Successful Teachers in Schools in Challenging Circumstances

August 2004

A joint research project between Lancashire LEA and St. Martin's College, Lancaster

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Successful Teachers in Challenging Circumstances: A Joint Research Project between Lancashire LEA and St. Martin's College

Executive Summary

Method

12 Secondary schools within Lancashire LEA (see appendix i) were chosen as being schools that were in particularly challenging circumstances according to a range of socio-economic and demographic criteria, including exam results, ethnic mix and free school meals.

The Head of each school identified 2 teachers as being particularly 'successful' within that school. Each of the 3 was interviewed individually by a member of the research team who used a semi-structured format (see appendix ii). Interview transcripts were analysed using cluster analysis related to the literature around Teacher Effectiveness. The main research questions were:

    a) What is the manifestation of a 'successful teacher' in these schools?

    b) What are teachers' views about what constitutes 'challenging circumstances'?

Results

Analysis of the interview data revealed 4 main, but interrelated, categories. These were:

**1.	Relationships between teachers and students**

**2.	Pedagogy**

**3.	Leadership and whole school ethos**

**4.	Challenging circumstances**

**1.	Relationships**

The central issue to arise was the necessity of constructing positive relationships with students based upon a recognition of students' and teachers' essential humanity – their person-hood. The personal and professional qualities that teachers exhibited towards students, the calibre and honesty of relationships between them, their images of teaching, their motives, passion, and 'moral purposes', were all crucial to 'success'. These qualities were manifested in valuing pupils and getting to know them for who they were in and out of school and by creating climates in the classroom based upon trust, mutual respect and rapport.

Implications/Recommendations:

1.1 Teachers, both trainee and qualified, should be encouraged to develop, sustain and rediscover their own **personal vision** of what they believe teaching to be about and to be able to make personally owned decisions about how those values are lived out.

1.2 Teachers need to be encouraged to believe their personal teaching identity as their best resource, their **personhood** in all its richness, one that shows aspects of their humanity in the classroom. They should be encouraged to develop themselves and share that self in all its wholeness- intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual and moral.

1.3 This finding also has implications for the way **behaviour management** is approached. The findings suggest that successful behaviour management is not about a series of 'tips for teachers' but fundamentally about teachers' active choice of how they interact with children, their integrity and authenticity in the classroom and their capacity to form the sorts of relationships described above, in particular to show their care, interest and unconditional respect for the children that they teach. Teachers stressed the importance of consistency for these children but said that this did *not* mean treating everyone the same but, rather, treating each individual consistently uniquely.

1.4 Teachers wanted to **make a difference**. In nearly all cases, that was the reason, purpose and motive the interviewees came into teaching. Indeed, some chose the school *because* of its challenging circumstances and therefore the potential to make an even greater difference to the children. They wanted to offer pupils something, a vision of what they could be, to raise their aspirations, to engender success and achievement. Teaching is a **creative and exciting** activity and one that is about contributing to change and making a difference to individual lives. This should be stressed in **recruitment material.**

1.5 Endeavours to develop a personal vision, teaching identity and personhood need to take place as a corporate event in order that individualism and community are balanced within a moral whole. Thus the research shows the importance of **teachers having a voice** - of having a forum in school in which to reflect upon, talk about and debate purposes, vision, beliefs and practice. In such a forum a, corporate vision, purpose and practice learning can occur and could promote what the GTC describes as "learning conversations" as a means to professional development (GTC 2004).

1.6 Since the demands of teaching are so great, particularly if the way of being a successful teacher in challenging circumstances is so much to do with sharing of oneself, then the need for **good support mechanisms** both within and outside the school is crucial. Teachers spoke of the need for the enormous energy needed to maintain this high and demanding level of interaction with the pupils and, therefore, the need for regular replenishment of that energy.

2.   Pedagogy

As well as referring to their **passion for being a teacher** and **their love of their subject**, teachers also saw **their subject to be an ideal vehicle** through which to reach children and make a difference in their lives. Successful teachers were very aware of their need for the **'craft skills' of teaching** - the OFSTED (and McBer 2000) list of competences worked out 'above the surface' - and took time and care to be up to date with both their subject and current **pedagogical theory and strategies**. Successful teachers recognised the importance of continual development of practice through, for example, **risk-taking** and **providing a variety of activities and inputs.**

Several Heads spoke of the importance of empowering the students through raising their aspirations and levels of achievement.

Implications/Recommendations:

2.1   A clear **emphasis on learning and on pedagogy** is particularly appropriate in schools in challenging circumstances.

2.2   That **continuing professional development** opportunities should take into account that teachers want to be up to date with both their subject and the latest ideas about learning strategies to promote it. Educational theories related to learning are not dead!

2.3   Teachers in challenging circumstances want the **resources** to be able to teach in an imaginative, engaging way. Interactive white boards and other ICT aids were mentioned several times as being particularly important with challenging, disaffected children.

2.4   Successful teachers are those who are **continual learners**. They are passionate about learning more from reflecting and getting feedback on their own practice, from observing others and from books and CPD opportunities. They embrace such opportunities and believe they always have more to learn. Teachers need such opportunities to be easily available and accessible, whether that be through in-school or externally provided CPD.

2.5   Some teachers and heads spoke of the difficulty particular pupils had with any form of change. Their learning and their behaviour depended very much on consistency, clear expectations and 'knowing where they are.' They responded badly to staff changes. This has implications for the issue of staff turnover in these schools, long term sickness and the **quality and stability of supply staff**. A case, therefore, is strengthened for recruiting a high quality supply teachers who are 'dedicated' to a particular school and therefore have a chance to get to know the children and the mores and expectations of that school.

2.6   A great many teachers spoke of their love of their subject and job and how their inspiration and commitment came from working with students. Many **highly successful teachers do not wish to leave the classroom**; for

example, one head of department wondered where his career development might lie without losing touch with students and classrooms. This has implications for **career structure and progression** and affirms the importance of rewarding highly skilled teachers who wish to remain in the classroom as a career route. Such issues might profitably be addressed by institutions such as the **National College of School Leadership**

2.7 Subject specialisms in Initial Teacher Education programmes provide the opportunity to develop student teachers' passion for learning in their subjects areas.

3. Whole school ethos and Leadership

The findings highlighted the central role of the school – its leadership, culture, ethos, vision and values and staff cohesion - in the promotion, support and sustenance of 'successful teachers'. The **headteacher** was seen to have a vital role in establishing an **ethos** within the school, developed through whole school contribution to vision, policy and practice. A common philosophy so established was explicitly and recurrently articulated, revisited and used as a touchstone for making decisions about the whole life of the school, including, of course, teaching, learning and behaviour in the classroom.

The Head was crucial, too, in supporting and encouraging his/her staff but also, at times, challenging them to greater heights. The calibre and honesty of relationships between teachers and head teachers was an integral part of being a successful teacher in these circumstances. The Head also played a part in teachers' career development. Several of the teachers reported that their Heads, both in their present schools and in past schools, had actively sought them out, encouraged their talents, given them confidence and invited then to apply for promotion. Teachers also particularly appreciated opportunities to contribute to the leadership of the school and be part of decision making, specifically with regard to producing whole school policies.

Implications/Recommendations:

3.1 Heads saw the value of establishing a **corporate vision** through consultation with the whole staff, which is explicit and constantly reiterated and referred to and is used as the basis for action throughout the school

3.2 The quality of **relationship** between head and his/her staff is crucial and, like the relationships with the children, is rooted in respect, trust, honesty and encouragement.

3.3 Headteachers play an important **role in teachers' career development** both through 'spotting' talent and through ensuring CPD and promotion opportunities are made available to them and by providing opportunities for staff to be part of the senior leadership team, even if only on a rotating, short-term basis.

4. Challenging circumstances

Teachers were aware that their schools were operating in various localised circumstances that could, and often were, interpreted by colleagues and the wider educational community as being challenging. The main theme was that the low social class position of the parents not only led to relatively impoverished home circumstances, but also poor parenting skills. This meant that the essential task of the school was to counteract two effects on the students:
   a) their adoption of a culture that did not embrace education
   b) their low level of self esteem.
However, successful teachers did not feel that these challenges were threatening to them for various reasons that included:
   a) schools implementing policies to address the issues
   b) teachers feeling supported by colleagues
   c) teachers positively valuing the students as individuals and not seeing them as the composite of their home backgrounds.
Indeed, for successful teachers, it was facing up to such challenges that made the job worthwhile, and although implementing lessons that engaged the pupils and generated success was a relentless task, they tended to enjoy it.

However, there were a number of aspects of their life in school that successful teachers found to be threatening as well as challenging; these related to the structure of the education system established by the government. :
   a) the pressure to produce exam results for league tables
   b) dealing with what was perceived to be an ever increasing workload of paperwork
   c) working to centralised curriculum specifications.
Such factors were obviously beyond the teachers' sphere of control and the sense of threat did often appear to stem from a feeling of powerlessness on their part. More significantly, however, the sense of threat appeared to stem from a feeling that these aspects of the system were not in the interests of their pupils; they did not address what the teachers felt to be the immediate needs of their students, and that was where their priority lay.

Implications/Recommendations

4.1 Section 6.1 has already pointed to the importance of teachers **understanding and valuing their students as individuals**. To fully understand the students, it is also important that teachers understand their **home background**, although they should not allow that to restrict their view of the students' educational potential. Indeed an effective understanding would mean interacting with the students' significant others and provide the opportunity to have an influence on the home background.

4.2 It is impossible for teachers to ignore the importance of results that contribute to **league tables**. However, it is possible to divert the focus of attention from results to creating lessons that generate a **commitment to the knowledge areas** through enjoyment and contribute to the students' **self esteem**.

4.3 Staff in senior leadership positions should be aware of the possibility that **increased documentation** could ultimately take **time and energy** away from the preparation and implementation of lessons.

4.4 The importance of **staff relationships** has already been cited in section 6.3 above. The sharing of expertise and insight among colleagues in a supportive framework is essential if a cohesive approach to developing positive relationships with students is to succeed. The GTC's notion of "learning conversations" (GTC 2004) would provide a useful model to adopt.

4.5 The **capricious nature of teaching interactions** should be acknowledged at all levels so that reliance is put on the resourcefulness of individuals as well as systems, and problems are accepted as challenges that making teaching a worthwhile occupation.

SUCCESSFUL TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS IN CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES:
A JOINT RESEARCH PROJECT BETWEEN LANCASHIRE LEA & ST. MARTIN'S COLLEGE

2.   Background

The impetus for the project came from the TTA's Recruitment and Retention unit which was concerned about the attraction of good recruits to the profession and also the retention of successful teachers. Lancashire LEA's Research and Development unit , together with its Teacher Recruitment and Retention team, decided to investigate this further by commissioning St. Martin's College to investigate the notion of 'successful teachers' but with particular reference to those who exhibit success in schools in challenging circumstances. We thought that, by concentrating on highly successful teachers who excel within particularly difficult contexts, the research might illuminate the characteristics needed to be an effective teacher in more general contexts as well. As such, this research is what one might call 'affirmative' or 'celebratory' research. We concentrated on outstanding teachers in schools that were chosen as doing a particularly good job within their social and demographic context. We aimed to focus on good practice, affirming the successful characteristics of teachers, identifying successful strategies for meeting pupils' needs and successful whole-school policies regarding teacher effectiveness. We were trying to tease out good practice rather than identify bad practice. As such, we hoped the research might make a refreshing and affirming change from some other, more inspectorial activity. The schools and teachers knew this and it was interesting to note that the response from the schools to the initial invitation to be involved was 100%.

