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Being English Teachers in Gaza

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Resumo

Ao longo de 8 meses, um pequeno grupo de professores primários de inglês, em Gaza, trabalhou à distância com um investigador do British Council, sediado em Londres, para articular a sua identidade como professores de inglês, fazer recomendações para fortalecer a identidade dos professores de inglês no seu contexto e considerar as implicações para organizações, como o British Council e o seu trabalho com os professores. O projeto de investigação seguiu os princípios da Investigação Participativa de Ação, utilizando uma variedade de quadros de identidade de professores, e a reflexão sobre o próprio processo de investigação também contribuiu para as conclusões. Os professores identificaram as suas áreas prioritárias como: cidadania e valores; bem-estar e trauma dos alunos; relações com os pais; bem-estar e trauma dos professores; atitudes para o desenvolvimento profissional contínuo; política e regulamentos. Os docentes perspetivam um papel fundamental para o inglês na expressão da identidade palestina, no global, abrindo Gaza à cultura e diversidade internacionais, apesar do bloqueio ilegal, e, por isso, querem fazer da sala de aula de Inglês um lugar que apoie o bem-estar dos estudantes. Fizeram recomendações ao nível de sala de aula, da escola, da comunidade e da política e desenvolveram um quadro de apoio ao futuro trabalho de identidade dos professores com base no processo. As conclusões sugerem a necessidade de um papel mais forte para o trabalho de identidade dos professores na contribuição para os sistemas nacionais de educação e existem recomendações para permitir que os professores de inglês, dentro desses sistemas, tenham uma voz mais ativa na formação do British Council e outros trabalhos no ensino de língua inglesa ao nível internacional.

Abstract

Over the course of 8 months, a small group of primary English teachers in Gaza worked by distance with a researcher, who works at the British Council based in London, to articulate their identity as English teachers, make recommendations for strengthening English teacher identity in their context, and consider the implications for organisations like the British Council and their work with teachers. The research project followed the principles of Participatory Action Research using a variety of teacher identity frameworks, and reflection on the research process itself also contributed to the findings. The teachers identified their priority areas as: citizenship and values; student wellbeing and trauma; relationships with parents; teacher wellbeing and trauma; attitudes to continuing professional development; politics and policy. They see a key role for English in expressing Palestinian identity globally, and opening Gaza to international culture and diversity despite the illegal blockade, and want to make the English classroom a place that supports student wellbeing. They made recommendations at classroom, school, community and policy level and we developed a framework to support future teacher identity work based on the process. The findings suggest the need a stronger role for teacher identity work in contributing to national education systems and there are recommendations for enabling English

teachers within those systems to have a louder voice in shaping British Council and other work in English language teaching internationally.

Resume

Pendant 8 mois, un petit groupe d'enseignants d'anglais primaire à Gaza a travaillé à distance avec un chercheur, qui travaille au British Council basé à Londres, pour exprimer leur identité en tant qu'enseignants d'anglais, faire des recommandations pour renforcer l'identité des enseignants d'anglais dans leur contexte, et examiner les implications pour des organisations comme le British Council et leur travail avec les enseignants. Le projet de recherche a suivi les principes de la recherche d'action participative à l'aide d'une variété de cadres d'identité des enseignants, et la réflexion sur le processus de recherche lui-même a également contribué aux résultats. Les enseignants ont identifié leurs domaines prioritaires comme étant : la citoyenneté et les valeurs; bien-être et traumatismes des élèves; les relations avec les parents; bien-être et traumatisme des enseignants; attitudes à l'égard du développement professionnel continu; politique et politique. Ils voient un rôle clé pour l'anglais dans l'expression de l'identité palestinienne à l'échelle mondiale, et l'ouverture de Gaza à la culture et à la diversité internationales malgré le blocus illégal, et veulent faire de la classe anglaise un lieu qui soutient le bien-être des étudiants. Ils ont formulé des recommandations au niveau de la classe, de l'école, de la collectivité et des politiques et nous avons élaboré un cadre pour appuyer le travail futur sur l'identité des enseignants en fonction du processus. Les résultats suggèrent la nécessité d'un rôle plus important pour le travail d'identité des enseignants dans la contribution aux systèmes éducatifs nationaux et il ya des recommandations pour permettre aux enseignants d'anglais dans ces systèmes d'avoir une voix plus forte dans la formation british council et d'autres travaux dans l'enseignement de la langue anglaise à l'échelle internationale.

Abbreviations	
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
ELT	English Language Teaching
L2	Second language
OPT, oPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories, comprising Gaza and the West Bank
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
UN	United Nations
UNRWA	The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East

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Introduction

My interests in this research project stem firstly from living in the region between 2005 and 2012, in Jordan and Lebanon. During this time, for 2 years, I managed a development project for Palestinian teachers in the refugee camps across Lebanon, and also formed close personal

ties with Palestinians which have remained to this day. Gaza has been subject to an illegal blockade and continuous conflict and oppression for many years and, while Palestine has established an independent education system, it is still heavily dependent on donors and subject to donor priorities. I wanted to work with English teachers in Gaza to see things from their perspective; to work with them to better understand how they see their identity and how they feel it can be strengthened to support autonomous education in Gaza.

Secondly, I currently have a global role, supporting British Council teams in their work with English language teachers in national education systems. There has been a shift in emphasis around this work in recent years, a recognition of experience and research (e.g. Walter & Briggs, 2012) which shows that, however good a training course is, unless the right systems are in place to support effective Continuing Professional Development (CPD), teachers are unlikely to change their practice. This has led to the development of better needs analysis tools, especially to make the voices of teachers louder in project design, to projects with a much stronger focus on areas such as mentoring and building communities of practice, to the inclusion of much more support for the application of learning, and to a greater emphasis on understanding the impact of teacher development on learners (British Council, n.d.).

However, while the question of teacher identity, at the level of both the individual teacher and the school community, is implicit in ideas such as collaboration and self-directed learning, it is not often recognised explicitly, either as an influence on the success of projects, or as an area that projects can aim to develop. Through working with these teachers I wanted to gain insights that can help the British Council and similar organisations provide a platform that does more to strengthen English teacher identity and develop teacher agency and leadership.

A key aspect to this is the contested role of English language and English language education which is subject to competing ideologies, including within the British Council. I hoped that by working together, we might gain insights as to how these teachers can situate their identity within the wider contexts of Palestinian education and society and the Palestinian cause, with a view to shifting the balance towards local needs.

Chapter I: Background, Aims and Rationale

1. Context and rationale

a) Gaza and Palestine

The landing page of the United Nations site *The Question of Palestine* refers to an ongoing committee, formed in 1975, “to enable Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the right to return to their homes and property from which they have been displaced.” (United Nations, 2020) It safe to say that this committee has not succeeded. Just last year, “the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced that the preliminary examination into the “Situation in Palestine” had concluded that war crimes had been committed in the OPT” and collective punishment through the illegal blockade in Gaza continues with no noticeable intervention from the rest of the world (Amnesty International, 2020). As a result of continuing hostilities, and especially the blockade, poverty and unemployment rates are exceptionally high in Gaza, one of the most densely populated places in the world, and “the compounded effects of the blockade and repeated armed conflicts and violence continue to have less visible, but profound, psychological impact on the people of Gaza.” (UNRWA, 2020) As an example of the extent to which the situation is deteriorating, today, 1 million refugees rely on UNRWA (The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Near East) for food aid across Palestine, up from 80,000 in 2000 (ibid.).

b) The education context

Over the last century, Palestinian education has been largely led by outside actors, from using an Egyptian or Jordanian curriculum up until recently, to ongoing efforts at reform mostly driven by donors (Ramahi, Education in Palestine: Current Challenges and Emancipatory Alternatives, 2015), and political pressure from the US and Israel, particularly on the schools run by UNRWA, where the research participants work. Inevitably, this has led to a gap between the real educational needs of the country and reality. Shinn (2012) argues that it is specifically donor influence and its singular, narrow perspective that prevents effective Palestinian teacher education and a comprehensive approach to education reform. In the current circumstances, an immediate withdrawal of donor aid does not appear possible or practical, but any attempts at reform need to support “the creation of an authentic Palestinian vision and agenda for education reconstruction [...which works towards] a viable nation state capable of developing and

contributing to the global community,” (Ramahi 2017:228) and independence from donor agendas. It means there is a particular onus on both outside actors and the education system itself to ensure representation of local needs, recognition of the challenges posed by the context, and the development of agency among those working within the system towards an autonomous, emancipatory system that supports the goals of the Palestinian cause.

c) UNRWA and the education system

The other participants in this research project work at schools run by UNRWA, which were originally set up in 1950 for refugees from other parts of Palestine, and are established as part of public education provision. UNRWA directly supports the 600,000 of the 1.4m refugees in Gaza (out of a total population of 1.9m) who live in the designated refugee camps and they have 276 schools for over 282,360 students. As well as education they offer “health and mental health care, relief and social services, microcredit and emergency assistance.” (UNRWA, 2020)

I have worked with UNRWA in Lebanon, with some highly committed, expert staff. It is, however, an external actor which relies on donor funding. Although it commits to using the curriculum of the host country, in Palestine it recently adapted materials and trained teachers to ensure ‘neutrality.’ A statement points out that it has been validated by “*The de-classified US Government Accountability Office (GAO) report of February 2019.*” (UNRWA, 2020) These changes have caused protests across Palestine (Zakarneh, 2020) and caused serious problems for teachers, as will be shown in the findings.

d) British Council work and English language teaching (ELT) in Palestine

The British Council describes itself as a cultural relations organisation which “builds connections, understanding and trust between people in the UK and other countries through arts and culture, education and the English language.” (British Council (1), n.d.) It works with English teachers in national education systems across the world through teacher development projects, and reaches millions online (British Council, 2018). The British Council has worked in Palestine since 1943, and English language teaching (ELT) has been central to that work. This is now focused on the *Teaching for Success OPT* project, which follows the principles described in the introduction and in chapter II.1 below. It is funded by UK government grants, and works “in partnership with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to support the development of English language teaching and learning across Palestine.” Specifically, the project aims,

To equip all Palestinian state school English teachers with the skills, knowledge and confidence they need to teach more effectively, to adopt a learner-centred, activity-based classroom approach as well as establishing a strong community of practice through which English teachers share ideas, solutions and best practice.

The project uses a combination of moderated online courses (including discussion forums and online meetings), and Teacher Activity Groups (TAGs), which are designed to act as a community of practice. It also acknowledges outside influences on teachers, particularly within the system:

Palestinian state schools teachers have a heavy workload, teaching many classes per week –often large mixed ability classes. There is a lack of motivation amongst many teachers due to relatively low salaries, limited access to high quality training and supplementary ELT resources. Most teachers use traditional authoritative teacher-centred methodology. Some teachers feel that CPD is something which ‘is done to them’ and does not meet their needs or interests.

However, as is common, identity is not explicitly addressed in the aims of the project. The teachers in the research group were also participating in *Teaching for Success* for some of the time.

For further context relevant to the research relationships, it is worth noting that, while I was working in Jordan in 2007, the British Council in Gaza was attacked and badly damaged by fire during protests. It has remained closed since then, while operating an office in Ramallah in the West Bank.

e) Why English teacher identity?

It is recognised that teachers are key to both quality (Hattie, 2003) and equity in education (Dubet & Duru-Bellat, 2007), yet, as pointed out above, after decades of teacher development project interventions in Palestine, research into teachers continues to highlight low motivation and the persistence of “traditional authoritative teacher-centred methodology,” as well as a passive approach to CPD (British Council Palestine, 2019), suggesting that, on the whole, these initiatives have been ineffective.

As far as I am aware, there have been no recent studies into in-service English teacher identity in Gaza. However, a number of Palestinian researchers have touched more broadly on teacher identity in recent years. Yamchi points out that, “Any teacher training program in the Palestinian context should take into account the socio-political effects of occupation, limited resources, and unequal institutional structures, along with cultural, religious, and ethnic issues.” (2006:864) Ramahi says that “Transforming teachers’ values and beliefs appears to be key to developing a pedagogy of empowerment,” (2015:11) but acknowledges that the status

of Palestinian teachers is a major obstacle, while Qaimari, looking at the effect on teachers of conflict during the Second Intifada, explains how beliefs are sometimes in contrast to actions:

... the teachers often talked in confused voices about their current practices in contrast to how it once was or should be. I interpret their actions or *identity-in-practice* as sometimes contradicting their own beliefs or self-identity with an essentialist understanding of identity as embedded in their professional selves. (2016:18)

In terms of English language teaching in Gaza, Imperiale et al describe working with student teachers towards an emancipatory concept of English teaching, and recognise the problems teachers face in terms of restrictive curricula, expressing the hope, “that formal institutions will support the difficult work of (English) language teachers by opening up possibilities for localized curricula to suit the needs of the learners’ populations” (2017:37). They also point out the important role that English plays in providing opportunities and hope in the “forced immobility” of the blockade.

The issues expressed above are fundamental to teacher learning and development, classroom practice, school culture, and the profession as a whole and need to be at the forefront of project design, yet they are often presented as secondary to a focus on methodology and a measurable improvement in test results, or in fact ignored completely.

Research into teacher identity presents the case for both understanding and strengthening teacher identity. In summarising research into language teacher identity, Varghese et al (2005:22) point out:

... in order to understand language teaching and learning we need to understand teachers; and in order to understand teachers, we need to have a clearer sense of who they are: the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them.

As Ramahi explains, for Palestinians, values and an educational philosophy are key to building “a national education system that meets their social, political and economic needs and hopes” underpinning, “change processes that facilitate locally relevant knowledge-building and grassroots socio-political transformation.” (Ramahi, 2017:238)

The rationale for focusing on and articulating English teacher identity is, then, informed by local needs in Gaza and Palestine more broadly, especially in seeing local actors as key to leading educational reform. It is also informed by what I perceive as a general gap in the British Council’s approach to the continuing professional development (CPD) of teachers, and an opportunity to improve my own work in supporting our teams around the world.

Furthermore, understanding and articulating the role of English in this context is key to the identity of English teachers and the purpose of the British Council itself. English is seen as of vital importance by parents and government alike in Palestine (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Rezaq, 2017). However, as shown above, the role of donors is at best ambivalent, and the question of whose interests are served, and how, through the funding and delivery of English language teacher development will also be addressed through both the theoretical framework and the research process. As well as for teachers, this has implications for how the work of the British Council and other organisations is approached and viewed globally.

2. Research aims and summary of process

Between December 2019 and July 2020, I worked with a small group (initially six, later four) primary English teachers in Gaza. Using the principles of Participatory Action Research (Atweh et al, 2002), we worked together using online video calls through a series of interviews, recorded reflections and group discussions with the following aims:

- 1) to provide a platform for this group of English teachers in Gaza to reflect on, articulate and share their voice and identity
- 2) to provide insight into the process and value of identity work with English teachers. (The research process was reflexive and aimed to strengthen teacher identity itself)
- 3) to provide recommendations from the teachers' perspective for strengthening English teacher identity and agency in Gaza, including their own plans
- 4) To provide insight into the relationship between an outside organisation or researcher (represented by me) and teachers in a different context
- 5) To identify implications for the work of the British Council and similar organisations

The research was designed so that participant priorities were emphasised. Consequently, for the body of the research, we used the following three broad guiding questions, which themselves changed slightly during the process (I have elaborated on this in Chapter IV.2.e) and the themes evolved during the process itself. *From these teachers' perspective:*

- What does it mean to be an English teacher in Gaza, Palestine?
- What are the key enablers and barriers?
- What can be done to strengthen teacher identity in this context?

The final guiding question was informed by the teachers input, but also by my own evolving reflections. Throughout the 'fieldwork' I was working full-time at the British Council, mostly through a time of great change, when our work was completely moved online because of the

pandemic. The teachers had a big influence on the way I see my work and that of the British Council, and I have aimed to capture through the question:

- What are the implications for the British Council's work with English teachers?

a) Scope and limitations:

The findings are entirely from the perspective of this very small research group, and based on the evolving priorities that arose through reflective process of the research. For the majority of the process there were 5 of us, since two teachers dropped out early on. Appendix 1, *An ideal Palestinian English teacher*, which forms the basis of the findings, has been revisited and revised by these four, and can be considered a consensus, but the sample size was too small for a useful quantitative analysis of the data. I have attempted to present their perspectives as they were presented to me, while recognising my own influence in interpreting and organising them. I should also note that I do not speak for the British Council, while acknowledging the influence of my being one of their employees.

The findings and recommendations are related to both English teachers specifically, and teachers in general according to the emphasis provided by the teachers themselves. While Gaza is a very specific context, I expect that English teachers across the world will recognise and empathise with many of the findings, and hopefully find them useful as they reflect on their own identity as English teachers. The findings also have implications for parents, school leadership, supervisors, policy-makers and, of course, researchers, but as noted, their perspectives were not part of the research.

Structure of the paper

Chapters 2 and 3 present the theoretical background to the research, looking at teacher development and identity before considering the role and aims of English language teaching. Chapter IV presents the research ethos, approach and methods, including the use of Participatory Action Research principles, an analysis of my role as “researcher”, a more detailed explanation of the scope and limitations, and my own reflections on the process as it happened. Chapter V is the body of the findings based on the teachers' priorities, while Chapter VI presents the teachers reflections and recommendations, followed by my own comments relating the findings to British Council work.

Chapter II: Teacher development and teacher identity

1. Approaches to Teacher CPD

There is growing consensus that teachers are key to improving both overall student achievement (Hattie, 2003) and, as Dubet and Duru-Bellat put it, “Reducing inequalities requires a deep concern – indeed, an obsession - with effective teaching” (2007:287). UK research reveals that the most effective aspect of leadership for school principals in terms of raising student attainment is engaging in and promoting a culture of continual professional learning among teachers (Robinson et al, 2009).

a) The aims of CPD – what does a teacher need to know and do?

Much research into effective teaching tends to focus on tangible data – i.e. what gets the best exam results. But, even if we consider assessment a reliable indicator of a student’s knowledge and skills, teachers’ own measures of success go beyond this to include areas such as increasing a student’s interest in the subject or topic, intellectual motivation, academic self-confidence and self-esteem, autonomy and social development (Kyriacou, 2009). These aspects of teacher performance are much harder to measure, particularly when you consider the range of factors that can influence schooling, including the individual student, the community, classroom practice or pedagogy, the institution and the education system itself (Azevedo, 2011).

The literature provides various ways of describing the knowledge and skills that a teacher needs. For example, Tardif (2002) divides them into four areas: disciplinary (i.e. subject-specific), professional (pedagogical), curricular and experiential. In aiming to provide guidance for teachers and those working with them across different national contexts, the British Council CPD framework for teachers (British Council, 2015) breaks this down into 12 ‘professional practices.’ The first six of these might be said to reflect the key elements of classroom practice. The second six, on the other hand, could be considered sub-sections, but the framework’s designers have decided they need their own emphasis, perhaps reflecting some of the particularly current issues facing teachers. “Understanding educational policies and practice,” acknowledges the pressure on teachers caused by ever more intrusive education policy – this variable is acknowledged by Azevedo, and perhaps acknowledges the fact that for many teachers, a change in policy is the most likely opportunity they have to access government-funded training. “Promoting 21st Century Skills” (such as collaboration, critical thinking, global citizenship etc) might reflect both neoliberal concerns with supplying the right kind of workers for the economy and recognition of the negative effects that traditional transmission

approaches have on learning. “Integrating ICT” aims to help teachers identify the ways in which technology can enhance learning, rather than dominating it, but also to recognise that “there has been a transformation in the modes of communication and representation” outside the classroom (Unwin & Yandell, 2016:24). Two of the categories, “Using inclusive practices,” and, “Using multilingual approaches,” are expansions of “Understanding your learners.” They are a response to the increasing diversity in classrooms, and the consequent additional skills a teacher needs to provide more equitable education.

