially if you are experiencing difficulties in your personal life. Our At Home section provides support for issues such as;

Debt, Finances, Relationships, Family, Your Home, Bereavement and Childcare.

At Work Many of our friendships, goals, ambitions and experiences stem from the workplace. Coping with work-related pressures will help maintain your wellbeing and the ability to be positive and effective. At Work contains articles, information, advice and support to address problems such as Stress, Change, Conflict, Promotion, Pressure, Retirement...

Health This section contains balanced, independent information and advice on Physical health, Wellbeing, Stress, Nutrition; a place to check out health worries or to get inspiration and support for healthy habits.

To access your online service visit
www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk
Contact your organisation for a username and password.

Counselling service

All our counsellors are members of, and Accredited to, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), with extensive experience and expertise.

Discuss anything that is troubling you, whether it is personal difficulties – for example relationships, family matters, stress, loss or bereavement; or work-related issues such as feeling pressure, work-load, changes at work, bullying or harassment.

Whatever your situation you can be sure of a supportive and constructive response. You are not alone.

Confidentiality

Although provided by your employer, Care first services are completely independent and your call is treated in confidence in accordance with the BACP Ethical Framework. When you make contact you will be asked to identify your employer and you may also be asked for other information – this is purely for statistical use.

Care first
information and support 24/7
0800 174319
www.carefirst-lifestyle.co.uk

Appendix D - Narrative Interview Conversations - Prompts

Narrative Interview Conversations - Prompts
"Tell me your story"

"Important connection between life as lived and life as told"
(Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 5)

Life Story

Tell me about yourself

Tell me about background and why you came to be a teacher?
Think about your life as a teacher - who/what influenced you to want to be a teacher? Is your purpose still the same?
What have been the most important life events that have affected your work as a teacher? How did you navigate this?
When thinking about you as a teacher, there may have been a turning point or a critical moment that stands out. Can you describe a moment like this?
What motivates/sustains you?
Tell me about the balance between your personal and professional lives?
What guides your decision making as a teacher?

Wellbeing

Tell me what is important for you to be able to thrive as a teacher

What does this look like in your school?
Describe a time in your career that has been a particularly positive/negative experience. What happened? Who was involved?
Can you describe a time when you have struggled as a teacher? Was there a factor/context which caused the struggle?
Describe the support in place for you?
What does it feel like to work at your school?
How does your personal life influence your role as a teacher?

Narrative Interview Conversations - Pilot Prompts
"Tell me your story"

"Important connection between life as lived and life as told"
(Goodson & Gill, 2011, p. 5)

School as an Organisation

Tell me about the culture within your school

How does the school values align with your values?
Does the school culture support you as teacher? How? Is this specific to you or common for all staff?
What factors support/hinder your professional growth?
How do others within the organisation support you?
Are you able to make decisions within your school?
Can you tell me about any experiences that have challenged you? How were you impacted by this?
How has the educational climate changed during your career? How do you feel about it now?

Collaboration

Tell me about your experiences of collaboration

How have these experiences supported you to thrive?
What collaborative experiences/activities do you engage with?
Can you describe an example of collaboration with other professionals. What happened? Who was involved?
What impact does collaboration have on you and/or your practice?
Do you believe the school as an organisation values collaboration? How?
Can you tell me about any experiences that have challenged you? How were you impacted by this?

Appendix E - Ethical Consent

APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL APPROVAL

RESEARCH STUDENTS
This form is to be completed by the student within **SIX** months for full-time students and **TWELVE** months for part time students, after the commencement of the research degree or following progression to Part Two of your course. Once complete, submit this form via the **_MyTSD Doctoral College Portal_** at (https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk). This document is also available in Welsh.
RESEARCH STAFF ONLY All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.
STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

In order for research to result in benefit and minimise risk of harm, it must be conducted ethically. A researcher may not be covered by the University's insurance if ethical approval has not been obtained prior to commencement.

The University follows the OECD Frascati manual definition of **research activity**: "creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of man, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications". As such this covers activities undertaken by members of staff, postgraduate research students, and both taught postgraduate and undergraduate students working on dissertations/projects.

The individual undertaking the research activity is known as the "principal researcher".

Ethical approval is not required for routine audits, performance reviews, quality assurance studies, testing within normal educational requirements, and literary or artistic criticism.

Please read the notes for guidance before completing ALL sections of the form.

This form must be completed and approved prior to undertaking any research activity.
Please see Checklist for details of process for different categories of application.

SECTION A: About You (Principal Researcher)

1	Full Name:	Catherine Ruth Place			
2	Tick all boxes that apply:	Member of staff:	☐	Honorary research fellow:	☐

	Undergraduate Student	☐	Taught Postgraduate Student	☐	Postgraduate Research Student	x

3	Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
4	Campus:	Swansea
5	E-mail address:	████████████
6	Contact Telephone Number:	████████
	For students:	
7	Student Number:	██████
8	Programme of Study:	Professional Doctorate in Education
9	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Dr Iain Jones

SECTION B: Approval for Research Activity

1	Has the research activity received approval in principle? (please check the Guidance Notes as to the appropriate approval process for different levels of research by different categories of individual)	**YES**	x	**NO**	☐
					Date
2	If Yes, please indicate source of approval (and date where known): *Approval in principle must be obtained from the relevant source prior to seeking ethical approval*	Research Degrees Committee	x	**28.03.23**	
		Institute Research Committee	☐		
		Other (write in)	☐		

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

	Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.	
1	**UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice**	**x**
2	**UWTSD Research Data Management Policy**	**x**
3	'*The Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research'* (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018)	**x**

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

If there are external collaborators then you should gain consent from the contact persons to share their personal data with the university. If there are no external collaborators then leave this section blank and continue to section E.

1	Institution					
2	Contact person name					
3	Contact person e-mail address					
4	Is your research externally funded?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
5	Are you in receipt of a KESS scholarship?		**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
6	Are you specifically employed to undertake this research in either a paid or voluntary capacity?	Voluntary	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
7		Employed	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
8	Is the research being undertaken within an existing UWTSD Athrofa Professional Learning Partnership (APLP)?	If YES then the permission question below does not need to be answered.	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
9	Has permission to undertake the research has been provided by the partner organisation?	(If YES attach copy) If NO the application cannot continue	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐

Where research activity is carried out in collaboration with an external organisation

10	Does this organisation have its own ethics approval system?	**YES**	☐	**NO**	☐
	If Yes, please attach a copy of any final approval (or interim approval) from the organisation (this may be a copy of an email if appropriate).				

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

1	Indicative title:	Creating the conditions to thrive: exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, through narrative inquiry		
2	Proposed start date:	April 2023	Proposed end date:	October 2024
	Introduction to the Research (maximum 300 words per section) **Ensure that you write for a <u>Non-Specialist Audience</u> when outlining your response to the points below:** ● *Purpose of Research Activity* ● *Proposed Research Question* ● *Aims of Research Activity*			

		● *Objectives of Research Activity*
		Demonstrate, briefly, how **<u>Existing Research</u>** has informed the proposed activity and explain
		● *What the research activity will add to the body of knowledge*
		● *How it addresses an area of importance.*
3		**Purpose of Research Activity** In a pilot study conducted in January - July 2022, I identified a relationship between teacher wellbeing and collaborative professionalism which is dependent upon internal (conceptual understanding, relationships, joint purpose) and external (PLD experiences, time and space, role of leaders) factors. The findings of this research showed that the role of leaders was central to the external factors as they make the strategic decisions and set the climate for school cultures (Murphy and Louis, 2018). The research was conducted in one primary school in Wales and despite the local context the study presented tentative contributions to an area that is limited within educational research. In terms of limitations, Shirley, Hargreaves and Washington-Wangia (2020) note "in comparison to student wellbeing, educator wellbeing has been relatively overlooked" (p. 1). There are gaps in research which has led von der Embse and Mankin (2021) to highlight a critical need to support teachers' wellbeing and stress. Turner, Thielking and Prochazka (2022) found that social support for teachers is closely linked to their wellbeing, however they did not examine the links between the supportive systems in schools and how these specifically relate to wellbeing outcomes. In terms of collaboration as a supportive system, Weddle (2022) identifies additional research is required to explore successful collaboration and how the context of schools support such collaboration. To further develop these findings, this research seeks to explore personal narratives in order to develop an understanding of the interaction between the personal, collective and organisational dimensions. Using a narrative inquiry and life stories will enable the personal and professional experiences of teachers in social contexts to be shared. There is little research which explores such a relationship in Wales particularly in light of the current distinctive education reform. This research seeks to contribute to the knowledge base, both within Wales and beyond, to provide a perspective of the impact of policy upon teachers from their point of view. This should support both school leaders and teachers in how we can create the conditions for our teachers to thrive.
4		**Research Question** **Creating the conditions to thrive: exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, through narrative inquiry** **Research Questions** ● RQ1: What does it mean for teachers to thrive in a professional context? ● RQ2: How is the culture of an organisation, and the way it constructs collaboration, experienced by teachers? ● RQ3: In what ways does collaboration support teachers' ability to personally and