The **purpose** of the research was two fold:

1.   To illuminate the notion of the 'successful teacher' by identifying the characteristics and factors that contribute to a teacher being successful in the challenging circumstance in which they are working

2.   To contribute to the debate over just what 'challenging circumstances ' might be and to identify good practice in how schools respond positively and effectively to those circumstances.

Procedure

The joint LEA and College research team selected 12 schools that were considered by the LEA to be successful schools within particularly challenging circumstances. (see Appendix i) A wide range of criteria were used to choose the schools including socio-economic and demographic data, exam results, ethnic mix and free school meals.

The Headteacher of each school was asked to identify 2 teachers who, in their opinion, they considered to be 'successful' teachers within that school. The head and the two teachers were then individually interviewed by the St. Martin's researchers using a semi-structured interview format. (see Appendix ii) The transcriptions were then analysed using cluster analysis.

The following report consists of a comprehensive literature review both to place the research in context and to provide a rationale for the questions we chose to ask colleagues. A detailed analysis and discussion of the data is then offered together with implications and key recommendations. An executive summary is provided at the beginning of the report.
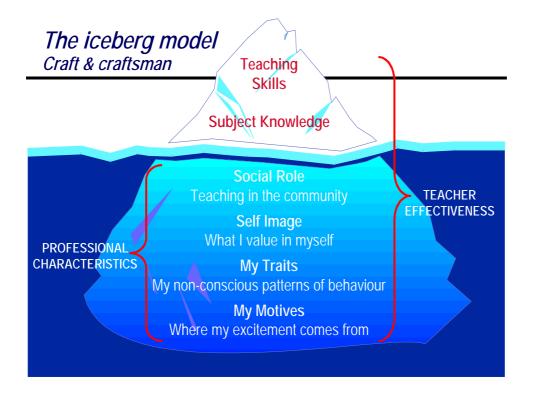
3. Literature Review

3.1 Teacher Effectiveness literature

The debate around what makes an effective teacher is one that is reflected both in the research literature and in Government/TTA policy.

The components and competences that contribute to an Effective Teacher have been identified (eg Wragg 1989; Dunne and Wragg 1994) and translated into competences (ie. The TTA Standards for QTS) and, as such, have formed the basis of both Initial Teacher Education and OFSTED inspection frameworks since 1994. The number and nature of these competences have varied over the years. The peak was reached in 1998, when Circular 4/98 (DfEE 1998) specified 863 items against which trainee teachers were assessed. The current Standards contain 42. (TTA 2002)

An important study, commissioned by the Government and undertaken by Hay McBer in 2000, set out to find the characteristics that underpinned excellent practice in teachers. It asked, what makes a highly effective teacher?

They represented their findings in what has since become to be known as the 'iceberg' model of teacher effectiveness.

The iceberg model
Craft & craftsman

Teaching Skills

Subject Knowledge

TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS

PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Social Role
Teaching in the community

Self Image
What I value in myself

My Traits
My non-conscious patterns of behaviour

My Motives
Where my excitement comes from

They found that although the following craft skills of teaching, 'above the surface', were important:

◆   high expectations for pupils
◆   a structured and planned approach for all lesson and units of work.
◆   flexible teaching strategies
◆   a clear strategy for pupil management.
◆   time and resources managed wisely
◆   a range of assessment techniques used

their main finding was that these were underpinned and 'fleshed out' by the core personal characteristics of:

◆   values
◆   personal motives
◆   sense of self and self- esteem
◆   passion and enthusiasm
◆   sense of community

They concluded that effective teaching comes from a combination of professional characteristics and good practice of teaching skills.

This was the first study to provide evidence for what many educators and practitioners already believed: that teaching was not merely a matter of behavioural skills and competences, but actually was a highly complex art form in which craft knowledge and skills were underpinned by a range of personal qualities and characteristics. In particular the Hay McBer study identified values, vision, passion, motivation and self-image as being key to teacher effectiveness - not characteristics hitherto mentioned in the teacher competency list!

3.2   Leadership studies

These 'below-the-iceberg' characteristics were also the very same key factors emerging in the Leadership literature as being fundamental to highly successful school leaders. For example, Fullan (1993) highlighted the importance of 'moral purpose' as underpinning all teacherly activity.

''Without moral purpose, aimlessness and fragmentation prevail. Without change agentry, moral purpose stagnates…moral purpose and change agentry should be married…(and) .. We need to make them explicit and make them part and parcel of personal and collective agendas.'' (pg.18)

Barth 1990 stressed the importance of vision, both for the school but also for each individual within it and its role in the professionalisation of teachers.

''Nothing so professionalises work in schools as educators who create, within the school house, visions of good education. Everyone who works in a school is not only entitled to a unique personal vision of the way he or she would like the school to become but has an obligation to uncover, discover and rediscover what the vision is and contribute it to the betterment of the school community.'' (Pg.159)

The National Commission of Education (1996) found that the hallmarks of a successful headteacher in schools in disadvantaged areas were that:

- ◆   S/he practised a shared leadership devolved into small, autonomous teams
- ◆   There was a strong vision that was learning centred
- ◆   There was careful use of targets
- ◆   The physical environment was one that promoted learning and self esteem
- ◆   There were common expectations about behaviour
- ◆   There was an investment in building relationships with parents and the community

This latter point – the importance of the relationship with parents – is reiterated by Hopkins (2001) who suggests that schools need to see parents as partners in the education process and therefore need to give proper time and effort to developing and building those relationships.

 Harris (2002) and Gold, Evans et al (2003) suggest that, particularly in schools in challenging circumstances, it is an emphasis on *pedagogy* that underpins highly effective leaders. They talk of *pedagogical leadership* which is highly focused on the quality of teaching and learning, has high expectations of pupils and staff whilst providing support and encouragement for all to give of their best. It is a leadership that is distributed and shared and guided by a consistent and clearly articulated vision. It is one that has the capacity to translate beliefs into action – to live out the below the surface characteristics into meaningful and morally consistent behaviour above the surface.

As Sergovanni (2001) puts it:

'When purposes are in place and shared values are cultivated, an ideas framework evolves in the school that encourages teachers to respond by feeling a sense of obligation to embody these ideas in their behavior. There is, in a sense, a moral

authority that emerges which compels them to participate in shared commitments and to be connected to others with whom these commitments are shared.'' (pg.29)

3.3   Multiple Intelligences

Also emerging was the literature about 'multiple intelligences' (Gardner 1993) with Gardner's original thinking being extended and embellished with notions of emotional intelligence (Goleman 1999) and spiritual intelligence [Zohar and Marshall; Sergiovanni (1992); Senge (1995); Parffrey (2000); West- Burnham (2003)]. Humans, and teachers and leaders in particular, were, it seems, becoming to be seen as more whole.

John West-Burnham (2000) called for no less than an 'educational renaissance' where principles based on moral and spiritual purpose, passion, community and wholism should come to undergird educational reform for the 21st century.

Brain research, too, was identifying the importance of emotions and 'right- brain' attributes in successful learning in a variety of contexts, including teaching, the most famous proponent of these ideas in practice being Alistair Smith and his notion of Accelerated Learning (Smith 1998).

3.4   Teachers as autonomous professionals: 'image' and responsibility

The idea of teachers as persons and professionals in their own right with motives, purposes and values of their own (as opposed to being but technicians implementing someone else's agenda) was one explored by Nias (1989). The notion of teachers having a personal image of themselves and their efforts to live that image or vision out authentically in their classroom and their school context was identified as central to our understanding of just why teachers did what they did and therefore was an important idea in understanding 'success' and effectiveness

Linked with this reassertion of the teacher's professionalism, was the growing emphasis, also, on the need to take responsibility for oneself and one's effectiveness. Successful teachers, it is suggested do not blame others for ineffectiveness and/or attribute success to causes outside themselves. ''What's worth fighting for (in change) is not change in the system or in others…but change in ourselves.'' (Fullan 1992)

 A central concept in the theoretical framework that we used was that of 'image of teaching'. This fits within a broadly phenomenological perspective and was first developed by Elbaz (1983) who summarised it as "practical knowledge ... a complex, practically-oriented set of understandings which [teachers] use actively to shape and direct the work of teaching" (p.3) Clandinin (1986) pointed to the investment of personal experience in the image and identified an affective dimension that was later taken up by Calderhead and Robson (1991) who refined the concept to comprise knowledge about teaching which might also act as a model for action and contain an affective component. Bundy (1999) subsequently identified an existential dimension that drew attention to the fact that for many teachers the implementation of their images of teaching is a crucial expression of self.

There is a significant amount of literature that takes up the notion of the affective dimension in teaching. For instance, Goodman (1988) argued that learning to teach

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is a complex process which not only involves thoughts perceptions and actions, but feelings and values as well. Nias (1989) pointed to the affective dimension which runs through an individual's whole teaching career and is manifest in the "emotional highs and lows" of everyday work in the classroom. Dadds (1993), in a study involving action research on teachers' thinking and being, found that teacher researchers' feelings, alongside their attitudes and beliefs, were significant factors in the conceptualization, as well as the execution, of their action. Boydell (1994) pointed out some illuminating implications of feelings of self-confidence and self-esteem for teachers during their training. Drawing on Claxton (1984), she suggested that degrees of self-esteem and self confidence may be key variables in deciding when a challenge becomes a threat. She stated that the distinction between challenge (a problem that hopefully can be resolved) and threat (a problem that cannot) is highly subjective and a teacher's propensity to perceive an event as one or the other, and thus his or her ability to cope with the event, will be influenced by his or her feelings of self-esteem and self-confidence as well as the size of the problem itself.

Other studies pay more specific attention to the notion of self. Nias (1984) drew attention to Ball's (Ball 1972) distinction between an individual's "situational selves" and his "substantial self". The former comprises the "multiple selves" that reflect "individuals' perceptions of themselves in relation to different groups in which they participate" (Nias 1984, p. 267) and the latter "comprises a person's most salient and most valued views of and attitudes to self" and " is persistently defended and highly resistant to change" (p. 268). Nias found that teachers with high self esteem also tended to see teaching as a means of "self-actualising" (p. 272), and of expressing their substantial selves. She also found that teachers "adopted various strategies to protect themselves from situational influences" (p. 274), such as moving to a school where people thought the same ways as they did. Tickle (1991) drew attention to "the growing concern about teacher stress" (p. 319) and pointed to "managing one's emotional self … [as] an intrinsic part of managing the pupils' learning" (p. 322).

