

1. Teachers and Teaching Post-COVID

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Abstract

This opening chapter provides an introduction to and rationale for *Teachers and Teaching Post-COVID*. It explores persistent challenges around teacher recruitment, well-being, and retention, before summarising some of the impacts that the pandemic has had upon teachers and teaching. It provides a rationale for the three organising sections of this book: *Priorities*, *Alliances*, and *Re-Imaginings* and introduces the chapters featured in each of these sections. Together these provide rich records of teachers' experiences from diverse educational phases and locations, that illuminate how the complexity of teaching work is entangled in the emotional, relational and embodied nature of teachers' everyday lives.

Introduction

Joanne: I think lockdown showed how important teaching is and how adaptable we are as a profession and how hard we work but also how wide our remit is, that it isn't just the learning in the classroom, it's the teachers that took lunch packs round to people and free school meals and all the safeguarding stuff that we did as a profession. Actually, it's wider than just the stuff in the classroom.

Joe: I know it's awful to talk about such a horrible time as being – well, I wouldn't have wanted to miss it, in some ways, to have missed the experience of being part of it and being involved with it and how much I've learnt about myself as a teacher, to how flexible and adaptable it's possible to be [...]. It's been just the most unique experience really to be teaching during COVID but also it's been a real privilege for me to be in a position of, I feel, making a difference in those children's lives. Being able to maintain those relationships, maintain that routine. So, yeah. For me, being a teacher, it's all been about connections, and communications, and empathy with emotions and feelings that people have been experiencing.

Helen: When I spoke to the Head [teacher] and I said that the reason I needed to care for my mum is she had a motor neurone virus, oh, maybe 20 years ago but it left her severely immunocompromised. My dad's over 70, diabetic and asthmatic so they needed a lot of support. They couldn't manage their house on their own, they're

in a three-storey house and obviously when they had a cleaner coming in, when they had me and my brother that helped a lot, they were fine, but as soon as we hit lockdown they couldn't do that [...]. My Head [teacher] didn't seem to be taking any of it on board [...]. It still bothers me now. It still upsets me hugely and I still feel very resentful and this is why I think I definitely need to go... I can't let that resentment go... I think if I'd been more 'difficult' and said ... "I have dependents, my parents need me", I wonder whether they'd have just sucked it up but of course being an adult and having a mortgage and having a child I couldn't take the risk.

Extracts from Interviews with UK Teachers, 2020

At the time of writing (February 2023) the first teacher strikes for almost 7 years have taken place in England. And yet only a few years before, in March 2020, teachers in almost all countries were embarking on an unprecedented attempt to maintain educational provision while their inhabitants stayed home. The COVID-19 pandemic halted formal school/campus-based teaching almost everywhere, at least for short periods, impacting 1.5 billion students - over 98% - across the world (UNESCO, 2022a). Education became primarily a remote practice due to the social distancing required to avoid the spread of the virus with digital technologies employed to teach online. While approaches varied across nations, many teachers had to combine teaching-at-a-distance with face-to-face teaching for some learners. In doing so they had to find ways of maintaining the meaningful relationships and interaction so central to learning whilst managing social distancing, mask wearing and sanitisation and risking infection themselves.

This crisis did much to increase awareness of and respect for the work of teachers. Not only did parents and carers gain insights into the challenges of supporting learning but, as 'lockdowns' led to social isolation for many families, teachers facilitated vital sources of practical and emotional support (Borup et al., 2020). They worked to ensure that children could continue to learn and in many cases that their parents could continue to work. Many teachers, like Joanne above, also went from house to house to deliver vital supplies such as books, digital devices and meals. And teachers did all of this whilst also caring for their own families and grappling with their own experiences of disruption, fear, illness and bereavement. Helen, featured above, spent the first six weeks of lockdown living with and caring for her elderly parents, during which time she was apart from her young son. The inflexibility of her school during this period led to her questioning her future as a teacher (for a fuller analysis of this case see Marsh-Davies & Burnett, 2021).

As academics with a longstanding involvement in working lives (Katy) and education (Cathy), we shared an interest in what all of this meant for teachers. Katy's doctoral research explored home-based work and she was keen to understand how enforced home-working would be experienced across professions but in particular by teachers – having heard of the struggles of friends and family members who are teachers as well as observing her own child's educators via Zoom lessons. Cathy is an ex-primary teacher who has worked in a variety of educational contexts including initial teacher education. Her research often involves working closely with teachers to reflect on their experiences and collaborate to advocate for innovation in educational policy and practice.

