

ENABLERS AND RESTRICTORS IN NAVIGATING CAREERS IN EDUCATION IN ENGLAND. THE ROLE OF POLICY IN SUPPORTING ASPIRATIONS TO BECOME A TEACHER.

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ABSTRACT

This research article examines how some mature students can recognise and navigate educational opportunities in University Continuing Education, despite the instability and transience of educational policy and the significant individual, societal and political challenges that must be navigated to succeed. It extrapolates findings from eight individual life stories, focusing on part-time pathways for teaching assistants becoming fully qualified teachers.

This longitudinal life course enquiry includes a series of semi-structured interviews over a period of four years, which are paralleled with educational policy. Bourdieuan-based 'Careership theory' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) analyses the multi-dimensional influences of structure, agency, and culture in relation to their educational 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). The study identifies that unstable routes to reach teacher status are disproportionately experienced by those who have not accessed higher education as a young person and that the effect of short-lived educational policies creates instability for mature students embarking on non-traditional routes. Enablers and restrictors to success for the participants in the study were centred around the balance between cost and risk, guidance and access to educational career structures, and acknowledgement that disruptive life events affect people at different times in their learning lives. Common to all participants is evidence of a strong desire to be active contributors to society and the impact of the positive influence of supportive others. The findings from this study support organisation of flexible, alternative routes in University Continuing Education that are accessible across the life course.

INTRODUCTION

Increased knowledge about experiences of educational career routes is particularly pertinent at the current juncture, where there is a predicted shortage of teachers for the future (Sibieta, 2020), alongside growing concerns for the continued well-being and retention of existing staff, an issue also faced across Europe (OECD, 2019; EACEA, 2018). Whilst the government in England will offer financial incentives by 2022 (Sibieta, 2020), there is not enough exploration of how to expose untapped potential (Bovill *et al.*, 2019) and provide

effective support for lifelong learning across the workforce. The current situation is clear – the supply of teachers in England is not meeting the demand (Coughlan, 2018), with severe shortage predicted.

This longitudinal, life course study exposes the enablers and restrictors in life that real people experience, whilst emphasising the need to be cognisant of enabling ‘horizons for action’ (Hodkinson, 2008) in educational contexts. The study aimed to discover how to broaden access to teacher training courses across the life course, whilst challenging the assumption that career progression is unproblematically linear, as has been hitherto assumed in policy making. A central concern of this study was a quest to understand how typically transient government policies interjected for short-term gain are maintaining a hold on assumptions which directly affect those on non-normative routes pursuing a career through University Continuing Education. Routes for non-traditional, mid-career students to access teacher training are limited by a range of circumstances. This life course research interrogates the social, political, economic, geographic, cultural and historical influences on eight female teaching assistants (TAs) in their pursuit to achieve qualified teacher status. TA refers to classroom support for a particular teacher, though the definition of the role is inconsistent; TAs are mostly on term-time or casual contracts and 90% of part-time TAs in England are female (Office for Statistics, 2022).

The study focusses specifically on the learning lives and educational experiences of eight female TAs accessing entry level higher education as mature students, some with few qualifications, between 2006 and 2010 in England through to becoming teachers between 2012 and 2018. The time under observation was one of unprecedented government involvement, intervention and change in education in England, some of which aided this pathway, and some of which changed so rapidly that plans were seriously disrupted. The study aimed to give specific insight to how courses, with lifelong accessibility, could be organised for the effective support of career changers, whilst benefiting society. This demanded knowledge that transcended numerical data to seek evidence from lived pathways that are not experienced the way policy makers appear to assume. The study aimed to unveil the influences across their educational life course that affected their ability to never-the-less achieve their current employment position.

The central research questions were therefore focussed on how TAs negotiate a career route to teacher status, particularly in how they sustained this route over time, and in the factors that enable or restrict TAs’ agency throughout their career path.

