Embedding Therapeutic Training in Teacher Education: building resilience in teachers

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Abstract

Early career teachers are under considerable pressure and are expected to adjust quickly to the complex and demanding role of teaching. The percentage of teachers who leave the profession within the first five years is concerning (Carlyle and Woods, 2002; Wilhelm et al., 2000). This study researched the emotional effects on the teaching and personal lives of early career teachers and was funded by Loughborough University Design Education Research Group. We employed a mixed methods approach. A pre questionnaire ascertained early career teachers' school experiences and the consequences (if any) on their personal lives. In response to this, 44 teachers in four different schools were offered six hours of therapeutic training. A follow-up questionnaire and group interviews considered the impact of the training on practice.

Key findings indicated that therapeutic training was beneficial for normalising many of the concerns raised. It offered an opportunity to share situations within a group which improved teachers' self- awareness and their awareness of others. The main conclusions revealed the deep physical and emotional exhaustion experienced by these teachers. The impact of the therapeutic training appeared to be extremely positive. This suggests it could be a significant area to be covered during a teacher education course to build resilience to sustain teachers in the profession.

Key words

Teacher well-being; therapeutic training; resilience; retention; emotions.

Introduction

On both a national and international scale, teachers play a crucial role in shaping, educating and supporting the lives of children. Much attention has been given to considering mental health problems of children (Underdown, 2007). However, it is important to acknowledge that the professionals working in schools may also be affected. Defining the emotional well-being of teachers relates to them demonstrating sound self-esteem, feeling of self-worth and contributing positively to their school environment (Underdown, 2007). If young

people are to be emotionally well, their teachers must be able to monitor their own well-being and promote good mental health in their students.

After committing to, and completing, an intense teacher training course, Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) are expected to quickly adjust to a new environment and carry out an increasingly complex and demanding role. The requirement to be a 'professional' (this on a simple level to be explained by considering four domains of teaching responsibility being: planning and preparation of subject material; providing an appropriate environment conducive for learning; engagement of pupils; roles outside of the classroom such as working alongside colleagues and reporting to parents (Danielson, 2007)) could be daunting. Therefore, a statutory induction process (Teaching and Higher Education Act, 1998) was introduced for NQTs during which they must show competence against a set of standards. Support from an induction tutor and a 10% reduction in timetable were also compulsory. In 2001, the Department for Education and Skills piloted an Early Professional Development scheme for second and third year teachers; however this was not continued.

A concern within the teaching profession in England is the large number of NQTs who fail to take up teaching posts, or who leave the profession within five years of completing their initial teacher training (Carlyle and Woods, 2002). A study by Wilhelm et al. (2000) followed a cohort of teachers and revealed that those who left the profession did so within the first five years of teaching. A study by Troman (2000) could provide some suggestions explaining why teachers may leave the profession: behaviour of pupils, pressure of school life concerning planning and marking, or politics within a school setting.

Statistics confirm that stress, anxiety and depression are most commonly reported by the teaching profession in the United Kingdom (double the level compared to other occupations) (Office for National Statistics, 2006) and stress (defined as '…threatening circumstances that elicit negative emotions' (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996:339) in particular is a reason why half of teachers would consider leaving the profession (You Gov, 2007). This is not a new issue in education; stress has been acknowledged as a feature of contemporary life and is accepted in educational research (Troman, 2000). This paper focuses on a small-scale action research project focussing on early career teachers which was undertaken in four different schools and the consequences and impact on their teaching following six hours of therapeutic training.

Teacher Traits
Most of those entering the profession do so with an initially positive and enthusiastic attitude towards children. The complex and multi layered interaction between teacher and pupil is very demanding and can impact on a teacher's personal life. The daily pressure of the role may lead some teachers to neglect their own well-being, or fail to recognise the need for their own way of being to

be secure and balanced for the benefit of those students in their care. There are many additional tasks to be undertaken at the end of the school working hours, such as marking pupils' work, planning assessments or report writing. Teachers simply 'cope' during term time (Day et al., 2007). An enthusiastic new teacher can be shocked by the culture of their school and can experience hostility amongst staff, negative attitudes towards the school leadership team, poor teacher collaboration and teacher apathy (Peterson, 2002). New challenges within the classroom include the full responsibility of leading a class through the whole academic year and within that the continuous assessment and monitoring can be overwhelming.