In Spring 2020 we collaborated for the first time (virtually of course) and managed to gain a small grant from our institution¹ to allow us to conduct 14 interviews with UK teachers about their experiences of teaching during the pandemic (ibid). We invited them to share photos of their new working lives and locations and reflect on what it meant to be a teacher teaching from home during the crisis. We were interested in how the participants constructed their teacher identities and navigated their changing and often conflicting roles within the physical spaces of their homes and the practical and emotional work this necessitated of them.

The interview extracts that open this chapter were generated through this project. Joanne and Joe capture a sense of professional pride about teaching during the pandemic. For them the pandemic experience seemed to animate - or perhaps re-awaken – a sense of fulfilment and self-respect. This however was not the whole story. Helen describes the incompatibility of her caring responsibilities with expectations of her as a teacher and the impossible tensions between her working life and family commitments. And her experience was echoed by other teachers who also told of anxieties associated with teaching at this time, anxieties that were often exacerbated by concerns for their families. As the chapters of this book explore, while many teachers responded to the COVID-19 outbreak with great ingenuity and resilience (see, for example, chapters 6 and 15), many also faced significant struggles, leading to detrimental impacts on their well-being (see chapter 5). The pandemic experience was important therefore not only in shedding light on the experience and achievements of teachers in unprecedented times but also in highlighting the complexity of teaching *at any time* and the tensions that many teachers were *already* experiencing between professional and personal commitments, tensions intensified by inflexible hours during the school day, workloads that stretch into evenings, weekends and holidays and difficulties in taking leave during term-time.

In this book we explore the impacts of the pandemic on teachers by considering not just their professional practice but also their lives and ‘landscapes’ (Reynolds, 1996). There is a substantial body of work which considers the implications of personal beliefs and experiences for teaching (e.g. Mansour, 2009; Kagan, 1992), and that explores the emotional impact of teaching on teachers’ well-being (e.g. Freid, 2011; Yin, 2016). Teachers’ experience of teaching and their personal experience of their working lives however have tended to be addressed separately (Feyed & Cummings, 2021). In this book we juxtapose insights into teachers’ lives within and beyond teaching itself in order to examine the working lives of teachers in the round.

The chapters that follow feature research from across the Caribbean and from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, the United States of America and the United Kingdom and focus on teachers at various stages of their career and working in different phases – in early childhood care and education (ECCE), in schools and in universities. Written from a variety of standpoints they combine to account for the myriad roles that teachers play: as pedagogues, carers, workers, colleagues,

¹ This project was funded by Sheffield Hallam University’s ‘Research Institute Fund: Interdisciplinary Research and Innovation in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic 2020-21’. Project activity code: L614.

leaders, innovators, administrators, managers. They also recognise the relationships between being a teacher and teachers' lives beyond teaching – their families, their commitments and interests, and their health and well-being. Together these chapters provide rich contemporary records of teachers' working lives that illuminate the diverse ways that the complexity of teaching work is entangled in the emotional, relational and embodied nature of teachers' everyday lives.

Beyond COVID

Before going further, we want to say a little about our use of the term 'post-COVID' in the title of this book and chapter. We recognise that the virus has not been eradicated and so 'post' might in some ways seem inappropriate. At the time of writing The World Health Organisation (2023) continues to talk in terms of a pandemic and through the course of writing this book new waves and variants have emerged. We use the term 'post-COVID' therefore in two ways.

Firstly, we use it to frame a period of time - specifically the period since the initial outbreak of COVID-19, from the earliest and most severe impacts through the various waves of infection and to the gradual easing of restrictions and concerns. As we write we reflect that we have lived with the consequences of a coronavirus pandemic for over three years. These will be engrained in the life experience of all those studying, practising, and leading teaching. This timeframe allows us to explore the impacts on teachers' lives and practice, to highlight where changes have taken place and where they have not, where COVID has spurred opportunity and innovation, and where it has been impeding or retrogressive.