3.5   The Reflective Practitioner

Schon (1983) presented a similar theoretical perspective on professional practice to that adopted in this research project. He argued that professional activity is much like an artistic performance, in that the professional action has an apparent spontaneity about it. Professionals constantly face unique situations and cope by drawing on a "repertoire of examples, images, understandings and actions" (p.138) which constitute the whole of their past experience as far as it is accessible to them with regard to providing them with understandings and actions. Schon argued that the practitioner "makes sense" of a situation perceived to be unique or unfamiliar by seeing it as "both similar to and different from the familiar one, without at first being able to say similar or different with respect to what. The familiar situation functions as a precedent, or a metaphor or... an exemplar for the unfamiliar one" (p.138). Thus in any situation the practitioner acts on the basis of his interpretation of it, and at the same time shapes the situation. For the professional, then, "the unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it and is changed through the attempt to understand it" (p.132). As a result the practitioner always engages in a process of reflection. As professionals monitor their practice, they have to assess such things as whether they can solve the problem they have set themselves and indeed whether it is worth pursuing, and "whether they achieve in the situation a coherence of artefact and idea, a congruence with their fundamental theories and values" (p.141).

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3.6   Pedagogy and Subject knowledge

The current research on teacher effectiveness is not suggesting that this activity called teaching is *only* about personhood, emotions and images of self. As we noted in the McBer (2000) study, these attributes are manifested 'above the surface' in practical ways. In particular, they are shown in pedagogy -the choice of practical activities and strategies within and through a particular subject matter. The McBer study suggests that successful teachers live out their values in their practice. They make active choices about the teaching strategies they use, they are passionate about their subject and are committed to their continuing professional development in that subject. As noted earlier, Harris (2002) and Gold et al (2003) would say that this emphasis on pedagogy is *the* key element in schools facing challenging circumstances.

3.7   The school context: climates of learning

'Successful teaching' cannot be separated from the context in which it takes place. The essentially interpersonal, social context in which teaching takes place is also a key to understanding the business we call 'effective teaching'. The Vygotskian idea that learning can only take place within and through dialogue stresses the quality, therefore, not only of the dialogue but also of the relationship in which it takes place.

McBer's follow up study on Classroom Climates (Transforming Learning 2001) identified 9 'climatic factors' needed to promote successful learning in the classroom. They are essentially descriptors of the quality of the r*elationship* that takes place within successful classrooms.

These 9 climatic factors are:

- ◆   emotional support and safety;
- ◆   fairness
- ◆   clarity of expectations
- ◆   order
- ◆   participation
- ◆   excitement
- ◆   a well organized and attractive environment
- ◆   high expectations and standards.

These elements of successful learning climates resonate with the earlier literature on climates and learning, eg Carl Roger's Necessary and Sufficient conditions of learning: 'respect, emotional warmth and genuineness' e.g. Rogers 1983 and Maslow's famous hierarchy of needs (Maslow 1959)

If we view these climatic factors along with the list of what children want from their teachers, then we have a fairly broad picture of what makes a successful teacher:

A Good Teacher

- is kind
- generous
- listens to you
- encourages you
- has faith in you
- keeps confidences
- likes teaching children
- likes teaching their subject
- takes time to explain things
- helps you when you're stuck

- tells you how you are doing
- allows you to have your say
- doesn't give up on you
- cares for your opinion
- makes you feel clever
- treats people equally
- stands up for you
- makes allowances
- tells the truth
- is forgiving

(McBer 2000)

3.8   The school context: the Learning school

Teaching, like all interpersonal activity, happens in a context and its understanding and development, therefore, can only take place within that context. The broader climate of the school, therefore - its Ethos or Culture - also contributes to effective learning.

A 'Learning School' is thought to have has a number of features which help create this broader climate in which all participants of the school community may be learners. These are:

- a firm and unrelenting focus on learning
- shared goals and clear purpose
- joint responsibility and collegiality
- commitment
- risk taking
- openness
- a high level of support between staff and the Senior Leadership team
- a strong sense of belonging indicated through celebration and humour

(Stoll and Fink (1996); Stoll and Fink (2003)

3.9   The Broader context

These schools, by definition, are situated in a demographic and socio-economic context that is challenging. They have been selected for their multi-ethnic mix, the number of free school meals, entry performance criteria and other indicators of possible deprivation and hardship. Early research pointed to the inhibiting effects these factors had on school achievement eg. Rutter et al (1979) but more recent work - indeed the whole ethos and purpose of 'school improvement' - is that schools can and do make a difference in overcoming these inauspicious circumstances [(eg

Reynolds and Cuttance (1992); Sammons, Hillman and Mortimer, (1995)] and that these factors should not be used, *per se,* as reasons for schools' underachievement.

Conclusion

In short, there has been a move away from more mechanistic conceptions of school and teacher effectiveness towards a model that takes account of underlying values, beliefs and ethics that underpin *all* our behaviour. It is a view that defines effectiveness not merely as the increase, *per se*, of subject knowledge but in a more holistic way: about personhood in all its fullness…cognitive, behavioural, moral, spiritual, and emotional. It seems to acknowledge 'being' (or personhood) alongside 'doing' (professional competence). Senge (1990) seems to sum up this shift in thinking towards what makes an effective teacher and a successful school:

''Nothing can change the fact that at the heart of every good organisation is a human being with a passion to transform living'.

Thus, in the light of the literature, we were interested to explore the following themes in our interviews with the participant teachers:

◆ Self - Image, authenticity, passion, commitment, enthusiasm
◆ Relationships with pupils
◆ Vision/ Purpose/ Motivation
◆ Subject/Pedagogy
◆ School- Leadership/ Staff relationships, Ethos, Culture
◆ Community/Parents/Broader context

Our research aims were:

1. To illuminate the notion of the 'successful teacher' by identifying the characteristics and factors that contribute to a teacher being successful in the challenging circumstance in which they are working

2. To contribute to the debate over just what 'challenging circumstances' might be and to identify good practice in how schools respond positively and effectively to those circumstances.

4.   Methodology

The aim of the research was to gather interview data on teachers' perceptions of what constitutes, and contributes to, success in teaching in circumstances acknowledged as challenging. Building on the work discussed in the literature review of Elbaz (1983), Clandinin (1986), Calderhead and Robson (1991) and Bundy (1999), a central concept in the theoretical framework was that of 'image of teaching'. Interview questions, then, were composed with a view to obtaining data on the images of teaching held by head teachers who had selected two members of their teaching staff as being "successful", and on the images held by the teachers themselves. The data on the images held by the heads was important because it gave insights into criteria they were likely to apply in selecting the teachers; this was

compared with the descriptions of the teachers provided by the heads. The data on the images held by the teachers themselves gave an insight into the ideals they were striving for. Comparisons were then made between those ideals and those aspects of self and the school community to which they attributed their success. We also asked questions directed to obtaining data on the teachers' affective experience in the school. Questions were included which required accounts of incidents considered by the interviewees to be illustrative of the information offered.

As the literature review suggests, the success of individual teachers is likely to be in some way related to the ethos and social context in which the individuals work and interact. There is a considerable amount of literature that has already been presented in the literature review in the field of school leadership which points to the importance of shared vision and values, participatory leadership, and the promotion of learning organizations. We therefore asked questions about the teachers' relationships with head teachers, colleagues, pupils and parents.

The selection of schools had been carried out on the basis of their being considered by the LEA advisory service to be facing challenging circumstances. Nevertheless, the perspective of the research, being broadly phenomenological, did not take the circumstances in which the schools were situated for granted. Our view, in keeping with symbolic interactionism and labelling theory (Blumer, (1969) Becker (1973)), is that challenges, like strengths and opportunities, are in the eye of the beholder. Consequently, we posed questions to gain data on what the teachers and head teachers considered to be the challenges faced by the schools and on what the teachers considered to be the challenges they found in their professional lives. Alongside these questions we posed others that sought similar data on what were considered to be the strengths of the school and the opportunities it offered the teachers to implement and develop their images of teaching.

Given the broadly phenomenological perspective adopted, the research approach taken was qualitative with an attempt being made to understand how the heads and particularly the teachers "experience, interpret, understand, perceive, or conceptualise" (Marton, 1981, p.3) the phenomenon of successful teaching. Indeed, the research approach was phenomenographic, in that the assumption was that the heads' and teachers' conceptions of their experiences related to successful teaching would be likely to vary, and thus the intention was to recording the variation of experience of the phenomenon. (Marton and Booth, 1997)

The interviews were conducted on the semi-structured basis and involved presenting the interviewees with the overall aim of the interview, namely to develop an understanding of what they considered made a successful teacher in the face of challenging circumstances. The questions were then clustered into four main groups centred on images of teaching, the school and its context, the challenges and the attributes that make for success. Each cluster had a lead question with subsequent questions to be born in mind by the interviewer, but not necessarily to be asked if the interviewee had previously covered areas unprompted (see Appendix ii). Our aim then was to be open in our questioning, prompt as little as possible and put the interviewees at ease, and thus we drew on the advice of Eisner (1991) who writes with regard to conducting interviews, "We need to listen to what people have to say about their activities, their feelings, their lives. ... The aim is for the interviewer to put the person at ease, to have some sense of what he or she wants to know, but not to

be either rigid or mechanical in method. ... Conducting a good interview is, in some ways, like participating in a good conversation" (p.183).

5. <u>Analysis and discussion</u>

Our analysis of the data revealed four key but inter-related categories. They are:

1)   Relationships between teachers and students

2)   Pedagogy

3)   Leadership and whole school ethos

4)   Challenging circumstances

Although this section of the report is written under these four broad headings, we recognise the interconnectedness of the categories and the interdependence of issues articulated by interviewees and discussed here. Direct quotes from the teachers and heads interviewed are in *italics*.

1.   The central issue to arise was the necessity of constructing positive relationships with students based upon a recognition of students' and teachers' essential humanity – their person-hood. The personal and professional qualities that teachers exhibited towards students, the calibre and honesty of relationships between them, their images of teaching, their motives, passion, and 'moral purposes', were all crucial to 'success'. These qualities were manifested in valuing pupils and getting to know them for who they were in and out of school and by creating climates in the classroom based upon trust, mutual respect and rapport.

2.   Throughout the interviews teachers referred to their passion for being a teacher and clear pedagogical messages of the importance of child, or student-centred approaches. There also existed messages about the complexity of teaching and the issue of constructing a whole range of strategies, ways of being and carrying out different approaches to common or similar situations.

3.   The findings highlighted the central role of the school – its leadership, culture, ethos, vision and values and staff cohesion - in the promotion, support and sustenance of 'successful teachers'. The headteacher was seen to have a vital role in establishing an ethos within the school which was explicitly and recurrently articulated, revisited and used as a touchstone for making decisions about the whole life of the school.

4.   The prevailing view of what might be seen by the heads, teachers and the wider educational community as being challenging was that the low social class position of the parents not only led to relatively impoverished home circumstances, but also poor parenting skills. This meant that the essential task of the school was to counteract two effects on the students:
a) their adoption of a culture that did not strongly embrace education

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b) their low level of self esteem.

5.1 Relationships between teachers and students

There are very many interconnected aspects of teaching upon which effective classroom environments are lived out, for example the teachers making their subject interesting and accessible, the range of strategies the teachers use, and the amount of (recent) display work on the walls. However, the strongest theme to emerge from the interviews was that of relationships teachers sought to build with students, essentially because teachers enjoyed the company of those they taught and felt their teaching to be an essential expression of self: *I love being in the classroom with the kids when nobody else can bother me, nobody else can demand my time, I'm in there with them, I come alive…*

5.1.1 Teachers, their identities and images of teaching

I don't put up a front. What they see is what they get.