	professionally thrive?
5	**Aims of Research Activity** The aims of the research are: - To explore the lived experiences of teachers and the impact these experiences have on their overall ability to thrive - To explore how collaboration is understood and how it interrelates with teachers' wellbeing - To better understand how organisational culture supports or militates against teachers' ability to thrive
6	**Objectives of Research Activity** The research objectives are: - Identify key themes of organisational culture, collaboration and wellbeing in research literature, establishing the need for the study and how this research will contribute to the knowledge base - Design a narrative inquiry to explore the life stories and lived realities of teachers within two schools in South Wales - Better understand the complex relationship between individuals and the social context in which they work within schools - Complete a reflexive thematic analysis of the data through an inductive, open coding process - Contribute to the field of research and influence policymakers, school leaders and teachers through providing further knowledge and understanding on creating the conditions for our teachers to thrive
	Proposed methods (maximum 600 words) Provide a brief summary of all the methods that **may** be used in the research activity, making it clear what specific techniques may be used. If methods other than those listed in this section are deemed appropriate later, additional ethical approval for those methods will be needed. You do not need to justify the methods here, but should instead describe how you intend to collect the data necessary for you to complete your project.
7	**Methodology** This research will employ a qualitative research design through the use of narrative inquiry and life stories (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; Bryman, 2012; Clandinin & Huber, 2010). Narrative inquiry provides in depth information of personal experiences and how lives are lived in particular social contexts. It is an appropriate approach for exploring the varied and interacting influences on the conditions in which teachers work (Chaaban *et al*., 2022). **Documentary Analysis** Data collection will start with documentary analysis of the School Improvement Plan (SIP) for each school represented. The SIP is the key strategic document within schools, revised on an annual basis, underpinned by statutory guidance and common across all schools in Wales. Research suggests that analysing foci for school improvement will highlight schools' values, purpose for improvement and management of change (Knoff, 2007; Dunaway, Kim & Szad, 2012). Furthermore,

examining school improvement can identify aspects of culture and the role of teachers as "part of the context, rather than purely actors" within an organisation (Wikeley *et al.*, 2005, p. 400).

The process of documentary analysis will follow a systematic procedure proposed by Ozga (2000) in which I will focus on the source, scope and patterns within the documents. I will first skim read and to identify patterns, then engage in focused reading to enable me to interpret the narratives within the policy document. This will provide an overview of both the organisation and its priorities. I acknowledge that this will only provide one perspective, therefore I will undertake narrative interviews with teachers to explore their lived experiences.

Interviews
In narrative inquiry interviews are regarded as the method most recommended to explore participants' stories (Creswell, 2008). The interview will start with a "generative narrative question" (Riemann and Schütze, 1987, p. 353) which will refer to the lived experiences of teachers in relation to how they thrive. Probing questions will be asked to contextualise the narratives and clarify details, exploring key themes such as the interaction between their personal and professional lives, the role of collaboration and their wellbeing. Recognising that these interviews will only provide a short snapshot of lived experiences, participants will also be asked to maintain a diary about their professional learning experiences particularly related to collaboration.

Diary
Diary methods provide further insights into the lived experiences of teachers and can provide rich, valid data about individual behaviour and cognition (Arndt and Rose, 2022). Participants will be asked to reflect upon present professional learning in light of previous experiences and critical events within their professional growth. Reflective journaling can be empowering for teachers, provide a better understanding of how they collaborate with others and reflect upon a sense of belonging (Clegg, 1997; Bashan & Holsblat, 2017).

Reflective journaling is also beneficial for researchers. Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest it is one of the most important tools to be able to make sense of a research journey. As such, I will maintain a journal throughout the process of my thesis which will enable me to reflect upon my multiple roles.

Sampling
To ensure representation and in support of the research questions, I plan to interview a sample of eight teachers and school leaders using the process of 'maximal variation' based on different lengths of service and experiences as a teacher. This criteria seeks to avoid what Goodson and Gill call "selective bias" (2011, p. 37).

Reflective Thematic Analysis
Interviews will be transcribed verbatim. This data, along with documentary analysis and participant's diaries will be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis and an open coding process (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Codes will be produced through a constructive and recursive process (Berger, 2015; Gray 2018). It is important to note that my role as a reflexive researcher will be key through this process.

	The methods above will follow the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018) to ensure that all individuals are treated fairly sensitively and without prejudice.
	Location of research activity Identify all locations where research activity will take place.
8	The interviews will take place within the teacher's/leader's own school in a designated comfortable and suitable room of their choice. The options include private office areas or larger communal areas. The diaries can be completed in a venue decided by the participant.
	Research activity outside of the UK If research activity will take place overseas, you are responsible for ensuring that local ethical considerations are complied with and that the relevant permissions are sought. Specify any local guidelines (e.g. from local professional associations/learned societies/universities) that exist and whether these involve any ethical stipulations beyond those usual in the UK (provide details of any licenses or permissions required). Also specify whether there are any specific ethical issues raised by the local context in which the research activity is taking place, for example, particular cultural and/or legal sensitivities or vulnerabilities of participants. If you live in the country where you will do the research then please state this.
9	N/A

10	Use of documentation not in the public domain: Are any documents **NOT** publicly available?	**NO**	x
		YES	☐
11	If Yes, please provide details here of how you will gain access to specific documentation that is not in the public domain and that this is in accordance with the current data protection law of the country in question and that of England and Wales. *(this box should expand as you type)*		

	Does your research relate to one or more of the seven aims of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015?	**YES**	**NO**
12	A prosperous Wales	☐	x
13	A resilient Wales	☐	x
14	A healthier Wales	x	☐
15	A more equal Wales	x	☐
16	A Wales of cohesive communities	x	☐
17	A Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language	☐	x

18	A globally responsible Wales	☐	x
19	If YES to any of the above, please give details:		
	This research aims to support the development of the Well-being of Future Generations Act through exploring teachers' wellbeing and how this may be maximised through choices and behaviours related to professional learning and development. The research aims to support all teachers to reach their full potential in safe and connected school communities.		

SECTION F: Scope of Research Activity

	Will the research activity include:	YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☐	x
2	Use of interviews?	x	☐
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	x
4	Use of participant diaries?	x	☐
5	Use of video or audio recording?	x	☐
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	x
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	x
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	x
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	x
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☐	x
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	x
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	x
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☐	x
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	x
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	x
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	x
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.		
	Details of any other primary data collection method: Documentary analysis of the School Improvement Plan (this box should expand as you type)	x	☐

If NO to every question, then the research activity is (ethically) low risk and **may** be exempt from **some** of the following sections (please refer to Guidance Notes).

If YES to any question, then no research activity should be undertaken until full ethical approval has been obtained.

SECTION G: Intended Participants

If there are no participants then do not complete this section, but go directly to section H.

