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Primary School Teacher Retention in England: Neoliberal Influences on Experienced Teachers' Professional Identities in a Dynamic Educational Climate

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Abstract

With more than one-in-ten teachers leaving the profession by the end of their first year of teaching, rising to over 40% after ten years (Maisuria, Roberts, Long and Danechi, 2023), primary teacher retention in England is highly problematic. My study responded to a dearth of research in the primary teacher retention context by addressing the motivational drivers of long-term teachers and the need to further explore how to retain teachers in the profession.

Therefore, my thesis examined the perceptions of nine experienced primary school teachers. 'Experienced', in the context of this study, refers to teachers who have worked for six or more consecutive years, full-time, in English primary schools. My study explored the teachers' beliefs about neoliberal accountability measures, such as high stakes testing, their teacher professional identity (TPI), and their reasons for remaining in teaching. From the researcher's position as an 'inbetweener researcher', which harnessed the benefits of both 'insider' and 'outsider' stances, this study generated qualitative data, via online semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. Data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Dialogical Self Theory (DST) was applied as this study's theoretical framework to the concept of teacher professional identity, as a way in which to explore the nine teachers' daily experiences in schools.

Findings strongly suggest that many neoliberal values and principles were active and present forces in the participants' schools. To illuminate the multiple intricacies of neoliberal policies and practices, this study is the first of its kind to re-think neoliberalism in the English primary school context through the lens of DST, to account for its strong relationship with these teachers and their professional identities. Positioning neoliberalism through the DST framework demonstrated how the teachers in this study have developed selfless TPIs; ones that are adaptable, flexible, reflective in nature and driven by the teachers' sense of purpose, and motivations for teaching. Teachers in this study can manage any TPI conflict that they experience, remaining in the profession as they achieve a sense of harmony and balance within and across their multiple identities, which was more substantial than any negative feelings from TPI dissonance. Therefore, their TPIs were found to be a retentive force for the teachers of this study.

Recommendations are made for TPI to prominently feature in schools' and national policy, and schools actively collaborate with teachers to develop and sustain a TPI conducive to primary school teacher retention. Teachers' professional identities in this study evolved across their careers, making it essential for TPI to be embedded in the education policy context. This should be achieved through the centralisation of TPI knowledge and understanding from the onset of a teacher's career. For trainee teachers, this integration should be done via their teacher training providers and the Initial Teacher

Training Early Career Framework (ITTECF); schools must then build on this during the first two years of teachers qualifying as an Early Careers Teacher (ECT) by means of the Early Career Framework (ECF). Beyond the ECT phase, mentors must play a pivotal role in nurturing and reinforcing strong TPIs to ensure long-term professional growth and retention.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.0 The formation of my study in the primary English teacher retention context

Over the course of my fifteen-year teaching career, I have observed passionate Early Career Teachers (ECTs) as well as highly skilled and experienced teachers leave the teaching profession and pursue alternative employment outside of it. In accordance with Maisuria, Roberts, Long and Danechi (2023), 45% of teachers leave the teaching profession within twelve years of qualifying. The fact that fewer than six-out-of-ten teachers remain in teaching for twelve years or longer concerns me, since it took me a considerable amount of time to develop a teacher professional identity (TPI) in tune with the subtleties and nuances of teaching and become very proficient in it. There is a strong contention in my mind that the Department for Education's (DfE, 2019a) ambition of providing all pupils with a world-class education is not feasible, since the teaching workforce is unstable.

The context of my study is firmly centred around the issue of teacher retention. Increasing numbers of teachers are leaving the classroom each year, according to the latest data from the School Workforce in England (DfE, 2024a). Teachers who have graduated since 2010 through to 2021 have left the profession at a higher rate than in previous years. There is a shortage of teachers in England (Huat See and Gorard, 2019; Perryman and Calvert, 2020), which is causing a crisis in the teaching profession (Sturrock, 2021).

In recognition of the longstanding teacher retention problems, the government have implemented several initiatives, including reducing teacher workload, and have reformed newly-qualified teacher strategies with the implementation of the Early Career Framework (ECF) (Maisuria et al, 2023), a statutory outline of standards and entitlements, that all schools must adopt, to help ECTs succeed at the start of their careers (DfE, 2019b). In addition to the ECF, the Education Support's Commission (2023) on teacher retention concluded accountability measures to be a contributing factor to teacher attrition, and it recommended holistic reviews that did not increase teacher workload from short-term reactionary measures. However, it is noteworthy that these initiatives failed to sufficiently change the English primary school teacher retention context. For example, Rawlings Smith and Rushton (2023) position the ECF as a prescriptive mechanism, which offers explanation as to why it may not have helped retain more teachers, some of whom have experienced it without the flexible support it posits as offering (Rushton and Bird, 2024). Therefore, my study comes at a fundamental time for English primary education as I can input into teacher retention discussions, which centre on worrying statistics and unsuccessful initiatives.

However, despite the attrition statistics, a proportion of teachers choose to remain in the profession and/or opt to move schools rather than leave entirely. Through the lens of their TPIs, I explore why

nine experienced primary school teachers, working full-time in England for six consecutive years or more, have remained in teaching so that useful recommendations for primary teacher retention can be suggested. My study focuses on TPI because choosing to leave or remain in teaching is a multifaceted and personal decision-making process (Hong, 2010), with TPI factors understood to contribute to teachers leaving the profession (Carrillo and Flores, 2018) especially if there is conflict or dissonance felt within TPI (Towers and Maguire, 2017).

Of specific interest to my research is the context under which schools operate, particularly the everyday lived experiences of primary classroom teachers, as their voices are rarely the sole focus in educational research (Sturrock, 2021). Many writers describe the primary school context as one of high levels of neoliberal accountability measures (e.g. Fuller, 2019; Pratt, 2016; Winkler-Reid, 2017). Neoliberal accountability measures are so ingrained that they are known to determine teaching practices (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021) and change the TPI of teachers themselves (O'Leary, 2013). In agreement with these studies, throughout my career, I have routinely felt many forms of accountability methods and measures from different sources. Lesson observations, performance management, data meetings, book scrutinies, and Ofsted (The Office for Standards in Education) inspections have all been part and parcel of my teaching. Moreover, I accepted these methods unquestioningly, like teachers are generally known to do (Perryman, 2022).

The core debates of my thesis, therefore, centre upon the working lives of nine experienced primary school teachers, how they experience neoliberal accountability measures in relation to their TPI, and their reasons for remaining as teachers, in the English primary school context. My work builds on the recommendations from other studies, that called for more research to be conducted that specifically seeks to find useful ways to keep teachers in the profession (e.g. Chiong, Menzies and Parameshwaran, 2017; Lindqvist and Nordänger, 2016; Towers and Maguire, 2017). Most research, however, aims to find quick fixes and fast answers (Schaefer, Long and Clandinin, 2012) based on why teachers leave (Arthur and Bradley, 2023). This, I feel, is at the expense of understanding the motivational drivers of long-term teachers (Ashiedo and Scott-Ladd, 2012). Perryman and Calvert (2020) partly addressed this gap by asking their participants (who were practising teachers) what may cause them to eventually leave the profession. However, literature is still limited on why teachers stay in post (Arthur and Bradley, 2023) thus my work is in response to this clear knowledge gap.

I now carve the way through the 'busy-ness' of this 'crowded' field, with its contested notions as to what 'TPI' is (Zembylas, 2018); multiple stances as to what constitutes 'neoliberalism' (Apple, 2017); and, confounding explanations regarding why some teachers stay in the teaching profession (Ashiedo and Scott-Ladd, 2012). I achieve this by explaining what 'TPI' means for my study, and why it is central

to my work. An introduction to the concept of 'neoliberalism' in the primary school context follows. My research questions (RQs) are then listed, and the importance of my study further centralised in this primary school context.

1.1 Notions of teacher professional identity (TPI): Dialogical Self Theory (DST)

In my fourth year of teaching, I became a school manager (English Leader). As part of my role, I monitored the teaching practices of other teachers to ensure that standards in the subject were high; I was both held accountable for this outcome and held others accountable in turn. My lesson observations showed teachers teaching in a variety of ways. I pondered if the teachers that I was observing were adapting their TPI for the observation as this is known to occur due to policies prescribing TPI outcomes (O'Leary, 2013). Indeed, I believe policy influences varied practices across the school to create feelings of tension and inauthenticity between policy and practice. The idea that it was the policies, and their influences on their TPI, that was responsible for how the teachers acted and taught, settled within me and warranted investigation.

Various terms and definitions have been applied to the concept of TPI (Skott, 2018), possibly due to researchers being unclear about the conceptual and theoretical frameworks that they adopt when working with TPI in fieldwork (Rushton, Smith, Steadman and Towers, 2023a). In my study, Dialogical Self Theory (DST) is the theoretical framework that has facilitated my investigation, which I have utilised to explore, describe and explain the notion of TPI. (See Chapter 2).

First coined by Hubert Hermans (2003; 2012) in the 1990s, DST explores the complexity and multiplicity of one's sense of self through the lens of dialogue (Gube, 2017). The theory builds upon the work of William James' nineteenth century concept of the 'self' (Hermans, 2012). James (1890) understood one's sense of self as being in one's environment as well as part of the individual; in this way, he extended one's sense of self as something that can be influenced by others. Hermans (2012) saw James' extended self as an intellectual step forward because influencing factors were no longer seen as being separate to the sense of self; rather, the two were entwined as a multiplicity.

The Bakhtinian notion of 'dialogue' and 'voice' are the additional concepts that culminated in DST (van Meijl, 2012). Bakhtin (1984) metaphorically suggested that individuals are like characters, occupied by several viewpoints. These are their voices, which are involved in dialogical relationships. In other words, characters all have their own multiple views that make them up (Hermans, 2012). Hermans built on these two authors to explain an influenced self that is not only extended outwards but one

that is also constructed by several voices. This resulted in the two concepts of 'dialogue' and 'self' being unified as the composite term 'dialogical self' (Hermans, 2003).

DST, therefore, is one theory to have dismantled the concept of a unitary self. With a DST lens, the sense of self is not a singular entity (Monti and Austin, 2018). Rather, people are a dynamic system of multiple selves, each embodying different perspectives from the voices of 'I-positions', small, multiple building blocks of internal and external influences on TPI (Hermans, 2003). Collectively, a person's many I-positions construct their overall sense of self (Ouwehand, Zock and Muthert, 2020). I-positions engage individuals in ongoing dialogues, influencing their beliefs, emotions and behaviours (Henry, 2019). As a result, conflict between I-positions can occur (Leijen, Kullasepp and Anspal, 2014) which are then experienced as 'natural phenomena' within the self (Monti and Austin, 2018).

Any tension that is experienced influences the multifaceted TPI of individuals, which are constantly changing due to the social interactions and external influences. Teachers' views from their engagements are central to their expressed TPI: Canrinus et al (2011) state that TPI is how teachers view themselves in relation to their context, concurring with work that shows TPI to be context-related (Steadman, 2023). Views such as what teachers find important in their own work and lives, steeped in their experiences and personal backgrounds (Schepens, Aelterman and Vlerick, 2009) demonstrates how a range of internal and external I-positions construct one's TPI overall, showing it to be a mechanism that teachers use to define themselves (Day et al, 2007). This defining factor highlights how TPI is not necessarily owned by teachers. Owning one's TPI does not account for the fact that some I-positions take their place within one's repertoire against the will of the person-in-question; for example, as a tyrannical I-position, which is an all-encompassing, dominant voice (Pugh and Broome, 2020). Ownership is also very much context-bound, as I-positions are instead known to reflect societal structures (Wijsen, 2020). Alternatively, TPI is used by teachers (Steadman, 2023), which is the dialogue that occurs between I-positions as they engage in dialogical exchanges (van Meijl, 2012). Such use is a valid idea as I-positions are past, present and future-oriented, and mediate between the three (Gamsakhurdia, 2019; Henry, 2019).

As educational research conducted with TPI does not always account for the importance of context, and to avoid general, descriptive happenings of TPI, my study aligns with the definition of Goktepe and Kunt (2023) who believe that TPI is a fundamental tool for contemplating teachers' lives, and this is how my research views TPI. Dialogic exploration is possible because TPI is a narrative about the teachers themselves and how they tell their stories (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), occurring through interrogation of I-positions.

As a result, I have chosen DST for this thesis as it is well-suited to scrutinise the dynamic multiplicity of teachers' I-positions (Assen et al, 2018), first noticed upon taking the post of English Leader. Indeed, the theory emphasises the importance of observing how these dialogues occur within an individual, as well as their interactions with others. Therefore, DST emphasises the complexity and multifaceted nature of one's sense of self (Henry, 2019) and sheds light on how this sense is socially constructed from significant others, groups and cultures (Torka, 2019). The study of the concept of I-positions specifically provides me with a lens to explore how teachers articulate the relationships between these multiple, fluid parts of themselves and their construction over time (Stewart, 2018). Indeed, DST helps showcase insights into primary teachers' perceptions of neoliberal accountability influences on their TPIs, and why they have remained in the profession.

1.2 An introduction to neoliberalism

In this section, I explore how English primary school accountability measures are informed by neoliberal principles. I introduce its existence as a pervasive ideology, affecting multiple aspects of teachers' professional lives, within an overview of the political history of neoliberalism. This discussion explains how modern-day, neoliberal accountability measures came to function in their current form. Following this, I introduce my study's position on neoliberalism in English primary schools.

1.2.1 Neoliberalism as a pervasive ideology and its place in English primary school policy

Neoliberalism is often presented as a universal and widespread ideology, capable of infiltrating multiple aspects of social, political and institutional life (e.g. Kamat, 2011; Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024; Peck, 2013). It does so because of its unique ability to reshape and reconfigure already existing structures (Baltodano, 2012; Holloway and Keddie, 2019) to politically and strategically operationalise qualities that it values, including competition leading to high outcomes for the context-in-question (Raaper, 2019).

It is in this way that neoliberalism specifically began to inform English primary schools, alongside all other education sectors, in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Ingleby, 2023). Neoliberal ideas were enthusiastically taken up by Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative government as a structural, common way of working, which goes someway to explain why neoliberalism can be understood as a "monolithic, coherent free market project" (Jones and Ball, 2023: 3) from this point. At this time, it was the Conservatives' belief that the individual consumer had the freedom to choose

from multiple providers (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024). Market forces were accordingly introduced to schools in a competitive manner, which resulted increasingly in a culture of outcomes and testing, controlled via top-down accountability measures such as Ofsted, centralised curricula (The National Curriculum) and assessment regimes ('SATs') (Abbott, Rathbone and Whitehead, 2013). From this point forward, these measures would increasingly hold schools accountable for their actions on a level not witnessed before (Ransen, 2007) in order to prioritise the economic well-being of England and produce the ideal school (Apple, 2017).

Thatcher confronted any ideals that were barriers to the introduction of free competition between schools. Instead, she promoted entrepreneurialism to raise outcomes, where it became expected for teachers, and in turn, their schools, to be committed individuals and settings (Brunila and Siivonen, 2016). The extent of this commitment and its effect on school outcomes were regulated with surveillance and accountability of teachers' productivity (Harvey, 2005). These neoliberal policies were justified on the grounds that changes to school funding and practices were necessary to individual, institutional, and national survival (Davies and Bansel, 2007).

To ensure one's continued survival in the neoliberal marketplace, one must strive for continuous improvement (Perryman, 2022). To achieve this, neoliberalism co-opts the language of betterment, redirecting it to serve its market-focused imperatives. This shift impacts educational practices and policies of reflection, emphasising individual school performance over others (Brunila and Siivonen, 2016; Holloway and Keddie, 2019). As a result, accountability and performance indicators increased from the 1988 Education Reform Act, which forever changed the educational landscape with the introduction of the first National Curriculum (Sturrock, 2021). John Major built on the neoliberal implementation started by Thatcher (Harvey, 2005) with further policies in the 1990s whose job was to reflect on and identify underachieving schools to better their marketability, which was achieved through the establishment of the neoliberal inspectorate, Ofsted, in 1992 (Abbott et al, 2013).

Neoliberal accountability methods in the English primary school context became farther-reaching from 1994, with the introduction of End of Key Stage Tests (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021) then have grounded themselves deeper since 2005, when short-notice Ofsted inspections were introduced, turning inspection-focused accountability into a state of permanence (Perryman, 2022). As a result of these policy increases, English governments have continued to implement a consistent neoliberal approach to educational policy in England in the form of a standards agenda (Ingleby, 2023), which includes accountability methods (Sturrock, 2024). To be clear, once neoliberal policy making had established itself in English politics, it stayed with successive Governments (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024).

1.2.2 Definition and application of 'neoliberalism'

In the English primary school context, neoliberalism is not a single phenomenon; nor is it a 'catch all, broad brush stroke' that encapsulates every practice and policy; nor is it an overwhelmingly negative concept. As Section 1.2.1 suggested, neoliberal approaches to education can be changed and adapted based upon the political will of the day (Fuller, 2019). Many authors in the educational field call for a more precise positioning of neoliberalism (e.g. Birch, 2017; Ong, 2007; Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021) as there is one commonality when attempting to define it: namely, how contradictory it is (Apple, 2017; Birch, 2017; Jones and Ball, 2023). This is because the concept of neoliberalism is used in various ways (Fuller, 2019) making it challenging to define (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024). Furthermore, neoliberalism can change the form that it takes (Klein, 2007) via the many ways in which it is applied (Peck, 2013) to configure multiple aspects of teachers' lives (Brown and Manktelow, 2016). In this thesis, I acknowledge the complexity of neoliberalism and how multiple strands can be attributed to it in English primary schools, including: "visibility, accountability, transparency, measurement, calculation, comparison, evaluation, ratings [and] rankings" (Ball, 2021: xvi).

This study explores the lived experiences of teachers and their professional identities. I therefore need to take account of specific neoliberal policies which have informed how teachers practically experience and negotiate their TPIs in the primary workplace. Apple (2017: 149) writes that neoliberalism is a "complex alliance and power bloc" and argues that if researchers seek a greater depth to their understanding, the multiple forces of neoliberalism must be recognised. Of particular significance to the primary school context and my thesis is how competition, choice and calculation are now experienced by teachers and managers as strong features of neoliberal policy in schools (Apple, 2017; Fuller, 2019). For example, Sturrock (2021; 2024) notes how the calculated practices of primary teachers were present in her research, where teachers applied tactical strategies in response to neoliberal datafication measures; this included teachers marking, feeding back and assessing some students' work in greater detail than others' to satisfy moderation requirements. Fuller (2019) had similar findings when researching Headteachers, who purposefully strategised and selected certain neoliberal policies to align with over others, which were often the ones Ofsted scrutinised when inspecting their schools.

Therefore, I position neoliberalism in the primary workplace as a plural set of policies-in-practices constructed from **competition, choice** and **calculation** (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021) and an influential force on TPI (Sturrock, 2024). This is due to the properties of competition, choice and calculation being overwhelmingly present in the English primary school context (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024). Competitive facets of neoliberal policy and practice relevant to this study include datafication; for example, teachers prioritising students who are 'below target' to the detriment of

students who are 'on target', which can affect teachers' classroom practice (Sturrock, 2021). I consider the ways in which teachers and parents ostensibly have choices of where to work and send their children to school and how that plays out in practice. I also interrogate how calculation influences teachers in the classroom; for example, to apply their appraisal targets, how to teach during lesson observations and how to act when being inspected (Perryman and Calvert, 2020).

In my consideration of competition, choice and calculation (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021) in English primary schools, I concur with the conclusions of Klein (2007: 17), who said that neoliberalism is a "shape shifter" capable of "switching identities". I specifically assert that the types of pedagogies, that exists in English primary schools, result from the need for teachers to calculate and calibrate their actions and performance in response to the largely neoliberal options arising from current education policy (Tett and Hamilton, 2021). Chapter 4 builds on this assertion by critically evaluating how neoliberalism is not, and must not be viewed as, a monolithic force in teachers' everyday lives. Not only does it have a plurality to its nature (competition, choice and calculation, amongst others), there are also subtleties and nuances to how it is experienced in English primary schools.

1.3 Research questions (RQs)

My study is guided by four RQs:

1) **How do experienced primary school teachers in the study experience neoliberal accountability measures in their work?**

The purpose of the first RQ is to contextualise the breadth of viewpoints of the participants within the context of accountability in the English primary school workplace. It seeks to understand teachers' perceptions regarding the range of methods, and forms, that accountability measures can take and be used for within primary schools. Furthermore, it ascertains whether teachers believe if any accountability measures that occur in schools are relevant to teaching and learning, or not, and why.

2) **How do experienced primary school teachers in the study articulate their sense of teacher professional identity?**

RQ2 is achieved with the tools and concepts afforded by my study's theoretical framework, DST, mainly 'I-positions'. RQ2 gives participants space to describe the ways in which they understand their TPI to be constructed. Alongside this articulation, the components of neoliberal accountability measures are scrutinised using a similar micro-approach that complements DST thinking.

3) **To what extent do experienced primary school teachers in the study feel that accountability measures influence their teacher professional identity?**

RQ3 explores the extent to which teachers believe any accountability measures that are present in schools influence their sense of TPI; in other words, the perceived happenings or outcomes of accountability measures on the I-positions within their TPI. This is worthy of investigation as accountability measures can influence TPI and contribute to teacher attrition (Carrillo and Flores, 2018).

4) **What do experienced primary school teachers in the study understand to be the contributing factors that have influenced them to remain in teaching?**

RQ4 asks the participants to consider, after thinking about accountability measures, and TPI, why they have chosen to remain in the dynamic climate of education rather than leave the teaching profession. This is important as statistics show that there is currently a teacher retention crisis in England (Maisuria et al, 2023), with a paucity of research that has worked with experienced teachers in the retention policy context (Rushton et al, 2023a). My work is in response to this methodological gap.

I now explain the importance of my study in relation to the RQs, and how my study addresses clear gaps in the research.

1.4 Why my study matters: neoliberal accountability measures and teacher professional identity (TPI) in the English primary school context

My work addresses calls from recent researchers, asserting the need for studying neoliberal accountability measures from the vantage of TPI. For example, Harris, Courtney, Ul-Abadin and Burn (2020) state how teacher responses to neoliberal accountability methods, including the restricting of curricula, should be studied. Similarly, Bartell, Floden and Richmond (2018) speak of reclaiming evaluation measures involving data to prioritise teacher actions for the betterment of their students, instead of utilising data to overly prescribe teachers' practices. While these two studies generally recommend TPI as the focus, other researchers are clearer in their sense of urgency.

Reeves (2018) notes how more research into TPI within the English primary school neoliberal context is needed because of neoliberalism's ability to change not only what teachers do but who they are as people, a viewpoint shared by others (e.g. Buchanan, 2015; Hall, 2015; O'Leary, 2013). Such influence on TPI is a worry for Ellis (2023: xi) who states that, due to the standards agenda and policies, the kind of person that a teacher should be is "assume[d]…uncontested" and the "identity of the teacher is at

stake". Therefore, the undertaking and timing of my study is essential and further strengthened due to the capabilities offered by DST. It is noted how "*creat[ing] dialogic, emancipatory spaces* that are affirming, positive and culturally sensitive" (Tett and Hamilton, 2021: 253, italics in original text) can help resist difficulties in one's setting. Spaces for dialogue promotes agency against constrictive policies (Steadman, 2023). Specifically, DST is known to assist identity development (Oleś, 2020) and there is a need for further study with DST in education (shown in Chapter 2). My study fully utilises DST to address this need.

In educational research that is conducted with TPI, the ownership of the TPI is often 'put on' the teacher: it is their TPI that they have or use. This can result in TPI being used as a resource of change, sometimes even exploited. In a study by Hall and McGinty (2015), findings showed how teachers' professional identity development was used to get teachers to 'buy into' change. Positive responses to change were framed as 'professional', leaving any form of resistance or challenge to be thought of as otherwise. Teachers who reported feelings of anxiety in Keddie et al's (2011) study questioned their abilities rather than the school itself or the systems in which they worked. Research such as these two studies show that more work needs to be done where wider contexts are fully accounted for, rather than just this is what the teacher is, or does. My work addresses this need by studying the English primary school neoliberal and retention context.

Furthermore, after conducting their work in Finland, with one newly-qualified teacher, Stenberg and Maaranen (2021) contended that future studies should work with a group of more experienced teachers outside of Finland, to deeply focus on how teachers negotiate their TPIs as part of the wider school community. In a similar assertion, Badia and Liesa (2022) analysed the written surveys of 58 Spanish teachers and stated a need for descriptive and comparative research with experienced teachers outside of Spain. As neoliberalism is difficult to observe (Apple, 2017), there is an urgency to study its effects in primary schools (Sturrock, 2021). Studying neoliberalism in the English primary school retention context will facilitate a deeper level of understanding during a teacher retention crisis, that is not improving, despite attempts from government policies (for example, the ECF). In an English context, with nine experienced primary school teachers, demonstrates how my work not only responds to the calls from these studies and necessitates my work, but provides fresh perspectives with the implementation of DST.

1.5 Thesis structure and organisation

The structure of my thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1 – Introduction. The first chapter has established the focus of my study, why it should be undertaken and has introduced TPI, neoliberalism and teacher retention, as well as the theoretical framework, DST.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework. Building on its introduction from Chapter 1, this chapter discusses DST's central place in my study by: exploring its key concepts (especially 'I-positions'), justifying its implementation in my study, and scoping the field of relevant DST studies to-date to highlight theoretical gaps in the literature.

Chapter 3 – Positionality. Accounting for my 'inbetweener' researcher self, this chapter utilises DST to thoroughly present the positions I have taken throughout my study's design and implementation.

Chapter 4 – Literature Review. I provide further contextualisation of my work and discuss the contested definitions of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism's existence in English primary schools is then critically reviewed. TPI, through the lens of DST, is explored before listing and explaining reasons for teacher retention within the neoliberal climate.

Chapter 5 – Methodology. This chapter explains and justifies the methodology I have selected and utilised for my study. I present ethical considerations taken when conducting the research and I also discuss how Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke, 2022) was used to analyse the data.

Chapter 6 – Findings. I present four overarching findings that were analysed and interpreted from the data. Findings are scrutinised against previous studies and discussed in relation to DST.

Chapter 7 – Discussion of Findings. The penultimate chapter analyses the findings from Chapter 6 against the literature to fully address the four RQs of my study. I refine and extend the theoretical capabilities of DST to the concept of neoliberalism during these discussions.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion. In the final chapter, I make four recommendations based upon the findings of this work. I outline six contributions to knowledge, show how my study can be used to inform future research and acknowledge the limitations of my work.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Framework

2.0 Introduction

In Chapter 1, my study's context was explained, and its aims and rationale were described and justified. This second chapter sets out the theoretical framework, Dialogical Self Theory (DST), that underpins my thesis.

DST characterises the relationships between teacher professional identity (TPI) and the context in which a teacher works (Ouwehand et al, 2020), portraying the links that exist between them. It achieves this by explaining TPI as a plural, multifaceted, diverse concept, via 'I-positions', small building blocks of influence that express one's TPI from multiple standpoints (Arvaja, 2016). TPI research rarely accounts for context, which results in unclear theoretical framing (Rushton et al, 2023a). Utilising a theory that accounts for context is pivotal to exploring lived experiences of primary teachers in educational research, due to the neoliberal context in which teachers work (see Section 4.1 for a full discussion of context) and the fact that TPI does not exist in isolation (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022).

In my study, I have used DST to investigate how teachers' multiple TPI expressions are interconnected within school contexts, to explore the ways in which teachers make sense of their multiple selves in relation to neoliberal accountability measures, and reasons for remaining in the profession. DST offers remedying capacities for any reported conflict (Grimell, 2020), an important capability when exploring the reasons as to why teachers have chosen to remain in the teaching profession, rather than leave it.

Chapter 2 demonstrates DST's central place as my theoretical framework by showing how the concept of 'I-positions' offers unique insights into the lived experiences of my teacher participants. Two specific movements of I-positions, relevant to my study, are also explored. Before the chapter concludes, I summarise past empirical research that has applied DST, helping to demonstrate the theoretical gap in the English primary school context, and how my study fills this gap.

2.1 Justification for utilising Dialogical Self Theory (DST)

DST was utilised as the theoretical framework for my study for two main reasons. Firstly, to fully investigate the teacher participants' accounts of their TPI (RQ2), and the influences on their TPI (RQ3), a framework that offered an in-depth examination of teachers' thinking and actions was required. DST can study and integrate teachers' thoughts and actions from internal and external sources (Badia and Clarke, 2021). Labelled as 'I-positions', these are the building blocks of a 'dialogical self' (Ouwehand et al, 2020) which allowed for a more nuanced understanding of TPI, that fully addressed RQs 2 and 3.

The second reason for applying DST to my work is that DST, and the study of I-positions, specifically helps to interpret any reported conflict within TPI (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022). In my study, DST makes it possible to focus the enquiry on any struggles, negotiations and integrations that may occur within the work life of teachers (Stewart, 2018) and why they choose to remain in the teaching profession. Therefore, fully addressing RQ4.

In turn, I now take both key motives for applying DST and explain how I-positions are the key concept to foster the understanding required to address the RQs.

2.1.1 How 'I-positions' aid deep understanding of experienced primary school teachers' professional identities (TPIs)

DST understands one's sense of self as dynamic and multiple in nature, ever shifting and fluctuating (Gamsakhurdia, 2019). 'I-positions' are the "core concept" (Grimell, 2021: 3) of DST, understood as the multiple finite building blocks that construct this dialogical sense of self (Ouwehand et al, 2020). Engaging in dialogue, I-positions manifest themselves from two main viewpoints: (i) internal positions and (ii) external positions.

Internal I-positions are expressed as *'I as'* (for example, '*I as a male'; 'I as a determined'; 'I as a teacher'*). Identification with a specific internal I-position occurs when it is felt as part of one's sense of self (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021). Internal I-positions are subsequently "appropriated" by the teacher as "belong[ing]" to them (Hermans, 2003: 101). Generation of a certain internal I-position then orients parts of the self towards the context that the teacher is in (Assen et al, 2018). It is from here that the I-positions' stances or viewpoints help to narrate the overall sense of self (Pugh and Broome, 2020).

External I-positions, on the other hand, construct one's broader sense of self as they are physically located outside of a person. External I-positions are expressed as *'My'* (for example, *'My school'; 'My class of children'*) (Pugh and Broome, 2020) and sometimes extend beyond the professional environment to contribute a wider set of factors to one's sense of self (for example, *'My father'; 'My hometown')*. External I-positions are labelled as personally and identifiably belonging to the individual, and the expression of these viewpoints means that they are also part of the sense of self assumed by the individual (Grimell, 2021). In my research, I will be taking both sets of I-positions to present teachers' overall TPIs (Arvaja, 2016).

DST explains how the concept of I-positions forms TPI over time, from their positioning, re-positioning and counter-positioning (Stewart, 2018). For that reason, TPI is mutable and not fixed (Rushton and Towers, 2023; Wijsen, 2020). I recognise that there are other theories that see one's sense of self as

complex and multiple; for example, Burke and Stets' (2009) Identity Theory. Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', whilst linking one's sense of past, present and future self to one's society, does not allow one to view one's habitus; only its effects (Maton, 2012). In comparison to this thesis, the concept of I-positions systemise precise critical interrogation of the interrelatedness of teachers' characterisations of their multiple TPIs (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). Intersectionality can be studied (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022) meaning that my research can provide details on the differing purposes and functions within different participants' TPIs (Badia, Liesa, Becerril and Mayoral, 2020). I-positions as an explorative tool is needed if I am to explore the range of accountability methods understood to exist in primary education (to explain RQ1), and to investigate how these influence participants' TPIs (RQ3) and reasons for remaining in the profession (RQ4).

Within their two categories of internal and external I-positions, as a collective, these I-position voices are the 'position repertoire of the self', which narrates one's sense of existence across narratively-complex contexts (Grimell, 2020). Numerous studies that utilise DST explain each I-position repertoire metaphorically, as an individual 'character within a story'; (which represents its position within the 'sense of self'). Each 'character' has a specific viewpoint, personality or story to tell, driven by its own opinion, motive or desire (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022; Wijsen, 2020). Their collective plurality within the 'story of the self' means that the I-position 'characters' do not always speak quietly or harmoniously. Certainly, teachers express beliefs from multiple I-positions (Assen et al, 2018). On occasions, there is supportive harmony between the I-positions when attempting to support an expressed idea (Leijen et al, 2014). In addition, 'coalitions' of I-positions may group around a united cause, due to their similar purposes or orientations, to be harmonious (Hermans, 2003). Yet, not surprisingly, conflict, criticism, disagreement, misunderstanding and challenge also occur at other times (Assen et al, 2018).

Variation in dialogue takes place because I-positions, like the sense of self, are not static nor fixed (Silva et al, 2020). I-positions are known to derive from multiple, overlapping contexts (Zhu, Mena and Johnson, 2020) and do not exist in isolation (Da Silva et al, 2020). Indeed, individuals are constructed from both personal and professional I-positions (Pugh and Broome, 2020) as TPI is a combination of a teacher's personal and professional sense of selves, influenced by their context (Rushton et al, 2023b). It is from these multiple experiences that TPIs emerge and develop (Colliander, 2018; Zembylas, 2018). Therefore, it is to be expected that variation in dialogue occurs; because of the situation and context, the I-positions will move (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022). Movement will result in different 'characters' at various times expressing their opinions, motives and desires, continuously restructuring TPIs (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). Sometimes, the movement is conflictual, and DST can be usefully

applied to analyse conflicts that exist within individual TPIs (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022), which is explored next.

2.1.2 Understanding dialogical tensions, conflicts and dissonance within experienced primary school teachers' professional identities (TPIs)

From a DST lens, dialogue is the inner speech exchanging of two or more I-positions within TPI (Gulerce, 2014). Such discourse occurs when different positions express viewpoints in relation to the person's life (Hermans, 2012). Properties of I-positions, specifically their dynamicity and multiplicity (Stewart, 2018) result in fluctuations (Perdue et al, 2018; Wijsen, 2020). Hence, why, the concept of a singular sense of self is rejected in the DST worldview (Ouwehand et al, 2020). Within the school as a workplace, dialogical exchanges within and between teachers' I-positions result in a "system of (re)construction" between the different internal and external I-positions (Zhu et al, 2020: 3) that are constantly and dynamically moving (Ouwehand et al, 2020) to help form and inform TPI.

With its position exchanges significantly contributing to its reconstruction, it is unsurprising that tensions and dissonance can be common occurrences for teachers, who must make sense of varying perspectives and expectations in and about their workplace and roles (Arvaja, 2016). For this reason, DST is a highly useful framework for addressing RQ3, where it has the theoretical capabilities to explore and analyse the sources of any conflict (Grimell, 2021). Dialogical dysfunction ('struggles') take a range of forms, as tabulated in Table 1.

Form	Dialogical dysfunction
Tyrannical	Internal dialogues are dominated by a single I-position (that is very 'loud')
Uniform	Movement between a very limited number of stereotyped I-positions, usually binary or dualist ('this-or-that') in nature
Barren	An absence of I-positions
Conflictual	Persistent conflict between polarised I-positions
Disorganised/Cacophonous	Internal dialogues are confused, unclear or perplexing
Disassociated	Avoidance, denial, or disownment of I-positions
Silent	I-positions are unvoiced or unexpressed
Disrupted	There are unresolved internal dialogues i.e. unexpressed hurt

Table 1: Types of dialogical dysfunctions (Adapted from Pugh and Broome, 2020: 226).

Table 1 demonstrates the range of dialogical conflict that can occur due to I-position movements and engagements within TPIs. Any tensions experienced can be understood as stemming from new situations in life, which DST explains as the I-positions adjusting the self (Grimell, 2020). I understand that there are many (other) reasons as to why tensions may arise in the primary workplace which are not only about one's sense of self adjusting; for example, micro aggressions from senior staff. However, it is not within the remit of this thesis' aims to focus on such tensions.

Studying conflict through I-positioning specifically attends to the inner dialogue "pursued by a teacher in striving to maintain a coherent and consistent sense of self" (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011: 316). If DST were not applied to report teachers' inner dialogues, my findings would feed into the large body of attrition research, which seeks to explain why so many teachers leave the profession, such as the work of Glazer (2018). Instead, my work identifies and analyses multiple, and often conflictual, understandings of TPI (van Meijl, 2012) which provides insights into why some teachers remain in the profession. It is the application of DST in this manner that differentiates my study from others. By gaining insight into teachers' inner dialogues through interviews and journals (see Chapter 5), I can analyse and interpret types of I-position conflicts alongside rationales for remaining in the profession.

For example, one way in which teacher-conflict can be experienced is due to an event, which is simultaneously incorporated into the self, whilst being rejected as not part of the self; the event is centralised and new I-positions emerge that clash or conflict with already established I-positions within TPIs (Perdue et al, 2018). In the English primary school context, an example of an event that could result in TPI conflict could be the prescription of curricula content by senior staff at the expense of what teachers perceive their class to require more urgently. In this example, the instruction to teach the specified content would be incorporated and rejected, manifesting itself as conflict. Rejection of an event was observed in the qualitative case study by Arvaja (2016), whose sole participant, Anna, redefined her TPI after an identity crisis event so it was more dialogically related and integrated to her personal positionings. Anna specifically ceased adopting the role of a teacher in-line with her setting's policies and redefined her TPI more in-line with her personal positionings. The event, which was a misalignment of Anna's values and the school's values, was centralised, incorporated, and rejected simultaneously, resulting in the conflict preceding the resolution.

A second way in which teacher-conflict between I-positions can be experienced is due to a mismatch between understanding of theory and its application into practice (Stewart, 2018). This is illustrated by Gube (2017: 4) who defines dialogical tensions as being "fuelled by power". Teachers must make sense of various policy perspectives in relation to their roles, and mismatches between the two can exist. Assessing the extent of any misalignments has ramifications for the teacher's sense of wellbeing,

satisfaction and engagement at work, of which there can be positive or negative consequences, like in Arvaja's (2016) study discussed above, where Anna experienced conflict but then harmony. A useful further example to argue this point is the fact that conflicts are naturally occurring (Monti and Austin, 2018). Hermans (2012) argues that tension, conflicts and uncertainties are a feature of the sense of self, thus tension is unavoidable. For example, a mismatch between policy and practice that could result in TPI conflict is when a teacher must follow the school's sanction-based Behaviour Policy yet it is believed by the teacher that a different approach, one not listed in the policy (e.g. restorative justice), is better. In my research, conflict and uncertainty arise out of the various policies at play in primary workplace settings, which manifest themselves in the day-to-day practice of the different teachers, who contributed to the data.

Pertinent to this conflict discussion is how new I-positions can originate from their binary opposite (Hermans, 2012). Hermans (ibid.) notes how a negative I-position, culminating in conflicts, can lead to its positive opposite; and yet, without the former, the latter may not manifest itself. Interesting to note is how Hermans describes that the two opposing I-positions keep one's sense of self balanced, and that negative I-positions have a place in the overall self, in the form of the outcomes they influence.

2.1.3 Outcomes to conflict for teachers

Experiencing conflict can influence positive outcomes. The literature suggests that TPI can be grown and enhanced in the aftermath of conflict (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). Dialogically, this is because I-position coalitions can support the integration of different I-positions (Arvaja, 2016). Integration is possible because one's awareness of I-position contestations is reinforced (van Meijl, 2012). Development of I-positions occurs, which surpasses individual I-position interests as a result (Leijen et al 2014). If I-positions that are understood to be negative can be negotiated, then 'radicalisation', a dominating, powerful, over-positioned 'I' "that represents a "universal" truth that is not open to doubt or criticism" is avoided (Oleś, 2020: 296).

Conflictual dialogue can also result in teachers experiencing negative emotions within TPI (van Lankfeld et al, 2017). Unease and frustration (van der Wal et al, 2019), guilt and self-doubt (Hendrikx, 2020), anxiety (Hermans, 2012) and stress (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021) have all been reported in research findings from other studies. Conflict that results in negative emotions being felt has been known to negatively influence teachers' sense of their own practices (Hokka, Vahasantanen and Mahlakaarto, 2017). For example, Brown and Manktelow (2016) noted how teachers' autonomy decreased due to conflict within TPI. Teachers can also abandon their firmly-held practices when conflict arises (Hendrikx, 2020).

It is concerning to note that conflicts could mean that some teachers' sense of care, for their job and children in their class, is decreased. Hendrikx (2020) and Arvaja (2016) both argue that conflict experiences lead to teachers having a lack of motivation and a sense of indifference for their practice. DST understands that negative outcomes to conflict are I-positions having difficulty adjusting to the original conflict (Grimell, 2020). They are disruptive due to the competing dominance, meaning that some I-positions cannot be heard (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021). Outcomes to conflict could, overall, result in TPI being adversely affected (van Meijl, 2012; van der Wal et al, 2019). This is due to negative emotions influencing teachers' practice, possibly even resulting in a lack of care.

2.1.4 Summary: the utility of studying I-positions within experienced primary school teachers' professional identities (TPIs)

DST is a valuable theoretical framework that has wide-reaching capabilities to generate new meaning. It allows for the study of teachers' knowledge, actions and interactions (Badia et al, 2020) from internal and external I-positions, which help identify and analyse the source of any reported conflicts. Therefore, studying I-positions makes it possible to more deeply explore the primary school workplace as well as the factors influencing teacher retention because DST conceptualises the multiplicity of TPI development, reconstruction and negotiation (Henry, 2019; Zhu et al, 2020). Specifically, DST focuses on complex internal dialogues between I-positions that build a teacher's TPI to shed light on the concept (Badia and Liesa, 2022).

Discussion now addresses two main ways in which I-positions are understood to move after dialogical exchanges, including conflictual ones, have occurred. A 'meta-position' is first discussed and a 'promoter position' (often referred to as a 'third position') is then examined. The relevance of both I-position movements are situated within my work.

2.2 Meta-position

The adoption of a meta-position provides an overarching view of one's I-position repertoire, so that the relationships, histories, and engagements between I-positions are visible to see (Assen et al, 2018). At this moment, the self is still influenced by I-positions however there is a wide, broad view of them, which can assist in important decision-making processes (Grimell, 2020). As a form of reflexivity, attaining a meta-position has many possible positive outcomes, including: the prevention of a radicalised over-position dominating, and shutting out the voices of other positions (Van Loon, 2020);

one's creative problem solving (Perdue et al, 2018); and, affecting future development of the self (Hermans, 2003).

Achieving a meta-position via dialogical processes takes a certain level of distanced self-reflection (Stewart, 2018; van Lankfeld et al, 2017), which can be challenging to achieve. Chapter 4 shows reflective practice to be an expectation of English primary school teachers but also how the process of reflection is dialogically situated. The uniqueness of researching with I-positioning in the English primary context is again established when discussing meta-positioning as a result. Acting 'like a helicopter' to gain a self-reflected 'birds-eye' perspective is the dominant metaphor within DST literature to explain the act of a meta-positioning (Grimell, 2020; Hermans, 2012; Oleś, 2020). This is where a person views their I-position links from a distance to harness the development opportunities from their reflections (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021).

In the primary school workplace, an example of meta-positioning may involve teachers reflecting on a lesson that did not go to plan, leaving them with feelings of disappointment. Hypothetical internal I-positions such as *I as a teacher, I as reflective* and *I as resilient* may express their stances alongside external I-positions like *My Senior Leadership Team (SLT), My school policies* and *My class of children.* A teacher, in this scenario, would see the range of I-positions influencing their decision-making processes on how to proceed following the lesson. Without the reflective tools of I-positions, there is a risk that any reflection would be simply going back over the process mentally (Phelps, 2005) rather than resulting in any form of change or improvement, a problem for teachers because attrition is known to stem from feelings of dissatisfaction (Madigan and Kim, 2021).

Alternatively, my application of DST in the primary context works well because realising a meta-position from a birds-eye vantage point facilitates the creation of a dialogical space (Assen et al, 2018). The 'I' can, and often does, take sides with one of the I-position expressions (Hermans, 2003). However, the meta-position encourages newer or submissive I-positions to speak up about their preferences and opinions, as well as identifying conflicts, enriching the dialogical space (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022). Returning to the example above, one or more of the exemplar I-positions may rarely be expressed yet meta-positioning fosters expressions from more subordinate stances. Successful meta-positioning contributes to the cohesion and continuity of the self (Da Silva et al, 2020) with the formation of a 'promoter position' (discussed next). In the context of my study, meta-positioning, leading to promoter, will illuminate the I-positions that assist in retaining these experienced teachers.

2.3 Promoter 'third' position

Much of the current literature on I-position conflicts and challenges conclude that I-position tensions lead to negative outcomes, such as the impacting of one's practice, identity dissonance, and negative emotions including confusion, insecurity and lack of control (e.g. Arvaja, 2016; Hermans, 2012; van Meijl, 2012). However, a large and growing body of literature has suggested that I-position conflicts could lead to more positive outcomes such as an increased self-reflected awareness, identity growth, personal development, transformative thinking and creative decision making (e.g. Hermans, 2012; Leijen et al, 2014; Stewart, 2018).