All of these practices suggest that, while recognising the constraints of the system, teaching needs to adapt to and reflect out-of-school realities, and to move from “delivering pre-fabricated content,” towards “designing innovative learning environments.” (Schleicher, 2016). This concept of the teacher as facilitator is nothing new (see Dewey, 1938), but there has long been a gap between theory and practice. Much of the research on ELT in Palestine (e.g. Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009), points to the need for a less traditional, more communicative approach to teaching, but, in an extensive review of primary English teachers, Shehadeh and Dwaik (2013:70) found that,

Palestinian teachers believe that it is essential for them to assume an authoritarian role in the classroom so as to maintain discipline in such large classes. They even argue that it is sometimes challenging to make the students respect each others' opinions. Some teachers have argued that in order for the students to take part in decision making, they have to display a high level of proficiency. A weak student, in their opinion, cannot be an active participant in the educational process and he/she has to be guided by the experienced teacher.

Abdel Rezaq, reflecting on his own experience supervising and training teachers in Palestine, (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Rezaq, 2017) links these problems to a low level of English language proficiency among teachers and expresses “shock” at the over-reliance on Arabic. These examples highlight the complexity of teaching and teacher development as outlined above, and the resistance of the profession as a whole to change, suggesting that perhaps the key skill of a successful teacher is the ability to understand his or her students in their particular context, and to learn and adapt. The remaining professional practice, “Taking responsibility for professional development,” should not be seen as an attempt to shift the onus for development onto teachers, but a recognition that engaging successfully in CPD and contributing to the profession are key parts of being a teacher, and are also abilities that, with the right support, can be developed alongside other areas of teaching.

Some of the key characteristics of this support, from the point of view of those designing intervention projects, are outlined in the next section.

b) Designing CPD support

Darling-Hammond (2017) identifies some of the characteristics of successful *pre-service* programmes as helping teachers close the gap between theory and practice; learn to teach diverse learners, with a particular focus on disadvantaged learners; use existing research as a basis for conducting action-research; and identify and investigate problems in the teaching profession at master's level.

In an ideal world, a teaching career and in-service CPD would continue seamlessly in this vein, but in reality, many programmes at both pre- and in-service levels are still heavily focused on a transmission approach. This is not only an inefficient way of learning to teach, it also reinforces this way of teaching as the norm. In in-service teacher development, training often takes the form of conferences, workshops or short training courses, but research such as Joyce and Showers (2002) has described how, when teachers return to their classrooms after attending external conferences or workshops, they put very little of what they recall into practice.

In an international review of empirical research into effective CPD, Walter and Briggs identified seven key characteristics which serve as a useful principle for designing project interventions; it is concrete and classroom-based; it involves teachers collaborating with other professionals; it engages with expertise outside the teacher's institution; it involves teachers in selecting their own professional development activity; it includes mentoring and coaching; it is sustained over time; and it is supported by school leadership (2012). The research also shows that areas such as collaborating and selecting professional development activity do not come automatically to teachers. Support through coaching and mentoring, and the need for strong school leadership, underpin all aspects of development, particularly in helping build teacher and school identity, which I will look at in more detail in later chapters, but it is clear from these principles, that the vast majority of successful development takes place *within* schools. Nóvoa (2003) describes 4 types of school-based development activity, involving; the mentoring of less-experienced teachers; participating in a community of practice within a school; peer-learning and development; and systematic, deliberate reflection on both theory and practice. Within a school, these types of development do not happen separately, but overlap and feed into each other.

Consequently, in planning projects or system reform, designers need to take into account not just the content and development activity, but also the capacity of the teachers to engage in

each activity and the support structures available. In many cases this will mean planning development of the CPD skills of teachers, teacher educators (i.e. anyone with a responsibility for teacher development), and school leaders. Ideas such as collaboration, school culture and self-directed learning implicitly recognise the importance of teacher identity, at both individual and collective levels. However, the approaches I've mentioned are largely focused on developing *skills* and *knowledge* related to teaching. The following chapters will provide a review of research into teacher *identity* and build on the rationale in the introduction for a more explicit focus on this area.

2. Defining and Framing Teacher Identity

Defining teacher identity is a challenge, as evidenced by the range of definitions in the literature presented Beauchamp and Thomas (2009). Olsen's is comprehensive and clear, and recognises both the influences on identity, and the way that identity influences teaching and the teaching profession:

... the collection of influences and effects from immediate contexts, prior constructs of self, social positioning, and meaning systems (each itself a fluid influence and all together an ever-changing construct) that become inter-twined inside the flow of activity as a teacher simultaneously reacts to and negotiates given contexts and human relationships at given moments. (in Beauchamp & Thomas 2009:178)

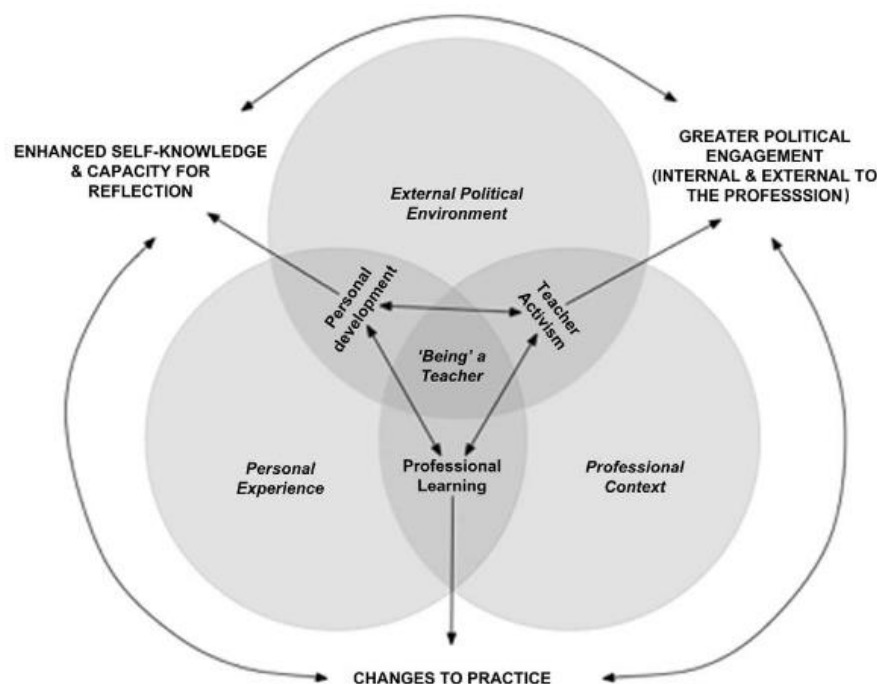


Figure 1 - The formation and mediation of teacher professional identity (Mockler 2011:521)

Mockler (2011) captures the way that teacher development work needs to both take into account and seek to strengthen teacher identity in a diagram (see figure 1 above). The three overlapping spheres of *External Political Environment*, *Professional Context* and *Personal Experience* summarise Olsen’s “influences and effects” (ibid). I have found it useful to combine these aspects of the model with ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977), which situates an individual within widening, permeable spheres of influence. As with Mockler’s model, ecological systems theory helps us move beyond the limitations of understanding teachers only within their direct professional context (the school) (Lopes, 2009), but I have also found it useful as a framework for looking at each of Mockler’s own three spheres, both for teachers in general, and where it has been applied by researchers specifically in relation to language learning and teaching.

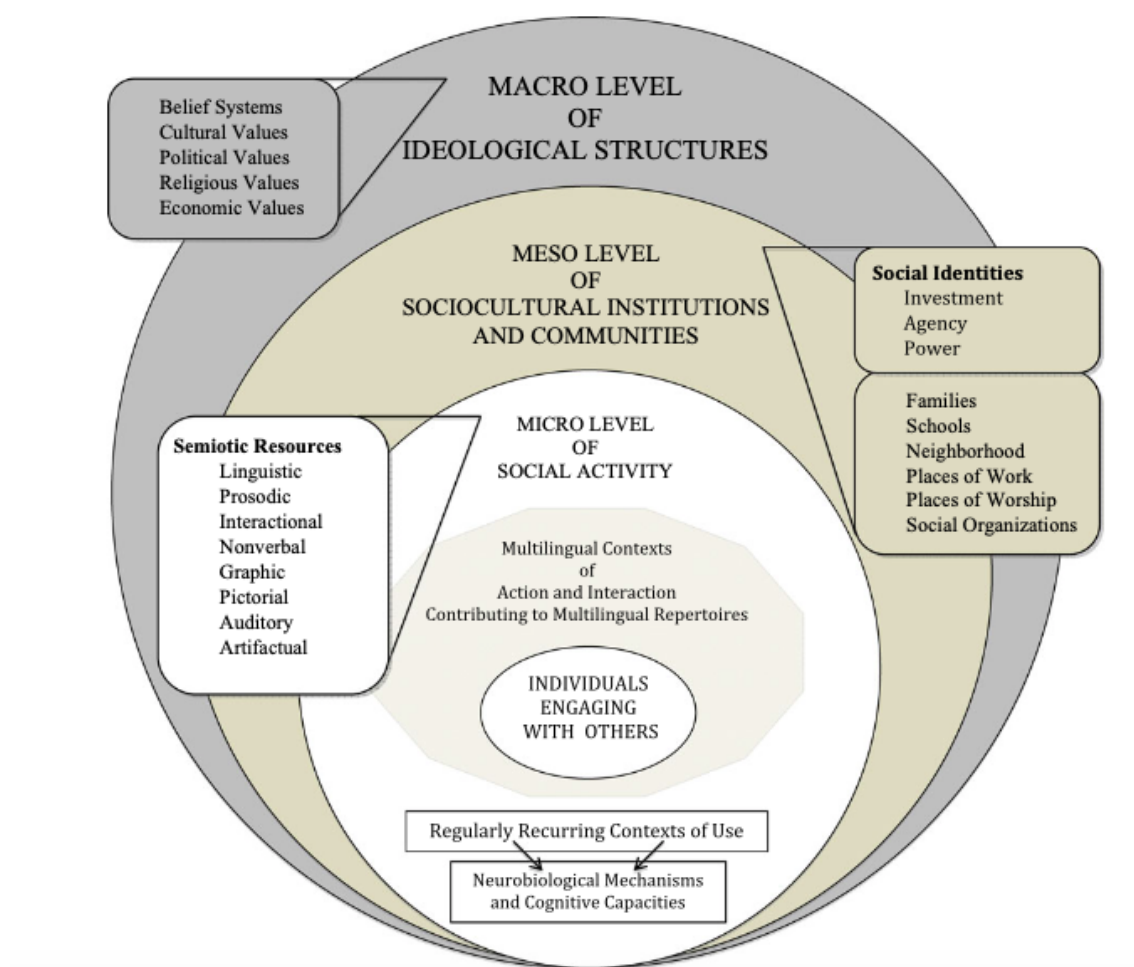


Figure 2 - The Multifaceted Nature of Language Learning and Teaching (Douglas Fir Group, 2016)

Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) point to literature recognising discipline-specific influences on teacher identity including in language learning (e.g. Varghese et al, 2005). In particular, the Douglas Fir Group (DFG) (2016) builds on Bronfenbrenner to present a transdisciplinary approach to identity in Second Language Acquisition (SLA), recognising that, “identity work shapes language learning, and language learning shapes identity work, both being mutually constitutive” (see figure 2). This affects how language teachers see the learning of their students, and also their own development, both in their roles as teachers and as language learners themselves. In turn, De Costa and Norton relate this framework to language teacher identity. As they point out, the DFG framework, “can provide guidance on how to respond to the real-world concerns of second and foreign language teachers and teacher educators as they attempt to navigate dominant ideologies, institutional constraints, and classroom possibilities,” (2017:3) in other words, the macro, meso and micro levels of the eco-system.

The arrows within and surrounding Mockler’s model demonstrate how the dynamic set of influences on identity might combine to create change in identity, leading to these related and interdependent outcomes:

- Personal development and enhanced self-knowledge and capacity for reflection
- Teacher activism and greater political engagement (internal and external to the profession)
- Professional learning and changes to practice

The model suggests that recognizing and strengthening the connection between personal, professional and political identities will promote greater engagement, confidence, fulfilment and agency, and a clearer idea overall sense of what it means to be a teacher, including related beliefs, attitudes, values and goals. It implies a holistic approach to teacher development, and emphasizes that, when planning to integrate issues of identity, a teacher, teacher educator or project designer will need to take into account not only professional, but also situational, and personal factors (Day et al, 2006). This is perhaps similar to the way that an effective teacher needs to analyse context, process and intended product (Kyriacou, 2009), rather than just presentation of the curriculum.

I have chosen to call efforts to move towards outcomes such as those described by Mockler ‘strengthening’ teacher identity, rather than common terms such as identity ‘construction’ or ‘formation’. Although all three terms seem to be used interchangeably in the literature, I want to avoid connotations of creating something new, when it is clear that identity exists prior to

any efforts to strengthen it, and to escape from the suggestion of some kind of formed or constructed end product. Olsen above and most of the other authors I reference below, see identity as fluid, evolving and dynamic. Varghese et al (2005:23) point out that strengthening identity is potentially both “transformational and transformative.” This recognises the impact on both the individual or the community and the contexts in which they exist, and highlights the role of identity in agency.

Mockler’s model shows how personal experience, mediated by factors such as family, race, gender, socio-economic background and so on, interact with professional and political contexts. There is not space to address all of these issues in this section of the paper – where they emerged from the research they will be discussed in the findings. Likewise, while I have touched on political, cultural and social issues in Palestine, it is not within the scope of this paper to discuss these in depth except when they are identified as important by the teachers themselves. In the following sections I have highlighted some of the key issues in teacher identity research, based on relevance to both Palestinian and wider British Council contexts. Then in Chapter III, I have looked specifically at roles and conceptions of English and the related role of the British Council in order to provide the basis for understanding their relationship with English teacher identity in Palestine.

a) The influence of teachers’ own schooling and pre-service education

This research focuses on in-service teachers, whose personal experience is now entwined with their professional experience since they began school. Plenty of research (e.g. Samuel & Stephens, 2000) has shown the importance of a teacher’s schooling on their professional identity. This tends to focus on the model of teaching that is provided and then replicated, leading to little change in classroom practice from generation to generation. But I would argue that this is not just an issue of new teachers needing to consider new ways of teaching. It is also an issue of identity. School-leavers base their ideal choices on perceptions of future careers and how these relate to their perceived identity. Those who choose teaching (as well as those who choose to avoid teaching) have seen the job up close, and decided it suits them (or it is to be avoided). In this case, when confronted with the idea that effective teaching is different from what they assumed, they may experience more than recognition that they need to change their practice. They may also find that their perceived identity is unsuited to their chosen career. All of these issues will influence how a teacher engages with their profession.

If we are to help future teachers deal with these issues, and make the transition from student to teacher, it would seem pre-service teacher education must play a key role. Lopes and Pereira (2012) present two central challenges in teacher education: understanding and addressing “a well-established but simplistic preconception about teaching and how to be a teacher,” and empowering teachers to become lifelong learners despite the modern-day challenges of the profession. Pereira (2015) proposes a vision for pre-service education that focuses on social justice, through giving trainee teachers experience of the real-life issues that both teachers and students face. This would reaffirm the sense of ‘vocation’ and belief in the value of education with which many teachers enter the profession, but also help teachers recognise the inadequacy of traditional models in creating a fairer society, and to motivate them to look for fairer (and more effective) models than those they may have experienced in their own schooling. Hanan Ramahi’s research on emancipatory alternatives in Palestinian education reinforces this point, reflecting the restrictive impact of “traditional” educational and societal models on both teaching practice and conceptions of education:

...as products of a society in need of fundamental social-cultural transformation, teachers can hardly be expected to act as change agents for a socially just society without support for their own consciousness raising. (2015:10)

The current reality of pre-service training does not appear to provide this support. In research conducted at a university in Palestine, Bsharat and Rmahi.R (2016:33) describe the views of student teachers:

The student-teachers... described the content and coursework as mostly outdated, and the methods of instruction as traditional. When asked to elaborate, they described their instructors’ teaching as teacher-centered and not so different from the teaching style they used to experience as students in elementary and secondary classrooms.

As in many contexts, student teachers learn their subjects and pedagogy in lectures, and teaching practice is either absent or insufficient. One of the students interviewed by Rmahi (ibid) explained, “We see a gap between what the instructors are telling us in class and what teachers face in real life. They teach us something but never provide us with real evidence or chances to try out what we’re learning.”

If we accept that traditional teaching models are ineffective, then, even if the content focuses on sound principles, the profession loses twice – student teachers are both badly taught, and they are also exposed to an ineffective model which they will go on to replicate. Without sufficient teaching practice, guided by specialist mentors (Darling-Hammond, 2017) the initial

shock of dealing with a real classroom can then lead teachers in different directions, but common choices are to revert to what they know from their own schooling or training, or to seek help from more experienced teachers where they find the same advice those teachers were given when they started out in the profession. For example, Buchanan (2015) cites an example of teachers who wanted to innovate, “but were shaped by the pervasive discourses of teacher as expert and authoritarian.”

On the other hand, we have idealised memories of our ‘favourite’ teachers, and the stereotypes portrayed in fiction, particularly TV and film; “the ‘charismatic teacher’, the ‘authoritarian’. The ‘intellectual giant’ who knows everything.” (Unwin & Yandell, 2016:137). These mythical figures set unrealistic standards and expectations among parents, students, and perhaps, until they have confronted the reality of life in a school, teachers themselves.

b) External effects on teacher identity

In 1966, UNESCO published their *Recommendation Concerning the Status of Teachers*. The following is an excerpt:

4. It should be recognized that advance in education depends largely on the qualifications and ability of the teaching staff in general and on the human, pedagogical and technical qualities of the individual teachers.
5. The status of teachers should be commensurate with the needs of education as assessed in the light of educational aims and objectives; it should be recognized that the proper status of teachers and due public regard for the profession of teaching are of major importance for the full realization of these aims and objectives.
6. Teaching should be regarded as a profession: it is a form of public service which requires of teachers expert knowledge and specialized skills, acquired and maintained through rigorous and continuing study; it calls also for a sense of personal and corporate responsibility for the education and welfare of the pupils in their charge. (UNESCO, 1966)

Even over half a century ago, it is interesting to note the emphasis on issues of identity here through phrases such as, “human qualities”, “status of teachers”, “public regard” and “sense of personal and corporate responsibility”, and the recognition that these are areas that can and should be addressed as part of strengthening the profession.

In Palestine, there seems to be a tension between traditional respect for teachers, (even if it is focused on societal value of “education as a means of obtaining employment and conferring social status” (Qaimari, 2016)), a lack of agency (Ramahi. 2015, Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009), and low pay and poor working conditions (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Rezaq, 2017).

Both from within, and from outside, particularly through donors, who have a strong presence in all sectors of public life in Palestine, including education, neoliberal discourse and systems are imposed in the belief that economic prosperity will reduce conflict, as well as contributing to Western interests (Haddad, 2016). Globally, the effects of neoliberal policies on the workforce in general as well on education in particular have been well-documented. In Harvey's 'A brief history of neoliberalism' (2005:167), he quotes Polanyi; "labour power" cannot be used indiscriminately, or even left unused, without affecting also the human individual who happens to be the bearer of this peculiar commodity." As such it impacts heavily on teacher identity and agency. Robertson (2007:11), describes three factors in education impacted by neoliberal policy: "...the mandate (what it is that the education system should do), forms of capacity (the means through which the mandate can be realised e.g. fiscal and human resources) and mechanisms of governance of the education sector (that is, the means for coordinating the system)." For teachers, this might mean, amongst other things, that the purpose of education is reduced to preparation for the labour market, that they are expected to prepare students principally to compete in standardised exams, and that they are subject to ever-increasing amounts of paperwork in the name of 'accountability', leaving little time for considered lesson and course planning.