Teachers' Emotions

Emotions are at the heart of a teacher's everyday life and 'play a crucial role in communication and engagement between people' (Demetriou et al., 2009:449). Oatley and Jenkins (1996:96) define an emotion as '…caused by a person consciously or unconsciously evaluating an event as relevant to a concern (a goal) that is important…the core of an emotion is readiness to act and the prompting of plans…an emotion is usually experienced as a distinctive type of mental state, sometimes accompanied or followed by bodily changes, expressions, actions. Teachers can experience both positive and negative emotions daily depending on the pupils' behaviour, colleagues, subject material teaching, and/or the amount of marking/reporting. The negative emotions can be due to feelings of frustration toward staff or pupils, disappointment in pupil achievement, lack of support from colleagues at school, disillusion when day-to-day routines do not live up to expectation, anger towards policy makers, colleagues or pupils and fear of being judged or observed by colleagues, Ofsted or parents (Kelchtermans, 1996). Therefore, teachers need encouragement or are in danger of becoming deprofessionalised (Jeffrey and Woods, 1996).

Personal Satisfaction

Carl Rogers (1983) was concerned for the personal welfare and growth of individuals in the caring professions. Rogers' opinion was that '…the qualities and conditions most effective in enabling counsellors to support personal growth and emotional health in their clients were the same as those most likely to encourage growth and learning in schools' (cited in Braine, 2008:14). Rogers used the term 'core conditions' to refer to empathy, congruence and unconditional positive regard which he described as being essential for a healthy relationship, which would encourage personal growth. In terms of education he tended to refer to these conditions as 'facilitative'. 'Teachers can improve their facilitative… attitudes with as little as 15 hours of training' (Rogers, 1978: 88) and hence this research project explores the impact of a shorter term of therapeutic training, based on this advice.

Why a Therapeutic Approach?

Research by Maslow (1970), Rogers (1961) and Schmuck & Schmuck (1974)

consider the need for teachers, and more importantly schools, to be humanistic. The interpersonal relationships encountered in schools form a 'human culture' (Schmuck and Schmuck, 1974). The therapeutic training approach should equip the teacher to understand the underlying motives for their behaviour, and also colleague and pupil behaviour. After reviewing existing counselling courses, the humanistic psychology aspects covered (work by Maslow, and Rogers for example) focus on the teacher or pupil experiences of fulfilment, creativity (in their work) and choice (with their emotional problems). Psychotherapy training and counselling courses were also reviewed.

Research Questions
The following questions were addressed in this research:

1. What emotions are experienced by early career teachers within their working lives?
     a) What are the rewarding aspects of your teaching so far?
     b) Are there any difficult areas experienced in teaching so far?
2. What is the effect of six hours of therapeutic training on their daily practice?
     a) In which area(s) of your teaching has the training had an impact?
     b) Has your work-life balance changed since the training?

Methods
This project involved investigating whether therapeutic training would change or impact on teachers' lives. This research was underpinned by an interpretative approach as it was '…interested in people and the way they interrelate – what they think and how they form ideas' (Thomas, 2009: 75). This was an evaluative case study as its purpose was to provide teacher educators with information to enable development of their teacher training programmes (Stenhouse, 1985:50 cited in Bassey, 1999:28). This case study provides an insight but due to the small scale will not enable generalisable results. Educational research of this nature may also highlight exceptions due to the complexity of each individual teacher in the sample therefore Bassey (1999) describes any generalisations to be made as 'fuzzy'. However, comparison to other studies will be made in the discussion section. The appropriate sub-methods in this case study were to answer the research questions were pre and post questionnaires and semi-structured, group interviews (Gillham, 2000). This 'mixed method' approach (Thomas, 2009), mainly qualitative, was deemed necessary to establish more robust research outcomes that could be validated through triangulation of the empirical data with relevant published research findings (Denscombe, 2010). Diary exercises would have been useful data; however, the effort by already busy teachers was deemed inappropriate (Cohen et al., 2007). Comparison after the training would largely focus on use of the content within their classroom and changes to their behaviour and therefore well-being in their everyday life. Participation in all aspects of the project was on a voluntary basis, based on

informed consent and with the right to withdraw at any time clearly outlined. The training was undertaken by a psychotherapist, not a teacher within the participating schools. Caution must be outlined as the psychotherapist did work at one of the schools; however their role was primarily to support pupils and to not assess teaching, or teachers. The interviews could be seen as biased as they were led by the psychotherapist; however, triangulating the findings with the questionnaires that were carried out by an independent researcher should provide a clearer picture.