After the identification of the participants, the following section justifies a life course methodology and describes the novel methods used to elicit the data and in analysis using Careership theory (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997). This is followed by the process of thematic analysis (Clark and Braun, 2017; Braun and Clarke, 2021) that includes visual representations of the data. The findings are then presented in terms of enablers and restrictors, with key themes emerging in time and timing, mitigating the structural affordances in facilitators to enable progress, and the importance of recognition (Honneth, 1995). The paper concludes with insights that alert policy makers to the importance of understanding individuals’ socio-cultural and agentic challenges when supporting non-traditional teacher training routes and the importance of accessible structural frameworks for this to happen.

Participants

The participants were known to the researcher through their initial part-time studies at university, as they worked as TAs in schools in the north of England. They responded to a call for an interview at a date after their teacher training was completed and they were in employment. The TAs began work as a result of the 2003-6 workforce re-modelling initiative

(DfES, 2002), which encouraged schools to use TAs to support some aspects of teaching under the 'upskilling' agenda. This policy enabled six of the eight participants in this study to acquire TA posts. Their careers prior to their TA posts were varied and included roles that were unsatisfying, or where they had reached a limit in promotion prospects. None had official careers advice, and all began in schools with voluntary work to fit around family life, with six of the eight having their own young children. Seven of the TAs began their higher education programmes through the new opportunities that arose to upskill their qualifications once in post. They all began HE studies on a Foundation Degree (FD) course (level 5), then topped-up this qualification with a BA (Hons) (level 6), and then continued on to teacher training. However, the original two teaching programmes that they had studied to reach abruptly ended in 2011 and 2012. Funding for FDs and BA (Hons) was initially available, but became increasingly difficult to access as they progressed in their studies. This situation was compounded by the significant fee rise in 2011. These participants had to adopt durability and assess finances as they frequently re-negotiated their career paths to fit with changing policy-based requirements and diminishing options.

Life course approach

Life course narrative approaches are employed to hear real voices telling us about the worlds people experience, seeing future possibilities, communicating and being more widely aware, more democratic (Plummer, 2013). They are often used to better understand humanity and change. Life histories explore how learning is felt, expressed and how it has shaped our identities at a particular place and time (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010); all of these are pertinent to this study. Plummer suggests that all stories are "patterned through cultures of inequalities" (2013, p. 8), but they are not equally heard, and findings often project beyond the stories and reveal other socially textured narratives (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

This study calls attention to the silent or tacit influences on these women's career progression in educational environments with the ability to connect individual accounts with self-awareness and broader social, political and cultural practices. Bruner's (1996) suggestion that researchers ask questions within narrative-based research to explore how local labour, education and training markets are structured is needed to understand the social, economic and political forces that constitute learning. This approach encompassed the understanding that personal narratives include public as well as private issues that occur in the context of a period of time and are experienced irrevocably in relation to social structures and power relations (Bathmaker and Harnett, 2010 after Wright Mills, 1959).

Giele and Elder's (1998) influential work on methods of life course research developed a design that bridged the relationship between macro and micro social relations and orders, compatible with this study's approach. Elder (1994) had identified four factors that determine the shape of the individual life course: historical time and geographic location, social ties to others, linked lives, personal control and variations in timing. Giele (1995) identified four elements that run parallel to Elder's themes, described as: cultural background, social integration, human agency and timing of lives.

By interrogating these elements through my research questions, I was able to get closer to examining and potentially connecting the micro, meso and macro influences on these TAs.

Longitudinal research exploring TAs' careers is sparse to non-existent. Most of the literature on the career progression of TAs in the UK was written at the height of provision for FDs during the 2000s, as higher education institutes built their programmes and were frequently concerned with transitions between FDs and top-up Honours degrees and the value of the outcomes for stakeholders (Penketh and Goddard, 2008; Dunne *et al.*, 2008; Woolhouse *et al.*, 2009). A more recent paper (Bovill *et al.*, 2019) has revived a line of thought suggesting that the 'talent' that lies in TAs is an 'untapped resource' (p. 4) that could be activated if clear

routes were made that also fit with the lives of women. This view highlights an interest and current gap in our need to learn from life experiences that influence access to and success in study for part-time students, including TAs.