	Who are the intended participants:	YES	NO
1	Students or staff at the University?	☐	x
2	Adults (over the age of 18 and competent to give consent)?	x	☐
3	Vulnerable adults?	☐	x
4	Children and Young People under the age of 18? (Consent from Parent, Carer or Guardian will be required)	☐	x
5	Prisoners?	☐	x
6	Young offenders?	☐	x
7	Those who could be considered to have a particularly dependent relationship with the investigator or a gatekeeper?	x	☐
8	People engaged in illegal activities?	☐	x
9	Others. Please indicate the participants below, and specifically any group who may be unable to give consent.		
	Details of any other participant groups: (this box should expand as you type)	☐	x

	Participant numbers and source Provide an estimate of the expected number of participants. How will you identify participants and how will they be recruited?	
10	How many participants are expected?	8 teachers/leaders will be invited to participate in the narrative interviews and maintain a diary for a period of one term. The diary will take the form of reflective journaling so participants can consider professional learning experiences.
11	Who will the participants be?	All participants will be employed teachers or leaders from six primary schools and one secondary school within a cluster in a local authority in South Wales.
12	How will you identify the participants?	To ensure representation and in support of the research questions, I plan to interview a sample of eight teachers and school leaders using the process of maximal variation based on length of service and experience as a teacher. Maximal variation will ensure that the participants selected are as different as

possible in terms of their length of service and experience as a teacher (Flick, 2018; Patton, 2015)

- 2 x leaders - working in a paid leadership role within the school, for example, on the leadership scale or in receipt of a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) payment
- 2 x experienced teachers - teaching for a total of six years or more
- 2 x teachers - teaching between two and six years
- 2 x Newly Qualified Teachers - working in their first year of teaching

Two participants will be selected from each category. If there are more than two participants volunteering within a category then they will be randomly selected.

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
13	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	x	☐	☐
14	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	x	☐	☐
15	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	x	☐	☐
16	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	x	☐	☐
17	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	x
18	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	x	☐	☐
19	With questionnaires, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	☐	☐	x
20	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	x	☐	☐
21	Will you debrief participants at the end of their participation, in a way appropriate to the type of research undertaken?	x	☐	☐
22	If NO to any of above questions, please give an explanation			
	N/A			

	Information for participants:	YES	NO	N/A
24	Will participants be paid?	☐	x	☐
25	Is specialist electrical or other equipment to be used with participants?	☐	x	☐

246

26	Are there any financial or other interests to the investigator or University arising from this study?	☐	**x**	☐
27	Will the research activity involve deliberately misleading participants in any way, or the partial or full concealment of the specific study aims?	☐	**x**	☐
28	If YES to any question, please provide full details			
	N/A			

SECTION H: Anticipated Risks

<table>
<tr>
<td colspan="4">Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.

If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td colspan="2">Full risk assessment completed and appended?</td>
<td>Yes ☐
No   x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td colspan="3">Risks to participants
For example: sector-specific health & safety, emotional distress, financial disclosure, physical harm, transfer of personal data, sensitive organisational information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td colspan="2">Risk to Participant, considered from their perspective:

Participant Wellbeing

Discomfort
Risk of participants feeling that the interviews are intrusive
Risk of participant feeling criticised if researcher asks specific questions relating to their professional practice
Emotional distress due to the sensitive nature of the research topic
Risk of participants perceiving engagement in the research as additional workload

</td>
<td><i>How will you mitigate the Risk to Participant</i>

I will reduce potential emotional distress through reassuring participants that the research is non-judgemental and will not impact in any way upon their professional role in school, will not be used to assess their performance, and will not be referred to other than in relation to the research I am undertaking. Their emotional state will be monitored throughout the interview and I will stop if anyone becomes distressed and allow the participant time and space. I will remind the participant that they can withdraw from the study at any time (BERA, 2018). A list of support services available to participants as employees of the council will be available in the Participant Information form and I will ensure participants are aware of this.

I will provide clarity to participants at the start of the research through a participant information document (BERA, 2018, p. 7) and verbally throughout the research.

I will receive voluntary informed consent in writing prior to the research taking place and ongoing consent throughout the research. This</td>
</tr>
</table>

			will be free from coercion. All participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw. Participants will be debriefed at the end of the research study (BERA, 2018).
			I will agree to the timing of interviews with participants, ensuring they do not take place during staff break time, Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) time or at a time that is inconvenient for the participants. In addition, I will ensure that I do not negatively impact upon the environment in which the participant is working or the children within their class.
	Participants may have a dependent relationship with the researcher who is also the 'gatekeeper' as headteacher		I acknowledge my positionality throughout the research. I will continue my normal routine activities as headteacher outside of this research study. I acknowledge the complexity of being an insider researcher and note that this relationship can form a sense of power and position. However I also acknowledge that as an insider researcher I have a rapport and relationship with participants and a deeper understanding of the contexts in which they work (Mercer, 2007). I will reinforce to participants that engagement in the research will not impact upon their professional role. If participants disclose any information that may cause an issue to myself or others I will ensure I remain impartial and confidential.
	Confidentiality		All information will remain confidential. Participants will acknowledge understanding of this when they sign the consent form.
	Working with own staff - risk of coercion and bias responses		I will reiterate the purpose of the study and that it is non-judgemental and will not impact in any way upon their professional role in school, will not be used to assess their performance, and will not be referred to other than in relation to the research I am undertaking. I will encourage participants to be open and honest in their responses. In an attempt to mitigate against participants possibly saying what they think I want to hear I will probe their answers requesting more information and encouraging them to provide examples from their own experiences. Mitigating factors also include the interview, which allows for open-ended and in-depth responses.

		Potential risk of loss of anonymity due to small sample size	I will explain this to participants as part of the voluntary written informed consent. As part of the Data Protection Act (1998) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) principles data will be treated anonymously and where needed pseudonyms will be used. Data will be stored following the University's Research Data Management Policy. The researcher will be the only individual with access to the data.
		Documents	All documentation will remain confidential and stored following the University's Research Data Management Policy.
		Interviews	I will record the interviews, transcribe verbatim and anonymise the transcripts.
		Diary	I will ensure all diaries are kept confidential and returned to participants at the end of the study.
		Risk of transfer of personal data	All personal data will be stored in my education Google account provided by Hwb, the all-Wales learning platform. My Hwb account is generated via my school's Management Information System, therefore it proves I am not posing as someone else. In addition the Hwb account is protected by password, encryption and multi-factor authentication enhanced control. I am the only person with the password to the account. I will not use the share function to ensure that all data is stored within *'My Drive'*. *'My Drive'* being the personal space where all files are housed.
3		If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use) or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities	
		The data collection methods are extremely unlikely to include any such issues. Should any disclosure of this kind be made then appropriate staff wellbeing, and/or legal processes will be followed.	
4		**Risks to the investigator** For example: personal health & safety, physical harm, emotional distress, risk of accusation of harm/impropriety, conflict of interest	
		Risk to Investigator:	*How will you mitigate the Risk to Investigator:* I will ensure that all participants and the Governing Bodies of all the schools within the

		As the principal researcher and headteacher of a school within the cluster there is an immediate risk of perceived coercion, power and bias.	cluster are aware of the aims and objectives of the research study, including the method for participant selection, through a research-briefing document. I will reinforce that participation in this study has no influence upon their role within the school or any professional decisions that are made in the future.
		As a headteacher of a participating school, and within the cluster, responses may affect me emotionally, particularly if there are adverse outcomes	I will remain professional and respect that participants may have different views. All ethical guidelines will be considered and followed to mitigate any additional risk. I will reiterate the purpose of the study and that it is non-judgemental. Responses will not result in any adverse consequences or negatively impact upon their job. I will ensure impact on participants is minimal, for example, the timing of interviews. All data will be anonymous. I will use my reflexive journal to record my own feelings if responses impact upon my own emotional wellbeing (BERA, 2018). There are benefits to being an insider researcher (Perryman, 2011). I have a greater understanding of the cluster, will be able to engage in social interaction in a natural way and have established relationships which promote the telling and judging of the truth (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Mercer, 2007; Subedi, 2006). As Smythe and Holian suggest "the trick is to work out how to try to derive maximum benefits whilst minimising the negative side effects of the researcher, the researched and the research outcomes" (2008, p. 38).
		Risk that the data is unreliable and/or responses are bias due to the positionality of the researcher	To mitigate against negative side effects including the unconscious bias of the researcher, a thematic analysis of data will be used and the analysis will be discussed with participants for accuracy. This will be highlighted in the Data Management Plan. The selected methodology supports the research design and it is acknowledged that this is a consequential risk. I will ensure transparency in the process and information provided to mitigate against potential misinformation. If a participant