Secondly, we use 'post-COVID' as a provocation for change. Much has been written about the pandemic as a reflexive moment, an opportunity to rethink established ways of operating in many aspects of our lives. Roy (2020) for example provides an evocative metaphor of the pandemic as a 'portal' while Arnone (2020, p. 43) contends 'it is a pathway that leads to a reconfigured future, one that must be different from the world we previously knew'. Within education there are some signs that the pandemic experience has generated renewed ideas about how teaching can and should be practised (Fayed & Cummings, 2021). And the chapters of this book demonstrate how much teachers have to offer to such a project. They tell of what teachers learned and reflected upon as they adapted to changing circumstances, as they 'figured out' how to teach (see chapter 8), adopted 'new ways of working' (chapter 6) and thought 'outside the box' (chapter 16). However at the time of writing memories of the pandemic experience seem to be fading fast amidst intensifying concerns about economic and national security. In the sphere of education, policy makers have focused primarily on the detrimental impacts of COVID (e.g., Chaturvedi et al., 2021). Rather than spurring debate, recognising teachers' innovations and involving teachers in shaping new educational futures, responses have tended to re-entrench existing approaches to pedagogy and schooling in the drive to recoup 'lost learning'². As we explore in the next section however, such approaches are ripe for change.

² We recognise that 'lost learning' is a contested and complex concept – see Moss et al. (2020) & Hargreaves (2021) for discussion.

Challenges for teachers and teaching

Education systems, policies and practices differ across the world and different societies revere and reward their teachers differently (Price & Weatherby, 2017). Nevertheless recent years have seen the increasing effects of a neoliberal agenda on educational provision in many jurisdictions (for a helpful discussion around those impacted, and a few notable exceptions, see Hill & Kumar, 2009). Gilbert (2019) describes neoliberalism as ‘a dominant ideological and discursive project that promotes deregulation, the privatization of the public sector, the eradication of unions and the welfare state, and the extension of market principles into all areas of life’ (p. 444). In a context of neoliberalism, students and parents are positioned as consumers as market-driven criteria are mobilised and ‘choice, competition, accountability, efficiency’ (Nóvoa & Alvim, 2020, p. 37) are the watchwords for systems that claim to be effective through combining high accountability with low regulation.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to track the advance of a neoliberal agenda in education³, suffice it to say that its effects are widespread. They play out in a series of mutually reinforcing developments that include:

- prescriptive frameworks for teacher learning that undermine professional agency (e.g. Trelford, 2021);
- the ‘datafication’ of schooling as standardised test scores are leveraged for school improvement, and accountability (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017);
- shifts from school governance by local authorities to the quasi marketisation of schooling through movements such as academisation in England and Charter Schools in the USA (Hilton, 2019);
- the increasing influence of independent consultants and commercial organisations in leading schools, educational innovation and the production of educational resources and interventions (Gunter, Hall & Mills, 2015);
- an evidence-based education movement which rests on randomised controlled trials as the key source of evidence (Biesta, 2016);
- state-funded banks of teaching plans and resources ostensibly designed to save teachers time but which work in effect to marginalise teacher judgement (e.g. Oak Academy in England - <https://www.thenational.academy/>).

These trends have been the subject of considerable critique for over two decades not least for perpetuating a narrowly conceived educational provision and exacerbating inequities for learners (Hayes et al., 2017). Their impact on teachers has also been well documented, from Ball’s (2003) seminal work on the ‘terrors of performativity’ through to more recent research exploring the effects of a data-driven system on teachers’ lives and work (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017; Lewis and Holloway, 2019). Such developments have contributed to a narrow technicist view of teachers that underplays the complexities of teaching and marginalises professional agency (Priestley et al., 2016). They have also led to developments that undermine teacher professionalism overtly. Gilbert (2019) for example presents an illuminating case study of North Carolina schools which insist on the use of a virtual time stamp of teachers’ work, requiring them to ‘clock on’ and ‘clock off’ using software provided by a privately-owned profit-making company.

³ A detailed account and analysis can be found in Hill & Kumar (2009).

Despite all of this, the work of teachers continues to be complex and teachers may exercise considerable professional agency in interpreting, contextualising and supplementing directives about curriculum, pedagogy and other aspects of their professional lives (Burnett, Merchant & Guest, 2021; Schaefer & Clandinin, 2019). However as professional frameworks position teaching as primarily a technical activity such subtle work becomes less visible. It is also likely to be diffused as strong accountability cultures channel energy towards measurable outcomes rather than the responsive and relational work of teaching (Lewis and Holloway, 2019). As such, many teachers find themselves at odds with the system in which they work and it is perhaps unsurprising that there is a global recruitment and retention crisis in teaching (UNESCO, 2022b).

