

# **Teachers and their transition to teach in schools in intense urban settings**

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This paper seeks to examine the transition of training teachers to schools in intense urban settings facing a diversity of disadvantage. The paper is based upon ongoing research with a group of teachers at the beginning of their careers in the teaching profession and has been conducted in two British conurbations, London and Manchester. The focus of the work has been upon the experiences of trainee teachers learning to teach in intense urban contexts.

The initial motive for the research was the writers' own experiences in initial teacher training of relatively small numbers of trainee teachers seeking and then moving to their first teaching posts in schools where attainment levels were relatively low and which were located in socio-economically disadvantaged areas of the conurbations within which we worked. Allied to this was data about teacher shortages and although there is evidence that media reports of teachers shortages in England (Dean, 2001) have been based upon inappropriate extrapolations from available data (Gorard et al, 2004) there is evidence that teacher shortages have been severe in particular locations (School Teachers Review Body, 2001) in England, not least large cities including London and Manchester. Based upon this emerging concern was a desire to investigate the actions, behaviours and experiences of trainees working within these particular contexts.

The broad context for our work is the concept of urban and, more specifically, urban education. Urban education is through the history and development of urban areas and the subsequent legacy of socio-economic disadvantage in such areas inextricably linked to continued low levels of aggregate pupil attainment in a relatively high proportion of urban secondary schools. Consequently, the use of the term urban

education has become synonymous with such educational disadvantage (see, for example, Maguire and Dillon, 1997). However, in the UK and England, in particular, with generally high levels of population density the question does arise about the extent to which the term urban continues to be of use where contextual commonalities between areas broadly described as urban are often insufficient in terms of the existence of broadly common variables. It may be that the term metropolitan to describe the more central zones of our larger urban areas (conurbations) is more appropriate. A related feature is the geographical, spatial and demographic dimensions of the term urban and, in particular, the extent to which smaller towns and cities and peripheral districts of conurbations can usefully be described as urban. The notions of urban and urban education are contested terms certainly in terms of which spatial locations might be described as urban, but also in terms of the socio-economic characteristics of the term urban and the associated question of which schools in the urban environment fit the term urban. Partly, this is because the spatial location of some schools and associated districts on the peripheries of urban areas often lacking some of the defining characteristics of urban on account, for example, of their immediate proximity to rural areas, but also because of the inextricable link between socio-economic disadvantage and notions of urban held by some writers; thus excluding those more advantaged schools located in urban areas. Where notions of urban or metropolitan do tend to converge is around relatively rapid shifts in populations and, in some cases, multicultural or multi ethnic communities, densities of populations surrounded by other densely populated areas mainly concentrated in the conurbations and with concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage. It is upon this more convergent notion of the urban that this paper focuses; those urban areas and the schools contained within and serving them with characteristics that match

more convergent notions of the urban or metropolitan. Such urban areas are referred to as intense urban settings. These include inner cities and areas with marked socio-economic disadvantage accompanied by one or more of the following features; high concentrations of social housing, high relative population densities and ethnic diversity.

It is in these intense urban settings that the attempts to improve schools and raise relative attainment levels have often foundered with perceived problems remaining seemingly intractable. Over the last decade there have been a variety of policy initiatives and reforms, including Excellence in Cities, Education Action Zones and the Schools Facing Challenging Circumstances programme, all with the ostensible intention of raising levels of attainment in urban schools. However, the problems remain. OFSTED (2000) point to the low proportion of schools with high levels of disadvantage that achieve results that are at or above the national average. They highlight the diversity of disadvantage that they face whilst simultaneously pointing to common features:

*a preponderance of families on low income, in poor housing and with little experience of education beyond compulsory schooling. Only a small minority of parents work in the professions: many are in low paid manual or service jobs or unemployed. In some cases families are exceptionally troubled. The communities are affected, to different degrees, by bleak surroundings and poor facilities, by poor health, by dislocation and disaffection, and by high levels of alcohol and drug abuse. (OFSTED, 2000, page 10)*

Three years after the OFSTED report on 'Improving City Schools' David Bell (2003) points to 'slow and unsteady' improvements in urban schools and 'almost intractable' problems with improvements in some schools being associated with declining standards of performance in others.

