**Title page**

**Managerialism and teacher professional identity: impact on wellbeing among teachers in the UK**

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**Abstract**

In Europe, wellbeing in the workplace has increasing prominence in the policy and research agenda and education is a key context in which the challenge of occupational stress has been reported. Traditionally, the ethos in school settings could be said to be shaped by the vocational motivation of employees, that is, a commitment to a social benefit through the development, support and improvement of the pupils and this commitment used to override workplace challenges and help teachers deal with stress. This paper argues that teachers’ commitment is being eroded by the impact of bureaucratic changes at management level, such as the setting of performance targets, increased workload, increased accountability and changes in curriculum. This in turn impacts on their professional identity and can negatively affect their mental health and well being. The current paper describesa qualitative study undertaken among 39 teachers and six school leaders across England and Wales in which we sought to understand, through interviews, the contextual workplace experiences of teachers who experienced work-related stress. Policy developments in education and management implementation of these developments and the consequent erosion of teacher autonomy dominated the narratives. We examine how managerialism can relate to a loss of commitment, professional identity, self-confidence and vulnerability to stress, anxiety and depression.This paper proposes that educational reforms, and the rigidly prescribed organisational and management structures that accompany them, need to be weighed against their impacts on professional identity and personal wellbeing (241).

**Key words**: identity, leadership/management, teachers, stress, commitment

**Introduction**

In England and Wales, various policy documents acknowledge the need for fresh public health approaches in how we live and work (NHS Wales 2016; Department of Health 2009; Leavey, Galway, Rondón and Logan 2009). Particularly relevant to this paper, employment is a key site in which people may find a sense of purpose, belonging, satisfaction and personal identity (Black 2008). However, when there are changes at work and when management want changes implemented quickly and simultaneously, the place of employment can become a source of unhappiness, anxiety and depression.

Education is an area of employment where changes at work are constant. Over the last 20 years, governments across the developed world have implemented reforms aimed at improving education in various ways. Raising educational achievement and making teachers more publicly accountable for student outcomes (Bottery 2004; Dainton 2005; Day and Smethem 2009; John-Brooks 2000) is an increasingly important perspective. This involves a move from a traditional state-centered, public welfare idea of teaching and learning which has a focus on caring relationships, on commitment to the profession and to others, to a new post-modern, private sector concept of a corporate teaching and learning context. Sahlberg (2012) calls this ‘The Global Education ‘Reform’ Movement (GERM)’ and proposes that it may threaten the teaching profession by prioritising and imposing a business model on education. In this newer context, reforms are brought in which mean teachers need to be measured in different ways, by various means, using different frameworks. For example, through monitoring systems such as performativity and accountability in appraisal meetings and promotion applications, and through production of information, such as databases of exam results, school inspection reports and league tables. This suits some teachers who find empowerment in improving themselves and by so doing the ‘look’ of the school. Others struggle with a sense of loss of identity as they leave behind an old values system which includes their ideas of what it means to be a teacher in order to attempt to respond to the new corporate requirements of school managers. Ball (2003: 215) suggests ‘this epidemic of reform does not simply change what people, as educators, scholars and researchers do, it changes who they are’. It is the tension between the nature and speed of education reform, the managerialism which accompanies it and teachers’ sense of self, a tension which Ball calls ‘the struggle over the teacher’s soul’ (ibid: 216) - that can lead to emotional ill health. It is this tension and how it impacts on teachers’ well-being that this paper is concerned.