By way of illustration, Perdue et al (2018: 4020) explains that, when there is a conflict between I-positions, a "dialogical triad" emerges. This promoter position, or 'third' position, is a hybrid, an attempt at a resolution, and it tries to rectify the two conflicting I-positions. Other studies concur, labelling such promoter positions as a mediator (Zhu et al, 2020) whose job it is to mitigate the tension (van Lankfeld et al, 2017), guiding, connecting, taking action and innovating (Assen et al, 2018).

In the primary school workplace, a teacher may be conflicted with regards to how to use mock End of Key Stage tests ('SATS'). Suppositionally, *I as a teacher* could be expressing diagnostic use of test data whilst *My SLT* could be voicing additional drill/rote practice as routine. The promoter ('third') position in this context could be *My class of children,* who express their needs, thus influencing the teacher's next steps and overcoming the conflict. Indeed, the evidence of positive outcomes from I-position dissonance is evident in Ouwehand et al's (2020) study as the authors found that when their participant reflected and engaged in dialogue, a third position, that integrated different I-positions, fostered positive outcomes. Therefore, my application of DST in the primary context is appropriate because overcoming conflict is known to assist teacher retention (Towers and Maguire, 2017). The development of a promoter position from its preceding meta, means that teachers can renegotiate, nurture and shape their preferred TPI (Hokka et al, 2017).

2.4 Empirical Research with Dialogical Self Theory (DST)

Since its initial deployment in the field of psychology in the 1990s, DST has been utilised worldwide, in many fields of study, and with various methodological choices, such as: autobiographies, questionnaires, interviews and surveys. Most DST studies still take place within the field of psychology (e.g. Den Elzen, 2021; Leijen et al, 2014; Van Loon, 2020). Where DST work has been undertaken within education, it is often done so with trainee or newly-qualified teachers (e.g. Martínez-Valdivia, Pegalajar-Palomino and Amber-Montes, 2024; Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021; Xu, Stahl and Poole,

2024) to map out developing TPIs at the start of careers and provide insights on the sources of early career struggles.

Certainly, there are DST studies conducted with more experienced teachers: Assen et al (2018) worked with four teachers in the Netherlands, all with 2 – 8 years' teaching experience and collected data via observations and interviews. Studies by Badia and Clarke (2021) and Badia and Liesa (2022) both utilised surveys, each working with around fifty participants, the very large proportion of whom had 8 years' teaching experience, or more. None of these studies focused on English primary education with experienced school teachers; this is where my study comes in.

Indeed, reviewing the DST literature highlighted the very limited studies in the UK. Where they were UK-based, DST research was not conducted with primary school teachers. For example, Crafter, de Abreu, Cline and O'Dell (2015) interviewed 46 young people (15- to 18-year-olds) to further understand their cultural identity. Application of DST has often been across mainland Europe, outside of school contexts (e.g. Grimell, 2021; Oleś, 2020; Ouwenhand et al, 2020). Other worldwide studies were theoretical- or practice-based discussions, with no participants (e.g. Gube, 2017; Monti and Austin, 2018; Pugh and Broome, 2020) or a single participant, case study approach (e.g. Arvaja, 2016).

Thus, I argue that there is a clear methodological gap in the DST educational field for a study such as my own. The affordances offered by DST, for example, I-positions and conflict remedy, have informed my thesis, and I use it to explore the thinking processes of a smaller group of experienced primary school teachers, as this has not yet occurred in England. My study, therefore, makes a distinct contribution to the literature in this field because I have utilised DST to examine a smaller group of experienced teachers' professional identities, contributing to a gap in the literature of the primary school context identified by Rushton et al (2023a) as well as engaging in a study with DST that is larger than a single case study. In applying DST to my work, there are many theoretical and methodological advantages that can be fostered, as has been discussed.

2.5 Conclusion

Chapter 2 has presented and justified DST as the theoretical framework for my study. At length, I have explained how I-positions, the multiple building blocks that construct TPI (Ouwehand et al, 2020), have deep and wide-reaching theoretical capabilities to fully address my RQs. I-positions specifically allow me to present how the research participants explain their multiple TPIs, the influences on them, potential conflicts and why they choose to remain in the profession. This is fundamental to addressing

the RQs, and illuminating the extent to which TPI conflicts are key to teachers navigating issues that might lead to attrition.

Empirical research has neglected to apply DST to educational fields. On the infrequent occasions that it has been implemented in school contexts, it has been conducted overseas with trainee teachers (e.g. Zhu et al, 2020) or early career teachers (e.g. Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021). Participant sizes also vary. My study, therefore, addresses a clear research gap by focusing on the primary English sector, with nine experienced primary school teachers.

My own positionality, from a dialogical standpoint, is the focus of Chapter 3 to fully account for myself in the research process.

Chapter 3 – Positionality

3.0 Introduction

Chapter 2 provided a detailed justification for Dialogical Self Theory (DST), the theoretical framework implemented in this study. From the lens of my own sense of dialogical self, I now use DST to explain my positionality, specifically showing the positions from which I stand (Greene, 2014) and how these have shaped my reasons, designs and methods of the study (Massoud, 2022).

After explaining how reflexivity has been applied, Chapter 3 considers my own teacher professional identity (TPI) as a primary Deputy Headteacher, alongside accountability measures and their relationships with poor teacher retention. I agree with many qualitative researchers when they say that the researcher is reflected in the research process (e.g. Chavez, 2008; Greene, 2014; Massoud, 2022). Therefore, influences on this study are critically evaluated. Towards the end of the chapter, I explain why being an 'inbetweener' researcher has enriched this study.

3.1 Reflexivity

The reflexive process of meta-positioning (Section 2.2) has been the evaluative tool used to interrogate and analyse my positionality. Being reflexive has involved me questioning and examining my own I-positions through "conscious" and "deliberate self-scrutiny" (Hellawell, 2006: 483) throughout the course of the research. The process of reflexivity showed me that previously unchallenged assumptions pertaining to TPI have developed my research interests (Collins, 2015). I therefore employed critical and analytical self-scrutiny so that I can fully present my role in the research process (Mason, 2003). I have kept a reflexive diary to aid this evaluation and interrogation.

As discussed in Chapter 2, I-positions are informed by varying sources, including one's history, culture, institution, and relationships (Zhu et al, 2020). Reflexivity accounted for the I-positions that I hold, in the research world (Preissle et al, 2015). Guba and Lincoln (2005) state that reflexivity allows the researcher's life influences to be questioned and critically reflected on during the process of becoming our researcher selves. I achieve this with meta-positioning, which has facilitated me to question and interrogate firmly held beliefs and events about my own TPI, to be open to alternative ideas and not take the perceptions of myself for granted (Zembylas, 2018). I present three reflexive accounts from distinct stages of my career to demonstrate this.

3.2 Reflexive accounts from my teaching career

3.2.1 New professional I-positions in my repertoire

I qualified as a teacher in 2009 yet forming and embodying professional I-positions beyond that of *I as a teacher* only occurred from my fourth year in the profession, when I was promoted to being responsible for English standards across the school. Meta-positioning showed me how leading English developed new professional I-positions within my sense of self: for example, *I as a new English Leader* and *I as a future experienced English Leader.* Established internal I-positions, such as *I as driven, I as determined* and *I as career-minded,* expressed to these newer I-positions the need to achieve and succeed. Consequently, the neoliberal expectations imposed on me meant that I did not question any of them. Subject reports, Governor meetings and 'standards checks' became my way of doing things, normalised and second nature (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). However, reflexivity has taught me that these career experiences reduced my own autonomy at the same time as shaping and influencing my TPI (O'Leary, 2013). I believed and accepted that it was in my own interests to willingly participate in neoliberal practices as a manger in my new role (Pratt, 2016). As a result, for my I-positions to succeed, I tailored my TPI to the required dominant accountability measures (Buchanan, 2015). Due to the additional demands that were being placed on me from the formation of these new I-positions, and the demands that I was placing on other teachers, I began to question why some teachers, including myself, remained in the dynamic and busy profession.

Indeed, the development of my professional I-positions as I was becoming a more 'experienced' teacher was an early frame of reflexive reference in developing this study's guiding research questions (RQs). My dual role of teacher/manager gave rise to engagement with different accountability methods. Observing, reporting, checks and meetings changed my experience as a teacher in negative ways. Yet, embedded I-positions, such as *I as passionate,* fuelled my desire to continue the role to manage English to what neoliberalism showed me to be the best approaches. Indeed, my TPI was influenced by the neoliberal practices I was being asked to manage, which is what I believed I should do (Schepens et al, 2009) and what was relevant (Beijaard et al, 2004; Poom-Valickis and Löfström, 2019) to lead English well. Once again, due to the demands within and from my TPI, I reflected on why some teachers remained in the heavily-observed profession.

3.2.2 First experiences of high-stakes accountability

In their research, Brown and Manktelow (2016) found that teachers who taught Upper Key Stage Two felt more constraints than those who taught Year Three and below; indeed, this was my first experience

of such educational constraints. After managing English for two years, I then led and taught in Year Six in addition to my subject responsibility. Pressurised accountability was first experienced during this time, as Year Six is a high-stakes testing year group in primary schools. I was accountable for reporting on the classes' progress and attainment, and the extent to which they would meet their individually set targets for Core Subjects. Before this point, I had not understood the full extent to which neoliberal accountability methods could be negatively experienced.

Moreover, when teaching and leading Year Six, my pedagogical approach did not agree with the then Deputy Headteacher, who held a very test-oriented, narrow, drill-learning teaching philosophy. My philosophy, on the other hand, was based on giving the children a broad and balanced curriculum, still with standards and rigour, but without narrowing learning to focus primarily on exam skills. The Deputy Headteacher prioritised the latter and via the imposing of several accountability methods, insisted that I did also, constraining my I-positions.

Being persistently held accountable for classroom practices that I did not agree with meant that my I-position repertoire was uniform as I moved amongst limited binary I-positions (Pugh and Broome, 2020) namely my teaching philosophy 'versus' that of my Deputy Headteacher. These limited movements created dissonance between my I-positions, especially *I as a teacher* and *I as a Year 6 Leader*. Lincoln and Guba (2013) write that identities can restructure when an individual is surrounded by very different people to themselves. However, my TPI did not restructure: I conformed because I felt, due to the role that I was in, that I had to, which resulted in the conflict that I describe from some of my I-positions being silenced. *My Deputy Headteacher,* as an I-position, eventually internalised itself into a tyrannical voice in my repertoire (Pugh and Broome, 2020). From a meta-position, it was my other well-established I-positions, such as *I as experienced,* I could draw upon, who maintained what I really stood for and philosophically believed education to be about.

3.2.3 Accountability, professional identity dissonance, and remaining in the profession

With reflexivity, I understand that my TPI was conflicted. In what was perceived to be for the best interests of the Year Six's examination results, and by extension, their schooling, my external I-position *My Deputy Headteacher* pressured *I as a teacher* to act in a way that contradicted my professional beliefs and values, resulting in an "internal struggle...between the situation-as-is and the situation-as-preferred" which left me feeling uneasy and frustrated (van der Wal, Oolbekkink-Marchand, Schaap and Meijer, 2019: 60). Despite these feelings, I did not enact the TPI that the Deputy Headteacher required me to, which I explain now.

Hong's (2010) work illuminates my lack of conforming in this context, as he found that teachers in his study, who remained in the profession, were not satisfied with macro-level school leadership but suppressed their negative feelings. I adapted to the given context, as my TPI is adaptable, but did not wholly believe or accept it. My surface-level behaviour imitated compliance but led to internally negative emotions such as guilt, anger and self-doubt. However, because I felt responsible to the pupils, I held myself accountable to them and actively changed what I did in the presence of the Deputy Headteacher (Hendrikx, 2020). I used self-surveillance (Page, 2018) out of fear of being categorised as a 'bad teacher'.

Reflecting on this TPI dissonance in Year Six, I can theorise that I was selectively choosing which I-positions to show at certain times. This demonstrates that some teachers are capable of separating parts of their 'true' TPI away from pressure being faced to meet the requirements imposed upon them; however, it is not certain for how long or under which conditions that this can work successfully (Katsuno, 2012). Indeed, Woods and Jeffrey (2002) suggest that TPI separation is a short-term solution and could intensify the TPI conflict by reinforcing accountability, which influences some teachers to leave the profession (Hendrikx, 2020).

My behaviour conflicted with my TPI but not to the extent that I felt compelled to leave the school or profession even though this has been known to happen (Hanna et al, 2019). I remained a teacher because I was fully invested in the children and despite my TPI conflict, I truly believed I was still their best hope in enjoying a successful year. Because I identified as experienced by this point (eight years in the job), I tolerated the situation (Van der Want, Schellings and Mommers, 2018). The negative emotions felt during this tension resulted in me changing my practice, *not* my TPI (Hokka, et al, 2017). Repetitions of enactments, such as excessive testing of children, fixed my TPI within one context (Zembylas, 2018). I knew what was 'right' for my teaching and held onto my philosophy and true TPI strongly. I had produced a fabrication (Ball, 2003) in order to be seen to be doing the job well, as defined by the Deputy Headteacher.

The TPI dissonance was not a negative experience as I used the experience to contribute to a stronger professional identity based on what I know to be both desirable and important to teaching (van der Wal, 2018). This led to me seeking to understand how other teachers present their TPIs within the influences of accountability measures, which significantly led to the design of this work and its RQs. Namely, I became a researcher with deep knowledge of the field as well as an ability to detach myself from certain I-positions when needed. In other words, part-insider and part-outsider researcher.

3.3 *I as an insider researcher* and *I as an outsider researcher*

Working in primary education for over fifteen years, I am attuned to the nuances and idioms of the shared identity of a 'teacher' (Le Gaillais, 2008). Therefore, some of my research into teacher identities is specifically voiced from the I-position, *I as an insider researcher.* Partly identifying as an 'insider researcher' is due to working as a researcher with a group of experienced primary school teachers like myself, with deep prior knowledge (Fleming, 2018; Greene, 2014).

As positioned throughout this chapter thus far, I recognise that my experiences are unique to me and my career. I have my own levels of resilience and responses to situations that are individualised. Whilst I took an 'active stance' against my TPI dissonance, this was only the case in my circumstances and other teachers' experiences may be different. Therefore, despite my *I as an insider researcher* I-position*,* there is a level of detachment away from such strong 'insiderness' within my I-position repertoire. *I as an outsider researcher* also exists as one of my I-positions because I am studying other teachers with whom I have differences as well as similarities. Furthermore, I do not work with these teachers nor know them outside of this research process. There is, as a result, an element of "distance [and] detachment" (Chavez, 2008: 475).

Thus, I do not identify as an 'insider researcher' only but neither am I an 'outsider'. Many qualitative researchers similarly state how placing insider against outsider researcher is a false dichotomy (e.g. Dwyer and Buckle, 2009; Greene, 2014; Milligan, 2016). Rather, I see myself as part-insider and part-outsider, which is something that is unavoidable (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2013). For example, although I share "*some* characteristics, roles or experiences" with the participants, (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 55, emphasis not in original text), I do not share all. In addition, as Chapter 2 described, I-positions are influenced by many relationships and contexts, as well as values, knowledge and practices (Grimell, 2020; Zhu et al, 2020). Therefore, continuing to think with binaries of insider and outsider is restrictive and simplifies my positionality (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009).

To avoid binary thinking, qualitative researchers often 'sit' on a continuum of insiderness and outsiderness, and can exist at a certain position, depending upon the closeness of the researcher to the participants (e.g. Fleming, 2018; Greene, 2014; Hellawell, 2006). For example:
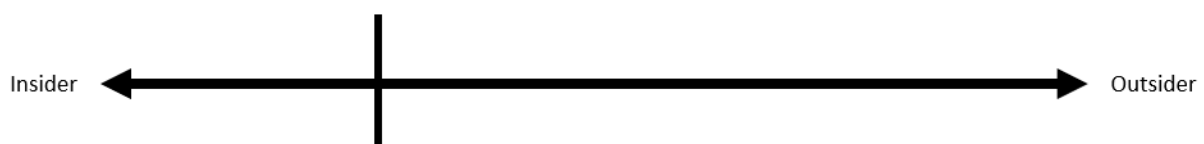
Figure 1: Example of an insider/outsider continuum

Figure 1, with its marker closer to 'Insider', could typify my positionality towards the end of the research process. The placement of the marker could be further right earlier on or when discussing something of which I had less prior knowledge. Indeed, thinking with continua shows that positioning is not static. Researchers can move along the continua when researching (Milligan, 2016).

Figure 1 show how *I as an insider researcher* and *I as an outsider researcher* were both present during this research process. However, Figure 1 does not demonstrate the complex interplay between the two, and how both I-positions (as well as others) could be present at once. I therefore identify as an 'inbetweener' researcher (Milligan, 2016).

3.4 *I as an inbetweener*

I as an inbetweener "occup[ies] the space between" (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009: 61) because it is not possible to be insider *or* outsider. There is an element of both insider and outsider within all qualitative researchers (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2013). Being both positions is because qualitative research is intimate but at the same time, I am a researcher. *I as an inbetweener* strongly challenges all notions of insider/outsider movement, such as the movement depicted by Figure 2, below.
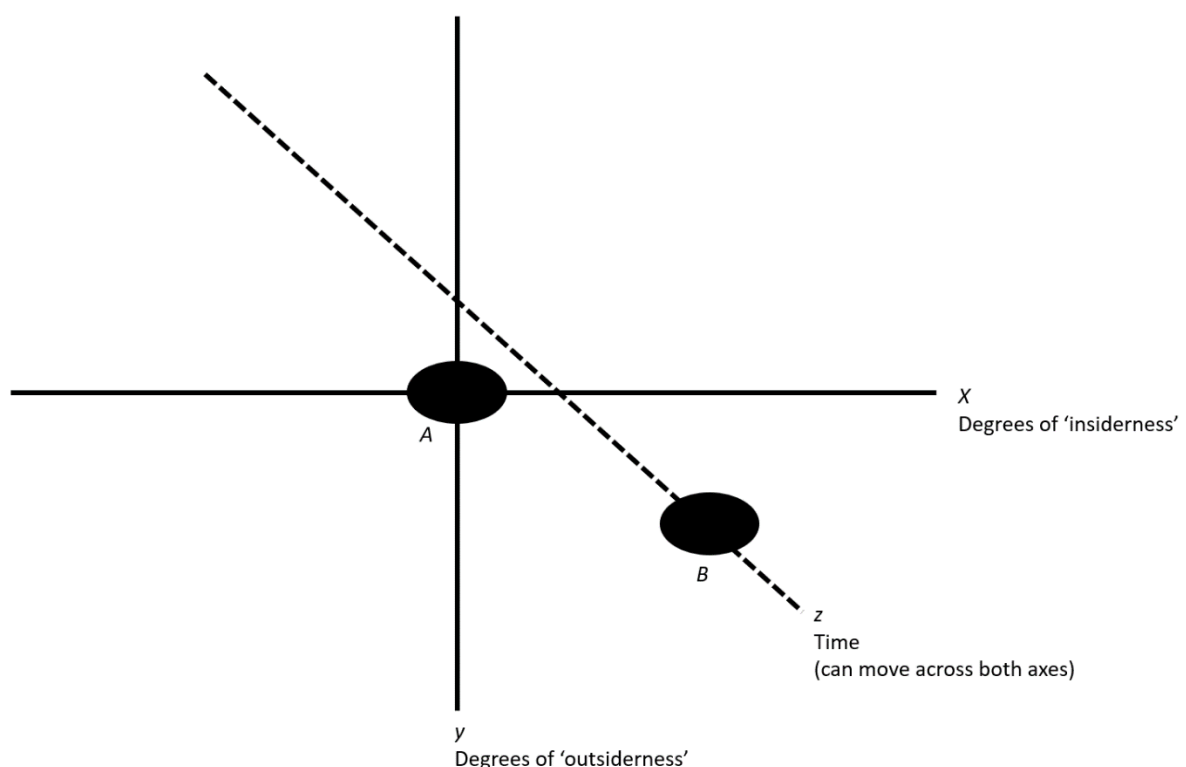
Figure 2: Conceptualisation of insider/outsider movement through time. (Adapted from Chavez, 2008: 477).

Chavez (2008) states how insider researchers sit at Point A on Figure 2, as a member of the community under study. I dispute this positioning as Point A is between insider and outsider, highlighting a further flaw in the insider/outsider statuses, and how it is not possible to be one or the other. Nevertheless, over time, Chavez (2008) explains that the researcher could move (Point B on Figure 2). In this example, Point B, centralised with some insiderness and outsiderness, could be when my insider and outsider I-positions were both positioned at once. Again, this is not precise enough. I re-position Point A as 'the space in between' (Figure 3, below).
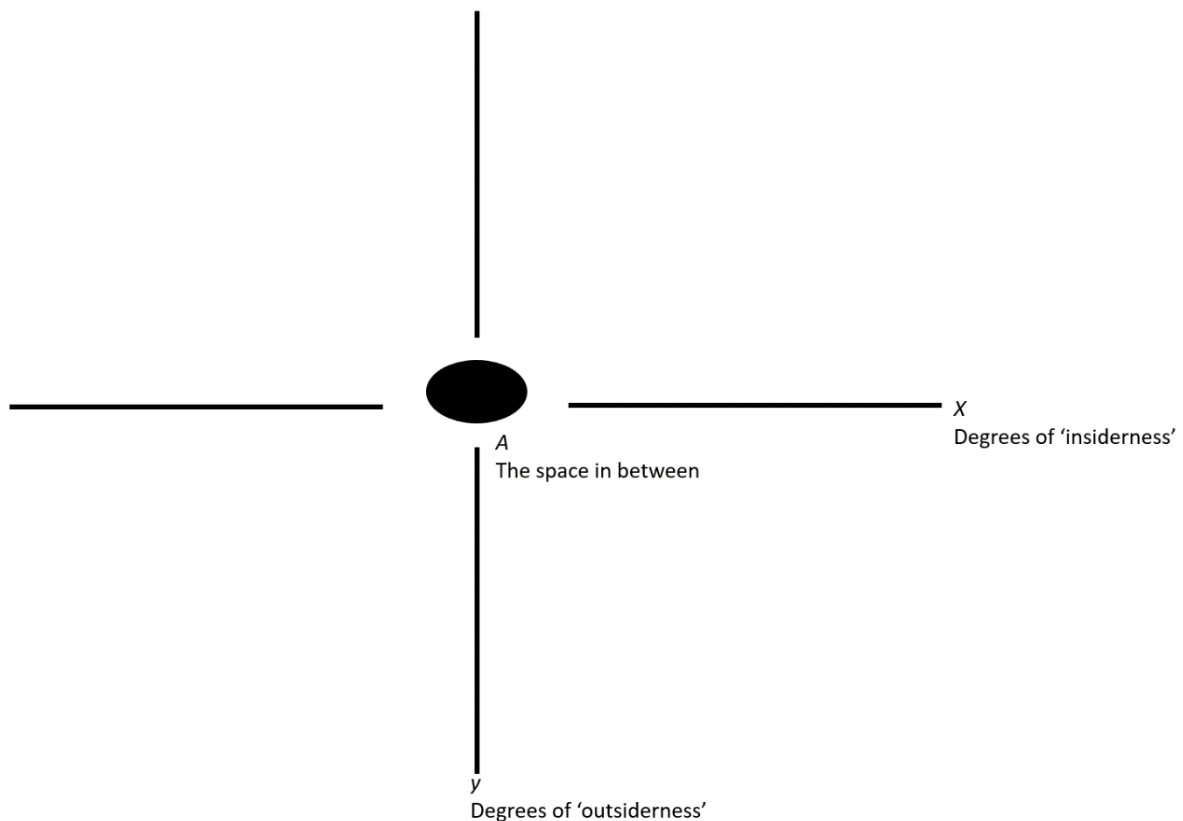
Figure 3: The space in-between (Built on from Chavez, 2008: 477).

Figure 3 helps to illustrate my position as Deputy Headteacher and researcher: I am someone who may be perceived as being all-knowing in comparison to teachers not yet in leadership roles thus impacting quality of data. However, whilst I possess information about my work, it is the participants that owned their knowledges and experiences for the study (Anyan, 2013); they had much expertise in the primary educational field, and I viewed them as very knowledgeable (Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton, 2024) from the I-position of *My expert participants*. Therefore, all participants and I had a stake in the research and my re-positioning of 'the space in between', Point A on Figure 3, shows that there was no movement between my insider and outsider statuses. Instead, I could view the research

simultaneously as both (Hellawell, 2006). To actively consider the application of these insider and outsider subjectivities, I drew upon the work of Rawlings Smith and Rushton (2023), who argued that reflexive embracing of researcher positionality does not negatively affect knowledge production. I achieved this by utilising *I as an inbetweener* as an enriching analytical resource, by being close to the research with certain I-positions (such as *I as a teacher)* and distancing myself from it with others (such as *I as a learner)* (Greene, 2014). Certainly, my inbetweener positionality is advantageous as it shows that I care for, and have professional curiosity about, the profession in which I am trying to uphold to a greater extent than an insider or outsider alone could show. There are benefits of both as "empathy and alienation are useful qualities for a researcher" (Hellawell, 2006: 487).

I do, however, share the concerns of insider researcher Lorenzetti (2013) when she worried about separating her participants from their first-hand stories, resulting in their experiences becoming hers, as the researcher. By occupying the in-between space (Figure 3, Point A) I am candidly showing the removal of insider/outsider boundaries, meaning that the stories of my participants are prominent (Massoud, 2022). Foregrounded stories are achieved by presenting detailed, participant-driven data from a space that shows realism and trustworthiness (Milligan, 2016).

My job as a researcher is one of reporting, and an inbetweener position ensures this, as positions from outsiderness could result in inaccurate representations of I-positions and missing interesting data due to a lack of nuanced awareness (Fleming, 2018). Instead, from the unique positioning of *I as an inbetweener,* other I-positions, imbued with knowledge, care and professional curiosity, can help to develop relationships based on trust and camaraderie, something that Milligan (2016) found from her inbetweener positionality. This helps with my fair and accurate reporting of data.

3.5 Conclusion

Attaining a meta-position has helped me to reflect on how the multifaceted complexities of my TPI formation and construction, and how the notion of TPI tensions and conflicts, have evolved during my teaching career. This positionality chapter has discussed at length how these struggles have influenced my own TPI (van der Wal et al, 2019). In turn, the design and implementation of this study has evolved from an inbetweener status, which brings the benefits of simultaneous insider and outsider I-position insights.

I can now undertake this study to a high standard at a fundamental time for education. This is because, as of September 2024, I have been teaching for fifteen years and English primary retention is still problematic (Maisuria et al, 2023). Over the course of my teaching career, I have, however, witnessed

many teachers remain in the teaching profession and I want to develop knowledge and insights as to why this is the case. I have remained in the career despite battling with my own sense of professional identity. It is essential to see how other teachers navigate the accountability measures that they are accountable to and the extent to which such measures influence their experiences of professional identity, as not every teacher remains in teaching after TPI conflicts (Towers and Maguire, 2017). An extensive review of the literature is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4 – Literature Review

4.0 Introduction

Chapter 4 is a review of the literature relevant to my study's research questions (RQs). Starting with RQ1, I contextualise neoliberalism in English primary schools and problematise its definition. I build on Chapter 1 to state what neoliberalism is specifically associated with for the context of my study before discussing how it can exist in English primary schools. English primary teacher retention (RQ4) is situated alongside the neoliberal discussion to scrutinise teachers' decision-making processes in context. RQs 2 and 3 follow, and I present what teacher professional identity (TPI) means for this study and the influences that are understood to affect it.

4.1 The English primary school neoliberal context

As discussed earlier, this research is strongly positioned in a deeply neoliberal education climate. Consequently, neoliberal policies inform the everyday lived experiences of English primary school teachers (Perryman, 2022; Winkler-Reid, 2017). Over the last 40 years, neoliberal policy and the principles underpinning it have been normalised within schools and become established as the common-sense ways that things are done (Anderson and Cohen, 2015; Harvey, 2005). Examples include prescribed and standardised curricula and assessment, alongside public management procedures such as controlling and monitoring teachers' performance, as well as inspecting and evaluating their outputs (Reeves, 2018). In this way, I argue that teachers enact their TPI through neoliberal policies because of their ability to "capture hearts and minds" (Finnegan, 2021: 155).

Through the enactment of established policies and the practices that arise out of them, neoliberal principles often enter teachers' consciousnesses and change their actions, thus their professional identities (Buchanan, 2015). I have used Foucault's (2020b) concept of 'governmentality' to explain how the repeated enactment of such principles (through policy and practice) can change a group's actions without them registering it. Ball (2015) defines 'governmentality' as the 'vehicle' for methods of control and dominance to be applied. In the case of primary teachers, governmentality is achieved through deliberate and sustained tactics employed by the combined force that regulate their professional actions. The 'vehicles' (Ball, 2015) include the senior leaders of a school, Ofsted or the Department for Education (DfE), who govern and control what teachers should be aspiring to and what they will be judged on (for example, high examination outcomes).

In the primary workplace, surveillance is also a principal form of control, meaning that primary teachers' behaviours can be monitored and changed, via observation and assessment, to the will of

the institution (Foucault, 2020b). Dialogically, this change of actions and professional identity is because neoliberalism is a source of some I-positions, as I-positions are known to derive from one's context (Da Silva et al, 2020). In entering teachers' hearts and minds, the English neoliberal primary education context provides some teachers with the tools to control and construct their own TPIs. For example, Keddie (2016) found some teachers to deliberately craft TPI with a sense of purpose, by representing a version of themselves based on what neoliberal policies define as 'successful', such as high examination grades. Foucault (2020a) discusses how one's perceptions of their 'independent' control and construction of their professional identities in the workplace, is actually more informed by the controlling mechanisms at play, which, in the context of this study, would inform and sustain teachers' professional identities, making them recognisable to themselves and others. The use of a Foucauldian lens therefore illustrates how studies such as Keddie's (2016) reveal the way in which neoliberal policies, and the principles informing them, help facilitate some teachers to survive, and even thrive, in the profession.

An important distinction, however, must be made between neoliberalism being presented as an overwhelmingly negative force compared to one that can be used for good. This is because studies like Keddie's (2016) are rare. Most literature in the field of education posits neoliberal influences on TPI as negative (e.g. Anderson and Cohen, 2015; O'Leary, 2013; Reeves, 2018). These studies point to the negative impact of centralised control over teachers and their practices, as neoliberalism shows teachers how to teach and succeed, and how not to (Pratt, 2016). Moreover, they focus on how education policies increasingly coerce and mould teachers, through surveillance and assessments. The neoliberal context therefore is one that is often characterised as holding immense control over teachers (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021), creating feelings of a lack of autonomy, which many experience negatively (Fuller, 2019). Such policies, that constrain and attempt to control, could exacerbate the teacher retention crisis as a result (Rushton and Bird, 2024).

I feel that it is unsatisfactory to state that the primary neoliberal context is one that is wholly negative; doing so would propose that there exists a one-dimensional policy-in-practice in English primary schools, which is experienced by teachers as a singularity. The literature illustrates that this is not the case, noting instead how the neoliberal context is constantly and inevitably in-flux. For example, Perryman (2022) and Finnegan (2021) describe this flux in terms of increases in influence, e.g. neoliberal policies and practices are greater in the 2020s when compared to previously, mainly due to changes in Government (Sturrock, 2021). Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) also discuss how the neoliberal educational context is changeable, restless and unfinished. It is helpful therefore to think of the neoliberal educational climate in English primary schools as fluctuating in its quest to increase successful outcomes for its institution because a static interpretation would not account for its multiple

facets (Birch, 2017), nor the multiple professional identities of teachers working within its remit (Steadman, 2023). Framing neoliberalism as a force for betterment in the context of my study is also an appropriate consideration because studies have shown how some teachers remain in the profession due to wishing to drive improvement in schools and children's lives (Arthur and Bradley, 2023), working alongside neoliberal policies in order to do so (Sturrock, 2024). It is, therefore, pertinent to see the interconnectivity that exists between: (i) neoliberalism as a multifaced influence; (ii) with regard to the formation of TPIs; (iii) and, teacher retention, within the primary English context.

4.2 The functionings of neoliberalism in the English primary school retention context

In Chapter 1, I posited that neoliberalism in the primary workplace manifests itself as a plural set of policies-in-practices, constructed principally from interpretations of competition, choice and calculation (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). In the primary school context, accountability methods are therefore neoliberal in nature, and an influential force on TPI (Sturrock, 2024). In this section, I build on these ideas to critically discuss how neoliberal concepts of competition, choice and calculation can be understood in terms of in the English primary school retention context, and how they influence TPIs. These three concepts or 'pillars' are firmly anchored throughout the literature on English education policy, as shown in Figure 4, below.
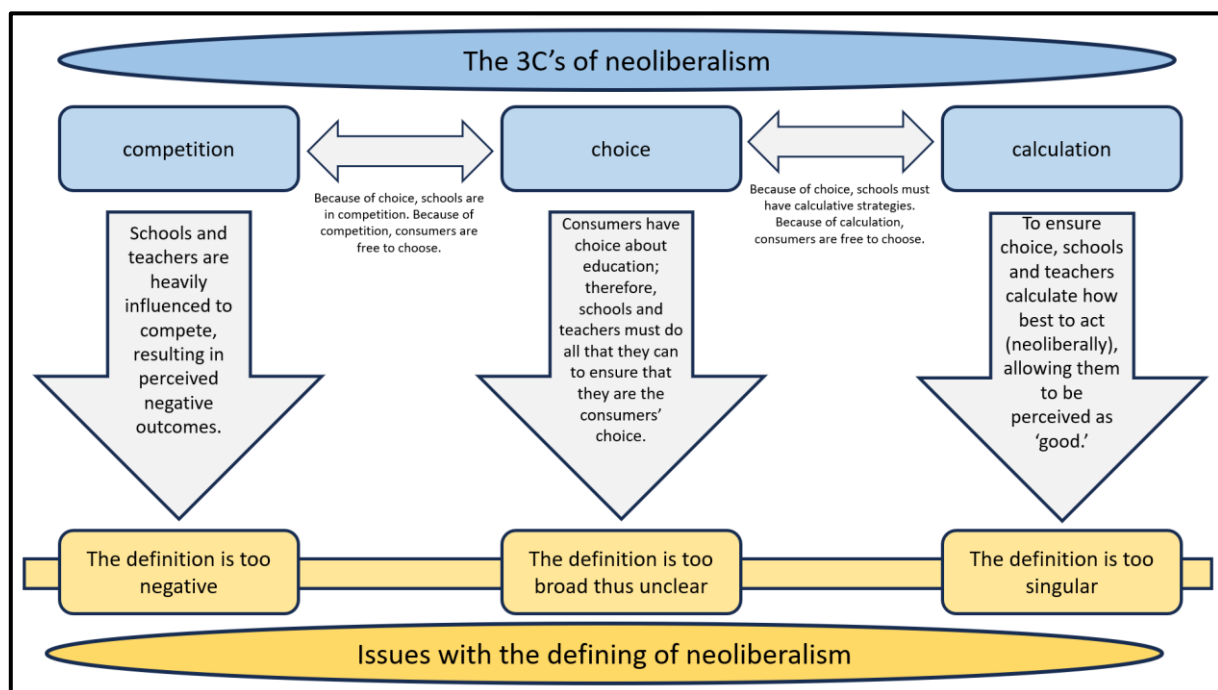
Figure 4: The 3C's of Neoliberalism. Figure 4 demonstrates the links between the three pillars and the associated issues when attempting to define 'neoliberalism'.

The ***competitive*** nature of schools working within the neoliberal climate has been identified by Finnegan (2021), Abbott et al (2013) and Brown and Manktelow (2016) amongst many others (e.g. Birch, 2017; Fuller, 2019). They have argued that the competitiveness between schools leads to many parents as consumers, who can ***choose*** the primary school where their child attends (Day et al 2007; Page, 2018). This means that, if parents are free to choose from educational settings, teachers must then best ***calculate*** how to "'own' that which the school defines as good practice" (Perryman, 2022: 57), to be perceived, by themselves and others, as doing 'well' and 'succeeding' (Buchanan, 2015). This is due, in part, to TPI being influenced by policy and the associated perceptions of what a teacher should be like (Rushton and Towers, 2023).

Whilst it does not embody every facet of neoliberal thought, Figure 4 offers clarity regarding three main features present within neoliberal practices, according to the literature. Furthermore, Figure 4 resolves some of the contradictory perceptions across previous research. This is because a definition that captures the complexity of neoliberalism's components and facets relevant to English primary education and the retention of teachers is absent from previous work. Additionally, there are three core issues regarding several authors' attempts to define neoliberal thought, discussed with Figure 4, next.

4.2.1 Neoliberal competitive practices in English primary schools

Negative perceptions of neoliberal policies by educational researchers (e.g. Hall and McGinty, 2015; Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024; Peck, 2013) exist in schools due to the competitions that occur within and between them. For example, Reeves (2018) noted how her focus teacher felt a lot of pressure to raise her students' test scores. Similarly, Gewirtz and Cribb (2008) found that some of their teacher participants were pressured to choose between maintaining their values and beliefs by giving students what was best for them (or met their needs); or, conforming to the neoliberal forces, thus giving students something that was positioned by the sector as a higher capital gain (higher test scores). In other words, the decision was between ensuring the students got the necessary credentials that they needed or disadvantaging them by refusing to, for example, teach to a test, thus shunning the dominant neoliberal forces at play in their assessments. Eight-out-of-ten of the participants from the study of Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton (2024) reported 'teaching to the test', due to their career prospectives being potentially affected depending upon the performance of their pupils in their examinations. If teacher success arises from high grades (Wilkins, 2012), teachers can be positioned as vulnerable because if they do teach to the test, some students still may not achieve due to factors beyond their control. However, neoliberal practices, for example, End of Key Stage Tests ('SATs') or

league tables, do not acknowledge this. The studies of Gewirtz and Cribb (2008), Reeves (2018) and Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton (2024) therefore provide examples of schools being influenced by the neoliberal policies that force them to act in certain competitive ways that are not always complementary. Findings such as these feed into the negative narrative about neoliberal policies and principles in English education prevalent in the literature as it provides evidence to show that teachers are effectively disempowered by them (McChesney, 1999).

There exists evidence of an alternative view that maintains neoliberal policies in education are uniformly and inevitably negative. Neoliberalism can be seen as a force for good in the context of this study, facilitating some teachers to develop a secure TPI, succeed at, and enjoy their jobs. To demonstrate this point, Perryman (2022) found that some teachers welcomed the competitiveness that stemmed from the accountability method of classroom observations. Their experience of competition resulted in feelings of satisfaction and specifically intensified as Perryman's (ibid.) participants accepted observations as routine and normal. When Foucauldian thinking is applied to this educational context, it reveals that when teachers have become accustomed and comfortable with competitive practices, it is due to the concept of governmentality executing very specific forms of control (Foucault, 2020b). In this instance, in-school competition, including classroom observations to ensure that teachers teach 'better', resulted in positively reported experiences.

Neoliberalism as a positive influence on teachers' feelings not only demonstrates the wide reach that neoliberalism can have within education (Baltodano, 2012), but also on teachers and their personal experiences (Jones and Ball, 2023). In this instance, governmentality is assisting some teachers to act with resilience to the negative effects that neoliberal practices can result in (e.g. restricting practice, discussed above). As a result, these teachers are persevering in the profession to benefit from the positive effects that neoliberalism sometimes affords. In particular, some teachers within this context are therefore presenting themselves as the committed individual that neoliberal practices value (Cleary Jr., 2017). Primary neoliberal polices and practices are therefore repositioning these 'values' (perseverance, resilience and commitment) for its own gain, to embed competitive practices; however, it is the teacher who seemingly benefits from this repositioning also as they are recognised and rewarded.

Competitive outcomes, in the form of recognition and rewards, can be of help to primary teacher retention. Recognition and rewards cement the competitive nature of contemporary English schools because it is the outperformance of other teachers or schools that is rewarded (Wilkins, 2012). Indeed, it can be argued that neoliberal policies reward teachers who successfully enact preferred models of practice and professionalism (O'Leary, 2013). It is, therefore, through this competitive nature that

school rewards or punishments are decided, and specifically, if teachers are deemed effective or not (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). Such labelling has implications for whether teachers stay in the profession, or leave. There are two specific papers that exemplify the link between competitive rewards and punishments, and teacher retention.

Arthur and Bradley (2023) and Iannucci and MacPhail (2019) found the receipt of recognition and rewards from school leaders to be a substantial retentive factor in encouraging teachers to remain in teaching, demonstrating, for the purpose of this thesis, how I-positions must be provided with external sustenance to thrive. Based on the relationship between competition, recognition and rewards, the competitive nature of teaching can have positive links to teachers remaining in the profession, if rewards and recognition linked to competitive outcomes are implemented. Foucault (2020b) notes how control operates multi-directionally from plural sources which, in this context, refers to the use of competitive rewards; teachers are motivated by rewards as equally as they are from fear of punishment. Therefore, it is important to interrogate primary neoliberal policies in its plurality and from different stances to explore, in depth, teachers' reasons for remaining in teaching.

4.2.2 School choice for teachers and parents in England

Neoliberalism is an extremely complex and inherently nebulous term (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024), which is its second definition-problem, as many definitions are contradictory (Apple, 2017) making definitions broad in nature. Birch (2017) blames this definition haze on neoliberalism being used to describe whatever one wants it to describe. Finnegan (2021: 152) concurs, labelling it as "a highly elastic and...overstretched term". I account neoliberal obscureness on that fact that, in an educationally-free country such as England, free choice (e.g. parents choosing a 'good' school or a 'good' teacher leaving to work in a different setting) has resulted in the broad, boundaryless, complex understanding of neoliberalism present in the literature. This is due to schools working by any neoliberal means possible to ensure the consumer (parent/teacher) choice is their school, as neoliberalism legitimises itself as the only option for many schools (Hall and McGinty, 2015; Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024).

For example, test-based practices of some teachers, the outcomes of which offer parental choice, allow for the learning and development of neoliberal practices because teachers' I-position expressions become 'better' at test-style teaching, resulting in a higher probability of being consumer choice if outcomes are high. Neoliberal choices will be nurtured on behalf of the school if they are lacking because if a school is not offering choices deemed 'good enough', external accountability audits (such as Ofsted/DfE) will intervene. Some authors have found that for schools such as these, who are below

the set standard, accountability measures increase from greater intervention (Cleary Jr., 2017; Ingersoll, Merrill and May, 2016). It can therefore be seen how 'free choice' feeds schools to take on neoliberal properties; especially if one acknowledges that choice is limited to the larger forces and relations at play (Buchanan, 2015). Therefore, the unclear definition of neoliberalism is the result of consumers choosing in-line with, and from, the neoliberal policies and practices (Wilkins, 2012).

The extent to which school choice is a retentive factor for English primary school teachers is limited in the literature. Whilst some studies have researched with this focus, their usefulness is limited due to their research context. Hanushek, Kain and Rivkin (2001), an older study from the United States, noted how poorer student outcomes in disadvantaged schools contributed to teachers' decisions to switch schools. Moving schools due to poor outcomes can be explained neoliberally, as neoliberalism presented some teachers in one study with a sense of agency and freedom to act in certain prescribed ways that they were rewarded for; but this was a disguise (Perryman, 2022). Many authors instead describe how neoliberalism decreases or removes freedom (e.g. Davies and Bansell, 2007; Hall and McGinty, 2015; Keddie et al, 2011). From the perspective of choosing where to teach, in the example of Hanushek et al (2001), teachers were free to choose and seek out schools that were perceived as achieving better, neoliberally. This demonstrates how teachers' perceptions of their choices can be a contributing factor to teacher retention.

Following Hanushek et al's (2001) study, Hanushek and Rivkin (2007) noted how salary and student characteristics were decision-making factors for American teachers moving schools. Although more recent, Hancock's (2017) American study focused on secondary school music teachers, and found that main reasons for moving schools were dissatisfaction with levels of support and workplace conditions. Vekemana et al's (2017) larger survey of nearly 1,000 teachers across more than 70 countries noted a direct correlation between the extent to which a teacher 'fitted' into their school and their intention to leave the school. This shows the analysis of overseas education neoliberal policy to have some commonalities with England (school choice for teachers). Whilst the findings of these studies may not easily equate to my smaller, qualitative project in the English primary context, they do go some way to demonstrate that when a teacher's I-positions misalign (in these cases, internal to external) then teachers can be compelled to remain in the profession and choose another school in which to work.

