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## ‘SUCKING RESULTS OUT OF CHILDREN’ REFLECTIVE LIFEWORLD CASE STUDY OF A PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHER STRIVING FOR AUTHENTICITY

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*ABSTRACT:* This qualitative study presents an analysis of the experiences of a teacher who had recently left working in an England state funded primary school. Using reflective lifeworld methodology, this study explored the teacher’s struggle to be authentic in the context of state funded education. Three prominent themes were identified as: 1) enhancement of every learner; 2) systemic oppression; and 3) tensions in being a teacher. The study concludes that being authentic as a teacher was experienced as being incompatible with the current educational system.

*Keywords:* teachers, authenticity, systemic oppression, primary schools, case study

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The issues concerning teachers’ retention are ongoing and spread worldwide (See *et al.*, 2020; Shanks *et al.*, 2020). The challenges in retaining teachers can vary in nature depending on the contextual factors; some examples include lack of adequate preparation and support for new teachers (den Brok *et al.*, 2017), poor working conditions (Bettini and Park, 2021), leadership behaviour (Semarco and Cho, 2018), racial discrimination (Frank *et al.*, 2021), and effects on well-being (Liu, 2020). High teacher turnover is particularly a problem in England.

Findings from Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 suggest that teachers in England remain among the least satisfied with their job among all the OECD countries (OECD, 2020) with 30% of teachers leaving within the first 5 years (House of Commons, 2019). Despite the government strategies aimed at promoting the teaching profession (Department for Education, 2019), concern over teachers’ retention remains (House of Commons, 2019; House of Commons Library, 2021). Existing research finds a variety of reasons for teachers’ decision to leave, most notably concerns over workload and its impact on work/life balance, accountability (House of Commons Library, 2021), and performativity culture (Perryman and Calvert, 2020). Therefore, teachers’ retention must be viewed in the context of these

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reasons, and how performativity culture in particular shapes the contemporary reality in English schooling (Ball, 2018; Perryman and Calvert, 2020; Wilkins *et al.*, 2021).

However, it is not simply that there are these external demands on teachers that is the problem, but that these external demands may be incongruent with the values of many teachers. The Department for Education (2013) teacher standards include the expectation for teachers to ‘*make the education of their pupils their first concern*’ and to ‘*act with honesty and integrity*’ while remaining self-critical, they also must always ‘*act within the statutory framework which set out their professional duties and responsibilities*’. However, this can lead to impossible to resolve contradictions if teachers’ values differ from those that underpin the statutory framework driven by principles of standardised (e.g. Ball, 2003, 2018) and meritocratic education (Owens and de St Croix, 2020). As teachers’ accountability to externally set targets continues to expand, their role aligns itself with Michael Gove’s craftsman that delivers ‘*best possible instruction*’ (Gove, 2010) rather than a pedagogue that strives towards education for human flourishing discussed by Gunawardena *et al.* (2020).

What we are proposing is the possibility that for some teachers the lived experience of being a teacher is one of inauthenticity which can negatively impact their job satisfaction. The psychological literature asserts that people strive for authenticity, to be able to live in ways that feel joined up, consistent, congruent, and where dissonance or incongruence exists, a state of tension arises (Festinger, 1957; Rogers, 1959, Joseph, 2016). Van Den Bosch and Taris (2014) found that authenticity at work was positively related to job satisfaction in 646 participants. This seems relevant when considering issues around teachers’ retention.

Authenticity in teachers is a topic that has long interested scholars and practitioners in humanistic education (e.g., Moustakas, 1966; Rogers, 1969), and it has more recently become a topic for research by contemporary educationalists. Findings from a number of studies show that when teachers do not have the freedom to restructure the pedagogy in a way that is congruent with their values, they feel limited in being able to ‘be themselves’ and in providing what they see as meaningful learning (Akoury, 2013; Carusetta and Cranton, 2005; Cranton and Carusetta, 2004; Rabin, 2013). When this happens, it can be seen as a loss of integrity as a teacher (Santoro and Morehouse, 2011). Moustakas’s (1996) findings also suggest that teachers who are struggling within themselves to be authentic will also fail to create opportunities for growth, development, and creativity in their pupils.