Careership theory

Employing Careership theory (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997) as a framework for analysis offered a lens to expose how decisions made by individuals are enabled and restricted by relational forces in a field and, thereby, affect an individual's horizons for action (Hodkinson, 2008). The external environment and individual embodied positions and dispositions can be influenced in many ways. The possible horizons for action at any given time are highly influenced by the context: the school, college, workplace and higher education; the geographical location, social status and qualifications; and economic status.

Careership theory was intended as a thinking tool that encourages exploration of the social, structural and agential influences on career progression. This study has also used a strong temporal lens to understand how these influences work over time. Whilst not directly using a Bourdieuan lens, it is relevant to note that Bourdieu's concepts of field (social arenas of action that are coded and where one's relative position is continually in flux), habitus (tacit codes of behaviour, shared dispositions and patterns of action in a specific context) and capital (valued, symbolic exchange) underpin the Careership model (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008), which was used as a tool for analysis of data. A hitherto undertheorised aspect of Careership that Hodkinson brought to the fore in 2008 was the concept of 'horizons for action'. Careership theory was now defined as having three overlapping dimensions:

- the embodied positions and dispositions of individuals
- the relations between forces in a field and the field in which it occurs
- the life course on longitudinal pathways

METHODOLOGY

To enable qualitative exploration of the relationships between effects of policy, society and in participants' 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson, 2008), this research is compatible with life course theory in its study of social structures, social change and in individual action through life events. Inevitably relational aspects of time, agency, linked lives and social context, which are argued to be dynamics in life, ought not be ignored in any social science study (Giele and Elder, 1998).

In this study, the participants' responses were collected in narrative reflections in three semi-structured interviews across four years. The first two interviews were in the first year of the study and the third after four years.

Data collection: interviews using graphic elicitation

The first semi-structured one-hour interviews were enriched through the application of a low-directed, participant-led mapping technique, which was re-visited in the second interview. This method employed a drawing technique where the participants created their own timelines (x axis) on a large piece of paper noting key educational and life events, which were paralleled by a subjective self-assessed satisfaction curve rating (y axis). Verbal explanation of the illustration encouraged expression of personal insights that were recorded and transcribed. Key life transitions and associated feelings were noted by all participants

both in their narratives and in their hand-drawn timeline graphics.

Data analysis: graphic timeline/satisfaction diagrams

Key nodes from each of the timeline/satisfaction diagrams were identified and logged on an excel spreadsheet by date for events: birth, pre-school, infant school, junior school, high school, post-16, work, work in educational contexts, college, university, teacher training, and teacher status, so they could be collectively viewed and compared.

This illuminated the complexity of affective responses at different times. It also drew attention to the sharp dip at high school for all the participants and the high satisfaction at the point of becoming a teacher. The frequently used descriptor of 'trajectory' in life course routes and careers is "not [...] a free trajectory, but rather follows a path whose twists and turns are a result of complex interactions between a 'minded self' and an environment" (Clausen in Giele and Elder, 1998, p. 196). *Figure 2* shows unproblematic beginning and end points of these participants post school education and reaching teacher status, whereas the experiences between these points are in fact complex and experienced differently at different times in their lives, dependent on structural and individual circumstances. The collective graphic representations show the antonym of an assumed normative career 'trajectory' in all cases (*Figure 1*).

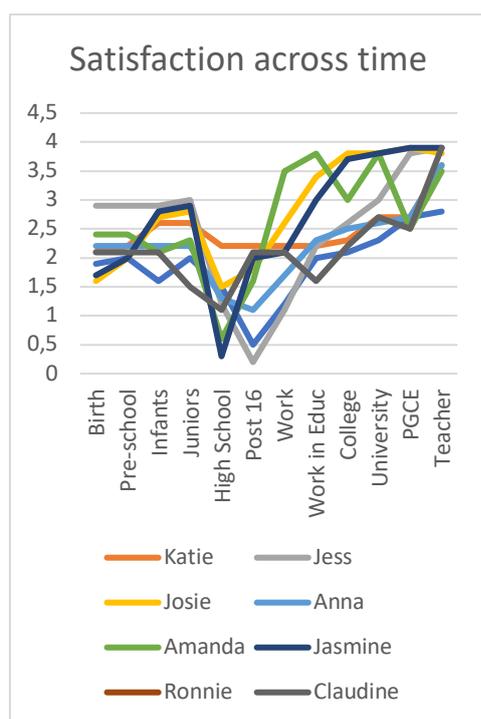


Figure 1. Detailed satisfaction across time.