Of course, OFSTED's role in relation to city schools need not be constructed as neutral. There are concerns that OFSTED's focus upon standard measures of attainment and inspection against a narrow curriculum geared up to the needs of more advantaged young people may work against many urban schools. In addition, a 'big brother' approach to school accountability allied to 'naming and shaming' (Fink, 1999) may within the context of a marketised education system exacerbate the problems faced by urban schools.

The marketisation of education itself through the creation of educational quasi-markets and the corresponding emergence of powerful symbolic tools such as school league tables based upon pupil attainment can also be viewed variously as contributing to, creating the conditions for and being intimately associated with the difficulties faced by many urban schools. The interaction of these policy changes with social class inequalities and the relational nature of such inequalities especially marked in an English context (Goldthorpe, 1996) can be also be seen as combining to create circumstances in which many urban schools struggle to succeed. In particular, the effects of the creation of 'choice' for parents has enabled middle class parents to engage in a range of strategies and behaviours (Ball, 2003) which can result in their withdrawal from some schools and even whole areas of our cities (Whitty et al 1998, Thrupp 1999). Another outcome of this process has been the reinforcement and

creation of 'pecking orders' of schools; a marked feature of the urban context and, for schools at or near the bottom of the 'pecking order', one which can reinforce the relatively low attainment levels of some schools and impede attainment levels (Woods and Levacic, 2002).

By focusing upon the urban the work seeks to explore the concept of space within the context of trainee teachers and their work. This includes, in this particular instance trainee teachers moving to particular schools in particular locations, training as teachers in particular cities and their hinterlands and making sense of particular localities and, sometimes, their communities. Rapid shifts in the global economy and a general move towards a post-industrial capitalism associated with high and rapid levels of capital movements have, it is argued (Lash and Urry, 1994) combined to create a highly mobile labour force increasingly unattached to particular spaces or locations and replacing a labour force recognisably 'local' with personal histories strongly associated with particular locations. At its most extreme this might involve individuals and their family or other groups moving between countries with identities and attachments linked to mobile communities rather than fixed places. Perhaps more relevantly within the context of research into trainee teachers and their subsequent spatial movements, this might involve high levels of actual or anticipated geographical mobility associated with movements between schools as places of employment. In any such new work context teachers will be required to adapt to these spatial changes in terms of their working world, community, identity and social life in the particular local contexts in which they find themselves. The significance or otherwise of the local in such circumstances is of particular importance in this respect as demonstrated by Taylor et al (1996) in their study of Manchester and Sheffield. In

the context of our research the extent to which local or localised features inform the working lives of teachers and trainee teachers is of particular importance.

The educational literature relating to the theme of urban education is predominantly North American in origin and largely specific to a US context. In common with much UK literature on urban education there is a lack of clarity as to what exactly the term urban refers to and it is commonly used as an assumed term rather than one that is explicitly stated and defined. It is consequently difficult to ascertain the commonalities of context between these different literatures. Nevertheless the US literature on the preparation of teachers for teaching in city schools offers a number of insights that may be helpful in illuminating the UK or English context. Much of the literature takes as its central concern disparities between the school populations of US cities and the teachers preparing to teach in them. In essence the demographics are that urban schools are increasingly being populated by black and hispanic students, yet the teachers being prepared to teach in those same schools tend to be white and suburban; a situation exacerbated by increasing social and housing segregation so that many training teachers' first meaningful experiences of contact with black and Hispanic young people is on their teacher education programmes (Olmedo, 1997). Research conducted on the preferences of pre-service teachers suggests that few wish to teach in settings that are different from those with which they are familiar (Gilbert, 1995). A consequence is that a number of programmes have been developed with the aim of improving the preparation of suburbanite pre-service teachers for teaching in US cities (Sobel and French, 1998; Burant and Kirby, 2002). Literature written in the US to help prepare pre-service and serving teachers cope with the demands of urban classrooms reflects this context. The scale of the problem can be inferred from

literature aimed at white, suburban teachers preparing to teach in urban areas. Weiner (1999), for example, in seeking to convey to how cultural variations may influence language and behaviour draws attention to the Puritan origins of the common terms ‘bathroom’ and ‘restroom’ as opposed to the French usage of ‘toilette’ and ‘WC’.