While the empirical studies to date did not explore the explicit connections between teachers’ authenticity and retention, Akoury (2013) reported a possible link between teacher’s inauthenticity and burnout. What existing findings offer is the insight into the external conditions that can inhibit becoming an authentic teacher; these include competitiveness (Akoury, 2013; Carusetta and Cranton,

2005; Rabin, 2013), punitive mechanisms (Rabin, 2013, Rappel, 2015), discriminative (Rappel, ), controlling and rigid systems (Carusetta and Cranton, 2005; Cranton, 2010; Cranton and Carusetta, 2004; Rappel). These are important issues to consider in the context of a decline in the overall quality of education in United Kingdom (Childs and Menter, 2013).

The purpose of this research was to develop a more nuanced understanding of a teacher's decisions to leave the profession. Specifically, we were interested in whether perceptions of the contextual influences on them were experienced as conflicting with their own values and beliefs, and whether this was perceived as influencing their decision to leave teaching. There were two primary interests; firstly, to open the space for a teacher to identify those values and beliefs and, secondly, to explore how they interact with pedagogies prescribed in a state-funded primary school setting.

## 2. METHOD

### *Study Participant*

This study presents and interprets the experiences and views of a primary school teacher six months after leaving the teaching profession. She had experience in teaching students aged 7 – 11 years. This study follows from a larger interview study on teachers' wellbeing, where all of the participant were recruited through a snowball sampling method. While this larger study was not directly concerned with the topic of authenticity, it emerged as a topic of possible interest in the discussion that ensued when the lead researcher was presenting the findings of the study at a debriefing session to the participants. This led us to think the topic of authenticity in teachers worthy of further deeper exploration. In the same debriefing session, it was the participants that suggested talking to a teacher from their school that had recently left the profession. This prompted us to approach that teacher and following an initial conversation we chose that teacher for this more fine-grained study.

The participant had worked in a small population state-funded faith primary school in a rural area of England. The school was recognised as Outstanding in the OFSTED reports and students were primarily of British heritage with very few children from minority groups. The socio-economic status of parents living in the area was higher than national average. The school is part of a multi-academy trust. As this a small school based in a tight community providing any more information about the teacher could potentially compromise her anonymity.

### *Context: primary Schooling in England*

In the recent years, English primary schools have been striving towards forming a more coherent system in response to concerns over significant variations in

quality of the educational provisions often referred to as ‘postcode lottery’ where the quality of education depends on location (Ball, 2018). In 2016, Department for Education released Educational Excellence Everywhere which introduced the plans for multi academy trusts (MAT’s), where struggling or failing schools can be integrated into academy trusts with outstanding schools and create a self-improving system. MAT’s have been presented as promoting the agency of the schools because the academies were no longer led by local authorities. However, the new found independence of the schools must be viewed in light of standardised curriculum and regulating body of Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (OFSTED) that decides on the quality ratings of the schools. In addition, schools are also subjected to the competition driven by the ‘regime of national and local league tables based on test and examination performance’ (Ball, 2018, p. 14). This involves standardised assessment tests (SAT) that take place in year 2 (age7) and year 6 (age 11) and their outcomes serve as evidence of the quality of education at the schools. In turn, this leads to prioritisation of subjects included in the lead tables and unnecessary testing pressures on children. It also supports practices of grouping children based on their ‘ability’ which contributes to hierarchical structures and segregation within the classrooms. Teachers working in the academy schools in England, while not legally required, are expected to hold a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) and maintain Teachers’ Standards as outlined by government (Department for Education, 2013).

### *Ethical Issues*

Prior to conducting the research, ethical approval was gained from the University Ethics Committee. The informed consent from the participant was obtained prior to conducting the interview. The consent covered the voice recording of the interview as well as publication of data in the form of text and images representing findings in research journals and online research orientated environments. The participant was assured that all the personal information would be kept confidential and any revealing data anonymised.

### *Procedure*

The interview began with the interviewer’s opening question ‘how did you experience your own values and the things that you believe in about education, how they fit with those of the school you had worked at, and if you felt that as a teacher, you could be true to yourself?’ From that point, the interviewer used reflective listening to encourage the participant’s exploration of her experiences as a teacher. We choose the non-directive interviewing style described by Rogers (1945) to ensure that we were soliciting the participant’s own views, without influencing the content of her answers, and to help her probe more

deeply into her own understanding of her experiences. In this way, it was our intention to remain open to the emerging data rather than to be contained by our pre-existing understandings (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2008). The interview was 80 minutes long to allow enough time for the participant to explore her thoughts and experiences at a greater depth.