Well-being and work

The problem of well-being in today’s working professions is a real challenge and has been well reported. The latest estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), as part of research undertaken by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in 2017, show the total number of cases of work related stress in 2016/17 to be 526,000, a prevalence rate of 1,610 per 100,000 workers. The HSE study shows that school teaching is one of the occupations with higher than average levels of common mental health disorders. This study also shows that causes of work-related stress are consistent over time with workload, lack of managerial support and organisational change as the primary causative factors. Other research backs up these statistics and shows teachers experience high levels of stress in comparison to other occupations (Smith, Brice, Collins, Matthews and McNamara 2000; Travers and Cooper 1996) and also that there has been an increase in teacher stress in several countries (Dinham and Scott 1996; Munt 2004; Schonfeld 2001; Carton and Fruchart 2014). Generally speaking, in England, stress and professional burnout among teachers has contributed significantly to an exodus from the profession and teacher retention has been a major concern over the past decade (Jepson and Forrest 2006). In their study of over 1,000 teachers who had left their jobs in English schools (excluding those retiring), Smithers and Robinson (2003, i) found that work load was by far the most important factor to influence the teachers’ decision to leave, with over 40% of the leavers saying that nothing would have induced them to stay, whilst Barmby’s (2007) study of 246 teachers from England and Wales shows that workload, stress and pupil behaviour were the most frequently cited reasons for wanting to leave the profession.

In the current paper teacher well being is explored against the backdrop of management implementation of educational reform.It shows how factors such as workload, change in educational policies and a lack of managerial support can cause a loss of professional identity and commitment focus in experienced teachers which in turn can lead to teacher stress and anxiety.

**The context of educational change and teaching reforms**

In the UK, educational policy change has involved such reforms as the introduction of a new curriculum and reformed qualifications at GCSE and A level, and assessment for these qualifications being moved away from coursework to exams bringing with it a new grading scale of 9-1. Additionally, at primary level, early phonics instruction is now mandated in the national curriculum. The inclusion agenda for greater diversity in schools is another reform that is well underway as is the continual attempt to embed the latest digital technology in the pedagogy of classrooms. Although such directives come from a perspective of need for positive change, it is suggested that the way in which they are implemented through managerialism in schools, can have a negative impact on teachers’ morale and sense of professional identity, lead to an erosion of autonomy and impact on mental well being (Day 1997; Day 2000; Enderlin-Lampe 1997; Fullan 2001; Hargreaves 1997). One way that this can play out is that teachers hold on to ‘old’ knowledge and understanding which are no longer relevant in the context of new reforms. For example teachers who may be unwilling to use a school’s virtual learning environment (VLE) for homework resources, and instead rely on pupils taking coursebooks home with them, may find themselves left behind in the new world of corporate education. Ball (2003, 226) cites Lyotard’s concept of a ‘commodification of knowledge’ as a key characteristic of the post-modern corporate culture of education. This is explained as knowledge which is ‘externalised and desocialised’ where relations between teacher and learner are no longer the key component of knowledge exchange and where teacher expertise is seen as subordinate to accountability requirements of management. In the case of the VLE, the teacher-pupil relationship may be put to one side, in order for the school to focus on getting all staff to engage with the VLE in order to meet a requirement of an inspection. Accountability is another way in which educational policy change impacts on teachers.

Teacher standards

In the UK, the 1988 Education Reform Act, which applied to England, Wales and Northern Ireland, introduced intensive and sustained central government interventions which held techers and school managers accountable in various ways. For example, target setting for teachers through annual performance management; increased assessments for pupils against targets; increased responsibilities of individual school governing bodies, self-evaluation and external inspection (Day and Smethem 2009). Schools are now in a tightly constrained partnership with government which sets the rules, determines standards and body of knowledge and teachers are rewarded if they follow these rules (Swann, McIntyre, Pell, Hargreaves and Cunningham 2010). Teacher standards are one way in which a corporate focused, accountability approach to education is implemented. In 2011, the Department for Education in England published its first set of standards (pp. 10-14) which set the minimum requirements for teachers' practice and conduct. There were 43 standards that teachers must adhere to, 35 of these related to teaching and eight related to personal and professional conduct. Now this number has been reduced to eight overarching teaching standards, with 35 sub-standards plus a number of personal and professional conduct measures. These define the minimum level of practice expected and apply to teachers regardless of their career stage. They are measures of teacher quality and productivity and as Ball suggests ‘as such they stand for, encapsulate or represent the worth, quality or value of an individual or organisation within a field of judgement’ (2003, 216).