This issue of teachers being themselves is a fine line between demonstrating 'larger than life' characteristics and 'putting on an act'. There are no 'rules' or one-size-fits-all pieces of advice that can be proposed. Teachers described how they are in the classroom is how they are as a person. This is not to say there are no differences, it is about exhibiting ways of being which teachers feel comfortable with. *This is me the person – not just me the person at school.*

Such qualities are related to teacher confidence and the type of presence they exhibit to students. This in turn is about self-belief and has a massive impact upon a teacher's ability to control students and manage classroom behaviour. *They* (successful teachers) *ooze confidence. They control the class.* How any teacher develops such confidence is not the purpose of this report; however, knowing how to find one's 'inner strength', to be confident and to demonstrate confidence is an important awareness to raise.

How far any teacher is prepared to share aspects of their life outside school with students inside school are professional decisions individual teachers choose to make. It was interesting to hear one teacher talk about being able to *share yourself – talk about your interests* so students *realise that I'm a human being just like anybody else.* The same teacher also talked about the value of showing emotion, *I let them know if they have upset or annoyed me.* Such honesty connects with teachers demonstrating trust in themselves and in students who, in turn, will feel sufficiently relaxed to open up to a teacher certain aspects of their lives. Indeed, one teacher saw the sharing of self, tempered with mutual respect and confidentiality, as essential to the promotion of her subject within the classroom. She stated: *I give so much of myself in terms of making things relevant to them; … I will give so much of me and if I want them to give back, then there has to be that respect and that they respect one another in those lessons. That's one of my rules, we respect each other and each other's beliefs and we never laugh at each other.*

The image that teachers have of themselves as teachers is connected to purposes and motives. The teachers we interviewed were clear about the purpose of the job they did. This was to *make some kind of difference* to children's lives: *maybe if I can change one person's* (attitude to racism)… They demonstrated a love for seeing children develop and for being part of that development; one teacher describing this

as wanting to *enter a caring profession… helping children develop.* Teachers' motives were many and varied: job satisfaction, personal and professional development, love of their subject and wanting to aspire to be the kind of teacher they admired when at school themselves. Two teachers offering the following: *I wanted to be able to be one of the teachers I used to like* and *I wanted to emulate the PE teachers.* Although there is nothing 'new' about wanting to emulate those teachers we admired, it is nevertheless important to be reminded that this phenomena will continue to occupy current students' thoughts and motivations; as such the job of teaching is deeply significant and has widespread implications for society at large.

5.1.2 The personal and professional qualities teachers exhibit towards students

We found teachers felt their success was fundamentally about the quality of the relationships they formed with students. *You know you have a relationship when pupils trust you enough to share their lives with you.* These relationships are founded upon students feeling 'safe', valued and gaining a sense of stability from their teachers. As one interviewee commented, students *need to know who they've got, when and what they're doing.* Students want to be known by their teachers and, as a consequence, become more prepared to rise to the challenges given to them by their teachers. This, in part, is about the processes and the rituals of classrooms.

Teaching is also akin to walking a tightrope in terms of the plethora of decisions teachers make and the basis upon which such decisions are taken. For example, the notion of a 'fine line' and of 'give and take' and being tolerant were qualities some teachers described. At worst this may result in a teacher compromising her or his personal standards in ways that may give undesirable messages to students; at its best teachers demonstrate such qualities to develop sound professional relationships with students. As such, teachers referred to the importance of the fun of being in classrooms, of having a *laugh and a joke*, of sometimes getting a little *close to the edge*, essentially of having and demonstrating a sense of humour to students. Several teachers talked about the value of *laughter and fun.* Humour and the enjoyment of being in classrooms and engaging with adolescents were seen as essential qualities. *You have got to have a sense of humour in the classroom or you are onto a loser because the kids will respond to laughter as opposed to shouting. Not ridiculing them but making the situation seem amusing, or telling situations that are funny and they love it. It's positive and it's funny and they can relate to it…*

Another fine-line was that of being friendly without trying to be a student's friend; the rationale for this is of the teacher being approachable, without potentially endangering the professional distance that adults need to keep with children. This relates to respect and is developed below.

Teachers gave a strong image of the two-way respect that existed between themselves and students and this was manifested in the genuine way students would greet and talk to teachers. Such respect was described as *genuine respect, not fear, it's respect.* Students consequently know when teachers are genuinely interested in their welfare and that they 'care' and as one headteacher commented (about a colleague) *she cares, she cares about the children.* The issue of respect being earned by comparison to being expected was also explored and captured by one teacher as follows: *the more you give them, the more you get from them.*

One teacher recognised how the issue of respect and how it is gained may clash with 'traditional' expectations. *Traditionally people may say, "Well you've lost the sort of respect," and I don't think we have because I think we now deal with every type of children… respect is something very different they deal with. It's not standing up in a classroom when the teacher walks in… you have to earn respect with students, you don't demand it whereas years ago you could demand it and get it.* Another teacher felt that although the implementation of behaviour policies helped create order this did not, in itself, create respect. *In the behaviour policy it talks about respect, but you've got to earn that, and by making the pupils stand at the start of a lesson I don't really think it gives respect. It starts a calm lesson, but … I think sometimes that the rigmarole of them stood there is maybe a little too regimented,* (however) *if it helps others* (establish order) *then it's not a problem.* Respect is also related to teachers 'being themselves' and this is discussed later.

Students value the relationships their teachers seek to build with them. The importance of building sound relationships may appear obvious, yet this cannot be understated and as one headteacher commented: *A good teacher has a superb relationship with students.* The complexity is how teachers are able to build such relationships without compromising their values and their professionality.

As well as caring about students one headteacher referred to a colleague's charisma and being *full of life.* Another headteacher described a successful teacher as someone who *loves his subject… he's contagious… the kids detect it.* This passion for the subject was explained by the way the teacher would *show off* his students work to the headteacher at any opportunity. This passion was similarly observed when the teacher in question invited a researcher to visit his classroom after school. There were twenty students in the room all working on their projects. This took place in a relaxed and convivial atmosphere, a tape quietly playing; this indeed was contagiousness in action.

Other qualities many teachers described were those of 'fairness' and 'consistency'. However, upon deeper exploration of what these words mean in reality, there was a recognition that neither meant behaving in, or dealing with, an issue in exactly the same way with different children. This is a complexity which can best be described by one teacher who explained the importance of students perceiving that - *they are being treated fairly even if differently from others.* The teacher went on to explain that the consistency of her approach is through her students knowing she will deal with certain behaviours, though not always in the same manner.
As such 'successful' teachers develop their awareness when engaging with students in terms of their perceived needs and making decisions based upon knowledge of students; this is different to applying rules for each situation, irrespective of circumstance or context. The humility with which teachers operate was considered a key characteristic and again, this quality was clearly observed by researchers.

Constructing positive classroom atmospheres was considered highly conducive to effective learning and, therefore, of paramount importance. Achieving this was described in different ways, for example, whilst students are entering a classroom: *when they come in I try and be at the door and have a quick natter with them all.* Similarly, there was a recognition that the professional relationships teachers formed with students occurred outside as well as inside classrooms. Such ways of being were manifested many times over and observed by the researchers as they moved around the school between interviews. Though teachers' abilities to 'banter' with students in corridors may seem both obvious and trivial, it is through such

interactions that strong bonds between teachers and students are formed; these bonds carry over into the classroom.

For some teachers, however, the importance of relationships went beyond the classroom; they pointed to the significance for them of having an impact on the culture and image of the school, as well as the individual students. One headteacher reported: *Last year a group of his Year 9 girls wanted to set up an anti-bullying club, and he worked very closely with them. They had a training day, had an external provider in to do work with them. Gave them huge amount of support and really enabled something that could have gone off half cock to work. The girls got the Princess Diana award for Service to the Community for it; so it's not just about the development of those girls, it's about the development of an opportunity within the school, it's also about raising the profile of the school within the community.* Similarly a teacher described how she had helped a year 11 group persuade the headteacher to allow a " leavers' do". She helped them to organise it and then, as she said, it *turned into a prom … formal dress, ball gowns, evening suits and full tuxedos that was the first year and it was fantastic. The atmosphere the day after… was unbelievable, the pupils were floating, it was like they were walking on air and it was wonderful. I did it again last year; they went one step better, limousines were pulling up … it was like something from the Oscars, I couldn't believe it.* Such teachers are sensitive to the positive aspirations of the students and support the students in bringing them to fruition. This empowerment of individuals benefits the whole school community and helps establish a positive school ethos.

5.1.3 Students being valued for who they are (as themselves as adolescents) and teachers' 'passion' regarding students' social and academic development

> *I love the pupils I teach, I've yet to teach a pupil that I haven't managed to get to grips with and that is because I treat them like human beings.*

Recognising the pressures and influences young adolescents are faced with is essential if teachers are to make sense of students' motivations, behaviours and interactions with one another. Pressure is brought to bear by the media, music, TV, video, computer games, the internet, magazines; all these mould adolescents' behaviours in both positive and less desirable ways. How teachers respond to students and how such knowledge is taken into account will have a significant impact upon the relationships formed between teachers and students. *… the first thing is to recognise that kids are individuals, that kids, I'm amazed when I talk to other colleagues from other schools, it's the old idea 'look at this bunch, they behaving like kids – oh yes they are kids'. Kids are kids, and kids make mistakes and therefore, the role that we have within school is not simply to identify the mistakes, it's to work with the kids; they learn from their mistakes and make them better people for it.*

Acknowledging adolescents for what and who they are, without compromising or lowering one's own standards does not necessarily mean that adults cannot change their perspectives or adapt their beliefs. *It's that belief that we can make a difference, it's that belief that if you've got the right attitude and if you recognise that kids aren't perfect then it's not just being tolerant because it's not simply accepting*

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bad behaviour, cause we don't, and we challenge it but it's recognising our kids. Some of the backgrounds for our kids are absolutely horrendous and you can't be surprised if you've got a kid that's slept rough for a couple of nights that their uniform's not going to be top notch…

As discussed earlier, the difference between tolerance and compromise is a fine line; and the complexity of *avoiding confrontation* and staying *consciously calm*, whilst at the same time being prepared to *challenge inappropriate behaviour* are not easy qualities to maintain, especially when some students are demonstrating aggressive or frustrated behaviours. The key issue here is about teachers having the confidence and the wisdom to know when to *stand your ground* whilst on other occasions acting on the basis of *understanding their problems…* showing *empathy with their situation* and *acknowledging their lives*. Such confidence and wisdom are crucial characteristics and as such it is important to be aware of the value of developing them.