The intention was also to offer a safe atmosphere where the participant exercises freedom in exploring her lifeworld. This is important in phenomenological research in which we wish to understand not only the individual but also the social systems within which they function (Dahlberg, 2006). In this case study, it means discovering the participant's inner world, her motivations, values and her interpretations of the external world of the educational system and how she chooses to interact with it. Arriving at a greater understanding of the experiences that occur in this 'inbetweenness' reveals the *how* of the becoming which seems to be reflected in Dahlberg and Dahlberg (, p. 5) where phenomenology is 'concerned with unearthing the structures or conditions of possibility that constitutes the world as we know it'. This happens by contrasting individual experiences in the system with theoretical possibilities of the system as it is presented to us.

The methodology that offered this was reflective lifeworld research where the researchers are comfortable with 'the continuous negotiation between the stance of immediate immersion in experience and the distance of objectivity' (Dahlberg and Drew, 1997, p. 31). Moving towards a greater understanding of lived experience is anchored in the concept of phenomenological intentionality; where the researcher begins from the preposition that our being in the world is intentional (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2008). In other words that we do/act/behave in certain ways for a reason and understanding of those motivations can offer a more holistic view of occurring phenomena.

### *Data Analysis*

After transcribing and a thorough reading of the recorded interview transcript the lead researcher began systematic coding and analysis of the data using MAXQDA2018. MAXQDA2018 is well suited for embracing the creative aspects of reflective lifeworld research as it offers a variety of tools including word clouds, mind maps on top of traditional coding functions, that can be helpful in visualising and re-organising the data. This process was conducted under supervision of the second and third authors. First, identification of key segments of data was completed, next theoretical and analytical memos were created, and finally these were assigned with codes.

The analytical process involved repetitive re-reading of the interview transcript identifying and reviewing codes guided by search for the participant's values, experiential claims and meaning making processes. Once completed the functions of creative coding to group and organise subthemes were followed by

code mapping to visualise the relationships between most occurring codes and themes. Creative coding in MAXQDA supports the process of generating, sorting and organising codes into meaningful groups, it is a virtual space where parent codes can be created, codes can be renamed, assigned colours and ordered in logical sequences (MAXQDA, 2020)

The penultimate stage involved the three researchers completing an audit of existing themes and interpretations to challenge the reflexive process of the lead researcher by bringing forth the perceived similarities between the existing themes. This resulted in reducing the number of themes by grouping them together into final subthemes that were then organised into prominent themes. Those themes aim to reflect the essential meanings behind the experiences described by the participant (Dahlberg and Dahlberg). The final stage of the analysis culminated in a written commentary on the final themes in the form of this paper and their representative data extracts.

### 3. RESULTS

Three prominent themes and a number of corresponding subthemes were identified when searching to identify values and beliefs held by the participant and explore how they interacted with pedagogies embedded in the primary school she has worked at. The first theme, 'Enhancement of every learner', represents the teacher's conviction that staying true to the values encapsulated in the subthemes of 'freedom', 'excitement' and 'trusting' is necessary for the emergence of the environment where every child in the classroom can flourish. The second theme, 'Systemic oppression', describes the teacher's perception of the school's environment and her understanding of its impact on herself as a teacher as well as her students, and encapsulates four interrelated subthemes, 'control' that leads to 'pressures', 'discrimination', and 'dependency'. The third theme, 'Tensions in being a teacher', reflects the responses of the teacher to the 'contradictions' of the educational system she was part of, her 'awareness' of her part in the system, and her own feelings of 'distress' and 'powerlessness'.

While presented as separate, these themes were represented through tightly interlinked statements experienced by the study participant. The narrative for each theme and the subthemes are shown below and supported by interview extracts (see [Table 1](#)).

#### *Enhancement of Every Learner*

The participant talked about how she saw the children in her classroom as individual learners with potential for growth and development. It appeared that she possessed a strong sense of justice and her idea of a 'great lesson' is where 'everyone can be learning in their own way' regardless of their starting point. As she explored her discomfort with some of the expectations she felt were

TABLE 1.