In this context, these influences combine with historical pressures:

Palestinians in occupied Palestine and the diaspora have historically relied on formal education for social, economic and political survival. ... award-bearing forms of education represented the fundamental vehicle for self- improvement and social mobility." (Ramahi 2015:44)

Bianchi and Hussein-Abdel Rezaq (2017:161) highlight the impact of the excessive importance of the national Tawjihi exam¹ on teaching and learning:

...all teachers, particularly at the high school level, wind up teaching to the test; their main concern is to help their students score the highest possible grade on this exam.

The backwash effect of this situation is that EFL teaching and learning are dominated by the Tawjihi exam and the items that are expected to appear on it.

But Torrance (2017:92) explains that neoliberal educational policies (and assessment in particular) go beyond affecting curriculum and methodology by creating and thriving on a

¹ The exam taken by school-leavers which determines university entrance, amongst other things

climate of fear, which permeates the layers of the eco-system, and affects all three of Mockler's spheres of influence on teacher identity:

This fear of failure is nowhere more apparent than in students' fears about failing exams – along with the fears of their parents, their teachers, and even of governments themselves as they strive to keep ahead in the global race for a 'knowledge-ready' workforce.

Naturally this fear has an impact on how teachers are perceived; by teachers themselves, who have experienced it within their own schooling, through their jobs, and in many cases through their own children; by students and their parents who then perceive teacher quality through this lens; by wider society, including the media; by governments, who judge and are judged on league tables; and especially by international organisations working in education like the British Council, who often use these metrics to analyse the success of their projects. It reinforces the idea of the teacher as a transmitter of knowledge, and reduces the student to a mere number on a list of scores. In other words, it makes evolving from traditional models of teaching even harder.

c) School culture and teacher purpose

As mentioned above, policy and the external political environment are major factors affecting teachers in Palestine, but as De Costa and Norton point out,

Ideological and identity challenges with respect to teacher education do not only reside at the macro societal level [...]. Rather, they percolate into the school (meso) level, where discourses on what counts as good teaching are often contradictory and can also become entrenched among school administrators, who are responsible for making pivotal employment decisions. (2017)

Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Rezaq (2017) cite a common "lack of workplace morale and motivation for teachers to do any extra work" among Palestinian teachers. Kyriacou (2013:165) identifies commitment as a key pre-requisite for effectiveness, and describes two external conditions which are necessary to foster such commitment. Society at large plays a key role, but school culture is also a vital component:

First, teachers need to feel that their work is worthwhile and that it is respected, valued and appreciated by senior colleagues in the school and by the community at large (parents, local and central government, and the media). Second, teachers need to feel part of a professional community in which the quality of their work is allied to the support necessary for professional development and enhancement.

As noted earlier, it is vital for improving student achievement that school leaders invest time and resources in collaborative, teacher-led CPD. But the role is also key in creating a school

culture with a strong sense of fairness and continual learning, where teachers both improve their practice and build a stronger individual and collective identity:

Allowing for teacher education within schools appears to provide an opportunity for close examination of the self and interaction with the context: an ongoing reassessment of a teacher's participation in the discourse of the context and the additional contextual factors that may affect the shaping of identity. (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009:186)

Research has shown that a defining characteristic of successful school leadership is to set out and maintain values that resist the influence of changing government policy and the negative influences of society (Gu et al., 2018). What is more school leadership and school culture are key to fostering teacher resilience (Gu and Day, 2013), a factor that is even more important in a context like Gaza. Qaimari (2016) explores the effect of the conflict on teacher identity in depth. He finds “high levels of stress, anger, self-doubt, and guilt, all of which can seriously damage the otherwise positive values, beliefs and attitudes associated with the formation of teacher professional identity.” (2016:22) What is more, “teachers appeared to be highly conflicted, torn between past and present cultural models of the ideal teacher, and confused as to how to negotiate their professional identity against the larger societal context of violent political conflict.” (ibid.) He reports on the importance teachers placed on school leadership and culture in this context, but notes that the closer schools were located to conflict, the more stress school leaders were under, leading to a breakdown in support.

d) Agency and the ideal teacher

Through their interaction with others, teachers themselves are a major influence on the culture within a school and as Buchberger et al (ibid.) put it, “it is the professional group as a whole that determines what standards should apply to its members.” In this respect, teachers have to learn to manage and respond to personal as well as and professional factors. Gonçalves (2009) describes how teachers' attitudes and feelings towards their work evolve through experience, in both positive and negative ways. Gu and Day (2013) show that as teachers progress through their careers, their sense of purpose, and consequently their resilience, is often diminished. This is supported by research with teachers in Palestine (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Rezaq, 2017).

Understanding, fostering and maintaining this sense of moral purpose play a key role in strengthening teacher identity. Mockler (2011) says that aligning this purpose with action is the aim of the identity ‘project,’ while Qaimari (2016) shows how teachers reach a crisis when they are unable to align the way they think they should be with the way they are. Beauchamp and Thomas (2015:9) reference a model developed by Lauriala and Kukkonen (2005), which

describes this as the difference between the *actual self* and the *ideal self*, but also adds another layer which they call the *ought self*, which is the one set or expected by society or an external group. This acknowledges the powerful macro influences (such as the neoliberal ideologies described above) which are also an important factor affecting the way teachers are perceived, and also the conditions in which teachers work. (I have used these terms throughout and in particular to analyse influences on the British Council in Chapter III.)

The alignment of conditions, skills and purpose in working towards the ideal self, or the ‘socioculturally mediated capacity to act’ (Ahearn (2001) in Buchanan, 2015:704), is one way of defining teacher *agency*. As Buchanan (ibid) points out, “There is choice, but the options available to choose from are shaped by larger force relations.” This highlights the reciprocal nature of identity and agency. While teacher identity is shaped by the various influences of the eco-system, teacher agency can be seen as the capacity to enact change at those levels, although Bourn argues;

Teachers are agents for change within the classroom. They can also be agents for change within the school. But within society as a whole, any discussion on teachers as agents for change has tended to focus too much on aspects of political activism that are seen as distinct from classroom practice. (2015:70)

The next section will consider these three areas as they relate to the *ought self* and *ideal self* specifically in the realm of English language teaching and learning and including the values and world-views that are intrinsic to identity, and consider the role of the British Council in propagating or mediating these influences.

Chapter III: English and English teacher identity

Introduction

This section situates English teacher identity within current global ideologies and approaches related to the role of English. I have framed this through my own conceptions of the *ought self* and *ideal self* of the British Council, as exemplified by its work in English language education. In this framework, the *ought self* is the British Council the UK government would like to see, largely as presented in the annual corporate plan (British Council, 2018) which is used to demonstrate that the British Council is meeting government strategic priorities. This organisation is focused on the benefit to the UK created by British Council work in English as evidenced through increased influence, attraction and especially economic advancement. The *ideal self* is the British Council as imagined by many of its staff (including me) and evidenced by some of its projects and publications. This organisation sees the intrinsic benefit of “international trust and understanding” (British Council, n.d.), and recognises that this requires a critical approach to English in education and society at both local and global levels, with a focus on linguistic and social justice. It is aligned with what Nasser and Wong, in a paper focusing specifically on English teacher preparation in Palestine, call an “approach that views language learning and education as a tool to empower people and promote understanding among different countries and cultures” (2013:430). The *actual self*, composed of these competing identities and other influences, has an impact on teacher identity but also provides a context for examining some of the competing and contradictory influences that form English teacher identity itself.

1. The ought self: Neoliberalism and development logic in ELT and at the British Council

Pressure from both the UK government and trends in international education have put the British Council in a position where it is both conforming to and propagating a globalist, market-driven approach. In the British Council Corporate Plan, financial competition is at the heart of its work;

Whether we are providing English language programmes to learners, strengthening international opportunities for UK organisations or delivering contracts for governments, we have to give people a reason to choose the British Council. That means staying ahead of global competitors, working

more with partners, delivering value for money and ensuring we engage audiences in ways that are inspiring and relevant to them. (2018: 22)

A consequence of neoliberal “universal competition” is the need for measurement and comparison, with the result that, “workers, job-seekers and public services of every kind are subject to a pettifogging, stifling regime of assessment and monitoring, designed to identify the winners and punish the losers.” (Monbiot, 2016). This is reflected in the fact that, while reducing funding, the UK government has simultaneously tried to make the British Council more accountable. Pamment describes how this affected the notion of cultural relations at the British Council:

...new management systems were put into place which saw the Council’s projects rationalised and measured like never before. The notion of intangible influence through cultural engagement, developed over time in order to shape perceptions and build trust, did not fit with this approach. Instead, projects had to be linked to yearly objectives, measured for immediate outcomes, and reported as favourability percentages and other similarly inane indicators of impact. (2012)

Returning to the financial imperative, English teachers also form a key audience for the UK’s English language teaching industry of publishers, language testing providers, teacher training organisations and language schools. This was expressed in the corporate plan as follows:

... we will work with education ministries, policymakers, donors and UK partners to improve the quality of English teaching worldwide and support young people with life-changing opportunities to open doors to international study and enhanced career opportunities [...] We will generate value for the UK by working closely with the UK English language teaching sector on international opportunities. The sector is worth approximately £3 billion to the UK economy each year. (British Council 2018: 14).

But note that teachers are completely absent from the list of stakeholders who will “improve the quality of teaching” and create “life-changing opportunities” for students. Seen from this perspective, there is not only a lack of recognition of teacher status and teacher identity through treating education as a business, teachers are actually almost invisible. As alluded to in this quote, the British Council also plays a role in bringing opportunities to others working in the UK sector, expanding the influence of this kind of discourse.

Neoliberal concerns have an impact on how the role of English (and consequently the role of English teachers) is conceived, and I will return to this point. But as shown above, the British Council sees English language learning and teaching as an economic opportunity, both for itself and the wider UK sector. The success of this relies on two factors; firstly that expertise in English language teaching and learning is a desirable *commodity* and secondly that the UK is the owner of this commodity. These assumptions have an impact on non-native English teacher

identity, and it is worth briefly examining their reliance on other, older ideologies, related to Britain's colonial past and "the development market" (Guichaoua, 1997).

Through its very nature and mission, the British Council has often been the object of accusations of linguistic and cultural imperialism. Phillipson, a long-term critic of both the British Council and linguistic imperialism, regularly draws clear parallels between the British Council's objective to "develop a wider knowledge of the English language" (British Council, 2011) and British Colonialism in the early 19th century (e.g. in Bunce et al, 2016). Freixo (in Gomez et al 2007:26) and Amaro (2003) describe how countries that have benefitted through colonisation can then profit by providing expertise and support to the same countries they exploited as these countries in turn aim to emulate the characteristics of wealth and status. Speaking English can be seen as one of these characteristics, whether by individuals or governments. In the Palestinian national curriculum, "English is perceived as the language of modernity. In order for Palestinians to achieve modernity, English is an important vehicle." (Amara 2003:217) This is also illustrative of the link between historical colonial or development narratives and more recent neoliberal ideology. Ramahi points out that the development of the curriculum, given its reliance on donors, "led to questions about the impact of development aid in the oPT and illustrated the hegemony of a global education agenda fixated on student performativity and school rankings," and that "economic dependency on foreign aid for educational reconstruction [...] lays hostage an entire nation's education system and aspirations." (Ramahi, 2015:4)

English teachers who depend on donors like the British Council for development opportunities cannot help but be influenced by the ideologies that accompany these actors, both directly and as they are reflected through the education system and wider society. The idea of English use as something that is 'owned' by the UK and transmitted to the rest of the world through UK expertise diminishes the agency that non-native English teachers and speakers demonstrate through the choices they make in terms of what the language is for, how it is spoken, and how and why it is taught. Research has long shown that, for most users (Crystal, 2012), English is not a national language but a "lingua franca" adapted and used as part of multi-lingual repertoires in a variety of ways, often unconnected to the UK. Despite this, marketing material positions the British Council as "the world's English experts" (British Council Portugal, 2020). This reflects the native speaker discourse which the Douglas Fir Group (2016) highlight as a

major impact on the identity of both language learners and teachers; I will discuss this further below.

In the context of the British Council's international work with public school English teachers, it also reinforces what Rahman describes as "a conventional development approach", where "the basic premise ... is the concept of a hierarchical human spectrum, in which some are 'superior', and therefore qualified to guide, control and determine the development of others" [my translation] (in Gomez et al 2007:39). In this approach, teacher agency is again invisible.

As described above, English can be seen as a symbol of, or even a path to, "the modern, technical civilisation of western countries, with its high valuation of wealth through trade." (Sampedro & Berzosa in Gomez et al. 2007: 41). Dajani and McLaughlin observe that, in Palestinian private schools where English is emphasised, "students become to believe that they are better and other students are understandably inferior." (2009:44). In neoliberalism, individual and national interests are linked with "the rejection of any conception of a public good over and above the aggregate sum of individual ends" (Olssen in Robertson 2007:3); ends which are implicit in claims for the value of English. For example;

For young Palestinians to be successful in today's global economy, they need to be articulate and artful communicators. The curriculum document construes the English language as a key resource which can offer Palestinians a competitive edge in the world of global communications. (Dajani & McLaughlin, 2009:27)

The connection between communication and competition expressed here reflects the fact that this ideology emphasises "individual wellbeing over collective wellbeing [...], not only in attitudes to accumulating wealth, but also in those aspects of life which make reference to feelings and human relations" (Gomez et al. 2007:40). The British Council's *Language for Resilience* report (Capstick & Delaney, 2015) shows how sometimes refugees value English over other skills, including literacy in their own language, to the detriment of their sense of identity and community. Phillipson calls this effect of English on other languages and cultures *linguistic capital dispossession*: "*Linguistic capital dispossession* means that a dominant language replaces another language for specific functions, in academia, commerce or private life" (2018:16). Again, this echoes wider criticisms of development work, where *ethnocentrism* reduces development to imitation and cultures from 'the periphery' are made to feel inferior, abandoning, "their own values, ways of life, knowledge and wisdom accumulated through time" (Gomez et al 2007:38). What is more, the link between English language education and economic advantage is tenuous. A British Council report on links between English and

economic gain in the Middle East and North Africa finds that, “without targeting the long-embedded inequalities in terms of gender, ethnicity and the urban-rural divide, education in general – and English language education in particular – is not likely to provide disadvantaged individuals with the resources that they need to catch up,” (Erling 2015).

2. The ideal self: critical and emancipatory approaches to English learning and teaching

a) Critical approaches to the role of English

The issues above pose problems for those working in English language education and especially English teachers in terms of conceiving their *moral purpose* and *ideal self*, key elements of both identity and agency. As Bourn (2015) points out, teacher agency can act to connect and influence what happens in the classroom, what happens in the school and what happens in policy and wider society. This is also suggested by Mockler’s model (see figure 1 above). The Douglas Fir Group argues that all language work is identity work:

When L2 learners participate in particular social contexts of action, they do so as actors with specific constellations of historically laden, context-sensitive, and locally (re)produced social identities. Social identities are aspects of L2 learners’ personhoods that are defined in terms of ways in which individuals understand their relationship to the world. (Douglas Fir Group, 2016:31)

Agency, as defined by Bourn (2015), allows a teacher to understand and respond to these “constellations”, but also to help others make informed choices. This might be, for example, at the micro-level of semiotics, or the macro level of policy and discourse (see figure 2 above). Capstick and Delaney point out; “Everybody makes decisions about which languages to use and when. We do not wish to restrict the realms of language policy and planning to the macro-social level.... Employers, head teachers and families all make decisions about language use” (2015). This role implies critical resistance to the ideologies presented in the previous section, and can be viewed as part of what Mockler describes as teacher activism (2011:521).

For English teachers, as well as other actors in ELT such as the British Council, an important part of responding to local needs is situating learning within the wider socio-linguistic landscape. Much research (e.g. Kramsch, 2009) has recognised that globalisation calls for a rethink of English language learning, the need to move away from native-speaker models towards the view of English as a lingua franca and a useful part of a multi-lingual repertoire. As AlKhatib puts it, “The [traditional] TEFL model has overstayed its time... Persistence in

using it can only support centripetal trends that consider “native” English as the norm and the target of learning” (2016). In her paper looking at Masters programmes in English Language Teaching, she argues that institutions in the ‘expanding circle,’ and Lebanon in particular, still follow models from the ‘inner circle,’ such as the UK and the US, and should move towards “a more ethnolinguistic and culturally rich English.” However, even in a world where the vast majority of interactions in English do not involve native speakers (Crystal, 2012),

...the bulk of research in SLA [Second Language Acquisition] and many areas of applied linguistics continue to rely on the monolingual native speaker’s idealized competence as a benchmark for defining and evaluating L2 learning. The majority of practices in language classrooms across the world, as well, continue to hold to the ideal of an imagined monolingual native speaker (and prospective interlocutor and role model). (Douglas Fir Group, 2016:35)

In other words, the vast majority of both English teachers and English learners are judged against a largely unattainable *ought self* (e.g. imposed by the curriculum or dominant discourses), and, where there is not sufficient understanding of the issues discussed above, an unrealistic and perhaps misguided *ideal self*. A critical approach to this *deficit model* (e.g. Correia, 2011), might allow a non-native English teacher to assert their identity and moral purpose, but as discussed above, implies necessary support from all levels of the eco-system.

Palestinian attitudes to the role and status of English appear mixed and contradictory, including among student English teachers (Amara 2003). As noted above, English is seen to confer status and to have instrumental value as a pathway to academic or career opportunities. It has also been seen as a neutral lingua franca in communication between Palestinians and Israelis (ibid:220). However, it also has negative connotations:

The most important allies of the occupying forces are the United States and the United Kingdom, both English speaking countries. The one-sidedness of the dominant English-speaking media in favour of the occupying forces, and the negative image of Moslems in general and Arabs in particular, have helped create a resistance culture toward the English language. (Yamchi, 2006:863)

Adding more complexity, Zakarna (1999:2) argues that due to mistrust in the media and a cultural and historical reliance on interpersonal communication, “Western-educated teachers, professors, and trainers - who have direct personal contact with the people - are much more credible and influential sources of spreading Western values.” She elaborates that along with Palestinians who return from being educated abroad, “the direct, interpersonal contact of *donor training projects* [my italics] have the power to cause the most strain to traditional Palestinian values.”

These factors, along with the fact that Palestine has a history of diglossia and multilingualism (Bianchi & Hussein-Abdel Rezaq, 2017), perhaps imply that there is already a healthy, critical cultural and linguistic awareness. On the other hand, this might create tensions for English teachers, both in terms of their students' motivation and their own identity, when they are still expected to work towards a curriculum based on native-speaker norms and to receive training funded and delivered by donors. It is worth then, briefly considering approaches to English teaching (including alternative conceptions of the role of English) that recognise some of these issues.

b) Alternative conceptions of English teaching

The global nature of English language use, as well as the need described above for a critical approach to understanding and responding to its social, political and economic roles, suggest a potential link between English teaching and global citizenship or development education, “where learners engage in constructive development of their knowledge of global issues and concepts in relationship with their local setting” (Liddy 2013:34). There is an example of this in Brazil, where, for example, the new curricular framework for English asks students to reflect “on aspects of interaction between cultures in a way that will encourage fraternisation, respect, the resolution of conflicts and mutual appreciation between peoples” (British Council Brazil, 2017). While this approach argues for English to be recognised as a global issue itself, others suggest that the English classroom lends itself to the analysis and discussion of global issues in general, and that English teachers have a responsibility to bring global issues into their classes (Ruas, 2017). This aims to create a link between an international language and international solidarity, and perhaps to reaffirm that, rather than to be better equipped to compete, “From the start of our lives, we acquire language because of the strength of our emotional bond with other humans, and hence our need to communicate with them” (Unwin & Yandell, 2016). Shehadeh and Dwaik point out the following related syllabus aims of the English Curriculum in Palestine:

1. Develop intercultural understanding and appreciation.
 2. Foster understanding and develop cultural sensitivity to the target language culture and other cultural backgrounds, and thereby, strengthen the learners' appreciation of their own culture.
 3. Develop students' respect for others, i.e, having a sense of the worth of others, especially those with social, cultural, and family backgrounds different to their own, and by encouraging them to reject sexual, racial, and ethnic stereotypes.
- (2017:64)

While this might be one way of connecting to an English teacher's sense of purpose, some have seen it as an example of others *assigning* an identity to teachers; Bourn (2015) warns about

training teachers to promote particular causes and in doing so actually weakening their agency. This is supported by Nasser and Wong, who quote one Palestinian English teacher as complaining, “You can’t teach about peace and freedom and leave the reality outside the classroom. Students are suppressing their feelings and that makes them more violent,” and another as saying, “The “English for Palestine” curriculum addresses global issues and topics and fails to address the everyday reality of Palestinian students.” (2013:44)

Imperiale et al (2017), working with pre-service teachers in Gaza, show their conceptions of the English classroom as a place to channel resistance and hope, perhaps linking the global with the local. In this conception, English is a tool to both express identity and create solidarity with others. There are examples of this kind of approach from those working with immigrants within the UK, for example using Freirean participatory approaches in addressing issues of integration within the ESOL sector (Bryers, et al, 2013) and helping immigrant students to use English in poetry in a mainstream state school as a means to gain confidence and to address and express difficult, diverse personal issues related to identity, society and culture (Clanchy 2019).