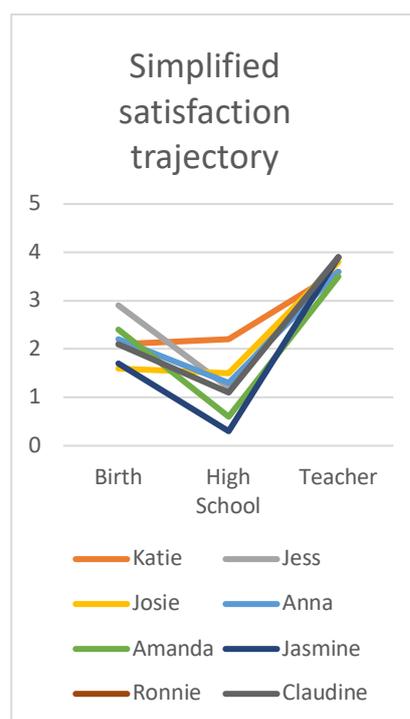


Figure 2. Simplified satisfaction trajectories.

Data analysis: mapping of policy

From 1993 onwards, change in educational policy in England was immense. By mapping policy to the participants' educational timelines, it illuminated how policy affected their horizons for action in significant ways. *Figure 3* is a simplified insight to the mapping of policy to the participants' educational experiences.

1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
									Gordon Brown			Lib/Con Coalition Gov. David Cameron					Con. Gov. David Cameron	
				2001 SENDA	2003 Workforce remodelling - 3yr initiative to reduce teachers' workload with classroom assistants							2010 Tripling of uni tuition fees			2013 Introduction of School Direct			
1998 National Childcare Strategy						2004 HE Act. Universities could charge fees up to £3000/annum from 2006							2011 Green Paper Support and Aspiration: A new approach to SEN					
1998 Teaching and HE Act - fees introduced up to £1000/annum, abolished					Foundation Degrees launched	2004 Children Act (Every Child Matters)					HE Fees rise to £3225		2011 DfE Training our next generation of outstanding teachers.					
					2003 Green paper Widening participation in HE				2006 -11 Registered Teacher Programme				2011 End of RTP	£9000/annum HE fees			2015 Fees repayment freeze at £21000	
								2006 Top-up fees effect applications to University							2012 CESC Great Teachers: Attracting, training and retaining the best			2016/17 planned end of means tested grants for HE
Graduate Teacher Programme (incl. QTS whilst working)														2012 End of GTP				
Student loan repayment base rate +1%																		2012 New £3000/annum fees begin + RPI+3% interest on student loans
						TA	Josie			BA(Hons)		PGCE		Teacher				
								TA	Katie			BA(Hons)		PGCE		Teacher		
								TA		Jess			BA(Hons)					
				TA						Anna			BA(Hons)		PGCE	Teacher		
						TA	Amanda			BA(Hons) + TA		PGCE	Teacher					
									TA	Jasmine			BA(Hons)		PGCE	Teacher		
								TA	Ronnie				BA(Hons) with QTS		Teacher			
								TA	Claudine				BA(Hons)		PGCE	Teacher		

Figure 3. Career timelines of participants paralleled with only most relevant educational policy (1998 - 2018)

Thematic analysis

Braun and Clarke’s (2021) seven step guide to analysis includes the process of data immersion, coding the data using NVivo to organise the data to meaningful groupings (themes), using graphic representations of data, reviewing, refining and defining themes, reaching a point of saturation in data, and finding relationships between themes. Clarke and Braun (2017) also confirm that key themes are not necessarily found where there are most occurrences across the data set, as may be the case in semantic analysis. The themes can be identified in the findings below.