Enhancement of every learner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Trusting</li> <li>• Excitement</li> </ul>
Systemic oppression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control</li> <li>• Pressure</li> <li>• Dependency</li> <li>• Discrimination</li> </ul>
Tensions in being a teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contradiction</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Distress</li> <li>• Powerlessness</li> </ul>

experienced by children, she unravelled a cluster of her own values that she believed were important for the growth and development of learners.

### *Freedom*

The subject of freedom was threaded throughout the interview, from the teacher striving to 'give everyone the freedom to be where they were', to provide a 'relaxed environment' where children can 'take responsibility for their own learning', to, recognising that it was also important that as a teacher she had her own need to 'be given more freedom' in order to be able to provide it for others.

[00:05:23] I definitely wanted to feel that I was to be given more freedom to just let those that need to spend more time on something that were drawn to it because often they are drawn to what they need to spend time on you know.

### *Excitement*

Freedom was seen as important because of how it allowed children to explore what they were drawn to, and in recognising the intrinsic motivation of her students she connected that with how learning then becomes exciting:

[00:54:54] If you think we want an ideal world we want people to be working out what excites them. What ... you know ... when they're experiencing learning in that way some things are more exciting than others.

'Working out what excites them' enables the learner to tap into their intrinsic motivation for learning. She shared her observation that there are 'children that are flying' because they find it rewarding, 'they can grasp it'



and they learn that ‘they can do even better’. She used words like excitement, love, self-fulfilment to describe their experiences.

### *Trusting*

In offering what she felt as freedom, it was underpinned by the sense that she could trust her children to make the best use of their freedom:

[00:14:35] I would want to let children feel ... I’d like to provide them with a relaxed environment to learn where they weren’t feeling a sense of come on come on you got to move on, we got to move on. I definitely trust that they would get where they needed to get.

She recalled a few situations where children were still engaged in the activity when it was time to move to the next, and for her that seemed more appropriate than pushing them to a new activity. Her reaction seemed to be summarised in this statement: ‘if a child just wants to keep on practicing the same thing, I trust that they’re doing that for some reason’. It was important for children to experience themselves as trusted by their teacher:

[00:43:49] The key is in the relationships you form with those children. And if you can form you know a really trusting relationship where they feel properly valued as people and if you are forming that relationship you wouldn’t be forcing them to do

things in their hour of a lesson that they couldn’t access happily.

In this extract she made a connection between trusting relationships and feeling ‘properly valued’, going on to discuss tensions between being a trustworthy teacher and having a role of an enforcer that betrays that trust.

### *Systemic Oppression*

When talking about the school system itself, however, words like ‘forcing’, ‘crushing’, and ‘disappointing’ were used. The theme of ‘Systemic oppression’ encapsulates how the ‘control’ inhibits the freedom of both teacher and students, creating ‘pressures’, ‘dependency’ and ‘discrimination’.

### *Control*

Practices embedded into the school system were experienced by the teacher as restrictive, ‘if you were letting children find their own way you wouldn’t be following a study plan’. This is further emphasised in her reflection:

[00:28:18] I really do wonder how children within a system that is so intense and so rigid and so structured, what they’re learning about ... what works for them. How are they learning what works for them?

She used the analogy of ‘sucking out the results out of children’ to capture her experience of the instrumental role of assessment. In her understanding, the controlling mechanisms integral to the school system did not acknowledge learners as trustworthy:

[00:51:57] That we don’t need we shouldn’t be forcing them off things that I suppose that comes out to me that I do trust them. Hmm. You know I do think that everyone is ... you know children are trustworthy. If you gave them that trust they would respond really well to it, but I don’t think schools do. I just think we’re taking it all away from them.

As a teacher she recognised herself as an unwilling enforcer, she acknowledged that those control mechanisms go far beyond the individual school system:

[00:33:36] And it you know you could have the most supportive Head in the world, but they will be judged according to what the system that’s been put in place by people way above them. So, with the best will in the world you don’t have that flexibility.