The passion with which teachers' described their roles and the approaches they used to support students was admirable. Qualities such as making students *feel valued* and letting them know the teacher is available as a good listener and *prepared to accept the student for what they are as a person and not as a stereotypical character* were considered to be important; *someone who is prepared to listen*. Another teacher referred to showing *an interest in them, about the rest of their lives outside the school, e.g. music, football…* When a teacher shows an interest in students' out-of-school interests and achievements this provides opportunities for students to trust the teacher enough *to share their lives with you.*

The focus on students' achievement was a driving motivation for teachers. Below are two responses to the question: "In the classroom, what is your fundamental aim for the children?"

a)   *Obviously to achieve as much as they possibly can.*
b)   *We want every child to feel they can be successful at something… that we are putting their future first, that they are more important than anything else that we do.*

This issue of placing the child at the centre is reminiscent of a quotation from the Plowden report (1967, para 505)

> *A school is not merely a teaching shop, it must transmit values and attitudes. It is a community in which children learn to live first and foremost as children and not as future adults... The school sets out deliberately to devise the right environment for children to allow them to be themselves and to develop in the way and at the pace appropriate to them. It tries to equalise opportunities and to compensate for handicaps. It lays special stress on individual discovery, on first hand experience and on opportunities for creative work. It insists that knowledge does not fall neatly into separate compartments and that work and play are not opposites but complementary. A child brought up in such an atmosphere at all stages of his education has some hope of becoming a balanced and mature adult and of being able to live in, to contribute to, and to look critically at the society of which he forms a part.*

Although this was written about Primary schools, and our research was carried out in Secondary schools there is, nevertheless, much here that resonates with our findings.

5.2   Pedagogy

> *I've always come from the angle that if you make lessons interesting they are less likely to be challenging. It's not guaranteed, nothing is guaranteed but if I throw a text book in front of them… every lesson I can guarantee you that they will be more challenging than they will be with the more kinaesthetic ideas.*

5.2.1 Teachers' ongoing pedagogic and academic development

Making sense of classrooms and understanding what any teacher can do to enhance learning is fast becoming the new orthodoxy. One strong feature from our research was how successful teachers focused not just upon personality and relationships but also upon curriculum, the strategies and resources for teaching and understanding how students respond to what is on offer. Making sense of the plethora of information about the KS3 Strategy, inclusion, learning styles, thinking skills, talk strategies, working in groups, multiple intelligences, etc. demands further energy from teachers, yet the connection between teachers' pedagogic development and student behaviour cannot be understated or ignored. This refers to, *understanding students' learning, the strategies teachers use and the classroom management skills they utilise.* However, there is an obvious difference between 'knowing' about such initiatives and using such knowledge to inform our planning-for-teaching – and, of course, actually implementing them. How any teacher applies such knowledge and the conscious decisions they make to weave it into their teaching and their work with colleagues is crucial to pedagogic development.

> *Increasingly it is recognised that developing thinking skills has implications not only for pupils' thinking but for teacher development and teacher thinking as well as for the ethos of schools as learning communities.* (McGuinness 1999, 2)

One school made use of two Advanced Skills teachers (ASTs), as part of their responsibility, to disseminate 'recent' research to the staff on a regular basis. … (what) *we like to do is keep up to date with the latest research … blend it all together and get the department to think how they could use the strategies.* The value of this was to create a forum where 'new' initiatives based upon research and literature were presented to staff. … *it's a change in the vocabulary of teaching.* How departments and individual teachers subsequently take on board such information and its impact upon teaching is all part of the decision-making and the pedagogic developments taking place in the school. Understanding this *vocabulary of teaching* is not necessarily something 'new' and for some teachers this vocabulary provides recognition that what they have been doing for many years is valued. For other teachers this vocabulary makes the tacit explicit: *… when they talk about modelling or when they talk about questioning or when they talk about plenary they've got some sort of framework to put together.*

The issue of teachers utilising recent learning and teaching initiatives and how grounded such knowledge becomes, is another recognisable aspect of what raises teachers' achievements in the classroom. As one headteacher commented about two of the interviewees: *I have watched them both teach and they are good practitioners. Because they think about what they are doing, they are well planned, the activities are good, they understand some teaching and learning strategies, they understand the kind of activities that bring children on.*

One AST talked about the risks he was prepared to take in an effort to develop a wide range of strategies in his teaching, referring to this as: *Teaching out of the comfort zone. So, for example, I force myself to sing in lessons in Spanish.* The teacher went on to describe what happens in his classroom as follows: *… it's a mixture of not just writing all the time, we are doing group work, we are using audio visual systems with them, we are doing lots of different ways of learning.* Risk-taking or teaching outside the comfort zone is another key component in teacher development. Teaching is a risky business so it is important to know why we choose to use any idea that involves students learning in different ways. Providing students with variety in their lessons is important particularly if such variety is planned and carefully considered within schemes of work. Risk-taking can lead teachers (and students) into unknown zones and we cannot always foresee any potential pitfalls. Neither can we predict the benefits and the positive outcomes that occur. Successful teachers saw their subject as a vehicle for changing students' perceptions of themselves. *The buzz of seeing children enjoy and learn; I want them to say "I CAN do maths" and "I DO like maths"… even if you can change two or three* (children's attitudes) *in a year group, it's worth it.* For such a value to be lived-out, students need to see a difference in themselves and recognise their potential for academic development. *RE is a vehicle for sharing my enthusiasm, my love and my passion. It allows ethical issues and multiculturalism* (to be addressed)*… and a spiritual side… something beyond a job and a paypacket.* This phenomenon of teachers seeking to make a difference would appear to have an impact on the culture of the school and therefore upon individuals.

5.3 Leadership and whole school ethos

Whole school ethos – you walk in and feel welcome, supported… everybody cares about everybody… we're encouraged to act like a caring parent here.

Although a whole school ethos is contributed to and constructed by everybody involved, e.g. students, parents, cleaners, teachers, dining hall staff, support teachers etc, headteachers, nevertheless, have a momentous responsibility for the ethos created through the facilitative styles of leadership they demonstrate.

5.3.1 The ethos of a school: vision, culture and underlying values

…this school does have a very strong supportive ethos across the staff.

Earlier in our report we discuss the importance of ownership and how teachers demonstrate their interest in being involved in and discussing vision statements. The final part of this section focuses on the qualities that underpin or make up the ethos

of a school. The images a parent or a visitor may see when they enter a school, the way in which they are greeted at Reception or acknowledged by a student or a member of staff are all variables that do not necessarily occur by happenstance.

First impressions are clearly important; the main issue is how the ethos of a school is lived out through interactions between staff, between adults and students and through observations of all types of incidents, large and small. One aspect of ethos the researchers constantly experienced was the way headteachers and designated teachers were pleased and proud to talk about their school and their roles within it. Interviewees demonstrated a high degree of openness, honesty integrity and professionalism.

Some of the values were described by the following comments:

… kids are successful and they are engaged in all sorts of activities.
… as a school is we don't give up on people.

Another headteacher was unequivocal about the facilitative style of leadership she sought to adopt and based this upon corporate ownership through involvement. The following quotation, in reference to voluntary attendance at a meeting to explore the vision for the school, encapsulated her approach. *I didn't want to come in* (with) *my vision; this is what we are going to do. I wanted to get staff involved with it so they had ownership of it. I was expecting 2 or 3 staff to want to get involved then I had 17 and governors as well.*

One teacher in a senior post explained his initial perception of leadership styles and commented on the changes he has seen*: When I first arrived in Lancashire the forms of leadership were different to now. At that time they (teachers) were quite amazed with a fairly democratic form of leadership… they didn't really want to be consulted, they wanted to be told what to do. And over the years I think that's moved on and … I'm working in a form of leadership that is consultative.* There is an interesting shift here relating to lines of demarcation of roles, away from being 'told what to do', to consultative approaches where teachers are valued for the contributions they can make.

The values a school seeks to establish and how these values impact upon the ethos of a school have a direct and strong influence upon the atmosphere that pervades a school.

… when you actually get people beyond the door and they see what the atmosphere is here… the relationships and the feel of the school, it's a very friendly school… not a them and us. As such, creating opportunities for all teachers in a school to be involved in constructing the kind of atmosphere and values they wish to pervade the school, and an opportunity to construct a vision statement is of paramount importance. For teachers to have an involvement with and ownership of the underlying philosophy in a school, the headteacher has a significant responsibility to create the conditions for this to grow. In the words of one headteacher*: Good teachers are professionals. They understand the role they are in and the job they are doing, taking on board some thinking behind their philosophy.*

The importance of a school philosophy but also one that is focussed on the children is summed up in these words from one head:

Here, the individual child matters and every last little bit of the individual child matters and you meet the individual child's needs whatever it costs you.

5.3.2 The calibre and honesty of relationships between teachers and headteachers.

There is always the danger of interpreting the data through 'polar vision' and it is important to recognise the vast number of variables that impact upon the well-being and the effective leadership of a school. A range of themes of leadership styles emerged and these relate to headteachers' qualities and capabilities in the following ways:

- An ability to relate in honest, open and sometimes humorous ways with staff.
- Being prepared to debate issues and, if necessary, to take criticism.
- Being facilitative and utilising democratic forms of leadership; recognising the importance of staff 'owning' developments.
- Constructing a vision for a school through collaboration, discussion and consultation.

One head was particularly grounded in the recognition he was a person with frailties and 'larger than life' personality traits that he did not attempt to hide. This honest and open approach was very clear through his dealing with colleagues and students. It was fascinating to observe this particular headteacher deal with a range of different situations involving students and in supporting staff in the course of several incidents that took place during a school 'tour' between interviews.

Being prepared to take criticism in an honest and open manner was an important leadership style of one headteacher who described his relationship with a particular member of staff in the following way: *She tells me if I get it wrong… I think the relationship between us is a bit like sorcerer and sorcerer's apprentice.* The quality of the relationship was supportive of the teacher's professional development and was similarly acknowledged by the teacher herself.

Being accessible and encouraging staff to articulate concerns or put forward ideas relating to whole school development, was recognised as an important approach to leadership. One teacher commented on the importance of *first name terms* with colleagues. One headteacher referred to the 'open-door' policy in operation: *I do run an open door* (policy). *I do talk to staff. I do listen to staff. I think it's about having a clear image and a clear vision yourself, a clear idea of where you stand on issues, but listening – it's more about consultation.*

For all teachers in a school to have clear, welcoming opportunities to engage in whole-school development, to advance as a teacher, the headteacher has clear responsibilities for laying the foundations for consultation to happen.

5.4 Challenging circumstances

It's like climbing Everest very, very hard, but very, very rewarding; very, very worthwhile.

5.4.1 The nature of the challenging circumstances

There was a great deal of similarity with regard to what headteachers and 'successful' teachers from the selected schools considered to be the challenges faced by the school. Their responses fell predominantly within two main categories: the home background of the students and the structure of the education system.

5.4.1.1 Students' home backgrounds

All the schools faced the challenge of dealing with children who came from *dysfunctional backgrounds*, although the proportion varied from a significant minority to a substantial majority. The dysfunction tended to focus on the parents:

A lot of their parents and a lot the households are very stressed because of economic circumstances, because of emotional circumstances, there are big problems about debt, big problems about marriage breakdown and big problems about poor parenting.

Some parents have drug and mental health related problems.

Teachers sometimes felt that such circumstances put their schools at a disadvantage to *more affluent schools*, but others thought that the problem was not fundamentally economic, since, as one teacher put it, *I see a lot of money in the kids, they have the trainers and they have all the clothes and they go on foreign holidays: things that I can't afford to do.*

A number of those teachers expressed the fundamental problem as one of *lack of parental support*, and this was seen as a function of *a culture around and about the area, which is anti-education, there's very little value placed on books or learning from when the kids come in.* There were a number of aspects of this culture. One was that it discouraged homework: *you've got children who go home and the ethos of the home is not to work, they don't see people in the homes working and sometimes they've not even got a flat surface to work on. To them, doing homework at home is quite foreign.*
Another was that it did not involve intellectual activity:
They have, what I (the interviewee) *call, "a spectating intelligence"; everything just flashes before the eyes and they don't have to think about it or consider it too deeply.*

Another was that it led to a lack of ambition:
they don't have a lot of vision themselves. They don't have a lot of hope for the future, they have a plan, and that plan though is very, very basic and it's normally to do with bettering what their parents have done, but not in a particularly big way.