The example sub standards that follow give a flavour of the breadth of knowledge, expertise and practice teachers in England are expected to have. Teachers must ‘set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions’; ‘be accountable for pupils’ attainment, progress and outcomes’; ‘demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching’; ‘demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship’; and ‘contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area (s)’. In Wales new standards for teaching were introduced in 2017 and will be used by all practising teachers and school leaders from September 2018. There are five overarching professional standards: pedagogy, collaboration, leadership, innovation and professional learning with two descriptors each, making ten in total. Although the number of standards is less than those set out by the Department for Education in England, the descriptors are dense and each incorporate a number of elements. For example, under ‘pedagogy’, teachers in Wales are expected to ‘consistently secure the best outcomes for learners through progressively refining teaching, influencing learners and advancing learning’.

The expectations which the current standards set, have a major effect on teachers’ atttidues towards their work. Standards mean teachers have to consider for example, whether they are being innovative, supporting those pupils with high ability, challenging those who do not have English as a first language at the same time as improving themselves and contributing to the excellence of the school. In short, to be constantly calculating their ‘value’ or ‘worth’ to the school. Ball (2003, 217) claims that in professional contexts like this, ‘value replaces values; care and commitment and service are of dubious worth within this new regime’. In this paper, standard setting, as one element of the new era of managerialism in schools, is shown to undermine teachers’ professional identity and by doing so destabilise their sense of wellbeing.

**Identity theory and teacher commitment**

A teacher’s professional identity and their sense of competence and worth, achieved and mediated through interactions with others, is crucially involved in determining wellbeing. The commitment teachers have for their work also intertwines with their sence of identity and therefore wellbeing. Commitment as a concept is characterised in various ways. Allen and Meyer’s 1990 model of organisational commitment proposed that organizational commitment comes in three distinct forms – affective, defined as employees’ emotional identification with the organization; continuance, defined as the perception of costs associated with leaving the organization, and normative commitment, which refers to employees’ feelings of obligation to remain with the organization. Allen and Meyer (1990, 3) state: “Employees with strong affective commitment remain because they want to, those with strong continuance commitment because they need to, and those with strong normative commitment because they feel they ought to do so”. Commitment theory (Becker, 1960; Kanter, 1972) explains how people make choices and “orient” themselves to the costs and rewards of taking part in a particular culture, to attachment to others within the culture, and to the extent to which they align with the moral purpose of the beliefs of the system’ (Kanter cited in Torres 2012, 120). Stryker and Burke argue that ‘commitment shapes identity salience shapes role behaviour’ (2000, 286). To clarify, the importance of teacher identity is predicted by the way in which commitment to relationships based on one’s teacher identity are carried out, and that in turn, is manifested in how much time, energy and enthusiasm teachers spend in teacher activities (Stryker and Burke 2000).

In the context of this era of new managerialism in education, commitment is a paradoxical concept. Much of the literature views commitment as having a stress buffer effect (Lazarus and Folkman 1984), however its effect of exacerbating stress on employees is also observed. For example, one study (Fernet, Lavigne, Villerand and Austin 2014) which explores teachers in Canada with 5 or less years of experience, finds that their commitment and passion for their work is positive when they have autonomy in their work but the same commitment and passion can have negative effects when the work activity controls the individual. The clear implication is, then, that there are associations of influence between teachers’ professional and organisational identities and commitment and effectiveness at work . As Brunetti’s (2006) study of teachers in one inner-city high school in the USA shows, managing and sustaining each of these and the associations between them has to be understood in the context of management and support from colleagues.

In this paper we describe how the salience of teacher identity – ‘how to be’, ‘how to act’ and ‘how to understand’ their work and place in society – may have been eroded by educational reforms and the way these are implemented by school management, leading to an undermining of teachers’ trust and autonomy. The methods used to investigate these issues are explained next.