Thematic analysis: Careership theory

Analysis of the interview transcripts and researcher- and participant-led visual representations were examined through the lens of Careership theory (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997; Hodkinson, 2008). In this case:

- Positioning in broad structural fields (recorded in timelines and interview)
- Embodied influence of the individual to their choices (from ideogram/graphic representation and interview)
- Acknowledging that not all decisions are planned or determined by identifying ‘horizons for action’ that change over time.

By employing these techniques, attention was also brought to temporal influences. For instance, the end of two teacher training programmes in 2011 and 2012 disrupted career plans until the introduction of ‘School Direct’, another teacher training programme in 2013. Entry qualifications to teacher training also changed after the participants began their HE courses.

FINDINGS: ENABLERS AND RESTRICTORS

By paralleling the participants' narratives alongside the structural and embodied contexts in which they were experienced, the accounts were pervaded by continual reference to their need to balance opportunities and risks. Each of the TAs referred to the effects of studying in their personal and familial lives. There was also a tense cost-benefit relationship between investing in longer-term career opportunities through higher education and that of 'managing it', 'finding that balance', being constantly 'on the brink' financially or exasperation in thinking that there must be 'easier ways [to make a living]'. A continual offsetting of significant personal monetary outlay and corresponding investment in time was seen through the data as necessary for the TAs to even attempt to achieve their career aims. For this, they needed significant support from others.

Effect of time

Career change decisions were affected by changes in family life and a need for employment that fitted in with that, so their choices were not technically rational career decision-making in a traditional sense. They realised they had potential and sought personal development through a desire to learn. Some were restricted geographically as to where they could go so that they remained available for school runs and childcare. The narratives reflected Colley's (2007) attention to the dimension of time in understanding women's lives in career transitions, following the proposition that women's time is used differently to men's and is experienced in "engendered and enacted social practices" (p. 427) that need to be noticed and recorded in life course histories. By focusing on the way that past and current experiences and positionings alongside future aspirations affect development over time, career routes were noted as decidedly non-linear. The women's lives, regardless of whether they had children or influences from their cultural background, were expected to include also being the main caregiver in the family; this included extended family. This unspoken expectation had a significant effect on the way time was experienced by these women.

Concurrently, in the advent of a competitive, neo-liberal society across the lifespan of these participants, there resulted in what Bryson (2007) noted as 'time squeeze' for women, for example, with longer and more complex routes of travel to and from work. 'Trip chaining' (Criado Perez, 2019) is multitasking on journeys, for example, visits to relatives, food and essential shopping or picking children up on the way to or from work, tasks that are often taken up by women in the household and squeezed into non-work hours. However, these participants have all recognised that they had *some* timely support when it was needed from family members that enabled them to pursue their careers and they also acknowledged an impossibility for those that do not have this support network.

The 'right time' for the participants to turn to education depended on their familial or social context and/or the strength of their own emotional fortitude, health or maturity and was dependent on key life challenges or enablers. Importantly, these were also entirely co-dependent on the political influence that enabled or hindered their access to HE. They were affected by the myriad of policy change that had to be adapted to and navigated over this time (*Figure 3*) as well as their familial responsibilities. The social, historical and chronological influences significantly affected their horizons for action, but these challenges remain atypical in terms of normative descriptors of careers trajectories, on which policy is based.

Some common challenges centred around having to be constantly alert to risk factors: the length of time to acquire qualifications, stability and perceived value of courses, financial sustenance and work/life balance issues, as well as expected financial gain, personal satisfaction and meeting of affective needs. Long-term investment was both emotionally and

financially huge. Where these participants were able to succeed was when there was acknowledgement of their value, contribution and potential; this acknowledgement significantly supported their tenacity to reach their goal. Their horizons for action were evidenced to shift across time with the varying influences in their positioning in the field, through their changing dispositions (embodied and social) and through their growing understanding and knowledge of the field and self. As the TAs spent a significant amount of time in their schools, they also assumed the cultural capital valued in that field over time.