Resourcing issues have exacerbated post-pandemic in the sector in many countries, in a context where there were already significant recruitment and retention challenges. In England, for example, a third of teachers who qualified in the last decade have left the profession, according to Walker's (2023) analysis of DfE (Department for Education) data. Worth & Faulkner-Ellis (2022) suggest that despite teacher retention rates improving substantially in England in 2020 due to economic uncertainty and lockdowns, they then decreased towards pre-pandemic levels in 2021. The overview for the British 'Teacher Recruitment and Retention Conference' (2023) suggests that 'a lack of competitive pay, unmanageable workloads and poor mental health are the leading reasons behind this trend'. As previously mentioned, unrest within the profession has led to strikes by school teachers, as well as university lecturers in the UK, and a telling article by Whittaker (2023) stresses that there might have been additional industrial action if teachers did not consider themselves already too poor to strike, i.e. unable to stretch to cover their basic living costs if losing even a day's pay.

This situation is further exacerbated due to inequalities within the teacher workforce. The UK reflects most nations in the gender composition of teaching and like most nations (WomenEd, 2023) has a gender pay gap. School workforce statistics (Education Statistics Service, 2021) show that in England: the early years workforce is almost exclusively female; primary schools are female-dominated; and secondary settings contain more female than male teachers. Only in Higher Education are males (very slightly) more prevalent in the teaching workforce (HESA, 2021). NAHT (the Union representing School Leaders in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) reported in 2021 that 'males earned on average 2.4% more at classroom teacher level, but 11.3% more (on average) than women head teachers'. NAHT (ibid) also reflect that there are pay and leadership gaps in relation to other characteristics such as race and sexuality, though issues may be less well-documented due to underreporting which has been attributed to historical inequalities within the sector.

Ferjola & Hopkins (2013) discuss the workplace experiences of teachers in Australia. They suggest that schools have traditionally been 'hostile environments' for those who are lesbian and gay. Griffin & Tackie (2017, p. 2) consider racial inequalities in the US context, reporting that 'while school systems have made significant progress in recruiting and hiring more teachers of color [sic], they have done little to keep them in the classroom over time. Indeed, teachers of color [sic] tend to exit the profession at higher rates than other teachers'. It is clear that the intersections of

gender, sexuality and race (as well as other attributes) with teacher identity, can compound struggles faced by teachers, as well as present notable differences in experience (as can be seen in Atay's chapter, later in this book).

'Post-COVID research' – openings and gaps

The chapters in this book look to the future, drawing on research largely conducted during the pandemic⁴ to propose shifts in educational provision and in teachers' working conditions. Before outlining the scope and range of their contributions, we note that research is never a neutral endeavour but is always constrained and enabled by particular social and material conditions. It is therefore worth reflecting on the kinds of research that were possible (or not) during lockdowns and how these constrained and enabled certain *kinds* of insights about teaching. In what follows we explore some reasons why the pandemic period may have offered particularly rich opportunities for investigating teachers' perspectives on their working lives. Many of the points we make here are rather speculative but are worth noting as they may go some way to explaining the distinctive contributions of the chapters that follow.

One of the effects of lockdowns was that academics around the world, finding themselves confined to their homes, at last found time for research and writing. Of course this was not the case for all, particularly for those with young families or other caring commitments. But for many lockdowns did make time for research, and research provided a sense of purpose in uncertain times. From a practical perspective educational researchers had to work out how to 'do research' whilst unable to visit schools or other settings or to meet with learners or teachers. Methods involving observation or 'sitting alongside' individuals or groups were out of the question and researchers also had to ensure that research did not generate additional burdens for professionals or learners in those difficult times. This meant that plans for ongoing projects had to be adapted (e.g. see Laidlaw and Wong's chapter) and choices of methods for new projects were limited to those that were feasible to conduct online such as: questionnaires (e.g. Hordatt Gentles, Leask & Williams), interviews and focus groups often using video conferencing software (e.g. Cameron & Abrams), autoethnography, reflective and experimental writing (e.g. Honeyford, Collins-Kramble & Neudorf-Wiebe), documentary analysis (e.g. Kinkead-Clarke & Abdul-Majied) and observation of online activity (e.g. Dunnett).