Two distinct themes emerge from this body of literature about the preparation of US teachers for urban contexts. First, is the cultural, social and spatial distance between the pre-service teachers being trained to work in urban contexts and the young people and communities they will be working with. Second, is the need to further develop aspects of pre-service teacher programmes to impact upon this.

The UK based literature specifically addressing the preparation of teaching for working in urban schools is significantly sparser although there are distinct parallels to themes addressed by the US literature. Such parallels are especially evident in the nineteenth century literature on this issue. Kay-Shuttleworth writing in 1862 and quoted in Cook, C (1984) wrote about the training he had organised for teachers working with the urban poor and described subsequently by Grace (1978) as:

*Social and cultural missionaries – a kind of secular priesthood dedicated to the work of civilization. (Grace, 1978, p11)*

More latterly, Anderson (1975) made the case for specific programmes of training geared up to the needs of urban communities. Riddell (1999) proposed the need to develop a specifically urban pedagogy emphasising familiar concepts such as inclusion, reflection and appropriate expectations of pupils and proposing extended

teaching roles for community members and the creation of teacher champions for urban pedagogy. The US literature on teacher training is perhaps most directly echoed in Batteson and Sixsmith's (1995) description of how one higher education institution located in primarily rural settings offers urban experience to help trainee teachers break through stereotypes of class, gender and race and offer countervailing experiences to

*government images of urban schools as folk-devil incarnations and objects of derision*  
(Batteson and Sixsmith, 1995, p232)

In common with much of the US literature, attempts to articulate an urban pedagogy and proposals for specifically urban teacher training are not specifically linked to an evidence base about urban schooling and it seems reasonable to assume that they reflect the relatively low level of development of this concept.

In terms of the practice of initial teacher training in England the Teacher Training Agency's (TTA) Professional Standards for Qualified Teacher Status make no specific reference to urban, or indeed any other, geographical contexts in which trainee teachers might find themselves working. This can be viewed in various ways from reflecting an increasing emphasis upon the technical aspects of teaching to equipping new teachers with skills that will best enable them to engage with the demands of classrooms through to a wilful ignorance of the social justice dimensions of teaching (Mahony and Hextall, 1997). Whilst there is some evidence of the pressures faced by urban schools preventing them from engaging in initial teacher training (Menter, 1998) not least through the application of Special Measures imposed

by OFSTED, effectively excluding schools from substantial direct participation in ITT, a high proportion of trainee teachers do continue to be trained in urban schools. This may be in no small part related to the concentration in urban areas of higher education institutions offering ITT provision.

For teachers working in the disadvantaged schools that are the object of discussions regarding achievement and attainment levels and for teachers training to work in an making the transition to work in these schools it is clear that particular challenges are faced. OFSTED (2003) acknowledge that they are 'hard places to teach in' and, given the circumstances, it is of no surprise that Maguire and Dillon (1997) pose the question 'who will want to teach in them?' or put another way 'who can be enticed to teach in them'. It is the intention of the research to offer evidence that may cast some light upon these questions. Currently, various possible responses to these questions can be detected in the existing literature. Maguire (2001) based upon research with experienced and long stay inner-city teachers identifies a minority who remain in such schools on account of their classed identities. Such teachers recognised an affinity with the students and children they were teaching, were often aware of the class based dimensions of such affinities and some of them articulated and engaged in political action seeking to challenge the structures of urban schooling. However, as 'Phil' one of the teachers included in this study noted it is not clear that the declining ranks of this latter group of teachers are, at the very least, being refreshed by new entrants to the teaching profession. A contrasting response (Hargreaves, 2003) has been to seek to attract members of the creative class (Florida, 2002) identified as individuals with high levels of human capital, trying out radical solutions, testing and refining new techniques and exercising a great deal of judgement. Hargreaves (2003) views both

the Fast Track and Teach First schemes as the embodiment of such attempts to enrich the ranks of the profession and recruit and retain such a creative class. The emergence of Chartered Teacher Schemes in both London and Manchester seeking to create a collective identity for urban teachers in those two contexts can be viewed as having some links to such notions of attracting and retaining members of the creative class in urban schools.