Four different secondary schools participated in the research. The sample was opportunistic and provided a variety of schools both independent/state and rural/urban. The number of participants for the training was 17 males and 27 females with teaching experience ranging from 1-4 yrs.

The research project crossed two academic years. The training took place in the Autumn and Spring terms, interviews at the end of the Summer term, and post-questionnaires the following Autumn. As with many long term projects, whilst waiting to evaluate the impacts of the action, some participants moved schools or were unable to complete the post-questionnaire.

Initial questionnaire – N = 22 - this was designed by the researchers to enable responses to answer the research questions. Before the training commenced, participants were asked to complete a voluntary questionnaire to reflect on their experiences of teaching so far. Questions related to: rewarding aspects, difficult aspects and settling into the school; and impact on one's self: changes in seeing family/friends, eating habits, sleep patterns, leisure time. Participants were asked to indicate how many hours they worked each day and to describe their experience as a whole in response to a range of positive (happy, boosted confidence, fun, friendly, rewarding, satisfying) and negative phrases (stressful, exhausting, isolated, daunting, overwhelming, challenging). A final question asked if teaching had so far matched their expectations and they were asked to justify their yes/no response.

Training involved: Despite the recommended 15hrs of training by Rogers (1961), when discussing the project with Headteachers, six hours was negotiated as time for teachers to commit to this project without impacting on their after school commitments. Therefore, six hours (3 x 2 hours) in a small group after school were arranged. Group numbers differed at each school and these were: 11 (sch A), 9 (sch B), 12 (sch C) and 12 (sch D). All participants volunteered (all NQTs and Recently Qualified Teachers (RQTs) were invited in each school to participate). The training was based on educating teachers on: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970), Eight Relational Needs (Erskine, 1998), Transactional analysis of ego states (Berne, 1961), Rogers' Core Conditions (1961) and basic psychology of why a degree of counselling skills are required by teachers in their teaching and pastoral role. The latter was based on research by Kottler and

Kottler (1993) who stress that teachers are not counsellors however, they do need rudimentary counselling skills for the multiple roles expected of them.

Broadly, session one involved an overview of mental health issues in the current psychosocial climate; current climate statistics of the educational/mental/ emotional situation and coverage of Rogers' Core Conditions. Session two focussed on Models including Transactional Analysis Ego States (work by Berne) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, whilst session three included case study examples and what teachers can do (based on the work of Rogers, Erskine and Berne).

*Follow-up questionnaire*s (N = 12) were used to track the short/ long-term effects of the intervention of six hours therapeutic training. Questions included: What key things have you remembered from the training? What, if anything, has been helpful from the training in your work as a teacher? What, if anything, has been unhelpful in your teaching? Following the training, what has been the impact (if any) on your classroom teaching, your form tutor role, your personal life, your relationships with colleagues? An opportunity was also provided for participants to add any additional comments relating to any of the questions.

Follow-up group interviews were conducted to probe deeper into, and to clarify some of, the questionnaire responses. These were conducted at each school and comprised of 4 (sch A), 5 (sch B), 8 (sch C) and 4 (sch D) self-selected volunteers at each school. Questions included: What key things have you remembered from the training? What, if anything, has been helpful from the training in your work as a teacher? What, if anything, has been unhelpful in your teaching? Following the training, what has been the impact (if any) on your classroom teaching, your form tutor role, your personal life, your relationships with colleagues?

Results

The initial questionnaire findings revealed that the early career teachers worked between 9-12+ hours per day, with the average number of hours worked being 10.8. Table 1. highlights that the new teachers worked a considerable number of hours, with some of the NQTs working for 11 or more than 12 hours a day, equating to at least 55 or 60 hours per week respectively. As teachers progressed in their career, the mode was 11 hours per day in the second year of teaching which reduced to 10 hours per day in the third year of teaching.