### *Pressure*

Being judged, evaluated, measured and compared in the context of standardised assessment with externally determined and narrow educational goals clearly conflicted with her values as a teacher. An analogy of ‘toxic’ captures the intensity of her negative experience within the system as a member of the teachers’ collective:

[00:36:23] I mean it’s some really, really toxic kind of system. I think it’s toxic because I think you’ve got teachers doing ... well doing it in ways they don’t want to do it because they’re feeling the pressure and the stress and children are feeling pressured and stressed.

Such ‘toxicity’ contaminates the intrinsic motivation of the teacher; she asserts that she cannot stay true to what her experiences tell her is in the best interest of children. The accompanying animated body language and frustrated tap on the table further emphasised the points she made about the rapidity of introducing new information where she is ‘trying to get as many to learn as much as they can in the hour’. This is experienced as stressful, not only for her but she is also ‘very aware that for children it must feel, I can only imagine, it must feel so pressured’, and lead to ‘knocked confidence’ ‘knocked self-esteem’ and was experienced by her as ‘painful to watch’.

*Dependency*

The teacher recognised that to be considered good or worthy enough the children must meet the expectations and educational goals set for them, thus creating not trust in themselves but rather a ‘dependency’:

[00:15:08] I just think that their experiences within the system are so shaping that if you manage to provide something more facilitative they had been conditioned into this way of learning, you know. Where I think it will take time almost to let them find their own way again to trust themselves. I don’t think that they trust themselves. I think that they are waiting to be told, you know, you need to do this you need to learn that, you need to ... This is the way you learn. Rather than being allowed to trust themselves that they’ll get there.

Conditioning and trust are polarised, where the fragmented, standardised practices that occupy every moment of being in the school inhibit the children’s ability to trust a process of becoming as learners. This is related to her discomfort of being pressured to comply to function as an ‘enforcer’ of the system that she does not agree with.

*Discrimination*

The teacher recognises a number of, in her perception, unfair practices within the school system. Some are more implicit, such as the judgemental and fragmented ways she is being assessed as a teacher. Others are explicit, where ‘it feels very wrong’ to her to have a hierarchical system where the learners in the top tiers ‘know they are all superior’. It is this discriminative side effect of the system that promotes excellence and outstanding results at the cost of letting down those that are ‘struggling’ with potentially ‘every kind of problem’ in and out of school that has been captured here:

[00:19:17] Obviously there are children within that group of children that that are flying that are finding it rewarding, they are first in the class. They’re excited about what they’re going to be learning. They love it. That it’s very self-fulfilling because they can grasp it and they practice, and they can do even better. That’s fine. But it’s the children that that doesn’t happen for and then they’re the ones that were coming in last because it didn’t give them that sense of fulfilment.

She recognises that as the ‘education system has children for so long it could have such a positive impact’ but her experiences suggest it is more of a matter of ‘luck’ rather than consistent outcome. She is very clear that the rigidity and tight structure and expectations of the curricular are ‘pushing it on to children that haven’t got that’ and prevents her from creating the environment where all children can experience learning as rewarding and fulfil their potential. Another form of discriminative tendency within the system came from her passionate critique of explicit elevation of some subjects that align with the political and economic agenda at the cost of removing others:

[00:30:49] What I find really sad is that through primary school you're gearing towards SATs to the point where subjects are just wiped off the board. You know there's no P.E. or there's no art or there's no music or ... you know. And for what? These three subjects that again should not be defining children they are part of education and I find that really sad because again it's just seeing goals that aren't about educating our society really.

She identifies the problem as 'those politicians who are deciding on what our education looks like are not responding to the research or evidence' adding with resignation that 'they are not listening'. This again, contributes to her perception of injustice as such instrumental approaches place some learners at a disadvantage as well as disregard the individuality and variety of the interests and passions that children possess.

### *Tensions in Being a Teacher*

This final theme captures the teacher's lived responses and struggles with what she experienced as tensions in the system that she perceived as oppressive in the ways described above.

### *Contradiction*

The teacher described the response of the system to issues in the field of education as 'bizarre' which captured the perceived contradictions between educational research findings, policy and actual practice where:

[00:27:46] It's almost responding in the opposite way. So, where there is evidence that our children perhaps aren't doing as well as they'd want to do. They're kind of making it more rigid. Which I find bizarre. So ... you know what we want to be doing is creating independent thinkers and problem solvers and you know enthusiastic learners and what we're doing is almost crushing that from a young age.