The idea that teachers, who often move schools, choose to remain in the profession can also be positioned dialogically. Choosing to switch schools means that some teachers' I-position(s) can be flexible to the idea of a new setting. TPI is understood to have flexible properties, as discussed in Chapter 2. However, Da Silva et al (2020) and Oleś (2020) note that flexibility is not just an established 'given' within an I-position repertoire. Certain I-positions need greater dominance at points of

decision-making, which emphasises how the movement (promotion/subordination) of I-positions results in their voiced expressions (Pugh and Broome, 2020). Whilst expressing, a teacher's sense of self may require their I-positions to combine and integrate (Hermans, 2012), even forming a meta-position to assist in creative decision-making processes (Grimell, 2020). I-positions with the required properties shows how their ability to help choose can be a contributing factor to teacher retention. I now show how this choice stems from the neoliberal push against their I-positions, as teachers calculate (the final pillar of neoliberalism) how best to position themselves (neoliberally), allowing them to be perceived as 'good' within the chosen setting, influencing retentive choices.

4.2.3 Professional calculations of primary school teachers working in England

Discussion to this point suggests neoliberal policies and practices in the primary English context may be too subtle to position as a binary 'good vs. bad thing'. Instead, they clearly inform teacher professional identities, albeit in a range of negative and positive ways. This is my positioning of the final definition-problem, which builds an understanding of neoliberalism that is too unitary. The outcomes from the ostensible competitive 'freedom of choice', discussed above, are often synonymous with a sole focus on pupils' examinations results (Ingleby, 2023). Specifically, parents and teachers having free choice leads to schools and teachers working with purposeful and intended calculative strategies (Jones et al, 2017) of how best to act to be perceived as 'good', which in the current environment is to align with broadly neoliberal principles, thus be 'the right choice' for the consumers. Such calculative behaviour can be found in the research of Holloway and Brass (2018), where one teacher participant complied to an accountability method (regarding unscheduled lesson observations) with ease, but his compliance was an act to allow his observers to note how he was 'working' in-line with school policy. Additionally, in their work, Ingersoll and Collins (2017) concluded that one teacher was acting against her beliefs to meet the perception of what she was being asked to do (set pupils targets that they then must achieve without fail) was in the best interest of the pupils; another example of calculative strategies. Taylor (2016) found teachers' practice to be in-line with what they were held accountable for, and teachers reported accountability measures driving their behaviour, one of calculative practice.

Calculative practice is one response to neoliberalism resulting in observing neoliberalism as a singularity; one unit focused on doing everything possible to achieve high examination results. In the primary workplace, this practice involves teachers selecting the required I-position for the time in order to survive and/or succeed in the profession, thus remaining due to high levels of happiness and/or satisfaction. Bozeman et al (2013) note how job satisfaction is a reason that some teachers stay

in teaching. Stress, an opposite emotion to satisfaction, can be an experienced state when I-positions do not have their needs met and so they become neglected or supressed (Hermans, 2012). High levels of stress have been known to influence some teachers to leave the profession (Howes and Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). Feelings of stress is why I situate competitive teaching as a form of calculated practice, due to the recognition and reward that follows the competition. Instead of unmanageable stress, recognition and reward provides I-positions with the sustenance that they need, which leads to feelings of safety and trust to conduct internal and external dialogues (Oleś, 2020). Therefore, calculative practices can help teachers remain in the profession.

If teachers' I-positions are nourished during the competitive and calculative processes within schools, then it is fair to suppose that the teachers-in-question will choose to remain at their setting because I-position expressions and school context are in harmony. I-position/contextual harmony was a finding of Skott (2018: 478), who conducted a longitudinal study of one teacher, Anna, over several years. It was noted that by Anna's third year of teaching, Anna was, "now less a '*Mathematics* teacher at Northgate' than a 'Mathematics teacher at *Northgate*'" (italics in original text). Teachers do choose to remain at a setting within the competitive framework of schools, if I-positions are harmonious and align to the wider institutional and policy positions that regulate their practice, as demonstrated in Skott's (2018) work.

On the other hand, it is possible for some teachers to calculate their I-position dialogue in an alternative way, away from competitive teaching, yet one which is retentive, nonetheless. The writing of Ball and Olmedo (2013) illustrate this point. Whilst not working with DST, Ball and Olmedo (ibid.) discuss how some teachers make deliberate, calculated decisions to either conform to or resist neoliberal mandates. For instance, one of their teacher participants, Walter, actively chose the I-position he needed to engage in constructive feedback following lesson observations. Yet, Walter also subordinated other I-positions to avoid them experiencing stress from what he perceived as harmful practices.

Walter's resilience and self-reflection, however, was not widespread across all the participants within Ball and Olmedo's (2013) work nor was it a consistent finding in Brunila and Siivonen's (2016) study, who argue that perseverance and resilience have been co-opted by neoliberal policies and practices. What these two studies therefore show is that whilst teachers may find personal ways to cope, adapt, and survive within neoliberal parameters, such as compliance, calculating practice to allow inward dissent or quiet subversions can sustain neoliberal systems at a structural level. Further forms or 'functionings' of primary neoliberal policy and practice, in this case, teachers' calculations away from

competition, once again demonstrates the expansive stretch of neoliberalism within education (Kamat, 2011; Peck, 2013) and further problematises it as a singularity (Birch, 2017).

However, competitiveness within and amongst schools, and the outcomes of such (rewards/sanctions), have been shown to influence where a teacher works, due to the fulfilment, or not, of I-position needs. Because of this, it is unsurprising that teachers could calculate (a further choice) to teach within the parameters of the neoliberal policies of their setting to uphold the competitive choices that they have; therefore, having an element of control over the outcomes experienced. Positing the pillars of neoliberalism in this manner rebukes much negative literature surrounding the concept. For example, neoliberalism cannot de-stabilise TPIs (Reeves, 2018) as some teachers are welcoming its effects to nourish and sustain their I-positions. Neoliberalism cannot have completely replaced autonomy with a range of accountability methods (Hall and McGinty, 2015) because some teachers are choosing to stay in certain schools or move to another one. It can be agreed that neoliberalism is changing school practices and procedures (Pratt, 2016). However, this must not be viewed as automatically negative as some calculated neoliberal practices undertaken by some teachers assist teacher retention. This was a finding of Arthur and Bradley (2023), where their participants accepted intense feelings within their sense of selves, but this was outweighed by high levels of enjoyment and positive relationships within the workplace. Due to the clear interconnectedness between competition and choice, teacher calculated practice helps teacher retention.

For my study, I have accounted specific neoliberal properties understood to directly correlate with how teachers practically experience their TPIs in their primary settings. Competition (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024), choice (Apple, 2017) and calculation (Sturrock, 2021) are core 'pillars' of English primary school neoliberal policies as epitomised by Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021); this is why discussion has focused on many intricacies within competition, choice and calculation (Figure 4). To deeply explore primary English neoliberal facets, interrogation has occurred from multiple angles and through the lenses of TPI, which it influences (Sturrock, 2024). Wider retentive influences on primary teachers working in England are now considered.

4.2.4 Wider retentive influences on English primary school teachers

Positive, collaborative working with colleagues has been widely identified as helping teachers remain in the profession (Avalos and Pablo Valenzuela, 2016; Perryman and Calvert, 2020). The collegial working extends to the levels of support that teachers receive (Ingersoll et al, 2016), especially from school leaders and managers (Lindqvist and Nordänger, 2016). Additionally, pupil-teacher relationships

has been considered to be a retentive factor (Arthur and Bradley, 2023; Perryman and Calvert, 2020), particularly because pupils' poor behaviour, and the management of their behaviour, can lead to teacher attrition (Towers and Maguire, 2017).

Feelings of somehow bettering the lives of children, contributing to society and making a genuine difference is another reported reason as to why teachers may choose to remain in the profession (Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd, 2012; Chiong et al, 2017). Perhaps because this is a way in which I-positions express their stances thus get heard, and/or a way in which they gain sustenance and maintenance. Nourishment from making a difference could be understood as job satisfaction, as that also is a retentive factor (Bozeman et al, 2013). If I-positions are nurtured in this gratifying way, and they are not unexpressed or silenced, then teachers would gain a sense of enjoyment from the work that they do. This has been reported to be a strong retentive factor for teachers (Howes and Goodman-Delahunty, 2015; Perryman, 2022).

From a dialogical perspective, positive, collaborative working with colleagues, making a difference and feelings of enjoyment, strengthen and reinforce a teacher's I-position repertoire, as links across would be formed and maintained (Da Silva et al, 2020; Ouwehand et al, 2020). Links form because I-positions do not work in isolation; they group in combinations (Badia and Liesa, 2022). Combined groupings was a finding in the work of van Lankfeld et al (2017), who noted that new I-positions formed coalitions with existing ones, which added strength to the self.

4.3 Summary

In this study, I have shown how teacher retention is firmly grounded within the neoliberal primary school context, as neoliberal policies and practices are established as part of the everyday lived experiences of teachers (Perryman, 2022; Reeves, 2018). It was important to determine the extent to which neoliberalism could influence teachers to remain in the profession. Therefore, the three 3C's of neoliberalism that my study has adapted from Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) discussed retentive issues and found that competition, choice and calculation could all assist in teachers remaining in the profession. Competition provided I-positions with sustenance they needed to maintain teachers' identity trajectories; choice gave teachers freedom of where to work, empowering them to move settings when needed rather than leave teaching; calculation fostered positive emotions within teachers. The decision-making processes to remain in the teaching profession are based on complex and individual rationales.

In summary, a direct link was found between the influence of neoliberal policies and practices, teacher professional identity and teacher retention, paving the way from my study to interrogate this link, and contribute knowledge to this area. In the next section of the chapter, I use Figure 4 to explore how neoliberalism is a long-term presence in English primary schools.

4.4 Neoliberalism's existence in English primary schools

Neoliberalism, as a set of policies and practices, exists in many English primary schools because competition and choice (two pillars from Figure 4) lead to neoliberal policies and practices establishing themselves in settings. From here, neoliberalism multiplies and cascades itself to different levels, and in varying iterations within schools, embedding and self-perpetuating itself from teachers' calculations (the final pillar).

4.4.1 The role of competition in the establishment of neoliberal policies and practices in English primary schools

Competition and the promise of parental choice first foster the establishment of neoliberalism in English primary schools. Schools compete with one another by reflecting on their standards and outcomes to ascertain if they are in-line with local and national data via league tables (Wilkins, 2012); therefore, neoliberalism is shown positively because schools promote autonomy, responsibility and self-monitoring (Winkler-Reid, 2017). As a result, schools are a good context in which neoliberalism can thrive as its policies can be seen as helpful. Ong (2007) agrees, noting how the production of autonomous employees can stem from neoliberal heritage; but, this only occurs when what constitutes as independent and free is ambiguous, and defined by the culture and politics of the setting.

In schools, the capacity in which this occurs is set by the Headteacher, whose value or worth is determined by their ability to create and market a distinctive entrepreneurial identity for their school (Keddie et al, 2011). Many Headteachers consent to neoliberal policies founding themselves in their schools in response to fear of poor examination results (Fuller, 2019; Page, 2018). I take the position that they compete to ensure this does not happen, adding to the offers of choice for consumers. Cascading to school level and subsequent instruction to create a school identity, deceives Headteachers into thinking that they can craft a unique school identity. They can, if it is in-line with 'good' neoliberal outcomes, suggesting that the consent given by Headteachers is only surface-level across the interrelatedness of neoliberal policies.

At classroom level, neoliberal policies and practices can then appeal to some teachers' desires (Harvey, 2005; Reeves, 2018), since it helps them see that they can do very well and succeed, if only they teach and act in a given way. Many teachers then compete to then do so in accordance with the accountability measures that they are set, e.g. appraisal targets. Monbiot and Hutchinson (2024) explain that this appeal is because of the extremely high regard neoliberal policies place on competition, the success of which is then consumed and reappropriated by neoliberal policies. When competitive outcomes are low, teachers and school leaders still return to the source of the competitive neoliberal policies, as was found in a study by Fuller (2019), showing teachers' reflections, resilience and commitments to help establish and sustain neoliberal policies, as neoliberalism is utilising these teachers' practices. Over time, therefore, teachers then internalise and project neoliberal policy views as their own (Perryman, 2022), specifically its competitive elements. Neoliberalism, overall, persuades some teachers to treat it as "personal rather than structural, which therefore become accepted by individuals as normal" (Tett and Hamilton, 2021: 2).

When existing at classroom level, neoliberalism gains the "active consent" from many teachers, but they do not realise that they are being controlled (Perryman, 2022: 25). Unawareness of control is because simple neoliberal practices ('just teach like this') can help some teachers reach a sense of achievement. Foucault (2020b) associates such achievement as being due to an absence of explanation; acquiring the required behaviour to teach in a prescribed manner with given or preferred methods is achieved with clarity, not justification. This normalisation feels good, especially for teachers who already feel inadequate (Reeves, 2018), once again demonstrating not only the reach of neoliberalism (Kamat, 2011; Raaper, 2019) but the power for good that primary neoliberal policies can also have. Assistance to succeed therefore fosters the competitive practices teachers adopt meaning that consent (surface level or active) has permitted neoliberalism to pervade into English schools with stealth (Davies and Peterson, 2005), cascading from meso to micro levels in primary schools. It is then down to the teachers to teach in its given image.

4.4.2 The role of teachers' calculations in the establishment of neoliberal policies and practices in English primary schools

The neoliberal prevalence in schools, for example, curricula control to prioritise test subjects, a finding of Ingleby (2023) and Perryman (2022), is actively chosen and selected by some teachers. Dialogically, this calculated practice is the purposeful selection of one I-position over another as I-positions are known to become shaped by the practices of their institutions (Grimell, 2020), so can guide a teacher's behaviour in the moment (Henry, 2019), successfully embedding neoliberal outcomes in schools.

As a result, teachers begin to see themselves as investable, and of high utility to their schools, due to their range of skills that they hold (Birch, 2017). Success shows the teachers that they can achieve, if only they continue to teach and act in this way, spurring on their desire to do so, and deepening neoliberalism's establishment in schools in the process (Harvey, 2005; Reeves, 2018). Calculated competition increases further to see who can be more profitable by building on their skills. All of this is made desirable as schools are labelled as 'winners' and 'losers' under neoliberal ranking policies e.g. Ofsted gradings and school league tables (Cleary Jr., 2017). Schools do not wish to be in the 'loser' category of a poor Ofsted rating resulting in not being the consumer choice. So, they aim for 'good' teaching to 'win'. Neoliberalism posits that 'good' teaching exists where examinations lead to high scores and data (Hall and McGinty, 2015; Pratt, 2016).

It has been found that teachers overwhelmingly teach by neoliberal means to secure high test outcomes (Perryman, 2022; Reeves, 2018). Teaching within neoliberal parameters includes prioritising key students' progress over developing wider skills (Taylor, 2016) and curriculum narrowing to promote knowledge that is tested (Deming and Figlio, 2016). A contributing factor to explain this could be that many teachers believe that they have the professional agency and freedom to teach how they wish (Pratt, 2016), which increases their calculative practices to deliver high examination results.

Agency is the choice to act in a certain manner from the options or selections available (Biesta, Priestley and Robinson, 2015; Lasky, 2005). The context in which teachers work is neoliberal; therefore, any so-called agentic act is a choice made within a neoliberal educational landscape, which can be seen as a balancing act (Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton, 2024). In their calculated practice, not only is the choice a neoliberal one, teachers' definition of success is also neoliberal because of what is prioritised: namely, commodified student outcomes (Pratt, 2016). Indeed, neoliberal policies tightly limit agency to a very restrictive set of testing procedures (Buchanan, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). Therefore, teachers are using what is available to them from the neoliberal context to calculate how to teach to tests, and how to do this well, but this is more of a pseudo-agency; as neoliberalism tightly governs the possible agency on offer (Davies and Bansel, 2007). Rushton, Dunlop and Atkinson (2024) reported that some their twenty-seven participants could identify spaces where agentic acts were possible but could not always realise them, due to datafication priorities, which narrowed the curriculum offer to students. Inability to achieve agency despite identifying spaces for it, strengthens the argument that I-positions are past, present and future oriented (Henry, 2019). In this context, present and future possibilities were from a neoliberal perspective.

Literature evaluation lacks any argument or findings which suggests that teachers have any actual agency over their teaching practices in the classroom. Instead, neoliberal policies allow teachers to

believe they have agency; but, in fact, teachers do not (Hall and McGinty, 2015; Keddie, 2014). Lack of real agency is due to the purpose of schools being centred on pre-empting negative outcomes of its students, achieved by school leaders thinking about how the students might perform, thus fully preparing them for future labour (Foucault, 2020a). In the primary workplace, this lack of agency is because the purpose of neoliberalism in schools is to increase competitiveness and produce the ideal school with the highest possible test outcomes (Apple, 2017). Therefore, school leaders and those they are accountable to must alter any unwanted behaviour and correct individuals (Foucault, 2020b), by controlling teaching to keep students on-track for their highest outcomes, which detracts from real choice and allows neoliberal policies to exist. School leadership has been understood as a requirement for agency to be achieved; but, leaders also have many competing concerns to provide the conditions needed for the achievement of agency (Rushton et al, 2024). Therefore, dialogically, teachers' selection of I-positions is very limited when acting 'autonomously' and could be from the choice of a few, which may include their restricted Senior Leadership Team *('My SLT').*

Lack of teacher agency is a key concept to help explain why neoliberal 'choice' has assisted primary neoliberal policies to exist. Teachers are not agentic (Keddie, 2014). Where agency is achieved, it has most recently been observed in less formal, non-teaching contexts e.g. extracurricular clubs (Rushton and Bird, 2024). Where this is the case, the teachers' I-positions have arguably been nourished to an extent whereby the teachers have felt satisfied to remain in the profession. This is despite teachers being surveyed in the more formal aspects of their structured organisation (e.g. within the main curriculum) in order to be programmed and automised as objects of information (Foucault, 2020b) to feed into the purposes of schooling. Teachers are, therefore, constrained in their choices because agency is an illusion; they cannot be truly 'different' from one another (Davies and Bansell, 2007). Dialogically, teachers manage and navigate primary neoliberal policies from a series of I-position responses that are arguably 'mapped out' for them; and it is from these which they choose as I-positions are known to be responsive to one's situation and context (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021). Agency, in the primary neoliberal retention context, is therefore teachers being practically strategic in their I-position choices: they are 'choosing' from neoliberal forces playing out in their I-positions, which embeds neoliberalism's existence in English primary schools. Discussion now explores occurrences once it has established itself there.

4.4.3 The self-perpetuation of neoliberal policies and practices in English primary schools

There are two overall ways in which neoliberalism self-perpetuates. Firstly, neoliberalism becomes part of teachers' belief systems (Birch, 2017). Afterwards, teachers independently and calculatedly enact these belief systems in practice, by holding themselves accountable (Mausethagen, 2013) until doing so becomes second-nature to them. This is the teachers ensuring the correct way of managing themselves ('governmentality') to the best possible outcomes (Foucault, 2020a) as their own accountability measures.

When teachers conform to neoliberal policy, and do as directed, neoliberal polices can offer an element of protection (Hall and McGinty, 2015), which demonstrates neoliberalism's positive capabilities. Conversely, it also illustrates the pernicious influence of neoliberal policy as people are afraid (Foucault, 2020b) and/or unaware of its existence (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024), to challenge it. A sense of individual control is the result of such action, as teachers can choose from the discourses that are available, which is a reason that neoliberal policies are able to take hold (Davies and Petersen, 2005). Control, followed by legitimation, then fuels its self-perpetuation (Hall and McGinty, 2015). This is mainly because teachers come to unconsciously accept policies (Steadman, 2023), believing that it is in their own interests to demonstrate the impact of their classroom practice in neoliberal policy terms (Pratt, 2016).

Therefore, neoliberalism informs teachers' belief systems and sense of dialogical selves, meaning that many teachers together give credence to certain positions, which form collective *we-positions* (Silva et al, 2020). The we-positions fulfil teachers' need to be seen as 'good' and their TPI accepted by their peers and managers. Therefore, neoliberal policies and practices currently dominate in the fulfilment of the need in English primary schools (Pugh and Broome, 2020). This is the case even when teachers do conform but do 'badly' due to challenges beyond their control (for example, a cohort with very low starting points). These schools and teachers do 'well' outside the parameters of neoliberal framing but not in neoliberal ranking policies. However, they strive to continue to conform due to their behaviour having been altered, which is positioned to be constantly corrected and improved (Foucault, 2020b). This can have a positive influence on teacher retention, as teachers are habituated to these school conditions (Chiong et al, 2017) and wish to continue to better themselves (Howes and Goodman-Delahunty, 2015).

Once neoliberal policies have become embedded in teachers' belief systems, it self-perpetuates within, as teachers drive to create themselves as a brand and maintain it (Page, 2018). Maintenance of 'this is who I am as a good teacher' aids the self-perpetuation of neoliberalism because teachers

hold themselves, and each other, accountable to very high standards of teaching. In Keddie et al's (2011) study, it is clear to see that the neoliberal policies implemented at Lemontyne College did just this, due to the school inviting external visitors/auditors to their school, as they believed themselves to be models of best practice. In this example, teachers had to ensure that they lived up to this brand to maintain it. Teachers acted in this way due to fear of failure (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). The possibility of failing, a truth regime (Foucault, 2020a) presented to teachers, results in teachers holding themselves accountable in a self-governing fashion (Ball, 2021), adding to neoliberalism's self-perpetuation. Similar findings have been discussed in Page (2018) and Ong (2007), showing self-accountability to be a facet of the multiple neoliberal policies and practices.

More intense feelings of failure occur from the point of self-government, according to Perryman (2022), who found that teachers accept that they must act as if they are being inspected all the time. This is the application of 'panopticism' in the primary workplace, which makes teachers think that there is a sense of permanence to observations in order to ensure an automaticity to their high-quality teachings (Foucault, 2020b). In this sense, self-governance supports the self-perpetuating of neoliberalism because it helps to demonstrate that there are no alternatives available, in comparison to the current status quo (Séville, 2017). Therefore, there is a new common sense regarding knowledge and practice, that has embedded a particular set of assumptions (Birch, 2017) over language as well as and meaning (Lynch, 2021). So much so, that it is normalised (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). Teachers may then become accustomed to working within these boundaries, which could assist in retaining many teachers, who feel safe and secure in their roles (Ashiedo and Scott-Ladd, 2012).

4.5 Summary

Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021) and Monbiot and Hutchinson (2024) synonimise neoliberalism with the concept of a 'zombie'. This is an appropriate metaphor on which to summarise. To continue the metaphor, on one hand, the neoliberal zombie 'bites' and 'infects' others, spreading the neoliberal 'virus' on. New 'zombies' (teachers) blindly follow others, forming a 'herd' of followers (the teaching profession). An alternative perspective is that the neoliberal 'zombie' is nearing 'death', and 'decay', and on the decline. TPI, from the theoretical lens of DST, in the neoliberal context, is the focus next, with this is mind.

4.6 Teacher professional identity (TPI) policy context

TPI is absent in English educational policy. Indeed, the only reference to 'identity' is in the DfE's (2019b) Early Career Framework (ECF), introduced to improve teacher retention. The framework specifies that newly-qualified teachers learn about pupils' identities. The same references do not exist when thinking about TPI, perhaps because TPI is undervalued in the education policy context (Rushton et al, 2023a).

Considering the competing definitions for TPI, discussed in Chapter 1, policy makers may perceive TPI as lacking rigour. Unreliability is not something that policy makers would value as TPI would be hard to measure, especially where teachers work in a context where many things are measurable. Deming and Figlio (2016: 50) demonstrate this measuring-based focus as, "What gets measured gets done", giving the example of teaching to tests. Due to examinations having quantifiable outcomes, practice aligned with teaching to them occurs. This was discussed in Section 4.4.2 as being a calculative strategy that teachers employ. Taylor's (2016) findings agreed, as she concluded how what is measured drives a school's behaviour. Measurable policies and outcomes have greater significance and prominence in schools; as a result, TPI is absent from school policy.

A conceivable way to measure TPI would be qualitatively through the lens of teacher role. In the neoliberal climate, TPI has been de-professionalised (Reeves, 2018). Possibly due to a lack of trust (Cleary Jr., 2017; O'Leary, 2013), teachers must earn a specific type of measurable professionalism, by meeting the neoliberal standards outlined in policy (Brown and Manktelow, 2016). These standards often include outcomes at the end of an academic year, which are monitored and regulated via performance review. Indeed, teachers must deliver the same content from centralised curricula. It is therefore clear that TPI does not conform to neoliberal accountability frameworks in schools due to its subjective nature; instead, teachers and their professional identities are situated within the framework itself (McKee et al, 2021; Tett and Hamilton, 2021). Not measurable themselves, rather their outcomes are the focal points.

If policy makers were to frame TPI around teacher retention, TPI could be measured differently thus given more gravitas. Allen and Sims (2018) concur and argue the need for a school's teacher retention information to be available for teachers to consider when applying for jobs. Public retention figures would not account for teachers who leave their settings due to promotions, or reasons that are not necessarily 'negative', which illuminates a flaw with Allen and Sims' (2018) thought. However, English policy wants to retain confident subject specialists as teachers, who have deep pedagogy of how to teach their subject (Ofsted 2022; 2023; 2024). Indeed, teacher attrition is not necessarily bad if the teachers leaving are poor (Kavenuke, 2013). This is why I advocate that TPI must be viewed as a tool to increase understanding of teachers' experiences (Goktepe and Kunt, 2023) because TPI is a narrative

about the teachers themselves and how they tell their stories (Assen et al, 2018). Both Goktepe and Kunt (2023) and Assen et all (2018) rationalise TPI as a means to consider elements of teachers' daily lives, something that my thesis sets out to do. Additionally, the absence of TPI within educational policy further demonstrates the importance of my study: Rushton et al (2023b) note that teachers may persist through challenging points of their career (positively influencing retention) if policy makers prioritise TPI.

4.7 Adaptable and flexible I-positions in the English primary neoliberal context

Adaptive and flexible functioning of TPI is due to having a multiplicity of intertwined I-positions representing different perspectives (Oleś, 2020). Literature evaluation suggests that these different perspectives are: contexts, information and time.

Contextually, although a primary school is a single location, the contexts that exist within are built on multiple relationships (Leijen et al, 2014). For example, a teacher's relationships with different stakeholders and groups, as well as a teacher's subjective relationships with concepts such as workload. As a result, teachers' relationships form, expand and influence their TPI in the multi-layered contexts that exist (Zhu et al, 2020). Dialogically, this is I-position interaction between group memberships within the primary workplace, which assists the formation of one's sense of 'we' rather than 'I' (Steadman, 2023). In this context, these are we-positions, which function to support one's adaptable and flexible I-positions for positive TPI narratives.

Supporting this argument, Rushton et al (2023b) investigated how relationships influenced the professional identity formation of pre-service teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors' findings suggested that fostering environments where care, nurture and collaboration are integral can significantly influence TPI formation of pre-service teachers. Steadman (2023) concurs, noting how collaboration is essential to the development of TPIs. The multiplicity of relational contexts within a single primary school therefore mirrors the multiplicity of I-positions within a sense of self; a valid thought as DST understands identity to include society within the mind (Torka, 2019). What this demonstrates is how a sense of 'we' alongside school stakeholders positively influences TPI formation but also facilitates TPI to be adaptable and flexible, as teachers have a society within the mind on which to draw upon in different contexts (Oleś, 2020; Ouwehand et al, 2020).

A society within the mind denotes a wide range of information (the second perspective to foster adaptive and flexible TPI functionality) that I-positions adapt to. Indeed, within the primary workplace, there can be I-positions that have different positions on the same information set (Silva et al, 2020).

For example, use of assessment data. This results in adaptable I-positions that are both continuous and simultaneous (Zhu et al, 2020); in this example, how assessment data should be used; with whom it should be shared, etc. TPIs demonstrate such flexibility by responding to the new information and adjusting their boundaries as a result (Monti and Austin, 2018). Positioning TPI as adaptable and flexible is sensible if one considers that the overall TPI is one that is not a bound phenomenon (Reeves, 2018). Although, it may be bound by what is available in a certain context (Leshem, 2020) demonstrating its modification properties from context-to-context (Gamsakhurdia, 2019), information dependent.

The final source that allows high degrees of adaptability and flexibility within TPI is time, and this is because I-positions are acquired and developed over time (Da Silva et al, 2020; Grimell, 2021). Therefore, when a new I-position has been created, it can be readily accessible in the future if it is called upon in a certain situation (Henry, 2019). In the primary workplace, a new I-position such as *My inspector* may develop during a teacher's first Ofsted inspection. *My inspector* may be recalled some time later during a subsequent inspection. Attaining a range of I-positions over time fosters adaptable properties within TPI because of the varying levels of dominance within the repertoire. Not all I-positions have the same credence (Gamsakhurdia, 2019) when they develop over time and the dominance itself is only temporary as I-positions account for others (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011); such as in the inspection example here. The result is that some I-positions experience exclusion or neglect during certain points of a teacher's life (Oleś, 2020). Exclusion is not necessarily negative if one considers that teachers continually, and sometimes consciously, navigate their TPI presentation (Zhu et al, 2020), including during an inspection (Perryman, 2022). Therefore, flexibility and adaptability of I-positions are helpful in navigating school contexts.

TPI has flexible properties, and therefore, does not need to be compliant to the neoliberal policies at play. For example, in Katsuno's (2012) study, teachers were able to maintain their TPI by acknowledging what they should and can do even in the face of disagreements with the accountability system. This is more prominent I-positions expressing their stances to prevent other positions from assuming power (Hermans, 2012), doing so to protect more vulnerable positions. Studies like this demonstrate how teachers' I-positions can allow them to act flexibly as a "'double agent'", (Reeves, 2018: 25). Subvert selection of I-positions, to undermine the power and authority of the neoliberal policy context, was found in a more recent study by Hendrikx (2020), who concluded how teachers were able to uphold their image to resist change; for example, by selectively reporting student information to ensure that their decisions were agreed with, which demonstrates how accountability measures can influence TPI. Ball (2003: 221) explains this as "values schizophrenia", and is a fabricated identity where one teaches inauthentically to be viewed as a 'good' teacher. These studies demonstrate how flexible TPI mean that

teachers are not truly compliant with the neoliberal accountability practices that occur in schools. More accurately, they are calculating their practice.

A small amount of research demonstrates TPI is more rigid than flexible. Inability to adapt is due to the extent to which teachers have a dominant I-position, as core I-positions can subjugate others (Silva et al, 2020). In a study by Assen et al (2018), teachers who articulated very strong I-positions were less able to move between their other I-positions, which highlights how the boundaries that exist between I-positions can hinder the extent to which they can be flexible and adaptable. A rigid self requires teachers to sustain certain types of dialogue to present themselves consistently (Ligorio and Tateo, 2007).

However, management and sustenance of the one's multiple I-positions cannot be approached from a rigid formation because dialogue would be limited to uniform, or even barren, exchanges (Pugh and Broome, 2020). Adaptability and flexibility must be the lens to better understand TPI processes due to differing and multifaceted identity filters impacting on teachers' practice (Steadman, 2023). Furthermore, the extent to which teachers undertake reflective practices can be a source of adaptability and flexibility within TPI. Teachers are reflecting to change, or build on their TPI, as reflection should involve reconstruction of one's practice (Donyaie and Afshar, 2019). Reflection, therefore, is the next part of the literature evaluation.

4.7.1 Reflection

The ability to reflect on teaching and learning is expected of English primary school teachers (Donyaie and Afshar, 2019). Part Four of the Teacher Standards (DfE, 2011) insist that teachers undertake systematic reflective practices, which is a clear indication that any reflective practice undertaken by teachers cannot be approached with neutrality, as the DfE have strategically operationalised reflection as a mandatory expectation within English teaching. This is a further example of the reach of neoliberalism as a pervasive ideology in English education (Baltodano, 2012; Brunila and Siivonen, 2016; Peck, 2013). Any reflection undertaken by teachers would therefore stem from how I-position orientations involve the past, present and future (Perdue et al, 2018) from within the neoliberal educational context (Perryman, 2022). Whilst Oleś (2020) places reflection centrally within the sense of self, and argues that internal dialogue begins with reflective questions, this could only be understood from within the context under which teachers work. As reflection is required within a teacher's practice, and is a feature of the dialogical self, it is important to understand the outcomes of reflection on TPIs, and their degrees of flexibility and adaptability.
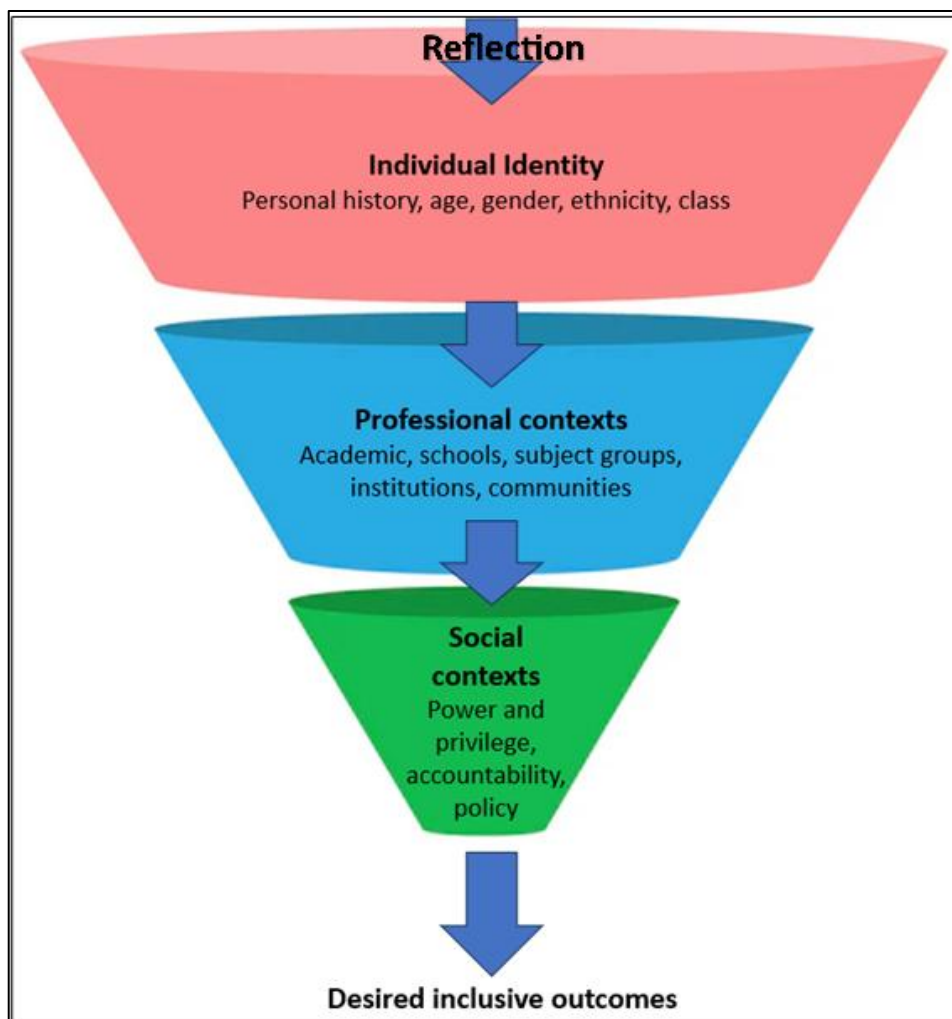
Figure 5: An identity filter for teacher education. Adapted from Steadman (2023).

Steadman (2023) explains that TPI is situated within individual, professional and societal contexts; she emphasises that to recognise these contexts, it is important to understand the multiplicity of identities in teachers' lives. Steadman's (2023) identity filter (Figure 5, above) can be adapted and framed to this discussion, due to reflection being a desired inclusive outcome, and part of individual, professional and societal contexts, such as the Teacher Standards (DfE, 2011), where individual teachers must apply them within their profession so that policy is followed.

Figure 5 shows possible inclusive outcomes are firstly filtered through a teacher's individual identity. Steadman (2023) justifies individual identity as the start for what possible outcomes may look like because teachers have experienced schooling themselves and so it is here that reflection first occurs. I challenge this viewpoint. Steadman (2023) does not account for two notions that influence the type of reflections possible before one is able to reflect through any I-position within their sense of self: firstly, it is the locations of accountability; and, secondly, it is then how these locations frame the type of reflections that are available.

As has been established in this chapter thus far, the neoliberal extent: socially, politically and institutionally, is far-reaching (Kamat, 2011). Indeed, Section 4.1 demonstrated how the context of English primary schools is one where neoliberal accountability measures and methods pervade (Perryman, 2022; Reeves, 2018; Winkler-Reid, 2017). Therefore, if one were following the argument of Steadman's (2023) identity filter, then social contexts must be situated within and across professional contexts and individual identity because it is through (governmental/educational) society that multiple policies first pass; not a singular policy at the end as originally presented in Figure 5. It is through this society where neoliberalism then re-purposes and re-tools (Raaper, 2019) reflective practices for its own gain. Due to these reflective practices being embedded within policies of accountability (such as the Teacher Standards), and these are not hypothetically situated at the top tier of societal level any longer, these accountability practices also filter within professional contexts, where many Headteachers consent to them out of fear (Page, 2018) whilst some teachers consent to them more willingly (Harvey, 2005; Reeves, 2018). As educational settings are held to account for the policies-in-practice (outcomes), the types of reflection that teachers are capable of are clearly restricted to the neoliberal discourses that are available. Therefore, Figure 5 can be re-thought of as Figure 6, below.
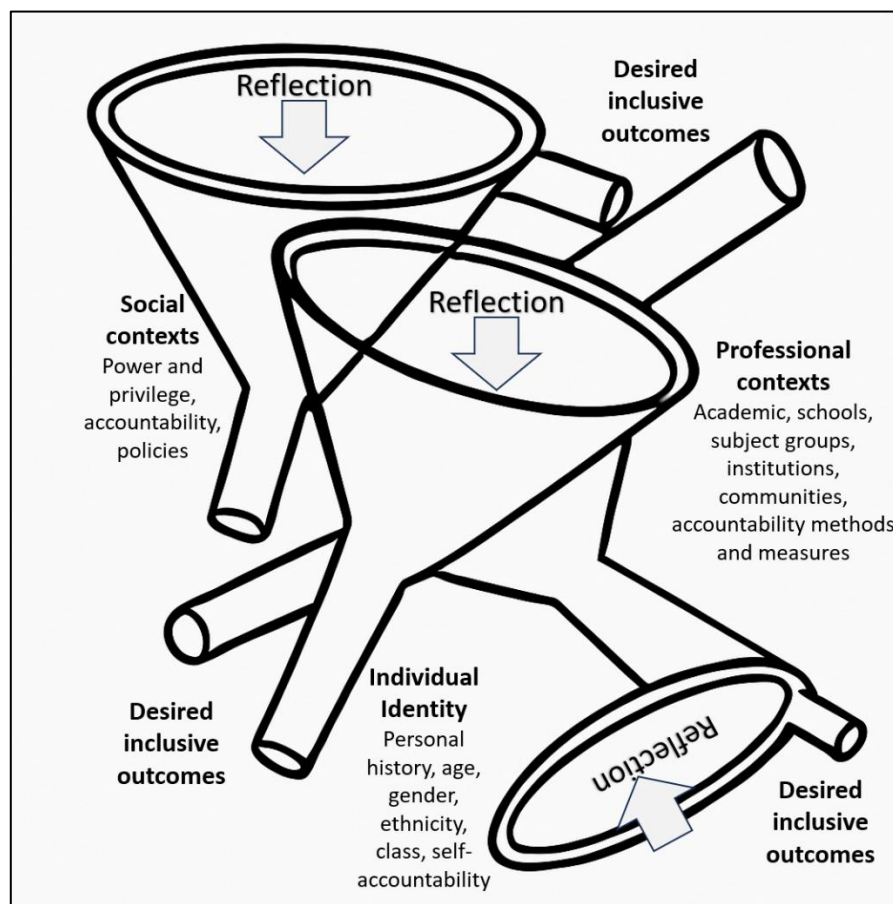
Figure 6: Rethinking Steadman's identity filter. Adapted from Steadman (2023).

Figure 6, an inverted, overlapped and edited version of Figure 5, is a more accurate way to consider how teachers' identity filters influence the practice of reflection. Figure 6 avoids the linearity of Figure 5, which alludes to a rigid TPI being influenced in a step-by-step manner. Instead, it demonstrates the plethora of influences on professional practices, from multiple I-positions, that TPI can be influenced by simultaneously (Ligorio and Tateo, 2007) with degrees of adaptability and flexibility (Oleś, 2020).

Figure 6 more accurately shows reflective practice to pass through the filters of social, professional and individual identity contexts concurrently for teachers to undertake reflection. This is because multiple I-positions fluctuate and influence one another in an ongoing manner (Perdue et al, 2018). However, due to accountability dominating educational society thus school settings, the reflection that is available is through the lens of self-accountability, and the extent to which teachers perceive themselves to have to have done a 'good' job, in-line with the standards that have been set for them. Due to the dominance of accountability now present within individual teachers, this scale of reflection by teachers could be shallow, and involve the simple thinking back over of things (Phelps, 2005) due to its repurposing by neoliberal forces.

Applying Figure 6 to this literature discussion emphasises the dominance of neoliberal accountability measures at many educational levels. Yet, Rushton and Towers (2023) centralise reflection as a vital component of TPI development throughout a teacher's career. If it were, they argue, teachers would be well-equipped if/when identity shifts or conflicts occurred as they would have the language to express and understand the occurrences. The importance of my study is underscored here because if reflective practice is accepted to be a desired inclusive outcome, then it is possible that teachers' I-position repertoire may only ever attain a meta-position (Section 2.3) and not the successive promoter position (Section 2.4) that can bring about change. Meta-positioning only is due to the neoliberal context dominating teachers' sense of self, as dominant I-position(s) can inhibit a promoter position (Oleś, 2020). Lack of promoter positions could mean that teachers do not engage in deep reflection that empowers them, improves their thinking, and overall changes them or their practice for the better (Black and Plowwright, 2010). The inability to truly reflect and attain promoter positions could have ramifications for teacher retention. On one hand, teachers are not challenging the status quo and therefore could remain as teachers, as they almost do not know any other ways. On the other hand, conflictual dialogue could occur between I-positions, causing tensions in the self.

4.8 Summary

Exploration of the literature related to TPI has demonstrated its absence from English educational policy. I have discussed how TPI is multiply constructed from a range of I-position sources within the

neoliberal context, and can be adaptable, flexible and reflective. Its multiplicities mean that TPI is a useful tool to contemplate teachers (Goktepe and Kunt, 2023) and any conflict experienced. Indeed, TPI has a range of features and properties that can help to explain why a group of nine experienced primary school teachers have remained in the teaching profession.

4.9 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the English primary school context, see the ways in which TPI is understood to exist within the context and explain why some teachers choose to stay in teaching, rather than leave. It is clear from the research reviewed that neoliberalism is the prominent policy context in English primary schools (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). Teachers working within the neoliberal policy context do so from multiple lenses of I-positionings (Leijen et al, 2014). These teachers choose to stay, or leave, due to complicated and individual rationales (Chiong et al, 2017).

Despite the breadth of research that has added to the debates surrounding teacher retention, no study to-date has provided empirical attempts to finitely define the neoliberal forces within the context of English primary school teachers' TPIs and retention. Instead, neoliberalism is presented as overly negative, too broad thus unclear, or too unitary (Birch, 2017); all of which mean that deep insights are not garnered. Furthermore, exploring reasons for teachers leaving is often the priority in research (Schaefer et al, 2012; Towers and Maguire, 2017).

Future research should prioritise how primary school teachers construct and sustain their TPIs in the retention context (Rushton et al, 2023a). Therefore, my study sets out to thoroughly interrogate the neoliberal context in which English primary school teachers work, their TPI constructions and why they choose to remain as teachers. The Methodology chapter follows, in which I outline how this study was undertaken.

Chapter 5 – Methodology

5.0 Introduction

Chapter 5 presents and discusses the methodology implemented for my study. Justification builds on the theoretical discussions of Chapter 2 by considering the methodological assumptions of Dialogical Self Theory (DST) and demonstrates how two qualitative methods (online semi-structured interviews and reflective journals) were the most appropriate to address the research questions (RQs). As this research establishes how experienced primary school teachers articulate, and make sense of, their teacher professional identity (TPI) in relation to neoliberal accountability measures, I employed a methodology to facilitate such exploration and 'get beneath the surface' of the nuances and intricacies that TPI and neoliberalism harbour.