When seeking to find out more about who will want to work in schools in intense urban settings it must be borne in mind that these teachers new to the profession are likely to be subject to, at the very least, some of the issues faced by all teachers as they move into the teaching profession. However, it may be that teachers working in intense urban contexts are more exposed to factors that may lead to personal or professional dissatisfaction than those working in other contexts. Research has suggested that whilst teachers may not expect to be well rewarded financially for their work they do expect significant intrinsic rewards associated with the work that they undertake (Johnson, 1990). In England the anticipation of such rewards is likely to have been reinforced by extensive media campaigns aimed at increasing the number of recruits to the profession and emphasising strongly such intrinsic rewards. The inevitable uncertainties of teaching can interfere with the acquisition of such intrinsic rewards by teachers (Lortie, 1975) and mean that teachers have no assurance that they will succeed in the classroom. Correspondingly the nature of individual schools themselves in terms of working conditions such as school facilities, the perceived competence of school managers and the opportunities for professional development can prevent teachers from gaining intrinsic rewards (Moore Johnson and Birkeland, 2003). How far teachers working in intense urban settings struggle more than their

counterparts in other settings to gain such intrinsic rewards is not clear from the existing literature, although it seems reasonable to suggest that at least some of the conditions of teaching in intense urban settings may militate against the gaining of such rewards. One aspect of this may be related to the professional standing of teachers and teaching both within and outside of the teaching profession itself. Although there have long been doubts about the status of teaching relative to other professional occupations linked to inferior pay levels, a perceived absence of specialised knowledge required to practice as a teacher and accusations of quasi professionalism it may be that in the current climate of performativity both within and outside of the teaching profession that some teachers are more prone than others to lack of professional standing deriving from their work. Thus a teacher working in a school where pupil attainment levels are high, inspections reports are positive and school facilities are excellent may derive greater status from his/her work than a teacher working in less favourable contexts. One aspect of the research is thus to examine the extent to which the lived in realities of trainee and newly qualified teachers accords with such patterns.

### **Research methods**

The research was conducted with trainee teachers on full time Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) courses in Manchester and London. 120 trainee teachers were initially surveyed at the outset of their PGCE year regarding a range of issues including the types of schools they would like to work in, their own schooling and their personal histories in relation to their previous places of residence (Ash, Hall and Raffo, 2004). A further survey was issued to the same group close to the completion of their PGCE year and seeking to ascertain, amongst other things,

whether or not their views on schools they wished to work in had changed. From the initial survey data a group of ten trainee teachers were selected for further research. The ten were selected according to one or more of a range of criteria including the involvement of trainee teachers studying in both London and Manchester, the inclusion of trainees indicating an intention to work in urban schools, the inclusion of trainees indicating an intention to work in schools with single or multiple disadvantages as well as those expressing no particular preferences in terms of schools they wished to work in and those indicating an intention to work in non-urban schools (rural or semi-rural). Each trainee teacher involved in this second stage of the research was interviewed on three occasions during their PGCE year. The interviews were semi-structured and sought to develop themes from earlier interviews during the second and third interviews. The final interviews took place at the end of each trainee's PGCE course. For the vast majority of the trainees both the surveys and the interviews took place during the critical period in which they were applying for and being interviewed for posts in which they would begin as newly qualified teachers. A case study developed from interviews with one of these trainee teachers follows.

### **Case studies and discussion**

The following case studies of individual trainee teachers are used to highlight some of the issues faced by such individuals as they train to teach in schools and higher education institutions and make the transition into the teaching profession. All of the trainee teachers have been given pseudonyms.

## **Lynn**

Lynn was 22 when she began her PGCE course in Manchester. She had been brought up in a socio-economically disadvantaged part of a conurbation and attended her local primary and secondary (comprehensive) schools in that same area. After leaving school she had attended a pre-1992 university to study Modern Languages where she described herself as the 'token' local. After graduating she transferred to the PGCE course at the same university where she had also gained a place on the Fast Track teacher programme. During the PGCE course she lived with her partner and child in the same part of the city where she had been brought up and remained in close contact with her extended family. Early in the course she indicated that she wanted to work in an inner city school and explained it as follows:

*'I think kids from that background – the bark is a lot worse than the bite so to speak'*

Lynn referred to her own schooling as a reason why she wanted to work in such an environment:

*'I had quite a positive experience from school because I was quite bright and so teachers always had a lot of time for me'*

During her first school experience, in a school in the same area of the city in which she had attended school herself, she described the reaction of the pupils to her presence as a teacher as follows:

*'They all thought it was hilarious that I was from (the same part of the city).....'*

During her first period of school experience she used the school bus to get home and again got a strong reaction from the pupils:

*'It was worse for the kids than it was for me... ..the kids were so shocked ....there was never any problem where I thought I'd have to intervene, nothing other than swearing and I am not going to tell them off on a bus for swearing, maybe some people would but you know'*

By the end of the first period of school experience there was an emerging sense of Lynn reflecting upon her relationship with the locality and the pupils attending the schools. In her interviews there was no sense of Lynn entering an environment that was in any way alien to her at least in terms of the locality in which she had lived. Consequently the distance between her and the inner city did not exist in the same way that it clearly does for both US and some English trainee teachers (Batteson and Sixsmith, 1995, Sobel and French, 1998, Burant and Kirby, 2002). However, she did have concerns about how lived in experiences of the inner city might transfer to other urban contexts. This was manifested in concerns about the extent to which she would be able to empathise with disadvantaged young people from other cities

*I don't know whether I would have the same empathy with people in a different city....In a way you make a difference quite quickly your accent they (the pupils) do automatically assume that they know all about your background whereas teaching in another city my accent is not going to mean anything to them so they are not going to make assumptions so it is a different kind of thing*

Lynn was also concerned about the extent to which her capacity to relate to young people would operate across the conurbation in which she lived. She explained this in terms of how people in other parts of the city might respond to her accent and where she came from:

*People living in (another part of the conurbation) just think (the district of the conurbation Lynn had been brought up in) is one big ghetto*

Lynn's second period of school experience was in a more suburban and affluent district of the conurbation. Lynn described it as follows:

*Very middle class school in my opinion...it is deceptive because a lot of the kids travel from further out.....I did a lot of conversation with years 10 and 11 the kind of things like where do you go on holiday, what do your parents do and fro answers that I got in those kind of sessions yes it is quite a middle class school.*

This was the first time that Lynn had mentioned social class in the interviews and there is a sense of her using this concept in a negative manner to describe what she is not rather than what she is. This was also evident in Lynn's second interview in which she speculated upon herself teaching in one of the most elite secondary schools in the conurbation.

*Can you imagine me at (name of elite secondary school), not really you know*

This may be related to apparent confusion about her own class status in relation to her family. This apparent confusion was most evident when Lynn discussed her mother's social class

*My mum's got middle class aspirations, my mum's in denial about the fact that you know we are not very posh, but I don't know I just think she is just my mum*

By way of contrast, Lynn was much clearer about her father's social class. She described him as being 'very' working class. Similar tensions were evident when Lynn was discussing the influence of her parents on her choices of school. Lynn referred to her mothers' aspirations for her and subsequent disappointment that being on the Fast Track programme would exclude teaching at independent schools, although there was a sense that this aspiration was mediated by her mother's recognition of Lynn's own position on this matter:

*But then as soon as we talked about it she has been yes she understands why I want to teach in that kind of school*

Her father's interest in her career progression was described thus:

*He is interested in what I do and stuff and I talk to him about teaching, he likes hearing all the stories and he is proud of me going and doing what I am doing. But he would never offer me career advice*

In terms of making sense of these expectations or lack of them from her parents Lynn described a strong sense of agency in pursuing goals on her own terms:

*I have always gone against people's perceptions of what having made it is, like people who advised me against going into teaching because that didn't tally with their ideas about being successful*

There is a notion here of Lynn constructing a set of values to counter those she faces amongst family and friends and of the initial decision to go into teaching being a social and cultural manifestation of those values.

Lynn spoke of her second, 'middle class' school in positive terms in a number of respects and made a number of unfavourable comparisons with her first school serving a more socio-economically disadvantaged intake of pupils. This can, within the context of her continued commitment to teaching in an inner city school, be interpreted as evidence of a more complex understanding of the lived in realities of working in disadvantaged schools. She was impressed, for example, with the standards of professional practice she observed in her second school and compared both these and teacher pupil relationships favourably in relation to her previous school.