		exercises their right to withdraw this will be accepted without explanation. Participant's data will be sensitively handled following BERA guidelines (BERA, 2018).	
	Risk of collecting insufficient data through attrition and non-response. This is particularly high for this research due to the low level of participants selected through purposive sampling.	There is a risk that there is little interest in participating in the study or participants may choose to leave the study during the research. If this is the case I will extend the boundary of the research to other schools within the area and acknowledge that narrative inquiry can also work with the story of just one as it is the richness of data that is more important than the quantity of participants (Creswell, 2013).	
	Risk of accusations of coercion made against the researcher by the participants	Written consent will be obtained prior to the research study and ongoing consent throughout the duration of the study. The consent will state that engagement in the research is of the participant's own free will (BERA, 2018, p. 18).	
	Unforeseen ethical implications	Events occurring during the research study which result in unforeseen ethical implications will be reported to the Ethics Committee. I will stop the research process until the university's committee has agreed with modifications to mitigate risk.	
5	**University/institutional risks** For example: adverse publicity, financial loss, data protection		
	Risk to University: Failure to declare involvement with the research study as the headteacher of a participating school and within the cluster	*How will you mitigate the Risk to University:* I will be open, honest and transparent about my role within the organisation. In addition, I will seek consent from the Governing Bodies of all schools involved in the research.	
	Improper conduct of the researcher	I will ensure all actions and behaviour are of the highest professional regard. I will follow the University's '*Research Ethics & Integrity Code of Practice*' and '*The Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*' (British Educational Research Association (BERA), 2018) which ensures that the core aspects of research integrity are upheld, those being honesty, rigour, transparency and open communication and care and respect (BERA, 2018, p. 4).	

	Fabrication and falsification	I will ensure all data transcripts are true and honest reflection of interviews.
	Plagiarism	I will ensure all contributions are attributed and referenced correctly.
	Failure to meet ethical guidelines	I will not engage in any research activity until ethical approval has been granted by the university. During the research I will ensure all ethical considerations are followed as highlighted on this form.
6	**Environmental risks** For example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	
	Risk to the environment: There are no foreseen environmental risks in undertaking this research	

	Disclosure and Barring Service			
	If the research activity involves children or vulnerable adults, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate must be obtained before any contact with such participants.	**YES**	**NO**	**N/A**
7	Does your research require you to hold a current DBS Certificate?	☐	**x**	☐
8	If YES, please give the certificate number. If the certificate number is not available please write "Pending"; in this case any ethical approval will be subject to providing the appropriate certificate number.	N/A		

SECTION I: Feedback, Consent and Confidentiality

1	**Feedback** What de-briefing and feedback will be provided to participants, how will this be done and when?
	All participants will receive a feedback session at the end of the research study. This will involve a generic overview of the research purposes, findings, future development. A question and answer session can be offered if requested. Through all feedback I will ensure participant confidentiality.
2	**Informed consent** Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before data collection begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded in accordance with prevailing data protection legislation.
	All participants will be provided with detailed written information prior to the start of the study. This information will include: ● Purpose ● Aims ● Objectives ● The rights of the participants (confidentiality, anonymity, right to withdraw) ● The expectations of participants

3	- Research activities - Data collection, analysis and storage - Publication of the research study and who will be able to access it - Procedure for making complaints - Support Services available to participants The information above will also be shared verbally with the participants at the start of each interview. In addition, voluntary informed consent will be obtained through a written consent form. Informed consent will follow the guidelines set out by BERA (2018, p. 9). I acknowledge and will follow that "voluntary informed and ongoing consent to be the condition by which participants understand and agree to their participation, and the terms and practicalities of it, without any duress, prior to the research getting underway" (BERA, 2018, p. 9). Participants do not have to provide a reason if they wish to withdraw from the study.		
3	**Confidentiality / Anonymity** Set out how anonymity of participants and confidentiality will be ensured in any outputs. If anonymity is not being offered, explain why this is the case.		
	I acknowledge and understand that no research is risk free. It is the entitlement of participants to privacy therefore confidentiality will be ensured through the anonymity of data in accordance with the *Data Protection Act* (DPA) (1998). The researcher will ensure that pseudonyms are used to provide further confidentiality. All information will be stored confidentially and comply with the guidelines as highlighted in the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR).		

SECTION J: Data Protection and Storage

		YES	NO
	Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 "GDPR" and the Data Protection Act 2018 "DPA")?	**YES**	**NO**
1	***"Personal data"*** *means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants is considered to be personal data.*	**x**	☐
	If YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
2	The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) states that "personal data only includes information relating to natural persons who can be indirectly identified from that information in combination with other information" (2018, p. 10). Therefore the research activity does involve personal data: - The criteria being used to select participants contains personal identifiable information, this is needed for purposive sampling - Consent forms contain personal identifiable information. These are needed to identify that participants are aware of the expectations of the study and have provided informed consent.		
	Does it involve special category data (as defined by the GDPR)?	**YES**	**NO**

3	**"Special category data"** *means sensitive personal data consisting of information as to the data subjects' –* *(a) racial or ethnic origin,* *(b) political opinions,* *(c) religious beliefs or other beliefs of a similar nature,* *(d) membership of a trade union (within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992),* *(e) physical or mental health or condition,* *(f) sexual life,* *(g) genetics,* *(h) biometric data (as used for ID purposes),*	☐	x
	If YES, provide a description of the special category data and explain why this data needs to be collected:		
4	N/A		

	Will data from the research activity (collected data, drafts of the thesis, or materials for publication) be stored in any of the following ways?	**YES**	**NO**
5	Manual files (i.e. in paper form)?	x	☐
6	University computers?	☐	x
7	Private company computers?	☐	x
8	Home or other personal computers?	☐	x
9	Laptop computers/ CDs/ Portable disk-drives/ memory sticks?	☐	x
10	"Cloud" storage or websites?	x	☐
11	Other – specify:	☐	x
12	For all stored data, explain the measures in place to ensure the security of the data collected, data confidentiality, including details of backup procedures, password protection, encryption, anonymisation and pseudonymisation:		
	All electronic data will be stored on my education Google account provided by Hwb, the all-Wales learning platform. My Hwb account is generated via my school's Management Information System, therefore it proves I am not posing as someone else. In addition the Hwb account is protected by password, encryption and multi-factor authentication enhanced control. I am the only person with the password to the account. I will not use the share function to ensure that all data is stored within *'My Drive'*. Data will include sound files and transcriptions.		

	Data Protection		
	Will the research activity involve any of the following activities:	**YES**	**NO**
13	Electronic transfer of data in any form?	x	☐
14	Sharing of data with others at the University outside of the immediate research team?	☐	x

15	Sharing of data with other organisations?	☐	**x**
16	Export of data outside the UK or importing of data from outside the UK?	☐	**x**
17	Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, emails or telephone numbers?	☐	**x**
18	Publication of data that might allow identification of individuals?	☐	**x**
19	Use of data management system?	☐	**x**
20	Data archiving?	☐	**x**
21	If YES to any question, please provide full details, explaining how this will be conducted in accordance with the GDPR and Data Protection Act (2018) (and any international equivalents, where appropriate):		
	All electronic data will be stored on my education Google account provided by Hwb, the all-Wales learning platform. My Hwb account is generated via my school's Management Information System, therefore it proves I am not posing as someone else. In addition the Hwb account is protected by password, encryption and multi-factor authentication enhanced control. I am the only person with the password to the account. I will not use the share function to ensure that all data is stored within *'My Drive'*. Data will include sound files and transcriptions.		
22	List all who will have access to the data generated by the research activity:		
	Catherine Place - the researcher		
23	List who will have control of, and act as custodian(s) for, data generated by the research activity:		
	Catherine Place - the researcher		
24	Give details of data storage arrangements, including security measures in place to protect the data, where data will be stored, how long for, and in what form. Will data be archived – if so how and if not why not.		
	A Data Management Plan will explain how the data is captured, analysed, used and stored. The plan will state how the research data will be stored in a secure way to mitigate against loss, corruption and unauthorised access. It will also explain the mechanisms I will use to share the research and preserve/delete the data collected. I can confirm that this data handling protocol has been developed. In accordance with the University's *Research Data Management Policy* (2022), data will be retained in a safe and secure way. This will be through my education Google account provided by Hwb, the all-Wales learning platform. My Hwb account is generated via my school's Management Information System, therefore it proves I am not posing as someone else. In addition the Hwb account is protected by password, encryption and multi-factor authentication enhanced control. I am the only person with the password to the account. I will not use the share function to ensure that all data is stored within *'My Drive'*. According to the ICO "you must not keep personal data for longer than you need it" (2018, p. 39). Therefore the data will be stored for the duration of the research study and until successful completion of this programme.		