These approaches also tie in with the concept of the English classroom as a safe space. The British Council’s *Language for Resilience* reports, examining the role of language in general and English in particular among refugee communities in the region (Capstick & Delaney, 2015, Capstick, 2018), show how language learning activities can take account of displacement and trauma, and create safe spaces to work through the effects of trauma and loss of learning through creative activities, play and stories in formal and non-formal education, in first or second languages. However, they also note that, “The effects of trauma interfere with many areas of functioning, including all aspects of education, learning a new language, parenting skills and establishing a new family home,” (Capstick 2018:56). This echoes Qaimari (2016) who shows the importance teachers in Palestine place on protecting the children in their classes, and terrible effect that the war with Israel has on their identity when they feel unable to.

Chapter IV: Methodological background

1. Research ethos and approach

Prevailing political and social currents, which reach us with increasing immediacy through various media, promote seemingly contradictory, but mutually reinforcing influences. Firstly, the hard pragmatism of market forces leads to the devaluation of education as an end in itself. This appears to be particularly true in Palestine where, to many, grades represent the only way of improving their circumstances (Ramahi 2015). Secondly, as seen, for example, in the conspiracy theories around Covid-19, there appears to be a greater trust in feelings over facts, leading to a distrust of ‘experts,’ and further entrenchment of “the distinction between an incomprehensible and prodigious knowledge and an obvious and obviously useful knowledge”(Santos, 2014).

On the one hand, there is a responsibility on research as a profession, and research into education in particular (it is largely through education that this is possible), to restore faith in its intrinsic value, and to provide a critical counterbalance to judgement and misconceptions based on intuition. Charlot (2006), for example, describes a role for educational sciences to play in dispelling myths about education, whether they are created by popular opinion or political decision-making.

On the other hand, there is also a need to better recognise and understand the value of ‘intuition.’ Teachers are caught somewhere between these two positions: a) blindly implementing a curriculum or teaching approach based on international research into ‘what works in English teaching’; or b) using their own judgement or instinct, developed through individual and collective experience, to do what they feel is best for the children they teach. So, the role of research in education is not only look for ways to help this intuition become more ‘scientific,’ but equally, to understand how it interacts with knowledge, and to change the way ‘science’ is perceived and approached by those who study or work in education and by wider society. This calls for the education researcher to demonstrate this approach to knowledge through their practice, working with participants as the creators of new knowledge, rather than the subjects of investigation.

Santos calls bridging the gap between science and “common sense”, *knowledge-as-emancipation*:

In modern science, the epistemological break symbolizes the qualitative leap from common sense knowledge to scientific knowledge; in knowledge-as-emancipation, the most important leap is that

from scientific knowledge to common-sense knowledge. Modern science taught us how to depart from existing conservative common sense. This is inherently positive but insufficient. (Santos, 2014: 94)

In practice, for research into education, this means making the voices of those who hold “common-sense knowledge,” such as teachers and students, and especially those who are marginalised by the existing system, louder. However, it also calls for investigation of the hierarchies and systems that promote traditional perceptions of knowledge and knowledge-holders, with a view to better integrating the reality of schools into educational theory, and the reality of life beyond the school gates into the classroom. In addition, it means identifying the language and communication channels that will make both the nature and content of research more accessible and contribute to “knowledge-as emancipation”. Researchers and academics must not be seen by teachers, students or parents as living in a “specialised ivory tower” (Bourdieu, 1986), but rather a part of the education system, a colleague and peer, perhaps with an overlapping but different, complementary skillset, to those working in schools.

As mentioned above, much of the research into “effective” teaching tends to focus on tangible data – i.e. what gets the best exam results - and this is largely restricted to classroom practice. In this project, these teachers look at their work through an identity lens, rather than one of classroom practice, with a view to developing a clearer, broader sense of their professional identity and its relationship with the ecosystem of influences that surround it (including research and ideologies of education), and through this understanding creating the basis for agency and change.

2. Research Design

a) Background

The participants are six primary school English teachers, who all work at schools run by UNRWA for the families of official refugees in Gaza². All are female, and, with one exception, within the first ten years of their careers as teachers. The majority work full time, but there is

² See annex x for an explanation of refugee status.

a mixture of experience of working full-time at one school and travelling to several schools. They are specialist English teachers, and teach various grades from 1-5, in classes of between 40 and 50 students and schools varying between 1000 and 3000 pupils. Classes are usually segregated by gender, and the majority teach girls, although there is experience in the group of teaching both genders. One teacher also teaches at a university. Other relevant areas include one having done work with deaf children, another working on a gender and inclusion project, several being involved in extra-curricular drama and English work.

They have a mixture of educational backgrounds, with some having taken teaching degrees and others taking a teaching diploma after completing their BA. This is officially required of teachers in Palestine, but not universally enforced. One teacher has a masters, and most have taken various other courses and qualifications.

They appear to have mixed socio-economic backgrounds, some mentioned parents doing jobs such as farming, working in the police or in education. There is a mixture between those from Gaza and those who are refugees. Of the four who completed the project, all have children, and one of them had a baby during the research (but still didn't miss a session). Until the lockdown, they were all taking part in the British Council Teaching for Success oPT project.

To recruit the participants, I gave a short presentation of the broad aims of my research at the end of existing online training sessions and asked teachers who were interested to contact me. These six were the only ones who responded, and as might be expected from a self-selecting group, subsequent conversations have shown them to be highly motivated, passionate about improving education in Palestine and the support teachers receive, and curious about working with me. They are self-aware, open to discussion and generous with their time.

b) Ethical considerations:

The role of the researcher

Through the research process I collected data on context, attitudes, practice and feelings about change, and analysed how these are linked, both from the teachers' perspectives and my own. In planning the process, I took into account both how my subjectivity influenced my analysis, and how my role and background influence the process. This was important from an ethical and human perspective, in that I must consider the impact on those involved of how I conduct the research and what I do with the results, and also from a methodological perspective.

My background is in teaching, academic management and teacher education, and I have experience of observing and talking to teachers about their practice. On the one hand, I am used to managing factors such as the fear of observations, issues around the process of reflection, and the dynamics of group discussion, and I aimed to draw on this experience to create an open atmosphere. But on the other hand, I was aware of the need to articulate and maintain the role of researcher-as-learner and avoid being perceived as an outside ‘expert.’ I had to be clear through the way I managed the interviews, reflections and focus groups that the aim was not to evaluate them, but to work together towards shared goals. In trying to identify attitudes and honest reflections, I was aware of the possibility of hierarchical perceptions related to researchers (or indeed the organisation I work for) causing participants to say what they think I want to hear or avoid giving opinions at all.

As I mentioned above, I feel education research should play a role in closing any gap (real or perceived) between researchers and schools. I aimed to blur the lines between teacher research, which runs the risk of being too focused on the individual classroom, and academic research (particularly of the type which interests international organisations (Charlot, 2006)) which can suffer from attempts to identify universal truths and end up being too removed from classroom realities to be of any use. Santos talks of “conservative common sense,” (2014:252) and this conservatism is partly due to the fact that common sense is built through responding to immediate needs. When a new teacher is struggling with discipline, for example, their most likely recourse is to ask a more experienced teacher for advice. There is no time to go away and read, and rarely enough support to experiment with new ideas, so they learn to survive by doing the same thing as the previous generation, and nothing changes. What is more, research moves on, and the teacher can be left feeling out-of-date (Novoa, 2003). Through my approach, I aimed to make the research both represent their needs and provide the possibility of and motivation for further investigation and development, perhaps through sharing and discussing our work with the wider community of teachers participating in further research, always bearing in mind time pressures and the risk that the research topic might place the teachers in conflict with their supervisors, principals or UNRWA.

Sensitive issues and participant wellbeing

Given the political and social situation in Gaza, there is the potential for sensitive information to arise during research, and the participants have all been informed of their right to anonymity and to have any information changed or removed from transcripts as they see fit. All

participants signed a consent form (Appendix 2), based on British Educational Research Association³ (BERA) guidelines, informing them of their rights.

A specific barrier which has come up during interviews is the restrictions these teachers work under due to international politics. UNRWA schools are dependent on international funding, and are consequently subject to influence from donors. Teachers have reported restrictions on discussion of anything that might be considered political. This has direct implications for their identity in terms of pastoral care, especially in terms of building student resilience in a war context, and for concepts of citizenship, empowerment and nation-building. With this in mind, we have discussed how to present sensitive issues as they have arisen to avoid putting anyone's job at risk. I have used pseudonyms throughout, but I have promised to share the final paper, which is one of the outcomes of our work together. They will no doubt figure out together which pseudonym is assigned to each other, but I have avoided personal profiles of the teachers, where I feel necessary I have avoided naming individual speakers, and in some cases I have avoided presenting specific incidents. The teachers will also review the submitted assignment before we take any further steps towards sharing the findings more widely.

The teachers work in a context which exposes them to direct and vicarious trauma. I have some experience of similar contexts, but I am not an expert. In preparation, I spoke to colleagues who work in similar environments and did some background reading. I made it clear at the outset that the teachers were free to leave the project at any stage with no questions asked, and that the topics we discussed were to be decided by them.

In this context it is also important to note the everyday pressures of being a teacher. As noted, these are motivated teachers who already take on a lot of extra-curricular work with students and for their own professional development on top of the heavy administrative load that appears to be the lot of the modern teacher across the world. In addition, some of these teachers are required to work double shifts. All six teachers participated in the first round of interviews and reflections, five in the second round, and four have continued working with me and each other until now, beyond the end of the project itself in order to share our learning.

³ <https://www.bera.ac.uk/resources/all-publications/resources-for-researchers>

Language

Although they regularly apologise for their language level, these teachers are confident English speakers, and are able to convey complex, nuanced ideas without undue difficulty. However, Costa quotes a research participant discussing therapy: “When I mixed in some words from my first language, it started to make more sense talking about my childhood. As if the English language did not let my memories come back efficiently enough, and I just needed some key words in my own language to bring memories back.” (Costa 2018:19) I have no doubt that some of the conversations would have been different if we shared the same first language. What is more, there was a risk that language issues would affect power dynamics. However, participating and contributing internationally in English is also intrinsic to these teachers’ identity and agency as well as their moral purpose (as will be shown in the findings, Chapter V.1). The situation also allows for further reflection on the nature of similar future research and replicates a typical relationship between British Council employees who are foreign to the context where they are working (like me), and local stakeholders (like the teachers). In line with the linguistic ethos of the research, laid out in the final part of the theoretical framework, I have not changed any of the direct quotations unless the meaning needed further explanation to the reader. In this case I have used square brackets.

c) Communication channels

All interviews and focus groups with the teachers was through Zoom video-conferencing software to overcome the difficulty of access to Gaza, although I had intended to visit in May, but was unable due to the pandemic. As Dotta et al point out, power relations tend to be diffused through this medium, and “Familiarity and comfort with the means of interaction and understanding the norms of communication in this type of context, increases the chances of success.” (2019) The teachers are familiar with Zoom through their online teacher development activity in the current as well as other projects. They submitted their recorded reflections through Whatsapp, as well as some logistical organisation and social conversation. There was occasional use of email to share documents. The participants were all informed on how data would be stored and used.

d) Timeline, logistical issues and adjustments

The research project took place between December 2019 and July 2020. It consisted of 4 rounds of individual interviews with each of the participants (bearing in mind the two who left early)

and three focus groups. The interviews and focus groups were regularly interrupted by problems with electricity or connectivity, meaning that an individual meeting might take place over several days, and that participants dropped in and out of group meetings. We adjusted to this as necessary in order to make sure that all participants had the opportunity to contribute when they wanted to. Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes, while each focus group was between 90 and 150 minutes, not including extra calls to catch up on what had been missed due to interruptions or technical issues. Covid-19 and the lockdown meant a further adjustment as we had been hoping to use video in relevant locations as part of the reflection process. Outside of the timeline of the research, during late August and September, we worked together over several meetings to produce and deliver a presentation of our findings to the British Council manager in Palestine and one of the district coordinators. This did not form part of the content analysis.

e) Research principles, methods and process

The principles of the methodology are directly connected to the aims of the research and the ethical considerations: “By maintaining commitment to local contexts rather than the quest for truth, PAR [Participatory Action Research] liberates research from conventional prescriptive methods, and seeks to decentralize traditional research.” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006 in Macdonald 2012:36). PAR aims to both, “Help people to investigate reality in order to change it,” and, “Help people change reality in order to investigate it. (Fals Borda 1979, in Atweh et al 2002:24). Through the research process itself, we aimed to strengthen teacher identity; and through strengthening teacher identity we were in a better position to do further investigation and make recommendations. Atweh et al (2002:23) describe the principles as follows:

1. PAR is a social process
2. It is participatory
3. It is practical and collaborative
4. It is emancipatory
5. It is critical
6. It is recursive

In general, action research involving English teachers is principally focused on classroom practice and its impact on learners (e.g. Borg, 2014). There have been a number of recent

British Council initiatives along these lines, aimed at fostering reflection and development based on real student needs. However, the combination of these principles for PAR insist on a wider view of teacher development, particularly in their *social* and *emancipatory* characteristics.

Mockler divides strengthening teacher identity into *process* and *project* and these provide a useful divisions for how we structured the research.

The process of articulating one's professional identity is in essence about teachers developing their own personal philosophy of education that grows out of who they are, what they believe and where they have been over the course of their careers, and finally, opening that up to each other on whatever scale is appropriate. (2011:524)

The first part of the research mirrored this process through a series of recursive interviews, reflections and initial group discussions to form an agreed basis from which to plan action. It focused on the following broad guiding questions:

- What does it mean to be an English teacher in Palestine?
- What are the key enablers and barriers?

Interviews, discussions and reflections

The interviews played an important stage of reflection, confidence-building and relationship-building. Interviews lend themselves particularly well to identity work and the construction of narratives; as Seldman puts it, "At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience." (2006: 9) However, bearing in mind the ethical considerations I have laid out above, I kept Stringer's advice in mind in considering how the content and structure might "be carefully formulated to ensure that participants are given maximum opportunity to present events and phenomena in their own terms and to follow agendas of their own choosing" (in McDonald 2012).

With this in mind, I used a responsive approach, starting with broad themes and a flexible set of questions I had identified, before letting the conversation evolve organically. The initial interviews were semi-structured to build trust, provide scaffolding and set up a basis for deeper exploration. I used a biographical approach, including childhood, own schooling, family and career to set the scene, which led naturally into discussions of their own teachers and their influences, as well as discussions of values and an initial discussion of the role of education.

Broadly, the initial conversations covered the teacher's background, their values and views on the role of education and English within that (and within society), and their key challenges and sources of satisfaction.

At the end of each interview we identified themes that had arisen for further reflection. The reflections were a short three- to five-minute recording, designed to provide some thinking time before we spoke. They gave teachers the chance to prepare and acted as a springboard for discussion, meaning that teachers were not caught cold. After the first theme, where we all agreed to consider the role of education as being fundamental to the project, I reviewed the content of each interview and suggested an area that they would might want to use for their reflection. I then shared these themes with the group, and the teachers had a choice of using their own idea, someone else's, something new, or a combination of these. In the later interviews, the teachers suggested their own topics, which I again shared with the others. Teachers generally submitted one reflection, but sometimes two or three (and on a couple of occasions, none!). Subsequent interviews started with these themes, but then evolved organically according to the teachers' interests, or where I needed further clarification or depth.

In line with the ethical considerations above, I tried to evolve the initial semi-structured interviews into genuine discussions and to build a sense of collegiality. Initially this was a natural sharing of information about myself as part of getting to know each other or mentioning my own experiences as a teacher or working with other teachers. As we got to know each other, I began to feel comfortable expressing opinions and, with some teachers, to engage in debate without feeling I was unduly influencing their responses. The flexible, recursive nature of the interviews allowed us to zoom in on specific areas and examples, then go back to the bigger themes, observing common threads and refining positions and opinions through the reflective process.

Initial content analysis

After each interview or reflection, I summarised the content in a spreadsheet (Appendix 3), creating categories and subcategories as they came up, and revising these as they developed with notes on each interview and reflection. This allowed me to get a view of how individual teachers had evolved during the process, and also to see how different teachers approached the same areas. As this evolved, and through the emphasis teachers put on certain areas, I was then able to identify a separate set of overarching themes that were important issues of identity to

all of the teachers. I shared this list with them and asked for comments and suggestions. The refined themes then formed the basis of the focus groups, and were as follows:

- Citizenship and values
- Student wellbeing and trauma
- Teacher wellbeing and trauma
- Relationships with parents
- Relationships with teachers, principals and school staff
- Dealing with politics and policy
- Participating in professional development

Readjusting the focus

It became clear through the interviews that, within the same broad scope, my initial research questions needed refining. Macintosh et al point out that, “As researchers entering the field, we face the challenge of grappling with things which are at once “strange, irregular and inexplicit” (Geertz, 1973:10 in Macintosh et al 2017:11).” This reflects my limited knowledge of a particularly complex context, but also a situation that those working in cultural relations or international research often encounter and have to respond to. They continue:

The subtle connotation of research here is the enmeshed sense of finding out about, orienting ourselves within, or becoming acculturated to a new setting. This implies the possibility, and indeed the likelihood, that as scholars become acculturated in a new setting, they may learn that research questions formulated without respect to this understanding may no longer be suited for use in situ.

I had initially wanted to frame the research within the context of the *Teaching for Success* project which all the teachers were all involved in, to understand to how the project interacted with their identity. However, the flexible nature of the interview process made it clear that while the teachers valued *Teaching for Success*, it was not a priority. The key for them was to develop and articulate their identity more broadly, and this was a rare opportunity for them to have a voice to do so. The themes outlined above reflect those priorities, and the point that research questions are likely to evolve, “especially when some of those involved, including actors in the setting, have a personal stake in the projects” (ibid.).

In addition, the research coincided with the department I work in at British Council having to adapt quickly to the pandemic, and a consequent opportunity to rethink the way we work. I found the teachers were helping me both define my role in a way that better aligned with my identity and shape my contribution to the British Council’s strategy in its work with English teachers (I have summarised this in Chapter VI.3.d).

Group discussions

As Mactaggart puts it, “Ideally, in PAR, all participant viewpoints are recognized and valued, as all participants have an opportunity to communicate.” (in McDonald 2012:41). The aim here was for the different dynamic to produce considerations that didn’t arise during the individual reflection, to provide a basis for discussion of what needs to change and how, and to develop a sense of shared purpose that will continue beyond the end of the research project. Over the course of three extended discussions, we revisited the key aspects of the interviews as a group, identifying commonalities and differences in perception, then reflected on the research process and what we had learned from it, before making recommendations.

