



# Juggling and struggling – walking the teaching tightrope



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## Introduction

Teacher attrition has been a concern in England, and other countries, for many years. Research indicates that up to 50% of teachers leave the profession within five years of joining<sup>1,4,6</sup>.

High levels of teacher turnover consume economic resources that can be used elsewhere<sup>5</sup>. Attrition also leads to cultural instability in school and an impairment of student learning experience<sup>4</sup>. In addition, it is harmful to student achievement<sup>2,8</sup>.

### Bucket Analogy

The perpetual recruitment of teachers without a focus on retaining existing teachers will prove unsuccessful<sup>6</sup>. Something needs to be done to stop the leaks! Discovering teacher views on attrition can help to plug the gaps in the bucket.



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## Methodology

Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT)<sup>3</sup> was the chosen inductive methodology for this research. CGT has a constructivist ontology – a belief that knowledge is socially constructed and that multiple realities exist<sup>7</sup>. Through its interpretive epistemology, it acknowledges researcher involvement, at the very least in interpreting the data, the researcher themselves is subjective, not an objective observer.

Within this methodology, visual methods were employed to allow the participant power in the process. These were followed by semi-structured interviews.

At the end of the data collection process, initial findings were presented back to participants in a visual form, as a way of member checking which mirrored their process.

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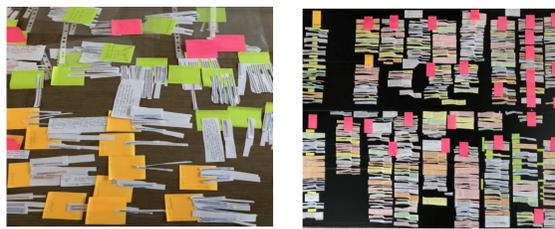
## The Project

Participants, either current or former teachers, with six or more years experience in the profession, were asked to create a visual representation of 'life as a teacher' in advance of a semi-structured interview.



Examples of participant visual representations 'life as a teacher'

Following each interview, transcripts were then assigned initial codes using gerunds or in-vivo codes where possible<sup>3</sup> and the constant comparison process continued as focused codes emerged and new data was compared with existing data and codes. After initial work with codes by hand, using post its and plastic wallets, 1,200 codes were sorted and grouped onto large boards under tentative focused codes and categories.



Sorting codes manually – from post its and plastic wallets to large boards

Memo making and diagramming started early in the research process and continued through data collection into analysis.

"You're doing so much; you've got so much constantly whizzing around in your head...You're constantly juggling..."

"That would make me feel really bad...if I hadn't prepared for an observation or I hadn't gone the extra mile on things..."

"It was quite hectic really...you might be working for long hours even when you get home for the weekend."

"It's about making a difference...if every suggestion is knocked down you just think 'what's the point?'"

Participant quotes from interview transcripts

## Future direction

Future work will outline the means by which participants made meaning of their experiences which were commonly through use of figurative language. There will be an emphasis on reflecting retention strategies suggested by participants.

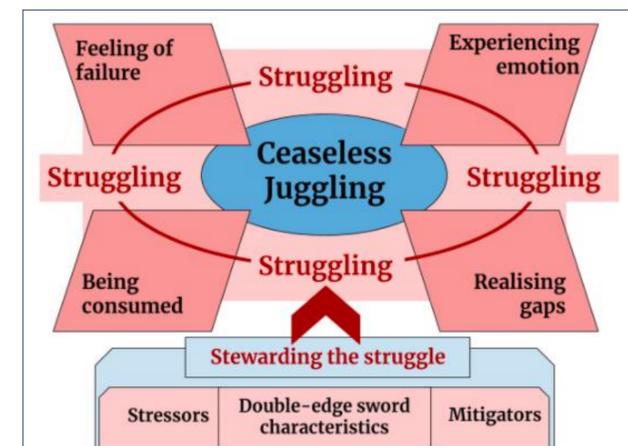
## Findings

All participants discussed undertaking wide ranging roles, encompassing a variety of tasks within each, as part of their job as a teacher. This 'ceaseless juggling' leads to a pervasive struggle to manage as a teacher, characterised by life outside teaching becoming consumed by work; an emergence of gaps between the perception and realities of teaching; an experiencing of adverse emotion and an overall feeling of failure. This feeling of failure is underscored by time pressure leading to a cycle of 'just managing' or 'doing just enough', being unable to meet own expectations and the persistent belief that tasks could have always been completed to a higher standard than they were.



Visual representation of findings for sharing/member checking with participants

The struggle is compounded by stressors such as judgement from members of the public; parental attitudes; lack of leadership support; a multitude of differing leadership failures; a difficult school culture, in the eyes of the participants. Mitigators such as finding ways to cope; entering teaching with realistic expectations; a supported NQT year and having useful personal characteristics, attitudes and skills can work to relieve some of the experienced struggle.



Theoretical diagram showing the core category and sub-categories

## Acknowledgements

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