*It was nice to see what a really good school is, yes I really enjoyed it but it has made me definitely want to go to an inner city school*

From the first interview there was a tension between Lynn's desire to work in an inner city area and the pressing need to gain employment:

*'I am just really concerned about getting a job first of all.....I am the only wage earner in my house so I have not got the flexibility where I can wait and see what comes up if you see what I mean.'*

Consequently it was not clear that her first job would actually be in an inner city school. Such tensions can be viewed as being manifested in her application for a post in the more suburban school in which she undertook her second period of school experience. Lynn was not short listed for interview for this post.

Lynn expressed the view in all three interviews that others, with less understanding of the culture and context of her area, might fail to understand the actions, words, intentions or positions of those who lived there.

*'I think a lot of the time some teachers see things as a discipline issue that I wouldn't necessarily see as a discipline issue.....sort of being cheeky which the teacher would take as an affront'*

*'I am well aware of how my situation on paper could be conceived by somebody else if you see what I mean. But in reality I come from quite a happy home but on paper it wouldn't look like that...I think a lot of the time people make judgments on kids and their backgrounds'*

There is a sense in the above of Lynn's deep lived in experiences of her locality leading to concerns about the extent to which those without such knowledge and understanding would be able to understand and work effectively with young people in that locality.

Close to the end of the PGCE course Lynn was offered and accepted a post at an inner city school in a different city. The school had low levels of attainment, had recently been in special measures and could be described as facing multiple disadvantage.

Lynn's case offers an insight into the potential complexities of trainee teacher's transitions into teaching in inner city schools and the potentially fragile nature of their position. There is a clear sense of class consciousness, some sense of class affinity and a strong sense of affinity with young people in disadvantaged urban schools and of links between this and the desire to teach in urban schools for Lynn. Yet despite this there are tensions that can be linked to her own family and, more acutely, to her own and her immediate family's economic circumstances, that have the clear potential to act as countervailing influences leading her to apply for jobs not matching this desire and potentially taking up the first post she is offered. Ostensibly Lynn might be viewed as a member of the creative class most obviously through her participation and inclusion in the Fast Track scheme. Her academic record, and attendance at an elite higher education institution since leaving school, would further strengthen her profile in this respect. However, her lack of geographical mobility and sense of self strongly linked to her localised affinities suggest otherwise and do not neatly fit the description offered by Florida (2002). Lynn has a strong sense of locality and of forging relationships with young people as a teacher based upon this notion of

locality. There is evidence that her knowledge of her locality and the broader conurbation within which she lives has impacted upon her ideas about teaching and informed decisions about the sort of contexts in which she would like to teach. How far these notions transfer as she reconstructs her sense of place to her new post in a different city remains to be seen.

## **Pete**

Pete was 34 when he began his PGCE course in London. As well as undertaking his PGCE Pete was on the Fast Track teaching scheme. His specialist subject was Economics and Business Education He had been brought up in a large town located in a largely rural and semi-rural part of his county. He attended a comprehensive school in the county town in which he had been raised. His parents both worked as civil servants. Prior to joining the PGCE course Pete had worked for multinational businesses in various management capacities. He explained his decision to make a career change and move into teaching as follows:

*Because I lost the appetite for business and I enjoyed management. I enjoyed leading people, leading teams, delivering...but I got I lost the rationale about why I was doing it...for profit and I wanted to reefing that again and so I moved into teaching with the specific intention as a career to develop...hopefully one day becoming a head teacher myself and cos...because while I lost the desire for doing it for profit I found after I spent a lot of time thinking about it, I have always been interested in education and developing people. Therefore this was an opportunity to combine that with my management skills.*

The ambition to become Head of a school was reinforced later in the first interview:

*I have come in to become a headmaster of schools which have failed and become one of those people that make a difference in terms of that. As I said it is my ambition and long term aim, whether I achieve it or not is another thing. I have no desire to work in schools which currently already are great. That's not what I have come in for.*

This time it was linked strongly to the notion of working in failing schools and 'making a difference'.

*I want to work in a challenging school. I like challenging schools*

When Pete began his period of continuous school experience during his PGCE year he described his school in socio-economically disadvantaged district of London as follows:

*My experience so far has been one of genuine shock. I was blown away by the attitude and the almost viciousness with which the children treated each other and the staff.*

Initially Pete stressed the commonalities between this secondary school and the one he had attended as a pupil.