Given the limited range of available methods it is perhaps unsurprising that so many educational researchers spent time eliciting the perspectives of teachers. There may also have been subtler reasons why this period was particularly fruitful in generating insights into teachers' lives. Research took place at a time when it was commonplace to reference mental or physical health in any kind of communication and to sign off emails and phone calls with the ubiquitous 'stay safe'. Teachers' and researchers' shared feelings of insecurity and uncertainty may have generated an intimacy and intensity that encouraged reflection, an intimacy heightened further as Zoom calls opened windows into one another's homes and family lives (Gourlay et al., 2021). It is possible that teachers' heightened sensitivity to mental and physical

⁴ Brown's chapter is the exception – but her research on part-time working teachers, conducted pre-pandemic, provides vital lessons on the challenges of flexible working for that are extremely pertinent post-COVID.

well-being led them to reflect deeply on their feelings about teaching and on their professional role in supporting the well-being of those they taught and worked alongside. It is also possible that teachers felt more inclined to talk as they themselves had more time to reflect and had much to say. As the strangeness of pandemic life threw teaching into sharp relief, it prompted reflexivity and critical reflection not just on what was happening as the pandemic unfolded but on teaching and teachers' lives more generally.

While recognising the important contribution that this book's chapters make to debates about teaching post-COVID, it is important to acknowledge that many voices are absent⁵. Teachers working in different countries, conditions, contexts will have had diverse experiences and the perspectives featured here are inevitably selective. While many teachers talked with apparent candour about their experiences their testimonies are inevitably shaped by the frameworks researchers provided and by teachers' perceptions of what they felt was *appropriate* to share. Also by choosing to foreground teachers' perspectives we leave out the voices of others. These include the children, young people and adults they taught and their families who may well have had very different perspectives on education post-COVID, perspectives with great potential to feed into frameworks for teaching in important ways (e.g. Chamberlain et al., 2021; Lee & Wenham, 2021; Children's Parliament, 2020). Despite these caveats, these chapters do, we suggest, provide nuanced insights into the complexity of teaching and being a teacher that offer much to debates about what teaching is and should be post-COVID.

Navigating this book

In curating this volume we had initially planned to sort chapters into sections that disaggregated the work of teachers and teaching. We allocated chapters to sub-sections focused on: working lives, professional identity, teaching and learning, and so on. Having reviewed the chapters we found them hard to categorise in this way as so many authors presented teaching as a messy assemblage of commitments, values, politics, beliefs and feelings that spill *between* professional and personal lives. We realised that our initial attempts at categorisation reinforced the very notion we hoped to challenge - that different dimensions of teachers' lives should be understood and addressed as separate phenomena. We decided therefore to organise differently, mixing chapters that addressed pedagogy and professional commitments with those that addressed aspects of teachers' working and personal lives. We refer to these as *Priorities*, *Alliances* and *Re-imaginings*.

Priorities

As explored above, the pandemic experience was important in shedding light on the achievements of teachers and the complexity of teaching and in highlighting the tensions that many teachers experience between professional and personal commitments due to heavy workloads and inflexible working conditions. For many it was a time when their commitment to learners and their families was reinforced as

⁵ We recognise that the concept of 'voice' is problematic, as do Snaza & Lensmire (2006), but use it as they suggest, as a powerful metaphor for thinking about agency and representation in education.

they gained new insights into the lives of the children they taught. Many of the chapters speak of reaffirmations of long held beliefs, of reinvigorated commitments, and of renewed enthusiasm for the work of teaching. At the same time they attest to struggle, to managing the complex demands of personal and professional lives, and to dissonance between deeply held beliefs about what matters and the demands of educational systems. Given all of this, the pandemic provided an impetus for interrogating priorities and, for some, time to revisit what mattered to them within and beyond their teaching role. In this section we explore how the pandemic experience surfaced professional and personal priorities for teachers that were often at odds with the workings of educational systems.

Working part-time is often considered to be effective in providing work-life balance and enhanced well-being (see the review by Shiri et al., 2022) but Brown's chapter tells a different story as she warns that, for many of the women who did so in her research, the result was not so positive. The part-time workers she interviewed in England were regarded as less committed and professional, and their career progression was hindered. They struggled with a lack of clear boundaries and the stress of competing priorities. The pandemic provided an opportunity to experiment with new working practices – with many teaching from home for the first time, resulting in, not only a change in location, but also adaptations to the temporal regimes of their professional, and personal, roles. Whilst the option of working fixed part-time hours was unsatisfactory for some, the new forms of flexibility afforded by the pandemic proved effective and popular, with many teachers not wishing to return to 'business as usual' (Marsh-Davies & Burnett, 2021b). Perna (2022, n.p.) states that 'education has traditionally been considered a field where flexibility is just not possible' but the enforced online and hybrid approaches adopted during lockdowns have shown that some flexibility can generate successful learning. He proclaims that 'flexibility is the future of education' and proposes that it is another valuable approach to recruiting and retaining teachers.