This dissonance between what she believes to be good for the child; a holistic education that is not just about the results but learning as a rewarding and self-directed process and, her perceived reality of schooling is apparent in her question:

[01:09:42] How can anyone be looking at a system like that and saying that sounds good for the child? You just wouldn't, would you ... You would think somebody was talking nonsense.

The notion of acting in the best interest in her learners outlined in teacher standards is challenged here – she does not believe that the systemic policy is actually good for children. Those contradictions between the seeming purpose of education as pathway to empowerment and independence and the systemic structures that foster compliance and dependency, having 'crushing' effects on

those within the system, and are also reflected in the next subtheme of ‘awareness’ as she understands that as a teacher she was part of that system.

### *Awareness*

This subtheme captured the drive of the teacher towards becoming more self-aware, she recognised her own values and beliefs, her own motivations and examined them in light of the expectations and demands that were placed upon her as a teacher. At the beginning of the interview the teacher recalled that she was ‘very aware’ that some children were having low levels of self-confidence as they were not secure in the basics or had gaps in knowledge, but she didn’t have time to accommodate for their needs:

[00:03:12] So I felt as though I was letting down children. I was, I was almost part of a system that was discouraging those that, that there was no ... I don’t know how to say this, I don’t think that the children needed to struggle if they had time to get key basic concepts.

Her awareness included her understanding of herself as a vehicle that had helped carry forward what she perceived as systemic oppression, and she saw how this contributed to the children’s sense of feeling lost and unworthy, and how she felt that as a teacher she detracted from learning as a fulfilling experience:

[00:06:05] And they are going ‘well I was just beginning ... ’ (she role-plays herself with an authoritative voice:) ‘Oh no put that away. Turn the page. Next page we are on subtraction!’ They are just beginning to understand subtraction and you start multiplication and there’s no room for them to enjoy that sense of fulfilment. ‘I’m getting it I’m getting it’ you know ... and I felt that so often.

This exemplifies being aware of how her actions impact on her learners even if she does not perceive it as positive. Earlier in the interview she stated: ‘I always try to give everyone the freedom’ and the above extract is saturated with a sense of hopelessness that contradicts that. It is her willingness to remain open that seems to enable her to expose such incongruences that are at the root of her discomfort or ‘distress’.

### *Distress*

The use of expressions such as ‘painful’, ‘frustrating’, ‘crushing’, ‘sad’ when recalling experiences from her pedagogical practice that are fused into a subtheme of distress. It is also an absence of the antonyms of those expressions and her reflection on ‘poor teachers’ where she accentuates on the absolute: ‘certainly not something I would ever want to do fulltime or for my life’. The teacher’s distress manifested in a number of experiential claims when discussing ‘pressures’, ‘control’ or ‘discriminative’ tendencies. Perhaps it is just as

important that she did not voice complaints about the long hours, difficulties in work-life balance, wages, teacher status or career progression when unfolding her narrative. She committed the time she had during this interview to talk about the negative impact of contemporary school systems on children and perceived injustice incongruent with her own intrinsic valuing:

[00:06:31] It was the ones struggling that for me it was most painful to see really because I think it knocked confidence it knocked self-esteem. Feelings of self-worth. Yeah. It wasn't a nice feeling.

The prescriptive structure of the curriculum itself restricted her own freedom to adapt to the needs of her pupils:

[00:51:57] Some of the hardest bits ... when one little girl in particular she just wants to keep doing this same thing and I felt like I couldn't let her even though she was feeling such satisfaction because she could do it. And you know, why would we not be letting her you know?

There seemed to be a frustration and powerlessness in her tone of voice when she asked why she cannot let the little girl follow her own direction. This was related to her perception of not being trusted as teacher, where she had to constantly prove her worth in light of externally set expectations.

### *Powerlessness*

It is significant that she opened and closed the interview with the acknowledgement of experiencing powerlessness. Her very first words referred to the 'impossibility' of staying true to herself in the context of working in the school:

[00:00:56] No. I didn't feel that. I don't feel that the education system allows me to feel congruent really in what I believe what I think is best for children and the job of being a teacher. I think there were ways which I tried I kept trying within the constraints to stay close to what I believed but it isn't actually possible.