**Method**

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate way to obtain detailed, ‘insiders’ experiences, beliefs and understanding on the issue of managerial causes of teacher stress and its impact on teacher identity. Due to the particularly sensitive focus of the study and the ethical and practical difficulties in identifying teachers who had suffered from stress and mental illness, participants were recruited through an advertisement in the teaching press in England and Wales. In this advertisement the overall aim of the study was outlined and it was made clear that in-depth interviews with teachers who had experienced mental health problems and who had been absent from work due to these problems were sought. It was also made clear that participation from school leaders who had experience of dealing with mental health problems among staff was also sought. Therefore, a purposive sample, that is a non-probability sample, was used and based firstly, on characteristics of teachers and school leaders as outlined previously and secondly on age, gender, length of service, school type and geographical location. Thus, we sought in-depth interviews with teachers who had experienced mental health problems and had been absent from work due to these problems in the previous 12 months. The interviews covered themes such as workload, work relationships, support systems at work, changes at work, management at work and impact on identity, self-esteem, professionalism and stress and health problems. Phase One of the interview process included 14 male and 25 female teachers from primary and secondary schools; Phase Two included six senior leaders – three deputy head teachers, one assistant head teacher and two head teachers.

*Data collection*

The study was approved by the researchers’ institutional Ethics Committee. On-going consent was built in and gave participants the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. On-going consent was particularly important as the interviews were exploring an emotive topic and had the potential to unearth feelings and emotions that participants were not prepared for. Therefore, as well as being able to opt out of the study at any point, ethical consent included the right to stop the interview at any point. The semi-structured interviews were undertaken at a time and place convenient and safe for the participants and varied in duration from 90 minutes to 180 minutes approximately and were audio recorded with participants’ permission.

Participants were also reassured that none of the data would be attributed to individuals so no-one could be identified. The interview data would be anonymised and all discussion would be treated with the utmost respect and confidentiality. Thus, pseudonyms or ID markers are used in any dissemination of the research. For further reasons of anonymity, most of the subjects taught by the secondary school teacher participants are not disclosed, rather they are referred to as subjects, X, Y or Z, the only exception to this is when the subject must be named in order to understand the specific subject related difficulty discussed.

*Data analysis*

The analysis and focus is on the linkage of policy and practice change to personal stress. All teachers had experienced long term absence from work with mental health problems and many remained absent from work, while a few had retired on ill-health grounds. The interviews were transcribed and transferred to a software programme for qualitative analysis (Atlas-ti v6.0). Figure 1 below shows how data were analysed to uncover themes to explore the issues relevant to the research area – teachers’ causal explanations of stress. In undertaking a thematic analysis, the researchers attempted to identify and group all data that fit within recognisable and coherent categories or concepts. These, to some extent, were pre-identified from a review of the literature on teacher stress and formed part of a loosely structured topic guide. Pre-identified categories for explanations of stress were: management structures, organisational change, policy and teaching reform, role conflict and interpersonal relationships (see first column, Figure 1). The pre-identified categories were used as a starting point, and as a way of getting to know the data. The data was read and re-read and relevant themes emerged (see column 3, Figure 1). The relevant themes were categorised in two strands (see column 2, Figure 1). In the first strand, policy development flux, we describe the following themes: (a) complex, constant change; (b) target-led performance; (c) leadership and school climate and (d) workload, themes which are similar to the ‘changes at work’, ‘interpersonal relationships’ and ‘work load’ factors mentioned in the 2017 research carried out by the HSE. The second strand describes the effects of policy developments on teacher identity under the following thematic headings: (a) autonomy and role conflict; (b) role ambiguity and (c) erosion of self-esteem. These factors are resonant with those from previous research (Day 2000; Enderlin-Lampe 1997; Fullan 2001 and Hargreaves 1997).

Insert Figure 1: Data analysis procedure

Themes are defined as units derived from patterns occurring in conversation topics, vocabulary and descriptions of recurring behaviour and feelings, shown in column 4, Figure 1 above. These came from the participants’ stories and were reconstituted to form a comprehensive picture of their collective and individual experiences of stress in their teaching (Bryman and Teevan 2005).