In line with Mockler’s *process* (2011), while the interviews were part of “developing their own personal philosophy of education that grows out of who they are, what they believe and where they have been over the course of their careers” the first focus group was initially about “opening that up to each other.” It gave a chance to work towards a shared sense of identity and moral purpose, bearing in mind Qaimari’s findings that “Palestinian teachers appeared to be highly conflicted, torn between past and present cultural models of the ideal teacher, and confused as to how to negotiate their professional identity against the larger societal context of violent political conflict.” (2016:22) To support this process, I asked the teachers to reflect individually on the conversations we had had, and to consider the characteristics of an ideal Palestinian English teacher, based on each of the themes from the interviews that they had agreed as priorities (see *Initial Content Analysis* above). The teachers then discussed these as a group, while I took notes on a live document, that they could comment on and correct during and after the process through further reflection. This was important as it also allowed the teachers who had connectivity or electricity issues during calls to catch up and comment asynchronously, or through separate calls. The process was sometimes repetitive, but it ensured that all teachers could see their contributions recognised. These negotiated and agreed characteristics formed the first column of Appendix 1, *An ideal Palestinian English teacher*.

On the one hand, while Graham and Young (1998) actually consider this conception of the ideal self a proxy for teacher identity (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004:118), as Bourn points out, “there are dangers to assuming that there is an ideal role for teachers”(2015:64). It was important to be clear that this was about expressing the teachers own *ideal self* as a starting point for articulating the influences on their reality rather than creating a sense of failure or disconnection. Consequently the second group discussion focused on the reality and barriers to

fulfilling that ideal self, and influences such as teacher skills and knowledge, other teachers, principals, school culture, parents and the community, cultural attitudes and beliefs, media, education policy, the wider political environment, resources and so on. As well as the practical purpose of analysis of the situation before making recommendations, this aimed to help the teachers further situate their reality within the wider ecosystem, and perhaps address any feelings of guilt about the gap between the ideal and the reality (Farouk, 2012). As in the first focus group, the summary was negotiated and repeatedly added to and revised in the live document.

The final discussion was focused squarely on the third research question *What can be done to strengthen teacher identity?* and articulating plans for what Mockler calls *the project* of identity development:

The ‘project’, then, of developing one’s professional identity is one of articulating and maintaining congruence between personal and professional values, moral purpose, and then ‘pushing through’ the border between moral purpose and ‘on the ground’ action, to create congruence between these and the key work of the teacher both inside and outside the classroom. (2011:524)

During this discussion, which was the longest, before moving to recommendations, we considered the impact of the research on us as individuals and as a group. This allowed us to review the impact of the research process on our own identities, as that might inform our recommendations for initiatives to support teacher identity development. The teachers then discussed recommendations against each of the priority areas, considering different actors in the eco-system such as teachers, principals other education staff, the government, UNRWA, the British Council and other professional development agencies, universities and teacher training institutions. Once again these were recorded and revised in the live document.

I used the completed document to go back and cross-reference with the spreadsheet I had produced through categorising the transcripts of both interviews and group discussions. This allowed me to present findings under the priorities identified by the teachers for an *Ideal Palestinian English Teacher*.

Reflections and Limitations

While the teachers’ reflections and recommendations are provided later (Chapter VI) and I have presented my conclusions and recommendations as regards my work at the British Council in the final section, I will give a brief summary based on notes of own reflections

before, during and after the research process, as they are relevant to the limitations of the research design and therefore the content analysis and presentation of findings.

Narrow perspective, broad view and limited time

By their own account, these teachers are different from many other teachers in their context. They are all highly motivated, self-described high performers, both academically and in terms of their commitment to their jobs. Throughout the research process, they demonstrated high levels of self-awareness, emotional intelligence and most of all a willingness to listen to each other and engage. However, while those qualities allowed for the in-depth reflection that was required for the research to be successful, despite strong personalities, it was quite a uniform group, and hence a narrow perspective. Perhaps because of this, and the fact that the teachers did not know each other very well, there rarely much serious divergence of opinion, whether during the interviews or focus groups. What would be the impact of introducing teachers with a different or less well-developed sense of moral purpose, for example? What is more, this tiny sample size can hardly be representative. As such there is obviously no attempt here to present their perspectives as a generalised reality for teachers in this context, or to suggest that their findings are definitive. There may however be implications for working with teachers with similar traits.

By revisiting the research questions, I aimed to better represent the priorities of the teachers and the result of our relationships over the course of the project. However, by removing the specific context I was intending to use to frame the research, I ended up with a set of findings that covered a wide range of topics. This breadth, and the way the teachers presented their thoughts are a result of the fact that they are presenting their thoughts to an outsider, who has limited background knowledge. They wanted to give me the key messages, and for my part, I wanted to see the teacher as a whole, from their perspective, and relate that to work the British Council does.

This is, once again, a realistic representation of a relationship that is part of our professional eco-systems. However, I was aware that while, for example, discussion of the teachers' own schooling worked well in one sense, as it provided background, allowed us to get to know each other, and appeared to make sense chronologically, on the other hand, our relationship was at a very early stage and someone closer to the participants would have been able to delve further into the deeply felt emotions that these topics often provoked. Indeed, I believe that revisiting

that topic now would be a completely different conversation. Interestingly, when I reviewed the transcripts, I noticed that although I asked about pre-service training, the conversations rarely developed beyond the bald facts. This may be simply be down to the fact that all of us are involved in in-service work, and consequently paid less attention to it, or there may be deeper reasons, related to a traditional approach (Bsharat and Rmahi.R 2016:33) that did not align with their identity; again, this is an area further investigation.

On the other hand, the breadth of the study meant there was not enough space or time to go into *detailed* theoretical examination of specific areas such as citizenship or resilience in Gaza. Instead, these are presented as they came up, and areas for further investigation or training are suggested in the recommendations. In addition, while the research is about being an English teacher at primary level, much of it is general to teachers and the whole education system. The emphasis was at the discretion of the teachers and how they see their identity, but again, this broadened the scope of the research topic.

The final point is that, in the traditional sense, there is not a lot of ‘action’ in this action research, although we have maintained the PAR ethos throughout. This is partly due to the Covid-19 lockdowns which prevented access to schools and teacher activity groups. On the other hand, the process of the research itself is a necessary part of actively strengthening teacher identity, and we have included our reflections on the effectiveness of the process as part of the findings. The recommendations are also part of the teachers’ plans to put this research into action. They have already presented the findings to the British Council and UNRWA, and are planning a global webinar for teachers on the British Council’s *Teaching English* platform in December.

My perspective on the research relationships

The initial interviews were characterised by a mixture of curiosity, enthusiasm and uncertainty among the teachers. Although they were aware of the research topic, the teachers needed clarification as to what I wanted to achieve. I explained that the direction of the research would be largely determined by them, and that we would start broadly and then focus on their priorities, but one teacher became frustrated that the questions were “too general.” This was perhaps reflective of a more general dynamic where, for some of the teachers, the initial relationship appeared more like that of teacher-student, and they expected a more directive approach, rather than the collaborative one I was aiming for. On several occasions, I had the

sense that teachers had done some reading beforehand in order to be able to engage in a theoretical discussion, rather than a reflection on their own experiences and beliefs. At the end of an early conversation, one teacher asked me, “Was I a good student?” On another occasion, although she didn’t present it as such, I realised that a teacher had simply read an academic article aloud as her “reflection.” This was a challenge to my own sense of professional identity, and I considered it a failure on my part that I had not managed to overcome the power dynamics that I have described above. I worried that I was in fact reinforcing the unequal relationships between teachers and “outside experts” that my research aims to counter.

However, as we got to know each other, the teachers began to express their own views, our discussions became more balanced, and we were able to engage in fun and frank debate, including plenty of polite disagreement. By the time of the focus groups, the teachers appeared more certain in their attitudes and beliefs and this was strengthened by a sense of collective identity. While they were preparing a presentation of our work to the British Council manager in Palestine and one of their supervisors, I made a suggestion about the structure, and was met with the reply, “We will take your ideas into consideration.” This felt like a validation that the power balance had shifted.

Chapter V: Being an English Teacher in Gaza

Introduction

For the teachers involved, this research is seen as an opportunity to present themselves to the wider world. I have aimed to do this as faithfully as possible, while acknowledging that my own perspective has an influence on the way I have put together the findings.

Given the small sample size, quantitative analysis of the data was not considered appropriate, so it was particularly important to make sure that the themes and emphasis reflected teacher priorities. As described above, the content analysis was done according to their priority themes, which I used to tag my own categories and notes so I could draw out threads and connections between all stages of the research process, such as their own schooling and their attitudes to role of education through to the group discussion of the ideal teacher and the identification of barriers. For example, the teachers mentioned parents as a barrier under citizenship, and through cross-referencing, I could see all the instances of where parents were mentioned in relation to citizenship through the interviews and group discussions. We then looked at impact of this project itself on teacher identity and based on all of that, the teachers produced recommendations. This was not a linear process. Like teacher identity itself, the data was sometimes “multiple, shifting, and in conflict” (Varghese et al 2005:23), but the overall messages from the teachers were clear.

Since they were participants and contributors at all stages of the research, the findings are presented as such in the following structure:

Being an English teacher in Gaza

This is the body of the research. The findings are presented according to the themes identified as priorities by the teachers. Each section is introduced by a summary of the teachers’ description of an ideal teacher, taken directly from *An Ideal Palestinian English Teacher* (Appendix 1 – in the main text I have rewritten the bullet points as paragraphs for the sake of presentation). These are the teachers’ key messages. The body of each section is a synthesis of data from across the whole research process to add depth and explanation to the reality and barriers summarised in the document. Where relevant, I have mentioned at what stage of the research comments were made.

Reflections on the research process

This is largely based on data from the final focus groups, and structured using Mockler's model (2011) as a framework.

Recommendations for Gaza

These are based on the recommendations made by the teachers as recorded in *An Ideal Palestinian English Teacher* and supported by data from the rest of the research process, but arranged to show the suggested changes at various levels of the eco-system. Where I felt I could add something, I have made suggestions to support the teachers' ideas.

1. Citizenship and values

An ideal Palestinian English teacher is passionate about Palestinian identity and fights for Palestinian citizenship. This teacher believes in Palestinian attitudes and values, and takes these values from religion. They see the English language as a way of communicating the Palestinian cause and correcting negative perceptions in the global media, but this is reciprocal, a way of bridging the gap between Palestine, the UK and other cultures. They see English as an international language.

This means that they integrate language and culture – including values, style of life, religion – into their teaching. They convey Palestinian ethics and values to students, while making them aware of and accepting of the values of other cultures, but also the realities in those countries. They are able to simplify complex ideas like these for the benefit of their students. They present international communication as the aim of English.

a) English as a Palestinian Language

All of these teachers saw the key roles of education as being connected to both individual character development and nation-building, especially in terms of citizenship and values. For Ayat, education should, “build a good society based on ethics and values,” and educate citizens who “are loyal to their country and their religion.” The way they interpreted this was closely connected to their how they presented their collective identity as English teachers. Sana calls for an education which “teaches the students to accept the others.; to accept religions, to accept scholars, to accept the different, the differences between man and woman.” She associates these characteristics with Islam, but complains that local traditions and customs are stronger than religion, “control life” and preserve the status quo. In imagining the perfect education system, she believes it can contribute to peace:

If the children, our children, Gazan children, took a chance for an education which teach them to think, “*Liberty*,” think, “*Freedom*,” think out of the box, out of the traditions, out of the customs, this, this, this will create a generation that put end for this hatred.

To Sana, restricted thinking is connected to the suffocating reality of living under the blockade. At the beginning of our first interview, Rasha told me:

I was born in Gaza and I grow up as a child in Gaza. I have never travelled to any place outside Gaza. So, all my childhood was in Gaza only. So, I grew up with my family and my siblings in Gaza. I went to schools in Gaza. My University was in Gaza. Everything in Gaza...I just hope to leave Gaza just to travel to any place in the world just for one day.

Sana feels that “living in a jail” like this creates stagnation, and a conservative, inward-looking view of education based entirely on tradition; “We don't find sources to learn [from], [apart from] this tradition. [Students] learn from traditions and customs more than they learn from books, more than they learn from the religion.” She is passionate when remembering a favourite English teacher, saying, “I loved her, really, I swear, Mr Damian, I loved this teacher because she tried to teach us something new, something not local.” All of these teachers cited their own English teachers as being their favourites because they had a modern, continually evolving approach, and curiosity about the world. This comment from Ayat was typical:

I feel that they are open minded. Maybe they learn a new language and that that makes them more able to accept new ideas. They are creative. They think critically. All of that attracts me in my English teachers.

Like Ayat, Mona associates her English teachers with a desire to learn, develop and experiment, in contrast to teachers of other subjects who followed the same routine year after year. For Souad, the only teacher she disliked was one who didn't give her students “the chance to express ourselves.” Most of these teachers also referenced being encouraged to be “leaders”. For example, Hanan says she remembers all her teachers because they left their “fingerprint” on her in some way, but she identifies one English teacher in particular who taught her to strive to be “iconic,” a word she also uses to encourage her own students. In a similar way, the concepts of creativity, openness and autonomy or leadership came up repeatedly when discussing their own teaching style and the traits they encourage in the students they teach. Rasha is proud of the fact that she makes her classes engaging and participative in a way that most of her own teachers never did, while for Souad, “the biggest role of education system is to improve the independent thinking and the critical thinking among the students,” so that they can “lead the world someday.” She continues, “[Critical thinking] creates independent people and independent generation that can define itself and define our country Palestine. It can speak out about the Palestinian cause to the external world.”

During the early interviews, and particularly when thinking about their initial attraction to English as a subject as individual students, most of the teachers linked the value of learning English to values like tolerance and openness, as well as creativity and autonomy. As Souad said, “[these things] should be taught regardless of that course, whether it be English, Arabic, religion, or anything else. [...] but I think that English has the most important role because, like I said, it's an international language that is spoken and understood by everybody.” This echoes Unwin and Yandell:

We learn to participate in culturally mediated perspectives on the world because other people matter to us. And sharing in these perspectives is what enables us to learn – to transform our understanding of the world, of others and of ourselves. (2017:29)

However, as the interviews progressed, more of the teachers became vocal about a direct link between English and the Palestinian cause. English is seen as important because “this generation will be ambassadors for Palestine one day” (Souad). They see English as a way of talking about and therefore preserving their culture, but a key element of this is also “to expose all the lies” (Ayat) in the Western media, which is “turning things upside down” (Souad).

Although it is the first language of this media, the teachers expressed little internal conflict between teaching English and Palestinian identity or values. At one level, this was framed in terms of pragmatic approach to keeping life simple; “Of course not. We try to separate...politics [and] learning. Okay, we learn about others. We learn English, but this doesn't relate it to politics... Politics ... is even more complicated than we can imagine.” (Hanan) But for some of the teachers, there is an important element of taking ownership of the language and attempting to create a place for it that strengthens rather than threatens Palestinian identity. As well as being a tool to communicate the Palestinian cause, share Palestinian culture, and resist, English is seen as part of helping a (literally) closed society to embrace Islamic values of tolerance, culture and learning. Ayat explains:

Some people are afraid of English culture and our curriculum, that it threatens our tradition or particular [...] issues related to religion. But in our religion, Allah said, “it's a miracle to have many languages,” and our prophet persuades us to learn the languages of others.

In this vision, as in Sana's comments relating Islam to inclusion, English is seen as a means of knowing about, understanding and sharing with other cultures in a global society, which aligns it with living the Islamic values that are so important to their identity. As in the use of English to speak up against oppression, English is not owned by native-speaker contexts such as the UK or the USA; it has a useful place as a global language within the Palestinian multilingual

repertoire, amongst different forms of Arabic, local languages and dialects, and other foreign languages. Souad points out that already having various dialects in daily life helps her think of English in this way, but also that she doesn't feel the need to conform to a particular model; "that's the nice thing about English actually [...], you can have different ways of speaking it." She goes on to explain how she approaches English in her classes:

The first thing they must understand is that they should focus on the fluency [...] not accuracy, you know, because English is now [spoken] by everyone in China, in Japan, in the United States. It doesn't matter the dialect they are saying or how they are pronouncing the word the words, because they are known.

b) Other Perspectives

By the time of the focus groups, through reflection and discussion, the teachers were united in their vision of education and English playing an important role in advancing the Palestinian cause. As they spoke together, and later as they prepared for the presentation, there was a clear unity of purpose on this topic, and a sense that this was one of the key ways in which they defined themselves as a group. They did, however, point out that not all their colleagues shared this vision for English teachers, and through the interviews, other views arose.

For some of the teachers, the automatic response when asked why English was important was its requirement for certain jobs. On one hand, this was also linked to a common good. The point was made that for the workforce as a whole, English is important because it allows Palestinians access to the latest technology and foreign expertise, which were considered essential for nation-building. On the other hand, at a superficial level, English is linked to prestige and glamour, even among teachers. Several teachers mentioned that this was part of the attraction when they were at school, and Sana explained:

English teachers are not like other teachers here in Gaza. They dress well, they walk well, they speak [differently] ... In our language we call them "class". "Class" means they have prestige. Until now, you if you enter any school in Gaza, you will [know] when she is walking, she is an English teacher and [...] all the visitors all that [...] enter any school they will know this is an English teacher. The teacher of English is special from the teacher of mathematics or teacher of Arabic. People look at her that she knows more, she more qualified, because she knows another language.

To a certain extent, the teachers also reflected research findings in a report focusing on the Middle East and North Africa: "The younger generation...view English as an essential stepping stone to better career prospects in the private sector" (Erling, 2015:42), and "A further driver for English comes from young people hoping to pursue higher education, which is increasingly provided through this medium." (ibid:43). However, as we discussed the high unemployment

rate, and the kind of work that was available or needed, the teachers pointed out that English was not necessarily a key requirement for the majority of jobs, although it was needed for many university courses. In essence, in this context, they saw English as an escape route from poverty only for a minority, but pointed out that for parents and students this hope was essential. They also explained that a major motivation for many parents and students is the potential for emigration. A scholarship abroad is a way of escaping from Gaza, and a high level of English is often a pre-requisite. In this context, it is easy to understand why, “Parents/guardians and community leaders may feel that developing a portable skill such as English, with all its concomitant symbolic capital...is the main goal of education” (Capstick & Delaney, 2015:17). Some of the teachers felt a conflict between the realisation that this opportunity would only be afforded to a tiny, elite, percentage of students, and the fact that downplaying this aim meant denying hopes and dreams which were closely aligned with their own. Perhaps with this purpose in mind, some of the teachers also attached importance to learning about the cultures of the UK and the USA, in addition to the conception of English as an international language. Quoted in an article reporting research into the connection between schooling and economic mobility in the USA, the director of Teaching for Change, Deborah Menkart, argues that, in the current system, even good intentions are misguided: “Part of the problem is that the whole conversation around education has become so focused on helping individuals ‘escape’ their bad circumstances, rather than helping them become part of the solution.” (Cohen, 2017). In Gaza, described in 2018 as “unliveable” by a UN inspector (United Nations, 2020), it is hard to criticise the desire to help others escape.

c) Facing reality

Throughout the interviews, Palestine is presented as a country which places great emphasis on qualifications and grades, both culturally, in terms of prestige, and instrumentally, as a means to escape the high level of unemployment, or emigrate (as in Ramahi 2017). The teachers themselves expressed pride in their own school results, often highlighting specific scores and rankings during their first interview. Several teachers also mentioned the pleasure it gives them when their students do well in their exams. However, in relation to the education system as a whole, and particularly in the attitudes of parents, an excessive focus on exams is seen as a major barrier to achieving what they see as the real aims of the education system.