As listed in Chapter 1, my research addresses the following RQs:

1. *How do experienced primary school teachers in the study experience neoliberal accountability measures in their work?*
2. *How do experienced primary school teachers in the study articulate their sense of teacher professional identity?*
3. *To what extent do experienced primary school teachers in the study feel that accountability measures influence their teacher professional identity?*
4. *What do experienced primary school teachers in the study understand to be the contributing factors that have influenced them to remain in teaching?*

In the remainder of this chapter, I first explain the ontological and epistemological standpoints of my study in relation to DST and the research methods. A detailed research outline, that demonstrates the robust sequences and processes of participant recruitment and data generation, with clear justifications and defence, follows. Reasoning for the investigative, qualitative approach is explored afterwards, including the justified use of online semi-structured interviews and reflective journals. Ethical considerations are then presented before the chapter closes with data analysis procedures, Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

5.1 A constructivist inquiry

This thesis extends the body of knowledge about teacher retention in English primary schools. It does so by understanding the data as co-constructions, stemming from dialogue between the teacher participants and me. Therefore, this study firmly sits in the constructivist paradigm. A constructivist

inquiry aims to improve understanding through the extension of existing knowledge, or by developing new knowledge, and make sense of it using the best possible methods (Lincoln and Guba, 2013).

Constructivism recognises the highly complex relationship between myself and the research participants. This relationship is a context-bound exchange-communiqué, resulting in the extension of knowledge about the issues without claiming that any accounts and discussions are 'true' (Pratt, 2016) as I explain in the next section. Instead, 'truths' are deemed thus by our own activities (Kukla, 2000). As discussed in Section 3.4, I am an 'inbetweener researcher', and given my wider ontological position, am constructed from the sum of my personal opinions, attitudes and values (Grix, 2004). The following section presents my ontological and epistemological standpoints.

5.1.1 Considering the ontological assumptions of Dialogical Self Theory

Whilst everybody's realities are personal to their context, communication and interaction can lead to shared realities, which are often taken-for-granted (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). In this thesis, I have used a constructivist standpoint to facilitate the thorough interrogation of neoliberalism as shared experiences (Chapter 4), as neoliberal discourses are many English primary school teachers' daily realities (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). Therefore, such an ontological stance is fitting for my research focused on TPIs and personal lived experiences.

Constructivism argues that there are multiple realities, and that these realities are socially constructed by human interactions (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Denicolo, Long and Bradley-Cole, 2016). The voices of dialogical I-positions from within the participants, and between the participants and myself, socially constructed our 'social realities' that we shared during the research study. Due to my ontological position, I contend that that these realities are a product of our human activities and beliefs because constructivist researchers are a core tenet of the research and part of the system that is under study (Denicolo et al, 2016). As I designed and conducted all research activities as this study's sole researcher, working in this way has opened up the space for me to construct new knowledge based on my interactions with my teacher participants, and their experiences, opinions and emotions.

Data drawn from participant accounts are multiple and contestable, and these do not speak for themselves; they needed to be interpreted and presented by my researcher self. Although some of what the teacher participants say is clear and self-evident, some of my I-positions, such as *I as an inbetweener* and *My DST framework,* interprets what they have said, as these I-positions are influenced by my wider theoretical and ontological stances. Constructivism, therefore, takes the view that reality and truth are relative concepts (Lincoln and Guba, 2013). I-positions are relative to

individuals because reality is related to the specific context where the thinking about it occurred (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

5.1.2 Exploring the epistemology of Dialogical Self Theory

From a constructivist perspective, knowledges are also regarded as a fundamental property of human interaction in social contexts (Berger and Luckman, 1966). As such, I use the definition for knowledges provided by Lincoln & Guba (2013: 54) and define 'knowledges' as "meaning sets". Coining 'knowledges' more specifically as "meaning sets", or contextualised in this study, one or more I-positions from the repertoire, is appropriate for this work because knowing something or recognising something as 'knowledge' is always based on one's position or place, socially or culturally (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). If this position or place changes, then so does the knowledges that one has access to or is cognisant of (Lincoln and Guba, 2013). The same can be said for I-positions in education because teaching is a social practice and very much a lived experience (Akinbode, 2013). Accepted practice in one setting will be underpinned by the available knowledges of the setting (for example, policies/subjects) because knowledges are required for specific practical purposes (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Knowledges, therefore, are always in relation to how a person is placed and so is experienced from their own perspective (Foucault, 2020a).

From this stance, knowledges, or the specific meaning sets, are used to make sense of one's experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Importantly, what this meaning set is not, is everything about teaching that can ever be known (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Any one meaning set offers one possible account of events, or one version of a phenomenon, that has been given credibility (or not) by its context and the status of the person making the meaning or interpreting the event (Burr, 2003). It is the best, most advanced form of knowledges available at the time.

There is "no final truth" offered in this thesis (Hermans, 2012: 108). Rather, I hold that 'truth', like 'reality', takes a variety of forms based on social actions and contexts (Burr, 2003). Participants may hold a phenomenon as 'true', or their understanding of it to be the 'truth', but this is based on the participant's interpretation of their experiences from their I-positions. When using DST, accounts and any interpretations of them by myself do not represent truths but ideas from which discussions and multiple interpretations can arise (Boulanger, 2017).

This constructivist study utilises two methods for data co-construction with participants, to elicit and investigate their ideas and I-positions within the immediate research context. I understand that the entirety of the participants' meaning sets or I-positions cannot be known. The following, taken from

Berger and Luckmann (1966: 59) epitomises Section 5.1, and how DST, from the constructivist paradigm, can ease and alleviate the study of the difficult concepts within this thesis and add compelling knowledge to the field:

"Knowledge...has the quality of an instrument that cuts a path through a forest, and, as it does so, projects a narrow cone of light on what lies just ahead and immediately around; on all sides of the path there continues to be darkness".

As ontological and epistemological stances have been established, my research design, which purposively selected and recruited its participants, is now discussed.

5.2 Participant selection and recruitment

Table 2 outlines the research timeline and the sequences of data generation.

Dates	Research activities	
Dec 2021	Ethical approval granted by Birmingham City University (BCU) Ethics Committee	
Dec 2021	Participant recruitment began via calls for participant on the social media platform, 'Twitter' ('X')	
Jan 2022	Participant recruitment concluded Participants participated in their first semi-structured interview	
Jan/Feb 2022	Interviews were transcribed and sent to participants in advance of their second interview	Participants entered into their reflective journals and sent to me in advance of their second interview
Feb/Mar 2022	Participants participated in their second semi-structured interview	
Mar/Apr 2022	Interviews were transcribed and sent to participants in advance of their final interview	Participants entered into their reflective journals and sent to me in advance of their final interview
Apr/May 2022	Participants participated in their final semi-structured interview	
May/Jun 2022	Interviews were transcribed and sent to participants	Participants entered into their reflective journals and sent to me
Jun 2022	Final emailed correspondence from some participants offering final reflections and any follow-up thoughts they wished to express	

Table 2: Research timeline from point of ethical approval

Malterud, Siersma and Guassora (2015) advise qualitative researchers to not solely rely on data saturation when selecting sample size. They note the importance of information power. In other words, the more that participants can offer to the research, the fewer recruits are required. Malterud et al (2015) specifically note that if a researcher has precise research aims with specific requirements for recruitment, an applied theory, strong dialogue across interviews, and in-depth exploration of narratives during data analysis, then the study will require fewer participants. By following Malterud et al's (2015) advice, purposive sampling was used to recruit nine participants for my study. I aimed to recruit six-to-ten participants to generate enough valuable data on which to make substantive claims. Enough participants to compare perceptions was a requirement if I were to offer compelling reasons as to why these teachers chose to stay in the teaching profession. Fewer participants would suggest that I have correct, factual answers to address the problem of teacher retention. Working with nine teacher participants allowed for the finite interrogation of the negotiations and interactions that occurred within the work life of the participants (Gube, 2017; Stewart, 2018), meeting the aims of the RQs.

Past DST studies, that have utilised interviews, have often done so with a much greater number of participants (e.g. Crafter et al, 2015; Grimell, 2020; Perdue et al, 2018). Where this is the case, participant voice is at-risk of being lost, as generalisations about the data could be made. To avoid such dilution, the decision is made to focus on less voices within the sample, such as in the study of Wijsen (2020), who conducted 175 interviews over six years yet only presented the findings from one participant. My DST work robustly addresses the notion of TPI (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Badia and Clarke, 2021) via a small-scale exploration, justifying why nine teachers is a suitable number.

Purposive sampling involved selecting participants who I believed could contribute knowledge and insights to my study (Flick, 2018). Calls were put out on the social media platform, 'Twitter' ('X'). This sampling strategy was appropriate because it was a requirement of this study for the 'experienced' primary school teachers to hold certain characteristics; namely, being full-time, class-based teachers who had at least six years continuous teaching experience in England.

A generally accepted term of 'experienced' is lacking. There is not consensus for if it is length of service that is required to be deemed 'experienced' or whether it the experiences of a teacher. The DfE (2019b) loosely provide a definition of what 'experienced' could be understood as, by comparing it to what it is not. They define an 'ECT' ('Early Careers Teacher') as someone who has been teaching for two years or less. Day and Gu (2009), Eilam (2009) and Carrillo and Flores (2018) are in some agreement that length of service is a prerequisite to being 'experienced'. They use the term 'veteran' to describe a teacher who has been teaching for twenty years or more. 'Long-serving', used by McIntyre (2010), also

refers to teachers with more than twenty years' teaching experience. These definitions and 'time labels' are not suited to this study because research indicates that over 40% of teachers leave within ten years (Maisuria et al, 2023). Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton (2024) define 'experienced' as teachers in post for seven years or longer, which is aligned with my own definition: in my study, 'experienced' refers to teachers who have been teaching for a minimum of six consecutive years and are therefore in no less than their seventh year, placing them at least at the top of the main pay scale. In agreement with Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton (ibid.), I argue that teachers with this length of experience have encountered challenges and can implement a range of teaching pedagogies, and can therefore contribute meaningfully to the debates within my research foci.

Participant recruitment, therefore, targeted those teachers who have taught for longer than the category of teachers thought to most likely leave (two to five years) (Worth and Van den Brande, 2019). Additionally, if I were to only recruit participants with over twenty years' experience, I may miss useful insights from teachers who have taught for less and lose valuable conceptions regarding why teachers remain in the profession. The purposive sampling was therefore strategic since it ensured good correspondence between the RQs and the population of the research. The outcome was an exploratory sample, who contributed quality information and valuable insights (Denscombe, 2017).

Purposive sampling is not without its flaws. Silverman (2017) warns that, with purposive sampling, researchers still need to give critical thought to the parameters of the population participating in the research, which could influence the scope of the knowledge generated during data generation. I acknowledge that my findings are not generalisable to the whole teaching profession; these teacher participants do not represent a homogenous group nor are they necessarily typical of primary school teachers (Fuller, 2019). If any generalisation were attempted, it can only be to experienced primary school teachers working full-time for six years or more in English primary schools. Additionally, the characteristics of my participants would need to match, or be extremely similar to, participants of future studies (Andrade, 2021). However, I strongly argue that the findings based on the experiences of the nine teachers are important to consider when seeking to discuss and apply TPI more broadly (Rushton et al, 2024). I introduce the nine participants and their range of teaching experiences next.

5.3 The experienced primary school teacher participants of this study

Nine participants, who were all class-based, primary school teachers working full-time in England, participated in my study. Their ages ranged from 30- to 54-years-old (average: 39-years-old); three were male and six were female; eight were White British and one was Asian; teaching experience varied from eight to 28 years (average: 15 years) and all but one participant had worked in more than

one school (average: 2.8 schools). Eight-out-of-nine participants had additional responsibilities beyond teaching a class of children and participants worked in a range of locations in England, with three working in academies and six in Local Authority maintained settings. Ofsted grades varied from 'Outstanding' to 'Requires Improvement'. Participant characteristics at the time of interview are tabulated below.

Name (Self-chosen pseudonym)	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of years teaching	Number of schools worked in	Leadership and management responsibilities	School type	School location (city/ town)	School Ofsted grade
Sally	33 y/o	Female	White British	11 years	2	Non-core Curriculum	Local Authority	Pensnett	Requires Improvement
Gemma	33 y/o	Female	White British	12 years	1	SENDCo	Local Authority	Walsall	Good
Heidi	40 y/o	Female	White British	15 years	2	None	Academy	Essex	Good
Derek	36 y/o	Male	White British	10 years	3	EYFS/ Science	Local Authority	Birmingham	Good
Amy	34 y/o	Female	White British	12 years	2	SENDCo	Local Authority	Walsall	Good
Sarah	49 y/o	Female	White British	28 years	4	Deputy Headteacher	Local Authority	Hereford	Outstanding
Ebony	30 y/o	Female	Asian	8 years	4	Reading/ Phonics	Local Authority	London	Good
James	46 y/o	Male	White British	25 years	3	English Leader	Academy	Yeovil	Outstanding
Declan	54 y/o	Male	White British	16 years	5	Deputy Headteacher	Academy	Essex	Outstanding
Averages	39 y/o	--	--	15 years	2.8	--	--	--	--

Table 3: Participant characteristics at the time of interview

To gain a sense of the TPIs of these participants, and who they are as people, I present a narrative paragraph for each teacher, which provides a summary of key aspects of their professional lives which are relevant to considerations of TPI. Quotes within these narrative paragraphs are taken from the participants' interviews.

5.3.1 Sally

Sally has been teaching for ten years, originally entering the profession due to a deep *"love"* of learning and wishing to *"spread that outward".* Her interest in education was shaped early through extensive volunteering in her Mother's school; her Mother was also a teacher. Despite being advised against pursuing a teaching career by her Father, who had observed its detrimental effects on her Mother, Sally describes the *"buzz"* she felt/feels from teaching, particularly the connections and relationships that education can promote. For Sally, teaching is like her *"superpower"* that can open doors for other people and help them see themselves in the best possible light. Sally sees teaching as a lifestyle choice, namely because she says that teaching is with her all the time and she openly admits to not getting her work/life balance right, something she accepts. Sally has worked across Years One to Six and prides herself on being versatile, hardworking and motivated. In her daily practice, she describes herself as dedicated to the children and highly organised. Sally appears to thrive from keeping *"9 million plates...spinning"* and operating like a *"blue-arsed fly".*

5.3.2 Gemma

Gemma has been a primary school teacher for 13 years and reports having always aspired to join the profession. Although she was discouraged from pursuing teaching by her own teachers in secondary school, she expresses continued enthusiasm for her role: *"seeing children learn something new every day"* and is glad that she *"went for what [her] gut was telling [her] to do".* Since qualifying, Gemma has worked in one school, teaching Key Stage Two, but says that she enjoys the high challenges and variety of roles/opportunities that the school has provided, which have always been built on strong collegial relationships with her school community. However, a standout moment in Gemma's career is of an extremely challenging class that she taught around five years ago, who still *"haunt"* her now. Gemma states that this class nearly made her leave teaching however her resilience and *"inner strength"* meant that she was determined to stay in the job she really enjoyed. Gemma reflects on this negative experience as being a *"good lesson learned".*

5.3.3 Heidi

It took a financial incentive for Heidi to enter the teaching profession. She then realised that she loved teaching as lots of things in Heidi's life *"clicked"* into place. Teaching allowed Heidi to channel her wide-ranging skill set so everything about her made a lot more sense. Her initial reluctance to enter teaching was because Heidi nor her family valued teachers or teaching despite Heidi's brother also being a teacher. However, after studying law, Heidi was unsure if she would like to practise as a lawyer and so

thought she would enter teaching for a year. She has now been teaching for 15 years. Heidi left her first school after ten years of teaching due to leadership issues and the fact that the school became *"too much"* for her; in this first school, Heidi witnessed teacher burnout. She worked under eight different Headteachers and over time in that school, witnessed culture change, different leadership styles, lack of teacher autonomy, high workload including large marking expectations, large levels of accountability, and how children were treated did not align with her. She therefore *"gave [her]self permission"* to move schools based on the personal and professional relationships in her life. Heidi reflects that moving schools kept her in teaching; she views this experience as a positive one.

5.3.4 Derek

Derek originally entered teaching for practical reasons; for example, pay and holidays. That being said, Derek wanted to make a difference to not only his own life (to better himself and *"be something"*) but children's lives also. Derek remembers inspirational teachers from his own schooling, whom he had very strong relationships with, and who instilled in him a love of learning. Derek has been teaching 10 years and explains how he enjoys pushing and challenging himself; having worked in mainly deprived areas, he likes to make an impact and not get *"stuck in a rut".* In his teaching day, Derek states that no learning time is wasted as he views himself as very experienced on knowing the children's limits in the Early Years, where he has spent his 10-year career, and now leads the Early Years department. Derek says that his most memorable moments are when children understand something, and things fall into place; he enjoys seeing the children progress from year to year. Derek takes his job very seriously and is clearly proud of the department that he runs describing it as, *"the face of the company".*

5.3.5 Amy

As a child, one of Amy's extra-curricular teachers had a *"really big impact"* on her life, and this is what inspired her to enter teaching 13 years ago. This teacher, according to Amy, *"always listened and put you first. Like he wanted to push me…he saw that…side of children that isn't just always the academic".* In her practice, Amy does the same. Amy is a very experienced teacher and has taught all year groups at primary level apart from nursery and has had, over the years, varied leadership and management experiences and is the school Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENDCo). She enjoys teaching all subjects and her specialism is the Early Years. Amy's frustration is how the Key Stage One curriculum quickly tries to force children to be Key Stage Two ready, and that is the wrong thing to do in her view. Therefore, Amy is anti-high-stakes testing.

5.3.6 Sarah

Sarah explains that she loves teaching. She is very passionate and gets a *"buzz"* from the profession. Sarah perceives herself to be a good teacher. She originally entered teaching 27 years ago because she imagined that it was always something that she wanted to do; she loved working with children and had lots of teachers in the family. During her 27-year career, Sarah has had a variety of roles and enjoyed the challenges that each one has brought. She is currently a class-based Deputy Headteacher, teaching in Year 6. Although she loves her class and what they are doing, she *"hate[s] SATs and what's expected".* Sarah gets into school early to set up. According to Sarah, her day busier than most other teachers, as she teaches an extra pre-tutor and booster class at 08.15. Despite a busy day, Sarah manages her workload well and makes conscious decisions, with her mental health and workload in mind, on what to do and when. Sarah has overwhelmingly happy and positive thoughts and memories about the profession.

5.3.7 Ebony

As a child, Ebony believes that she had some good teachers herself and so went into teaching to make her own difference to somebody's life. As well as this, Ebony, who is from an Asian and Arab background, comes from a culture who really value teachers and see them as important in society. *"So I wanted to make a difference. I wanted to continue that".* Ebony has been teaching for eight years, in the UK and abroad, and has taught from Key Stage One to Further Education (FE); she sees all year groups as important. Ebony currently leads on Reading across the school and is also the Literacy Leader for her lower Key Stage Two phase. The source of Ebony's frustrations, by her own admission, are poor relationships in schools, especially teachers who do *"the bare minimum"* and leaders who *"lack vision".* Ebony feels that if everybody had her strong work ethics, then the profession would be a lot more positive.

5.3.8 James

James began teaching 24 years ago as it was something he always wanted to do, and he had never considered any other career options. For work experience, he volunteered in an Infant School and for him, that *"cemented"* that he was *"heading in the right direction for [his] career path".* James has worked in three different schools and in his previous school, was Deputy Headteacher, but moved schools and 'dropped down' after a change in Headteacher. James describes falling out of favour with the Headteacher of the school. The experience made him ill and he left the school but never considered leaving teaching: *"I just needed to be in a different context".* In his current school, James is

enjoying making new relationships with the staff as well as developing his own ideas across the school. James recalls meeting an ex-pupil many years after teaching him and describes the positive social and emotional impact that he had on this ex-pupil's life.

5.3.9 Declan

Working temporary contracts within educational research, Declan was led to apply to be a primary school teacher for financial security reasons 16 years ago. He is currently a class-based Deputy Headteacher in an Outstanding school, leading on curriculum and pupil progress as well as being a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Declan has had varied experience across his 16-year career, having taught from Reception all the way to Year Six. He explains that although he enjoys Year Six, it is very *"pressured and stressful",* which is why he prefers other year groups such as Year Four or Five as, *"you haven't got that…pressure of Six".* Declan explains that he left his previous school due to working unmanageably long days and weekends and was really struggling: *"I needed to get out".* He never considered leaving the career at this point and wanted to try another school first to see if it was the role or education itself. When reminiscing about his career, Declan describes non-classroom-based memories, such as Year Six residentials, educational visits and outdoor learning experiences, all of which foster relationships and strong bonds. Declan enjoys the variation that each day brings and the fact that children are *"sponges",* and he can make a difference. Declan describes the relationships in his school as one where *"the staff are in it together…we're all one staff".*

5.3.10 The affordances and challenges of working with these nine experienced primary school teachers

In the context of my primary school study, which focuses on accountability, its influences on TPI and teacher retention, working with these nine participants brought certain affordances. For example, there were participants who worked in both academies and maintained schools, all of which had a range of Ofsted gradings; an important factor when thinking about RQs 1 and 3 as Ofsted is a central accountability method in England. Participants entered teaching for a range of different reasons and at different points, e.g. Heidi, who was a career changer; an important consideration when discussing RQ2, as I-positions that construct TPI may be influenced by the past, present and future (Henry, 2019). A female-heavy recruitment pool (six-out-of-nine) is broadly representative of male-compared-to-female primary school teachers in the UK; 14% of whom are male according to the latest School Workforce in England statistics (DfE, 2024b). Furthermore, my work specifically contributes to research gaps highlighted by Rushton et al (2023a). For example, my study is not only primary-focused but two

of my participants (Amy and Derek) were Early Years specialists, both of which (primary/Early Years) lack in educational research.

However, challenges remain: only one person (Ebony) was from a minority ethnic background. This is despite Rushton et al (ibid.) identifying a literature gap to research with people from minority ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, despite all but one participant having additional responsibilities outside of their classroom teaching, I cannot claim that my work inputs into any subject specialism alongside TPI discussions even though this is an area where again, literature is limited (ibid.). My sampling strategy (Section 5.2) adopted a self-selecting approach and so I as the researcher could not control these omissions however it is important that they are acknowledged as I do not claim generalisability.

Therefore, overall, my nine participants, with their range of characteristics and experiences, were well-placed to address the RQs during the semi-structured interviews and when entering into their reflective journals.

5.4 Semi-structured interviews: use and justification

The first method of data generation used in this study was online semi-structured interviews, via the communication platform, Microsoft Teams. Post-COVID-19 has meant that online interviewing is more accepted than pre-pandemic (O'Leary, 2021). Online interviewing allowed me to interview frequently without any need to travel (Mason, 2018), which was flexible and convenient for the participants (Rushton and Bird, 2024). Researchers have also noted that online interviews reduce the 'interviewer effect' meaning that participants were more comfortable and therefore at-ease (Denscombe, 2017; Gray, 2018), influencing the quality of the information shared.

I recorded the interviews on Microsoft Teams, audially and visually. Visual and audio recording meant that I could build a more personal rapport, which stemmed from the participants being in their own homes. When speaking about TPI, it was important to be able to see one another so that ongoing ethical assent could occur, and for the checking of any signs of distress (see Section 5.5). Participants were often surrounded by their belongings, which facilitated comfortable and open conversations (Oliffe et al, 2021), leading to a richer and more detailed analysis. Participants' facial expressions, body language and other non-verbal cues could also be considered during analysis (Saarijärvi and Bratt, 2021). However, although it preserves body language, video recording is more intrusive than audio alone (O'Leary, 2021). I acknowledge that such recording may have impacted participants' engagement in the interviews and so establishing a relaxed atmosphere with a good, working relationship was a key objective from interview one (Denscombe, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews were deliberately utilised as a type of conversation (Holstein and Gubrium, 2004). They were built around interactional, verbal exchanges between the participant and myself (Mason, 2018). By applying DST, I recognise that the perceptions of a participant are only one part of that individual person; furthermore, a particular perception is a fragment of their overall perceptions, which may change. This only revealed a small part of the participant's life and my job was to present and describe these segments (Miller and Glassner, 2004). Therefore, it was not possible to ask all participants the same, pre-established questions in a structured interview. Flexibility and improvisation (Fontana and Frey, 2003) aligned with my research intentions as I was not looking for a fixed range of answers (Bryman, 2008).

With a semi-structured design, participants were given scope as well as structure to reveal their thoughts and talk about them (Flick, 2018). The design was there to follow but I was unafraid to move around and/or from it, for the benefit of the research (Mason, 2018). I was able to re-order questions, add/remove questions and to probe further (Gray, 2018), giving me good scope to ensure that the complex social events being discussed could be explored thoroughly. In agreement with Boulonger (2017), identity is not 'true', as this would infer that one's I-positions are finished and complete. Instead, I-positions are known to fluctuate and change depending upon the context (Ouwehand et al, 2020) and conducting three interviews over time made it possible to consider and track the shaping of participants' ideas and values (Rushton, 2021). Indeed, repeated semi-structured interviews facilitated exploration of those changes and TPI formation across multiple interviews rather than providing a snapshot in time of momentary states (Rushton et al, 2023b).

5.4.1 The interview schedules

The interview schedules (See Appendix 1) set out the content and structure for the three interviews. With the RQs in mind, the schedules were designed from my inbetweener positionality (Section 3.4), using literature as well as my own thoughts (Rapley, 2004). This ensured that the interview topics and questions were purposeful and relevant (Mason, 2018). Each interview guide had a sense of coherence and order (Arksey and Knight, 1999), ensuring practicality for the participants.

Interview one was of particular importance to begin the building of a lasting, trusting relationship. The first discussion points of the first interview, therefore, were ones that was 'easier', ones that participants would already have well-formed views on and/or collected contextual information about (Denscombe, 2017). Questions focused on topics such as participants' career to-date, what they perceived as the 'best things' about the teaching profession, and what their 'perfect' classroom would look like. I did not want to start with a difficult or sensitive question because the rest of the interview

would then be more challenging to conduct (O'Leary, 2021). Participants may not have felt at-ease to contribute expressively, an ethical dilemma.

To help participants successfully verbalise their understandings and self-truths, and not always rely on retelling events, each participant was asked to bring an item to the first interview that represented their thoughts about accountability methods. The main part of the first interview was allowing each participant to explain their reasonings for choosing their item. The use of a stimulus meant that discussion centred around the common frame of reference chosen by the participants, who could express themselves clearly based on what they had selected. Formulating thorough lines of questioning (Stacey and Vincent, 2011) followed, as it was the participants who were the expert informants on what they had selected. Discussion could then continue based on concrete, rather than abstract ideas (Denscombe, 2017).

Interviews two and three began by participants discussing some of the entries from their reflective journal (Section 5.4). Some pertinent statements from the transcript of the previous interview were also shared. These were determined by the participants wishing to extend or clarify their thinking on a certain point or by me asking for elaboration/clarification on a matter of research interest. This is what Flick (2018: 228) calls a "structure layer technique" and is useful to recall the previous interview as well as viewing the statements with the purpose to "reformulate, eliminate, or replace" (ibid.). With DST ideas discussed during the interviews, this process allowed for TPI to be interrogated as the dynamic, fluctuating entity that it is understood to be rather than something that is stable and fixed (Steadman, 2023). Structured layering also meant that meanings and expressions stood less chance of being misunderstood as there was a second articulation on these matters.

A main feature of the interview questions' design was ensuring that they included education-specific definitive moments and biographical processes over time (Mason, 2003) to align with the development of I-positions. Several researchers suggest that abstract or hypothetical questions should be avoided (e.g. Arksey and Knight, 1999; Gray, 2018; Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Mason (2003) is particularly critical of abstract questions; she recommends asking the participants to recount or narrate examples of events, situations and contexts instead, so they can effectively (re)construct them in the interview setting. That way, knowledge about outside the interview can be constructed based on the interactions within it, which helps the ontological grounding of the study. I accept that participants may have intentionally selected and/or omitted information when retelling events and answering questions (O'Leary, 2021). Dialogically, this is the participants' I-position(s) expression at the time. Indeed, participants may control their I-position expressions to appear as competent teachers (Gomm, 2008). DST acknowledges how every I-position stance within a participant's

repertoire cannot be known; Boulanger (2017) explains how this is due to the self moving and expanding to an undetermined horizon. However, use of DST as the theoretical framework aids precision when analysing which stances participants are speaking from.

At the end of each interview, after the more sensitive or difficult questions towards the end, each interview was ended neutrally, with a final, routine, everyday-based question (Arksey and Knight, 1999). I followed this by asking each participant if there was anything they would like to cover in more detail or clarify, and gave them the opportunity to ask any questions (Gray, 2018; O'Leary, 2021). I then explained the processes of the reflective journaling.

5.5 Reflective Journals: use and justification

The second method of data generation utilised in this research was that of 'reflective journals', which participants entered into after their first and second interviews. There is no unified agreement for the definition of 'reflective journal' (Hojeij, Meda and Kaviani, 2021); they are not set and can take a variety of formats (Bashan and Holsblat, 2017; Faizah, 2008). A journal's range of formats can include one that is open, with the freedom of an unstructured design to capture a stream of consciousness; or, more closed constructs, with structures, such as questions, prompts or frameworks in place (Cohen-Sayag and Fischl, 2012; Göker, 2016).

In my research, participants used their reflective journals as a strategy (Ahmed, 2020) to openly write about their experiences, thoughts, opinions, feelings and reflections (Göker, 2016; Simons and Harris, 2002). Multiple TPIs, neoliberal accountability measures and teacher retention are too complex and abstract for participants to be expected to write about in an unstructured manner, in addition to a full-time teaching commitment. Likewise, these areas of interest cannot be 'shoehorned' into prescriptive questions for participants to follow. Therefore, the reflective journals in this research were structured into three stages, that were clear, but encouraged uncensored writing (Heath, 1998). The three stages were based on the work of Minott (2008) but additional guidance added from the work of Gibbs (1988). On their own, Minott's (2008) stages were too broad, but Gibbs' (1988) cycle was overly prescriptive, and I was concerned would lead to participant reluctance and/or poor-quality entries.

Table 4 (below) shows how the two authors' ideas have been synthesised and utilised. The stages of Minott (2008) provide clarity and conciseness. The supplementary guidance from Gibbs (1988) adds a good variety of questions to avoid boredom and offer choice (Ahmed, 2020). Design of this nature mirrors the studies of Cengiz and Karataş (2015) and Cengiz, Karataş and Yadigaroğlu (2014); in both, questions were listed with the idea that participants chose which one(s) to answer in-depth, alongside

any other topics that concerned their thinking. (See Appendix 2 for what was provided for participants at the end of interviews one and two).

Stages (adapted from Minott, 2008)	Reflective guides/questions (adapted from Gibbs, 1988)
1 **Event**	• When and where did the event happen? • Who was present? • What did you want to happen? • What did you and the other people do? (What happened)? • What did you/others contribute to the situation? (Positive or negative).
2 **Feelings**	• What were you thinking and feeling during the situation? • How did you feel before and after? • What do you think other people were feeling about the situation? • What do you think other people feel now? • What do you think about the situation now?
3 **Learning**	• What was the outcome of the situation? • Did it go well? Why? • What was good and bad about the experience? • What sense have you made from the situation? • Have you learnt/realised/understood anything?

Table 4: Reflective journal stages (guidance/framework)

The participants sent me their reflective journal entries before the next interview. I drew upon the work of Rushton (2021) to ensure thorough reflexive consideration of what had been sent to me. Rushton (ibid.) prepared for subsequent interviews with her geography teacher participants by reading the teachers' reflections in advance and comparing these to the transcripts. This helped Rushton (ibid.) design appropriate follow up questions, that encouraged reflection, but were also directly based on participants' contributions. By applying Rushton's (ibid.) methods, I read my participants' entries, alongside their transcript, with the RQs in mind, but did not use RTA (Section 5.6) to analyse them (e.g. code/theme). Instead, I picked out parts that were underdeveloped or needed clarification; opinions that contradicted literature; views that contrasted with other participants or parts that addressed one of the RQs. I used my inbetweener status to be close to the entries and then distance myself; in other words, use my knowledge of education whilst allowing myself to read the entries as an outsider too.

Well-considered questions and/or discussion prompts were formed from the selections that I made, resulting in an extra layer of understanding when these were discussed.

Using the journal entries as a 'springboard' for discussion was an appropriate strategy for three main reasons. Firstly, there was the practical element of time. I am employed full-time as Deputy Headteacher and co-ordinating my EdD project was demanding. Time restrictions links to the fact that I had nearly twenty-eight hours of interview data across twenty-seven semi-structured interviews alongside more than fifty reflective entries. Secondly, reflecting on my research aims, sample size, theoretical approach, quality of the data and analytical process, I deemed that the "information *richness*" of my dataset "mesh[ed]" very well with my reflections, indicating that I had plenty of insights (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 28; italics in original text). The final justification for not coding the entries was an ethical one. Some participants did reflect very deeply in the journals. Although participants gave voluntary informed consent, fully knowing how the journals would be used, and their schools had been pseudonymised and anonymised, there was still an element of upholding participants' dignity. There were some relevant parts of their journals that were better left uncoded for the sake of the participants. For this decision, I drew on the work of Day and Thatcher (2009), who did not code participants' journal entries containing sensitive and emotive data. The decision to not code my data was similarly an ethical, protective one.

One advantage that reflective journaling fostered within the participants of this research was that of an increased self-awareness (Hussein, 2018). Participants were able to re-interrogate their ideas and thinking so that "latent beliefs and assumptions" could surface (Abednia et al, 2013: 507). As discussed in Section 4.2, neoliberalism is a policy turn that is often accepted without question to the point that it is taken-for-granted and normalised (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). Therefore, it was beneficial that reflective journaling encouraged the re-thinking of deeply-rooted beliefs in my teacher participants in order to gain new insights (Ahmed, 2020).

A second important consideration is that journal writing has been thought to actively contribute to identity construction (Donyaie and Afshar, 2019), which was a main reasoning for selecting journaling as a method in this research. It was hoped that, if participants could enjoy some of the more general advantages, including catharsis (Simons and Harris, 2002), then they could grow to understand how past and present conditions influence them (Phelps, 2005). This could prompt purposeful change and different actions where needed (Mahlanze and Sibiya, 2017). The fact that there are advantages for the participants means that, in turn, there are many advantages for the research.

Participants chose the medium of their reflective journals: some chose to hand write, others typed, others tabulated, and one used voice notes; some journals were accompanied with diagrams and I-

position maps. The data generated was solely from the participants themselves (Faizah, 2008). Independence and choice provided a balanced contrast in comparison to the interviews. Indeed, semi-structured interviews *or* reflective journaling alone were not substantial to provide insights into TPI. I drew on Robson and McCartan's (2017) work, that showed reflective journals should be combined with another data collection method so that cross-checking can occur, and confidence can be gained regarding how reliable the data is. Utilising two methods allowed me to document the narrative journey of the participants' TPIs over time rather than be presented with snapshots. The process of reflective writing is "dynamic and evolving" rather than "fixed and static" (Black and Plowright, 2010: 254), mirroring TPI itself. Therefore, interviews (moments in time) *and* reflective journals (recursive) have been understood to be a complementary combination (Jacelon and Imperio, 2005; Simons and Harris, 2002).

After explaining the process of journaling at the end of interviews one and two, I had no further involvement in the participants' journaling 'gaps' between the interviews, granting the participants much freedom (Savadova and Plowman, 2020). This helped to capture unexpected outcomes and insights (Phelps, 2005). In being left alone to their own thoughts, the journaling jogged participants' memories (Goodson and Sikes, 2001), and they recorded entries that may have been unsaid in an interview. There were a wide range of insightful entries, including responses to the research topics but in addition, reflections that communicated the stories of daily lives (Jacelon and Imperio, 2005). I feel, therefore, that journaling reduced researcher influence and contextually enriched this study, not least because on the 23rd April 2022, after presenting at a methodology conference, I wrote in my own reflective journal:

"I would argue that I got a higher return rate [of journal entries] and what was returned was more genuine. This was good when working with busy teachers…By setting 'realistic' expectations regarding journalling [see Table 3 above] was certainly a good thing to do. It is positive that both Declan and Derek said how much they enjoyed the process and that they also found it useful".

The data generated in the reflective journals, over several months, provided significant insights into the participants' TPI thinking over time, that would not have been achieved through other data collection methods (Bashan and Holsblat, 2017, Faizah, 2008). Journaling helped the participants, and me, to make sense of what happened in their schools (Bashan and Holsblat, 2017) and, as a result, made "invisible thoughts and actions visible" in the form of very detailed and expressive data (Simons and Harris, 2002: 2). I now explain how my research was ethically sound.

5.6 Ethical Considerations

Birmingham City University (BCU) Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for my research project in December 2021 after key ethical considerations, as stipulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018), were satisfactorily met. The full variety of responsibilities that my research had to the participants is now presented, including: voluntary informed consent, transparency, participants' right to withdraw, protection from harm, and privacy.

Before any data generation occurred, participants were provided with the information they required to understand the purposes, design and scope of the research. It was made clear to the potential participants why their participation was sought, what commitment would be required of them, what would happen to the data they generated, who would see the data and how it would be reported and disseminated. Full disclosure was provided, including the fact that there were no incentives for participation. If participants consented to be a part of the research, they understood that they had the right to withdraw, fully or partially. I was transparent about the purposes of the research: that it was being undertaken as part of my EdD studies, there were no conflicts of interests, no extrinsic motivations for completing the studies and the research was not being funded.

I provided potential participants with an information sheet detailing these considerations (see Appendix 3). Those who then wished to participate could give fully-informed, voluntary consent. Before consent was given, there was the opportunity for participants to ask any questions that they may have had; they could also question at any stage during the research process. No duress was placed on participants, confirmed or potential, and there were no repercussions for those who did not wish to take part.

Participants were pre-informed that there was a possible element of risk when researching something as personal as TPI (Gray, 2018). For example, discomfort, upset or embarrassment when discussing I-positions. Additionally, people do enjoy the chance to talk about their ideas at length to a researcher, who is not there to be critical (Denscombe, 2017). Disclosures, that could be upsetting for the participants, were a possibility because of this highly personal nature in the interviews, especially as I built up rapport and mutual commitment to the interviews (Gersen and Horowitz, 2003). I explained to participants that I was not there to judge them, even if these feelings were felt, and consent and assent of participants was seen as a continuous process (Savadova and Plowman, 2020).

At the beginning of the first interview, I reminded the participants of the above, and gave ethical assurances of confidentiality, anonymity, the right to decline an answer and to end the interview at any time (O'Leary, 2021). I re-confirmed if participants were satisfied to begin the recording and start the interview. Ethical guarantees were repeated at the start of the second and third interviews, along

with re-affirming that participants were happy to be recorded during each interview (Denscombe, 2017). Participants were provided with a debrief sheet detailing support information after each interview (see Appendix 4) as I ensured that I did not give them any personal advice or guidance (Gray, 2018).

During transcription and data analysis, all participants, and their schools, were pseudonymised. When participants spoke and wrote about their colleagues, or precise information, details were anonymised so that third parties could not be identifiable through association of their relationship with the participant (Flick, 2018). Data were held in-line with BCU policy as well as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). For example, electronic data was transferred and stored via secure, encrypted, password-protected BCU devices. All e-mail communication between myself and participants was carried out via my BCU email address, which utilises multi-factor authentication whenever there is a log in. Overall, the steps taken here ensure my study was conducted ethically.

5.7 Data analysis: Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA)

I used Braun and Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to examine the data generated from the semi-structured interviews. Implementing RTA allowed me to develop themes from the data, and to coherently and accurately report my overarching interpretations of the dataset (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). Establishing themes to present one's research is the primary purpose of RTA (Gomm, 2008; Gray, 2018). In addition to generating themes, there were three main reasons why RTA was used for data analysis.

Firstly, RTA acknowledges the central place of me as the researcher; my subjectivity and I are the "primary tool" for the data analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 8). I designed and conducted all twenty-seven interviews and had introduced the participants to the core tenets of DST during the process. Therefore, an analytical process where I could remain central and continue to put my inbetweener subjectivities to good use, and see the research through to the end, was essential to demonstrate high-quality work. Indeed, RTA views research subjectivity as a resource to develop understanding rather than as a hindrance (Rushton, 2021; Rushton and King, 2020).

Secondly, engaging in reflexivity with meta-positioning (Section 3.1) is another important reason as to why RTA was utilised in my study. Linked to my core role in the analysis process, reflexivity acknowledged that my assumptions were the first object of study in my project, and they should not limit or constrain the process; instead, reflexivity throughout the use of RTA allowed me to recognise what I brought to the data analysis (Terry and Hayfield, 2021).

Reflexivity, combined with DST tools, was possible because RTA, as discussed in the subsequent sections, offers a theoretically-flexible process to be followed (Braun and Clarke, 2022), the final justification as to why RTA was used for data analysis. My central place as the researcher to apply this flexible process, including my use of reflexivity and meta-positioning, can best be explained metaphorically with the idea of an optician's 'phoropter', an instrument comprised of cylinders, prisms, and lenses, that help quantify a patient's short-sightedness and far-sightedness. See Figure 7 below.
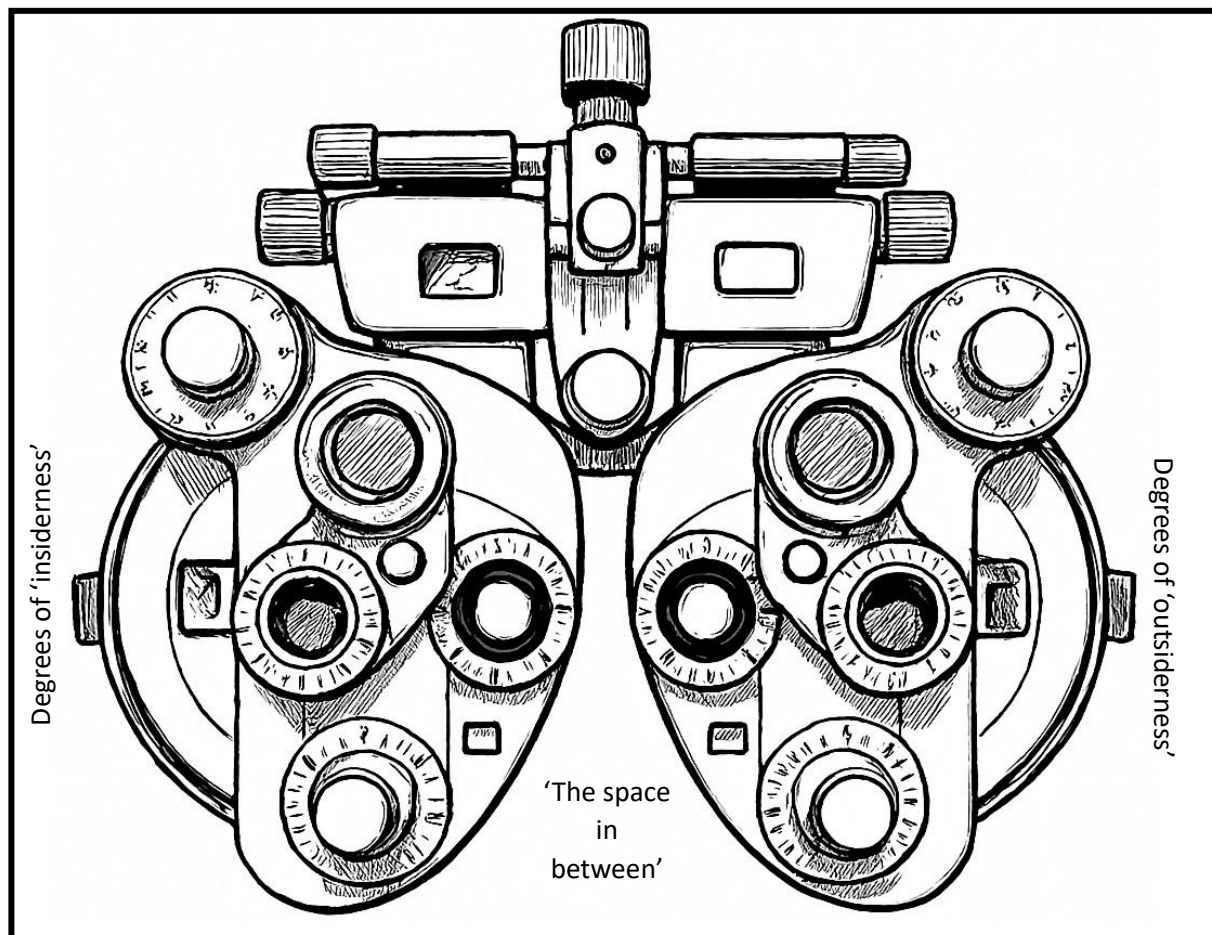
Figure 7: 'Reflexive phoropter' – how my reflexivity informed my engagement with the data.

Figure 7 metaphorically illustrates my positionality of *I as an inbetweener researcher,* (Section 3.4), and shows how my multiple selves have informed my engagement with the data. During the data analysis stage, from a meta-position, I specifically applied degrees of 'insiderness', such as *I as a teacher, I as an experienced teacher* and *I as caring* to purposefully be close to the participants' voices. As a result, I was not 'short-sighted': I was in-tune with participants and the subtleties that they were describing due to our I-position similarities at this point, which offered the analysis greater depth and insights (Thompson, Walldeck and Holliman, 2025). At the same time, I also operated with degrees of

'outsiderness', such as *My expert participants, I as a researcher, I as a Deputy Headteacher* and *I as a Doctoral candidate* to give myself distance from the participants. I allowed myself to be 'far-sighted' as I wanted to be surprised by the data and let the participants speak for themselves in addition to interpreting their beliefs.