	All storage of data will comply with the DPA and GDPR guidelines.		
25	Please indicate if your data will be stored in the UWTSD Research Data Repository (see https://researchdata.uwtsd.ac.uk/). If so please explain. (*Most relevant to academic staff*)		
	N/A		
26	Confirm that you have read the UWTSD guidance on data management (see https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/research-data-management/)	**YES**	**x**
27	Confirm that you are aware that you need to keep all data until after your research has completed or the end of your funding	**YES**	**x**

SECTION K: Declaration

	The information which I have provided is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge. I have attempted to identify any risks and issues related to the research activity and acknowledge my obligations and the rights of the participants**.** In submitting this application I hereby confirm that I undertake to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice which is published on the website: https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/research/research-ethics/	
1	**Signature of applicant:**	**Date:** 29.03.23

For STUDENT Submissions:

2	Director of Studies/Supervisor:	Dr Iain Jones	**Date:**
3	Signature:		29.03.23

For STAFF Submissions:

4	Academic Director/ Assistant Dean:		**Date:**
5	Signature:		

Checklist: Please complete the checklist below to ensure that you have completed the form according to the guidelines and attached any required documentation:

x	I have read the guidance notes supplied before completing the form.
x	I have completed **ALL RELEVANT** sections of the form in full.
x	I confirm that the research activity has received approval in principle
☐	I have attached a copy of final/interim approval from external organisation (**where appropriate**)
☐	I have attached a full risk assessment (where appropriate) *ONLY TICK IF YOU HAVE **ATTACHED A FULL RISK ASSESSMENT***

x	I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the above named research activity will meet the University's Research Ethics and Integrity Code of Practice.
x	I understand that before commencing data collection all documents aimed at respondents (including information sheets, consent forms, questionnaires, interview schedules etc.) must be confirmed by the DoS/Supervisor, module tutor or Academic Director.

RESEARCH STUDENTS ONLY
Once complete, submit this form via the **MyTSD Doctoral College Portal** at (https://mytsd.uwtsd.ac.uk).

RESEARCH STAFF ONLY
All communications relating to this application during its processing must be in writing and emailed to pgresearch@uwtsd.ac.uk , with the title 'Ethical Approval' followed by your name.

STUDENTS ON UNDERGRADUATE OR TAUGHT MASTERS PROGRAMMES should submit this form (and receive the outcome) via systems explained to you by the supervisor/module leader.

Appendix F - Data Management Plan

Data Management Plan

Title of Research Project:
Creating the conditions to thrive: exploring the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing, through narrative inquiry

Research Aims & Objectives
Aims
The aims of the research are:
- To explore the lived experiences of teachers and the impact these experiences have on their overall ability to thrive
- To explore how collaboration is understood and how it interrelates with teachers' wellbeing
- To better understand how organisational culture supports or constrains teachers' ability to thrive

Objectives
The research objectives are:
- Identify key themes of organisational culture, collaboration and wellbeing in research literature, establishing the need for the study and how this research will contribute to the knowledge base
- Design a narrative inquiry to explore the life stories and lived realities of teachers within two schools in South Wales
- Better understand the complex relationship between individuals and the social context in which they work within schools
- Complete a reflexive thematic analysis of the data through an inductive, open coding process
- Contribute to the field of research and influence policymakers, school leaders and teachers by providing further knowledge and understanding on creating the conditions for our teachers to thrive

In order to support the validity of the research, the following data management has been developed.

Type of Data	Personal Data The criteria being used to select participants contains personal identifiable information, this is needed for purposive sampling. Consent forms contain personal identifiable information. These are needed to identify that participants are aware of the expectations of the study and have provided informed consent.
Data Collection	Data collection will include: ❖ Sound files ❖ Transcriptions ❖ Participant diaries ❖ School Improvement Plans I acknowledge and understand that no research is risk free. It is the entitlement of participants to privacy therefore confidentiality will be ensured through the anonymity of data in accordance with the *Data Protection Act* (DPA) (1998). I will ensure that pseudonyms, chosen by participants, are used to provide further confidentiality.
Data Storage	All storage of data will comply with the DPA and GDPR guidelines. All electronic data will be stored on my education Google account provided by Hwb, the all-Wales learning platform. My Hwb account is generated via my school's Management Information System, therefore it proves I am not posing as someone else. In addition the Hwb account is protected by password, encryption and multi-factor authentication enhanced control. I am the only person with the password to the account. I will not use the share function to ensure that all data is stored within *'My Drive'*.
Data Retention	In accordance with the University's *Research Data Management Policy* (2022), data will be retained in a safe and secure way. This will be through my education Google account provided by Hwb, the all-Wales learning platform. According to the ICO "you must not keep personal data for longer than you need it" (2018, p. 39). Therefore the data will be stored for the duration of the research study and until successful completion of this programme. All storage of data will comply with the DPA and GDPR guidelines.
Data Security	My Hwb account is generated via my school's Management Information System, therefore it proves I am not posing as someone else. In addition the Hwb account is protected by password, encryption and multi-factor authentication enhanced control. I am the only person with the password to the account. I will not use the share function to ensure that all data is stored within *'My Drive'*.
Data Sharing	The data will be used for research purposes, to explore the inter-relationship between organisational culture, collaboration and teacher wellbeing. The data will be used in a thematic

	analysis which aims to mitigate against negative side effects including the unconscious bias of the researcher. The research study will be compiled into a written thesis and will be accessible to others.

Appendix G - Documentary Analysis SIP

Documentary Analysis

Process
Phase 1: Skim read to identify patterns
Phase 2: Focused reading to interpret narratives

School Improvement Plan: Secondary School
Made the decision to read this one first as it is not mine!

Phase 1: Skim read to identify patterns
Common language used across SIP focusing on learning, pedagogy, coaching
SIP is a working "relational" document reacting to needs and progress reviews
Clear focus on support for staff
Working 'with' staff

Phase 2: Focused reading to interpret narratives

Process of Documentary Analysis (Ozga, 2000)	Key Considerations
Source	What narrative is being presented? Why have priorities been considered? How well do they align with national and local priorities?
Scope	What are the priorities for the organisation? What relationships with other policies are identified? How are teachers developed?
Pattern	What relationships between micro, meso, macro and chrono levels are implied? What developments are required? What outcomes are expected?

Table 5. Process of Documentary Analysis based on Ozga (2000)

Source

Mission statement and core values highlighted at the start of the document - clearly articulating school's individual narrative - their purpose and vision

SIP priorities aligned to five key areas:
- Standards
- Wellbeing
- Teaching
- Care, Support and Guidance
- Leadership

Aligned to national and local priorities
12 priorities for 2023-2024
Progress from future priorities identified and used to inform current priorities
Some priorities removed/woven into others
Previous priorities - consistent themes
Reduction in number of priorities over the years

Scope
Standards
Accountability driven performance measures
Interesting - this is the first section on the SIP but not a key theme from the teachers in their narrative conversations

Wellbeing
Staff role identified as a priority
However no formal mention of staff wellbeing

Teaching
Focused on staff
Highlights various forms of collaboration
Personalised pedagogical approaches
Range of support for staff - documents, PL, leadership
Prioritising professional dialogue
Trial and evaluation to find most effective methods of identifying, challenging and support staff
Clear collaboration between primary and secondary schools
Links to other policies

Care, Support and Guidance
Student focused

Leadership
"Support all staff"
Coaching

Pattern
- Implied relationship between SIP priorities at a meso and micro level - for example, clear link from action required - professional learning - measurement of impact
- Measurement of impact in some cases refer to staff, notable in key area of 'Teaching'
- 'Professional learning' column in each key area related to required development. Development supported by a range of forms of PL including in school and out of school events - "workshops", "INSET", "learning exchange", "cluster meetings", "network meetings"

Key Area - Teaching
I decided to analyse this key area more deeply as it is a significant area for targeting staff development and supports the key elements of the study

"Target 5 - Continue to evaluate and develop a shared understanding of: effective principles of pedagogy (****); standards and progress in pupils' skills, in line with the new curriculum."