*I am sure that my school was very similar to the school I am in, but when I was a kid it did not really seem that bad*

Having completed his teaching experience in this school he reaffirmed his commitment to securing a post in a 'challenging' school, but expressed a number of direct concerns arising out of his teaching experiences:

*In my last school I really don't think I would have survived a year of teaching. I had just started feeling mentally weak, ill almost. As if I was not enjoying this anymore. There is a limit to what you put yourself through for something you believe in*

Pete regularly discussed his career change and new experiences on his PGCE course with a group of close friends and with his parents. He referred to his friends as largely very supportive although he wasn't always sure about the forms that this support took:

*It's getting to the point where occasionally where I feel I am some kind of martyr, because they end up singing my praises to everyone saying, you know he's given up his job and he's gone into teaching what a hero. That's not what I have done.*

What emerges from this though is a clear sense that there is status and kudos to be derived by Pete from his peer network directly arising out of his move into teaching and, in particular, into teaching in inner city areas. However, this status and kudos did not always transfer to other individuals and groups important to Pete. In particular, Pete was more concerned about his parents' reaction to him moving into teaching:

*I was the shining star. I was the one I was earning more money than....and to some extent money is always seen as a bit of a sign of social status and I think my parents were very proud.....now they have to explain that their son is a teacher rather....or*

*just a teacher...as opposed to being the manager of a blue chip company, which was far more exotic. I guess they'll be slightly happier if I do become a headmaster. They are not unhappy. They are not unsupportive*

Here there is a sense of Pete's anxiety about his change of status and how that might impact on his parents. His ambition to become a School Head can be seen in this context as being directly linked to the bridging of a status deficit, both in terms of the increased remuneration received by school Heads and the status associated with the occupation of a more senior role in the teaching profession.

Pete's own reflections upon his change of career are varied and can be seen as representing both hopes in terms of anticipated personal rewards and fears in the sense of the sense of risk associated with his career change:

*I have not done it to gain hero status and I am not doing it because I feel like I need to give something back to society. I do need it because I actually feel that's where I personally and selflessly get most enjoyment out of my life.*

*There is a touch of madness. Getting a very highly paid job where I was destined for the top and to start from the bottom. And sometimes I think I am mad myself.*

## **Graham**

Graham was 24 at the start of his London based PGCE course in which he had specialised in the teaching of Modern Foreign Languages. He had grown up mainly in

an affluent suburb on the periphery of a large conurbation, although had spent part of his childhood abroad. His father had been a manager in the catering industry and his mother was a civil servant. Graham was married to a serving teacher at the time the research was conducted.

During his first interview at the outset of the course Graham expressed no particular preference regarding where he ultimately wished to teach other than a mild preference for a sixth form or further education college.

*I am quite happy to teach wherever, I mean I have no preference really where I teach. It's the subject. If you are interested in the subject, it's fine by me. I'll teach you.*

Graham cited a range of factors he would consider when deciding which jobs to apply for. These included the working conditions within the school, the way teachers are treated within the school and the school's ethos.

*You normally get a feel when you arrive at a school, whether you are going to fit in, it's your gut instincts.*

Graham spent his first period of continuous school experience in a school in a socially disadvantaged district of East London. He described the young people attending the school as follows:

*Mostly boys, no sixth form. Very low expectations of themselves. They don't really value their education, I don't think in most cases, they have such low expectations of*

*their own lives that they regard school and education as totally pointless, which is totally sad.*

His description of working at the school was as follows:

*The people I work with are excellent. There is a lot of support.*

Prior to his second interview Graham had unsuccessfully applied for a post at an independent school. He had been especially attracted to the ‘fantastic facilities’ at the school. He described his reaction to not being offered this post as follows:

*It would have been great, it would have been fantastic. But yeah they are obviously looking for someone a lot more experienced than me. Its not really a NQT (newly qualified teacher) kind of position, but it would be nice.*

Since failing to secure this post Graham had applied for a job in a ‘challenging inner London comprehensive school where most of the children have a English as a second language’. He explained this change of approach as follows:

*Before I took my first placement I wanted to teach more able pupils. Now I am at school with more able pupils I actually find out I enjoy the less able pupils more, getting the most out of them*

In part, this could be attributed to Graham’s positive experiences of his second placement school in East London:

*It's a good school, its totally inclusive. So they take all kinds of kids ....great ethnic diversity, a really positive environment and the kids are cracking*

A well as the nature of the school itself a recurring theme in Graham's thinking about applying for teaching jobs in schools was the possibilities for career development:

*And career development you know, the possibility to go on and develop with the school as well.*

## **Jane**

Jane was aged 25 at the outset of her Manchester based PGCE year. Her specialist subject was Modern Foreign Languages. She attended a comprehensive secondary school in the same town that she had been brought up in. Her father's and step-father's occupations were as teachers and sales people. The town from which she originates is situated in a largely rural and semi rural area although its proximity to Greater Manchester means that it acts as a dormitory town for those commuting to the conurbation. At the outset of the course Jane stated that she wanted to work in an 'inner city school' where she could 'make a difference in the lives of people whose backgrounds do not include university education'.

Jane explained this aspiration in terms of her own difficult educational circumstances, she had left home at 16 before taking her A levels and had been dependent upon income support:

*Partially from my own experience doing my A levels I found it very difficult to be motivated to do my work when I was getting income support and getting into a lot of debt with gas bills*

She also explained this aspiration in terms of her husband's experiences. Her husband had attended an inner city school in an area of marked socio-economic disadvantage, had left school at 16 and had subsequently moved to a skilled manual job with limited personal and job satisfaction:

*The same can be said for every single member of his family, all of his brothers are working in factories or as security guards and none of them are earning much money and have no security with their lifestyle. I would like to think I could make a difference to people like that as well.*

Since marrying her husband Jane had lived in a socio-economically disadvantaged district of Manchester.

As well as her desire to teach in a school in a particular location Jane was also interested in working in a school with a sixth form:

*I do want to work with A levels students as well. It would have to be a comprehensive school that had a sixth form as well, but they are not easy to come by are they?*

From her own family, as opposed to the one into which she married, Jane has received mixed messages about her shift into teaching in general and her desire to work in

inner city schools in particular. Her father who at the time of the research continued to work in an inner city school did:

*His utmost to try and persuade me not to go into teaching. Don't do it whatever. He has given me all the accounts of bad behaviour you find in inner city schools.*

Other family members similarly tried to persuade Jane against joining the teaching profession. Another teacher in her family had, by way of contrast, inspired her with the way he talked about teaching and his dedication to his work, 'he always seemed to get a lot of satisfaction from it'.

*Once she had begun the course and was making decisions about the sort of jobs to apply for Jane again received strong signals from family members about the type of schools she should teach in with a strong preference for her to take jobs in academically selective and independent schools located outside of the city.*

*My mum, for example, she won't hear of me going and working at XXXX School (an inner city school serving a socio-economically disadvantaged community).....she doesn't want to say to her friends that her daughter is working in an inner city school*

Jane undertook her first period of continuous school experience in an inner city school serving an area of marked socio-economic disadvantage. She summarised her experience there as follows:

*I actually really enjoyed it; it has been a real eye opener. Some of the behaviour is absolutely shocking but I actually got to like the kids....I heard one of the parents call her daughter an arsehole.....I was horrified by it, just because your daughter didn't*

*hold open a door and you called her arsehole. But I thought if their self esteem is being knocked at home like that and then they are going into school and not achieving there what chance have they got. I really would like to work with kids who come from that sort of background, build their self esteem up, see some real improvements, find a way of getting them out of that trap.*

The experience at her first PGCE placement school had reaffirmed her intention to seek a post in a school serving more socio-economically disadvantaged young people. However, during her second period of school experience in an academically selective maintained school she had applied for a job at a maintained grammar school in an affluent suburb of Manchester. Her decision to apply for this post had been influenced both by her desire to secure a post with some sixth form teaching, she had enjoyed the A level teaching at her second school, and she thought 'possibly' as a consequence of family pressure. Jane was not offered the post at this grammar school and she later successfully applied for a post at a 11-16 comprehensive school in a socio-economically disadvantaged area of Manchester.

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