When discussing how teachers could meet these aspects of the ideal English teacher, this focus on exams was one of several barriers identified, mostly concerned with curriculum and

assessment, and related attitudes. They point out that issues related to culture and citizenship are not implemented systematically in the English curriculum, they are part of separate citizenship classes, and these are rigid and rules-focused; theoretical, rather than practical. This leaves it up to individual teachers, which in turn leaves them open to criticism from parents. Sana said, “When we teach English, they love that, but they love marks more.” Souad says the curriculum is too full, and that even where it aims for active learning, she sometimes succumbs pressure from both from parents and school administration:

[Towards the end of term] I just escaped all the questions that focus on critical thinking and, I have to finish what I need to give...I had to finish the material before the exams come. Of course [I feel guilty], yes. But [...] we are being monitored, you know, by the principal and the supervisor that we have to finish this regardless of how.

As well as affecting the content and efforts to increase learner autonomy, the teachers commented that focusing on exams actually has a negative impact on citizenship and values, fomenting cheating, dishonesty, competitiveness and even hatred, jealousy and conflict. However, Sana points out that the students aren’t ready to work autonomously, and that recent attempts to implement “authentic” assessment processes had in fact reduced students’ autonomy, because they needed constant support.

They need the teacher to read the exam for them. They are still unable to read the exam alone or by themselves. They need the teacher to read it for them. If you didn't read the exam and give them the worksheets, maybe five out of 40 will pass the exam and the rest will fail.

The same applied to initiatives to implement active learning. All of the teachers have classes of between 40 and 50 students and the teachers sometimes feel powerless to address students’ needs. Sana is honest about taking a pragmatic approach, saying that maybe one lesson in ten she is able to facilitate a class where real active learning takes place.

As mentioned above, focusing on citizenship can attract negative attention from parents and principles if it distracts from getting through the curriculum and preparing students for exams. However, it can also have more serious consequences for teachers, as it may lead to them breaking UNRWA policy, which may cost them their jobs. UNRWA, who rely on international donor-funding, claim that their approach to the curriculum “does not take sides or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature,” (UNRWA, 2020) but in reality, this makes any discussion or representation of Palestinian identity impossible, and completely ignores the reality of life in Gaza. The teachers report having to sign agreements that they will not bring politics into school. One points out, “They don't want us even to teach

our students that Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine” and another explains, “We love our country and we want to see all of the heritage, or you know, the evidence of the existence of our grandfathers available everywhere, and our flag.” She says she respects the rules as an employee, but it creates tension for teachers. They try to find ways of including Palestinian culture in classes by introducing things like traditional clothes and marriage ceremonies, but are frustrated by this major barrier to fulfilling their *ideal self* as a teacher, while their identity as UNRWA teachers is placed in conflict. What is more, this separation of education and culture in the name of “neutrality” only seems likely to entrench what the teachers see as a limited, traditional approach to education that is only good for passing exams. Referring to the fact that Palestine has one of the highest literacy rates in the world, Sana argues:

Here in Gaza, we have very good learning and teaching [for] reading and writing, but we don't have culture really. In Gaza, we don't have culture. We go to school for 12 years, then we come out of the school. We don't know anything. We just know how to read and how to [...] write.

2. Student wellbeing and trauma

An ideal teacher prioritises their students' wellbeing above all else. They make a continual effort to know and understand their students and to adapt as necessary, which includes having the basic counselling skills that allow them to recognise and address trauma. This involves understanding the socio-emotional impact of conflict on learning and wellbeing, as well as on character development and behaviour.

They make the school and the classroom a safe space, and know how to make lessons fun to take children's minds away from traumatic events. The English classroom is recognised as a particular opportunity for dealing with issues of wellbeing and trauma.

The ideal teacher seeks and takes advantage of professional development opportunities in this area, but recognises that the ideal response taught in trauma training sessions is difficult to implement in the hard reality. This teacher is able to overcome their own trauma to be strong for the children in their classes.

a) Wellbeing in the school

As seen above, for these teachers, education plays a dual role in nation-building for the future, in strengthening the economy, and particularly in strengthening citizenship. However, although they emphasise encouraging leadership and autonomy to support these aims, they have more immediate concerns which are not always compatible. Sana told me;

When we enter the class, we look at the kids like [this]: I don't want to make them suffer more. Really in each period we look at them and say, in our heart, I don't want me to make them suffer more. They suffer. Our children in Gaza suffer. Really that's it. That's the truth. So, when we teach them, when we give them exams or we give them worksheets, we try hard to make it easy for them. [...]. Because we feel that they suffer and we don't want to...to make them suffer more and more.

When talking about their own favourite teachers, without exception, they mentioned *kindness* before any of the other qualities mentioned in the section above. They and the students they teach have to deal with violence and extreme poverty. They described trauma caused by factors including regularly experiencing bomb attacks, being exposed to violence and death in border protests, grieving the death or injury of family members or classmates, suffering domestic violence and malnutrition. Ayat explains that the impact on boys' classes is often the hardest to manage:

They are so violent. Sometimes we try our best in order to work rules and try to make them polite and you know, to have an excellent classroom management but in general, because the students live in, as I mentioned before, in a poor area and it is full of violence. So they are in general violent. Their parents deal with them in a violent way, the loud voices are crying, so dealing with them isn't easy.

These issues manifest themselves by affecting learning and behaviour, but also in daily interactions in their schools. One teacher, who works in a school near the border, was saying goodbye to a fourth-grader when he told her that he might not see her the following week because he was going to the border protest at the weekend. "Can you imagine that? He thought that he will be killed." She describes how a misbehaving student told her, "If you tell my mum, I will go to the border with the Jews and let them kill me." One recounts a situation where a child didn't want his mother to come to school to meet her because he was ashamed of her burned face. Other teachers tell me of helping parents buy uniforms, or of children who don't have the daily money to pay for their lunch. As Ayat put it, education is important to alleviate poverty, but, 'Hungry kids don't learn.' On the other hand, Rasha says, "It's a protection. Education protects children from being you know, very poor and going out in the street and having just street life." For Sana, it is also a distraction in the context of restricted movement and dense population;

We love to have children and the children are making noise all the time. And our houses are very, very tight, very narrow houses here in Gaza. So, the school sometimes is an exit. A place to feel happy, to feel ... to change the mood. Maybe for change. Yes. From sitting at home. We don't have a place to go like... forest places, the wider places to go.

These teachers have a number of strategies for supporting student wellbeing and trauma. They include songs and games in classes often as possible and, when there has been a particularly traumatic event, a number of days is devoted to helping children recover, "to absorb the negative energy from them" (Sana). She explains that, in general, it is important for the students to "learn without feeling that they are learning. They children don't love boring things. Our children love to jump, and they have little span of attention, songs, games, tactile, using

hands in learning it to teach them away from that traditional way. The traditional way means fail to teach.” For Souad, this is a way of managing behaviour; “When students are bored, they tend just to move a lot and make a lot of chaos and just to play with anything they see. So I use [...] our songs to reactivate them. And this makes them motivated and excited to continue their lesson with me.” However, Sana points out that, “They sometimes are [active] and we are active. They sometimes they don't like to share, to share a play [...] to share answering the questions. So we deal with [it].”

The teachers try to treat their students as individuals, and to understand their home life. Reem says,

Every student inside the class has a story. So if a student doesn't work doesn't work, doesn't do his or her homework, you have to go investigate and see what is the problem, sometimes the problem, the problem comes from the family and the [...] environment which he or he or she lives in. So, as a teacher, I must contact have you know, constant contact with parents and family.

The teachers also have recourse to a school counsellor, but say there is often only one, in schools with between 1000 and 3000 children. Souad describes how this works;

I will tell you about my experience with a boy in the third grade. He used to hit other students and he used to steal from them. But when I asked about him, I figured out that his parents are divorced and that could just be, I don't know, that he doesn't have anyone to talk with. So I asked the help of the counsellor and she sat with him many times. Now he stopped stealing and he stopped hitting, hitting other students. But from time to time, he makes a lot of chaos actually, and I'm trying to solve his problem to now. Well, most times, he sits quietly, but sometimes just he, I don't know maybe he's bored. Maybe he just doesn't feel well or he has some issues outside the school. So this reflects and in his attitude at classes, but I will try to help him as much as I can.

Towards the end, Souad seems to be putting a brave face on a feeling of helplessness. Most of the teachers felt they were underprepared and under-resourced for dealing with trauma-related issues. Ayat explains that,

the biggest problem is to have some students who have hidden problems and trauma and you don't know. The signs aren't visible for you as a teacher, but for example you have some low academic achievements, but you don't know from their behaviour. In the end I'm not a therapist, but my classroom is a communicative atmosphere so I should make sure that this positive communication between students [is] occurring in a good way.

Sana has attended training for trauma, but is not convinced of its effect; “I took more than ten sessions in trauma, so I knew how to be ideal, and how and what is the reality.” However she points out that not all teachers share the caring approach taken by this group. There are those who try to normalise war like, “it's something ordinary. It's something we should deal with [...], that we should deal with weapons, we should deal with killed bodies, dead bodies, killing.

But there's this feeling as it's normal because a lot of our borders or our land is, uh, is every day is forced to war.” And there are others who say to children, ““You are not a kid! You are a man! Be strong! This is our land. This is war. This is our land. We should [...] face war anytime [...], you should be ready.” They wanted to create a warrior.”

b) Barriers to addressing trauma

When discussing whether there was a specific role for English classes in addressing trauma, or supporting wellbeing, the teachers felt that the English classroom is important, because its communicative nature allows teachers to identify problems, and that there ‘is an emotional side’ (Ayat) to language learning. They also refer back to the fact that English teachers are different from other teachers, more open and caring. But they tend to articulate a general effort to understand their students’ problems and react to them sensitively, rather than an attempt to create English classrooms that use language learning activities specifically to address trauma. They feel they need more training in this area, and while Ayat is clear that they “are not therapists,” research shows that , “Psycho-social interventions do not always need to be seen as separate interventions to language learning” (Capstick and Delaney, 2015:29) Dixon points out that, in language classrooms, “safe spaces can be created, and support provided in navigating a new space if curricula are designed to be flexible and driven by student needs.” (Dixon, 2018:65). However, as Ayat says, when, on the contrary, the education system and the parents prioritise a rigid curriculum and exam results, “Sometimes we are just too busy to give students information, skills, writing, reading, speaking, so I have a full and overloaded schedule and objectives, aims to achieve.” Souad backs her up, saying that for most teachers,

The time of the class is too limited, it’s 45 minutes, and the teacher has to do what he’s supposed to explain in this lesson, he’s going to explain a grammar lesson, so he focuses on the grammar lesson, regardless of other things like the students have trauma or not. The teacher would be busy explaining the lesson and would not have time to try to cheer students up or reveal their emotions.

Parents can be another obstacle. Ayat explains that she asks parents at the beginning of each year about their children’s wellbeing, and finds out about some of those who have experienced trauma. But “cultural and social factors” lead to parents hiding any problems for fear of stigma. Souad also points out that, “sometimes the parents themselves are the reason of the trauma. We have some domestic violence, so the children, when you ask them what happened, will not tell you, and when you communicate with the parents, also nothing happens.” Rasha comments that, “[Many] parents don't care about education, and they are poor. We have low economical

situations. So then the easiest way is to not to go to school and just to work in other things like being in industry or working with their parents, their father's factories or other jobs, you know.”

What is more, teachers are afraid of falling foul of UNRWA rules if they discuss traumatic events involving Israel. I heard of one teacher whose students had lost a classmate at the border protests, but was not allowed to discuss it with them in the school. This left the teacher unable to support her students, but also exacerbated her own trauma. As Souad puts it:

It's really difficult, you know, because teachers themselves will [...] will suffer from trauma. So it would be difficult to be gentle and just love the children. But I guess, ideally, that should happen because teachers, they are like models for the children and for the students.

3. Relationships with parents

An ideal teacher sees parents as an important part of schooling and makes themselves approachable for both students and parents. They recognise when a student might have problems at home and follow up. They communicate difficult messages clearly, showing they are fair, and avoiding accusations of favouritism. They stick to their principles when under pressure from parents.

They help parents understand teaching methodology, especially online teaching, and use social media to maintain open communication and involve parents in education.

As described in previous sections, parents came up across all the interviews and focus groups, often as a representation of attitudes to education that clashed with teachers' own. Parents most often appear as the human face of the macro-level neoliberal ideologies that emphasise teaching as knowledge transfer and student achievement only in terms of grades. As Sana puts it, “We want to teach the students for the real life and the parents wants us to teach them for the marks.” Ayat describes a conversation with a father:

I told him that your son's character becomes better with me. He talks in the class, he participates. “No, but look at his grades. Look at his grades. I don't care if he participates in your English club, if [...] he's a leader in a group in your class.” No, they don't care about all of these details.

Hanan recounts constant conflict with parents around behaviour and discipline, while Sana describes a recent situation where a boy left her class during a test, leading to a bad mark, and the whole family came to remonstrate with her, threatening violence. On top of this there are various socio-cultural issues. Some parents consider certain activities unsuitable for girls, in particular refusing to allow them online access, leading to frustration from the teachers who can see the effect on children who are excluded like this. On the one hand, Souad mentions the

pleasure of being known in the community, and greeted in the street, but on the other, teachers who are outsiders can be rejected, and there are occasionally tensions between those whose families are from Gazans and those who are refugees. However, Hanan points out that sometimes outsider teachers are less vulnerable to pressure from parents or accusations of favouritism.

Despite all these problems, the teachers are sympathetic to parents at various levels. As described in section 1 of this chapter, they understand parental motivations for insisting on the prioritisation of grades, and are constantly aware of pressures outside the classroom. Ayat says, “If the family are poor, they will not cooperate with you as a teacher. They are busy [...] just to give them their kids, you know, food.”

As shown in their summary of an ideal teacher, the teachers continually acknowledge the importance of their relationship with parents to successful schooling, whether in terms of helping teachers better understanding individual children, or supporting their learning, and several teachers mentioned positive parental feedback as a key factor in feeling fulfilled in their work. This was particularly evident during the first weeks of the Covid-19 lockdown, when Hanan commented, “They said, you are great! How can you [...] face six to eight hours a day face to face with our children?”

Rasha describes a two-way process, where she and a mother discuss a child who is very quiet, both at home and at school:

So I had some, you know, alternatives or some things to encourage them to, to be more real inside the classroom and at home. I created a Facebook group and I asked the parents to record them at home, you know, speaking and doing videos using the language that we learn, to send them to me and I'll you know, post them on this group this way. So [...] many students, you know, feel very happy and encouraged and the next class, they come to the class and they practice a bit and they become you know, less shy.

However, the teachers agree that there is no effective systematic channel of communication and Ayat recognises that cooperation isn't the norm. She mentions asking a parent to discuss their child and getting the response, “No, that's your role. Why do you take your salary?” Souad, on the other hand, gives a very honest assessment of her own bias, recognising that in a class of 45-50, those students whose parents show interest have more visibility, and an unfair advantage:

I think that [...] some parents are motivated that they want the best for their children. So they grab every opportunity to contact the school and the teacher, just to say that “We are here,” because, you

know, if parents come regularly to the school and they connect more than others, the teachers and the principals will take more care of their children.

I have some parents who come regularly every month. They come and ask about their children. Actually, I take more care about these children, because I noticed that the parents appreciate our effort. So, in my lessons, I take notice of those students. Of course, I take care of all students, but, to be honest, I focus more on the students that their parents come and ask about them

Jalala et al cite “poor education approaches [in Gaza] used by counsellors and teachers which are mainly focused on learning and lack protective measures, and lack of partnership with family and community to promote wellbeing and resilience of school children” (2020:3). These teachers recognise this problem and make efforts to address it, but, as can be seen above, it is a source of both frustration and guilt (see also Farouk, 2012). It is clear that they are as much victims of these “poor educational approaches” as instigators, and that their own wellbeing is often ignored or forgotten.

4. Teacher wellbeing and the role of the school

An ideal teacher recognises their own trauma and takes steps to address it. This may involve seeking counselling or other ways of coping. They understand that the relationship with students is two-way and that teachers and students can help each other through a positive classroom environment. An ideal teacher can show a strong face to their students and has good anger management skills.

They also know the importance of good professional relationships, and care deeply about the team and the school as a whole. An ideal English teacher works particularly closely with the other English teachers to understand and respond to specific issues.

a) Teacher trauma

Ayat says,

A teacher is not a superhero. They can't hide their feelings for a long time. I know they should have anger management skills, and I believe that they should also have a basic counselling skills, because I feel guilty when I know a student in my class [has] some trauma [and] I can't deal with them in a skilful way.

Costa's description of the effect of trauma on teachers and interpreters working with Syrian refugees mirrors that of these teachers in Gaza. She explains how secondary traumatic stress and vicarious trauma are caused by teachers' empathy with their students' traumatic circumstances, which is evident from these teachers' discussions of their students' wellbeing in the previous sections. She continues,

Teachers and interpreters are frequently in a bystander position – witnesses to distress and unable to do anything about it. This can be exacerbated when clients' [meaning stories of trauma and terror

resonate with their own experiences. [...] so the trauma they hear is layered on top of the trauma they themselves have experienced. (2018:62)

The earlier sections have already shown the empathy and sometimes the sense of helplessness that these teachers feel when discussing or dealing with their students' wellbeing or behaviour as a result of trauma. This is compounded by the fact that they themselves live in fear. Sana says, "You feel that you will die [at] any time [...]. You are not afraid for you. You are afraid for your relatives, your sons, daughters, your father, mother and brother." This ties in with Qaimari's findings, whose findings challenge

...the assumption prevalent in the literature that people who live and work in conflict zones necessarily become habituated to local conditions associated with violent political conflict. On the contrary, evidence from the present study shows that the majority of teachers living and working in such conditions were unable to adjust their professional identity and practice to the daily fears and threats of harm to themselves and their students. (2016:22)

As well as this, the teachers suffer the daily grind of the blockade. Rasha's hopes for the future? "I just would like to have 24-hour electricity." Costa (2018:62) says that "teachers and interpreters have little, if any, help with their self-care, and there are few outlets for the emotional impact on them," and this is echoed by these teachers, who feel that, although there are courses and counselling available, neither parents nor school administration give much consideration to their wellbeing and mental health.

Teaching itself seems to provide the teachers with some kind of resilience. It is in this context that the teachers describe school as a "second home" (Hanan). All of them are frustrated by the lack of facilities and the behaviour of the students, but try to be pragmatic. In discussing classroom management, Ayat says they aim for "the best version of it in our schools." As Sana puts it, "If I wait [for the resources and facilities we need], the students will be 25 or I will die." But when I talked to Hanan in the first weeks of the Covid-19 lockdown, she said that she although she had been feeling nervous and upset at school recently, she now missed it badly. There was almost a sense of grief in the way the teachers talked about this. Souad said,

I miss my students very much because even if they are quite noisy, actually, they make fun. You know they are funny, they make me feel that I'm doing something good. Yeah... as a human being, yes, yes. Now, yes, I spend more time with my family, but there's something missing. You know, there's something that I can give people and now I don't have to give that thing, so I hope that we get schools better.

Sana too explains the importance of school in giving both purpose and escape to such a restricted life:

Where to go? Where? we don't...The borders are always closed. We are in... we are in a big jail. Yes. So school to us is a thing we.... we feel happy in it. We feel that we make something [worthwhile] just like that. For me as a teacher, where, where can I go if I don't go to school? Just to my mum, to my sister. That's it. And now I can't go to the sea. I can't go to a cafe.

b) Relationships with colleagues

When asked about their first experiences of teaching, all of the teachers mentioned the value of colleagues in helping them cope with the reality. For example, Rasha was working double shifts and moving between schools, so never had the time to form supporting relationships and almost gave up, whereas Souad says that it was a supportive principal and senior teachers who helped her through a very difficult initial period. When discussing her future career, she recognised the pressures of working as a principal:

Well, no, actually, I [would] not like being a principal because I believe that principals have really much more pressure and are more stressed than the teacher. You know, a teacher, it's true that he cares about his students and gives his best but as the principal has to take care about the children, teachers and schools and how to manage the school. So the principal has a lot of responsibilities. I don't think... you know, it's really exhausting. I don't see myself as a principal at all.