We see the effects of increased flexibility in Woodhouse's chapter, also from England, which tells of the experiences of student teachers who are also mothers. Her sample consisted of those who embarked on initial teacher education before the COVID-19 pandemic yet completed the second half of their course during the 2020 lockdown. She describes how the lockdown period made it more possible for mothers to manage their multiple life roles and alleviated the necessity to juggle complex childcare interventions. Reflecting on her own experience as a teacher educator during the pandemic, she concludes 'the COVID-19 experience of teaching and preparing teachers has been challenging. Yet, it has opened up new possibilities, as we have become more aware of alternative ways of working that offer the potential to enrich students' experiences in lasting and meaningful ways'.

However, while such shifts may have happened at local level, educational systems often remained obdurate. Kinkead-Clarke and Abdul-Majied call for a 'paradigm shift' in how early ECCE teachers are valued, supported and remunerated. They describe how COVID impacted efforts to give professional status and improve pay and working conditions for ECCE teachers in the Caribbean. Hoped for improvements in pay and working conditions that would better reflect levels of qualification and the value of ECCE teachers' work did not materialise and professional and personal vulnerability linked to unstable and poor working

conditions meant that some ECCE teachers were forced to seek alternative employment. This account reflects the low priority given to ECCE by policy makers in many jurisdictions, evident in low levels of funding and inadequate support for professionalisation. As with other chapters in this section we see how professional and personal vulnerability is inextricably linked not just to the health and well-being of teachers but to the possibility of providing empowering and enabling education for all. Kinkead-Clarke and Abdul-Majied conclude with a set of recommendations for measures for ensuring that ECCE achieves the prioritisation it deserves.

Steffan & Potočník follow up on the broad theme of teacher well-being by focusing on a more specific and often-unreported challenge for many teachers: menopause. Within the feminised teacher workforce there is an exodus of people in their early fifties (Camden, 2015). The average age of menopause in the UK is 51 (NHS, 2023). This, Steffan & Potocnik propose, is no coincidence and highlights a women's health issue that desperately needs addressing as part of the teacher retention battle. They propose that 'the inflexibility of (pre and post-COVID-19) teaching presents a barrier to women accessing reasonable workplace adjustments to manage their menopause symptoms', which again points to the importance of flexibility for teachers post-COVID. Disappointingly, their participants had low expectations of gaining support from their employers for their well-being during menopause.

For some, a focus on greater flexibility in working conditions was also associated with greater flexibility in how and what to teach and this in turn had further benefits for teacher well-being. Forde et al. found that some teachers reported improvements as they found respite from performance management, assessment, and other energy- and time-consuming activities. Their participants reported that having more flexibility and control in their work became important for managing their well-being. They reveal that 'there were aspects of work during the crisis which enabled teachers to reinvigorate their sense of professionalism and allowed them to work according to the values which brought them into teaching'. This return, for some teachers, to the core principles of teaching contributed to enhanced teacher well-being, and, Forde et al. propose, may hold the key to retaining teachers in the profession.

In a similar vein, Coleman, Cain and Campbell explored how the COVID-19 crisis prompted university educators to revisit professional priorities and gave them the time and space to do so. Using digital ethnography they collected stories of teaching that were often written collaboratively across digital platforms. These stories highlighted various sites for shifting – or perhaps re-articulating- priorities linked to identities, epistemic beliefs, pressures, stress and self-efficacy; and to agility, risk and creativity'. Together these stories of online teaching speak to a 'pedagogy of kindness' (Rawle, 2021) that involved navigating challenges around student well-being as they attempted to balance this with self-care. Coleman, Cain and Campbell provide powerful examples of the entanglement of personal and professional lives not least because students were more easily able to view their tutors 'as people who experience similar problems to them'. As well as highlighting the personal dimensions of professional life, they show how a focus on the personal had 'humanizing' effects, forged through empathy between teachers and learners and between teachers and their colleagues, effects that reflected and perhaps re-affirmed priorities marginalised in a datafied educational system.

Alliances

Many of the chapters in this book highlight the role of mutual support and relationships in navigating the pandemic. This is important as one of the effects of neoliberalism in education is to individualise teachers and learners by focusing on measuring progress and professional competence at an individual level (Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes, 2017). In this section we feature chapters which foreground the role of partnership, collaboration and community in teaching. We use the term 'alliances' to evoke the shared sense of purpose that seemed to be central to so much of the work described and to acknowledge that many teachers faced challenging circumstances which were often exacerbated rather than eased by educational policy and resourcing issues.