And then there was the effect of this on the self-esteem of the students:
the pupils have an incredibly low level of self esteem.

This culture did not involve a significant amount of criminal activity; although one school did register that there were parents in prison and a mother who was a

prostitute, others tended to celebrate the fact that the students were *very straight and very honest.*

Poor discipline and behaviour was cited as an issue, but even so it was seen as a problem for *less experienced staff*, rather than the 'successful' teachers. Indeed, it was evident that although there were recognised challenges for the schools, these challenges were not seen by those interviewed as being threatening to them in any way.

One teacher put the issue in perspective by stating:
any school will have challenges … It's all a matter of your point of view.

And the point of view expressed tended to be that whatever the perceived challenges were with regard to the nature of the students' home background, the teachers interviewed were *prepared to accept … as part of the package* and there *were steps in place to deal with [them].*

Such steps, which included discipline policies and other aspects covered in 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 above, also involved the staff letting the students know: *you are brilliant people, you can do anything that you set your mind to* and taking home circumstances into account when dealing with incidents: *so they quite often turn up without a pen, or a uniform that's never been washed. What's the point in saying, "What do you mean you haven't got a pen?" They've probably not had breakfast that morning.*

Interestingly, the ethnic mix in the schools we visited was *not* considered to be a challenge. Despite some schools being in communities exhibiting high racial tensions, the schools had developed policies and practices whereby such tensions did not exist within the school. Also, in such schools, the Asian community was extremely well-established and stable, with a strong family ethos and respect for education. Some teachers reported being invited to family occasions and how, generally, they were known and liked in the local community. Other schools spoke of the way in which the local community supported them in various initiatives, including taking a whole city approach to integration and celebration of difference and of ethnic mix.

At the time of the riots (in Burnley), we were approached by a TV channel…he was coming to us and saying "what happened at your school that day?" and we said "nothing out of the ordinary, it was just business as usual" and he said "you have 60% Asian children" and we said, 'Yeah, they couldn't wait to get here because they felt this was somewhere safe, secure where it would be calm and it would be business as usual. We didn't have to do anything different' and he said "you must have done something"…and we said, "no, it's what we are rather than what we do. We try and create that kind of atmosphere that a lot of what's going on in the big wide world, they can come here and everything is calm and safe."

5.4.1.2 The Structure of the Education System

In contrast to the lack of a sense of threat voiced by members of staff in the previous section, some staff felt that aspects of the structure of the education system were perceived as threatening:

I think the change in demands of the Government …. I think a lot of the staff do feel almost threatened now, they feel that their position isn't safe; they're worrying about what they do, whether they do it well and are focusing on the results.

I think one of the main challenges comes from external pressure; league tables, exam results are becoming so important.

The threat experienced here was not an indication that teachers' did not consider their pupils' achievement to be important. Many teachers acknowledged their students' exam results to be indications of their success, for instance:

I think that last year my exam results left me feeling pretty good.

However, it was often not the overall results that were important, but the results achieved by the lower ability students:
I get my satisfaction out of that pupil that should be getting at grade F, but gets a grade C than I do out of a pupil who's predicated a grade A and they get an A*. I get more from the lower ability pupils.

In fact, sometimes the results appeared to be a by-product of the main priority which was the quality of experience in the classroom. One teacher acknowledged the situation as follows:
[in response to government demands] we do, to an extent, move away from what we do in lessons and focus on the end result; it's inevitable I suppose, but I think we maybe need to move back to looking at what we do in class.

And an example of what was being done in class was:
I try, with every lesson that I plan, how am I going to make them enjoy this because if they're enjoying it, they're learning and they do; the kids will say they love English

Indeed, for one teacher the priority was retention:
I've had a boy that was going to be excluded without any doubt, but we managed to keep him and got him on a classroom support plan. … He's a very aggressive young man who's very confrontational with staff but there has been none of that for four weeks. He's been pleasant, polite … [and said], "Yeah I think I'm doing well, I'm feeling much better about myself". I think that was reward enough in what I did.

Thus, although the teachers did not ignore the league table results, they were not their first priority and were often seen as an unnecessary challenge. One teacher felt particularly challenged by *sustaining the energy to keep going* and voiced fears about the future:
There's got to be a point where further improvement becomes harder because we've come from a low base line and made significant improvement in recent years, but there will come a point where we say, "What can we do now?"

Clearly some teachers felt disempowered by the demand for continual improvement in terms of government imposed criteria, and one headteacher saw his role to be to reverse this tendency; he said,
My biggest job as a headteacher is to protect my staff as far as possible from the nonsense that the DfES throws at me. … With children like this, it's about addressing the emotional needs. You can forget the teaching; what are they going to do with history if their life is hell and they have nobody to talk to?

5.4.2 Challenging Aspects of a Teacher's Life in School

We distinguished between the challenges teachers saw their schools to be facing and the challenges that they felt they faced in their professional life in school. These latter challenges will now be considered under the headings of work load, the 'one pupil' syndrome, the centralised curriculum and the conflict between serving the interests of students and other staff.

5.4.2.1 Workload

There was no doubt that the predominant challenge perceived by teachers was that of excessive workload resulting in teachers feeling they never had enough time to do everything that was demanded of them. A number of teachers used the metaphor of plate spinning to describe their experience. Inevitably success had brought additional responsibilities for the teachers interviewed; a teacher who was a head of department as well as head of continuing professional development, described the workload as *horrendous*. She spoke of *the relentlessness of it all*, stating:
 I stormed into our English office the other day with 5 minutes of my lunch time left having not had a cup of coffee or any dinner, and I said "if anybody wants me I'm not here", and the Deputy Head was behind me and I didn't know he was there and he said "I know you're not here but…" that's what I mean by the relentlessness of it.

Teachers told of the exhaustion resulting from working a nine hour day at school at such a pace followed by work in the evening. As a result, teachers talked of being *exhausted.* One teacher who described the work as *exhausting*, went on to say:
It's very tiring, very hard work, the kids are demanding, the pace is demanding, the school day is demanding, but I do like it.

And once again this indicates the positive meaning often attached to the challenge; it is like climbing Everest: if it were not hard, it would not be worthwhile.

However, there was one aspect of the workload that was singled out as carrying a more negative meaning, and that was *the documentation, …the paperwork.* One headteacher complained that it was *a conveyor belt, you just keep sticking something else on the end*, without any overview of what was being required. He said,
…there's no-one saying, "Hang on a minute, schools can't do this, this and this;" something has got to go … Nobody's actually formally saying, "Well actually if I'm doing this, then I'm not doing this. If I'm filling this form in, I'm not doing that."

His concern was that the paperwork was being increased at the sacrifice of *lesson preparation time [and] dealing with individual pupils.*

One teacher offered a very interesting perspective on marking and we offer this because it opens up all kinds of issues about the roles teachers play and the 'time' they have to carry them out. The comment was: *There are still teachers who will spend hours and hours and hours marking books and they are wasting their time.* This was echoed by a headteacher who encouraged his teachers to *work smarter* and offered the following: *the recognition that you may take home 300 books a week and assiduously tick every single one, put 9 out of 10 and accepting that although you've been doing that for 20 years you're actually wasting your time. Taking the books home once every 3 weeks, acknowledging work that's been done with a tick,*

and actually spending longer thoroughly marking a piece and giving targets for improvement is far more productive to both you and for the child.

There is a workload issue here and the need for teachers, via school policies, to be encouraged to prioritise tasks that have the greatest impact upon students' learning is vitally important if successful teachers are to feel valued and to be retained in the profession. One teacher had decided to step down from a senior position because of a lack of time for both a personal and a professional life. The teacher stated - *my biggest challenge* (is) *I have so many things on the go at any one time… At the moment, I am working most evenings until 1am, and that's becoming Friday and Saturday as well… I'm exhausted…* How teachers are supported, valued and retained must continue to be a central consideration for headteachers and governors.

Basing policies upon existing practice and vision upon 'lived-out' values will be imperative for the future development of successful teachers in schools in challenging circumstances.

5.4.2.2 The 'One Pupil' Syndrome

However well organised a school may have been, teachers were often sensitive to the potential challenge that could be presented by a single pupil with ill intentions. One teacher pointed to the frustration *when you've got a top set that you know are capable of being very, very good in their GCSEs and there's one pupil that every week will hinder their learning.* Another teacher told of a colleague who had planned a lesson meticulously, had *taken 2 to 3 hours planning it, thought the lesson was going to be good, but one boy in there who was absolutely abominable came in and just ruined the lesson.* He said,
I think that's quite a good example of doing our best but sometimes it doesn't always work out.

Such a view points to the tenuous nature of teaching and learning interactions which in reality fit closer to a chaos model in which the typhoon in Miami can be related holistically to the butterfly flapping its wings in China, than to a Newtonian model in which careful control of variables leads to a predictable result.

5.4.2.3 The Centralised Curriculum

A few teachers felt challenged by the constraints of the centralised curriculum. One teacher argued that it made engaging the students in the subject unnecessarily difficult; he said,
I sometimes get frustrated with the systems, the constraints, and the order that are put upon me. I sometimes get frustrated at teaching kids who have no interest in science about nuclear radiation, which they're never going to need to know, and I think, "Why don't I just go and teach them about fixing a car, or do more work on things that matter like electricity, more specific things?"

Another felt it impeded the students' progress by making unnecessary demands:
we're going to assume that all teachers are mediocre and we're going to tell you that this is what you should be teaching them. That gets in my way because …in order to get their entitlements I must spend two lessons on it and then we'll get on to what they really need, so that gets in my way.

These views are clearly the product of reflection and indicate a professionalism that the centralised pressure on the curriculum appears to override.

5.4.2.4 The Conflict between Serving the Interests of Students and Other Staff

As might have been expected, none of the teachers interviewed suggested that they had discipline problems with students that they were unable to deal with. This meant, however, that they often found it particularly hard to stand by when other members of staff were having problems with students with whom they had developed good relationships.

As one teacher said,
it becomes frustrating when you develop a good relationship with a student and other staff are unable to do that. Problems are occurring that go above me and have to be dealt with by other senior managers; I find that quite difficult.

This conflict of loyalties was also experienced by teachers in positions where they had to deal with disciplinary incidents brought to them by other members of staff:
One of the difficulties is having to deal with challenging pupils on behalf of other members of staff, and certainly when it's challenging pupils who, for different strategic reasons, are not as challenging for me, but having to deal with them. … a member of staff brought a child to me and told me what this child had done, and then told me that he wanted this child excluding you see, he then said "either he goes, or I go". Now I find that very difficult to cope with, I respect that there's been a situation with that member of staff, I sometimes feel that one of the frustrations is staff don't think strategically and they shoot from the hip with the kids and it just makes things worse and worse and worse and you're on a downward spiral.