However, in terms of teacher wellbeing in general, it appears that to these teachers it is the interactions with students that are most important within a school. While the value of supportive principals and other teachers was mentioned regularly in an abstract way, all four of the teachers who remained in the group throughout mentioned problems with other teachers in their schools or preferring to solve problems alone. It was interesting that although the teachers had identified relationships with other teachers as a key part of the identity of an ideal teacher, this topic initially generated *the least* discussion of any in the focus groups. During individual interviews, Laila said she preferred to keep her problems private, and Souad said of other teachers, “in most cases, they are friendly and they want to help, but it depends on the teacher, because for me, sometimes I don't talk about some situations and my life, even if I feel sad about it, because I prefer actually to solve my problems individually. So it's related to the teacher himself [...] if he wants to reveal his emotions or not.”

While this may of course simply be a personal preference, it also appears to be partly connected with the idea of being “strong,” “optimistic” and “cheerful,” all words that came up regularly when teachers described themselves or their own teachers. Chen and Kristjánsson argue that, “The emotional labour of the teacher thus risks becoming a solitary affair: a personal problem. This can easily lead to emotional suppression or [...] to the inappropriate transfer of negative emotions to innocent colleagues.” (2011:355) Looking at international contexts, their paper

examines jealousy between teachers, a regular subject during individual interviews. As noted, the participants are all motivated, active, high achieving teachers, and while we spoke one-to-one, without prompting, three of the four who constituted the main group cited jealousy among other teachers as an issue. One told me:

So, for me, the atmosphere in general and my school is good, they are cooperative, we help each other we use, you know, the aids and the, you know, peer coaching and a lot of things, but I think, for me, I suffered from something. I have, you know, a masters degree, and I think there are some, some colleagues that they feel jealous, because I am you know, the holder of a high degree certificate. They all the time try to hunt [for] mistakes [from] me. So, this thing, you know, it doesn't, you know, leave me very comfortable.

And another said she receives no support from colleagues:

From my family sister, my sister and my sisters, my mum; the support comes from here, you know. In our work...we suffer from jealousy here. My colleagues, especially English teachers, they feel jealous of each other, especially when the teacher is very active. And she is awarded the prizes and everyone says that she's active. She's the best one in the school. She's the best English teacher. They feel jealous and they try hard to give you the feeling that you are [an] ordinary one, you [don't] do a miracle, you...you do ordinary work. So I don't, I don't depend on their support. I'm not the best, Mister Damian. [But] I try hard to be active, I try hard to put myself [forward], I go to sessions outside the school. I follow everything new and apply it in my lessons [...] and all of them [the other teachers] follow the traditional and old way in teaching. They don't want to get tired. But if they [see] me feel tired, they say, "Why are you like that? You are so busy. Why? Why are you doing that to you[rself]? Are you doing that [for] your head teacher to feel satisfied [with] you. I told them no, I do this work [for] me. I feel satisfied, not my head teacher.

Chen and Kristjánsson point out that, "As part of their training teachers have not been taught how to bring their own emotions to moral scrutiny nor to find appropriate outlets for them, especially in societies where social norms do not facilitate their expression." (2011:352). This is no doubt also true of teacher training in Gaza, and as shown above the teachers feel pressure to put a brave face on things. But as Costa points out, working in a context of conflict and trauma exacerbates the situation by producing, "exhaustion, cynicism and inefficiency"(2018:62). Chen and Kristjánsson go on to reference Hudak, whose hypothesis is that "the negativity of envy/jealousy is fuelled by a sense of powerlessness, which is likely to be related to contradictions felt in one's life between where one is at the moment and where one would like to be." (2011:355) In other words, jealousy is a symptom of guilt at the gap between the *actual* and *ideal* self.

In contrast, perhaps because they are putting some distance from the intensity of day-to-day relationships in school, the teachers place a lot of value opportunities to meet teachers from other schools. Ayat says, "You feel it's like a safe atmosphere to share your feelings," in contrast with working with her direct colleagues. Although some of them have met through

Teaching for Success, the teachers are all from different schools, There is an immediate atmosphere of camaraderie, curiosity and even solidarity when they come together for the focus groups, and they all cite the *Teacher Activity Groups* in the project, where they get together to discuss classroom issues, as the best thing about the course.

Sana also mentions the importance of international networks when living under the blockade and travel restrictions:

A lot of teachers like me, they belong to the international community. Here in Gaza we have ambitions, we want to change our life. We want to be something. This blockade kills us. We want to travel we want to get out get together. [...] It's very bad here in Gaza. We feel that we are suffocated. And you think we want anyone from outside. We want anyone from even from Arabic countries and we want to feel that we live just like them. So we talk to foreigners, talk to our Arabs, just like that.

5. Attitudes to Continuing Professional Development

An ideal teacher seeks a variety of approaches to allow adjustments to suit different students. They recognise that techniques learnt on courses need adapting to different contexts. They are brave about experimenting with new approaches and are committed to continual improvement as part of their job.

One of the keys ways in which these teachers define themselves is in their desire to learn and develop. As shown in Chapter VI.1, this is closely related to their values, their feeling of citizenship, and their sense of duty to their religion. Often this is articulated in their description of teachers who are different from them. Sana describes a community which you belong to, “if you’re active and share with the lessons and ideas [...] and if you isolate yourself and if you don't care, you will be out.”

Other teachers were often described as conservative and resistant to change. This group welcomed and understood the thinking behind the new curriculum and felt that new approaches such as ‘authentic assessment’ were positive, but were frustrated that some teachers refuse to adapt their approach. Sometimes they felt this was a generational issue, compounded by the fact that traditional values emphasise respect for older, more experienced teachers make it harder for younger teachers or supervisors to push for or facilitate change. One teacher mentioned that sometimes other teachers even refused to allow supervisors access to their classrooms.

On the other hand, the same themes appeared as barriers to motivation. Although she was very positive about the *Teaching for Success* course, Souad pointed out,

Even if we try to apply all the activity, all these activities and strategies, time is really killing the teachers, you know, time and the number of students in classes. Yeah, we have from 40 to 45 students in each class, and we have 45 minutes to give the lesson. So, time wouldn't be enough to practice all the activities and strategies that we learn and that we learn in Teaching for Success. Yeah, so [...] applying all strategies that would be not quite possible. You know, it's circumstances like the ones we live in.

Ayat argues that, “in real life you can't have 60 teachers that are self-motivated. for example, you will have four out them.” She says many teachers don't see professional development as part of their job – it's an extra, and they don't want to sacrifice their own time or work-life balance; “If you enrol in courses, if you prove yourself, you will have the same payment. So what is the difference? Just take care of your family.” Sana points out that there is a teacher assessment system, and but that in her experience 90% of the teachers get an acceptable rating, and no-one gets a low rating, making it meaningless. She also thinks some teachers become discouraged from changing due to reactions from principals or other teachers.

The teachers recognise that, with what training that exists usually organised and delivered by outsiders, sometimes the content will be irrelevant or need adapting. There is little in-school support, and it is often up to them as individuals to convert theory into practice. Hanan describes doing this from before she even started teaching, for her job interview:

When I was preparing myself for the interview, I read about all things related to how to connect with parents in which matters and how to deal with them, how to talk with them. So, I myself read about them. So I have theoretical materials and I read about them. And when I became a teacher, I tried to apply these theoretical points in my teaching life.

They feel that they have little say in the content of development activity, and very little opportunity to talk about things that are important to them. Ayat said of this research project, “This is the first time someone listened to us.” They agree that “human development is as important as “academic development” and as a consequence, they value projects that allow them to meet teachers from other schools, or, if they are very lucky, to travel to the West Bank.

6. Politics and policy

An ideal teacher finds a way to express their identity and character, maintaining a focus on values and culture despite UNRWA restrictions They use their judgement to balance a need to talk about sensitive issues with following the rules.

They have a voice to contribute to policy and change things for the better. and take an interest in improving the school and talking to the principal to suggest change.

Ultimately, the discussion of this area was about potential, but depending on agency. In reality, they felt that teachers have little voice in terms of contributing to issues of policy. This is supported by Ramahi:

In the Palestinian context, despite extensive reconstruction efforts teachers continue to be excluded from influencing the direction of educational and teaching improvement, which may be leading to a sense of marginalisation and disaffection. (2017:14)

On the other hand, this was the part of the conversations that produced the most positive view of the teaching profession in Gaza as a whole, and a sense of solidarity as a collective identity. The teachers were clear that, despite their criticisms, many teachers are talented and committed and schools would benefit hugely from taking their opinions into account. If given the chance, they feel they can be the link between the students and the administration, allowing schools to better reflect the needs of their students, inside and outside the classroom.

An area of particular concern was the UNRWA rules on discussing politics, which the teachers feel severely restrict their agency. They are contracted not to discuss these issues, but said, “We have our ways!” when I asked how they managed. One teacher also expressed concern that the lack of open conversation led to opinions being treated as facts.

The *Discussion and Recommendations* section will focus on how these issues of agency might interact with the other aspects of identity presented in the findings.

Chapter VI: Discussion and Recommendations

1. Reflections on the research process

The methodology and approach were designed to enable a process of reflection and discussion that led to a description of the teachers' professional identity, which then provided a platform to consider how to strengthen it. However, bearing in mind my relative lack of familiarity with the teachers and the context, I did not start with any specific aims for the research project itself to strengthen identity. Consequently, since the circumstances did not allow me to establish a clear baseline, it was not always clear to me whether the teachers were previously formed ideas and opinions, or these were developing as a result of the process. With this in mind, in the final focus group, we reflected on the process as a whole. This allowed what we learnt about the process itself to inform the subsequent recommendations. I have introduced this with a brief summary based on my notes and review of our discussions, before applying Mockler's model to the comments made by the teachers.

As I reviewed and analysed the transcripts, I noticed regular changes in emphasis, and even contradictions, recalling Varghese et al's point that identity is "multiple, shifting, and in conflict" (2005:33). This was often related to whether they were presenting themselves to me, their peers, or with a wider influence in mind, once the idea of presenting our findings was suggested. It varied according to the personal (especially as we got to know each other better), professional, and political attitudes they adopted. It was connected to which group the teacher was identifying with. For example;

- We are *committed* English teachers (our job is a vocation and we put in extra effort to be our best)
- We are *English teachers* (we are modern, international and open-minded)
- We are *teachers in Gaza* (we suffer together in negotiating the barriers placed before us by the occupation, by parents or by UNRWA policies).

However, as we discussed things as a group, and summarised, the teachers formulated a more global conception of their professional identity, reflecting a clearer understanding of society, the education system and their part in it, very much reflecting Mockler's three spheres of influence (figure 1).

I should note here that I was present in this conversation, and of course, there may have been an element of wanting to make me happy. However, the teachers' comments are consistent

with the commitment they have since shown towards further work in this area, and the ideas they express very much their own. A summary of their points during the final focus group suggests that teachers had noticed changes in their ability to:

- Articulate a shared moral purpose
- Develop our confidence as professionals
- Reflect on and develop our own sense of personal identity, values and attitudes to education
- Understand the relationship between our work and our wider identity
- Reflect critically on the systematic influences that affect our work
- Think realistically about what these allow us to achieve
- Recognise the impact of relationships with colleagues
- Recognise the impact of relationships between teachers and parents
- Reinforce our commitment to professional learning and contribution to the professional community
- Consider our own citizenship and role in the community
- Identify the ways in which we can contribute to change

It is important to note that these are summaries, and that sometimes they were presented teachers in different ways. To help analyse these points, I have organised them according to Mockler's three areas of change:

- Personal development and enhanced self-knowledge and capacity for reflection
- Teacher activism and greater political engagement (internal and external to the profession)
- Professional learning and changes to practice

It should be re-emphasised that these categories are, of course, overlapping and interdependent.

a) Personal development, enhanced self-knowledge and capacity for reflection

Outcomes of research project identified by teachers:

- *Reflect on and develop our own sense of personal identity, values and attitudes to education (particularly important to these teachers)*
- *Develop our confidence as professionals*
- *Understand the relationship between our work and our wider identity*

For Souad, this was as fundamental as a new belief in her own suitability for the role. She admitted, "I studied medicine, dentistry for a semester, then I [...] transferred to study English. I now believe that I am destined to be a teacher." For Sana, the most experienced of the teachers, it was a chance to step back and reflect;

Before this research. [...] I didn't ask myself any questions. I just go with others, just listen and speak. Now I am analysing researching it, giving an ear to everyone, trying to have evidence, not like before. A big change has happened to me, uh, because of this research. I'm really...I'm thinking all the time. When we are a group, a group of teachers are talking, I just think [...], What is this about, beyond all of this?

The opportunities for discussion and reflection not only produced new ways of thinking, but also built confidence. Souad felt that having someone take interest in her ideas - “You used our thoughts in your thesis!” – validated her opinions; “I believe that I am now a stronger and more self-confident because [...] I was a little bit scared and embarrassed before talking to you.” She compares identity work to other training; “I think that passionate and emotional things are much stronger than all the training to be a teacher. So I think this is number one training. Training yourself to be more self-confident and independent.”

At the same time, Ayat recognised that sometimes the conflict between her own values and what she sees or can achieve at work can create a strain.

It helps me to become more critical thinking about how I deal with my colleagues, with my administration and particularly with my students.

I'm not just a blind follower of the traditional or just want to finish my regular [classes], I have other missions. I have some influence on my students. And I believe in the power of how my personality affects my work. So I should try to manage, to put boundaries between my personality issues at my work.

b) Teacher activism and greater political engagement (internal and external to the profession)

Outcomes of research project identified by teachers:

- *Develop and articulate a shared moral purpose*
- *Reflect critically on the outside influences that affect our work*
- *Identify the ways in which we can contribute to change*
- *Think realistically about what these allow us to achieve*
- *Consider our own citizenship and role in the community*

The articulation of this shared purpose can be seen in the previous chapters through the teachers' agreed representation of *an ideal Palestinian English teacher*, and there was consensus that continuing to maintain this small group would be beneficial, to discuss problems or even visit each others' schools and classes. Ayat feels that she herself, and the rest of the group in their localities, can deliver training to, “highlight [...] teacher identity and its impact on the classroom atmosphere.” Sana provides a note of caution;

I noticed that there is nothing wrong in our curriculum and there is nothing wrong about our students. And there is nothing wrong about our teachers, all of them. And if you take them in isolation, they are good, but after a while, if they connected with each other, some thing wrong happens.

I can't change all the community. My change, even if I work, my change will be limited. When you want to make a small change, a lot of people will stand against you, even if even they are educators and even they are teachers or even the administrator of my school. So if I want to change something [...], I should start gradually from me to my students. So my colleagues ... I can't change the community at all. Not suddenly. That's what I mean. These values need time to be, to be accepted.

Interestingly, two of the teachers said that the research project had encouraged them to pursue initiatives outside of English teaching that were close to their heart. Both were related to forming solidarity groups among teachers. Sana is intending to form a group to raise awareness about the environmental impact of shooting birds, which she says is common in Gaza, while Souad wants to create a support group for female teachers who are targeted by unemployed men looking for wives as a solution to their financial situation.

c) Professional learning and changes to practice

- *Reinforce our commitment to professional learning and the professional community*
- *Find ways to integrate our beliefs into our teaching*
- *Recognise the impact of relationships with colleagues*
- *Recognise the impact of relationships between teachers and parents*

Souad and Hanan both mentioned that the reflection and discussion involved in the project motivated them to engage in professional development “and actually to raise the generation to be self-confident” (Souad).

Like Souad, Ayat linked her identity and moral purpose to classroom practice:

[I knew there was] some effect, but I [didn't] realize the power of this effect. I can see a positive relationship between the teacher identity and the classroom. There is a connection, the classroom environment and atmosphere, because the teacher will build this community according to his values and according to his culture, So I can see that relationship. I become more aware of it after this experience.

Sana called this, “How to lead students to live with the curriculum, to be part of the curriculum, not to just learn about the curriculum.”

Hanan recognised the need to create more opportunities for sharing ideas with other teachers; “I don't [just] mean the face-to-face meetings. Sometimes if we can't, we can make it online. We can make it even sometimes on WhatsApp or on Facebook or anything. But the idea is to have a way or a, have to find a way for sharing our ideas.” However she also identified a need to connect more with colleagues and others.

I'm working on my personality in order to make [a good] relationship [...] with my administration and with my colleagues, because in the past, I have relationships with just those who are in the same age as me. But after this project, I think that I'm going to make many relationships and many friendships, with other colleagues from my profession or other professions, and from my age or other [ages] also.

Souad also feels she should make more of relationships;

If I have problems, I am, um, a bit embarrassed is to ask other teachers, you know, because, they know each other for so many time, so long time and I am new. So, I think, this makes a barrier that I cannot go and ask other teachers, but actually when I try to ask them, I found them really like a family.

On the other hand, Ayat says she recognised that with the appreciation of, the “parents, the students, and my administration, of course, my level of teaching performance will be better.”

2. Recommendations for strengthening teacher identity in Gaza

The findings above form the core part of the research – what Mockler calls the *process* of reflecting on and articulating identity. The recommendations are about planning the *project*:

The ‘project’, then, of developing one’s professional identity is one of articulating and maintaining congruence between personal and professional values, moral purpose, and then ‘pushing through’ the border between moral purpose and ‘on the ground’ action, to create congruence between these and the key work of the teacher both inside and outside the classroom. (2011:524)

An Ideal Palestinian Teacher (Appendix 1) reflects a balance of responsibility. A recognition that much depends on the teacher, but also that there are many barriers which make fulfilling this responsibility difficult or even impossible. This is a matter of agency: “Moral purpose keeps teachers close to the needs of children and youth; change agency causes them to develop better strategies for accomplishing their moral goals.” (Fullan, 1993:2) This section summarises the teachers’ recommendations for developing this ‘project.’ I have categorised them using an eco-systems approach: at classroom level, school level, community level and policy level. We are very aware that each area needs further investigation and the teachers themselves are considering how to approach this – we touch on the potential for teacher research in some of the recommendations.

a) Achieving teacher purpose in the classroom: A flexible curriculum and a multi-disciplinary approach to teacher development

As seen throughout the findings, curriculum and assessment are seen as major barriers. The teachers want more input in these areas, but it is depressing to note that Dewey made the same point in 1901:

If [the teacher's] work is the task of carrying out the instructions imposed upon him, then his time and thought must be absorbed in the matter of execution. There is no motive for interest, of a thoroughly vital and alert sort, in questions of the intrinsic value of the subject-matter and its adaptation to the needs of child growth. (2001:396)

The teachers call for more space and flexibility in the curriculum, more attention to alternative types of learning and assessment such as task-based learning and project-based assessment, and specifically more focus for English lessons on citizenship and activities which support child wellbeing and resilience. However, these teachers are pragmatic, and while recognising the barriers, want continued training to help them shape their lessons to the needs of their learners, knowing that, “Even in the unfavourable context of obsessive concern with measured outcomes, the everyday world of classrooms is one in which learners work together in complex acts of meaning-making.” (Unwin & Yandell, 2016:137).

At a general level, Capstick points out that “there here is insufficient understanding of what it means to educate large numbers of marginalised, displaced children who live in contexts of distress” (2018:72), and there is clearly a need, for organisations like the British Council who deliver training, and for teachers, to develop a better understanding of how to apply learner-centred approaches in this type of context. On the other hand, while the teachers are used to extracting what they can and applying it to their context, they want a better, understanding, both practical and theoretical of how to manage wellbeing and trauma in the classroom. Ayat says, in their situation, “the process needs a smart, clever teacher that makes sure that he achieves the objective of the lesson and then has time for fun.” But rather than this separation, perhaps the teachers need a repertoire that allows them align their “moral purpose” with the curriculum. As Capstick points out (2018:61) there are examples of there are examples of integrating psycho-social support into the curriculum:

Language learning classes are increasingly seen by many agencies as a potential space in which to deliver psychosocial support alongside or embedded in formal language learning. This is seen in in state sector schools in Lebanon, which deliver the curriculum in English or French and in NGO classrooms in Erbil, Kurdistan where English language lessons are seen as a vehicle for ‘post stress attunement’ programmes in adolescent- friendly spaces.