Table 1. Hours worked by early career teachers.

	Number of Years in Teaching

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Number of Hours per day	1	2	3	4
9		1		
10	1	2	5	
11	3	5	1	1
12			1	
12+	3			

The responses to rewarding moments, difficulties, settled in and matched expectations were categorised into three groups: rewarding aspects, difficult aspects and how well trainees had settled into school. The teachers revealed a number of both positive and negative aspects to their work. Rewarding aspects included: teaching being a varied job; pupils success in their learning; specialist subject related; pastoral; professional development; extra-curricular and relating to comments from pupils' parents. Difficult aspects included: lack of time; difficult pupil behaviour; exhausting; academic challenges; pupils' parents; workload; school's expectations and report writing. Settled into the school responses included: well; happy to talk to colleagues; took time to settle in; OK. For responses to whether the school had matched expectations, 70% reported yes; 5% no; whilst 15% reported yes and no.

Comments from staff related to matching expectations and some examples of those that felt 'yes' teaching matched their expectations said the following:

'I am enjoying it. It is rewarding so I am more willing to work long hours.'

'My inner well-being and job satisfaction are big plus points.'

'Every day does present new challenges and is varied.'

'I love everything that I am doing but would like to create more of a work/life balance.'

Those that felt teaching had not matched with their expectations expressed the following:

'I work longer hours than expected but enjoy it also.'

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'Before I started teaching I didn't realise the amount of work and effort that goes into teaching. I also didn't realise all the added pressure that goes with the job.'

Some described that it was a 'yes' and 'no' mix commenting:
'I was aware of the heavy workload, however it has been even more than I anticipated. It has however crossed my mind both to leave this school and to leave the profession so I can have a much better work/life balance.'

'I never realised how tiring and challenging the job can be at times'.

Responses surrounding the changes to their everyday life are summarised in Figure 1. In all descriptions the teachers' responses of 'yes' were supported by explanations that for example there was a decline in exercise time, leisure time and activities (including family) and more disturbed sleep.
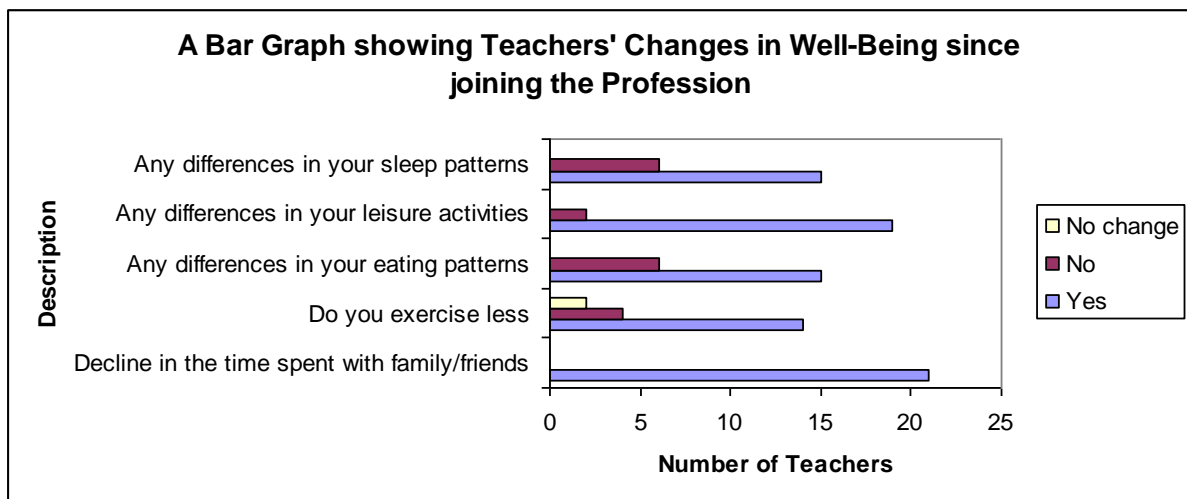

Figure 1. Teachers' changes in lifestyle since joining the profession.