Mitigating the structural

For several of the participants there was the promise of an in-service, government-initiated teacher training course, which was abruptly withdrawn in 2011; the effect of this cessation caused great anxiety at the time. Their route had to be re-negotiated, which meant another two years of part-time study, adding to cost/time effects. This second route also ended in 2012. There was, for several months, considerable concern that they had been left stranded before a new progression route was launched in 2013. One participant reflected on her long-term plan: 'it was all very planned out, but I had to work with what I was given ...the end goal was there.' These participants had to adopt durability as they frequently re-negotiated their career paths to fit with changing policy-based requirements and diminishing options.

Government increasingly expected learners to be able to invest individually in their own education. This, thereby, both individualized and closed opportunity for those without the social or economic capital on which to trade. These participants experienced the volatile education and training markets of the 2000s from which they needed to make decisions around economic, social and structural influences that affected their livelihood. The high cost/high risk of career change has previously been confirmed as "risky business [...] [where] everything becomes an individual responsibility" (Reay, 2003, p. 312) and is a gendered experience where dual households continue to be divided when making pragmatic decisions based on social norms about where familial responsibilities fall. This is certainly seen in the narratives of these women. All were co-workers or significant contributors to the family income, and those with children then assumed the main care-giver role as well.

Facilitators in enabling

Enablers fell largely into affective and social domains. Affective influences such as being valued, wanting to realise self-sufficiency, confidence and their desire to contribute to home and society were strong elements in all narratives. Friends, family, teachers and supporters in the workplace were also influential in helping to navigate their road to teacher status. The influence of family 'know-how' of higher education and corresponding parental assiduousness in their own approach to careers encouraged the TAs.

The participants' well-being and confidence were closely linked to the quality of the relationships they experienced in different learning communities. At school, this was identified in supportive teachers noticing or taking interest. The maths teacher of one of the participants had seen her potential when she was asked to leave before GCSEs to have her baby; he stepped in with another teacher to home tutor her in maths and English, and she quoted him saying, 'there's no way that I'm letting her leave school without any qualifications at all, it's not happening'; the framing of the quote suggests that this was an important declaration to receive and confirmed to her that she was important enough for attention. The juxtaposition of a valued human response and the system that rejected her non-normative positioning was significant.

Each participant gave examples that emphasised the importance of being valued and being believed in. Examples from school days came from teachers who stepped in to support. A

former tutor took one participant under her wing, 'she just cared, she cared about me, I enjoyed being with her'. Her aunt and uncle tutored her in English and maths when she had missed a lot of school; these were the only General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs) she achieved at the age of 16.

Later, from their voluntary beginnings of supporting in school through to their TA work, university and teacher training programmes, their confidence was gradually re-established and they purposely place value on attitudes to educational justice issues in their own work.

One participant's uncle was a head teacher and told her:

"you'd be a brilliant teacher and I was like don't be so ridiculous. But actually, him saying that to me, who was a head teacher... because I'd had a lot of doubt from my teachers in my Primary Education. Whereas none of them believed me in all this and to tell me that ...".

Perhaps as an additional counterbalance to structures of inequality, three participants had head teachers who supported their careers, where they could, in advisory, practical and appreciative capacities. This included direction and advice on progression, mentoring and their support through HE; none received formal careers advice. However, the changes in education are so rapid that advice offered also shifted from one year to the next. Head teachers moved schools, academies implemented different regimes, and their support depended on the direction of the school leader whilst they were in office or until governmental change; their narratives corroborated this complexity. Non-normative routes were and are complex and leave mature part-time students vulnerable to political tides.

Recognition

Study in HE enabled these participants to develop the three necessary levels of recognition as proposed by Honneth (1995): those of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem. The realisation of increased self-confidence is seen in this study through both supportive familial and work-based relationships along with receiving increased acknowledgement of respect in educational work environments. The ability to replicate such respect to others in their charge is evident in the way the participants, as teachers, work with their TAs.