I acknowledge my heightened care and empathy towards the participants and their stories, and wanted to represent their views fairly and accurately (Thompson et al, 2025). Thus, the 'lenses of the phoropter' gave rise to *I as an inbetweener researcher* so that I could view things simultaneously and achieve both. As Figure 7 metaphorically demonstrates, it was not a case that only two I-positions could be configuring the data at any one time; there were multiple lenses and the 'dials' at the top and bottom of the phoropter provided closeness and distance when needed from the space in between.

Reflexively engaging with my I-positions via meta-positioning foregrounded my subjectivities during the RTA process, so that I can demonstrate how my experiences as a teacher and researcher informed my understandings of schools and teaching in this study (Rushton and King, 2020). Indeed, reflexivity, with the theoretical affordances provided to me by DST, has allowed me to bring forward my prior knowledge, pre-conceptions and self-awareness, in the form of I-positions, dialogues and movements. Metaphorically, this is my 'short-sightedness'; my degrees of 'insiderness' from Figure 7. I have been able, therefore, to specify the relationship between the participants, data and myself (Preissle et al, 2015). Such clarity has resulted in the enhancement of my conceptualisations (Collins, 2015). I have interrogated my own multiplicity and how the research has been "shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form [my life]" (Guba and Lincoln, 2005: 210). This has been appropriately balanced with my 'far sightedness'; the extent to which I am an 'outsider' to then open 'the space in between'. To be clear, reflexivity, with DST, has become the golden thread that I have weaved throughout all five stages of RTA, discussed in the upcoming sections.

5.7.1 Familiarisation

The first phase of data analysis, familiarisation, was the development of "deep and intimate knowledge" of my data (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 42). Familiarisation involved three immersive sub-phases: listening to and transcribing each interview; re-listening to each interview whilst highlighting and annotating the transcript; then finally tabulating summaries. Whilst there is no one correct method to become familiar with qualitative data during RTA, familiarisation is active engagement with the data that can begin with transcription (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). My three sub-phases are in-line with Braun and Clarke's (2022) immersion, critical engagement and note-making recommendations to quality RTA.

After an interview had been conducted, I uploaded the Microsoft Teams recording into the transcription software, 'Otter', which aided the transcription process by preparing the bulk of the text. However, there was still a large element of manual transcription for each interview. Mann and Stewart (2000) describe manual transcription as tiring and difficult. I was determined to transcribe, as this facilitated early reflexivity and I did not want to lose closeness to the data. I was able to reflect on my early emotional responses to the data (Terry and Hayfield, 2021) by asking myself how my own I-positions were responding, recording thoughts in my own diary. Probing follow-up questions, especially those that challenged accepted viewpoints, and cross-participant contradiction, could then be written into the subsequent interviews. The participants themselves also had the opportunity to read their transcripts, to demonstrate a responsible research process whilst offering another layer of reflection.

A second listen of each interview followed transcription, allowing me to read the transcript at the same time (checking for errors) but also physically highlight and annotate points of interest (Braun and Clarke, 2022). These formed broad summaries about what the participants said and what this indicated that they could believe. The summaries were tabulated and helped me make sense of the data overall, as I began to form working, overall impressions whilst seeing where there were contestations between what participants said (Braun and Clarke, 2022). The second listening of each interview culminating in summary tables meant that I could reflexively ask questions of the data, such as "who, what, when, where, why, how and what does this mean"? (Terry and Hayfield, 2021: 32). Ongoing reflexive questions such as these were an effective precursor to the coding process.

5.7.2 Coding

For participant voice to be central to the research analysis, data-driven coding processes were adopted from the work of Adu (2019), who offered systematic advice on how to adopt manual, line-by-line coding. Thorough coding avoided offering partial transcripts, that could result in poorer data analysis, stemming from a frame of reference imposed too early (Mann and Stewart, 2000). A third and final listen to each audio recording, whilst following the transcript line-by-line on Microsoft Word, began the coding process (phase two of RTA).

I understand a 'code' to be "the smallest unit of…analysis" that, altogether, form the "building blocks" of the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 52). Coding, therefore, was the process of managing the dataset, achieved by breaking down the data into rigorous chunks (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). The output was then the 'code label': a "word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing…attribute for a portion of…data" (Saldaña, 2021: 5). When coding, I paused

the recording each time I noticed something of potential relevance to one of the RQs, and tagged it with a code label (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Reflexivity has shown that the video recordings may not have assisted with data analysis, but I contend that they did serve to begin the process of forming conducive relationships between the participants and myself as we could see one another.

When coding, I kept a codebook (Microsoft Excel document) where I noted the source of the code, and described what the code-in-question captured data about. Code descriptions helped codes to be specific and convey key points (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). I also noted the initial meaning of the empirical indicator, and how it could possibly answer the RQ. Early interpretations of how empirical indicators might address the RQs provides a comprehensive blueprint on my manual, line-by-lining coding strategy, and documents my thinking (Adu, 2019).

To ascertain if I were ready to begin generating initial themes, I used guidance from Braun and Clarke (2022), who advise researchers to scrutinise their codes to see if the range of meanings from across the whole dataset has been adequately summarised. To assess if codes and code labels did so, I compiled the codes and tallied their frequencies (Adu, 2019) in different layers: firstly, to see if each RQ had sufficient breadth; secondly, to ascertain the spread of contributions from each participant. Reflexivity showed me that each RQ had plentiful data attached to it, from all participants, who had each contributed to the research aims. I was satisfied that data saturation had been achieved and no new information could be gleaned from further coding (Saldaña, 2021). Checking for frequency, breadth and depth of codes and participant contributions, meant that I could begin generating initial themes, phase three of RTA.

5.7.3 Generating initial themes

A theme "capture[s] a wide range of data that are united by, and evidence, a *shared* idea" (Braun and Clarke, 2022: 77, italics in original text). Initial theme generation involved me 'clustering' the codes, done so by selecting the dominant code that addressed one of the RQs and comparing the remaining codes to the dominant one, to determine commonalities or divergencies (Adu, 2019).

When I clustered my codes into initial themes, I first listed each code under the RQs to form a macro-view as to how the variety of codes answered the RQ, and how frequently the codes presented in the data. I also listed how many times each participant had contributed to the code, forming a meso view, done to ensure data were not interpreted by over-reliance on the same participant. A reflexive process such as this had many advantages as it allowed me to interrogate the initial themes generated from the clusters rather than automatically spot a ready-made theme (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). Therefore,

the cluster developed could hold up to scrutiny: it was more than a code, as it was purposefully derived from two or more codes. As a result, clusters were actively supported by first-hand empirical data, and could tell me something about the RQs (Thomas, 2019), rather than being of general interest. There were clear boundaries as I could determine what the cluster included and excluded (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Where there were overlaps, clusters could be re-clustered. Subsequently, individual clusters were not diverse nor wide ranging as they were distinct around a single, organising concept (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). Together, however, the thirty clusters generated were connected, coherent and rich, and began to tell a story about the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

5.7.4 Developing and reviewing themes

To generate candidate themes, the thirty clusters were "reconnect[ed]" to the wider data to "ensure the story that is being told has not drifted too far into interpretation beyond what you can evidence in the data" (Terry and Hayfield, 2021: 55). Therefore, developing and reviewing the themes was a vital check on the accuracy of the initial theme development (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Once I was satisfied that the clusters appropriately represented the data from which they derived, thematic mapping marked the interconnectedness of the thirty clusters and nine candidate themes were created, which continued to avoid topic summaries that could have within-theme contradiction (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Reviewing the candidate themes identified the broadness of some, the repetition of others and the use of imprecise language to convey meaning, which was the precursor to the thinking of the final stage, where the candidate themes were refined.

5.7.5 Refining, defining and naming themes

Four refined themes were defined and named from the dataset. When refining my themes, changes occurred based on further testing, that continued from the previous stage (Terry and Hayfield, 2021). This included writing and reflecting on a theme definition to outline and test the scope, boundaries and core concept of each theme (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I found that I was able to summarise the essence of the four themes, their uniqueness, specificity and how the theme contributed to the overall analysis. Indeed, each theme directly correlated to one of the RQs. Tools of DST added to the refining process as I reflected on my own I-position stances as well as noting the dialogical movements within the dataset to help define and name the themes. It was important to return to the empirical data during this process to continue to ensure that the themes could be clearly found in the first-hand accounts of the participants.

In undertaking RTA, I have shown my analysis to be upheld by a quality process achieved by: undertaking thorough familiarisation of the data; coding strategies facilitated by a codebook, that kept forensic detail; and iterative theme development.

5.8 Conclusion

Chapter 5 has discussed in detail the methodological considerations relevant to this study. I use a qualitative research design, which utilised online semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, to explore notions of accountability and TPI within a teacher retention context. Research was undertaken with nine participants, all of whom were purposively selected for being full-time class-based teachers, who had worked for at least six consecutive years in English primary schools. My study ontologically and epistemologically aligned with social constructivism and facilitated the in-depth addressing of the RQs, which were analysed with RTA and from the lens of DST. The findings of this study are now presented and discussed.

Chapter 6 – Findings

6.0 Introduction

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke, 2022) of data generated four themes; see table below.

	RQ	Theme to address RQ	Main codes that contributed to the theme	Indicative quote
1	How do experienced primary school teachers in the study experience neoliberal accountability measures in their work?	The present and active status of neoliberal accountability measures in English primary schools.	• Self-accountability • That's just the way it is • Accountability should be helpful • Accountability is needed in schools • Datafication	"I don't mind [accountability] because I want to have an impact; I want to make sure the amount of children reaching age expected has increased. So, I don't see accountability as threatening, personally" (Sally).
2	How do experienced primary school teachers in the study articulate their sense of teacher professional identity?	There are three foundations that build a strong TPI.	• Ability to reflect • Working very hard • Striving for the best • Taking teaching home • Demonstrating perseverance	"I'm a very reflective person, and I try and make sure any…constructive feedback that I'm given, I'll act upon it straight away or as quickly as I can". (Derek)
3	To what extent do experienced primary school teachers in the study feel that accountability measures influence their teacher professional identity?	Teachers' management of their TPI conflict.	• Negative feeling: pressure/stress • I-position dialogue: conflict • Dancing to the tune of inspections • Negative feeling: worry • I-position dialogue: selection	"[The accountability] was stressful, but it wasn't debilitating if that makes sense. I could see an end in sight. So, you could stick to that and know that we were gonna [sic] get there together" (Declan).
4	What do experienced primary school teachers in the study understand to be the contributing factors that have influenced them to remain in teaching?	Achieving and maintaining a sense of harmony and balance.	• Enjoying being a teacher • Changing setting • Making a difference • I-position dialogue: complementary • Supportive colleagues	"I love [teaching]. It's my vocation. You know, I love the fact that every day is different. I love the fact that I get to have a relationship, a yearly relationship, with a group of perfect little people who are perfect for me" (Heidi).

Table 5: How the four themes were constructed and address the RQs

Table 5 above shows how each theme was constructed from several codes (the five most prominent codes are listed). Each theme clearly addresses one of the research questions (RQs), and contributes to the overall aims of this study. As tabulated above, the nine teacher participants confirmed that neoliberal accountability measures are present and active in their schools. To manage these accountability measures, the teachers have three core foundations that construct a strong teacher professional identity (TPI): (i) TPIs are adaptable and flexible; (ii) TPI has the ability to reflect; and, (iii) TPI has in-built selflessness. Due to the three strong foundations of TPI, the participants managed any TPI conflict that occurred, remaining in the profession as they achieved a sense of harmony and balance. An indicative quote for each theme provides a snapshot of these findings.

This chapter builds on Table 5 and takes each theme, in turn, and presents the findings to address the RQ. The findings tell the stories of the nine teacher participants, what they perceive schools to be like, and why they choose to remain in the teaching profession.

6.1 The present and active status of neoliberal accountability measures in English primary schools

This first main theme illustrates that accountability measures have a strong neoliberal hold on the experienced primary school teachers and their practice. It strongly proposes that much of the accountability stems from teachers' I-position articulations, which regulate the teachers to continue teaching within a manner set by neoliberal parameters in the form of 'self-accountability'.

"The present and active status of neoliberal accountability measures in English primary schools", is explored in detail through both key components that build up this first theme:

- Accountability is entrenched and self-perpetuates within English primary schools and teachers.
- Accountability as a malleable policy-in-practice in English primary schools, implemented through purpose.

6.1.1 Accountability is entrenched and self-perpetuates within English primary schools and teachers

A common view amongst all nine interviewees was that accountability was routine and normalised, demonstrating its fixed roots in policy and practice (Keddie, 2016; Reeves, 2018). *"That's just the way it is…There is that Big Brother watching all the time",* stated Ebony, suggesting how accountability had strongly taken hold of her school. Amy agreed, and expressed accountability as having omnipresent

qualities in her setting: *"Everything's an accountability measure, isn't it"*? The most regularly cited accountability measures are tabulated below.

Accountability Measure	Number of participants who discussed this measure
Data	8
Performance management/appraisal	7
Ofsted	7
Book trawl/scrutiny	6
Lesson observations	5

Table 6: Most regularly cited accountability measures

Participant views such as these, as well the accountability measures cited in Table 5, show how participants believed neoliberalism to have affected a great proportion of their working lives (Kamat, 2011; Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024; Peck, 2013). Therefore, all nine participants showed neoliberal policies to be the only available ideology for their schools to function. However, no participant in my study verbalised the phrase 'neoliberal/ism', suggesting how its existence in English primary schools is not one of direct awareness (Monbiot and Hutchinson, 2024). Instead, participants discussed the features that facilitated the existence of neoliberal accountability policies, such as the policies and practices listed in Table 5. Therefore, I was able to get a good sense of what the participants thought neoliberal policies and practices to mean, showing it as a multiple and subtle concept (Birch, 2017) in their schools.

In their settings, there was no other means by which to work. Neoliberal exclusion of other principles was not due to general marketised demands that neoliberal policies make (Chomsky, 1999). Nor was it exclusively responsible for feelings of participant satisfaction (Davies and Peterson, 2005) that appealed to their personal desires (Harvey, 2005; Tett and Hamilton, 2021). My findings are therefore distinguished from other conclusions as they show neoliberal policies to undermine other ways of working in multiple ways, further justifying the need to use Figure 4 (Section 4.2) to move away from definitions that are unitary. All participants worked under forms of neoliberal policies unique to their school. Whilst commonalities such as neoliberalism's hold over their schools existed, methods of neoliberal promotion were specific to individual schools. For example, senior leaders, school systems, dialogue and participants' practice assisted neoliberal policies to dismiss other ideas about teaching and managing. Taken collectively, processes of exclusion, such as the Teacher Standards and End of Key Stage Tests ('SATS'), led all participants to accept government policies, as Sally queried, *"How*

high"? she was expected to *"jump",* when she was asked to complete a task or perform in a particular way.

Not questioning practices offers some explanation of neoliberal policy entrenchment, as all participants felt that they, and other teachers, just do, or react, to accountability measures: *"We all jump in at the deep end, and say, "Oh, right, we're doing this""!* (James). Neoliberal accountability measures have become part of the everyday thinking of the teacher participants so that they have not recognised that they, through their actions and reactions, are being normalised into neoliberalism's common-sense ways of doing things (Anderson and Cohen, 2015). In this context, Foucault (2020a) would attribute this axiomatic thinking to the uninterrupted and continuous coercion of the teacher participants, from top-down neoliberal policies such as those in Table 5. Teachers' (re)actions were therefore helping the self-perpetuation of neoliberal policies by, "legitimating knowledges and practices…embed[ding] a particular set of assumptions" (Birch, 2017: 119). An example of this can be found when Gemma was discussing how one of her colleagues made certain changes to some of the foundation subjects in school. Gemma was clear that the changes did not improve teaching or attainment. However, the changes made were a deliberate choice to: *"Tick the right boxes…when it did come to…Ofsted meetings, she was able to talk the talk".* Unquestioning practice, underpinned by responding neoliberally to accountability methods, added to the self-fulfilment of neoliberal policies in these schools.

Insights such as these highlight how neoliberal educational policies and initiatives over the last 40 years have amassed a plentiful force (Jones and Ball, 2023), which make it appear as if there is no alternative for the participants (Séville, 2017). Whilst participants accepted accountability from its vantage point as a dominant discourse, my findings specifically add insight into the nature of the purpose of accountability methods. Seven participants expressed beliefs beyond broad descriptions of accountability implemented to ensure quality and raise standards (Winter, 2017). Instead, accountability for the benefit of the children was at the heart of teacher viewpoints. It exists in schools to ensure that, *"Children are getting the best education possible…And that…they're learning every minute of every single day, and that they're getting the best deal",* as exemplified by Gemma. Such opinions suggest that there is an association between why accountability is entrenched in school systems and why alternatives are disregarded: it is for the children, and not for the teachers themselves. This is a finding that rebuffs the first 'C' of neoliberalism, *competition* (Figure 4), as external I-positions such as *My class* dominated. Therefore, all participants categorically argued that accountability methods are required in primary schools.

In my study, it does not appear that teachers actively competed with one another or against other settings, for example, in order to secure the best results or outcomes, rejecting work such as Finnegan (2021), Abbott et al (2013) and Brown and Manktelow (2016). Teachers did not prioritise accountability measures over their students either, which disagrees with Harris et al's (2020) work. Instead, the accountability implementation was an internal competition between the teachers as individuals: *"I don't want to be mediocre…I came into the profession with an objective, and I want to ensure that…I am doing it in my classroom"* (Ebony). Internal I-positions, such as *I as a hard worker,* were prominent when participants competed against themselves, which self-perpetuated neoliberal accountability measures as the teachers in this study wanted only the best for the children in their classes.

Indeed, all but one participant described their deep knowledge of their classes' requirements, and how the teachers themselves ensured that their classes were provided with precisely what they needed: *"I will do whatever I can to help my children…I serve my children…So really, aren't we actually accountable to our children"?* (Sally). Perceptions such as these provide important insights into how participants regarded the children as accountability stakeholders, and how teachers, via their actions, competed to answer to the children by being accountable to them and their outcomes. There was a palpable sense in the data of participants being driven by the children's needs and this deep sense of care meant that the teacher participants' daily practice often went beyond the minimum requirements as described in the Teacher Standards, to go 'above and beyond' for their classes, entrenching accountability measures.

This finding demonstrates how it was not the implementation of certain neoliberal accountability measures, for example, lesson observations or book scrutinies, that were projecting the image of a committed teacher onto the teacher participants. It was, instead, the holistic care for the children that was driving teachers' commitments, which is at odds with Brunila and Siivonen (2016) as the teachers in my study did not have their collective responsibility, care, and social solidarity undermined by the ways in which they were held accountable. Whilst neoliberal accountability measures were influencing and affecting their professional lives (Holloway and Keddie, 2019), their commitment was to the children: *"I wanted the best…for everybody in the school…if we were not accountable, we'd never raise the attainment of these children"* (Gemma). This important finding separates my study from others as it shows how primary neoliberal accountability measures can be imagined in ways other than solely data outcomes, rebuffing the third 'C' of Figure 4 (Section 4.2), as the definition of neoliberalism here is not one that is always singular.

That being said, the children-focused teachers in my study still aided in neoliberalism's entrenchment (Ball and Olmedo, 2013) despite not solely focusing on examination outcomes. Indeed, a striking

explanation into how accountability is entrenched within these schools and teachers is because accountability existed in the form of 'self-accountability', that all individual teachers in this study were committed to placing upon themselves via the I-position, *I as self-accountable*. The dominance and control from external accountability audits, to ensure that teachers are as economically efficient as possible, was present in the participants' I-position repertoires. This art of Governmentality had successfully established itself at micro levels, so teachers' I-positions managed themselves (Foucault, 2020a). Teachers specifically exercised this internal form of accountability regularly, making themselves accountable to themselves (Ingersoll and Collins, 2017). They did so by monitoring their actions and teaching, and reporting to themselves on what they did (Page, 2018). *I as a teacher, My class* and personal I-positions were synchronised meaning participants had accepted self-accountability as the common-sense reality.

In their accounts of these self-accountability checks, teachers followed through to determine that their classrooms and outcomes met the self-defined high standards that they strived to, as Derek said: *"Making sure that I know that I'm hitting everything where I feel I should be hitting it".* In the teachers' views, where things needed changing, or they personally needed to challenge themselves, they were unafraid to do so; and this often resulted in firm, self-given reminders, and even criticism, permeating teacher viewpoints: *"You will never hold me to a higher accountability standard for my class as I hold myself"* (Sally). There was not a need for external checks to insist that teachers performed certain practices; teachers' *I as a teacher* was their own embodied internal check (Mausethagen, 2013). This is a new perspective from which to understand teachers' self-regulation. Page (2018) speaks about self-scrutiny but with my study, one can view what is occurring at a dialogical level. When justifying his actions and speaking about performance-related pay, Derek exclaimed, *"Good! Because [it will] weedle out all the staff that aren't necessarily that good...actually, are you here for the right reasons"*? Discussion now turns to how the policies of accountability are implemented in practice, and can they *"weedle out the staff",* who, in Derek's view, are not in the job for the *"right reasons".*

6.1.2 Accountability as a malleable policy-in-practice in English primary schools, implemented through purpose

My study has found that the actual practice of utilising accountability methods, such as those listed in Table 5, could be informal and 'done with' teachers; this process was where five-out-of-nine teachers reported to have a large input regarding how the methods were implemented or the outcomes of them. However, according to all nine participants, accountability could also result in formal, increased scrutiny that was 'done to' them; in these cases, teachers had little-to-no say as to how the methods

were implemented or their outcomes. For this reason, accountability's implementation was understood to be variable.

Perceptions of informal accountability methods were expressed by five teacher interviewees, who defined informality as short, almost casual, lesson visits; these were to be distinguished from formal, longer lesson observations. For example, Declan said that, in his school, informal accountability methods operate where the SLT, *"Literally just popping in for…a few minutes. Just to…check what's going on".* Informality is not a common discourse that frames understanding of accountability because many authors note the overwhelming neoliberal climate in which teachers work (e.g. Harris et al, 2020; Mausethagen, 2013; Taylor, 2016).

Instead, findings from these five participants suggest that they were acting under an informal version of accountability present in their schools but one that had been accepted, nonetheless. Heidi epitomised this climate by welcoming neoliberal methods into her classroom, *"I don't have a problem…Just pop in and out whenever you want to".* These viewpoints once again underscore the professional reach of neoliberal accountability measures in these English primary schools (Jones and Ball, 2023). However, this finding specifically shows that the informality that has been accepted here is governmentality in action (Foucault, 2020b). Neoliberal practices have shown themselves to be highly malleable, and have 'taken over' and repurposed (Kamat, 2011; Raaper, 2019) these five teachers' understandings of what accountability is into acceptance and even welcome via the strategic mechanicalisation of the schools' SLTs. Academics explain this neoliberal climate as masquerading teacher agency (Anderson and Cohen, 2015; Pratt, 2016). Viewpoints expressed here could be an example of pseudo-agency as the teachers are being informally governed but it is still present and within them, albeit "at arm's length" (Harris et al, 2020: 229).

A form of pseudo-agency may exist for teachers when accountability is viewed as a helpful process; but, findings indicate that this type of agency still maintained an element of control over the teachers. When outlined with support, eight participants believed that they had some agency regarding the outcomes of accountability; namely, how they were allowed to develop as teachers. Sarah was clear that what an Ofsted inspector said: "*Was very supportive and actually, she did give me some really good ideas".* Six other participants spoke of continual professional development (CPD) and growth opportunities stemming from accountability, especially when accountability was dialogic and built on discussion. Harvey (2005) situates thinking such as this as helping neoliberal policies circulate through schools because this type of agency could easily be built upon in the future (Rushton and Bird, 2024) as participants noted its 'reputable' source (e.g. Ofsted). In my study, teachers' positive acceptance of some neoliberal policies deemed as 'helpful' appeared to offer 'choices' as to how they were

implemented, by governing participants into thinking they were free (Foucault, 2020a). Participants were, at times, not being competitive nor calculative in their I-positionings because neoliberal policies were re-framing accountability outcomes as having an element of choice (Section 4.4.2), which added to its variability in school as participants then came to accept it further.

Indeed, participants did explain their acceptance of accountability practices, of which they were a central part. For example, Gemma described how teachers in her setting completed their own book scrutinies, which got, *"quality assured",* by senior leaders after completion; as a result, staff were part of a *"comfortable accountability process".* This is an example of teachers having agency of their work but only to the extent of the conditions of possibility available to them (Buchanan, 2015; Lasky, 2005). Participants could be part of the accountability process but their agency was diminished as, in reality, they were "compliant operatives" from their *I as a teacher* I-position (Hall and McGinty, 2015: 5). The teachers' practice had been redefined based on the accountability methods available, which brings into question if accountability can ever really be 'done with' teachers as equals.

Alternatively, accountability methods can be implemented via more formal, 'done to' ways, and in increasing measures, showing its malleability as a policy-in-practice and how it can be utilised in multiple ways. In his research, Cleary Jr. (2017) found that schools that were perceived to be achieving well did not have to participate in all of the same accountability methods that were imposed on schools that were seen to be less successful. This is a finding within my study, reported by four participants. At a teacher/classroom level, accountability was known to increase in school for some teachers when standards were not deemed as 'good enough'. Following senior leadership meetings, Heidi's senior leaders were known to implement accountability methods to 'fix' everything that they thought 'wrong' with the school; and, *"It's not done…quietly and carefully. It's done [High-pitched voice] all in one go [Laughs] quite often"!* In a similar vain, two other participants noted how if senior leaders did not believe that what they had seen was up-to-standard, then there were accountability consequences: *"Maybe a more…formal…observation"* (Declan). This demonstrates that accountability can be implemented to suit the purpose of the person who is controlling the method or measure: *"Sometimes that agenda comes through in accountability"* (Heidi). Findings show how neoliberal accountability can exist as more than one iteration (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). Here, it is not self-accountability, but that which is imposed.

A key finding, therefore, is that accountability practices can significantly vary, from school-to-school, mainly due to the person who is implementing the method(s). Gemma's opinion is typical of four other participants: *There's no consistency in accountability…every school is slightly different".* Birch's (2017) problematisation of defining neoliberalism featured in the data. Each school had its own set of

neoliberal accountability practices within a common frame of reference: it is for the children to receive excellent teaching. What participants could also agree on was how accountability was used for whatever one needed it to be used for, as Amy questioned: *"What are [the senior leaders] focusing on at the time?",* which links to the idea that neoliberal accountability measures can describe whatever one wants them to mean (Birch, 2017).

Lacking a nuanced definition gives neoliberalism in these English primary school malleable properties. Foucault (2020b) would posit such variation of neoliberal accountability methods as a school management issue, due to the supposition that the observer can become the observed from even higher levels of control above them. In the context of my findings, whilst the participants used neoliberal accountability practices to centralise the children's benefits as a commonality, how this was implemented was the decisions of the schools' individual senior leaders and what their priorities were from 'higher up', as explained by Gemma, Amy and Heidi above.

In summary, this first main theme has discussed how accountability measures have a strong neoliberal presence in the daily lives of the teachers who participated in this study, with the vast proportion of the accountability directly stemming from the teachers themselves. 'Self-accountability' was felt due to teachers believing that its purpose helped in giving children the very best standard of education that could be provided. From its deep entrenchment in their daily lives, to its self-perpetuating properties, the fluctuating accountability methods were deployed with malleability and purpose to varying degrees. The second theme, pertaining to TPI, is now discussed.

6.2 There are three foundations that build a strong teacher professional identity (TPI)

The teachers in this research described three foundations that, taken together, built a strong TPI. I show how the I-positions within the foundations provided the teachers with a sense of protection against the neoliberal forces described throughout the first theme, and explain how this assisted in them remaining in the profession.

"There are three foundations that build a strong TPI", is explored in detail through each of the key components that build up this second theme:

- Foundation One: Adaptability and flexibility.
- Foundation Two: The ability to reflect.
- Foundation Three: Selflessness.

6.2.1 Foundation One: Adaptability and flexibility

Experienced teachers' professional identities had adaptable and flexible properties because they were multiple in nature, constructed from many smaller components, I-positions, that dialogically engaged in varying levels of dominance/subordination, dependent upon context. Yet, teachers could manage the dominance within their TPI by consistently demonstrating perseverance and resilience.

Seven participants understood themselves to hold a TPI that was multiple in nature (Hendrikx, 2020). Ebony explained this by using the analogy of a mask:

"I have many different masks…I've got to go into maths model and wear a maths mask. And then I've got to go to English model and wear an English mask. There's so many different facets. Then I've got to be a scientist…a historian".

Participants explained how their multiple TPI could adapt based on what was required for the school and children, which highlights a direct correlation between the perceived purpose of neoliberal accountability measures and enactment of TPI to meet the purpose. Assen et al (2018) concluded that teachers have a preferred I-position; this was a finding not seen from this study's participants. Instead, participants used their varied I-positions and re-told their professional stories (Hermans, 2012; Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022) due to their embracing of change.

Teachers welcomed, and wanted, change, showing their TPIs to reconstruct over the course of their careers (Rushton et al, 2023a). *"It's time for a change",* stated James, when describing his upcoming promotion. Where new changes were given to the participants, it was accepted, as in the case of Ebony: *"Whenever…I've got a little bit bored or a little bit stagnant…things have changed".* New I-positions that formed within teachers' repertoires were, overall, agreed with and assimilated into TPI. Many researchers have shown that I-positions have the dialogic capabilities to agree (e.g. Akkerman and Meijer 2011; Da Silva et al, 2020; Pugh and Broome, 2020). Agreement helped in maintaining the sense of adaptability and flexibility that the participants felt. In practice, participants believed that this helped their teaching as they were able to respond to students' needs within the lesson: Gemma described liking and benefitting from, *"Having the ability to change things at the drop of a hat".* Here, teachers' established I-positions, along with new ones, assimilated themselves into their repertoires, allowing them to teach the children in their classes to the very highest standards (Section 6.1.1). Teachers' adaptable and flexible TPIs, therefore, offered a sense of protection against the neoliberal discourses pervading their schools. The want – and need – to teach the children extremely well no matter the cost, with the aid of an adaptable and flexible TPI, outweighed any oppressive neoliberal forces: *"I'm driven by the children in front of me"* (Sally).

The root, or source, of adaptability and flexibility within TPI can be traced to the *I as a teacher* I-position: *"I think the teacher with me will walk in the footsteps, won't it, continually?"* (Amy). Eight of the teacher participants explained how *I as a teacher* was a dominant part of their repertoire because even when the teachers were not physically in school, participants articulated how their TPI was linked to their personal backgrounds and biographies (Rushton and Towers, 2023; Schepens et al, 2009). The teacher voice was always being expressed throughout their repertoires irrespective of context. James' *I as a teacher* rarely became subordinate: *"It, sort of, defines my life really".* Other participants, including Derek, Sarah and Sally, also expressed a sense of an ever-present, loud-voiced *I as a teacher,* suggesting that such a strong *I as a teacher* position is key to teacher retention in my study. A finding of Grimell (2020) was that participants' stronger I-positions did not willingly engage in dialogue with other positions; the result was that louder I-positions were maintained. My findings contradict Grimell (ibid.): participants' dominant I-positions engaged with other positions to the extent that flexibility occurred; but, this maintained and embedded the dominant one (often *I as a teacher).*

However, there were occasions when the dominance of this adaptability and flexibility was not enough protection alone to support the teachers to remain in the profession. On these occasions, eight teachers described a need to persevere. Perseverance was accomplished via I-positions such as *I as a hard worker, I as disciplined* and *I as passionate* aligning and all working towards a constant goal or common purpose: to continue to teach extremely well and provide for the children. For the sense of self to persevere, the internal dialogue of the I-positions was reciprocal and conducive rather than commanding (Hermans, 2012). Teachers described how they consistently managed the challenges of the school, with strength and drive. There was a sense of stubbornness amongst the participants, too, which added to their skills of perseverance, as shown by Sally:

"There's definitely a bloody mindedness there of…this is me, and I just have to do the best I can do and I will keep doing it…So I'm just gonna [sic] keep going"!

The source of these participants' resilience was their high expectations, which continued even when it was all-consuming: *"When things are really difficult, sometimes I think, ah, you know, I just cannot do this. It's exhausting. But that doesn't tend to last very long…I may as well stay"* (Sarah). It is at this point that the self becomes dialogically resilient.

Seven-out-of-ten of Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton's (2024) teacher participants persisted in the face of challenge from policy makers for the benefit of their pupils; they did so to teach in-line with their professional values of education. My findings add knowledge to this discussion to show the possible sources of the persistence because when the need to 'bounce back' from a negative situation presented itself to my teacher participants, they were able to do so due to their repertoire consisting

of one or more external I-positions that made this possible. Often, strong external I-positions did not work in isolation; they grouped together in combinations (Badi and Liesa, 2022) to form a 'we-position', (Section 4.4.3) which acted as a source of this resilience. The we-position-in-question here included the I-positions *My school, My colleagues, My class,* and *My career.* This important finding demonstrates the collaborative nature of TPI development (Henry, 2019; Steadman, 2023) for the teachers of this study. At this point, whilst it was the high expectations imposed upon the teachers from neoliberal standpoints, which were informing their belief systems and sense of dialogical selves, the we-positions were "rebuilt in the individual's own personal terms" (Silva et al, 2020: 267), which was from the lens of their external I-positions and not solely neoliberalism.

In this situation, the participants' high expectations (the source of their resilience) had not been wholly re-appropriated by neoliberalism, as it had not reshaped the entirety of their educational context, rejecting the thoughts of Brunila and Siivonen (2016) and Raaper (2019). Alternatively, I show primary neoliberalism in this context to be imagined differently: a version of neoliberal forces existed in these settings which 'pulled on the heartstrings' of the teachers to collaboratively navigate tasks and trials of their teaching, with strength and drive, always for the children. Neoliberalism, instead, showed itself to have liveable, symbiotic properties in-line with the teachers. Therefore, resilience was not due to the participants being competitive towards one another, which rebuffs Figure 4's first explanatory pillar. Resilience was always for the educational benefit of the children, as explained here by James:

"Sometimes, when you get home, you think, oh, this has gone wrong!...Things do, sort of, swamp you a bit. But there's always that thing you say to the children, like, 'Tomorrow's a new day'. And, 'No two days are ever the same'…And, you know, you, sort of, move on with the children".

This finding illustrates a key reason for the teachers' retention: the participants' TPIs were assisting the teachers to remain in teaching not solely out of compliance with the accountability demands, but due to their external I-positions with colleagues and their class. This underscores the contribution of my work as identity studies lack within the primary context (Rushton et al, 2023a) and further retention studies from the lens of experienced teachers are required (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021).

Overall, teachers firmly kept school-based I-positions at the fore and when in difficulty, the 'pull' of these positions resulted in teachers overcoming whatever it was that was challenging their TPI: *"I think, right, just ignore the bad…carry on with the good because you can do this"* (Derek). This finding shows how even if school was the reason why resilience was required to begin with, teachers never acted upon their contemplations to leave the profession. For this group of teachers, the high expectations that they had of themselves, coupled with their resilience from we-positions, helped them to remain in the profession. This was the case even if they perceived themselves to have personally failed, a very

significant finding due to the need to retain experienced teachers (Quiroz-Martinez and Rushton, 2024).

6.2.2 Foundation Two: The ability to reflect

All nine of the experienced primary school teachers in this study had the innate ability to reflect; however, their reflections assisted in further embedding neoliberal accountability measures. Reflective practices undertaken by the participants was not a linear, stage-by-stage process, rendering Figure 5 (Steadman's (2023) identity filter, Section 4.7.1) an inaccurate representation of how reflective practices occurred for the participants of this study. Participants could challenge the status quo though, even if they did not always act on the challenges. Even so, their reflections allowed participants to be highly optimistic, framing school life positively. Whereas foundation one (adaptability and flexibility) facilitated participants to respond in-moment, the second foundation that builds strong TPI (the ability to reflect) has restoration and improvement properties, capable of sustaining TPI in the longer term from concurrent social, professional and individual I-positions.

Participants described mentally recalling events and sorting through their ideas regarding the experience (Phelps, 2005; Simons and Harris, 2002). Often, this was about their lesson outcomes, and/or the content and delivery of upcoming lessons: *"I kind of scaled it a bit too high, pitched it a bit too high…Next time, I would do this, this and this'"* (Ebony). If reflection is accepted to require both knowledge and personal experience, it was mostly the latter that participants used as a source of reflective material (Hojeij et al, 2021). This is because participants used reflective practices as a further opportunity for self-accountability. Both Mahlanze and Sibiya (2017) and Black and Plowwright (2010: 246) place change as a main purpose of reflection, with the latter aspiring this change to be "transformational in nature…empowering, enlightening and ultimately emancipatory". This understanding was not found in the data analysis. Alternative insights often pertained to the self-accountability practices discussed in Section 6.1.1, such as participants reporting to themselves on what they did. However, this time it was a mental practice. Derek exemplifies how reflection was used to hold himself to account:

"Is what I'm doing enough? Is it the right thing? And if needed, is there any scope for change? Or, you know, being better?...I'm accountable to myself, first and foremost".

When participants reflected, they often upheld the accountability practices of the school in the process, demonstrating the pervasiveness of neoliberalism (Baltodano, 2012; Brunila and Siivonen, 2016; Peck, 2013) and the lack of neutrality during any reflective practice. An example of this is when,

in his school, Declan described how feedback was given to all teachers about the 'poor quality' of their books. Following feedback, staff: *"Reflected on the point that what SLT [the Senior Leadership Team] were saying was correct…Within a few weeks, we'd…improved…the presentation in the books…delivery in the lessons and even the planning to a certain extent".* Reflection in these instances was not transformational (Black and Plowwright, 2010). Thinking placed *My class* as the dominant I-position in the moment. If the reflection was empowering (ibid., 2010), it was only insomuch as it confirmed that things were as expected (and if not, to act upon these poor standards and remedy them). Crucially, reflection was neither enlightening nor emancipatory (ibid., 2010). Reflection assisted in the self-perpetuation of self-accountability in these teachers and their settings. This was achieved by reflection that was, at best, actively considered, ongoing and careful (Cengriz and Karataş, 2015).

Expressions of I-positions, heard during reflection, sometimes stemmed from participants challenging the status quo, or questioning accepted practice. This resists the vast published literature that insists neoliberal policies cannot be fought as it displaces alternatives (e.g. Angus, 2013; Chomsky, 1999). Findings, instead, align with the opinions of Roberts-Holmes and Moss (2021), Séville (2017) and Finnegan (2021) who state that there are alternatives to neoliberal educational structures, it is just that we cannot yet articulate what those are. Gemma embodied this view, as she did not *"just necessarily accept things anymore".* Whilst Sally explained that she is: *"Much more willing to rock the boat than I maybe used to be".* Perceptions such as these show how these experienced primary school teachers thought that they challenged the status quo. Yet, in practice, their questioning engrained neoliberal narratives and helped participants to resume their daily lives, and undertake what they had always done, sometimes even better. Indeed, to return to Gemma: *"[Questioning has] probably improved my own ability to do my job",* which further resisted claiming alternatives to neoliberalism.

By teachers taking these questioning stances, participants framed school life positively. As a result, even when times were challenging, teachers' I-positions expressed their adaptable nature, whether that was flexibly identifying some joy in the task: *"There's always something in what you're teaching that you find that you love"* (Heidi); selectively adapting memories: *"Those success stories that I tend to remember more than, you know, the crappy things"* (Sarah); or, choosing to frame things with hope: *"Right, if we get through this, hopefully this is as bad as it gets"* (Declan). Participants' dialogical self was protecting their sense of self from the perceived threat of neoliberal accountability measures, but the accountability was once again entrenching and embedding itself in school. This is because reflection was mentally framing potential negative school life more positively. There were not learning experiences following reflection. Instead, reflections added to neoliberal self-perpetuation as it was the teachers' enacting of the policies. Discussion now turns to the final foundation, selflessness, to see if such altruism also has similar neoliberal trappings.

6.2.3 Foundation Three: Selflessness

It is evident from the data that the experienced primary school teachers were selfless because they tenaciously acted in ways that they perceived to be right; they did what they believed must be done, always for the sake of the children, even when faced with negativity and regardless as to why they originally entered the teaching profession. Teachers put themselves second to the school and children by working extremely hard and striving for the best, to ensure that they gave children exactly what they needed and deserved.

Seven of the teachers described the ways in which their TPI was constructed to do the right thing, sometimes via force. Teachers dialogically positioned their *I as a teacher* in opposition to external voices such as *My SLT, My colleagues* and *My school,* because TPIs were led by what they believed was relevant to teaching, and what they specifically should be able to do as teachers (Henry, 2019; Schepens et al, 2009). These teachers explained that their fights concerned the children, and providing what was best for them, when the school system or colleagues were not. This is most clearly seen here as Amy explains how she: *"Was fighting tooth and nail…to get [Child] into a special school".* Therefore, TPIs developed because of teachers' relationships with others (Rodgers and Scott, 2008; Rushton et al, 2023b); in most cases, the relationships influencing the teachers were from their class of children.

Dialogically, the accountability that was present in the participants' schools was sometimes the platform for the I-positions to be heard; the accountability gave opportunity for the I-position to selflessly express itself. For example, Sally said how accountability methods: *"Gives a voice to my 'I'…the measures, the idea of being accountable, allows that strengthening of 'I'".* Other researchers conclude that TPI is constructed from what is available (Burr, 2003; Sachs, 2001). The findings of my study demonstrate this but more firmly show how the availability of accountability methods act as mechanisms for selfless action and not just tools for construction. Teachers described freely following their own hearts and minds; James said: *"At the end of the day, it comes down to you do what you feel is best for your children".* The finding that teachers fought for their learners was prevalent; teachers acted selflessly even during times of negativity because in the context of this negativity, were the class of children whom the teacher was responsible for. I-positions facilitated a 'doing what must be done' expression, for the sake of the children and their outcomes:

"Even if there's stuff you don't agree with [and] you find difficult, you're more likely to continue, because the…wellbeing of those children is still important to you. And still, yeah, is above…your own wellbeing" (Declan).

Here, personal I-positions were subordinate to *My class* and *My school.* Teachers were overcoming struggles to make sense of their TPI (Grimell, 2020; Henry, 2019). Specifically, how they could be self-

accountable and act in a manner that they believed was right, even if it meant they were second to the school context. This further showcases the direct link between the perceived purpose of neoliberal accountability measures and the enactment of TPI to meet this purpose.

The neoliberal climate that is prevailing in English primary schools ostensibly promotes individuals who work very hard (Keddie, 2016), which is often construed as complying with expectations and performing to achieve the policy-oriented outcomes (Reeves, 2018). To give their best, all participants selflessly spoke of working extremely long hours, in school and at home. A sense of choice, however, entered teachers' rationales, with teachers being proud of how long and/or hard they worked: *"I worked my backside off and did it"* (Derek). Pride was followed by restlessness; the idea of never achieving satisfaction filtered into many viewpoints: *"You can always refine things. You can always make things better"* (James), which is neoliberal policies encouraging individual competition even for these experienced teachers, who had all been in teaching for an average of 15 years.

Chapter 5's narrative introductions to these participants listed their main motivations for entering the profession, and these reasons are tabulated below (Table 7).

Participant	Main motivation for entering the profession
Sally	Volunteered at her Mother's school, who was a teacher, which inspired Sally to teach (despite her Father warning her not to).
Gemma	Always knew that she wanted to be a teacher and followed her instinct (despite being warned by some Secondary School teachers not to).
Heidi	Financial incentive after working in Law.
Derek	Financial incentives (pay) and other incentives (holiday) as well as wanting to be something that he deemed worthwhile.
Amy	A teacher from Amy's own schooling had a big impact on her as a child.
Sarah	Always knew that she wanted to be a teacher and had many teachers in the family.
Ebony	Had positive experiences from teachers as a child; her family and culture value teachers.
James	Always knew that he wanted to be a teacher.
Declan	Financial security after working in educational research.

Table 7: Participants' main motivations for entering the teaching profession

It is outside the parameters of this thesis' RQs to discuss reasons for entering the profession in detail. However, this discussion around selflessness can be enriched by briefly returning to these teachers' initial motivations for entering teaching. For example, three participants (Heidi, Derek and Declan) originally became teachers for what one could deem as practical reasons (finances). Yet, all three participants had a sense of selflessness like those participants who always knew that they wanted to teach (Gemma, Sarah and James). Sally and Gemma were 'warned' to not become teachers by those close to them (Father and teachers, respectively) yet they still did.