Dealing with such frustrations was made easier in relationships with colleagues who sought advice and in situations where collegial support and team action were a matter of course.

5.4.3   Attitude to Challenges

The teachers interviewed tended to see the challenges in the sense that they were problems that could be resolved. Any sense of threat came from problems that were outside their power to resolve and these were often a function of government constraints on their practice which left the teachers feeling professionally disempowered.   The meanings that the teachers attached to their students appear to have contributed to their feeling unthreatened by them. They said of them:
I think the pupils are one of our best assets. We have some fantastic children in this school. They might not all be the brightest children in the world, but we have some fantastic characters; they're the strengths of our school.

I love the kids, absolutely love them.

I don't think I've ever met a truly bad pupil, I've met lots of naughty kids but I've never met a truly bad one.

And attaching positive meanings to the children meant that they were treated in a positive way which appears to have been reciprocated:

I like them; I love the pupils I teach. I've yet to teach a pupil that I haven't managed to get to grips with and that is because I treat them like human beings.

Another factor which contributed to the teachers feeling unthreatened was the support received from other members of staff. This has largely been covered in 5.3 above, but the following gives a flavour of the feeling of staff solidarity that helps to contribute to the sense of security of the individual:
I think the staff do feel that they get quite a lot of support from the relevant people, and that's right down from the senior staff right down to the NQTs, your student teachers, your supply teachers, your cover teachers. I think that the solidarity and togetherness of the staff is quite strong.

5.5   Turning platitudes into realities

…the work that's needed is relentless and the energy that's needed is incredible. The staff you're going to meet today are examples they've got that drive, they've got the energy, they've got the belief.

One of the dangers of researching into the notion of what makes a 'successful' teacher is to form lists of qualities which may appear to be little more than platitudes or a set of 'wish-lists'. Throughout our research, therefore, we have constantly been struck by the way teachers and headteachers have been enthusiastic, excited and occasionally emotionally moved to discuss their teaching, how they relate to students and how they manage complex situations, as one headteacher commented: *Good teachers enjoy being around children. They are efficient planners, effective communicators, they have all those skills and I think the best teachers also are able to see it as a profession.*

In this report we can only offer a small percentage of what interviewees told us and whilst we have sought to capture the central issues, there have been so many examples to draw from that we have had to be 'selective' in what we can offer here. All three researchers have been amazed and moved at the anecdotes teachers have related and the qualities teachers have been described as having. The following is typically celebratory of one teachers attributes: *he's terrific to watch in front of sort of a half year group … in PSE lessons* (he is) *very up front. … students like being in his lessons, they like being there.*
Teachers frequently operate in ways they take for granted; however, in the process of carrying out our research we found that teachers were able to reflect upon and articulate their tacit practices and professional knowledge very clearly. Indeed, we were privileged in the process of conducting the interviews to hear teachers become excited, passionate and animated in the way they describe the roles they play.

When teachers recognise the skills they have and apply in all kinds of situations, many of which are unpredictable, they grow in self-confidence, so important to their professional development. There is nothing in this report which is a platitude. Researchers were impressed (though not surprised) by teachers' and headteachers' commitment to put their ideals, values and perspectives into practice and saw examples of this between and after interviews.

5.6   Teaching and learning

This report has focused on what teachers do, the skills they have and the personal characteristics so vital to the support of learning. However, it would be remiss not to mention the responsibility students have for their learning. Learning requires students to engage with difficulties and at times to enter uncomfortable zones to work through difficult concepts. For students to take responsibility for their learning, they must recognise their teachers as honest, open people with strengths and frailties, excitements and disappointments. Students need to recognise teachers work hard to support their learning, but cannot do the learning for them.

Nevertheless, the successful teachers were often those who were able to set up such an expectation, as this teacher explains: *A good teacher is somebody who works as hard as they expect their pupils to work. For example, English teaching has a lot of marking involved, but if you take in the pupils' books when you've asked them to do a homework… you should mark them, and they should have them back with some positive feedback as soon as possible. Then they'll want to do the next piece of homework for you because they know you will look at it and they value what they're doing.*

This report has focused on what teachers do, the skills they have and the personal characteristics so vital to the support of learning. It is summed up by one headteacher who commented: *I look in particular (for) somebody who is excited about learning, excited about teaching and learning. I look particularly at somebody who has great enthusiasm and it oozes out of their personality.*
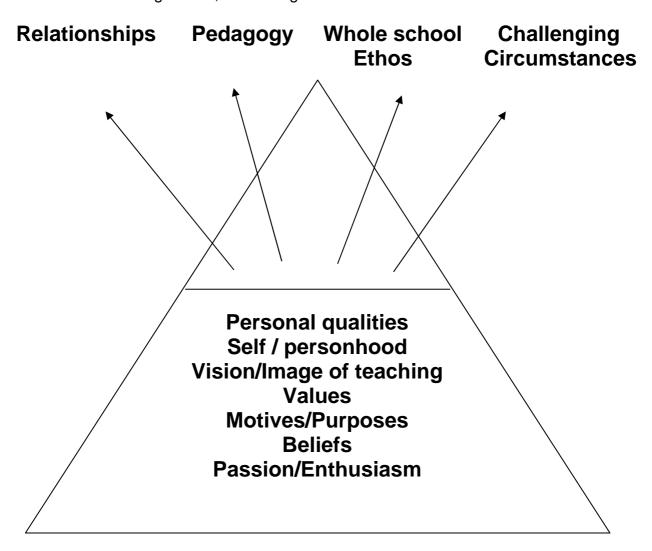
6.   Conclusions And Recommendations

What we found in this research - and what we found impressive - was a group of teachers and heads endeavouring to live out, in their everyday practice, their beliefs, purposes and personal vision about teaching. They were trying, in inauspicious and challenging circumstances, to live authentically according to their individual view of what they believed teaching and learning to be about. This endeavour was most successful when the school ethos and policies supported and encouraged this personal outworking both within the school and within the community.

One of the things this research was able to do was to give 36 teachers a voice. When we listened to that voice and asked 'what makes a successful teacher in this school?' the answer was four-fold:

1)   **RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS**

2)   **PEDAGOGY**

3)   **LEADERSHIP AND WHOLE SCHOOL ETHOS**

4)   **CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES**

Put into the 'ice-berg' model, our findings look like this:

**Relationships   Pedagogy   Whole school   Challenging
                                 Ethos   Circumstances**

**Personal qualities
Self / personhood
Vision/Image of teaching
Values
Motives/Purposes
Beliefs
Passion/Enthusiasm**

6.1   RELATIONSHIPS

The central issue to arise was the necessity of constructing positive relationships with students based upon a recognition of students' and teachers' essential humanity – their person-hood. The personal and professional qualities that teachers exhibited towards students, the authenticity and honesty of relationships between them, their images of teaching, their motives, passion, and 'moral purposes', were all crucial to 'success'. These qualities were manifested in valuing pupils and getting to know them for who they were in and out of school and by creating climates in the classroom based upon trust, mutual respect and rapport.

These were the qualities identified by McBer (2000), Barth (1990) and Fullan (2003) (amongst others) as being central to promoting effective learning, although we would suggest that this research has reiterated and strengthened this view. The notion of personhood - 'being yourself', emotions, beliefs, warts and all - in the classroom and around the school, is both a freeing concept and enriches the definition of what it is to be a 'professional'. It suggests there is not a cardboard cut-out that a teacher or head 'should' be. Rather a professional carves out their image of themselves as a teacher according to their own particular vision and values, in partnership with others. Moreover, these teachers took total responsibility for themselves. Not one

attributed their success – or their failure – to others. Their success they put down to hard work and the support of others. Not one tried to 'blame' the children, or their home backgrounds, for the challenges they faced. They 'owned' their practice – and its consequences.

What, then, are the implications of this finding?

6.1.1 Teachers, both trainee and qualified, should be encouraged to develop, sustain and rediscover their own **personal vision** of what *they* believe teaching to be about and to be able to make personally owned decisions about how those values are lived out.

6.1.2 Teachers need to be encouraged to believe and have confidence in them **selves** as their best resource - their **personhood** in all its richness - not an anodine, emotionally cold, cardboard cut-out of a teacher but one who shows all aspects of their humanity in the classroom. They should be encouraged to develop and show that self in all its wholeness - intellectual, social, emotional, spiritual and moral - together with enthusiasm and excitement that should 'ooze' out of them.

6.1.3 This finding also has implications for the way **behaviour management** is approached. All the teachers to whom we spoke, considered behaviour to be the biggest challenge. These findings suggest that successful behaviour management is not about a series of 'tips for teachers' but fundamentally about teachers' active choice of how they interact with children, their integrity and authenticity in the classroom and their capacity to form the sorts of relationships described above, in particular to show their care, interest and unconditional respect for the children that they teach. Successful teachers **know and value the students for who and what they** and are passionately child-centred in their teaching. The interviews also raised the question of what it meant to be 'consistent'. The teachers said that this did *not* mean treating everyone the same but, rather, treating each individual **consistently uniquely.**

6.1.4 Teachers wanted to **make a difference**. In nearly all cases, that was the reason, purpose and motive the interviewees came into teaching. Indeed, some chose the school *because* of its challenging circumstances and therefore the potential to make an even greater difference to the children. They wanted to offer pupils something, a vision of what they could be, to raise their aspirations, to engender success and achievement. The opportunity to do that and that teaching is a **creative and exciting** activity and one that is about contributing to change and making a difference to individual lives, is an attractive one and should be stressed in **recruitment material.**

6.1.5 These endeavours - to develop a personal vision and personhood - need to take place as a corporate event in order that individualism and community are balanced within a moral whole. Thus the research shows the importance of **teachers having a voice** - of having a forum in school in which to reflect upon, talk about and debate purposes, vision, beliefs and practice. In those fora, corporate vision, purpose and practice learning can occur.

6.1.6 Since the demands of teaching are so great, particularly if the way of being a successful teacher in challenging circumstances is so much to do with sharing of oneself, then the need for **good support mechanisms** both within and

outside the school is crucial. Teachers spoke of the need for the enormous energy needed to maintain this high and demanding level of interaction with the pupils and, therefore, the need for regular replenishment of that energy. Some also expressed concern as to whether, as they got older, they would be able to maintain this level of energy.

6. 2   PEDAGOGY

Throughout the interviews teachers referred to their **passion for being a teacher and their love of their subject**. Linked with 6.1.4 above re. wanting to make a difference, the teachers to whom we spoke all considered **their subject an ideal vehicle** through which to reach children **and make a difference** in their lives. Successful teachers were very aware of their need for the **'craft skills' of teaching** - the OFSTED (and McBer 2000) list of competences worked out 'above the surface' - and took time and care to be up to date with both their subject and the most **modern pedagogical theory and strategies**. Successful teachers and successful schools were **learning centred and student centred** with a clear commitment to **individualised, personalised learning**. Such teachers do not let behavioural challenges distract them or the class from getting on with the main purpose of the lesson.

Several Heads spoke of their explicit emphasis on pedagogy as being particularly appropriate for pupils in challenging circumstances, as they believed it was the best way of addressing their needs and empowering young people to make a difference for themselves by raising aspiration and achievement levels.