**Findings**

**Policy development flux**

*Complex, constant change*

Teachers universally described the seemingly continual programme of school reforms which lacked enough time to be embedded. Thus, innovations brought into the school system meant major restructuring of teaching methods and implementation of learning objectives resulting in an enormous intensification of work resulting in diverse and contradictory demands,

I think one of the things that, not just me but a lot of people find a challenge is all the new things that keep coming … just when everybody’s getting to grips with new strategies. And it’s almost like you’re not given time to get your head round things, to do things properly before they change something else. And it’s making sure that the training for those things filters through the school properly and they’re assessed and managed well and before that even has a chance to finish, something else is coming along(P7).

For many, the specific demands of the school context leads to a mismatch between the formal expectations of the school and personal motivation, this in turn appears to have impacted on their ability to function as a teacher and the achievement of results.

*Target-led performance*

Throughout the interviews, the constraints of the school context, in particular, the institutional focus on targets and results achievement is described as fundamentally altering the teacher’s role as an educator and “getting in the way” of the pupil-teacher relationship. Thus it was argued that a target-driven culture ultimately harmed the learning opportunities and psychological needs of children. The constraints imposed by overly rigid syllabuses, curricula and performance targets were perceived to detract from teachers’ expertise and insights accumulated through practice. Job satisfaction previously derived from working spontaneously and creatively was considered to be eroded by bureaucratic demands. Importantly, as this quote suggests, meeting the demands of new reforms outweighed the importance of the pupil-teacher relationship:

I think it’s heavily bureaucratic and I think there’s a great deal of pressure on people to perform to targets and there seems to be a loss of spontaneity that teachers used to have, and I think that, sadly, its gone. So it’s all conforming to syllabus and rigour of that syllabus rather than responding to the children and pupils that you’ve got in your care. It’s talk about statistics rather than the children (P103).

Again, as the following quote suggests, the sense of professionalism has been undermined by the removal of trust by management:

Teachers aren’t allowed to be the professionals that they’ve been trained to be and they wanted to be, in that they constantly have to account for what their actions are and what’s occurring in their schools (P108).

A teacher with 28 years of experience described how such demands pushed her to the point of suicide. She overdosed on medication following a performance appraisal during which she was put under pressure to produce results required to get the school out of special measures. The brief description provided here of the destruction of self-esteem and effectiveness, combined with the despair of an externally constructed failure permeates most of the interview data:

I don’t like to say I attempted suicide but I just attempted to get myself out of the situation in a drastic way because it felt like the only way out at the time. It felt like there’s no help, there’s nowhere to go, there’s no point. I’m useless. I’ll never achieve what they want me to achieve. I must be a rubbish teacher. All that sort of thing (P71).

*Leadership and climate*

The working conditions and atmosphere within the school also mediated the impact of policy development on teachers but were, in turn, altered by such changes. It is important to note that in our study, while there were numerous examples of teachers feeling bullied by head teachers, described in terms of feeling under constant scrutiny, pressure to perform to unrealistic expectations, unfair judgements and criticism; there were also positive examples of head teachers who provided a significant amount of support for teachers. However, difficulties with leadership and management styles dominated the discussions. One teacher vividly expressed the enormous impact of the excessive rationalisation of the school management in an account of how monitoring was carried out:

… the Head in that school just ruled with fear … I used to get letters in the middle of lessons feeding back on when he’d just walked past my lesson. His secretary would hand them to me in the middle of a lesson and I’d know it was another letter with all these faults about me (P10).

Other aspects of the micro-politics of the school negatively affecting teachers include decision latitude, lack of resources and administrative support and the lack of trust in their expertise. Although teachers were conscious of the pressures on school managers to successfully implement the new policies, they also felt excluded from the process and ill-equipped to implement the required changes. Management styles seemed to play an important role in allowing for a smooth implementation of new policies:

When this new head [teacher] came we expected a lot of changes and probably more work to implement the changes … As a staff she told us she wanted the planning improved so we all tried our very best. She did change a lot of things, and that is fine, but nothing was ever good enough (P9).