A sense of selflessness within all nine participants as an overarching foundation of their TPI, irrespective of their reasons to first become teachers, can be explained as how the neoliberal forces under which they work have repositioned selflessness for its own gain. In this primary retention context, a sense of selflessness has been strategically operationalised via governmentality (Foucault, 2020b) so that the teachers put themselves second to the schools by working extremely hard, always for the benefits (outcomes) of their pupils. Therefore, the participants' opinions and actions, including those who did not enter the profession for selfless reasons, have been changed by these neoliberal forces so that they are all output-facing. All participants have accepted the expectation that teachers are committed individuals because neoliberalism has (re)shaped the participants' institutional lives (Baltodano, 2012; Peck, 2013). In the context of these specific participants' TPIs, this (re)shaping has promoted the I-position *I as self-accountable* (Section 6.1) so that a part-neoliberal TPI has been adopted for its own gain (Holloway and Keddie, 2019). Indeed, there was no sense that any selfless actions were troublesome for the teachers of my study, and this is because the selflessness was for the children. This contradicts the writings of Brunila and Siivonen (2016), who discuss neoliberal reconfigurations from the lens of displacing any sort of empathy, co-operation and relationship bonds, instead favouring individualised success metrics. Whilst neoliberal norms were embedded within TPI (ibid.), it was for selfless reasons and not selfish ones, yet neoliberalism still thrived under this repositioning.

Overall, discussion of this second theme shows that there are three foundations that built a strong TPI: (i) adaptability and flexibility, (ii) the ability to reflect, and (iii) selflessness. These three foundations partly existed due to neoliberal policies in schools but, in turn, protected teachers from neoliberal policies in schools. Specifically, selflessness was demonstrated due to a dominating set of professional I-positions, that meant that TPI had a sense of momentum to strive for the best for the children irrespective of whether teachers entered the profession for selfless reasons. Selflessness stemmed from the hard work that the participants input, which links back to the teachers holding themselves accountable for the highest possible standards from the I-position *I as self-accountable*. Sally described the hard work as: *"A typical day is having 9 million plates and just trying to keep them all spinning"!* It

would never cross Sally's mind, nor any of the other participants for that matter, to 'not keep the plates spinning', or, to continue the metaphor, to 'drop the plates'. This is due to participants being able to well-manage any conflict that they did experience, which is where exploration of the third theme begins.

6.3 Teachers' management of their teacher professional identity (TPI) conflict

This third theme directly addresses what is taking place at a dialogical level. A main finding is that accountability measures influenced teachers' I-positions to not only engage in dialogue but also move, often in conflictual ways such as expressing stances from different points of understanding (Grimell, 2020; Monti and Austin, 2018). However, participants described how their TPI conflict often resulted in positive feelings, thoughts and emotions, offering new insights into how TPI conflict influences teacher retention positively. Although negativity was also reported in the data, teachers in this study were able to manage their TPI conflict, meaning that two conclusions can be gleaned: attrition did not occur, and neoliberal accountability measures were embedded and self-perpetuated.

"Teachers' management of their TPI conflict" is explored in detail through both main sources of conflict within TPI, from:

- I-position dialogue and movement.
- Feelings and emotions.

6.3.1 Conflict from I-position dialogue and movement

Conflict within TPI was routinely expressed by participants of this research. The source of the conflict stemmed from the promotion of one school-based I-position to the detriment of another, often triggered by neoliberal accountability methods. The result was the voiced expressions becoming louder, or larger, in size. For example, Amy said that accountability measures from others and herself: *"Can affect your I-positions and which one's prominent and almost making them, like, in a bit of a list or a hierarchy".* Participant views extend Buchanan's (2015) work, who writes of accountability entering teachers' identities. My findings show accountability discourses entering specific I-positions, influencing sub-sections of participants' overall TPIs. Derek vividly explained his *I as a teacher* and *I as an EYFS Leader* in conflict as he was uncertain as to how to approach a school-based issue that he was held accountable for:

"It was like a war in my head…It's just like a battlefield in my head of these two positions really going at it, trying to navigate and find a way".

Holloway and Brass (2018) explain that accountability measures change who a teacher is and there is no space between a teacher and the accountability method. My findings show this space decrease between teacher and accountability is due to certain school-based I-positions becoming promoted. Ebony described the link between I-positions and accountability as a: "*Mentality of…I must do everything that I can do. I'm very unforgiving in terms of…the time I allow for myself".* A finding of my work is that this decrease of space, this *"mentality"*, is a punitive, neoliberal state, where teachers felt the need to constantly improve. This finding distinguishes itself as different to other studies because of the teachers' acceptance of what was happening to their I-positions. Heidi metaphorically accepted how accountability measures: *"Cause* I as a teacher*, to inflate, I would say like a balloon [Laughs]. And it becomes more and more important".* Acceptance added to the self-accountability seen here, embedding and self-perpetuating neoliberal accountability measures further.

Juxtaposed with the promotion of certain I-positions due to accountability, was how others were subordinated. Declan explained that when I-positions such as *My school* or *I as a teacher* became enlarged, personal I-positions were pushed to the side and: *"Work starts to consume you…*I as a teacher *is overbearing compared to the* I as a husband *or* I as a father*",* which represents the colonisation of the personal space by school. Perdue et al (2018) found that discord is created when new I-positions emerge and subordinates a once-dominant I-position. A difference in my research was that subordination usually occurred when already-existing I-positions became too large or loud, at the expense of others, as explained by Sally: *"Then me as just a human being, like, me as Sally…gets shoved off quite a lot".* This is a key finding that helps to explain why conflict was then felt: as a result of school-based I-positions being promoted, other favourable (often personal) I-positions became subordinated resulting in tensions and TPI dissonance within and across participants' TPI. Such levels of dissatisfaction could lead to teachers leaving the profession (Madigan and Kim, 2021) as there is a loss in the teacher's sense of self in favour of the job.

A teacher maintaining their belief systems may lead to their TPI adapting during a time of dissonance (Rushton, 2021). In my study, belief systems sometimes became so enlarged that *I as a teacher* acted tyrannically within the repertoires of five participants, that, on occasions, meant that no dialogue from other positions occurred. Declan and Sally described *I as a teacher* as having momentous, even obsessive properties, leaving them with an overwhelming feeling. Some literature shows that tyrannical or 'louder' I-position expressions may not be the choice of the individual. Hermans (2012) gives the example of an external command from another, that results in such inner monologue, at the

exclusion of dialogue. Declan experienced his I-positions unwittingly reacting to events in his school setting. However, this was not the case for everyone. Sally describes her tyrannical conflict as a choice; she did not disregard the power of *I as a teacher.* Instead, she embraced it, describing herself as having an: *"obsessive personality in terms of: this is the thing I want to do, and I'm going to make it my all".* A tyrannical I-position that was actively listened to is an important finding. It was Sally's tyrannical I-position that seemed to be preferable as well was dominant (Assen et al, 2018). Preference was due to *I as a teacher* being influenced by the values that Sally upheld (Grimell, 2020). Values such as hard work, and being perceived as a hard worker, were extremely important to Sally, adding to the upholding of *I as a teacher* in its tyrannical state, at times. Here, acceptance further added to the embedding and self-perpetuation of neoliberal accountability methods. More crucially, this finding highlights that those teachers who felt so strongly about their *I as a teacher* I-position, are the ones who are most likely to stay in the profession because they are 'at peace' with giving everything they have got to the job, whilst at risk of losing sight of their other I-positions.

Even though participants welcomed other forms of accountability, such as lesson observations, and believed that accountability was needed in schools (as Section 6.1.2 discussed) they were highly critical of the Ofsted inspectorate. Seven participants discussed how they and their schools do certain things because of Ofsted, suggesting how Ofsted could be an external I-position within their TPIs. Teachers described how they were having to constantly spend their: *"whole term preparing for Ofsted"* (Sarah); prepare documents so that: *"you can show this Ofsted if they ask you"* (Gemma); and also teach differently to usual: *"Your practice may change or [be] a little bit different because you want to get the best out of [the inspection]"* (Derek). What my findings add here that distinguishes them from the literature is the prominence of Ofsted within TPI. Ofsted had taken up a conflictual external position within the seven TPIs. Indeed, the inspectorate had become part of the lived experience of these participants (Zembylas, 2018), changing their actions and identity (Foucault, 2020b). Ofsted was not merely a method to control compliance as suggested by Perryman (2022). Participants were influenced to act in certain ways because of inspections at a dialogical level, which also had dialogical ramifications.

A heavier conflictual toll was only really felt when teachers believed that what they were doing detracted from the quality of education the children were receiving; or, the extent to which the children were not priority. Whilst acting in a certain manner for Ofsted may have been conflictual, it was tolerated. Yet, when these actions meant children were not provided with precisely what they needed, due to the datafication pressure from the inspectorate agenda, frustration was expressed:

"The pressure becomes you just put [the children] up a level because then no one's gonna [sic] look at you any closer than they were before; like, scrutiny is reduced because you're doing your job. But are you doing your job"? (Heidi).

For the participants, *"doing"* their job was teaching to incredibly high standards and giving children what the teachers perceived the children needed and deserved; it was not doing things for Ofsted. To do this job, at times, accountability methods influenced seven of the teachers to select the I-position(s) that they felt were the right one(s) for the time, place and context, upholding the calculation 'pillar' of neoliberalism (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). Selection of, for example, *I as a hard worker, I as making a difference, I as disciplined* and/or *My class of children,* therefore allowed the teachers of this study to take back some of the control that was lost when other accountability methods (particularly Ofsted) insisted that they do certain things and act in certain ways; it was a remedy to annoyance such as that expressed by Ebony: *"All I see happening is dancing to the tune of, you know, inspections".*

These seven participants were very clear when articulating their sense of choice in their schools. I argue that these teachers' choices have allowed them to become 'successful' and remain in the profession due to the alignment of I-positions, such as the four listed above. However, in communicating their choices, the teachers of this study did not always understand how they were being oppressed by the neoliberal forces and conditioned to choose from the neoliberal selection (Buchanan, 2015; Keddie, 2014). The participants only acknowledged and recognised their reactions and responses to the conditions that they found themselves in from the larger orchestrations at play. This is demonstrated by the case of three participants, who described how selecting the deeply-ingrained school-based I-position that they needed to be relatively straightforward: *"At the click of a button…As soon as I walk into that classroom, first and foremost, I'm a class teacher"* (Derek). Being able to select the required I-position, e.g. when entering a classroom, is because I-positions arise from contact with one's social environment as they are "spatial-relational acts" (Konopka, Hermans and Goncalves, 2019: 35). Acts such as this indicate an element of automaticity within TPI.

This finding shows a conscious, controlled level of selection that these experienced primary school teachers possessed from those available in context. For example, Amy explained how she was not fazed by being observed by her Deputy Headteacher, whose pedagogy and teaching philosophy did not align with her own: *"Having to teach in the style that the Deputy Head loves, and I don't teach in that style…You have to change your teaching for…three lessons a year [Laughs]".* In this highly strategic response, one can see the neoliberal ideology embedded in Amy's I-positions, which she is experiencing and reacting to but not necessarily understanding it to be a form of neoliberal oppression

and/or pseudo-agency. I-position dialogues and movements, such as these, come with a level of feelings and emotions, which is the final discussion within this third theme.

6.3.2 Conflict from feelings and emotions

Evident in the data is how accountability measures influenced all nine teachers' I-positions to experience many negative feelings, especially stress and pressure (Perryman, 2022). Strong sources of the pressure and stress came from SATs, upcoming Ofsted inspections and also from the teachers as individuals, which links to previous discussions of self-accountability and acting selflessly, in Sections 6.1.1 and 6.2.3 respectively. Teachers internalised these emotions on a deep, personal level within their TPI, showing that they cared for accountability. A finding that differentiates my study from others is that teachers expressed juxtaposed feelings and emotions. One was an outcome of the conflict, and another had restorative properties, resulting in teachers' I-positions experiencing positivity.

The SATs were understood to be a great source of conflict for five of the participants. There was a sense of increased pressure about SATs, above and beyond 'normal' teaching expectations and worse than teaching non-testing year groups. An intensity of these negative feelings dialogically resulted in greater prominence of certain I-positions; with *My SATs* existing in participant repertoires: *"I wake up thinking about SATs and go to bed thinking about SATs"* (Sarah). Conflict was caused because even though this negativity was present, it did not detract from the participants' sense of duty to 'do' testing year groups 'justice'; in other words, for the children to perform well. Gemma situated this duty as an internal I-position taking the form of pressure, as it is just something that: *"Year Six teachers put themselves under"*. She went onto explain that even though she felt pressure, one of her I-positions was *I as a Year Six teacher,* which was separate to *I as a teacher*, because: *"It's a year that I love and I enjoy teaching"*. Here, teachers' juxtaposed feelings were both an outcome of the I-position conflict and remedy to it, which adds a new perspective to the literature pertaining to TPI conflict. Past studies list outcomes (Hanna et al, 2019) and solutions (Hendrikx, 2020) to conflict as separate entities. My data offers feelings and emotions to be capable of both.

For four participants, the uncertainty of when the next Ofsted inspection would be was also a trigger, exemplified by Sarah, who explained that it was the: *"Stress of they could be in tomorrow"*. Linked to this uncertainty, participants felt that even when Ofsted were inspecting, still absent was a feeling of security because inspection frameworks lacked clarity and instead: *"The goalposts are changing all the time"* (Derek). The inspectorate was not physically required to experience negative feelings such as insecurity. In response, participants governed themselves (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021), which is panopticism in action in the English primary workplace (Foucault, 2020b). Self-governing even when

Ofsted were not there ensured that Ofsted's standards were met when, "'Playing the Ofsted…game'" (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021: 133). Indeed, within their TPI, many school-based I-positions felt enhancement before, during and after an inspection: *"Put some of them under quite a lot of pressure on the spot"* (Gemma). This left participants feeling stressed and contrasts to other findings from this study, which showed TPI to offer participants a sense of protection from accountability methods (Section 6.2.2). Uncertainty, before and during an inspection, resulted in participants further pressuring themselves to rise to the challenges imposed by Ofsted, helping to explain how participants unwillingly completed things for Ofsted (Section 6.3.1), and showing how their juxtaposed feelings assisted in the management of conflict.

Participants wanted to ensure that their self-image (their TPI as highly competent teachers with very high standards) was upheld within their schools: teachers desired to be seen as caring about accountability. A prime example of this can be seen when Heidi assessed children's progress within her class as below standard. Even though she was sure that her SLT would be aware of the situation, she still sought them out to inform them of her assessments. Heidi's accountability measures, in this instance, data, placed conflictual morality on her. Even though she was not being directly questioned, she still felt monitored due to the panopticon effect; she felt that she was being observed from afar but still regulated herself nonetheless (Foucault, 2020b) as she did not want to be seen as irresponsible (Holloway and Brass, 2018). Heidi was clear that she: *"Needed to let [SLT] know that I knew where was…I wouldn't have been able to stop thinking about it".* Heidi's juxtaposed emotions were an outcome to the conflict and then helped manage and overcome it.

As has been shown, for these participants, initial negative feelings led to more positive ones afterwards. Such positive emotions contrasts with much literature, which suggests how accountability negatively influences many teachers to leave the profession (e.g. Chiong et al, 2017; Ingersoll et al, 2016; Towers and Maguire, 2017). Instead, eight participants clearly explained how accountability affirmed that they were doing their job to a good standard and helped them to confirm the purpose of why they continued to teach in the first place (often around the notion of making a difference). Derek linked how positive feelings of accountability can aid teacher retention: *"I think it can be a very positive tool and a very powerful tool to keep a lot of teachers in the profession to say, 'I've done this; it worked well; I know it works well'",* a significant finding as teacher retention is still a persistent challenge in England (Rushton et al, 2023b).

Conflict, from I-position dialogue, movement, feelings and emotions, has been explored. Building on Derek's opinion regarding teacher retention, discussion now turns to why this group of nine

experienced teachers choose to remain in an accountability-driven profession, by exploring the fourth and final theme.

6.4 Achieving and maintaining a sense of harmony and balance

The nine teacher participants remained in the teaching profession for many years due to extremely positive feelings and emotions for, and about, their jobs. These emotional attachments within I-positions were more prominent than any pessimistic feelings and could overcome the negativity. External I-positions contributed to teachers' feelings of positivity, demonstrating how TPI was an influencing force for teacher retention. However, there were occasions when the school setting in which the teachers worked mismatched with their TPIs, culminating in identity conflict. Therefore, participants described changing their settings (rather than leave the profession entirely) to remain in the profession in which they genuinely loved, to achieve and maintain a sense of harmony and balance:

- From feelings and emotions.
- From within their TPI.
- Resulting in TPI restoration.

6.4.1 Achieving and maintaining a sense of harmony and balance from feelings and emotions

Eight participants believed that they were making a difference to the lives of children and garnered high levels of enjoyment and satisfaction from this (Ashiedu & Scott-Ladd, 2012). Participants acknowledged the fact that there was challenge but this was also a source of enjoyment (Howes and Goodman-Delahunty, 2015). They specifically described rising to, and overcoming the challenges, giving the teachers of this study perceptions of high self-efficacy (Avalos and Pablo Valenzuela, 2016). Therefore, the teaching profession felt 'right' for them to remain in.

Sincerely enjoying the job that they do, and working with children, were prime reasons for why the nine teacher participants had remained in the profession for so long (Chiong et al, 2017). Explanations of generally *"loving"* teaching was a constant within the data. Teachers were able to harness this deeply-felt enjoyment from within their school-based I-positions so that there was long-term retention. This finding is misaligned with the opinions of Boulanger (2017), who explains that if the self is facing uncertainty, it tries to find security by closing itself off to others and novel ideas. In my study, Heidi's *I as a teacher* I-position was extremely positively framed; she explained how she opens

up her repertoire, and looks for potentially new ventures when she is uncertain about how positive something may be: *"There's always something in what you're teaching that you find that you love".*

Heidi's ability to use her I-positions to find enjoyment extends the argument of Hermans (2012), who describes how some very positive I-positions can stem from their binary, negative opposites. He explains that a negative experience later functions to motivate and better oneself. Interestingly, he notes how two binary I-positions are needed to keep one's sense of self balanced. A possibility of not *"loving"* something teaching-related (negative experience) led to a positive outcome (Heidi finding something "lovable" in her job). Utilising I-positions in this searching manner is one of the reasons why Heidi's TPI could achieve and maintain a sense of harmony and balance, and why she spoke so passionately about teaching throughout all interviews. Three other participants (Gemma, Sarah and Sally) communicated feelings at a deeper dialogical level, showing how some I-positions were given more credence than others (Gamsakhurdia, 2019). Sally explained how she:

> *"Will prioritise* I as a teacher*…And if that means there's no time left for* I as Sally*, then so be it. I'm just very lucky that I can draw a lot of purpose and enjoyment and strength out of [*I as a teacher*]".*

Sally's opinions here link closely with the work of Stenberg and Maaranen (2021). In their research, the two authors (ibid.) found that their participant, Sara, experienced harmony and balance within her I-positions because Sara integrated her *I as a person* position within her school duties. This is the case with Sally; she enjoyed her job to the extent that *I as Sally* was intertwined with *I as a teacher* within her overall sense of self (Steadman, 2023). What sets my study apart from Stenberg and Maaranen's (2021) is how Sally could select and prioritise the I-position that was needed and not solely have harmonious and balanced I-positions (as discussed in Section 6.3.1).

As well as (generally) enjoying teaching, eight participants remained in the profession for many years because they perceived themselves to make a genuine difference to the lives of the children in their classes (Perryman, 2022). *"That's what I love doing. I really wanted to work in a school where I could make a difference"* (Sarah). Gemma describes making a difference as *"the best thing"* about her job. Such high regard placed on changing children's lives for the better demonstrates how the participants in this study considered being positive in their outlook as important; for example, Heidi noted: *"When I'm feeling really positive about my teaching…it's really easy to see, I make a difference to the whole child".*

My data emphasises that, if Heidi were feeling negative, the importance of seeing that she does make a difference to children may go unnoticed by other positively framed I-positions in her repertoire, having consequences on her ability to remain in the profession. This is especially true if one considers

that perceptions of self-efficacy have an influencing factor on teachers' decisions to remain in teaching (Avalos and Pablo Valenzuela, 2016). My data shows how it is vital to consider I-positions at this point to understand teacher retention. For the sense of self to achieve harmony, both security and uncertainty are a prerequisite so that inner dialogue can give rise to balance (Oleś, 2020). This finding shows how participant I-positions were engaged in dialogical exchange to achieve a sense of harmony and balance because the need to give back *(I as making a difference)* was a strong voice in the participants' repertoire, which Amy really encapsulates:

"I think those people that have stayed for so long, [the need to make a difference is] ingrained in them. It's what they know. And it's what they're good at. And they want to do it. They want to help. It takes over. And it can be all encompassing".

Despite positivity outweighing negativity, seven out of the nine participants spoke of challenge within their careers. When challenge incorporated itself into TPIs, it is a finding of this study that it did not faze the participants as the feeling of enjoyment was too strong. Gemma specifically enjoyed facing challenges head-on; Derek described being bored in the absence of challenge; interestingly, Sarah and Amy both actively sought out challenge. This finding contrasts with the opinions of Grimell (2020) and van Meijl (2012), because the incorporation of challenge into TPI shows how participants did not experience difficulties with adjusting their sense of selves based on the dialogue between I-positions. Participants did not describe any confusion, insecurity or lack of control. Instead, they believed themselves to be skilled/good at teaching therefore teachers in this study remained in teaching because they knew, deep down, that they could do the job well (Avalos and Pablo Valenzuela, 2016).

Teacher participants' I-positions appeared to achieve and maintain a sense of harmony and balance since they genuinely enjoyed being a teacher, and specifically making a difference to the lives of children; they embraced challenge, which allowed them to feel like they were very skilled at their jobs. As a result, six teachers in this study explain how teaching felt right for them; this was I-position harmony at its highest. Heidi discussed this the most over the course of her three interviews. Originally from a law background, Heidi explained that when she entered teaching around fifteen years ago, things: *"Clicked into place…So I stayed being a teacher…once I was in the classroom, everything about me made a lot more sense".* Carrillo and Flores (2018) note how teachers stay in the profession because they have a desire to, whilst Ashiedu and Scott-Ladd (2012) explain that job satisfaction is key to retention. Schaefer et al (2012) conclude that personal characteristics of a teacher are important to avoid attrition. Whilst these authors are relevant to what Heidi explained, they do not account for how Heidi's (and other participants') I-positions are specifically geared to help them remain in teaching, which is what my work does.

6.4.2 Achieving and maintaining a sense of harmony and balance from within teacher professional identity (TPI)

The TPIs of all teachers in this study facilitated them to remain in teaching. Retention was aided because external 'My' positions, such as *My Colleagues, My Family* and *My Friends* assisted in maintaining a sense of harmony and balance within TPI, helping these teachers to overcome difficulties that they may have faced. Support was in the form of a meta-position, which returned participants' TPIs to complementary states.

All but one participant explained that *My colleagues* helped them to remain in the profession because this external I-position was a positive, dominant voice within their repertoires. A sense of care and unity was explained, with six participants likening their colleagues to one nurturing, familial team; people with whom they shared values with, and a clear vision on what education should be like, indicating that internal and external dialogues were very interconnected (Ligorio and Tateo, 2007). This was shown with Declan, who merged the staff with himself as one voice: *"We're one staff together, aren't we"?,* and Amy, who acknowledged the central place of colleagues past and present in her I-position repertoire:

"Those people in my journey that stopped and helped me and that talked to me… I wouldn't be the teacher that I am today without them. If somebody had seen me struggling, or, you know, seeing something going wrong and not helped me, things might have been very different for me".

When required, *My colleagues* took the role of a critical friend, that helped with issues, developed the self and reassured the teacher. At odds with the 'competition' pillar of neoliberalism, where it has been seen that neoliberal policies foster in-school competitive practices (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021), *My Colleagues* was a driving voice that sustained teachers to remain in the profession because when there was challenge, this external voice helped to achieve and maintain a sense of balance back again. Other studies (e.g. Avalos et al, 2016; Perryman and Calvert, 2020) have shown colleagues to be a positive retentive factor but not to the extent that colleagues become a part of a teacher's self, which is what my data shows.

Other external I-positions acted similarly; three participants discussed how *My family* and *My friends* were of high importance to them as a sounding board and support network: *"The external positions I was most listening to were like* My parents, My friends" (James). This range of dialogue exchange highlights how the participants' TPIs do act as a mini society within the mind (Torka, 2019). Via I-position turn-taking, participants were able to understand the relationships between their different

positions (Stewart, 2018). Understanding led to the generation of new meanings (Van Loon, 2020). In this context, participants listened to their internal, professional-based I-positions and their external ones, to harmonise and balance any conflict, to then help them remain in the profession. This type of dialogue was meta-positioning in action, where participants had an overarching view of several I-positions so their relationships and engagements were visible (Assen et al, 2018).

Findings from my study, therefore, reveal that teachers' relationships specifically those grounded in care, nurture and collaboration, played a central role in shaping TPIs. Rather than understanding TPI solely as an individualised concept of the self, participants often described their TPI development through relational encounters with colleagues and children. These interactions fostered a shared sense of purpose and belonging, pointing to an emergent collective identity within their settings, a sense of 'we', that extended beyond a sense of self. In contrast to framings of TPI as an internalised construct, the experiences of the teachers in this study suggest that TPI is dynamically co-constructed within their primary workplaces. This collective identity was not incidental; it was deeply entangled with the ways participants made meaning of their roles and navigated the complex emotional and pedagogical demands of their teaching experiences.

As a result of their sense of 'we', in addition to their sense of selves as individuals, the experienced primary school teachers in this study had a secure sense of professional identity, guided by a moral compass to do what they perceived to be right: give the children in their care the very best education possible. Due to their TPI clarity, where all nine participants knew why they became and remained as teachers, all participants could attain a meta-position. Data shows how the teachers could view several I-positions simultaneously, illuminating the links and voices between and across them (Assen et al, 2018). Their wider view of several I-positions assisted in decision-making (Grimell, 2020). This was due to the meta-positioning helping to bring order to any conflict that was being felt (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022). Sally likened her meta-positioning process to being on playground duty with the children:

"We manage that conflict of the 'I's', which just makes me think about when you manage conflict on the playground, taking your two 'I's' to one side and going, "Right, you're going to speak first and then you're going to speak and we're going to come up with a solution"".

In this instance, Sally was able to create dialogical distance between her positions to see several at once, evaluate them and their organisation, to the consider future development of the self (Hermans, 2003). Meta-positioning can inspire new or creative actions (Perdue et al, 2018). It is a finding of my study that when participants attained a meta-position, the result was a harmonising balance that helped participants remain in the position. Rather than a new action (Oleś, 2020), participants' meta-

positioning encouraged a *re*-newed action to remain in teaching. A final point of discussion, restoring balance within TPI, is the last finding to be discussed.

6.4.3 Achieving and maintaining a sense of harmony and balance with restoration

The teachers in this study were able to restore the balance of their TPI when they felt profound identity dissonance; especially when the settings in which they worked clashed with the values and belief systems (Reeves, 2018). Participants capitalised on their good career development and achieved restoration within TPI by finding a job elsewhere, to remain in a profession that they genuinely loved. Leaving the profession was never considered by any of the nine participants.

Avalos and Pablo Valenzuela (2016) write that a general lack of CPD opportunities can contribute to teacher attrition. In my study, findings related to CPD are more distinctive. Four participants (James, Sarah, Ebony and Derek) all explained that they were the ones who wished to use their TPI as a tool for CPD to make a difference on a larger scale, as they had been in teaching for several years. This is the promotion of certain I-positions within their repertoire (e.g. *I as making a difference)*. Bozeman et al (2013), Buchanan et al (2013) and Kavenuke (2013) agree that quality CPD opportunities can contribute to teacher retention. In contrast to their writings, my study finds that it is less about the 'training' or 'INSET' (In-Service Education and Training) provided but more about the teachers' professional identities, and how they can be used as a tool for CPD. Although this should not be a requirement for all, this finding is based on the premise that it was the teachers themselves who explained that they were ready to give back to the profession; for example, by training teachers new to the profession, as opposed to being provided with further training to better themselves:

"I want to be…developing staff and younger teachers and curriculum…that passion that I feel about teaching, just helping others achieve that sort of thing" (Sarah).

These four participants explained that potentially providing career progression opportunities to others would help them to remain in the profession. Their I-positions were sturdily bound to the institutional and contextual practices that they had been a part of for many years (Zhu et al, 2020) and they explained that they could see no alternative to teaching. This helps show why they *themselves* were the CPD tool: their professional roles were imbued with a wealth of social and historical practices and pedagogy (Leijen et al, 2014). As a result, the identity story being expressed was one of *I as a teacher,* which was now 'experienced' enough that these teachers felt the need to give back to the profession, in order to further retain them.

There were multiple occasions when eight of the teacher participants, despite having an extremely secure sense of who their teacher selves were, experienced deep TPI dissonance (see Sections 2.1.2 and 3.2.3) because their settings' values or practices mismatched with who they were, and/or wanted to be, as a teacher (Hanna et al, 2019). Practices that were not for the benefit of children's education or experience were not welcomed by the participants. Teachers discussed poor leadership, unnecessary and burdensome emails and expectations of long hours on-site as some of the main areas of contention. In contrast to related teacher attrition literature (Ingersoll and Collins, 2017; Lindqvist and Nordanger, 2016), and of significance, is that none of the participants left teaching; instead, they sought out alternative employment. What can be taken from this study is *I as resilient* shows itself to be a clear I-position within these eight participants, as exemplified by James: *"I just need to be in a different context".* This *"need"*, in part due to his genuine joy for the job (shared by the eight other participants), links back to why these teachers can be a tool for CPD, rather than needing CPD to remain in teaching. Three participants (Amy, Derek and Claire) described how changing schools was of benefit to their TPI: they improved their knowledge of curricula and pedagogy; their teaching improved and it strengthened their *I as a teacher* I-position, which was being *"tested"* (Amy). Therefore, identity tension was not always negative and contributed to identity development in my study (van der Wal et al, 2019).

Heidi and Sally labelled *"unrealistic"* accountability methods as a source of TPI dissonance in their previous settings. It is a clear finding that only accountability that was deemed as helpful in upholding (what the participants perceived to be) the purpose of education was embraced by the teachers; others were tolerated until dissonance was experienced. When conflict did occur within TPI, it allowed for the position exchange of relevant I-positions and their associated feelings. Due to the participants deeply identifying as teachers, the dialogical exchange would serve as "interpersonal recognition" of their teacher selves (Gulerce, 2014: 248). As the participants truly wished to remain as teachers, and did not express anything in opposition to such, dialogical proposals to remain in teaching, versus proposals to leave the profession, embedded their teacher selves. The outcome was conducive dialogue (Hermans, 2012); it served to help teachers remain in the profession, which is what they wanted. Despite accountability methods, balance within TPI was restored, as clearly exemplified here: *"The move I made has meant that I'm likely to stay in education for the foreseeable future and…beyond"* (Declan).

6.5 Conclusion

Chapter 6 has discussed the four themes generated by applying RTA to the interview data. Discussion of the first theme demonstrated how neoliberal policies existed in large quantities in the participants' primary schools, including in the form of teachers' self-accountability, which added to the entrenchment and self-perpetuation of neoliberal accountability methods. The second theme showed that experienced primary school teachers in this study constructed three main foundations that built up their multiple TPIs: (i) adaptability and flexibility; (ii) the ability to reflect; and, (iii) selflessness. Where conflict was experienced, theme three explored how it was due to I-position dialogue and movements, which sometimes compelled teachers to act in certain ways, as well as select the required I-position(s) for the context, in helping to manage the conflict. The final theme discussed how a sense of harmony and balance within TPI was achieved due to teachers having a genuine love and passion for what they did, meaning that teaching felt like it was the right profession for them to remain in. The significance of these findings are now discussed.

Chapter 7 – Discussion of Findings

7.0 Introduction

This Discussion Chapter focuses on the relevance of the findings from Chapter Six and why they matter for the teaching profession. Each of the themes, in turn, are interpreted through the lens of Dialogical Self Theory (DST), and their significance discussed in-context, with reference to key literature. Discussions pertaining to RQ1 (neoliberal accountability measures) begins the next part of this chapter. I explain the need to re-think neoliberal accountability measures through dialogical lenses termed 'neo-positions' and 'neo-purpose', which are original concepts for this study. Afterwards, to address RQ2, the distinct symbiotic relationship between TPI and neoliberal accountability measures is discussed. I achieve this with 'I-purpose', a refinement of DST and another new concept coined for the purposes of this thesis. The third section of this chapter focuses on RQ3 and applies this study's novel concepts to interrogate where, how and why conflict is experienced within the participants' TPIs. A similar application occurs to address RQ4 (reasons the nine participants choose to remain in the profession), centralising the place of neo- and I-purpose.

7.1 The present and active status of neoliberal accountability measures

Neoliberal policies as a prevailing, governing force within participants' schools (McKnight, 2016; Perryman, 2022) is significant for two main reasons. Firstly, the findings state how neoliberalism is the only policy for schools to work under and it is offered as the accepted 'way' in which to do things (Steadman, 2023). These policies influence teachers to work in a certain way regardless of educational changes. In my study, each participant was clear that 'self-accountability' held a large part of their TPI thus their ways of working (Section 6.1.1). Teachers' self-accountability entrenched and self-perpetuated neoliberal policies, marginalising alternative ways of doing things (Angus, 2013; Chomsky, 1999). Secondly, my study shows that there are a group of nine teachers, who choose to remain in the profession and work under high levels of neoliberal policy and management. If this could be positively capitalised on, recommendations could be made for the growth and maintenance of a stable workforce, offering to somewhat combat the teacher retention crisis in England.

The fact that neoliberal policies have been found to be present and active in the participants' schools extends Dialogical Self Theory's explanatory capabilities by uncovering an additional condition that has not been accounted for. I apply DST to the construct of neoliberalism as it is used in English primary schools, rather than a person or a group of people. Whilst competition, choice and calculation are advocated as three core features of neoliberal policies and practices by Roberts-Holmes and Moss

(2021), such presentation is not precise nor nuanced enough to tend to neoliberalism's strong, multiple stances explained by the participants. Instead, I advance DST's use in English primary education by using its capabilities to re-think neoliberalism, as understood in this field, dialogically. Neoliberal policies and practices share many properties of the sense of dialogical self, which helps explain its present and active status. It is a secure fit with teachers working in schools, who select what they perceive to be the required I-position for the neoliberal context, which helps neoliberal policies to thrive. DST, therefore, offers new and profound theoretical insights into these findings: to present neoliberalism dialogically.

7.1.1 Similarities between the sense of self and neoliberalism

To posit neoliberalism within a dialogical framing in the context of this study, I offer four profound similarities between the sense of dialogical self and neoliberalism, as understood by the participants. The four likenesses are: their shared dynamicity and multiplicity; how both are constructed from internal and external influences; how the links between TPI and society are not unidirectional; and, how both TPI and neoliberalism develop.

Firstly, and fundamentally, the sense of dialogical self is dynamic and multiple in nature (Saenco and Laurens, 2020; Silva et al, 2020). In my study, participants also clearly discussed the multiple methods and measures that were used to hold them to account, that were characterised with constant change and therefore used variably. Neoliberal policies and practices, therefore, cannot be a single entity either. Participants discussed changing and adapting practices, with accountability methods being utilised differently, by different colleagues and depending upon the situation. In a similar way to the sense of dialogical self, neoliberal policies and practices in English primary schools can therefore be thought of as something that change and develop (Ouwehand et al, 2020) in contrast to finalised and singular (Boulanger, 2017).

Participants explained how internal and external I-positions constructed their TPIs in a system of ongoing reconstruction (Zhu et al, 2020) where significant others, groups and cultures all contributed to the construction of their sense of selves (Torka, 2019). With a multiple, interactional framing, the resemblance between the sense of dialogical self and neoliberal policies and practices continues. Namely because the conditions that create neoliberal policies and practices for English primary school teachers are also both internal (the teachers' self-accountability), and external (for example, government policies of high-stakes testing). Significant others, groups and cultures, in the form of colleagues, classes of children and school culture, fuelled neoliberal practices in my study which shows neoliberal policies, as understood by the nine participants, to hold similar properties to their TPIs:

complex and multifaceted (Henry, 2019) and something that continuously positions, re-positions and counter-positions (Perdue et al, 2018).

To strongly theorise DST as having the capacity to present the construct of neoliberal policies in English primary schools as dialogical in nature, one needs to study the relationship between the sense of self and society, and how this connection fosters dialogic exchanges. DST explains that the sense of self and society are interconnected (Wijsen, 2020). Specifically, if the context is dynamic and heterogeneous, so is the sense of self, because the context penetrates it (van Meijl, 2012). Crucially, the sense of self can extend into the context as it incorporates the voices of others into itself (Da Silva, 2020; Grimell, 2021) showing TPI and neoliberal policies to have a symbiotic relationship. In other words, the sense of self is built by society; in turn, it adds to societal structures (Wijsen, 2020). In the context of my research, TPIs were partly constructed by neoliberal policies and practices. Negative feelings, which often stemmed from End of Key Stage Tests and Ofsted, were internalised by the participants to the point that they utilised the feelings to help overcome any TPI conflict (Section 6.3.2). As a result, TPI added to the neoliberal policies and practices, underscoring the connection between the sense of self (TPI) and society (the primary neoliberal educational context).

Finally, TPI is understood to develop in response to experiences (Perdue et al, 2018) and relationships (Monti and Austin, 2018) because the practice of teaching is a collaborative social process (Rushton and Towers, 2023). A dialogic model of neoliberalism mirrors TPI development because participants discussed how certain neoliberal practices occurred in response to certain experiences whilst others were based upon the relationships between colleagues in the settings. This is a striking parallel between TPI and neoliberal policies and practices in English primary schools, especially if one considers how TPI is goal-oriented and closes itself off to novelty when faced with uncertainty (Boulanger, 2017). The same can be said for neoliberal policies, which have clear goals and will do all it can to achieve them (Harvey, 2005).

The four similarities between participants' TPIs and primary neoliberalism as it exists in their schools shows the relationships to originate from the 'lived-ness' between TPI and the neoliberal context. In other words, there are strong associations between the two because of the organic nature of TPI and how it develops in response to relationships that the teachers have, including to their context. As a result, the nine teachers and the specific conditions under which they were working in their schools, give rise to using DST in a way not previously accounted for. I have established that the theoretical capabilities of DST can be extended to explain the primary English neoliberal construct as understood by the participants, due to four prominent similarities. These similarities are not neutral: Chapter 4 explored neoliberalism as the universal and persistent ideology (Baltodano, 2012; Brunila and

Siivonen, 2016; Peck, 2013) that it is understood to be and Findings showed how this was a discourse the participants shared (Section 6.1). This includes how neoliberalist practices have exploited and reduced (Raaper, 2019) complex and nuanced concepts, including some parts of the three foundations that constructed the teachers' professional identities (Section 6.2). As neoliberal policies can be explained dialogically in-tune with the lives of everyday teachers and their TPIs, the next section interprets the findings and explains the relevance and significance for the teaching profession so that the symbiotic link that my study has found does not leave neoliberal practices to remain unchallenged and normalised.

7.1.2 Re-thinking the concept of 'English primary school neoliberalism' dialogically: 'Dialogic neoliberalism'

Findings show that the experiencing of neoliberal policies is a personal and subjective experience, depending upon the teacher and their context. Its presentation as a set of features, would be to do the participants of this study a disservice. Furthermore, as neoliberalism is an experience, it is not possible to show it as a complete finished form (Birch, 2017). Therefore, to make sense of the neoliberal experiences of the nine experienced primary school teachers, I present the dialogic neoliberal model (Figure 8, below).
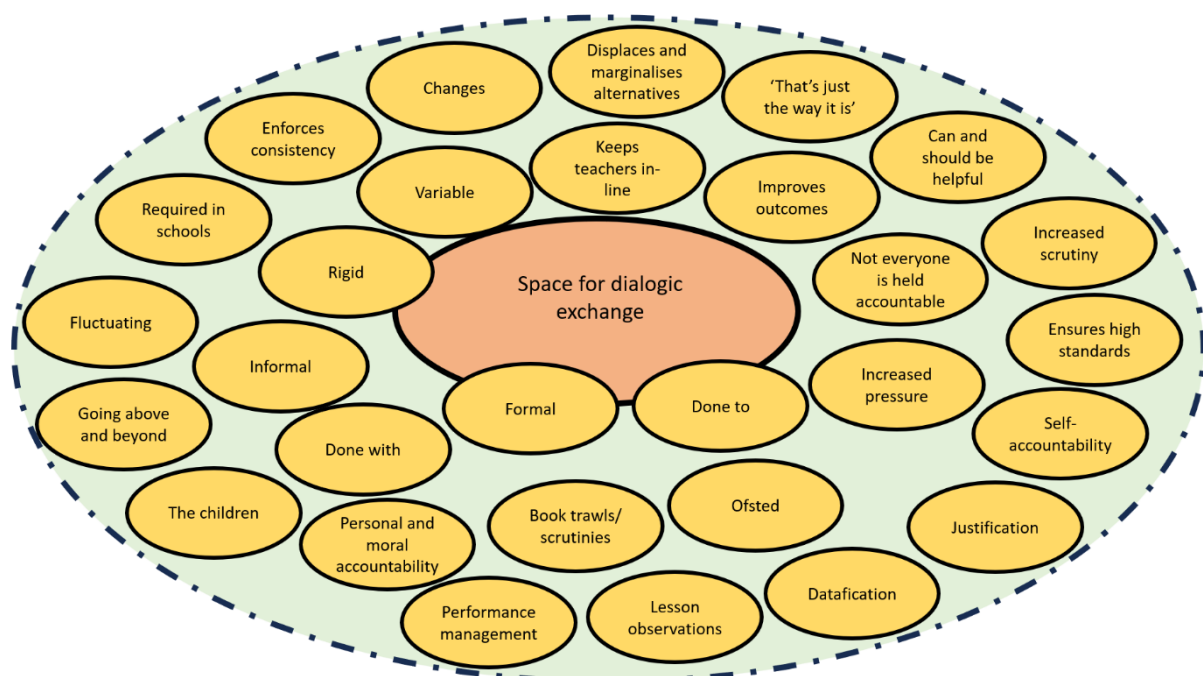

Figure 8: 'Dialogic neoliberalism'

'Dialogic neoliberalism' is a model that is unique to these nine experienced primary school teachers at this time, to show the very precise ways in which neoliberal policies and practices play out in English primary schools; this is because my findings are not generalisable (Andrade, 2021). They are of value to the educational field nonetheless because they illustrate the interplay between teachers and accountability and do not present either in isolation.

The dialogic neoliberal model is based on the premise that the neoliberal society under which the teachers work, has become part of the teachers' professional identities, as discussed in Section 6.1.1 and written about previously (e.g. Buchanan, 2015; O'Leary, 2013; Steadman, 2023). As a personal experience, not only have neoliberal policies entered TPIs, TPIs have fed into the dialogic neoliberal model in return. TPI and dialogic neoliberalism exist in a symbiotic relationship to the extent that neoliberalism almost has liveable properties, an argument that is strengthened due to its malleability. For example, my findings show how accountability, as experienced by five of the participants, could vary depending on who was implementing the method(s), what and why they were focusing on, and how they were going about doing so. Section 6.1.2 specifically highlighted participants' differing thinking around neoliberal accountability practices and experiences; there was an inconsistency of approach to accountability methods across the participants' schools. As a result, I do not claim an overarching, canonical or generalisable 'version' of neoliberalism. My findings and the literature are clear that this cannot be possible due to its broad applications (see Figure 4 in Chapter 4). For example, how it is used too negatively (Peck, 2013); how definitions are too broad and all-encompassing (Finnegan, 2021); or, conversely, how definitions are too singular, explained by Birch (2017: 83) as an issue because "when trying to pinpoint exactly what neoliberalism is, one will always put some sort of bind onto the term and thus something will always be missing".

Figure 8 presents the multiple articulations of the participants regarding neoliberal accountability measures. Each small individual oval is a 'neo-position', short for 'neoliberal-position', a new term coined within this study. A 'neo-position' is a neoliberal influence that contributes to the overall purpose of accountability (discussed next in Section 7.1.3). There are multiple neo-positions, which all have the capacity to engage dialogically with one another within the space for dialogic exchange, where certain neo-positions are given prominence by teacher(s), leader(s) or policy(ies) in a school, once again showing the purposeful application of neoliberal practices rather than a set of forces that exist neutrally with degrees of separation. For example: *Lesson observations* may be *Formal* in their application and experienced as *Done to* by the teacher-in-question; *Ofsted* could be applied as *Justification* for *Increased scrutiny* from external audits; or, *Fluctuating* alongside making *Changes* could be experienced as *Helpful* in a school's drive for *Improved outcomes*. Neo-positions do not, however, exist as binary internal or external positions. Existence in this manner would over-simplify

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the dynamic nature of neoliberalism (Birch, 2017) in English primary schools. Instead, neo-positions can fluctuate between internal and external positioning, depending on the context, sharing similar properties to I-positions. Some neo-positions originate internally (*Self-accountability)* whilst others originate externally (*Ofsted)* but they occur in a range of ways, showing how teachers and neoliberal policies exist in symbiosis. Collectively, the neo-positions construct the participants' understandings of the neoliberal accountability measures that exist in their schools. The outline of the figure is bound by indistinct lines to represent how the participants explained accountability to be malleable. With Figure 8, one can see the similarities between neoliberal policies and practices, and TPI.