He goes on to mention research linking these interventions to “beneficiaries’ increased levels of social trust, diversity of social networks, perceptions of security and safety, and confidence

in the future” (Panter-Brick et al 2018, in Capstick 2018:61). This shows how citizenship and wellbeing intersect and it is perhaps through related activities, such as drama and art, that, given more flexibility in the curriculum, teachers could use their agency to meet their students’ needs. As Ateek points out, this calls for a multi-disciplinary approach to teacher development:

These activities, with the aim of helping refugees with their trauma, cannot be effective without delivering them effectively through experienced teachers. It is important to give teachers proper training to support their use of creative activities to deal with the effects of trauma. Therefore, it is important to build a collaboration of psychologists, artists, teachers, academics and even curriculum designers. (2018:58)

Several of the teachers have experience of taking part in an ongoing extra-curricular initiative called the *Hands Up Project*, which uses drama, story-telling and video-conferencing to support English learning, and draws on teaching and drama expertise from teachers across the world. Ayat cites this as the kind of project which supports both wellbeing and develops citizenship:

All of the people there who worked in the Hands Up project are volunteers and they work from the heart. You can touch that when you deal with them. [The organiser] appreciates the children here in Gaza and gives them the right in order to deliver their voice to other people. You know, we live in a small world and they are the mic. Their plays, their activities are the mic for our people.

b) School level

School leadership

The teachers echoed Gu et al (2018) in emphasising the key role for school principals in setting and upholding values within the school. This was seen as important for helping teachers maintain their passion, for ensuring a positive school culture and for enabling teachers to contribute to the school as a whole by listening and valuing their input. They suggested principals should be trained in these areas and evaluated on some of these criteria by the teachers, (although as Ramahi (2017) points out school leaders also feel disempowered).

On the other hand, the teachers suggested teacher evaluation needs to be more holistic, and go beyond student grades, and that teacher development needs to involve supervisors discussing needs with teachers.

I think the supervisors should counsel the teachers themselves [...] instead of them, giving them you know, some workshops that they already know or they already applied it in their classes. They should interview the teachers and ask them which field do you want, would you like the theoretical part or the practical part? (Ayat)

Teacher wellbeing and trauma

The teachers felt strongly that principals, teaching colleagues and parents needed training in understanding and supporting teacher wellbeing through trauma. Costa's research supports this:

Teachers and interpreters benefit from ongoing support for themselves from more senior colleagues to reflect on their practice. This enables them to build up their resilience and self-care, both for their own well-being and to model self-care for the children and adults they are supporting. (Costa 2018:62)

In particular, teachers felt there was a need for understanding guilt – recognising it, recognising the cause of it and the recognising consequences of it, including behaviour with children and conflict with colleagues. They pointed out the need for clear reporting systems for both child and teacher trauma, and identified the need for time and a quiet space at school for teachers to deal with things in their own way.

Zembylas (2003:230) points to a number of “strategies to increase awareness about the role of emotions in teaching and create collective resistances through the power of emotion” including mentoring relationships, teacher-teams for emotional and professional bonding, and research on their own practices and on the “emotional aspects of the self.”

Collective agency and relationships

The teachers want the opportunity and the freedom to discuss and contribute to school policy. In addition to providing socio-emotional support, this will help teachers navigate difficult political issues with their students and improve the way the school operates in general. An initiative run by one of the supervisors which brings together teachers from across the district every week was identified as an important source of resilience, but this is not available to everyone.

The teachers did not make any specific recommendations regarding inter-teacher relationships within their schools, but, as seen above, have identified this as an area they want to develop themselves, and it would be a useful area for further research. The conflict and jealousy that they describe in Chapter V.4.b bears similarities to situations described by Lopes (2002), who looks at the identity construction and relationships between “traditionalists” and “innovators” in Portuguese primary schools. I could not identify anything similar in a Palestinian context. Likewise, since the teachers identified generational differences as a barrier to strengthening identity, research that allows teachers, school leadership and anyone working in teacher development to understand career phases (Gonçalves, 2009) in this context would be valuable.

Outside links

The teachers regularly emphasised the importance of both improving relations within schools, and engagement with those outside their immediate environment. These external relationships were identified as vital for maintaining optimism and motivation, as well as creating the curiosity to learn. As mentioned, the *Teacher Activity Groups*, which offer a chance for teachers to exchange ideas and discuss application of learning in their contexts, were the most valued part of the *Teaching for Success* programme. On the other hand, Souad points out that the British Council needs to be more active in understanding what's happening on the ground: "I think that it has to, you know, to have some groups visiting the schools [...] just talk to children and understand what they feel, how they [...] feel when they think about the teachers or schools and the principals."

c) Parents and the community

As Sana points out, "These parents play a very big role in our teaching system here. I think from the beginning [of my time as a teacher], [donors] work on the teacher or the students, no one worked on the parents." The teachers feel that work is needed on communication channels, awareness-raising and relationship building. They want clear communication systems with parents for dealing with student wellbeing, but also training for parents on managing the effects of trauma, and understanding how it affects the classroom and teachers. They suggest identifying motivated parents who can become links with the community, and also providing opportunities for teachers who may not be from the area where they teach with chances to get to know the community outside of the school. As mentioned throughout, the teachers also identify a need to create a shared understanding of the purpose and importance of education, including integrating culture and citizenship into lessons, and most importantly, trying to shift obsession with grades. The teachers felt that developing a better understanding of this attitude was a specific area of research they would like to pursue themselves, leading to initiatives working directly with parents.

One innovative approach might be to consider building these communications into English language classes for the community. This could demonstrate the value of more student-centred, communicative teaching methodology, as well as providing the added benefit that "well-designed language programmes can also foster intergenerational community connections and family cohesion (May, 2012 in Capstick and Delaney, 2015:20).

d) Research and policy

Ayat argued that a key role for organisations like the British Council should be, “to promote dialogues between teachers and educational researchers[...] In order that, you know, the voices of teachers can be known by their stakeholders and taken into account.” The teachers feel motivated and confident to take part in further research, particularly into the areas identified during this research project. As mentioned above, they are also keen to share the what they have developed through presentations or leading discussions in their localities about teacher identity. Most of all, they want a platform, so that their voices can be heard at policy level, but also to represent their country internationally, meet and learn from other teachers and other cultures. Hanan complained about the rigid nature of their opportunities to present their thoughts to other teachers, on set topics and once or twice a year. There were clear suggestions that this was a way to motivate and reward teachers who put extra effort into their work and are keen to engage and develop professionally.

From my own perspective, participating in long-term research with these teachers has provided a richness and depth to my understanding of both my studies and my work, and a stronger link between them. In particular, the way the teachers present the role of English and its relationship with all levels of their particular eco-system shows a practical, pragmatic embodiment of the theory. However, while I referred earlier to AlKhatib (2016), who points out that understanding and expertise in what it means to learn English in Lebanon shouldn't be held in the UK, by necessity, the vast majority of her bibliography on English as a Lingua Franca, Global Englishes etc., is written by researchers based in native speaking contexts, and a disproportionate number are native speakers themselves. These researchers perhaps, like me, have the benefit of a global view (albeit seen from a particular socio-cultural perspective), but as these teachers say, there is a key role for teachers like them in defining areas of research and policy in education from the ground up, as well participating in, conducting and presenting research both at a national and international level with partners from universities. In other words, in this conception, the expertise held in universities would be a resource that teachers can both draw on and contribute to at their own instigation, as well as the other way round. Any global view can be more representative of the sum of local perspectives, rather than the narrow group of perspectives that currently lead in this area. The British Council potentially has a role to play in this, as I will discuss further in the final section.

3. Reflections and recommendations for British Council and international work in ELT

The *ought self* of the British Council presented in Chapter III is very much that; the manifestations of an ideology driven largely by policymakers outside of the organisation, and, though we are of course influenced by it, almost completely misaligned with colleagues in the department I work in. The ideas presented in this final section present both ideas for moving towards an *ideal self* and recognition that our *actual self* is already trying to make these things happen. I have already presented the teachers' rationale (Chapter VI.1) for a shift in emphasis towards teacher identity. Here I link make some practical recommendations for work in ELT to add to those suggested by the teachers in the previous section. I have used italics to emphasise some of the key findings of this project.

a) Developing an identity framework

Tools and frameworks used in “the process of articulating one’s professional identity” included; the scaffolding of interviews and focus groups to draw out personal experience and values; the use of the ideal teacher as a basis for strengthening identity and recognizing influences on identity and agency; the reflection on the research process using Mocker’s model (2011) to understand how the project itself had strengthened identity; and the presentation of recommendations using the ecosystems approach. Although some of the structure was planned, much of this evolved as the project developed and we made sense of our findings. I have put this together into a draft framework to support teachers and those they work with (including the British Council) in strengthening identity (appendix 4). It is very much a draft and an output of these very specific circumstances, and will need much review, revision and testing, clear theoretical grounding, guidance on use and a range of supporting tools. It is also hoped that through use, teachers and researchers will improve the framework.

The framework aims to help teachers identify and analyse the identity factors across the ecosystem according to their priorities. So a priority they have identified in column 1 (e.g. Relationships with Parents) might be influenced by or have an influence on several or all of the levels of the ecosystem identified in column 2. The columns under “Outcomes of process” are the intended results of this reflection, in order to provide users with a way of planning and understanding change. The example outcomes, derived from the reflections of teachers in this research project, are a mixture of achieved change and engagement in change (or outcomes and

processes) which recognise that identity is constantly evolving and, once we engage with the identity project, we are always in transition between the actual and the ideal (Day & Hadfield (1996) in Day 2005:566), and under the influence of the *ought self*.

The final column is the stage of identifying areas for further investigation and planning change, including identifying change and support needed by others. While based on a real process, the framework is of course an artificial construct intended to be used flexibly, reflexively and cyclically to help navigate fluid and contradictory realities. It is also worth re-emphasising that these teachers started with strong motivation and belief in their work. The theoretical section shows that identity work has a positive effect on commitment (e.g. Kyriacou 2009), and I am hopeful that this tool will be of use to teachers with varying levels of motivation, but it is a result of its particular context.

b) Consistent country level work towards local, teacher-led education

When we talk about sustainability and the aim for the design and content of education systems to truly reflect and be led by local needs (as we often do), we must be serious and explicit in recognizing that our ultimate aim is for the British Council and other international donors to withdraw from direct involvement in these areas. Teacher identity and agency are central to this (Ramahi 2017). Souad (section 6.2.b) says the British Council should visit schools and get to know them better in order to design their work with teachers, but who knows the teachers and their contexts better than the teachers themselves? The findings suggests that, through its role in understanding and strengthening moral purpose, *identity work helps teachers recognise and respond to the needs and motivations of marginalised and vulnerable communities*. For example, these teachers know that the school and specifically the English classroom can play specific roles as places of recovery from traumatic events, and an escape from the suffocating reality of the blockade. They recognise that they need local, context-specific support beyond ELT training (e.g. Capstick and Delaney, 2015). Likewise, they explain that, for their own wellbeing, a key aspect of training provided by outside actors is the opportunity for teachers to escape their reality, learn about and share with other people, building relationships and supporting teachers by creating a collective sense of English teacher identity.

Teacher-led development and multi-disciplinary support

Teachers need a platform and the skills to share what they know, ultimately leading the design and delivery of teacher development work. There is clearly an element of capacity building

involved and the approach will vary according to countries and needs, but it can't be done in isolation. A holistic conception of a teacher (as described in the framework), both on the part of the teachers, as well as those planning and organising events or programmes is essential. The British Council in Palestine is already organising training for facilitators of local communities of practice, including for one of the teachers involved in this project. By incorporating wider issues of identity as well as classroom practice, we might start to see a more locally oriented direction towards both the content and the delivery, moving on from traditional conceptions of the training room.

To achieve this, support might not come from traditional sources. For example, two key areas of interest are identified by these teachers. Further investigation is needed to avoid unwarranted generalisation, but as I have described in section 2.2, and in the presentation of the findings, use of the English classroom to support citizenship and child wellbeing are established in research and practice in the region. By using the identity framework (or other identity work) in communities of practice to reflect on these issues from a range of perspectives inside and beyond the classroom, they can develop a deeper understanding of both the issues themselves and their own agency in responding to them. In many cases the teachers would then work together to solve problems and exchange ideas themselves, perhaps doing their own action research or using video to share and reflect realities.

However, for example, initial support might be needed from experts in participatory research to support the facilitators, or the teachers may want to call on expertise from across disciplines to help them situate their work within the wider context. They may identify key actors who need to be involved to enable change, or researchers with the quantitative or qualitative skills to support further investigation. They may indeed want work with specialised teacher educators to build specific classroom skills. Ideally, all these resources would be available to the teachers through the existing system, but the British Council is often in a position to bring these people together, and even to give teachers a voice at policy level. An identity-focused approach can support teachers in constructing and articulating their identity to help them better present and address their needs, and by doing so build the agency that can support a teacher-led, autonomous education system. There must also be a mechanism for using these communities to inform both future teacher development activity and research and maintain momentum.

Teacher Councils

The recommendation for this mechanism is based on the impact these teachers have had on the way I view my own work, and the fact that expert, motivated, value-driven teachers like them exist in every context I have worked in. Despite long associations with ministries of education and various institutions or individual teacher educators, due to annual funding and reporting cycles, the British Council normally operates in time-bound projects. This dilutes the impact of our work and means the constant rebuilding of relationships and connections existing initiatives.

Based on these findings, *identity work helps teachers see their identity and agency within the ecosystem*. This enables them to recognise what is within their control and what isn't, how to make their voices heard, and what kind of support they need, whether at school or policy. It encourages teacher activism in finding platforms to make their voices heard.

A teacher council or advisory board, made up of a cross-section of teachers from a particular context and tasked with advising on, reviewing and holding to account the British Council's plans and work against agreed principles (working towards autonomy) would help ensure consistency of direction and long-term planning. It would also, of course, strengthen the agency of the teachers involved and the status of teachers in general, and could ensure that the work of the communities described above is recognised and shared. There is also the potential for an international network of such councils.

c) Create meaningful international connections for a new vision of English teaching

As well as its work at country level, through its webinars, resources, websites, social media, MOOCs and so on, the British has a vast network of millions of teachers across the world. These teachers actively demonstrate their agency through seeking the British Council out for professional development opportunities or to download resources and lesson plans. More often, we are starting to see these teachers themselves contributing to the delivery of webinars and Facebook Live events.

In *Teaching for Success OPT*, as well as the importance of the activity groups, one of the things the research participants highlighted to me was the opportunity to work with the international online moderators (through the *Zoom* platform) and I suspect this was also a big part of their motivation for working with me. They are in a permanent, enforced lockdown due to the blockade, and every opportunity to have a voice in the outside world, as well as to hear about

and understand those of different backgrounds is hugely valuable, and intrinsic to their identity as English speakers as well as English teachers (see V.1.a on the role of English).

Despite differences in context, the fact that English is seen as a global lingua franca makes an international outlook likely to a common trait in English teacher identity. For example, a highly motivated English teacher in rural Bangladesh might also embrace the chance to meet, learn from and contribute to the professional lives of English teachers around the world. At the moment this kind of international interaction is largely limited to comments in the chat box during a webinar, brief interactions on Facebook, or occasional forums. Because the British Council works mainly in partnership with ministries at national level, there is little chance for teachers to collaborate at a meaningful level internationally.

Based on the identity and agency presented to me by these teachers, I believe series of small, motivated international groups working together on common themes would strengthen collective identity as a global community of English teachers. As Kaul points out, global struggles show us that “it is possible to conceive of identity as transnational” (Kaul, 2014:22) and the connectedness created by globalisation allow international solidarity and action for and between marginalised or oppressed groups. My hypothesis is that, if managed through a participatory process and alongside experienced researchers, similar teacher projects linking broader social themes to English language teaching, might start to better reveal how English can and does sit closer to the *ideal self* in Chapter III, than the *ought self*, especially if complemented by similar work at country level. This knowledge, created by and for teachers, could also be presented by these teachers to the global audience; a small catalyst for the ongoing shift away from the predominance of UK experts towards an international, teacher-led movement focused on understanding English teacher identity and critical and emancipatory approaches to ELT. In other words, this research project suggests that *identity work can add to understandings of the evolving nature and role of English teaching and use by revealing and strengthening motivations which aim to support the local community as well as contribute to the wider world*. Through doing so it provides insights into use of English in a multilingual repertoire, a key area of interest for the British Council and the wider academic community. As stated above, English is seen by the participants as a valuable way to communicate the reality in Palestine to the world and counter misrepresentations. Through enabling learning from other cultures, it supports nation-building. It helps build Islamic values of openness, and valuing and learning from diversity. Also, for these teachers, it is possible to see English as

part of their linguistic repertoire, rather than the language of their oppressors, and take advantage of learning opportunities even while suggesting, “I think nowadays that [...] the United States [...] is the big boss, like they say, for the world. So I think that the UK is trying via the British Council to spread again and to restore the Golden Age!” (Souad) The globalization of English has traditionally allowed its native speakers an advantage in the business of ELT, but it can also be a language of solidarity: as Koshy puts it, “Internationalism flows through the grooves cut across the planet by colonialism and globalization” (Koshy, 2019).

d) Final comments

The British Council’s cultural relations aim is to, “create friendly knowledge and understanding between the people of the UK and other countries” (British Council (1), n.d.). As the CEO puts it, “We believe that through these connections – through the interchange of knowledge and ideas – good things will happen and ultimately the world will be a better, safer, more prosperous place.” (E-International Relations, 2016). As shown above, *identity work reveals the extent to which work English teachers can provide insights into social and cultural issues, and their links with English learning and teaching*. In fact, it can unite British Council work with English teachers with cultural relations aims.

The recommendations above are relatively small changes or initiatives that fit within a wider shift in emphasis towards the value of cultural relations *in itself*. Far from being mere recipients of training, the teachers in this project have shown that they can contribute to international understanding both as English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners and as experts in the lives of their students, offering insights into the broader educational, social and cultural contexts where they live and work. If I have represented them half as well as they presented themselves to me, a reader of the findings will have a far deeper insight into life in Gaza in general, as well as in the life of English teachers, enriching out understanding of the world as a whole. Consequently, identity work, leading to giving teachers like this the platform to share their insights and engage with the UK and other countries is far closer to what Gillespie et al call “the genuine reciprocity and mutual understanding” to which cultural relations practitioners aspire (2018) than uni-directional training programmes which exchange “expertise” in return for attraction and influence, or financial gain. Furthermore, to realise “mutual reciprocity,” stronger teacher voice, agency and participation are key, just as they are to improving education systems.

The British Council is already doing work and research in the region and beyond which highlight and respond to some of the same issues raised by these teachers, including looking at the role of English and multilingualism in resilience (Capstick & Delaney, 2015, Capstick, 2018) and examining how new conceptions of English teaching can contribute to hope and resistance (Erling, 2017). I hope this paper will add to this and the wider body of evidence, and highlight both the need for more work in this area and the role that teachers must play in reform.

In addition, the impact of Covid-19 has also led to an examination of the way the British Council delivers its work. My own role is to understand and advise on this from the perspective of inclusion, in its broad sense. Work with the teachers on this research project has given me insights into *the value of both English and identity work in promoting participation and agency* among communities who feel under-represented. Agency enabled these teachers to represent the specific needs of the children in their schools, as well as their own and that of their community, and to link that to their work as English teachers.

Finally, I want to emphasise the pleasure and fulfilment that working on a joint endeavour like this gave me. For me too, it was an escape from the day-to-day grind of online meetings and reports, but it also brought me closer to the work I do, gave me purpose and I believe it has made me better at what I do. If I do my job well, these teachers in Gaza will have an influence on British Council work with English teachers, not just in Palestine, but across the world.

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