Codes	Interpreting the Narrative
"Continue to" at the start of the target	Identifies that behaviours for evaluation and developing a shared understanding are already in place within the school Is this part of the culture?
"Evaluate"	Making a judgement of pedagogy, standards and pupil progress
"Develop"	Acknowledging a process of evolving/maturity
"New curriculum"	Identifies changes nationally - reflecting macro level Important for this study as it supports the distinctive nature of mass education change in Wales and demonstrates how the school is preparing and supporting teachers to experience this change

"Continue to develop Leaders of Skills as our team of experts" "Support and coach all staff"	Prioritising leaders as "experts" and providing appropriate PL to enable them to succeed Did the leaders see themselves as such "experts"? Were the expectations on leaders to support and coach understood and how did this interrelate with their wellbeing?
"Reflective practice"	Identifying culture within school of reflection and action 'learning through and from experience towards gaining new insights of self and practice' (Finlay, 2008) How did participants view reflective practice in terms of their wellbeing and supports or constrains their ability to thrive?
"Bottom up approach"	Evidence of a culture that is not led solely by the headteacher, collaboration is encouraged and expected at all levels from the students in the classroom to Senior Leadership Team
"Trial and evaluate" "improve our ability to identify, celebrate and challenge"	Evidence of a culture where teachers can help determine how monitoring activities are developed Clear emphasis on "most effective ways" - identifies that they are open to new ideas and will challenge existing behaviours Taking time to celebrate as well as challenge
"Coaching" "Professional dialogue and reflection" "Learning exchanges" "Pedagogy Fayres"	Forms of collaboration, including evidence of teachers and leaders collaborating

Identified that the social context in which the teachers work is one that is continuing to develop, is reflective and prioritised professional learning and collaboration. There are high expectations of staff and students. Engaged leaders as "experts" but also involved all staff.

School Improvement Plan: Primary School

Phase 1: Skim read to identify patterns
Common language bespoke to the school used across SIP focusing on learning, pedagogy, collaboration
Common language of school as a learning organisation model evident in SIP
Accountability phrased as an output - learning, teaching and learning organisation
SIP is a working "relational" document reacting to needs and progress reviews
Clear focus on importance of individual practitioners across the SIP

Phase 2: Focused reading to interpret narratives

Process of Documentary Analysis (Ozga, 2000)	Key Considerations
Source	What narrative is being presented? Why have priorities been considered? How well do they align with national and local priorities?
Scope	What are the priorities for the organisation? What relationships with other policies are identified? How are teachers developed?
Pattern	What relationships between micro, meso, macro and chrono levels are implied? What developments are required? What outcomes are expected?

Table 5. Process of Documentary Analysis based on Ozga (2000)

Source & Scope
Process of strategic development and key strategic documents highlighted at the start of the SIP

Process of school development from opening in 2017 with key priorities highlighted
Strategy for Wellbeing, Community and Collaboration - including staff wellbeing

Three pillars for strategic development - entitlement and expectation

Organisation
Cluster and school level driven by vision

- Mission statement and core values
- Vision principles
- Principles into action
- Journey as a learning organisation - key features being values, culture, relationships, communication, purpose and slowness
- Culture for learning
- Curriculum design and realisation

Practitioner

Teams and groups driven by self-evaluation
- School as a learning organisation
- SIP priorities aligned to four key areas:
    - Leadership
    - Learning and Teaching
    - Curriculum
    - Wellbeing, Equity and Inclusion

Aligned to national and local priorities

6 priorities for 2023-2024

Progress from future priorities identified and used to inform current priorities

Some priorities removed/woven into others

Previous priorities - consistent themes

Reduction in number of priorities over the years

Phases of school improvement a key factor of the source and scope of the documentation - for example

2017-2019: Foundations for Learning

2019-2022: Strengthening & Deepening Learning

2022-2024: Enriching & Refining Learning

2024-2025: Collaborative, Community Learning

Interesting - accountability is an output in this SIP which is distinctly different to secondary SIP. Does this reflect different expectations on primary schools and secondary schools with new curriculum arrangements?

Each of the SIP key areas start with 'Where are we now? 'Why' for improvement?

Priorities - identify success and impact on standards and wellbeing. They all refer to both children and staff.

Collaborative leadership is a priority.

Practitioner

Individuals driven by professional learning and development

- PLD strategy
- Value collaboration
- Common language of learning and teaching
- Inquiry focused

Also references to:

- Community
- Cluster
- Learning with and from external environment and wider learning system
- Contribution to wider education system

Pattern

- Implied relationship between SIP priorities at a meso, micro and macro levels - for example, clear reference to Welsh Government national agenda influencing consideration for SIP priorities
- Where are we now? 'Why' for improvement? - this is at the beginning of each of the four key areas providing a context for school improvement. Identifying previous strengths and challenges and using this information to create new SIP priorities. This demonstrates continuous school improvement and an ongoing commitment to developing as a learning organisation.
- "What will the impact on standards and wellbeing be?" in each of the four key areas contain clear references to potential impact of action on both staff, children and community wellbeing
- Each of the four key areas highlight professional learning as a key driver of action - "All staff are actively learning", "Deepen the understanding of the professional standards", "Learning Leadership", "Leadership Days", "cluster working"
- Specific professional learning for all staff to support their understanding of how to support the emotional and mental wellbeing of themselves and others, allocated funding to pay for a consultant to deliver professional learning

Codes	Interpreting the Narrative
"Enrich", "refine", "strengthen"	Identifies that school is in a strong place and are now ready to enhance and improve rather than develop Is this part of the culture?

"The work at **** will be shared wider and used as a catalyst for system-wide change" "Wider education system positively influenced by principles and practices impacting upon standards and wellbeing across the system"	References to sharing work across education system How does this aspect of the school support or militate against teachers' ability to thrive?
"Refine collaborative leadership to support growth and enable system-wide change."	Leadership target specifically referencing collaboration. Expectation that leaders "help grow other leaders" and "demonstrate agency". Articulated view that this will "foster positivity and support the growth of agency and identity" Reference to the whole school, cluster and community demonstrating a wider view of micro, meso, macro and chrono levels and a need to understand implications of these levels on school improvement. Is this shared in narrative conversations?
"Collaborative Approach to Improving Practice (CAIP)" "Collective whole school hunch" "Collaborative inquiry" "Collective responsibility"	Specific reference to the CAIP process as a method of collaboration. Significant references to collaboration and expectations for staff Do participants share these experiences and how they impact their ability to thrive?
"Deepen the understanding" "Actively participate" "Engage" "Effectively resource"	Descriptions of action that are social in nature

Identified that the social context in which the teachers work is a learning organisation with clear priority on the organisation, practitioners within groups and teams and practitioners as individuals. Clear reference to staff wellbeing, collaboration and also supporting the wider education system.

Recommendation to the system:

Use this approach for learning about school's and their priorities, e.g., School Improvement Partners, etc.

Appendix H - Documentary Analysis Participant Diaries

Documentary Analysis
Professional Learning Diaries

Process
Phase 1: Skim read to identify patterns
Phase 2: Focused reading to interpret narratives

Interpretation of Narratives

Dorothy
Range of professional learning experiences:
- Reading and research
- External networking with research teams, ITE, cluster
- Collaboration within school
- Professional learning and development sessions
- Leadership role

Reflective on both personal characteristics and impact on role. Acknowledges impact of time on requirements of role.

"How does this pedagogical approach fit in with work that we will be carrying out? When I read about this theory it makes me think of our inquiry process and how children make meaning and apply that meaning. I possibly need to think more about the bigger picture thinking/problem solving concepts for learners rather than going to lesson ideas. This is so hard to do as I feel like I am unlearning how I've always planned and sometimes I slip back into old habits without realising it. I find this especially hard when I'm time poor or have a lot of other 'plates spinning'"

Space provided by dedicated reading and research time enables Dorothy to articulate her reflections.

Value of CAIP evident in reflections captured, particularly relating to collaboration, working with others, classroom observations.