There was a mixture of responses to how teachers described their experiences to date. There were many positive points shared surrounding satisfying and feeling happy in teaching (see Figure 2.). Also, highly rated by teachers was the rewarding nature of the job. There were also some negative areas highlighted. The most commonly reported experience by the teachers was feeling exhausted (see Figure 3). Teaching was also said to be challenging, both emotionally and in relation to work load associated with pastoral aspects, planning and reporting.
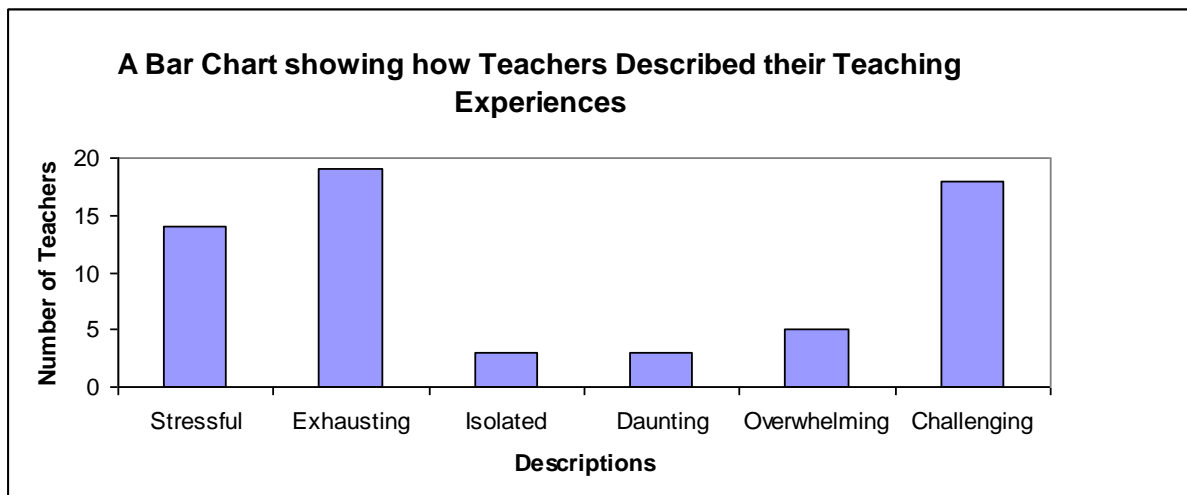
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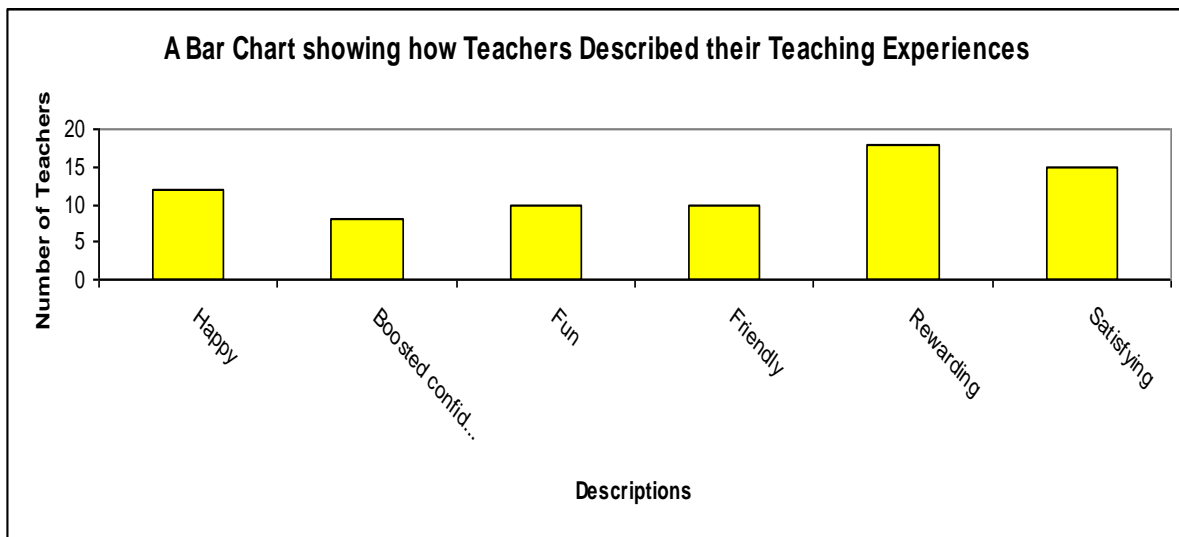
Figure 2. How teachers described their teaching experiences to date (Positives).