The implications of these findings are:

6.2.1   The present **concentration** in Initial Teacher Education programmes on individual **subjects**, **is appropriate** in capturing potential teachers' imagination and passion and as **acting as a vehicle** in carrying and promoting the other aspects of a teacher's - and a pupil's - learning.

6.2.2   An unrelenting **emphasis on learning and on pedagogy** is particularly appropriate in schools in challenging circumstances.

6.2.3   That **continuing professional development** opportunities should take into account that teachers want to be up to date with both their subject and in the latest ideas about learning and strategies to promote it. Educational theories of learning are not dead!

6.2.4   Teachers in challenging circumstances want the **resources** to be able to teach in an imaginative, engaging way. Interactive white boards and other ICT aids were mentioned several times as being particularly important with challenging, disaffected children.

6.2.5   Successful teachers are those who are continual learners. They are passionate about learning more - from reflecting and getting feedback on their own practice; from observing others and from books and CPD opportunities. They embrace such opportunities and always believe they have more to learn. Teachers need such opportunities to be easily available and accessible, whether that be through in-school or externally provided CPD.

6.2.6 All the teachers and heads spoke of the difficulty these particular pupils had with any form of change. Their learning and their behaviour depended very much on consistency, clear expectations and 'knowing where they are.' They responded badly to staff changes. This has implications for the issue of staff turnover in these schools, long term sickness and the **quality and stability of supply staff**. It strengthens the case for high quality supply teachers who are 'dedicated' to a particular school and therefore has a chance to get to know the children and the mores and expectations of that school.

6.2.7 Some of the teachers who we interviewed spoke of the stress of the work load level, the paperwork and petty chores that distracted from their main purpose of teaching and learning. The implications for the continuing **remodelling of the workforce** are clear and these teachers would wish to reiterate the importance of that agenda.

6.2.8 All the teachers spoke of their love of their job and how their inspiration and commitment came from their work in the classroom with the students. Highly successful teachers do not wish to leave the classroom. It is also a dilemma for middle leaders. One head of department wondered where he could go next in terms of leadership development and promotion without losing touch with the students in the classroom. This has implications for **career structure and progression** and affirms the importance of AST's as a career route but raises questions about the presence of other opportunities for development for those who do not wish to become heads and deputies. Is there a gap here, for example, in the suite of course offered by the National College of School Leadership?

6.3   WHOLE SCHOOL ETHOS and LEADERSHIP

The findings highlighted the central role of the school's leadership, culture, ethos, vision and values and staff cohesion in the promotion, support and sustenance of 'successful teachers'. The **headteacher** was seen to have a vital role in establishing an **ethos** within the school developed through whole school contribution to vision, policy and practice and focussed on clear, commonly held values and practices. The common philosophy so established was then explicitly and recurrently articulated, revisited and used as a touchstone for making decisions about the whole life of the school, including, of course, about teaching, learning and behaviour in the classroom.

The Head was crucial, too, in supporting and encouraging his/her staff but also, at times, challenging them to greater heights. The calibre and honesty of relationships between teachers and head teachers was an integral part of being a successful teacher in these circumstances. The Head also played a part in teachers' career development. Several of the teachers reported that their Heads, both in their present schools and in past schools, had actively sought them out, encouraged their talents, given them confidence and invited then to apply for promotion. Teachers also particularly appreciated opportunities to contribute to the leadership of the school and be part of decision making.

The implications of these findings are:

6.3.1 The importance of the **Head** establishing a **corporate vision** through consultation with the whole staff, which is explicit and constantly reiterated and referred to and is used as the basis for action throughout the school.

6.3.2 The quality of **relationship** between head and his/her staff is crucial and, like the relationships with the children, are rooted in respect, trust, honesty and encouragement

6.3.3 Headteachers play an important **role in teachers' career development** both through 'spotting' talent and through ensuring CPD and promotion opportunities are made available to them and by providing opportunities for staff to be part of the senior leadership team, even if only on a rotating, short-term basis.

6.4   CHALLENGING CIRCUMSTANCES

Teachers were aware that their schools were operating in various localised circumstances that could, and often were, interpreted by colleagues and the wider educational community as being challenging. The main theme was that the low social class position of the parents not only led to relatively impoverished home circumstances, but also poor parenting skills. This meant that the essential task of the school was to counteract two effects on the students:

- c) their adoption of a culture that did not embrace education
- d) their low level of self esteem.

However, successful teachers did not feel that these challenges were threatening to them for various reasons that included:

- d) schools implementing policies to address the issues
- e) teachers feeling supported by colleagues
- f) teachers positively valuing the students as individuals and not seeing them as the composite of their home backgrounds.

Indeed, for successful teachers, it was facing up to such challenges that made the job worthwhile, and although implementing lessons that engaged the pupils and generated success was a relentless task, they tended to enjoy it.

However, there were a number of aspects of their life in school that successful teachers found to be threatening as well as challenging; these related to the structure of the education system established by the government. :

- e) the pressure to produce exam results for league tables
- f) dealing with what was perceived to be an ever increasing workload of paperwork
- g) working to centralised curriculum specifications.

Such factors were obviously beyond the teachers' sphere of control and the sense of threat did often appear to stem from a feeling of powerlessness on their part. More significantly, however, the sense of threat appeared to stem from a feeling that these aspects of the system were not in the interests of their pupils; they did not address what the teachers felt to be the immediate needs of their students, and that was where their priority lay.

A further challenging aspect of life in school was not seen as threatening, so much as problematic and manifested itself as a conflict between serving the interests of students and colleagues. Successful teachers, who had developed positive relationships with their students, were frustrated when other colleagues had difficulties with the behaviour of those same students, especially when it was their responsibility to resolve the disciplinary problems. There often appeared no obvious

way to resolve the dilemma between supporting the student and supporting the colleague, although it was alleviated in situations where colleagues asked for advice or where collegial support or team action were a matter of course. The dilemma of whether the student or the colleague is responsible for the indiscipline points to the capricious nature of teaching interactions where unpredictability means that, even for successful teachers, the best laid plans can be disrupted by the ill intentions of a single pupil.

Interestingly, the ethnic mix in the schools we visited was *not* considered to be a challenge. Despite some schools being in communities exhibiting high racial tensions, the schools had developed policies and practices whereby such tensions did not exist within the school. Other schools spoke of the way in which the local community supported them in various initiatives, including taking a whole city approach to integration and celebration of difference and of ethnic mix.

Implications/Recommendations

6.4.1 Section 6.1 has already pointed to the importance of teachers **understanding and valuing their students as individuals**. To fully understand the students, it is also important that teachers understand their **home background**, although they should not allow that to restrict their view of the students' educational potential. Indeed an effective understanding would mean interacting with the students' significant others and provide the opportunity to have an influence on the home background, maybe, for instance, through parent support groups.

6.4.2 It is impossible for teachers to ignore the importance of results that contribute to **league tables**. However, it is possible to divert the focus of attention from results to creating lessons that generate a **commitment to the knowledge areas** through enjoyment and contribute to the students' **self esteem**.

6.4.3 Staff in senior leadership positions should be aware of the possibility that **increased documentation** could ultimately take **time and energy** away from the preparation and implementation of lessons.

6.4.4 The importance of **staff relationships** has already been cited in section 6.3 above. The sharing of expertise and insight among colleagues in a supportive framework is essential if a cohesive approach to developing positive relationships with students is to succeed. The GTC's notion of "learning conversations" (GTC 2004) would provide a useful model to adopt.

6.4.5 The **capricious nature of teaching interactions** should be acknowledged at all levels so that reliance is put on the resourcefulness of individuals as well as systems and problems are accepted as challenges that making teaching a worthwhile occupation.

Conclusion

Through this research we found a group of teachers and heads endeavouring to live out, in everyday practice, their beliefs, purposes and personal vision about teaching. They were trying, in challenging and often inauspicious circumstances, to live authentically according to their individual view of what they believed teaching and learning to be about. This endeavour was most successful when the school ethos and policies supported and encouraged this personal dvelopment within the school and within the community. In this, one could argue that they were displaying the characteristics already identified in previous research as being those underpinning effective teaching. However, it seems that successful teachers in challenging circumstances, in particular place relationships at the very heart of their practice; at the heart of these relationships is the teachers' *selves* – their personhood. This, it would seem, is the crux of what it is to be a successful teacher in challenging circumstances.

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Successful Teachers in Schools in Challenging Circumstances

Participating Schools:

Christ the King High School

Edge End High School

Fearns High School

Fleetwood High School

Glenburn High School

Lathom High School

Moor Park High School

Morecambe High School

Primet High School

Rhyddings High School

Towneley High School

Walshaw High School

Successful Teachers in Schools in Challenging Circumstances

Interviews with Headteachers

Statement of Intention:
We want to develop an understanding of what you consider makes a teacher successful in the face of challenging circumstances.

Questions in mind:
What is your image of a good teacher?

> When recruiting teachers for this school, what in particular do you look for in a teacher that is likely to be successful?
>
> What would you say has made you successful as a head in this school?

How would you describe this school – social context, nature of pupils, staff, aims, values, organisation?

> Could you find a metaphor that encapsulates it?
>
> What do you see to be the strengths of the school?

How would you describe the challenges this school faces?

> What do you see to be the most challenging aspects of a teacher's life in this school?

You have identified two teachers that you consider exemplify successful teachers in this context. Could we start with teacher A: how would you describe him/her?

> What is it about him/her that you think makes him/her successful here – resilience, charisma, self-esteem, emotional intelligence, indiscriminate positive regard, respect for others, academic competence, pedagogic skill?
>
> How would you describe his/her relationships with the pupils?
>
> How would you describe his/her relationships with colleagues?
>
> How would you describe his/her relationships with you?
>
> How would you describe his/her relationships with parents?
>
> Could give examples of incidents or other evidence that have demonstrated his/her competence to you?

Repeat for teacher B.

Interviews with Successful Teachers

Statement of Intention:
We want to develop an understanding of what you see to be the main challenges you face as a teacher in this school and how you would explain your success as a teacher in these circumstances.

Questions in mind:
What is your image of a good teacher?
> Could you think of a metaphor that encapsulates your image of teaching/draw a picture of you teaching?
> What are your fundamental aims when you are teaching in the classroom?

How would you describe this school – social context, nature of pupils, staff, aims, values, organisation?
> Could you find a metaphor that encapsulates it?
> What do you see to be the strengths of the school?

How would you describe the challenges this school faces?
> What do you see to be the most challenging aspects of your life in this school?
> How far do feel able to implement your image of teaching in this school?
>> Do you feel you have to make any adjustments to the circumstances here in implementing you image of teaching?

You have been identified as a successful teacher in the context of this school. To what do you attribute your success?
> How would you describe your feeling about being a teacher in this school?
> Could you describe the best things about being a teacher in this school and the worst things?
> Could you describe an incident that has left you feeling very positive about yourself – and an incident that has left you feeling negative?
> How would you describe your relationships with the pupils?
> How would you describe your relationships with colleagues?
> How would you describe your relationships with the head?
> How would you describe your relationships with parents?
> Could you give some examples of incidents that have occurred which you consider demonstrate your success here?
> How do you see this job in the context of your whole career?
>> How did you come to be appointed here?
>> How long do you intend to stay here and what will you be looking for in your next job?
>> How do you think your experience here will help you in attaining your next job?
>> What are your long term career goals?