Dialogic neoliberalism is a novel concept derived from the findings of my work. It is presented to illustrate the very particular ways in which neoliberal policies and practices are enacted in these English primary schools rather than over-relying on simplified and problematic definitions that could arise (see Figure 4's problematised definitions in Chapter 4). Despite dialogic neoliberalism offering a different imagination of primary neoliberalism, the neo-positions that assemble Figure 8 are not 'new'. Section 6.1 showed how they have existed in participants' schools for a long time and continue to entrench and self-perpetuate due to participants' self-accountability. Therefore, the neo-positions manifested themselves due to participants' TPIs and the actions that arose from them, showing them to be 'charged' from and by TPIs, and vice versa.

As a result of this 'charge', and due to a lack of neutral existence similar to TPI, there are several neo-positions that, from what the participants expressed, operated at greater levels of dominance than others. The most dominant neo-positions in this study were: *Self-accountability, The children, Normalisation, Accountability can and should be helpful, Accountability is required in schools* and *Datafication.* Taken together, these more dominant neo-positions engendered the reported purpose of accountability measures, according to the participants: to give children the very highest standards of education and ensure that all teachers taught to these standards. Thus far, I have extended DST into the neoliberal construction and away from its typical implementation within identity work. I now refine the theory further.

7.1.3 'Neo-purpose'

By thinking with a collective of very dominant neo-positions, a 'fusion position' is formed. In the case of these dominant neo-positions, the fusion position is one pertaining to the purpose of accountability. See Figure 9, below. Labelled as 'neo-purpose', this 'fusion position' is a refined concept to derive from DST thinking and is the second new term coined within this thesis. 'Neo-purpose' combines the respective voices of the six dominant neo-positions to give purpose and drive to the dialogic framing

of neoliberal policies and practices for English primary teachers, in the context of this study. The neo-purpose helped neoliberal values to entrench and self-perpetuate themselves, as well as be implemented with the required purpose. Indeed, the fusion position of neo-purpose is highly significant in its explanatory power as to why neoliberalism is present and active in the participants' schools. When one studies the purpose of accountability (as stated by the teachers) and compares this to their own purpose (why they remain in the profession) fascinating explanatory insights are garnered.
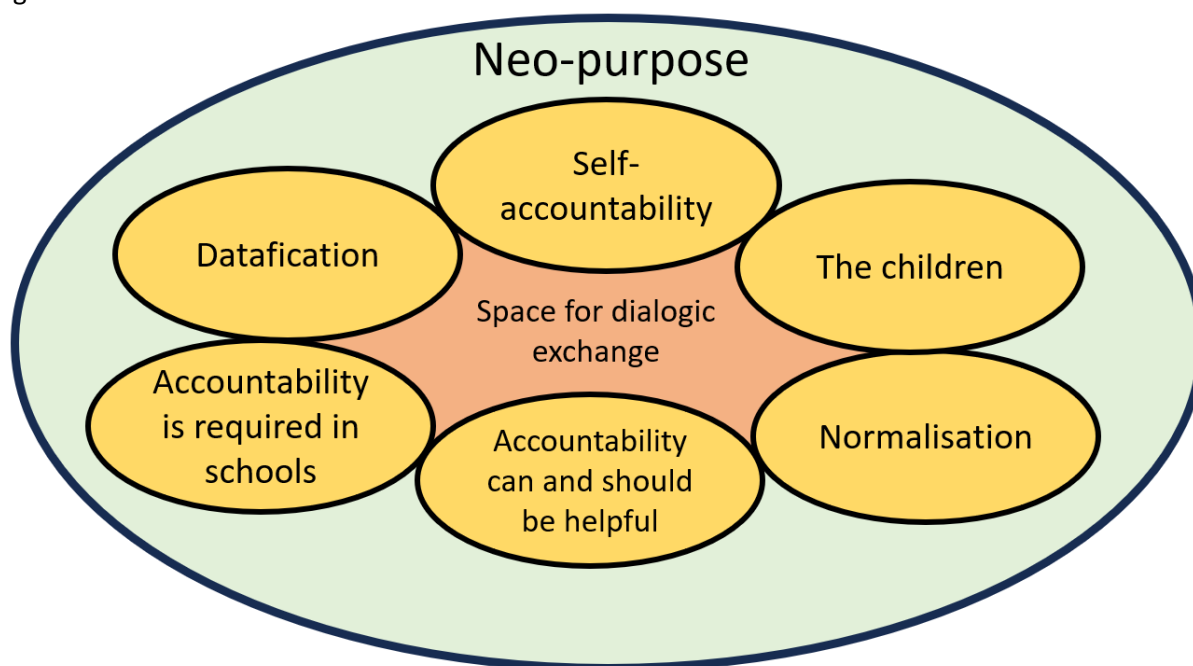
Figure 9: The 'fusion position' of 'neo-purpose:' the collective neo-positions that give rise to the purpose of neoliberal accountability measures

The dominant neo-positions in the collective form of this fusion position facilitated teachers' unquestioning acceptance of neoliberal forces. Neo-purpose drove and upheld the function of accountability: to give the participants' classes the best learning experiences that they possibly can. With this purpose, participants experienced neoliberal contexts as regular, everyday experiences (Anderson and Cohen, 2015; Perryman, 2022). In its absence, arguably, the participants would be at-risk of lowering their standards and providing their classes with teaching that is below-par.

If the neo-position of *Normalisation* were to act in isolation, neoliberal policies may not hold the active and present status that it did in the participants' schools. Other positions within the fusion were required, especially *The children*. Eight participants expressed being able to challenge the status quo and question authority to fight for what they perceived was right for these children; indeed, there was also a sense of defending one's professional judgments from five participants. In the absence of the

neo-purpose fusion position, there is a chance that neoliberal policies may not be normalised to the extent that it was found to be, as the rationales for its normalisation are absent.

Neo-purpose not only explains why neoliberal policies and practices are routine and normalised in English primary schools, but why it is also the source of the self-accountability that participants habitually utilised in their schools. If the *Self-accountability* neo-position were to be isolated, then the potential for strengthening dialogic exchange is limited. *Self-accountability* as a position might conflict with more dominant voices in the neoliberal repertoire, disrupting the space and subordinating the voice (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021). Instead, fused with the sense of purpose from like-minded neo-positions, *Self-accountability* thrives. The fact that accountability is perceived to be helpful by eight of the participants, means that teachers do not compete between one another nor against other schools, a finding that differs with much published work (e.g. Abbott et al, 2013; Birch, 2017; Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021). Instead, the teachers in this study competed against themselves to drive teaching and standards as high as they could for the children in their classes. In this way, competition was individually-situated (Finnegan, 2021; Ong, 2007). It was promoted due to the level of agreement across the fusion position, especially as participants believed that accountability was required in schools to ensure that all teachers taught as well as they did. The neo-position of *Self-accountability* therefore helped to entrench neoliberal values within the schools.

The space for dialogic exchange within the centre of the fusion position strengthened the *Self-accountability* position to the point that it was the common-sense reality for the teachers of this study. There was not a need for external checks; the teachers themselves were the checks (Page, 2018). Self-checks can be seen with the neo-position *Datafication.* In a trend that mirrors *Normalisation* and *Self-accountability*, if *Datafication* were an isolated position, neoliberal ways of working would not be present and active to the extent that they were. Participants' acceptance that *Datafication* was normal meant that data could be used to facilitate teachers' self-checks that they were good enough, and their class were receiving the best education they were able to give. In turn, this entrenched neoliberal thinking within their schools. It is interesting to note the absence of *Ofsted* as a neo-position within neo-purpose. *Ofsted* as a neo-position is tolerated by the teachers. It is a distraction to implementing the teachers' purpose of accountability: *The children.*

Neoliberalism's malleable properties is also best explained with the neo-purpose fusion. Findings demonstrated how accountability was variable in strength, adding credible weight to the notion that neoliberal accountability measures are personal lived experiences and not a one-size-fits-all policy-in-practice. Indeed, there was no uniform agreement as to what 'accountability' is, demonstrating its multiplicity (Birch, 2017), only that its purpose should be for the children to receive excellent teaching

from all teachers. Rethinking neoliberalism dialogically, and how certain neo-positions can be promoted, subordinated, fused and selected, explains how accountability was understood to sometimes be informal, and 'done with' staff; at other times, it was more formal, with staff having less input into the measures. This was all done as accountability can be helpful for the children; therefore, it is required in schools. The children were always upheld as main accountability stakeholders, which weighs down neo-purpose as its main driver. Discussion now interprets the significance of Figures 8 and 9 for the teachers' identities.
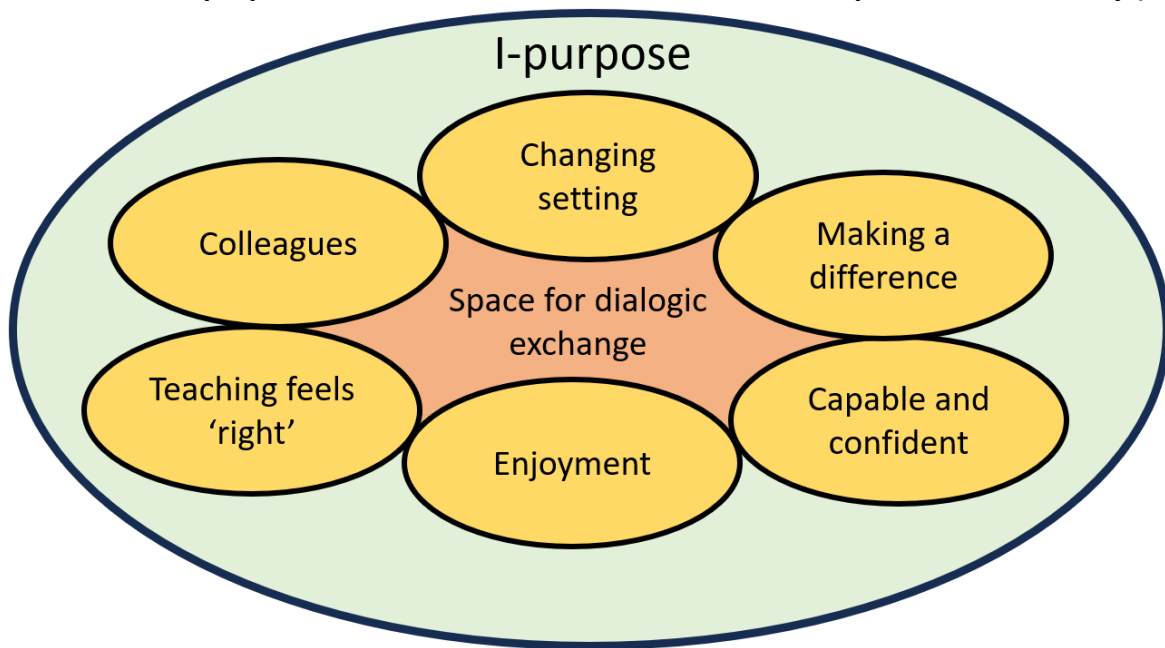
7.2 There are three foundations that build a strong teacher professional identity (TPI)

Participants of this study explained their TPIs via a range of internal and external I-positions (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021). Participants' multiple TPIs did not exist in isolation but instead developed within the context of their school settings (Rushton et al, 2023b). TPI specifically existed as a response to the present and active status of neoliberal policies and practices, where teachers gave voice to three positionings so that they thrived through self-accountability yet embedded neoliberal measures further. Findings show the three main expressions acted as 'foundations', that, taken together, built a strong TPI for the teacher participants. The three foundations were: (i) adaptability and flexibility; (ii) the ability to reflect; and, (iii) selflessness (Section 6.2). DST showed TPI to be a positive retentive force for teachers, who enacted their TPI to teach to very high standards, for the benefit of the children, as stated by their neo-purpose.

The findings that show three foundations that built a strong TPI is significant as it calls into question the constructions and sources responsible for TPI. One wonders if a teacher may experience a professional identity beyond the active and present neoliberal climate; or whether TPI is always reactive and programmed to the neoliberal discourses found to be prevalent.

In this section, I once again, extend and refine the theoretical potential of DST. Due to my research offering conditions unaccounted for previously, namely, researching with a smaller group of experienced primary school teachers working within a perceived English neoliberal climate, TPI is interrogated through Figure 8 (dialogic neoliberalism; see Section 7.1.2). The fusion position of Figure 9 (neo-purpose; see Section 7.1.3) is compared with its TPI equivalent, I-purpose (Figure 10, below), which interrogates the sources of the teachers' three TPI foundations. Doing so sheds light on where the three foundations of TPI originate, and the outcomes of these foundations.

7.2.1 'I-purpose' builds the three foundations of teacher professional identity (TPI)

I-purpose

- Changing setting
- Colleagues
- Making a difference
- Space for dialogic exchange
- Teaching feels 'right'
- Enjoyment
- Capable and confident

Figure 10: The 'fusion position' of 'I-purpose:' the collective I-positions that sustain the three foundations that build strong TPI: (i) adaptability and flexibility; (ii) the ability to reflect; and, (iii) selflessness.

With similar properties to Figure 9's 'neo-purpose', the teachers' 'I-purpose' is another fusion position, a set of dominant I-positions that combine to give purpose and meaning to teachers' professional identities. This 'I-purpose' is the third novel concept for this study and is an extension of DST. I-purpose made it possible for the three foundations to exist. Whilst a range of DST authors define a 'coalition' (see Chapter 2) as two or more I-positions supporting one another due to their similar purposes or orientations (e.g. Grimell, 2020; Hermans, 2003; Ligorio and Tateo, 2007), I do not suggest that 'I-purpose' is a coalition. Although a coalition has strengthening or reinforcing properties (Ouwehand et al, 2020), their unified strength may restrict and subjugate other voices (Silva et al, 2020). Inflexibility cannot be the case where these teachers' professional identities are concerned, as I have demonstrated.

It is important to note that Figure 10 is not understood to be a coalition due to the symbiosis between TPI and neoliberal policies: one is needed in relation to the other. Indeed, whilst DST provides tools to analyse what it means to be a person from the perspective of oneself (Badia and Liesa, 2022), and the relationships between one's multiple selves within one's environment (Stewart, 2018) it lacks scrutiny regarding one's purpose. Lacking theoretical capability to study the purpose of one's identities is important in the context of this study, where identities can be influenced by what teachers think that they should know and do (Reeves, 2018). I-purpose is more than several positions engaging in dialogue

for dominance, as many I-positions are known to do (Henry, 2019). It is, instead, the nucleus of a teacher's professional identity, the core positions and set of expressions that substantiate wider TPI expressions. Therefore, I extend DST's theoretical tools with the concept of this 'I-purpose', which is significant to understanding the findings of this work, especially as the I-purpose builds on the concept of a coalition and fills DST's theoretical 'gap' to finitely explore a teacher's sense of purpose.

Whilst findings showed the three foundations that built a strong TPI were sustained due to neoliberalism, it is I-purpose that made the teachers' three identity foundations possible. Teachers' ability to be adaptable and flexible was due to the multiple positions within the purpose that fused then navigated TPI, helping teachers to use their identity as a tool for sense and meaning-making (Skott, 2018). From the space for dialogic exchange, the fusion and navigation facilitated perseverance and resilience when required from the multiplicity, including: *Colleagues*, who were a source of support and helped to develop TPI (Rushton et al, 2023a). *Enjoyment* negated negativity and capitalised from combined dialogue with feeling *Capable and competent.* Positive feelings were fostered further, such as high levels of self-efficacy, which promoted expressions that *'Teaching feels right'.* The fusion position of I-purpose instilled in teachers that they *Make a difference* to the lives of children, an important retentive factor (Arthur and Bradley, 2023). As a result, teachers could demonstrate adaptable and flexible positions when needed.

I-purpose also helped to produce the high levels of reflection that existed in teachers' repertoires. Participant reflection stemmed mainly from emotions, which are understood to aid TPI construction (Rushton et al, 2023a). Firstly, the need to continue feeling *Enjoyment*, to then feel *Capable and confident*, to finally ensure that *Teaching feels 'right',* strengthened the overall need to *Make a difference* to children's lives and education. Therefore, I-positions worked in tandem as collective voices (Hermans, 2012) to aid reflection in-line with the participants' view of education's purpose, helping retention.

If *The children* (expressed from neo-purpose) were not getting the sustenance required, e.g. receiving anything less than the teachers' best, teachers were quick to remedy that via reflection. *Making a difference* was a loud expression in these instances. Whilst *Teaching feels right* may have been restored, it was via neo-purpose's *Self-accountability* which then upheld accountability practices in the process. For example, teachers competed with themselves to ensure that the positions within I-purpose were nourished, but only so that its force could continue to be one that is used for the good of the children. As a result, teachers were protected from any negative repercussions that could stem from accountability measures. I-purpose allowed for the framing of school life positively, with the children always at the centre of their TPI, thus decisions, highlighting the symbiotic connection

between the two. Therefore, whilst teachers' I-purpose developed practice in-line with, and to the benefit of, neoliberal accountability measures, it did so with a sense of selflessness.

Indeed, selflessness was secured within participants' TPIs due to I-purpose. The I-positions within I-purpose centralised on the children and classes that the participants taught: *Enjoyment, Making a difference, Teaching feels right*, and willingness to *Change setting* all meant that dialogical exchanges were vocational in nature, upholding the idea that I-positions can be linked to institutions (Gube, 2017). Each of the nine participants described working long, hard hours outside of the school day, often putting themselves, their families and their needs second to those of the children and school. It was their necessity to *Make a difference*, in addition to benefitting from the positive emotions that I-purpose harnessed, that meant I-purpose established such selfless enactments of TPI. When teachers in this study acted selflessly, children's I-positions engaged as a triad alongside I-purpose and neo-purpose, underscoring the symbiosis. This meant that teachers ensured that they acted in the best interests of the children, upholding selfless actions.

Discussion has shown a clear commonality between the two fusions of neo-purpose and I-purpose: the centralised place of the class of children within the dominant expressions. Children at the centre of both fusions validate the symbiosis between neoliberalism in English primary schools and TPI and highly demonstrate how one cannot exist without the other, as a personal lived experience. I now use these two concepts within wider DST thinking to explore how the two interact (Figure 11, below), what happens and why it is of importance for this study.

7.2.2 Neo-purpose and I-purpose

For the participants in this study, the want, or need, for children to do well, habitually came from their internal I-positions, creating the conditions for their 'self-accountability' in neo-purpose. It is, therefore, important to scrutinise the interactions between the two fusions as TPI is heavily influenced by context and relationships (Steadman, 2023) and TPI influences one's context in return (Grimell, 2021). Neither neoliberal policies nor TPIs operate within isolation; the positions are nested within the context of one another (Zhu et al, 2020). Figure 11 (below) demonstrates the interplay between neo-purpose and I-purpose.

With Figure 11, I show how the exchanges from neo-purpose and I-purpose both influenced each of the three foundations that constructed a strong TPI, demonstrating how the relationships which teachers have with others (including colleagues, senior leaders and children) in their workplaces were integral to TPI formation. Therefore, teachers' professional identities and dialogical neoliberalism existed in symbiosis, as part of the lived complexity of teachers' lives, with the faint grey, double-ended
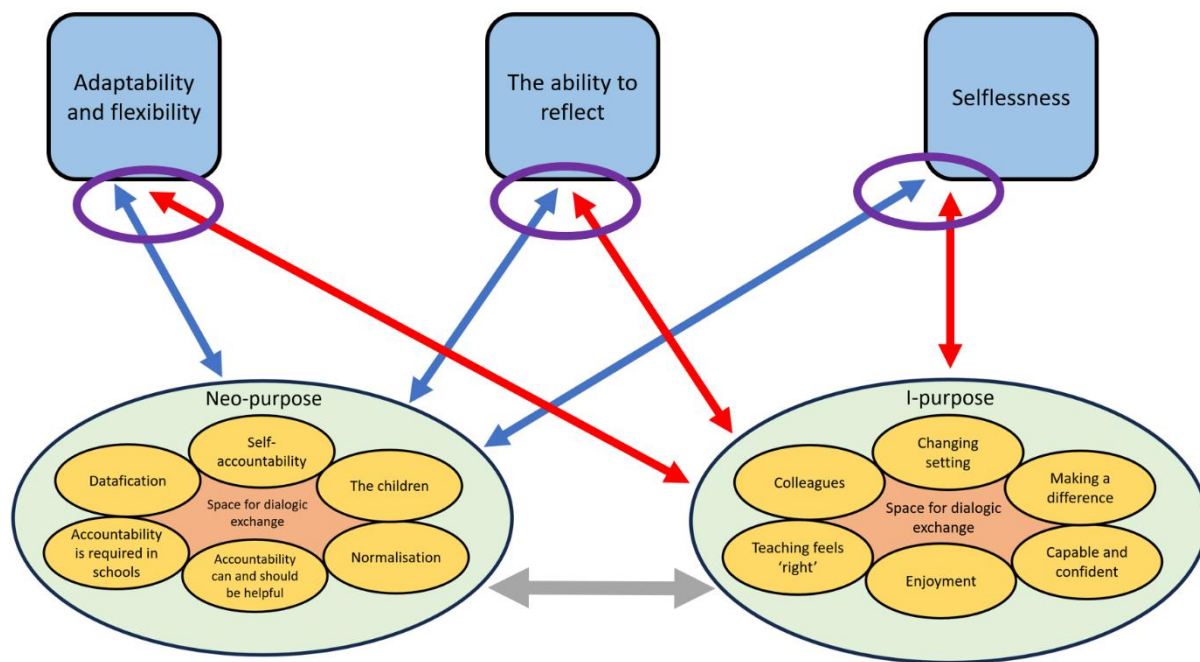
Figure 11: Identity construction for teachers

arrow between neo- and I-purpose acknowledging the constant link between the two. Neo-purpose not only engaged in dialogic exchanges within itself, but also with the teachers themselves, strengthening the argument that the sense of self and society are interconnected (Wijsen, 2020). The sense of self (I-purpose) influenced the society (neo-purpose) around it (Grimell, 2021), and vice versa (van Meijl, 2012). In this example, teachers upheld neo-purpose by engaging in dialogic relations; subordination of some of their own I-positions occurred meaning that teachers accepted neoliberal accountability measures. As a result, neoliberal accountability measures entrenched and self-perpetuated in the participants' schools. It is important to note that teachers did not necessarily see this as something negative as neo-purpose ensured that high standards, for the benefit of children's outcomes, were promoted; something that the participants aligned with.

Each of the TPI foundations, however, had the ability to act as the catalyst for dialogical engagement, which then contributed to the continuity of TPI. This dialogical engagement is denoted with the clearly demarcated double ended lines between the fusions and TPI. Each foundation is now taken in turn, and I explore the happenings at each of the cross-sections (marked by the purple circles), where neo-purpose and I-purpose expressions overlap in context. It is specifically in these three cross-sections, where neoliberal policies become further entrenched, self-perpetuate and show themselves to be capable of malleable implementation. When combined, these three occurrences are positive retentive forces for teachers.

7.2.2.1 Adaptability and flexibility

Taking the first foundation of adaptability and flexibility to begin exploring the cross-sections, neo-purpose expressed that, amongst other voices, *Accountability is required in schools*. I-purpose, in sync, voiced how *Making a difference* to children was paramount. This finding is at-odds with Harris et al (2020), who explain that certain schools prioritise adhering to accountability measures, rather than meeting students' needs. The left-hand cross-section in Figure 11 shows the priority was of the students through the accountability, and not one at the expense of the other. Teachers in the study became adaptable and flexible due to both expressions.

As a result, these teachers constructed an adaptable and flexible foundation to their TPI; one that allowed neoliberal accountability measures to exist to ensure that children received exactly what they needed to succeed in the classroom. Entrenchment of neoliberal policies and practices then occurred when neo-purpose and I-purpose expressions, as a collective voice, interacted and reinforced one another in a united direction (Ouwehand et al, 2020). While their wider utility has been contested (Birch, 2016; Winkler-Reid, 2017), neoliberal principles showed themselves to be *Helpful,* with the teachers believing that *Teaching feels right.* Teachers therefore persevered and demonstrated resilience to uphold helpful neoliberal methods, and ensured positive feelings, such as *Enjoyment* and *Confidence*. These positive neoliberal feelings were then accepted as *Normal* by the teachers (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021), and teachers continued to use self-accountability to keep the children's best interests centralised. This is a finding that shows neoliberal policies in English primary schools to be more than a negative concept and underscores the utility of my study at this time, as findings that show neoliberalism's helpfulness are lacking from other studies.

7.2.2.2 Reflection

The adaptable and flexible foundation within TPI, individually, was not sufficient to ensure that teachers could enact their TPI purposefully. The foundation of teachers' ability to reflect was constructed because of neo-purpose's *Datafication* and I-purpose's *Making a difference.* The two expressions highlighted to teachers how 'good' their outcomes were. Other expressions, such as *Self-Accountability* and *The children* (from neo-purpose) and *Teaching feels 'right'* (from I-purpose) strengthened the expressions and assisted in teachers' reflective processes.

If the reflection showed teachers to be 'below par', as deemed by themselves, then neoliberal measures self-perpetuated due to further *Self-accountability,* which was strengthened from messages such as *Accountability is required in schools* for *The children* therefore *It should be helpful* because teaching is about *Making a difference.* To manage the specific moment, I-positions were calling upon

other like-minded expressions to support their case (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). This dialogue demonstrates the influence that the two fusion positions had on one another especially when a TPI foundation synergised with the various expressions. When teachers' positions deemed themselves as succeeding, or neoliberal outcomes did so, then positive feelings of *Enjoyment* and high levels of self-efficacy helped to self-perpetuate neoliberal accountability methods. Either way, neoliberal policies showed themselves to be required in schools through the foundation of reflection, for the teachers and children; the only policies and practices that can keep these high standards (Harvey, 2005).

7.2.2.3 Selflessness

All three TPI foundations were required for participants to fully enact TPI with the sense of purpose they had bestowed upon it. Therefore, the final foundation of selflessness was constructed from similar engagements between neo- and I-purpose. Selflessness was specifically established because if teachers in this study could not adapt or flex with a sense of ease (even with the assistance of perseverance or resilience), and reflection could not remedy the situation, then teachers used *Accountability is required in schools, Accountability can and should be helpful, Datafication* and *Self-accountability* (all from neo-purpose) alongside *Teaching feels right, Making a difference* and *Colleagues* (I-purpose) to strengthen their *I as a teacher* I-position. The result was the teachers put themselves in second place to the needs of the school and its pupils.

Transcending settings, selfless actions continued even if participants felt the need to change setting. This neo-position's expressions collaborated with *The children* and *Accountability can and should be helpful* from I-purpose to ensure the usefulness of accountability, as required by the teachers for the children. This demonstrates how accountability measures can be implemented with a sense of malleability, irrespective of where the teachers worked.

7.2.2.4 Summary

It is clearly at these three cross-sections between the two fusions that neoliberal policies showed themselves to be active and present in the participants' settings, entrenching and self-perpetuating over time with malleable intent. Neo-purpose and I-purpose both worked to influence the formation and enactment of participants' TPIs. The resulting three foundations were powerful, hard-working expressions, that could take their toll on some teachers when teachers articulated the limitations of their adaptability, flexibility, reflectiveness and selflessness (Section 6.2).

7.3 Teachers' management of their teacher professional identity (TPI) conflict

Findings show that neoliberal accountability measures were a source of TPI conflict for the nine teacher participants of this study (Carrilo and Flores, 2018). Dialogically, accountability sometimes resulted in I-positions engaging in dialogue, and moving, in conflictual ways (Grimell, 2020). Teachers were able to manage TPI conflict, especially as the conflict sometimes resulted in positive feelings, thoughts and emotions, upholding previous work that conflict outcomes are not always wholly negative (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011; Arvaja, 2016).

When teachers used their varying I-positions to manage and remedy TPI conflict, in turn, neoliberal accountability measures were embedded and entrenched further, often due to teachers' self-imposed high standards (self-accountability). Returning to Figures 9 and 10 of neo-purpose and I-purpose respectively, I show how the further engraining of accountability stems from how teachers enact these identity fusions in practice. Implementing these two fusions resulted in the portrayal of neoliberalism's idealised state, which means that alternatives were marginalised (Angus, 2013), an important finding.

Neo-purpose and I-purpose, and the cross-sectional spaces where the two fusions interacted (Figure 11), explains the TPI conflict that the participants experienced. In schools, if events moved the teachers away from their self-purported purposes of accountability or their sense of self (consistently teaching the children to very high standards), dissonance was experienced. In other words, if neo-purpose and/or I-purpose were either absent or compromised, there was conflict.

For this set of findings, my work continues to refine DST due to an additional variable previously unaccounted for within the theory, which is how much dominance professional I-positions have, from the perspective of teachers' sense of purpose. Of significance is the fact that teachers have developed strategies and outlooks to remedy accountability measures conflict. However, they embedded these measures in the process, which returns one to question if these participants have harnessed the power of TPI for anything beyond upholding neoliberal policies and practices in their schools. In turn, I take teachers' management of their TPI conflict (from I-position dialogue and movement; from feelings and emotions) and use the explanatory potential of Figure 11 to scrutinise the happenings at a dialogical level and why it is significant for this study.

7.3.1 Management of conflict from I-position dialogue and movement

Discussion up to this point has firmly shown the dual identity fusions of neo-purpose and I-purpose to have strong, motivational influences on the practices of the teachers via their symbiotic relationship. However, dominant I-positions have been found to unwillingly allow other I-positions to take greater

control (Hermans, 2012) and therefore engage in a conflictual manner. The same can be said for the fusion positions. Neo-purpose firmly upheld the resolutions of accountability, as understood by the teacher participants; namely, how it should be of high utility for the benefit of the children. Alongside, I-purpose helped maintain teachers' reasonings to remain in the teaching profession. Whilst children's outcomes, and the quality of the education that they receive, were the commonality across the two, both are clear voiced expressions in their own right; similar to I-positions (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022). As each position had its own 'story' to tell from its own perspective (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011), conflict occurred.

Participants were clear that, when certain school-based I-positions were promoted to the detriment of other I-positions (professional ones or personal ones), then conflict was experienced. This occurred within the cross-sections of Figure 11, when neo-purpose and I-purpose promoted these school-based positions (Section 7.2.2). Teachers wished to uphold these purposes as part of their values and belief systems, and the I- and neo-positions assisted with this process. Other I-positions, not part of either fusion, were therefore subordinated (Oleś, 2020). Despite the authority that the fusions held within TPIs, they were not fixed; they fluctuated alongside the other positions (Perdue et al, 2018; Wijsen, 2020). Thus, when other positions attempted to voice their stances in opposition to the purposes, the fusions were a louder expression, resulting in the conflict. In other words, teachers were trying to maintain their TPIs but the complexity of neoliberal accountability measures, and how many facets there are to the set of policies and practices (Roberts-Holmes and Moss, 2021), in English primary schools made it difficult. In the context of my work, neo-positions and I-positions were jostling to be heard in the cross-sectional spaces. As a result, there was sometimes conflict, which endured until it could be overcome by feelings and emotions, other (often external) I-positions, and/or participants changing setting (Section 6.4).

Due to participants experiencing TPI conflict within the cross-sections of TPI and position expressions, accountability actively entered their TPIs. As a result, teachers' professional identities were changed in the process (Holloway and Brass, 2018; Ingersoll and Collins, 2017). I have shown neo-purpose and I-purpose to be highly influential factors in the construction of teachers' professional identity foundations; both of which having initial effects on TPI. My findings, therefore, produce new insights into TPI being influenced by one's sense of purpose. The study of van Lankfeld et al (2017) concluded that identity can define oneself, from the perspective of legitimising and justifying oneself. In my study, in the cross-sectional spaces when conflict occurred, messages of new priorities were voiced in order to legitimise and justify practice and pedagogy for the children's education. Conflict concerning the foundation of adaptability and flexibility then resulted in participants prioritising certain accountability methods over others, especially self-accountability. Consequently, there were new varieties of how to

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be flexible and adaptable to legitimise and justify practice. When reflecting, conflict meant that participants further entrenched accountability measures due to the priority it was given from adaptability. This finally resulted in selfless actions, even if participants wanted to promote other (sometimes personal) positionings. This is especially significant as it underscores how teachers of this study were transformed by neoliberal discourses, which marginalised the possibility of alternative ways of working.

Findings demonstrate that conflict also occurred when teachers were trying to uphold neoliberalism's image of the competitive individual, a single neo-position expression, but this went against their overall neo-purpose and/or I-purpose. Indeed, participants expressed that being held accountable was not problematic, providing that the accountability did not detract from the educational 'deal' that the children were getting. The participants, however, took umbrage towards the Ofsted inspectorate, as they strongly felt it was a distraction from what mattered: the children. Ofsted, as a neo-position, was not the 'correct' accountability expression from the perspective of the teachers; conflict was therefore felt between the spaces of the fusion position as participants rejected the position (Grimell, 2020). What compounded this conflict was the acknowledgment from all participants, that the possibility of an impending inspection, informed the wider accountability discourse. This included participants speaking about eleven different accountability methods during their interviews and seven participants explaining how school life is more pressured now compared to when they entered teaching. Some referred to past practice as likely to be below standard by the present Ofsted framework. Neo-purpose, specifically *Accountability can and should be helpful* was at-odds with wider neo-positions such as *Ofsted, Justification* and *Rigid* in this instance.

Whilst *Ofsted* as a neo-position may not have directly caused dissonance, it contributed to wider accountability practices and assisted to marginalise alternatives. My findings strengthen previous work that posits the inspectorate to have negative side effects on schools (Jones et al, 2017) but here I also demonstrate the indirect 'damage' of Ofsted to individuals' positive TPI. However, it was neo-purpose's other expressions that then helped to re-dress the balance, that show how teachers acted when pressured, because the accountability drove their behaviour in schools (Deming and Figlio, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Neo-purpose acted in-line with the purpose of accountability, as perceived by the teachers.

What teachers in this study did, therefore, was select what they believed to be the required neo-position, in line with their beliefs as to what the purposes of accountability were. In other words, teachers were understood to 'fight' one accountability position with a different one, with a degree of conscious, calculated choice and automaticity. Robert-Holmes and Moss' (2021) view that

neoliberalism results in teachers calculating how to act is upheld with this finding, and it shows teachers to continually embed and perpetuate neoliberal policies and practices through their TPI enactments. Teachers calculated how to take back the control that Ofsted took away from them; but, this was done with the power from neo-purpose. Therefore, what sets my work apart from Robert-Holmes and Moss' (ibid.) and other studies which show that teachers are not agentic (e.g. Buchanan, 2015; Hall and McGinty, 2015; Kiddie, 2014) is how Figures 8 to 10 finitely show how my teacher participants 'choose' from the neo-positions available, and how this plays out in relation to their TPIs and schools (Figure 11). Consequently, these figures precisely show the 'neo-agency' of the teachers in this study, who were able to choose the neo-position required for the context because of the level of depth to their sense of purpose; as they were experienced by this point in their career, they were grounded about who they were as a professional. What happens to teachers' feelings and emotions due to conflict, and how these are managed, is the final part of Section 7.3.

7.3.2 Management of conflict from feelings and emotions

Emotions and feelings were sources of TPI construction and influence for the nine teacher participants (Rushton et al, 2023a; Zembylas, 2018), demonstrating how I-positions are often imbued with emotions (Da Silva et al, 2020). These emotions and feelings, both positive and negative, were utilised in the management of TPI conflict. Findings specifically detailed how stress, pressure and worry all internalised themselves on deep, personal levels within teachers' professional identities. I explain this internalisation as teachers trying to uphold their neo- and I-purposes, both of which express high expectations within their required outputs (consistently teaching their classes very well). To an extent, it is unsurprising that in upholding neo-purpose and I-purpose, teachers would experience conflict in the form of stress, pressure and worry; participants explained how teaching was a high-pressured, difficult job.

However, it was high-stakes accountability, such as Ofsted inspections and testing, that emerged as the main sources of stress, pressure and worry, rather than generic ideas about not meeting expectations. Perryman (2022) notes the place of high-stakes testing and inspections as a form of negative feelings. But, teachers as individuals, via their self-accountability and selfless actions, added these negative emotions into their own TPIs. The addition of self-imposed negative emotions can be explained as neo- and I-purposes striving to be upheld in response to other emotions that could potentially subordinate their voices, showing how different positions contested for space dialogically, sometimes being in a position of temporary dominance (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). It also shows the strength of the three foundations that constructed participants' TPIs; foundations that upheld even in the face of adversity.

Absent from the data is any form of resistance or challenge towards the stress or pressure. As the priority is the children, deemed so by both neo- and I-purposes, teachers used their negatively-felt emotions as a catalyst to continue and thus overcome them. Indeed, negative emotions did not detract from teachers' duty to ensure that the children did well. In its place were more positive emotions that stemmed from negative ones; for example, high-stakes testing was understood to be negative, but teachers gained a sense of satisfaction when children performed well. Such a finding suggests how individual I-positions can be modified (Gamsakhurdia, 2019) due to their constructions from sub-positions (Da Silva et al, 2020) and because the positions themselves have needs and motives, that are not fixed (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022). When such positivity is experienced relating to the children, neoliberal accountability measures show itself to be the only way under which to work, marginalising alternatives.

Lack of control, discussed in Section 7.3.1, also featured in this context of conflict from feelings and emotions. Lack of control was in the form of worry about Ofsted (Perryman, 2022), that was experienced by eight of the participants. In response, it was again a different neo-position that was used to manage the conflict to ensure that participants did not 'crumble' under the pressure. Teachers rose to the challenge by pressurising themselves, without the need for a meta-position (Van Loon, 2020). Certainly, this self-induced pressure was their own form of control, and something they could manage, using their own emotions to overcome the conflict. Neoliberal policies were seen to be embedded and perpetuated due to participant enactments of their TPIs in another context.

It can clearly be seen that when participants of this study were held accountable, they internalised the accountability on a personal level (Hall, 2015; Ingersoll and Collins, 2017). Participants held themselves accountable by facilitating reflective questions regarding themselves and the quality of their output. Reflection was another form of a control that the participants only had to rely on themselves for, especially as self-image was important to the participants, who wanted to be seen as caring about the profession, and, in turn, accountability. In these instances, accountability resulted in positive feelings and affirmed to teachers that they were doing a good job. Positive feelings and emotions within neo- and I-purpose were a retentive force.

7.3.3 Summary

Conflict was experienced within the TPIs of the nine teacher participants, usually when events of experiences attempted to move teachers away from their neo- and/or I-purposes; therefore, the children. Whilst a form of accountability was often the source of the conflict, it was also the remedy used to manage the conflict. Therefore, I-position movement and dialogue, and the associated feelings

and emotions, aided in the entrenchment and perpetuation of neoliberal accountability measures within the participants' schools. The discussion within Section 7.3 is significant as teachers have developed strategies and outlooks to remedy accountability measures conflict, which embeds these measures in turn. This 'chicken-or-egg' stance of TPI again brings into question if these nine teachers have truly harnessed the power of TPI for anything beyond upholding neoliberal policies and practices, whilst conflict could be a continuous state for them, as alternatives to neoliberalism are marginalised. Explaining the reasons for remaining in this dynamic profession is the focus of Section 7.4.

7.4 Achieving and maintaining a sense of harmony and balance

The nine teachers' professional identities could achieve and maintain a sense of harmony and balance even when neoliberal policies and practices were sometimes a source of conflictual dialogue and movements. Feelings and emotions, TPI itself and conscious choices regarding their careers all played a significant role in the achievement and maintenance of their harmony and balance. A harmonious and balanced TPI was a significant contributing factor as to why these teachers have remained in teaching.

It is teachers' enactment of their purpose, in the form of the fusion position I-purpose (Figure 10), that facilitated the harmony and balance required to remain in the profession. I-purpose was strengthened by generally positive dialogue from neo-purpose (Figure 9), as teachers' views as to what neoliberal accountability measures should be like and do were upheld within the workplace. The combination of these positive fusions meant that, when there was contention or conflictual dialogue, teachers could overcome it relatively quickly to remain in a profession that they genuinely loved. The profession felt 'right', which further 'fed' their sense of purpose.

Harmony and balance within TPI aiding retention is an important finding. Workload (both quantity and nature) is cited as the main reason for teachers leaving the profession (Arthur and Bradley, 2023; DfE, 2019a; Perryman and Calvert, 2020), along with other reasons such as identity dissonance (Towers and Maguire, 2017) and neoliberal accountability measures (Iannucci and MacPhail, 2019). If there are teachers who cannot achieve harmony and balance to override such attrition factors, teachers could continue to leave the profession and add to the retention crisis.

In this section, I show how DST is further refined from the variable previously unaccounted for from the model, which is how strong teachers' sense of purpose drives their professional I-positions to override anything negative or conflictual. The core place of teachers' purpose and meaning is centralised within DST.

7.4.1 Achieving a sense of harmony and balance from feelings and emotions

The I-position, *I as a teacher,* was found to be an influential and prominent position for the teacher participants of this study. It was closely intertwined with other positions to form well-articulated narratives (Ligorio and Tateo, 2007). Narratives occurred from this perspective due to teachers being able to fully enact I-purpose, which resulted in three main feelings and emotions being felt: (i) enjoyment; (ii) making a difference and, (iii) teaching feeling 'right'. Feelings and emotions assisted in teachers achieving a sense of harmony and balance. Any challenge to these positive reactions were outweighed to achieve the harmony and balance once more. Therefore, feelings and emotions were a strong retentive factor for these teachers.

Enjoyment and *Making a difference,* from I-purpose, helped achieve a sense of TPI harmony and balance because they were closely connected. Sometimes, *Enjoyment* originated from teachers *Making a difference,* and vice versa. Ligorio and Tateo (2007) found their participants' internal and external dialogue to be closely linked, and often I-positions were difficult to isolate. In my study, the closeness of *Enjoyment* and *Making a difference* within I-purpose was due to the neo-purpose expressing positive implementations of accountability; in other words, firmly in-line with what teachers believed it should be. It can be seen how the two fusion positions worked in-tandem to produce the perception that the teachers 'needed' to give back, 'feeding' both senses of purpose simultaneously. Consequently, harmony and balance from dialogue was achieved, resulting in a positive retentive force.

Six participants, despite their genuine love for their jobs, openly spoke about its associated challenges. These included teaching a range of different children, including those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), teaching in areas of high disadvantage and teaching in a phase of primary education that participants did not have much experience or knowledge of. Unlike in the study of van Meijl (2012), these challenges to their TPI did not lead to confusion, insecurity nor lack of control. Therefore, problems with adjustment were not experienced to cause any conflict at this point (Grimell, 2020). The participants of my study wanted and welcomed challenge because I-purpose instilled the message within their TPI that they were capable and confident teachers, leading to secure messages of high self-efficacy. In other words, they knew that they could do a 'good' job, for the children, who were promoted by neo-purpose.

Any teaching challenges were, therefore, not as dialogically strong as *Enjoyment*, *Making a difference* and *Capable and confident,* showing clear I-position movement within repertoires (Hermans, 2003; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). Out of the three foundations that built teachers' strong TPI overall, it can be seen how the foundation of selflessness was upheld during these exchanges, as all of the

expressions were voiced away from the benefit of the teachers, towards the children. Movements of this nature led to harmony and balance for the teachers, aiding to sustain them in the profession because the overall I-purpose expression was one where *Teaching feels 'right'.* Teachers benefited from the dialogue after the children, which is a reminder that neo-purpose and I-purpose exist in symbiosis, being embedded in practice by teachers in the study as it showed itself to be helpful and a requirement; the two fusions cannot be separated.

7.4.2 Achieving a sense of harmony and balance from within teacher professional identity (TPI)

In order to achieve and maintain a sense of harmony and balance within TPI, I-position dialogue with *My colleagues* was a driving expression within I-purpose to help to portray why teachers have remained, and should continue to remain, in the profession (Perryman and Calvert, 2020). Colleagues specifically helped teacher participants to overcome any challenges that occurred within TPI. *My colleagues* therefore aided participant retention because they were, overall, similar in outlook to the participants' wider TPIs, showing how I-positions can work together on like-minded goals (Grimell, 2020). Helping to explain a general absence of teacher-to-teacher competitiveness, *My colleagues* upheld and emitted similar values with regards to accountability; indeed, arguably upholding neo-purpose themselves. This was especially true with expressions regarding children, accountability's requirement in schools and how it should be helpful. Participants and their colleagues were in-sync with the credence they gave neoliberal expressions. As a collective, they therefore embedded and sustained neoliberal accountability measures whilst sustaining their TPI, showing the symbiotic relationship between the two.