Figure 3. How teachers described their teaching experiences to date (Negatives).

The main findings from the four separate group interviews were able to be categorised into four groups: Personal; Pastoral pupil-centred; Classroom; Colleagues. The key findings to emerge from each category were as follows:

Personal (all schools)
✓ The training was personally reassuring. Participants found themselves feeling more relaxed about things, for example things they worried about were common to all in the group hence normalised the emotional material in the job.

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Pastoral Pupil-centred (schools B and C)
✓ The fact that teachers were not expected to fix everything and that children's problems were not their responsibility as such (once they had acted lawfully if necessary).

Classroom (all schools)
✓ In the classroom, the participants understood better the importance of boundaries, such as being as calm as possible, learning children's names, being positive and why these things were important from the depth of the psychological understanding now acquired.
✓ Trying to speak 'adult to adult' with a child so that they were not patronising a child to exacerbate childish behaviour. They had learnt that there would be a positive outcome from offering a child respect in an adult way.
✓ Over time they had realised they had become more confident in interacting with children due to a deeper understanding of what psychological needs they may have.

Colleagues (schools A, B and D)
✓ When working with colleagues, the training reinforced that if other staff were in a bad mood or intimidating them (the inexperienced teacher) in some way that it was not about them so comments were taken less personally. Many had also formed a 'protective layer' to cope with this.

✓ The training provided a sense of community for the group that participated together and helped the teachers form a network of support and friendship.

The four areas identified were shared by most of the participants which suggests that the training environment had benefits for each teacher's teaching, their relationship with other colleagues, the pupils in their care and in their personal life. Caution must be expressed due to the positivity of the findings relating solely to the support network generated and not on the actual theory and training provided.

The post–questionnaire findings (though completed by a small number and therefore must be treated with caution) reinforced those from the interviews. Leisure activities and time with family/friends were areas in the teachers' personal lives that had declined since teaching. All had taken away different aspects of the training into their teaching, for example, talking to the adult in the pupil; knowing pupils' stages of development and understanding their behaviour; shame being a powerful emotion to be used and knowing that often you cannot fix a problem. Nearly all stated a desire to think about the pupil and the relationship, not simply subject knowledge. Two of the teachers did report

that they did not find the training useful or helpful. All teachers also felt the job was exhausting and stressful at times; however, they were all satisfied and felt rewarded with the profession.

Discussion

Even though an NQT has a 90% timetable compared to other staff (Teacher Development Agency, 2012), the amount of planning, marking and new daily responsibilities, such as form tutoring, are demanding. Early career teachers are also continuing to learn about the school routine, policies and facing new interactions and situations with pupils, staff and parents. The research findings (from both the questionnaires and interview) clearly show the exhaustion felt by the participants. Also, the majority of the teachers reported a change in their life style relating to their 'free' time decreasing and their 'normal' activities changing to become work-related. This is surely not helpful for their well-being in the long term and may result in decreased teacher effectiveness. The teachers in this study were working long hours to support the children in their care, to deliver changing curricula and '...many teachers are pedalling against a policy current that appears so strong that teaching has become literally heartbreaking and soul destroying work' (Harris, 2007:2). This exhaustion was evident in the teachers' responses in this study who noted that they were experiencing a heavy workload and that they had not realised the effort and challenge involved with the profession.

The questionnaires and interviews have reported that therapeutic training has been beneficial for these early career teachers. Therefore this could be recognised as an important area to be included within teacher training programmes not only to develop pastoral skills for working with children but also to help teachers be more in control of their emotions and more secure about their role in school. The impact in teacher training may be different; however, it would appear that some areas of the training, such as that relating to work-life balance and stress techniques would be helpful. Research conducted by HØigaard et al. (2012) concurs that early interventions related to emotional difficulty in teaching is advised. For all of the teachers involved, the group training situation enabled friendships to be formed and sharing experiences helped many to feel their problems, concerns and situations being faced on a daily basis were 'normal'. This suggests that for senior school leaders, an approach of having regular group meetings for NQTs or those with other schools nearby, could provide a secure, sharing place where experiences, such as work-life balance, could be normalised.