However, earlier poor experiences in school hold strong and were exemplified for one participant, whose parents were first generation immigrants. Her experiences at school pulled the rug from under her in terms of confidence because of the severely detrimental way English was wrongly assumed to be her second language. Withdrawing a university application solved the problem and allowed her to close the door on this unsettling time. This decision was not due to lack of aspiration, but rather the effect of unsettling assumptions by others placed on difference with avoidance tactics.

Avoidance of failure was common to all the participants. One participant said she became non-committal about career options. Another participant associated commitment as being tied closely with potential failure and that it would be a representation of herself. That is, others' perceptions of her position did not necessarily relate to how she saw herself. Avoidance activity seemed to be a reaction to this misinterpretation or categorization. The responses from all the participants suggested there was a lack of positive recognition during their high school years. Through the lens of recognition theory (Honneth, 1995), individuals develop a sense of self and self-worth by recognising, and being recognised, by others. Where there are conditions for 'misrecognition', it can give rise to resistance. The participants spoke of their scaled responses from subtle to less-than-subtle actions of emotional and practical withdrawal in some aspects of school, but also of frustration in their subsequent work lives after time had passed. The decision to return to education could be seen as a

response to their un- or misrecognised potential and represent the shift that Fraser (2003) discussed in the struggle to find place and recognition through accessible institutional patterns. Fraser recognised that there are psychological- and identity-led causes to misrecognition, but that they are not unrelated to the effects of maldistribution of equality. The narratives here align with this proposition. Opportunities in support roles in educational spaces were the start of the search for status, whether initially intentional or not. What followed was the determination to make others notice their contribution in order to get nearer to needs that were not yet recognised. These became apparent with being recognised initially as able practitioners and highly valued in the workplace.

Common to each participant was a similarity in their espoused values in relation to life and work. Having initially rejected an academic route, each came to a point when they reached a glass ceiling both financially and intellectually in their jobs and they searched for more meaning in their work lives. One participant spoke of higher education 'opening her mind', her beliefs changed, she questioned more and became more confident as she began to understand societal challenges. This included further personal disorientation when she realised that she was also part of the system and ultimately recognised the constraints of the job. Another participant said that the more she understood, the more ethical her practice became. At first, she would just replicate teaching, but then began to create meaning and purpose in the activities planned. She appears to be comfortable in her field and can now make a difference in a way that upholds her ethical values.

Each participant described their route as requiring discipline. Managing family life, work and study was very challenging, but was enabled by time management and through proactive family support mechanisms, mostly from parents. All participants had significant family support once they embarked on their ambition to be a class teacher. They each saw the route they took as the only pragmatic way to eventually reach their end goal.

Supporting careers in teaching

These participants represent the most robust in their field, those with some capital upon which to draw. And yet, the picture still shows structural inequities in access to educational careers and additional challenges in navigating continuing higher education as mature, part-time students with a lot to offer society. It suggests that those with the most enabling factors coming together in a timely fashion can succeed, but inevitably this will favour some more than others. One participant's son tellingly reflected that 'there must be easier ways to make money than that' after seeing mum with her head in her hands.

Once off the standard normative pathways, career routes are less well accepted, much more complex, take longer and are controlled by the socio-political context. The paths taken here resembled negotiations of off-piste routes that were not supported or predictable. Accessing these paths required the assignment of durable personal characteristics with emotional and financial support over time. For those that did navigate their way, one important advantage was identified in negotiating the long transition to teacher status, and that was the benefits of acclimatisation over time. Whilst they had all felt impatient at times throughout the process, they reported a strong sense of belonging to and crafts(wo)manship in their places of work as a result of having worked in school/educational contexts whilst they studied.

Horizons for action

Participants recognised that their social support networks along with the attribute of self-efficacy and their economic context (whilst still challenging) enabled them to manage this route; they also recognised that those with less capital in these areas would not. One spoke of how she was able to ride the crest of a wave of policy, hitting opportunity at the right time,

whereas her colleague one year later hit financial blocks when fees policy changed; their professional lives have become very different.