"CAIP Reflection: It was so lovely to observe others, especially to collaborate with teachers that I haven't worked with before. We all had a fairly coherent sense of learner effectiveness. Having that dialogue around the concept really helped focus us when observing the teacher and the learners. All teachers had really lovely relationships with learners and all children were very engaged.

Relationships, routines for learning formed large parts of our conversations alongside scaffolding and modelling to support children with their independence and resourcefulness. We discussed the possibility of split screen learning and the use of the learner capacity continuum and how we model the language of learning."

Clear sense of wanting the best for children and honesty about pedagogical decisions and teaching practices.

"I think both the children and I weren't sure what those spaces were - they didn't have a clear definition so to speak or they felt really hard to resource."

"It's made me consider the different languages of learning offered to children. Before this project I hadn't considered the different languages on offer - from changing the space around it's made me think about different media I plan for children - for example, clay, sewing."

*"Taking part in the project has focussed me to explore pedagogical approaches in more depth. Whilst I think I instinctively approach my practice through a constructivist approach, I'm not sure I knew the theory behind it (although I have been working in that way for many years). Alongside this, I have been undertaking further research around the Reggio approach as even after the sessions with *, it still felt a bit abstract to me and so I needed to read more around it and have that thinking time to absorb the key principles."*

Emotional responses to work - interplay between personal and professional and highlighting that Dorothy's work matters to her. Use of words such as "time poor", "deflated", "frustrated", "uncertainty", "pressure", "disappointed" demonstrates the impact of PL activities.

Fox
Range of professional learning experiences:
- Within school professional learning in AoLE teams, year groups, departments
- Whole school professional learning
- ITE mentoring

Professional learning diaries focus on impact. Words used describe impact:
"Thought provoking", "solutions discussed"

Time - pressure, busyness
"Most tutors agree that form time is too busy and time pressures to be addressed"
*"Decision to 'take time' with the * course in order for students to fully understand it."*

Timing of PL and focus of session - consideration for school leaders
Entry during last week of term before Christmas:
"Most feeling a little low on energy for the intense conversations regarding progression, but still a number of informative conversations regarding classroom practice."

Engagement with others, collaboration and mentoring
"Very excited about the prospect of supporting and challenging my ITT student next week."

Reflective practice
Recognising PL activities as an ongoing process

Kate

Range of professional learning experiences:
- Within school professional learning in AoLE teams, year groups, departments
- Whole school professional learning
- External networking with exam board
- Cluster professional learning

Professional learning experiences provided knowledge, confidence, opportunities to share own experience, focus on vision, opportunity to clarify own thoughts and ideas, passion for own subject

Culture of support and professionalism
"Engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues allows me to build my confidence in all aspects of my job and create a culture where we support each other and recognise the challenges in our roles"

Positive responses to PL and articulated impact. Impact focused on time, reflection, collaboration. Honest reflection about highs and lows!
"Good chance to reset thinking and engage with colleagues in school to strengthen the vision and work together"

Leading PL sessions to share work with others and reflect upon self. Importance of dialogue and collaborative working.
"Has allowed me to directly lead a large group of staff and enabled me to consider my leadership style and how best to use systems to evaluate what provision will be in place"
*"I am really enjoying developing a system of productive * meetings where QA is central and staff get to focus on and discuss the progress of learners in a professional environment"*
"Good to discuss the progress matrices with primary colleagues - gave real insight into the journey of our learners"

Focus on curriculum development and impact of Curriculum for Wales
"The primary presentation allowed the opportunity to see what happens at this level and tap into the expertise - really helped my understanding of the new curriculum"

External networking highly valued, widening experience and discussion, forefront of curriculum development in Wales, career progression
"Had broadened my understanding of learners in Humanities and given me reflection time to consider the changing

nature of education with the new curriculum in Wales"
"Has allowed me to network with many other professionals and consider whether this may be a future area of career development I may like to explore (possible QW roles)"

Mary

Range of professional learning experiences:

- Within school professional learning in AoLE teams, year groups, departments
- Whole school professional learning
- External networking with exam board
- Cluster professional learning

Professional learning experiences provided opportunities for learning, sharing, reflect on strategies used, developed understanding of pedagogical tools

Importance of time for reflection

"It gave time to reflect on the progress made last term on my personal targets"

Romeo

Range of professional learning experiences:

- Reading and research
- External networking with DARPL, research teams, cluster
- Collaboration within school
- Professional learning and development sessions
- Leadership role

Focus on pedagogy and Curriculum for Wales, articulation of thoughts and how to refine approach in school. Clear sense of wanting to learn and to use this for improving practice across the school.

"Informed thinking around Spring CAIP and PL in Spring regarding practitioners as learners and our Language of Learning"
"As I read the start of this text it encourages me to think about our correspondence with parents and how we approach sharing knowledge with parents and carers."
"I am keen to continue developing my knowledge, practice and research to emphasise the power of technology to amplify teaching and learning beyond my classroom walls."

Development of passion project

Clearly interested in area chosen for passion project, use of research and books to support thinking and development in thinking evident.

CAIP

Value of CAIP evident in reflections captured, particularly relating to collaboration, working with others, classroom observations.

CAIP Reflection: Interesting to collaborate together regarding what learner effectiveness means at different ages and stages of development. Relationships, routines for learning formed large parts of our conversations alongside scaffolding and modelling to support children with their independence and resourcefulness. We discussed the possibility of split screen learning and the use of the learner capacity continuum and how we model the language of learning."

Importance of collaboration

"It has also become apparent to me that having thoughtful discussions and sharing observations with others within the team has allowed us to look at the environment from differing perspectives that have influenced our theme development."

Personal reflection

"These reflections have forced me to be more patient and consider how to incorporate the changes needed into teaching and planning for our theme development. This has supported transitions and interactions between children."

Outcome

"As a result of these reflections and detailed considerations it has enabled me to nurture relationships with children and have greater insights into their learning, imagination and fascinations."

Sally

Range of professional learning experiences:

- Within school professional learning in AoLE teams, year groups, departments
- Whole school QA and learning walks
- Cluster professional learning

Professional learning experiences provided opportunities for reflection and quality assurance linked to role. Sally found it difficult to maintain the diary during the 4 month period.

Honest reflections

PL activities that had little impact

Marking harsh for certain students

QA experience

"A rewarding experience and so positive to see Year 11 learning happily in a range of classrooms."

Sparky

Range of professional learning experiences:

- Reading and research
- Collaboration within school
- Professional learning and development sessions

Reflective on both personal characteristics and impact on role.
Clearly articulating impact of professional learning opportunities such as reading and research and CAIP on own development. Very reflective as a practitioner.

Passion Project - linking personal and professional life
"I know that this year I am going to focus my passion project on Welsh, the Welsh language that is spoken within school and the (lack of) interest that surrounds the language at the moment. I want to learn why this is, as I am going to be trying to improve my own Welsh speaking skills this year. It is something that I have wanted to do for a few years, and I am going to finally start actively improving my skills and knowledge of the language outside of work."

Importance of collaboration and working with others during CAIP
*"It was an incredibly purposeful and effective CAIP day. It was lovely to experience this in a new group: * and * have different opinions on how to improve practice which is very useful for me."*

Consideration of professional learning and impact on personal life, linked to wellbeing
"It is something that is a massive part of my own mental and physical wellbeing and I want to explore the benefits it has on children, their learning, attainment and behaviour."
"Overall, engaging with the reflective journal points have helped deepen my understanding of white privilege and its implications in my own life. I think it is incredibly important to continue to reflect, educate myself and take as much action as possible to dismantle systems of oppression and work towards equity and justice for all."

Victoria
Range of professional learning experiences:
- Reading and research
- Collaboration within school
- Professional learning and development sessions

Reflective about own practice:
"Maybe this needs to be made more of a conscious part of my pedagogy?"
"I have revisited our Culture of Learning document to refresh my own memory. It enabled me to dig a bit deeper into what our language of learning is actually intended for."
"A very different role this year which has meant having to adapt my pedagogy and approach to a certain extent."

Passion Project - dedicated time for reading and research
Opportunity to research and reflect upon as area of personal interest. Making pertinent links to refining school practices, using phrases such as *"advantages for us as a school"* and *"challenges for us as a school".*

Importance of collaboration and impact on wellbeing
"A really beneficial day spent with colleagues from a wide range of year groups. It was lovely to spend time in year groups that I wouldn't necessarily get to spend time in, observing practice and noticing the environment and how this progresses throughout the school. We had really effective conversations around themes that we have noticed across the school linked to learner effectiveness."