… the new head … immediately set about changing everything, didn’t take advice from anybody … and [the new head] also set about rubbishing everything. Everything that had gone before was a whole load of rubbish. Nothing was any good. Despite the fact our tests results were amongst the highest in the country, everything was no good (P20).

Others experienced what seem to be authoritarian, controlling behaviour from school leaders:

Just to tell you how bad it was. Just somebody watching you is just horrible. Just looking at you – looking through the window. Another thing was, he’d ask the kids about me. How unprofessional is that? … At the hospital the [specialist] said it’s quite likely that stress has brought this [physical illness] on. … He [the Headteacher] ruled the staffroom; you weren’t to go in the staffroom. He didn’t like people in the staffroom. It was a place where people would start … He didn’t want chat amongst staff. He didn’t want them communicating. At lunchtime he liked it if departments kept themselves to themselves in their department. That’s how he kept it. It wasn’t an open kind of thing (P10).

*Workload*

Another difficulty was the increased workload derived from the new ways of working. Participants consistently reported excessive workloads in terms of paperwork in addition to the pressures to improve results while simultaneously managing diverse social and educational issues presented in the classroom. One teacher comments that it is difficult to know what to prioritise:

All these little things just all were adding up and I thought if I go in people come and ask me for this, ask me for that and in the end it was as if you were running – well I was actually running down the corridor and never having enough time for anything (P12).

The stress of constantly ‘trying to catch up with things,’ never adequately attending to the growing list of responsibilities contributed to the participants’ sense of inadequacy and failure. These feelings can be increased by uncertainty about why things need to be done – because I believe in it; because it is necessary; or because it will look good for me/for the school? In most cases these feelings are internalised and not dealt with, potentially adding to anxiety and eventual ill health.

**Effects of Policy Developments on Teacher Identity**

*Autonomy and role conflict*

The participants in various ways expressed a decreasing level of autonomy and personal agency. One teacher simply said: “I’ve said for a few years now, we do not educate children, we train them to pass government inspired tests” (P20). Other participants referred to the lack of control, for example, in curricular matters which further impacted on their prestige, status and professional authority: “It's almost like part of your professionalism is taken away from you because so many decisions are made for you” (P7).

Teachers resented the loss of decision-making about classroom practice leaving them with doubts and, in some cases, guilt, about their role in the classroom. On the one hand, they considered themselves, primarily, as educators, helping pupils to learn; on the other, the constant push to achieve results contravened that tenet. Some teachers have felt that they were being scrutinised and children were being ‘cheated’ on their education. One teacher, in particular, talked about parents and children being ‘abused’ due to poor management practice of the school headteacher who was only interested in increasing the numbers in order to boost the school profits rather than in offering high quality education. Teachers have ended up feeling undervalued and unappreciated with little or no influence in the education process. As one teacher, put it:

… you could do good lesson observations but sometimes that’s not really enough and you sort of feel a bit, ‘Why on earth am I spending all my weekends and my evenings putting all this effort into it when nobody actually cares what I do? (P7)

*Role ambiguity*

Unclear role expectations for both teachers and managers were reported as responsible for numerous pressures and difficult working conditions, particularly for teachers. Stryker and Burke’s proposal of a ‘multi-faceted’ (2000) identity was the feeling of both teachers and senior managers alike. As stated by one senior manager:

… Now schools have to deliver on community cohesion, they have to deliver on knife crime, on sex in relationships, on a huge range of society issues and it seems to be because schools are the universal service that we are selected to do and it’s difficult to fit in because you have to take something out if you put something else in and maybe what we’re taking out is quite sad that it’s been removed in terms of some subjects and some knowledge bases … all to fit in the new agenda. I’m not saying it’s wrong to have all those things for kids, I’m just saying it’s a struggle to reconcile it with what’s going on in a classroom all the time (P109).