Successive governments can now be seen as having eroded previously valued professional employment through its increasing de-professionalisation and attendant declining relational salaries, disrupting the lived experience that was not as 'respected and stable' as their parents had believed. There are complex relationships between educational expansion and inequality and between class, ethnicity and gender; inequalities have been reduced but are still substantial (Thompson, 2019). Furthermore, those with stronger positioning in a field are still best placed to take advantage of opportunities.

The life course paradigm encompassed understandings of changing conditions relative to age and across time. Life stages (for instance, the traditional order of pairing, marriage, childbearing, life span) are increasingly regarded in atypical patterns and can happen earlier or later than traditional social norms or expectations (Elder and Giele, 2009; Milesi, 2010). These were clearly identifiable through this study in examples such as early pregnancy, family unrest, unexpected personal tragedy, hospitalisation and economic circumstance. This complexity supports Hodkinson et al.'s suggestion (2006) that careers policy is often based on 'folk' theories that suppose careers do not extend beyond the particulars of an outdated, historically traditional, and normative privilege.

DISCUSSION

Political distrust in the teaching profession in England is endemic. Belief in and value of the status of educators would enable the positive advantages of recognition to flourish. Conversely, misrecognition of individuals' educational value or potential can engender avoidance tactics or highlight a poor sense of representation by others and towards self. Findings indicate interrelationships in temporal, agentic, cultural and structural dimensions in the participants' ever-changing contexts. Consistencies were seen in socio-cultural dimensions, particularly through recognition, by managers, peers and family. Methodologically speaking, there are possible limitations in the visual representation process as a result of potential researcher inaccuracy in interpreting the collected data and the relatively small sample of the whole TA population. The data collected was limited to those who had become teachers but does not include the experiences of those who did not, nor the experience of male TAs.

The narratives in this study showed intrinsic links that associated policy, agentic influences and socio-cultural impacts in multi-layered ways. It was significant that the relationships between structural, agentic and cultural domains changed over time for each individual, so the balance between opportunity and restriction see-sawed according to the relative positioning of those influences at any particular time. Relative to normative career routes to teaching, the alternative routes of these participants proved possible, but unremittingly precarious.

What has emerged with this group of TAs, in their path to becoming teachers, is the significance of time and timing on that route, particularly in relation to effects in the following broad areas:

- Support mechanisms from family, the workplace or significant others (socio-cultural)
- Negotiating static social structures alongside gendered cultural expectations (socio-cultural and agentic)
- Relationship between failure and success and sense of worthiness and esteem (social and agentic)

- Policy change: admittance and restriction (structural)

The first three of these areas were needed to navigate the fourth. This appeared to be made eventually possible through submersion (over years) in the relative fields of practice. Should government wish to attract teachers, there needs to be flexible access for those in mid-career to access University Continuing Education.

This study proposes a methodological model to collect and analyse narratives that intersect within social and structural fields and demonstrates how these affected the participants differently as the socially constructed relationships changed over time. The mapping of their narratives highlighted change in fields across time that influenced their positioning and thereby agency in the field. As Bourdieu recognised, those with stronger positioning within a field are likely to have greater positive influences, and those in weaker positioning are less likely to be able to navigate a similar path. For these participants, an alternative 'second chance' route was found, which in a previous decade would not have been possible. Still, access and success on the route can be seen to be much more challenging for those with less socio-economic and cultural capital on which to traverse this ever-shifting terrain. These participants demonstrate how the potential to participate meaningfully, whether in or out of education, has been and arguably still is screened out very early on for many.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed complex transitions in post-higher education, in both family and work roles, along with accepting temporarily low paid or short-term work contracts to fit with other gendered responsibilities and the job market. Over time, the participants realised the higher-profile jobs they wanted, but with evidence of the necessity of prolonged negotiation and sustained tenacity in the process. The dimension of time in which the action occurs was needed to understand possibilities (horizons for action) and to recognise social actions, interactions, and inequalities (Colley, 2007). The complex negotiations in accessing opportunities in these participants' career routes clearly showed how their navigation towards teacher status was dependent on many structural as well as social factors and atypical of a direct career 'trajectory' upon which corresponding policy is based.

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