The external I-position of *My colleagues* was strengthened by *My family* and *My friends* as supplementary sources of retention. Helping to construct the secure sense of TPI that teachers enacted, the external I-positions demonstrated the central place of others' voices within TPI, which were collective (Pugh and Broome, 2020). Their collective prominence was considered as firmly owned by the participants, adding further explanation for their strength (Hermans, 2003). Adaptability and flexibility (one TPI foundation) was therefore strengthened due to the dialogue exchange between these external positions. Positions participated in dialogue that encouraged teachers to adapt and flex to school situations, always for the benefit of neo-purpose and especially the children that they taught. Whilst Da Silva et al (2020: 250) note external I-positions as "a part" of TPI and "semi permeable", my findings suggest something more centralised and longer-lasting. The wants and needs of the teachers in my study were inextricably linked to the needs of the children. Therefore, after the firming of

adaptability and flexibility, selflessness was then strengthened due to the children being centralised above the needs of the teachers.

Importantly, this relational orientation of teachers' professional identities also served as a form of resistance to the accountability structures present in their settings; indeed, relationships with others is an example, in my study, of how teachers remained in the profession not through compliance but because of their sense of 'we' with other colleagues, further supported by family and friends. Performative metrics often risk fragmenting teacher identity (Arthur and Bradley, 2023; Hendrikx, 2020) so the collaborative relationships documented here support a sustainable and humanised form of professional engagement. The participants' sense of responsibility to the children as well as one another, rather than to accountability expectations alone, contributed to their capacity to remain in the profession with a secure sense of 'togethered' TPIs. In this way, my findings offer a valuable counter-narrative to retention discourses that emphasise compliance and accountability demands (Iannucci and MacPhail, 2019). Instead, they suggest that fostering spaces of trust, mutual care and collaboration may be critical in enabling teachers not only to stay, but to thrive.

Care, nurture and collaboration from *My colleagues, My family* and *My friends* assisted in meta-positioning. During times of challenge or self-doubt, participants listened to one or more of these external positions to attain a promoter position (Wijsen, 2020). Whilst Dialogical Self Theorists note how promoter positions can produce or develop different I-positions (e.g. Grimell, 2020; Hermans, 2012; Stewart, 2018), the participants of my study did not necessarily experience any new positions from the promoter position. Instead, there was a re-newed action to remain as teachers; in other words, uncertainty was re-promoted to certainty leading to continuity of the self (Assen et al, 2018) from I-purpose; a retentive factor from the continuity that was re-instilled.

7.4.3 Achieving a sense of harmony and balance from restoration

Whilst the findings of this study do not indicate that TPI is a fixed phenomenon (Leshem, 2020), *I as a teacher* was a continual expression from all nine participants. The idea of their TPI, led by *I as a teacher* and its sense of purpose, having restorative properties was very strong across the dataset. The source of the restoration is explained as the yet-to-be-applied capabilities of I-purpose. Participants were clear about their future-oriented I-positions (Gamsakhurdia, 2019) within I-purpose, which helped them remain in the profession. The future orientations can be observed in two contexts: firstly, I-purpose implementation on a greater scale. Secondly, I-purpose implementation in a different setting.

The first future orientation of I-purpose was from the vantage point of the teachers' professional identities as a form of continual professional development (CPD) for others, rather than them as a recipient. Section 6.4.3 discussed how CPD, leading to career development opportunities, motivated the teachers to remain as teachers, rather than general in-school CPD (Bozeman et al, 2013). Indeed, in contrast to general CPD as a retentive factor (Kavenuke, 2013), it was found that CPD from TPI was retaining teachers in the profession. I acknowledge that not all teachers may want career development thus these findings are localised to the participants involved in my study. However, the potential for I-purpose to be implemented on a larger scale was a retentive influence for these teachers, as teachers could then combine this with what they perceived accountability to be: neo-purpose. Together, the two fusions clearly co-existed as teachers had a desire to give back to the education profession not only in their classrooms but towards future teachers too; something that enthused teachers to remain in the profession.

Similar to previous findings of my study, which demonstrated how positivity often outweighed negativity, a restorative TPI facilitated teachers to remain in the profession when there was a misalignment of values between their TPI and the setting in which they worked. Misalignment was sometimes when a certain accountability method conflicted with their neo- and/or I-purpose. However, teacher attrition did not occur as it is sometimes known to (Arthur and Bradley, 2023; Perryman and Calvert, 2020). Restoration occurred because I-purpose centralised *Making a difference* from the context of *Changing setting.* Simultaneously, neo-purpose concentrated expressions that were child-centred. As a result, for the benefit of children, teachers actively chose to change their settings and work elsewhere. In this situation, for the teachers, it was almost irrelevant where they taught, so long as they worked in an environment where neo-purpose and I-purpose were synchronised. If they were not, rather than leave, teachers remained in the profession due to the future potential of I-purpose in a different setting.

Whilst participants' ability to change settings may appear straightforward to an outsider, it was not simply the case of conflict resulting in an easy change of schools. Instead, this finding is dialogically positioned in several ways. Firstly, I-positions are largely understood to move (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). One or more I-positions (for example, *I as a teacher, I as making a difference* or *I as passionate*) moved to a place of dominance within TPIs to facilitate the expression of the voice. Movement was the result of participants visualising their future selves (Henry, 2019). Secondly, because most teachers have a preferred I-position, this movement was the result of the dominance of the preferred I-position (Assen et al, 2018); unsurprising if one considers how dominant school-based I-positions are for these participants. Thirdly, the sense of dialogical self is known to be dynamic in its fluctuations and changes (Wijsen, 2020). Participants were driven by their moving I-positions thus adapted and flexed to change.

They were also selfless with it, and repositioned their TPIs in response to upcoming change for themselves. As can be seen, participants negotiated I-positions to advise on the best course of action. In this context, the best action was future-orienting I-purpose. This looked a simple undertaking due to the prominence of I-positions and strength of TPI; but, it was not.

7.4.4 Summary

Teacher participants of this study have remained in the profession for three main, often interrelated reasons. They were able to achieve a sense of TPI harmony and balance from: (i) feelings and emotions; (ii) TPI itself; and, (iii) the restoration properties from within. Their experiencing of remaining in the profession was a complex and individual experience, unique to their circumstances and how they posited neo-purpose. Teaching felt 'right' for these participants, as they enjoyed making a difference and rising to challenges; external I-positions were a sound source of meta-positioning advice, helping TPI to feel complementary; and, teachers envisioned a future-oriented self, where they themselves were a source of CPD within the setting they were at or at another setting if necessary.

7.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, DST has been applied in novel ways to show how the nine experienced teachers in this study have specifically positioned themselves in their primary school contexts. I have extended and refined DST's explanatory capabilities away from solely identity work to the concept of neoliberalism in the field of English primary education, which has been explained dialogically. Dialogic neoliberalism clarifies neoliberalism's active and present status in the schools of the teacher participants. A deep-rooted existence in schools is because of a set of understandings firmly held by these teachers. I term this a 'fusion position' of 'neo-purpose'. Neo-purpose gave resolve and drive to the dialogic framing of neoliberal policies and practices, helping them to entrench and self-perpetuate in schools as the children were central to participants' enactments of their TPI. Thus, neo-purpose was the specific variance of neoliberalism understood and experienced by the teachers of this study. It is not an all-encompassing fact nor truth of what neoliberalism is. The social constructivist paradigm of this work and the unique lived experiences of participants' TPIs do not align with such thinking.

However, neo-purpose does have ramifications for the participants. In response to the neoliberal context led by neo-purpose, participants have responded with a second fusion position, termed 'I-purpose'. I-purpose offered the teachers a sense of protection; thus, it helped them to thrive with TPI enactments (specifically the practice of self-accountability). Teachers thrived because I-purpose aided

in the construction of three foundations that collectively built a strong TPI: flexibility and adaptability, reflection and selflessness. Taken together, neo- and I-purpose symbiotically existed within the context of one another and helped these teachers remain in the profession because they enacted their TPIs with purpose.

Neo- and I-purpose were so closely linked within the lived experiences of these participants that, if there was an absence of their expressions, participants felt conflict. Harmony and balance were restored when I-purpose was strengthened by generally positive dialogue from neo-purpose; a process that was found to help retention as positive feelings were often experienced. Strongly upheld belief systems of teachers meant that tolerance levels were high, and it was the fusion positions themselves that restored the balance following conflict. Other I-positions, especially external ones, were also helpful during the process. The outcome, however, was that neoliberal policies and practices were sometimes embedded because of these actions. The teachers did not see this as negative as they could see I-purpose as having restorative properties from its future orientations; another retentive factor.

I now conclude this work by presenting my recommendations and opportunities for further study.

Chapter 8 – Conclusion

8.0 Introduction

My study has been designed and conducted within a social constructivist paradigm to explore the perceptions of nine experienced primary school teachers, each of whom have worked for a minimum of six consecutive years, full-time, in English primary schools. My investigation has been situated within the teacher retention context and has explored the dynamicity of primary education from the lens of teacher professional identity (TPI) using Dialogical Self Theory (DST) as the theoretical framework. My research has specifically generated findings that address four research questions (RQs):

1. *How do experienced primary school teachers in the study experience neoliberal accountability measures in their work?*
2. *How do experienced primary school teachers in the study articulate their sense of teacher professional identity?*
3. *To what extent do experienced primary school teachers in the study feel that accountability measures influence their teacher professional identity?*
4. *What do experienced primary school teachers in the study understand to be the contributing factors that have influenced them to remain in teaching?*

The addressing of these RQs was possible due to complementary qualitative methods: online semi-structured interviews and reflective journals, analysed with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

In this final chapter, I conclude my study. The main findings are first broadly described to situate the four recommendations that follow. I then propose six contributions to knowledge. After I acknowledge the limitations of my study, I explain how future research could build on its work. Final thoughts regarding my study are given at the end of the chapter.

8.1 The findings of my study

Implementation of RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2022) generated four themes, with each theme providing detailed insights into one of the RQs.

Participants clearly described and explained the active and present effects of neoliberal accountability measures in their settings. Extending and refining the explanatory capabilities of DST, to apply it to the construct of neoliberalism (Figure 8), I posited that the 'forms' of neoliberalism experienced by the participants of my study could be understood dialogically. This was due to profound similarities

between TPI and neoliberalism, including their shared dynamicity and multiple natures; how both are constructed by a range of internal and external influences; how the links between TPI and society exist in dual directions; and, how both neoliberalism and TPI can develop in similar fashions. Participants upheld their 'versions' of neoliberalism ('neo-purpose', Figure 9) as a set of strong beliefs about how neoliberal policies and practices should exist in schools: always for the children, the primary accountability stakeholders.

In response to established neoliberal policies and procedures, participants had developed a strong and secure TPI, mainly built from three foundations: (i) adaptability and flexibility; (ii) the ability to reflect and (iii) selfless enactments. These foundations were built, in part, because of participants' 'I-purpose' (Figure 10). Constructed from the most dominant I-positions, I-purpose, the second extension and refinement of DST, was the nucleus of teachers' professional identities, that gave drive and meaning to their sense of dialogical selves.

It was found that any conflict that was experienced occurred in the intersections where neo- and I-purpose engaged in dialogue (Figure 11). Conflict was not long-term because teachers were able to manage any dissonance via their TPI and remain in the teaching profession. However, in the process of their TPI enactments, teachers sometimes further sustained the neoliberal practices that were present in their settings meaning that the participants only ever worked within neoliberal parameters.

Regardless of their school contexts, participants explained that their main influences for them to remain in teaching were: genuine enjoyment and love for their job; making a difference to the lives of the children in their care; and challenge, which all contributed to a complementary and harmonious TPI, showing TPI to have retentive properties. These influences stemmed from teachers' I- and neo-purpose.

I now make four recommendations based on these findings.

8.2 Recommendations

Though not generalisable beyond the scope of the study, my findings have implications for main stakeholders of the primary teaching profession: policy makers, school leaders, experienced teachers, Early Careers Teachers (ECTs) and trainee teachers. I make four recommendations, listed below.

1. **Theoretical:** TPI was a positive retentive force in my study. Therefore, with the use of DST, this first recommendation helps to address the problem of why over 20% of teachers exit the profession within the first two years of qualifying (DfE, 2024a). Whilst DST is known to effectively conceptualise TPI (Badia et al, 2020) and specifically identify moments of struggle (Grimell, 2021),

in my study, DST has also shown itself to be a potentially useful tool for professional learning and retention. DST implementation gave the participants a clear set of concepts on which to 'hang' abstract ideas, experiences and felt tensions. Indeed, DST alleviated some of the complexities when discussing identity. All nine teachers praised its utility for helping them to professionally develop their teacher selves whilst four participants spoke of the catharsis and enjoyment of working with DST. I therefore recommend that trainee teachers in England receive DST knowledge (I-positions, meta-positions and promoter positions) as core input from their teacher training provider and this continues into the content of the Early Career Framework (ECF). ECTs, with the support of school leaders, can then access these resources to build and secure ECTs' TPIs during the first two years of teaching, helping somewhat to combat the high drop-out rate of ECTs. My first recommendation is therefore a theorised way to help teachers construct positive TPIs because they are, presently, not in positions to do so from the ECF.

2. **Schools:** My thesis has utilised DST to articulate an understanding of TPI that will help teachers to understand the primary school workplace and their places within it, to help resolve conflict. Most TPI work focuses on developing identities of trainee teachers and those beginning to teach (e.g. Rushton et al, 2023a). I offer a solution here with this second recommendation. By building upon recommendation one, recommendation two embeds the concept of DST/TPI in schools to help improve the 42% of teachers known to leave teaching within ten years of qualifying (DfE, 2024). Schools should work with teachers to develop and secure a strong sense of TPI post-ECT years, both individually and as a collective setting. Therefore, professional identity concepts and ideas should exist at school policy level. Schools should work to identify their (I-)purpose, and the different positions that 'feed into' their overall driving force, underpinned by teachers who are self-aware. To create the conditions required for retention, teaching staff must be a part of this process. It may be a further ineffective or counter-productive neoliberal implementation if 'done to' teachers from school leaders. If the school, as a teaching community, undertakes this recommendation, conflict management could be part of any school identity policy to ensure that any hardworking expressions within TPI do not take their toll on teachers and lead to attrition. This would be achieved as teachers would have a working knowledge of the components that construct their identity; they would be able to identify the source of any dissonance and use DST tools to seek to remedy it. Discussing and reflecting on TPI would harness its power beyond upholding neoliberal accountability measures, something I have questioned throughout this study.

3. **Teaching and learning:** Teachers need explicit guidance regarding the concept of TPI, including its links to practice, which can be achieved via meaningful reflection away from the standards and assessments of teachers (Rushton, 2021). This third recommendation is, therefore, the practice of working with TPI knowledge and understanding in schools, and through this work, the active countering of some of the more harmful aspects of neoliberal practices in primary education. Recommendation 3 builds upon the idea that the wants and needs of the participants of my study were inescapably linked with the children's needs (Section 7.4.2), and sometimes this caused conflictual dialogue between I-positions. I recommend that, to foster retentive conditions in schools, leaders should build and facilitate spaces for identity development. These spaces should take the form of reflection/review-style work (e.g. coaching or mentoring sessions with prompts), and be places for teachers to articulate TPI growth and concerns, specifically with an evaluation lens on teachers' wants and needs compared to that of the school and children. With a focus on relationships in school (children, colleagues, school leaders and parents), as relationships were a central factor in TPI formation in my study and a retentive force, the effects of some elements of neoliberalism may be countered via collective and collegial practices that emphasise relationality instead of individuality. This would foster teachers to fully enact their own TPIs within the school's remits of providing children with a high-quality education. However, I would not want this recommendation misconstrued therefore I do not condone teachers working outside of policies nor doing 'whatever it is they wish'. I do, however, acknowledge that these identity spaces may be imperfect and difficult to develop. Yet, following this recommendation in a supportive, reflective manner, oriented around care, nurture and collaboration, would mean that teachers are less likely compelled to teach in restrictive ways that could subvert helpful I-positions and/or overly-promote others, as was seen in this study. In addition, the extent to which self-accountability exists within teachers and the schools could be monitored; again, to evaluate for its effects.

4. **Educational policy context:** TPI will never be given the credence that it deserves if it is not recognised in national educational policy and given the support from the Government and/or the Department for Education (DfE). Thus, I recommend that TPI be placed into national educational policy, including teacher recruitment and retention initiatives discussed in recommendation one. This is because, despite recent Government efforts such as the ECF and the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy, retention is still an ongoing problem in England as these recent initiatives have shown no improvement to retention (Rushton and Bird, 2024). In the form of support materials that schools could access, including knowledge and training resources, there should therefore be policy directives to build teachers' sense of TPI within schools. This should include

sources of construction and influences upon TPI, conflict and conflict resolution. Mentoring, to support the building and maintaining of a strong TPI, should also feature within the materials/policy directives. This recommendation is because there are three foundations that helped to construct a secure and stable TPI for nine experienced primary school teachers working in English primary schools. For these teachers, the foundations were strongly linked to their sense of self, and they were what were needed for the teachers to be retained in the profession. Whilst I do not advocate teachers to be selfless (foundation three) to the extent that the participants of this study were, securing durable TPIs to retain longer-serving teachers must become priority. As a result, future teachers may not feel the need to be inherently selfless to the detriment of personal I-positions. TPI, in my study, has been found to have retentive influences and capabilities. If the Government wants to change the course of the tide on teacher retention, then I suggest that they start looking at the power that TPI can have.

8.3 Contributions to knowledge

Following my recommendations, I offer six contributions to knowledge: two practical, two theoretical and two methodological. All six of my contributions to knowledge add to, and extend, the conversation about primary teacher retention in England.

8.3.1 Practical

Two practical contributions to knowledge are offered based on findings from this EdD study.

1. Accountability measures are widely reported to encourage competition between teachers and schools (e.g. Angus, 2013; Birch, 2017; Holloway and Brass, 2018). In contrast to this published work, I offer a practical contribution to knowledge. My findings clearly show that the teacher participants of this study did not primarily compete externally (with one another and/or other settings). Instead, their I-positions competed with other I-positions in their repertoires, due to wanting to teach to personally constructed high standards for the benefit of their classes. The competition observed in my study stemmed from the teachers themselves and their sense of self-identified accountability, rather than sources of external (neoliberal) accountability methods or measures. This is an important practical contribution to knowledge. Other teachers' self-competitiveness might not influence retention as it has done in this work. In other settings, if present, self-accountability could contribute to attrition if in the form of identity dissonance (Towers and Maguire, 2017). Linking to recommendation three (Section 8.2), reflecting on the utility of self-accountability is important for schools.

2. Rather than a myriad of influences on TPI known to exist in the literature, including experiences (Steadman, 2023), policies (Hendrikx, 2020), emotions (Rushton et al, 2023a) and relationships (Henry, 2019), my findings show that TPI is predominantly influenced by teachers' sense of purpose. Reasons for retention list purpose-related factors, such as making a difference to children's lives (Arthur and Bradley, 2023) and enjoyment (Perryman and Calvert, 2020). However, a teachers' sense of purpose driving their TPI to such a large extent found in my study is absent from previous research. Therefore, I offer a second practical contribution to knowledge. The TPIs of the teacher participants of my study were highly influenced by their sense of purpose, which was constructed from powerful and dominant articulations of why they remain in the profession. Their purpose became the nucleus of their TPI, driving TPI expressions and enactments in the classroom. I-positions are driven by their own views, needs, wants and desires (Silva et al, 2020). To date, a clear and coherent sense of purpose navigating a repertoire overall has not been reported. This is another important practical contribution to knowledge. In-line with recommendation two (Section 8.2), teachers need a coherent sense of purpose to help drive their TPIs. A lack thereof could feed into teacher attrition as unclear TPIs are understood to do (Hanna et al, 2019).

8.3.2 Theoretical

I have refined and extended the explanatory capabilities of DST in two ways during my study.

3. 'Dialogic neoliberalism' (Figure 8) presents the participants' experiences of neoliberal accountability measures in their settings. It demonstrates their lived experiences and how the participants themselves exist in dialogical symbiosis with the neoliberal accountability measures in their settings.

    By extension, 'neo-purpose' (Figure 9) is a 'fusion position' that fills a theoretical 'gap' not previously accounted for by DST. Neo-purpose takes the dominant 'neo-positions' from Figure 8, all of which operated at greater levels of dominance in comparison to others. Neo-purpose engenders the reported purposes of accountability: to give children the very highest standards possible and ensure that all teachers teach to these high standards. Neo-purpose explains why neoliberal accountability measures were able to entrench and self-perpetuate in the participants' schools, and be malleable with its implementation. Previous studies have not used DST in this manner before to apply the theory to constructs other than identity. Due to clear links between TPI and neoliberalism in the context of my study, I present dialogic neoliberalism and its linked neo-purpose as a theoretical contribution to knowledge.

4. The fusion position of 'I-purpose' (Figure 10) is the second theoretical contribution to knowledge. I-purpose is explained as the nucleus of TPI: the core positions and set of expressions that substantiate wider TPI expressions and constructions. It is more than a coalition of I-positions, as the fusion position is not fixed; instead, it can be understood as working in symbiosis with neo-purpose (Figure 9) in a variety of ways. Whilst I-positions have individual purposes, that influence their motives and views (Pauha and Ronkainen, 2022), the concept of one's purpose, as a collective, driving multiple I-positions, has not been explored via DST before. Neither have the symbiotic links between them, which I achieved with Figure 11.

Figures 8 to 11 are important theoretical contributions to knowledge as they clearly illustrate the profound links between TPI's purpose and the neoliberal context in which the participants worked. The figures also demonstrate the multiple positions that collectively built them both, helping to explain how these teachers and neoliberalism operated in symbiosis. Such explanations have not done so before, demonstrating how Figures 8 to 11 shed new light on understanding primary teacher retention in England via links between TPI, its purpose and school context.

8.3.3 Methodological

There are two methodological contributions to knowledge from my study. The first is based on DST application; the second is due to the participants with whom I worked.

5. With a smaller group of participants, I have applied DST in an English primary school teacher retention context. Historically, DST has been used to study non-English contexts (Xu et al, 2024) or applied in different fields, e.g. psychology (Den Elzen, 2021). My study worked with more than one participant, unlike Pugh and Broome (2020) who did not recruit any participants and Grimell (2021) who recruited one; but, not so many that participant voices become merged as one, thus lost (Badia and Liesa, 2022). This shows my study to be methodologically significant as it paves the way for future research (full discussion in Section 8.5) to build on my exploration of DST, which involved more data than a single case study but did not reach the scale of a large survey. I have shown that fewer participants can generate rich insights into the focus topic. Whilst no-participant, theoretical discussions and larger field work have a place within the literature, my study's unique lens is 'the best of both worlds' to centralise theory and personal lived experiences together. Therefore, my smaller scale DST study, with nine participants, is a methodological contribution to knowledge that future researchers can build upon.

6. I have worked with experienced primary school teachers working full-time in England, rather than ECTs or teachers who have already left the profession. Previous DST work typically focuses on trainee teachers (Martínez-Valdivia et al, 2024) or new teachers (Stenberg and Maaranen, 2021). Where more experienced teachers are participants, the focus is not regarding teacher retention (Assen et al, 2018). More recent research has neglected this area too and focused on retention in deprived socioeconomic areas only (Chong, Bond and Negrea, 2023), or retention outside of England (Shell, Hurt and White, 2023). By working with experienced teachers, established in their careers, I show my study to be methodologically relevant as the English teacher retention context is still highly problematic (Maisuria et al, 2023). I provide insights into why experienced teachers choose to stay in the teaching profession, which has answered a clear call to fill this research 'gap' (Arthur and Bradley, 2023; Rushton et al, 2023a) and is of high utility for the teaching profession.

8.4 Limitations of the study

As with any research that is undertaken, there are limitations that are important to recognise. The first limitation of my study is that I was the sole researcher undertaking an EdD. My research was therefore bound by practicality restraints; namely, needing to complete the research within a timely manner around a full-time job, whilst not compromising interactions or relationships with participants, thus the integrity of the work. I feel that I have managed this well, by building a steady rapport with the participants, established and maintained throughout. In my own reflective journal after my first interview (10.01.22), I wrote:

"Why did the interview go so well? I was certainly very prepared; but, I very early on realised that the interview would be more than one hour. When I accepted this, I was far more inclined to simply listen – and intently listen at that – rather than 'get through' the interview. I was surprised at how very conversational the interview felt".

Secondly, my study is small in scale. I have presented findings from limited dialogical narratives: nine experienced teachers, working in England, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised. However, "Sometimes research is not about generalisation; it is about targeted, rich, deep exploration…and that is important work" (Hall and Wall, 2019: 74). Using highly complementary methods, with my inbetweener status and a well-placed theoretical framework, I posit that my work is in-line with Hall and Wall's (2019) description.

The final limitation to my thesis is the nature of the data, which reveals specific findings because of the characteristics of the participants. Aside from the English primary school context, data demonstrates that the participants are confident, self-assured and determined in their roles due to

the strength and harmony of their TPIs. The participants in this study were asked to come forward via social media therefore my study may have missed 'quieter' experienced teachers and those without the 'X' platform. The participants of my study wished to voice their opinions and whilst my findings fully address the RQs and are useful to the teaching profession, they could represent a certain 'type' of teacher.

8.5 Areas for future research

There are four avenues for future research that my study could lead to.

The 'testing' of the fusion positions, neo- and I-purpose, stemming from dialogic neoliberalism, is something that future research could focus on. Neo- and I-purpose are novel concepts, extended and refined via DST application for this study. Whilst they are specific to the findings of this research, future research with DST could ascertain if, as a concept, they can continue to shed light on why other teachers have chosen to remain in the teaching profession. This testing would also remedy the final limitation discussed in Section 8.4 if a different sampling strategy were to be applied. However, two important clarifications must be made regarding any future application of the neo-positions that construct Figures 8, 9 and 10.

Firstly, as stated earlier, I do not advocate dialogic neoliberalism to be applied to other settings with generalisable neutrality as I strongly feel this an unsuitable application. If one were to use Figures 8, 9 or 10 as the basis for future research, care must be taken to ensure that the 'lived-ness' that I describe is fully accounted for so that the figures are used from the vantage point of TPI and not inappropriately applied as a 'one-size-fits-all policy-in-practice' that neoliberalism is sometimes presented as (Apple, 2007; Birch, 2017). Secondly, and to extend this, Figure 8 summarises the neo-positions present in nine school settings across England. As I do not support neoliberalism to remain unchallenged and normalised, Figure 8 and the subsequent figures show how neoliberalism can be imagined differently in the context of this study. Therefore, these figures should be used to continue to refresh the debate on primary neoliberalism and not applied to other studies neutrally or in uncontextualised manners.

In addition to continuing the conversations with Figures 8 to 10, there is much potential for further DST studies of a smaller scale. The specific size of my study has pushed DST into unexplored avenues and is at-odds with studies that work with no, few or many participants, as deep but varied views were ascertained. Future work should continue to tap into this mostly 'unmapped' area of research, possibly with research designs that are longitudinal, to thoroughly analyse what is happening to identity in the longer-term. For example, ECTs could be 'followed' as they become more experienced teachers.

After positive feedback from the participants, I also advocate for further research into the use of DST as a professional learning tool, and a source of professional development, for primary school teachers. It is outside the parameters of my study to evaluate such views. But, participants welcomed DST as a form of CPD for their professional identity development, and so future work would be well-placed in this arena, especially as there is a need to understand TPI to inform purposeful CPD opportunities (Rushton, 2021).

Finally, my study has shown neoliberalism to be a personal and subjective understanding based on events, experiences and colleagues in school. However, further research should continue to investigate how other teachers experience neoliberal accountability measures in their settings, and whether self-accountability is just as prevalent. Alternatives to neoliberal accountability measures have been mentioned throughout but not developed nor could they be within the scope of this study. Therefore, researchers must prioritise identity work in the context of accountability to, one day, see if there are indeed any alternatives and what these could look like.

8.6 Final thoughts

Undertaking my EdD has been a genuine pleasure and honour. There is nothing more worthwhile than the pursuit of meaningful knowledge to improve the teaching profession, of which, I am extremely passionate about. I have contributed to this profession with new knowledge and recommendations. The length of time that this knowledge is spoken of, and the extent to which the recommendations are acted upon, cannot weigh up to how this Doctorate has changed me: personally, professionally and academically. I really am living embodiment of how identities change over time! My EdD will mean that I continue to think, question, reflect, debate and challenge, and it is my fervent hope that others will do the same, in a bid to help remedy the teacher retention crisis in England.

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Appendix 1 – The Interview Schedules

Interview 1: Framework

Welcome/introductions/confirm verbal consent for the audio/visual recording of the interview/take any questions.

How long have you been teaching?

What are the age ranges that you have taught?

Do you have any favourite subjects or subject specialisms?

How many settings have you taught in?

In which part/parts of the country have you taught?

Were the schools LA maintained, academies or private schools?

What made you enter the teaching profession?

Tell me about the kind of classroom experiences that you have had in your career so far.

What are the memorable moments of your teaching career to-date?

What's the best thing about the teaching profession?

Visualise yourself in your perfect classroom and describe it to me.

Have you ever had any management and leadership experiences?

I asked you to bring along something to this meeting that, for you, represented or showed *'accountability methods'* or *'accountability measures.'* What have you brought along? Why? What made you select [accountability item]?

Why have you brought _____[accountability item(s)]_____ with you?

What kind of experiences have you had with this [accountability item]?

Tell me about what you think of/about when you think of/see/use this [accountability item].

What are you held accountable for in school? How?

What word, words or phrases do you think of when you think of the word, 'accountability?'

How does being held accountable make you feel?

Do you know of any other accountability methods?

Have you had experience of any other accountability methods?

Why are accountability methods used in schools?

Are there any alternatives to accountability methods?

Visualise yourself back in your perfect classroom: are there any accountability methods? If so, describe them. Tell me about them.

Would you like to say/speak about anything else/ask any questions?

Explain next steps/DST video/reflective diary. Thank and close.

Interview 2: Framework *(4 to 6 weeks after interview 1)*

Welcome/confirm verbal consent for the audio/visual recording of the interview/take any questions.

After reading the transcript from your first interview, did you have any additional or clarifying comments that you wanted to make? Please describe/explain.

It was really interesting reading your transcript after the first interview. After re-reading them yourself, could you tell me/clarify/go into more detail about _____

Do you see what you said about _____ any differently after re-reading it?

Thank you for sending me across your reflective diary. *[Interviewer to select interesting, surprising, unexpected or contrasting data from the reflective diary for the participant to then describe and explain in further detail; opportunities to probe/elaborate].*

After watching the video that I sent you about DST, what are your initial thoughts of it?

Do any parts 'speak' to you? Why?

Are there any parts that don't match your thinking or you disagree with? Why?

What are your thoughts on 'internal I-positions' and 'external' ones?

[I-position mapping; repeat as needed]:

> What I-position have you mapped? What have you labelled it as? Is it internal or external?

> > Why? Tell me about it.

> > > How dominant is this I-position? How often is it present? When is it used?

> > > Where is it used?

> > > Does it evoke any thoughts?

> > > Does it evoke any feelings or emotions?

[Repeat for each internal/external I-position. Approx. five to six].

Now you have finished mapping your I-positions, what are your overall thoughts on your positioning?

Can you see yourself in this I-position map? Why is that?

Can you see any links between any of the I-positions that you have mapped out?

In our first interview, you said that you said accountability was [summarise participant thoughts]. Look again at your I-positions. What would you say about them in relation to accountability and accountability methods?

Do accountability methods do anything to your I-positions in any way?

Would you like to say/speak about anything else/ask any questions?

Explain next steps/reflective diary.

Thank and close.

Interview 3: Framework *(4 to 6 weeks after interview 2)*

Welcome/confirm verbal consent for the audio/visual recording of the interview/take any questions.

After reading the transcript from your second interview, did you have any additional or clarifying comments that you wanted to make? Please describe/explain.

It was really interesting reading your transcript after the second interview. After re-reading them yourself, could you tell me/clarify/go into more detail about _____

Do you see what you said about _____ any differently after re-reading it?

Have you felt any of your I-positions when teaching/in school over the past few weeks? Which ones? Describe and explain them to me.

Have you seen or identified any of your colleagues' I-positions when teaching/in school over the past few weeks? Which ones? Describe and explain them to me.

Thank you for sending me across your reflective diary. *[Interviewer to select interesting, surprising, unexpected or contrasting data from the reflective diary for the participant to then describe and explain in further detail; opportunities to probe/elaborate. Refer to I-positions throughout].*

Talk me through a typical day in your classroom.

Has teaching changed since you first joined the profession? How/why?

Would you describe yourself as an *'experienced teacher?'* Why/why not?

What makes someone *'experienced?'*

What kind of I-positions would you expect them to have?

Do you know any teachers who have remained in teaching for as long as you have? Tell me about them.

What kind of I-positions can you identify in them?

Why do many teachers stay in the profession do you think?

Do any of those reasons that you gave just now align with why you have stayed in teaching?

What other reasons have influenced you to stay in teaching?

Are there any I-positions that specifically stand out to you as helping you stay in teaching? Explain.

Are there any I-positions that specifically stand out to you as making it challenging to remain in teaching? Explain.

[Repeated question on purpose following I-position discussion]: What other reasons have influenced you to stay in teaching?

Would you like to say/speak about anything else/ask any questions?

Explain next steps now all three interviews are complete/reflective diary.

Thank and close.

Appendix 2 – Reflective Journal Guidance

Reflective Journal Guidance

Don't worry too much about following certain 'rules' for your reflective journal; it is your journal, and I am interested in learning from your daily experiences in school.

However, to get you started, thinking and writing, you might want to follow the guidance below. For each *'thing*'* you wish to write about, have a go at following this guide:

1 Event	• When and where did the event happen? • Who was there? • What did you want to happen? • What did you and the other people do? What happened? • What did you/others contribute to the situation? (Positive or negative).
2 Feelings	• What were you thinking about during the situation? • What were you feeling during the situation? • What do you think other people were feeling about the situation? • What do you think other people feel now? • What do you think about the situation now? • How do you feel now?
3 Learning	• What was the outcome of the situation? • Did it go well? Why? • What was good or bad about the experience? • What sense have you made from the situation? • Have you learnt/realised/understood anything?

Don't feel obliged to follow each question in order if you do not want to. Instead, answer questions that 'jump out' to you about whatever it is that you are wishing to write about. Use the table above as a guide.

* Remember the focus to enter into your journal about is accountability measures. But, do feel free to consider wider school *'things,'* that could include: events/things that happen, lessons, meetings, conversations with colleagues, children or parents, feelings you have and things that are making you think.

If you have any queries or wish to clarify anything, don't hesitate to contact me at nathan.douglas@mail.bcu.ac.uk or 0121 675 9744

Appendix 3 – Participant Information Sheet

BIRMINGHAM CITY University

December 2021
Version 2

Invitation to participate in research

Dear Primary School Teacher,

I am recruiting some qualified primary school teachers to be voluntary participants for a research project that is starting soon. The purpose of this information sheet is to inform you about the project so that you can decide if you would like to be a part of it, or not. If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you.

What is this research called?	'Primary School Teacher Retention and Attrition in the 2020s: Neoliberal Influences on Experienced Teachers' Professional Identity in a Dynamic Educational Climate.'
Why are you doing this research?	I would like to find out what you think it is like to be a primary school teacher in England, and what has influenced you to stay in teaching, despite the busy lifestyle that can come with being a teacher. I am specifically interested in your thoughts and opinions about accountability measures, and what experiences you have had with them in your teaching career. I want you to help me to understand how you identify as a teacher, what your professional identity is like, and where accountability measures sit within your day-to-day practice.
What are your research questions?	*1) What do experienced primary school teachers understand accountability measures to be and how necessary do they believe the measures are?* *2a) How do teachers describe their sense of professional identity in light of accountability measures?* A secondary question arises from research question 2a: *2b) To what extent do accountability measures that occur in school influence experienced primary school teachers' sense of professional identity?* *3) What do experienced primary school teachers understand to be the contributing factors that have influenced them to remain in teaching?*
Why do you want me to take part?	I am searching for people who: • Are qualified teachers, working full-time in an English primary school. • Have taught consecutively for at least six years in English primary schools. If you meet this criteria, and are willing to give up some of your time voluntarily, then I am very interested in finding out your thoughts, feelings, ideas and opinions for my research into what it is like to be a primary school teacher in England.
Do I have to take part?	No, definitely not. Taking part in this research is completely voluntary and if you do not wish to participate, then that is fine. There will be no consequences if you do not wish to take part.
If I want to take part, what do you expect of me?	If you wish to take part in this research, then there will be two ways that I'll working with you to gather your ideas and thoughts in this research: 1. Three interviews. 2. Reflective journals/diaries. *Interviews* I will invite you to take part in three interviews, each separated by a period of approximately one month. I anticipate that each interview will last approximately one hour.

	Interviews will take place online, via MS Teams at a mutually convenient time. Each interview will be recorded visually and audially. I will transcribe the interviews and you will have the opportunity to read the interview transcript and provide further comments if you would like to. *Reflective journals/diaries* I will also ask you to write into a reflective journal/diary a few times in between each interview about your experiences in school. I will provide you with some guidance on the kinds of things/topics I'd like you to write about.
What will the interviews be like?	The interviews will be set up to be a relaxed conversation between you and me. They will take place outside of the school day on MS Teams and each interview will be recorded visually and audially. I will be asking you some questions about teaching, and asking you to talk to me about your experiences as a class teacher.
What will the reflective journal be like?	The reflective journal will be a chance for you to think further about some of the things we have spoken about in the interview and write up your thoughts. You will have the choice to write with a book and pen, or on a computer. I will have a read of your journals before the next interview.
I want to take part in just one part of the research, is that OK?	Thank you for your interest in some of my research however, unfortunately, I am looking to recruit people who are willing to participate in all three of the interviews and writing in the reflective journals.
I want to take part in the research, but I don't want to be recorded on MS Teams.	Thank you for your interest in my research. However, the interviews need to be visually and audially recorded. I want able to have everything that you say so that I can transcribe the interviews afterwards. This is an important part of the methods used in this research. If you decide to voluntarily take part in this research, then when you participate in the research, they will be visually and audially recorded. I will remind you about this at the start of each of the interviews.
Are there any benefits for me?	Being given the opportunity to openly talk and write about the professional identity or identities that you think that you have, and what they are like, might help you to reflect on wider classroom practice, which is always encouraged in schools and for the profession in general. As well as that, some people, who have used reflective journals/diaries before, have said that they bring about some advantages for the writers, including: increased self-awareness, better problem-solving, gaining new insights, understanding things better, a sense of catharsis and an improvement in classroom pedagogy. Of course, this is no guarantee. You will also be adding valuable insights and opinions into the educational field.
Are there any risks for me?	As we will be discussing your identity, experiences and opinions, you may at some point become upset, embarrassed or distressed if we are talking about something very personal to your life. Of course, every step has been taken to minimise these risks for you; for example, by piloting the questions beforehand. The risks are still a possibility and so there is a range of professional support available, and you will be provided with the details of this support if you wish to participate in the research. During the interviews, you may pause or stop the interview at any time if you wish to. You can also choose to not answer certain questions. You can also withdraw from the research completely at any time, should you wish, with no repercussions on you if you decide to do this.
If I take part in this research, will you know who I am?	Yes, I will know who you are. This is for two reasons: 1. Should you wish to withdraw from the research, I will need to know who to exclude from the data. 2. You will need to provide me with your name and contact email address to participate in the research and take part in the online interviews. 3. Your camera will need to be turned on in the online interviews. Please note, that you shall be anonymous in any sharing of findings (your name and the school name will not be used). When the findings are shared, individual teachers will not be identifiable.
Will my data be protected?	Yes. During this research, data will be protected under the Data Protection Act 2018. Electronic data will be stored in encrypted, password protected devices on a secure server. I will have access to this data during the research and will share relevant parts with my supervisors only. In-line with Birmingham City University policy, this data will be kept for five years, after which it will be securely deleted. If you wish to raise concerns about how your personal data is used, you can contact the Data Protection Officer on informationmanagement@bcu.ac.uk or 0121 331 5288 or Data Protection Officer, Information

	Management Team, Birmingham City University, University House, 15 Bartholomew Row, Birmingham, B5 5JU.
	You can also complain directly to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, further information available at www.ico.org.uk if you have a complaint about how your data is used.
What will happen to the research that I contribute to?	The findings of this research will be written up in the form of a doctoral thesis and will be presented at conferences. You will be provided with a summary of the research findings. All participants will be anonymised so that no individual or the school are identifiable.
What rights do I have if I participate in this research?	Firstly, you have the right to say no. You do not have to participate in this research and it is your choice whether you do or don't. You also have the right to change your mind. If you take part in any stage of the research and then decide you don't want your data to be used, you can withdraw your data from this research up until all data has been collected and anonymised. You can withdraw simply by letting me know (see contact details below). If you take part in any part of the research process, you have until **Friday 1st July 2022** to withdraw. Withdrawing any part of your responses/data within this time frame will not result in any prejudice or consequence. Please note that your responses/data will not be able to be withdrawn after the cut-off date, which is when all of the data has been collected and anonymised. If you withdraw from the research, your data will be securely deleted. As a participant in this research, you will be anonymous. Your name and the name of the school will not be used at all.
Is this your research?	Yes, this is my research. I am, however, being supervised by: Dr. Stephen Griffin (Senior Lecturer at Birmingham City University) stephen.griffin@bcu.ac.uk Dr. Shannon Ludgate (Deputy Course Leader at Birmingham City University) shannon.ludgate@bcu.ac.uk Please do contact either of the above if you have any questions about this research. Dr. Griffin and Dr. Ludgate both have a clear insight into this study as they have supervised me since I began designing it.
Is this research being funded?	No, this research is part of my studies to gain the qualification Doctor of Education (EdD) at Birmingham City University and is not being funded.
Are you being paid for this research?	No, I am not being paid to carry out this research. This research is part of my studies to gain the qualification Doctor of Education (EdD) at Birmingham City University.
What do I do if I have a complaint about this research?	Please address your complaint to: HELS_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk
How can I contact you?	You can contact me with the following methods: • Email: nathan.douglas@mail.bcu.ac.uk • Work telephone: 0121 675 9744
What do I do if I would like to take part?	Please note that national statutory safeguarding policies and procedures will be adhered to at all times if you take part in any part of this research process, specifically: • Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021) • Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) • What to do if you're worried a child is being abused: Advice for practitioners (2015) Please ask me any questions to clarify any uncertainties that you may have or any extra information you may require. Then, if you would like to participate, please read, complete and sign the attached consent form and return to me by **Friday 7th January 2022.**

Appendix 4 – Participant Debrief Sheet

Debriefing Sheet

Thank you very much for participating in my research. I appreciate your time and input. Use this debriefing sheet to contact me, answer any queries you have and access any support, if you wish to.

Do I have to continue taking part?

Absolutely not, continuing to participate in my research is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time up to Friday 1st July 2022 by contacting me.

What do I need to do now?

Please enter into your reflective journal about your experiences in school. Remember, you can write about day-to-day goings-on, moments that make you think and things that we spoke of in the interview.

How can I contact you?

If you have any queries, want to provide feedback or wish to withdraw your consent and stop taking part in my research, please contact me at: nathan.douglas@mail.bcu.ac.uk or 0121 675 9744.

Where can I access support?

There are a range of organisations that you can access support from, should you want to:

- www.mind.org.uk provides advice and support for mental health worries and anxieties
- www.mentalhealth.org.uk supports positive mental health in the workplace
- www.educationsupport.org.uk and www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk both support mental health specifically for teachers in schools

How can I contact your supervisors?

Dr. Stephen Griffin (Senior Lecturer at Birmingham City University) stephen.griffin@bcu.ac.uk
Dr. Shannon Ludgate (Deputy Course Leader at Birmingham City University) shannon.ludgate@bcu.ac.uk

How do I raise concerns?

Please contact HELS_Ethics@bcu.ac.uk with your concerns:

How do I raise concerns about how my data is used?

If you wish to raise concerns about how your personal data is used, you can contact the Data Protection Officer on informationmanagement@bcu.ac.uk or 0121 331 5288 or Data Protection Officer, Information Management Team, Birmingham City University, University House, 15 Bartholomew Row, Birmingham, B5 5JU.
You can also complain directly to the Information Commissioner at Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF, further information available at www.ico.org.uk if you have a complaint about how your data is used.