Cameron and Abrams draw on interview data to explore how three elementary teachers and their principal in a New York Charter School faced the demands of meeting children's needs from day to day in an unfamiliar and unsettling context. They describe how this experience generated a high level of reflexivity which generated significant professional learning. This involved a considerable amount of flexibility in adapting teaching to the needs of children and families. Specifically they describe how these educators shifted from an emphasis on the 'grit and grind' of data analysis, detailed forward planning and demonstrable progress to a focus on 'care and flexibility' that was responsive to children's needs and kept children's well-being to the fore – a shift in priorities similar to that described by Coleman, Cain and Campbell. Importantly they highlight how this reflexive and responsive approach was galvanised by mutual support between colleagues and empathetic leadership that focused on the well-being of both students and staff.

Boyd, Rogers and Sims also highlight the central role of leaders – in their case in early childhood education (ECE) settings in Australia. Like Kinkead-Clarke and Abdul-Majied, they comment on the lack of consideration given to early childhood education, noting how early childhood practitioners in Australia slipped through the cracks during the pandemic as they were not recognised as essential workers by the government. Many faced financial hardship and their well-being suffered. Boyd et al. note how ECE leaders shielded staff from harm, recognised and valued their work and helped them to navigate difficult circumstances. Given this support, Boyd et al. found, their participants were able to adapt and experiment, finding new ways of working and enhancing their practice during this challenging time.

As well as alliances between colleagues, another aspect of pandemic education was a strengthening of relationships between home and school as parents and teachers became more aware of one another's roles and everyday lives (Moss et al., 2020). Hylton-Fraser and Hylton describe some of the challenges faced by parents and teachers, and specifically teachers who are parents, in the context of the Jamaican education system. They note the challenges of juggling professional and familial responsibilities at a time when spaces and times for teaching and parenting merged and access to wider support networks was limited. One key implication for this work is that 'the pandemic has brought into sharper focus the need for parents and teachers to be greater collaborators in their children's learning process.'

Honeyford, Collins-Kramble and Neudorf-Wiebe reflect on their codesign and coteaching of the 'Read/Write/Share Club' – an online writing and book club for young teens in Canada held in the summer of 2020. Central to their work is the collaboration between the three authors. They exchanged experiences, thoughts and feelings through a process of 'stacking stories', which involved sharing and juxtaposing stories of their own experience of teaching through Lockdown. Their chapter is a compelling evocation of the role of community and togetherness in educational contexts, through which educators think not just 'about ourselves as teachers, but about what we are a part of with our students' and through doing so continually reflect on 'what matters most' in educational contexts. Their 'notice, think, wonder and share' rubric is a compelling invitation to think more widely about the purpose, form and impacts of teaching. As such this leads us to our last collection of chapters – 're-imaginings'.

Re-imaginings

As the chapters in the previous two sections illustrate, the stories and experiences featured in this book provide powerful accounts of aspects of teachers' lives that have often been marginalised in neoliberal education systems. They tell of how imperatives to demonstrate progress were to some extent, if not always, replaced by imperatives to attend to mental and physical well-being, to care and relationships, and to collective effort and mutual support. In this section we focus on chapters that offer ways to re-orientate to education through unsettling fundamental assumptions about how education is done and how the work of teachers is positioned.

Some chapters call for major reworkings of educational provision and how the work of teachers is conceived and supported. Moorhouse and Tiet, drawing on their experience as teachers and as teacher educators in Hong Kong, propose a radical revisioning of teacher education given that,

'the pandemic, as a destabilizing event, can provide us with important insights into becoming a teacher. First, it has reinforced the notion that 'being' a teacher, as part of a teacher's identity, is a dynamic construct that is unequivocally affected by personal as well as contextual factors (Pennington & Richards, 2016) and one which is continuously evolving and negotiated through experiences with those environmental changes (Sachs, 2005). Second, it has reminded us of the core role teachers ought to play in our communities. Not, just as disseminators of knowledge or assessors of skills, but as carers – someone with whom children within their care can trust and get support from in challenging times'.

Moorhouse and Tiet argue for developing approaches to initial teacher education that foreground the 'personal and contextual factors associated with 'being' a teacher' and build on three key ideas: 1) pedagogy of care (and self-care), 2) pedagogy of autonomy and partnership, and 3) pedagogy of reflective practice.