In her understanding, being a teacher did not permit her to act congruently with what she believed to be the natural tendency towards enhancement of every learner/child. Her final reflection expands on what powerlessness meant to her:

[01:11:22] Powerlessness. yeah. Massively and I think that is the not being trusted, it's not being given the opportunities to experience learning in a really positive fulfilling way. That is that powerlessness.

She seemed to connect the powerlessness to distrust stating that she is 'not sure there is much trust in teachers anymore' which emphasised the issue of distrust that strips teachers of their agency. The interview data suggested that she held the systemic structures at least partially responsible for inhibiting authenticity of both teachers and learners.

## 4. DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of a teacher in context of state-funded education. Reflective lifeworld was a good fit to this research concern as just as studying the society can reveal new insights about the individuals that function within it, studying the individual can support a deeper understanding of the structures of social organisations, in this case, schooling. This case study reveals how the systemic structures can play a role in desensitizing a teacher to the educational needs of children as a way of surviving in the system.

The teacher reported being held accountable for actions that go against her own valuing, forcing her to engage in pedagogies that do not align with her understanding of what is best for the children, but are then symbolised by her and integrated into her self-concept as a form of betrayal of herself and her learners. These experiences of the teacher are the signs of inauthenticity described by Moustakas (1966), where the teacher betrays the trust of the learners by pressurising them to follow teacher's direction rather than learn to trust themselves. It can also be seen as a loss of her integrity as a teacher, a loss that she was not willing to accept. The findings of our study could be considered within the category of 'principled leavers' as proposed by Santoro and Morehouse (2011) where the decision to leave occurs on moral or ethical grounds. It is our understanding that it is the teacher's unwillingness to accept such state of the matters while experiencing powerlessness to challenge it, that resulted in her decision to leave the profession, and which we have tried to conceptualise as a way to resolve the lived tensions of a felt inauthenticity.

Following from the above, the findings suggest that the teacher did not have the freedom required for her to 'be herself'; to learn from and restructure her pedagogy in a way that is congruent with her values. As such, the case study has illustrated the perceived incompatibility of the explicit and implicit values that underpin standardised curriculum and results-driven pedagogies encapsulated in the teacher's experiential statement of 'sucking results out of children' and her own valuing of what constitutes constructive and meaningful learning. These findings can be viewed in light of educational reforms where values and beliefs about learning align with maximising performance, productivity and resulting in externally set measurable outcomes, and the neoliberal values of individualism that seem to saturate British education currently (see, Amsler, 2011; Ball, 2003, 2018).

The existing state-funded education system appears to promote the principles of cognitive, fact-based, outcome-orientated education, reflecting the values of economist approach focussed on efficiency, effectiveness and achievement of set aims at a 'reasonable cost' (Barrett *et al.*, 2006). In such a system, motivation is thought to be promoted through the implementation of mechanisms of control in the form of rewards (eg. praise, grades) and punishments (eg. disappointment, failure) and amplified by the principles of individual

accountability typical in systems that are based on notions of neoliberal individualism and entrepreneurial self-concept (Ball, 2003). This appears to happen at the expense of more meaningful learning, aligned with values in which a person learns how to learn, build constructive relationships with others and to grow as a person (Barrett *et al.*, 2006). Tellingly, the majority of studies on teachers' authenticity discusses a decrease in teachers' agency and in their opportunities to develop trusting, caring and genuine relationship in the context of educational reforms and control, authority and hierarchies in education (Plust *et al.*, 2021).

As such, the exploration of teachers' authenticity cannot be separated from the context of 'capitalist reality' and its impact on educational systems that can fragment pedagogies and stifle human flourishing (Amsler, 2011; Akoury, 2013; Arthur *et al.*, 2020; Gunawardena *et al.*, 2020). Finally, we acknowledge the limitations in generalizability of a single case study, and while the reflective nature of lifeworld research strives to reduce the 'confirmation bias' it remains our interpretation of data that emerged. Reflective lifeworld research methodology by design remains open to interpretations and invites the reader to 'continue beyond the researchers' interpretations' (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2008). We think that this study provides important new insights into teachers' experiences and how the concept of authenticity might help to understand teachers' the problem of retention within the profession, in the context of the wider social, political, and economic contexts of their role.

## 5. DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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