The results from both the questionnaires and interviews indicated that teachers need to feel valued and supported in their professional life and this responsibility lies with school leaders. '...in organisations which foster mutual respect, consultation and collaboration, intrinsic motivation is likely to be higher. School leadership teams should perhaps consider the extent of their efforts to promote

positive interpersonal relationships in their schools.' (Rhodes et al., 2004:77) Pyhalto et al. (2011:1108) concluded that the 'teacher–working-environment fit provided a functional framework for exploring the narratives of episodes that promoted teacher burnout in the complex and multilayered working environment of school'. Head teachers and senior management teams are clearly influential over their staff and if their role to nurture, develop and engage in dialogue to encourage well-being, this could be a way forward in retaining good teachers in the profession.

The therapeutic training undertaken by the teachers revealed positive outcomes; firstly from the sharing of everyday concerns regarding workload and teaching which allowed teachers to feel more at ease within their environment and their teaching self. Demetriou et al. (2009:463) supported this position:

> 'Such teachers were able to balance school life and home life and provide a fine balance and quality of reflection so that they didn't over immerse themselves in thought to the detriment of their life outside school. Teachers need to be made aware of these aspects of teaching during their Post Graduate Certificate in Education courses….so that they know exactly what they might become exposed to and whether they are suitably emotionally equipped.'

Two participants did not feel that the training was beneficial and did not see the relevance to them of mental and emotional health. However, both commented that they increased their awareness of the broadness of the topic and their general understanding although could not apply any suggestions to themselves. Thus providing these teachers with knowledge and skills on mental and emotional health for both themselves and to transfer into the profession was beneficial.

This research report suggests some implications for consideration in teacher education:

1. To improve trainee teachers' understanding in creating the right learning environment for effective teaching and pupil learning;
2. Support trainee teachers in managing difficult, disaffected or distressed pupils;
3. Give trainee teachers a level of self-awareness and self-understanding that is protective against many of the stressed inherent in the job;
4. Encourage a higher level of self-care and resilience and career longevity.
5. The teachers highlighted the importance of support from school staff, colleagues within a department and also the Head if they were to feel secure, valued and stable. This also concurs with Rhodes et al. (2004) who found that 97% of teachers acknowledged that a satisfactory aspect of the profession was based on the friendliness of other staff.

The first research question (and sub-questions) concerning the emotions of early career teachers can be answered from the responses to the questionnaire and interview responses. These teachers have reported feeling exhausted, stressed, yet rewarded and satisfied by the profession. To answer the second research question (and sub-questions), some important impacts were evident from the interviews and post-questionnaire following the therapeutic training such as how the teachers related to their colleagues and their pupils and how the training had enabled them to change their behaviour and emotions positively. This was echoed in both the post questionnaire and the group interview which might be generalisable to other early career teachers in England and their experiences (although may be limited due to the small sample).

Conclusions

The main findings from this research project reveal the deep physical and emotional exhaustion experienced by teachers during their early years of teaching. The findings indicate that the six hours of therapeutic training undertaken by teachers in their early stages of their career do seem to represent a mechanism for their survival, personal growth and building their resilience. Nearly all of the teachers reported that they were exhausted and had reduced the amount of time spent with family/friends, or participating in leisure activities due to the high number of hours required to complete school-related tasks. Evidence from both the questionnaires and interviews suggests that work-life balance remains a problem for many teachers. This resonates with the view of Rhodes et al. (2004) who state that the balance between personal life/work and the amount of time spent on administration was a dissatisfying aspect of the profession. The dynamics of the group training incorporated a sense of belonging and safe environment for the early career teachers to learn about other colleagues in their school. This therapeutic training, as Rogers (1961) predicted, needs to be made available to teachers as they are learning the profession and all who participated clearly found it beneficial to all aspects of their teaching life. Despite being less hours than Rogers suggested, some six hours of core training proved beneficial and should therefore be considered for inclusion within teacher training programmes. Teacher educators need to consider this priority area within their courses so that knowledge can be gained before the journey of teaching commences.

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