

SELF FUNDED PHD OPPORTUNITY

The Role of Staffrooms in Early Career Teacher Interactions, Relationships and Wellbeing

Abstract

Government data show that more than 10 per cent of teachers leave within one year of qualifying and 30 per cent of teachers leave within five years (DfE, 2016). Although heavy workload is a main reason that teachers cite for leaving teaching (House of Commons Education Committee, 2017), nearly half of respondents to a poll on teacher wellbeing said their mental health was poor, fuelling fears that growing numbers are struggling to cope with the profession's changing demands (Hepburn, 2017).

One location where most teachers and other school staff can meet outside of lesson time, identified as a key place in the working lives of many teachers, is the school staffroom. This space has been described as somewhere used by teachers to talk, relax and spend time together (Wood, 2014), socialise with colleagues, (Frankel, 2011), work away from pupils (Holland et al, 2007), escape or seek refuge (Clandfield & Foord 2008), share resources (Hansom 2012), develop professional learning (Lisahunter et al, 2011) and build a sense of collegiality (Ben-Peretz & Schonmann, 2000). Previous research has also recognised that this space and the interactions that take place within it are likely to factor in the emotional wellbeing of all teaching staff, especially those at the beginning of their careers (Chartered College of Teaching, 2017; Kington et al, forthcoming).

As teachers in England work on average 19 per cent longer than teachers in other OECD countries, with an average working week of nearly 50 hours (Sellen 2016), coupled with the fact that many new school settings are being built with no designated staffroom (Howard, 2012), identifying the role and importance of staffrooms for early career teachers (ECTs) would appear to be a high priority. Thus, in order to identify, describe and explain key features of the social interactions and behaviours evident within primary school staffrooms, the study has four overarching research questions:

- (i) What are the social and behavioural practices of ECTs regarding collegial relationships in staffroom settings?
- (ii) What are the characteristics of interactions of ECTs within this social condition?
- (iii) What do practitioners perceive as key features of, and influences on, these interpersonal relationships?
- (iv) How do the complex relationships developed and nurtured between colleagues relate to early career teachers' emotional health and wellbeing?

The successful candidate will be required to consolidate their methodological approach derived from a review of existing literature, along with discussions with supervisors. However, it is proposed that the most effective way of addressing the research will be by adopting an integrated mixed methods design, utilizing a combination of data collection tools. Through a range of methods (for example, questionnaire surveys, classroom observations, and a range of interviewing techniques), sources of data will be generated that could then be used to analyse and provide insights into the role and nature of staffroom interactions, the development of teacher peer relationships, and the impact on early career teachers' emotional wellbeing. For this reason, findings will be of interest to policymakers, advisors, researchers engaged in primary education, school teachers, headteachers and ITE providers.

References

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Supervisory team

The supervisors for this research would be Professor Alison Kington and Dr Karen Blackmore, both of whom have extensive experience of conducting mixed methods research utilising narrative, observational, and repertory grid techniques. Alison's research focuses on educational relationships with a specific emphasis on teacher-pupil/peer relationships and identities. She is currently supervising 6 research students, and has supervised a further 14 students to successful completion of their studies. Karen has taught in a range of schools and university academic departments as a science educator for the past 20 years and this is reflected in her research into science pedagogy and identity. She is currently supervising 4 research students.

Costs The overall cost of the project has been considered and there would no unfunded spend.

Links to current areas of research This research would fit within the Social Psychology of Education Research Group, which is undertaking an ongoing programme of activity. Members are involved in a wide variety of projects covering issues such as professional identity, career phase, classroom interactions, teacher-pupil relationships, effective classroom practice, social and learning transitions, peer/friendship interactions, and school leadership. Six research students (4 of which Alison & Karen supervise together) are already active members of this group. Continuing to develop research capacity related to the social psychology of education will provide research based evidence for the

benefit of those working in the teaching profession (including higher education), and contribute to case studies that will have significant local, regional and national impact.