In other instances, teachers were torn between a call for a duty of care and their professional duties. For example, one teacher explained the added responsibility she felt for pupils with significant social difficulties:

… I’m dealing with the social issues, which actually are those of the social worker but there’s never enough social workers or people that can do anything. But these children come under our care so you are dealing with that (P104).

*Erosion of self-esteem*

Most teachers felt that they were failing the profession. They felt deficient and inadequate and that they are failing the children and themselves by not doing what they were supposed to be doing: encouraging active learning. Besides, they felt ‘doubts’ and ‘fears’ about the consequences of making decisions about their teaching practice and what they viewed as the ‘right thing to do’ for the benefit of the pupils. The quotations below reflect a sense of insecurity where self-worth is uncertain. Paradoxically, teachers not only resented not having control and autonomy over their profession but also feared ‘having control’ due to fear of failure and criticism:

 But that’s just the way that schools are. It’s results-led, target-led. So no, you don’t feel as though you have as much control as you would like … But then, you’re worried to have that control because you don’t want … to feel as though it’s you that's failed the children – even though you won’t have done, but that's how you’d be made to feel (P7).

While some teachers felt occasionally ‘vindicated’ when they were able to demonstrate their ability and achievements, the more commonly felt experience was one of professional defeat and waste. Those who talked about the ambiguous relief of early retirement best demonstrate this: “I feel grieved. I said to a friend, ‘What a shit way to end 30 odd years, to finish your career on a down’ … But, I’m now out” (P20). Another teacher said:

[The Head] knew that I was laying to rest the old Ofsted and she also saw the change in me because, overnight I suddenly could hold my head up high and I became instantly a full member of staff and I could confidently ask people questions (P19).

For some teachers, the loss of self-esteem and self-confidence permeated their personal lives, one said:

You start to doubt whether you are any use at all, in your normal life you would doubt yourself on whether you could do something like getting the tube. That’s how much it affected me (P10).

For some teachers this perception of worthlessness and impotence manifested in frustration and anger; lack of motivation and great dissatisfaction with their jobs:

 … my mind would be engaged on the frustration of going to work, the annoyance and frustration! You get annoyed with what’s happening to your colleagues, to students and your inability to do anything about it! (P16)

In a few cases, there was a sense of relief on the part of the teachers when they had to come to a decision to take time off, for example, due to a certified ‘illness’ (e.g. stress, depression or anxiety) as a way to reassure them that they have not ‘failed’. This could dissipate many of the feelings of guilt that teachers might get for ‘failing’ the profession. As noted by one of the teachers:

 But to be told that it’s up to you, to sort of sit opposite your head and them say, ‘Right if you don’t achieve the results we will be in special measures’, is quite a massive thing to put on one person. And then when I got signed off work … I got signed off by the psychiatrist I was seeing at the time – well, I still am. I felt I needed to be off, yeah; although I sort of let the psychiatrist make that decision because I always found it very difficult to say that I needed time off because again, that was almost like an admittance of failure, that I couldn’t teach at that time (P7).

**Discussion**

The teacher narratives in this study strongly resonate with the causes of stress-related ill health reported by the HSE mentioned earlier in this paper - organisational change, workload and lack of managerial support. Significantly, the perceived impact on teacher professional identity of role conflict, role ambiguity and loss of autonomy through increasingly bureaucratic processes are a central and unifying theme for the teachers’ explanations for distress. Among all competing explanations for lack of well being and emotional and mental illness, why should loss of identity predominate? Some of our understanding of this may lie in the dismantling of a relational system and culture of employment and its replacement with a tightly contractualised educational culture characterised by performance management and targets setting.

Teachers’ comments show that participating in performance review can cause stress. There are formal appraisal procedures such observations, review meetings and setting of objectives and as Ball states (2003, 218) this ‘allows heads to ‘control’ the teachers in a more managed way as more of the teachers’ behaviour is made public’. However, as one of the teachers in the current study states, the informal ‘watching’ by a line manager can be just as unnerving. To be seen as successful, teachers need to see themselves and think of themselves in new ways; they may ask themselves how am I doing since the principal last looked in on my lesson? What does he or she think? Am I doing as well as my colleagues? Those that are able to present themselves in this new way, may be able to push on with reforms but those that cannot are the ones who may succumb to ill health and sink. The pressure to meet performance targets leads one teacher in our study to consider suicide.