Considerations:
- Leadership - professional learning is a clear priority for both schools in which research is situated - can make this claim due to the range of experiences offered and the use of professional learning diaries as a reflective tool
- Support for professional learning - clear structures in place and regularity of PL is evident
- Culture of learning organisation - focused on learning, reflection & expectations clear
- Reflection - Importance of maintaining a professional learning diary, providing a place for teachers to share honest reflections of practice and personal thoughts
- Importance of space and time for professional learning
- Collaboration within school and with external partners is a strong feature
- Sense of 'wanting' to learn and develop - intrinsic motivation
- Curriculum for Wales - development of understanding through PL experiences
- Sense of professionalism

Thoughts:
- Does the honesty reflect the culture of the organisation? It is ok to say that you are struggling, frustrated, etc.
- Recommendation to the system - strategy for PL which includes the elements highlighted above. Prioritising role for PL diaries/reflections.

Appendix I - Code Book

Role of Leaders
Leaders
Leaders treating everyone as equal
Headteacher
Toxic leadership - no trust, low morale, bullying
Impact of leaders on wellbeing
Time with headteacher
Genuine leaders
Understanding from headteacher - not labelling staff
Life event and compassion from headteacher - positive impact
Importance of communication - able to talk with leaders
"Normal" leadership
Leaders prioritising staff wellbeing
Leaders lead by example - collaboration and supportive
Need to know doing a good job - validation
Leaders approachable and personable
Treating everyone as an individual
Make a conscious effort to see school from everyone's perspective
Use of technology
Communication
Demonstrates ethical reasoning

Experiences of Collaboration
Small day-to-day things
Not scrutinised but collaborative
Networks of support
Culture of collaboration
"Informal" collaboration
"Formal" collaboration

Previous experiences show not all schools value collaboration
Collaboration is a priority for the school
Collaborative Approach to Improving Practice & PLD - significant impact
Previous experiences of contrived collegiality
Collaborative mentality
Cluster working
CAIP
Cluster collaboration - impact on pedagogy
Focus on collaboration
Collective responsibility supports teachers

Professional Learning
Layers of PL
Research influenced
Prioritising time for reflection
Taking responsibility for own development
Inquiry

Concerns, Negative Emotions
Anger
Coping
Hated job
Inner negative thoughts
Doubt
Difficulty when parents complain - personal
Worry
Perfectionist
Impact on physical health

Relationships/Belonging
Able to be oneself
Feeling of belonging
Friendships
Acceptance
Importance of relationships with children and colleagues
Friends not colleagues
Safety and belonging
Connection
Valued

Welsh Government/Curriculum for Wales
Positive impact of CfW
Change in freedom and choice with CfW
No ticking boxes
Not data driven
Difference between England and Wales

Individual behaviours/enablers for thriving/experiences of culture
Purpose
Taking opportunities
Opportunities
Experience as a teacher
Consistency
Being organised
Reflective
Knowing school context
Outward facing outlook
Feeling in control

Impact on whole school
Perspectives
Importance of saying "no"
Individuality
Impact of supporting others on own development
Understanding of own personality traits
Knowing when to stop
Challenging
Passion
Determination
Positive emotions
Decision making
Change

Enabling behaviour from others/experience of organisations valuing collaboration
Intentional
Support
Agency
Integrity
Trust
Autonomy
Able to show vulnerability
Perspective
Find your balance

Issues
External pressure
Significant incident - scrutiny

Wellbeing
Individual personal view on how to thrive
Nurture
Ability to be vulnerable with leaders
Freedom and space so important for own wellbeing

Time
Impact of time and experience on confidence
Slow
Valuing slowliness

Place
Context and place
classroom is a safe place
Unique experience opening a new school
New building
Importance of context, place and time

Why be a teacher?
Always wanted to be a teacher
Moral responsibility
Choice for teaching
Safeness of teaching
Heart work
Love for subject

Impact of others
People
Teams - various
Impact of pupil behaviour on teacher wellbeing
Pupil behaviour
Teachers celebrating each others' successes
Validation by others
Impact of others on purpose - positive and negative
Experienced teachers
Early career support from experienced teachers
Impact of behaviour of others on culture

Life events
Early life experiences
Life events - importance of place and time in life
Impact of own teachers
Personal/professional balance
Personal/professional conflict
Past experiences
Covid
Impact of covid
Covid - time to think differently and be more effective
Motherhood
Impact of becoming a mum and changing role
Positive - teacher conditions and holidays as a working mum
Life event - becoming a mum - impacting on role and shift in perspective
Juggle - mum and teacher

Mum guilt - feelings change when become a mum
Motivation from child to work
Change in view after having a baby - empathy

Organisation
Learning organisation - learning with and from
School expectations - marking and planning
Support systems
No competition
Systems and procedures
Structure
Values
Ethos
Whole school systems and processes
Learning focused
Culture
Reflect on process over time

Appendix J - Victoria's Story

Victoria's journey into teaching began in childhood, when she would gather friends to 'play teachers' – a moment her mum recalls as early evidence that she was destined for the profession. Victoria thoroughly enjoyed her own schooling and following her A-Levels it was an obvious choice to go to university to study Primary Education. She entered the teaching profession at 21 years of age and immediately became comfortable in the classroom. She worked in a socio-economically challenging school where supportive colleagues and leaders provided a safe space for her to learn and develop her skills as a teacher. It was in this school that she began her leadership journey. However, she wanted a new challenge. She described a period of applying for jobs but things didn't feel right, until she saw an advertisement for the school which she is now teaching in. Victoria has been part of the school from its early stages of development and has taught in many classes and year groups. When talking about the school she beamed and described that she absolutely loved her job!

Victoria's experience as a teacher over the last few years has been interrelated with global events such as COVID-19 and personal experiences of motherhood. Victoria described her period of maternity leave as the biggest challenge and greatest joy. Prior to becoming a mum her life centred around school, with many friends and family members being teachers too. She enjoyed the rhythm of the school day, week and year. She had spoken with colleagues who were parents and they described how becoming a mother had changed them, however, she was not prepared for the enormity of this change. Returning to school following maternity leave also came with a change of role where she described feeling like a newly qualified teacher again, despite her years of experience. Becoming a mother shifted her perspective. Her passion and love for the job remained but she began to view many aspects of being a teacher through a different lens. Storied examples of putting herself in the position of a parent and acting more emphatically were interlinked with her now making more informed choices about working at home. Her decisions once centred solely on teaching, now had her child in mind. She was now a teacher and a mother; and these two aspects coexisted rather than competed.

Victoria's story also recognised her role as a school leader. Her experience of leadership centred around the positive culture within the school. A culture where leadership is human first and managerial second. She recounted the shock of discovering that teacher wellbeing was actually discussed at weekly leadership meetings and that everyone supported each other. This was a stark contrast to the vulnerability of her early career, where she faced unmanageable pupils alone and would drive to work feeling sick. The difference now was a clear sense that she was not alone, that children belong to everyone in the school. Her experiences on the leadership team became a defining moment in shaping her understanding of what supportive and relational leadership can look like. Leadership felt collaborative, respectful and rooted in trust. Being both on and off the leadership team helped her to value the importance of inspiring staff, offering supportive and constructive feedback and creating a culture where no one was left to struggle alone. This is a huge part of her story and she continues to use these lessons in her everyday practice, recognising the impact that leaders can have on teachers' sense of belonging and wellbeing.

Victoria's experience in her current school focused on collaboration, describing it as simply the way things are done. Sharing a storied and varied landscape of collaborating with other staff and other schools she described how collaboration provided opportunities to step into one another's worlds, linked with the buzz of a team willing to share, question and celebrate. Victoria felt part of something purposeful and kind. Even during her times of self-doubt or questioning the impact of maternity leave on her career, she has been met with reassurance, flexibility and honesty from colleagues and leaders.

Victoria loves teaching, but this love is now carried differently. With experience in both life and her profession, she appreciates the relationships and growth that have shaped her. School feels like a second home – a place where she belongs.