Hordatt Gentles, Leask and Williams draw on the findings of their international research project to describe teachers as drivers of change during the pandemic. They observed a decentralising of power relations in education during the crisis, which some teachers expanded to shift the power dynamics of their (virtual)

classrooms, giving more autonomy to learners. In the light of this analysis they call for a 'democratization' of teaching post-COVID that fully recognises the agency and creativity of teachers.

Other chapters ease into the process of reorientation more gently but reflect similar ambitions. Many of these take digital technology as a starting point but their implications go far beyond calls for the effective use of digital technologies in schools. Orientating in myriad ways to digital spaces they foreground the embodied material work of teaching and characterise educational contexts as complex, problematic and ultimately fluid spaces. In doing so they interrogate the very nature and purpose of education, and consequently the role of the teacher.

Dunnett focuses on the ways in which teaching online altered the temporalities and spaces of teaching and required teachers to adopt new systems, language, and routines. Dunnett reflects on these to question taken-for-granted classroom practices and teacher expectations in her sociomaterial analysis of teaching using Microsoft Teams. She notes how online teaching generates hybrid spaces in which physical and on-screen activity are overlayed and mutually entangled. From this perspective, she problematises notions of 'classroom' and 'school' and suggests there is much to learn from hybrid classrooms about what matters in teaching and learning and the kinds of approaches that are supportive to learners, not least through recognising and cultivating permeability between formal and non-formal learning.

Atay also explores the possibilities for recalibrating educational practice through teaching online. Leveraging a perspective as a transnational migrant queer scholar Atay elegantly problematises the relationship between identity, pedagogy and being a teacher. Presenting stories of online teaching in the USA, Atay notes how the physical classroom can be a magical space for some but oppressive for others and concludes by arguing 'we need to understand how technology and online platforms facilitate learning for some and offer new ways of empowerment for others who are actively teaching in highly oppressive academic structures'. However Atay's personal account is not just an argument for better more flexible use of technology. It attests to the 'slow violence' (see Aggarwal et al., 2021) of an unequitable, inflexible educational system and highlights the pressing need to attend to persistent and pernicious inadequacies of educational systems in which teachers do not simply act but are acted upon.

Laidlaw and Wong draw on a study of teachers' perspectives of teaching during the pandemic. They organise their analysis of teachers' innovations by drawing on Green's (1988, 2012) work to distinguish between operational-technical, cultural and critical orientations to teaching. Their argument is not so much about the challenges of teaching online - although they certainly speak of those, such as the difficulties of 'reading the room' online - but rather the 'unexpected learning' about teaching and learning more generally. As teachers became better acquainted with digital tools and the skills required to teach online (the operational-technical dimension), they grew in awareness of cultural dimensions of learning such as the need to acknowledge, value and build on children's own experiences and to make space for linguistic diversity. Importantly their experiences also led them to systems level critique and a questioning of the rhetoric on 'lost learning' and 'catch-up'. While this dominated

debates about education during lockdown it did not resonate with the needs of the children they taught. Instead they argued that greater emphasis should be placed on ensuring children had plenty of time to connect with others in light of the social experiences they missed. These reflections not only led to some feeling they had become 'better teachers' during the pandemic but generated pressing questions for teachers, educators and policy makers that could frame highly productive future discussions about educational priorities.

Final thoughts

As examples of 'Post-COVID research', the chapters in this book speak to ongoing debates about teachers' well-being, identities, professional growth and professionalism and how teachers' working lives are managed, organised, celebrated and lived. In all cases context matters and local and national policies combine with histories, social and cultural matters to inflect experience and conceptualisations of what might and could be possible. Together however these chapters suggest implications for teaching and for teachers' working lives, many of which we return to in the final chapter of this book. These include invitations to rework and rethink partnerships with parents and others, school leadership, pedagogy, more flexible working conditions and for repositioning and validating the centrality of care both for teachers and for those they work with. Such recommendations recognise teachers as those with working lives that they must juggle with pressing personal concerns and pursue while managing bodily change and experiencing the effects of social injustice and marginalised and/or racialised identities. Perhaps most importantly, post-COVID, they offer insights that collapse the personal and the professional and move beyond a preoccupation with learning loss to re-imagine possibilities for teaching and being a teacher. We hope that as you read these chapters you are inspired by Honeyford et al.'s invitation to 'notice, think, wonder and feel' what teaching is and might be and to imagine possibilities that (re)position teachers as pedagogical innovators and activists, as respected professionals, as valued members of school and wider communities, and as healthy individuals who lead fulfilling lives in and away from work.

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