Comments from teachers in the current study also show that the managerialist approach to education leaves them feeling that their expertise is useful only for the schools’ accountability statistics rather than for the pupils’ learning and that they are no longer allowed to be professionals. They feel their knowledge is no longer their own, it has been, ‘commodified’ This involves a different perspective on knowledge and basic changes to relationships between the learner, learning, teachers and teaching ending up in a ‘thorough exteriorisation of knowledge’ (Lyotard cited in Ball 2003, 226).

With this dissociation of professional knowledge and expertise, and accountability pressures, comes loss of meaningful relationships within the school. Real social relations, where teachers chat in the staff room about pupils’ learning may be replaced with evaluative relations where teachers are judged for their performativity alone and their value as a real staff member and person is not noticed. This in turn may decrease individual commitment to the job and gradually dumbs down social relationships in schools. Day and Gu (2014) suggest that when the social organisation of the school is characterised by supportive, trusting and collegial relationships then teachers’ commitment and effectiveness, built through collective capacity impacts positively on professional identity and allows them to override challenging times. As Goleman (cited in Day and Gu 2014, 39) states – ‘we are wired to connect’. However, when those real connections break down so does teachers’ capacity to cope with educational change, workload and management issues leading to negative impact on emotional and mental wellbeing.

Teachers’comments also reflect that there is no time to tackle the work load, that the changes are never ending, that they are always playing catch up and that they are uncertain about why specific tasks and procedures are needed. These teachers are no longer prepared to commit as the ‘costs’ of participating in this constant and complex working environment outweigh the ‘rewards’ of being part of the school culture. They lack ‘continunace commitment’ and are fighting against their ‘normative commitment’. Just like the teachers in Fernet et al’s (2014) study the requirements of managerialism overrides teachers’ commitment to their pupils’ learning and their professional identity can be severely dented. As Ball (2003, 221) suggests there is potential for ‘‘splitting’ between teachers’ own judgements on good practice and pupils’ needs and rigours of new managerialism’. Professional commitment that focuses on individual autonomy and collegiality clashes with organisational commitment which focuses on measurement, competition and reward. Given that organizational commitment is predicated on shared employee and organisational values, the adoption of managerialism may lead to a loss of commitment to the organisation.

To return to comments earlier in the paper, commitment shapes identity which in turn shapes role behaviour which in turn shapes commitment - each factor impacts and influences the other (Stryker and Burke 2000). The level of salience that the teachers in the current study attach to their professional identities is being worn away and this influences the focus, effort and performance they are able to offer.

It is in this regard that previous theorising of commitment may have failed to consider its dissonant, sometimes, contradictory elements. Teachers, similar to other ‘vocational’ professionals, may see commitment only in terms of the direct recipients (pupils or patients, for example); institutional loyalty may be a secondary consideration or entirely rejected when viewed as undermining or in conflict with the former. In this situation, while individuals may strive to preserve an older model of teacher identity through their focus, effort and performance in terms of commitment to teaching, the power ultimately rests further up the system. When these are irreconcilable, stress and psychological disorder appear to follow, creating its own type of resolution.

**Conclusion**

The teachers’ and headteachers’ comments express the tension between two opposing forces, one being the old view of what it means to be a teacher, that is, commitment, service to the school and pupils’learning, ownderhsip of expertise and knowledge and the other being the new managerialist view of being a teacher, that is, accountability, performativity, meeting standards, and stepping up to the presentation of the school in a new corporate world. This tension is often internalised and impacts on the teachers’ identity – it pits taking care of themselves against taking duty to management and can lead to mental health and emotional wellbeing challenges. It is these factors that the teachers in this study are struggling with.

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