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# Teachers' constitutive motivations for professional learning in England's context of high-stakes accountability

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## ABSTRACT

How are teachers motivated to continue to learn throughout their career in a high-stakes accountability context? This innovative mixed methods study employs inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analysis and self-determination theory to investigate teachers' self-reported motivations to continue their professional learning. Through analysis of survey responses and in-depth interviews, a new concept of 'constitutive motivations' is presented. This concept adds more nuanced insight into the motivations of teachers working in contexts dominated by a neoliberal framework that foregrounds teacher performativity. The analysis suggests that, despite experiencing controlling managerialism within high-stakes accountability workplace contexts, teachers retain a sense of vocation and are motivated to learn based on their commitment to children and to teaching itself. The findings imply school leaders and teachers themselves should take steps to cultivate and harness constitutive motivations as a driver for professional learning.

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## Introduction

Internationally, we know that quality of teaching is fundamental in developing effective education systems and this priority has stimulated international research on professional learning (PL) for teachers (Cordingley *et al.* 2015). Yet globally, many education professionals are working in high accountability contexts where teacher performativity is foregrounded through managerialist strategies such as target-setting based on student test results and performance-related pay. Crucially, this neoliberal dynamic actually constitutes 'a motivational approach' because of the emphasis on the reward and punishment of performance (Ryan and Weinstein 2009, p. 225). However, at the same time, it has been recognised that motivation has an important role to play in teacher learning (Heystek and Terhoven 2015, McMillan *et al.* 2016, Appova and Arbaugh 2018). It is therefore essential that we understand the motivations of teachers to learn professionally in such a high-accountability environment. Thus, this study investigates the motivations of teachers towards PL in England, which epitomises a neoliberal, high-accountability context (Stevenson and Wood 2013).

The neoliberalism which has so strongly influenced the school system in England, and internationally, is an ideology dedicated to the commodification and marketisation of education (Venugopal 2015). It is predicated on a belief in the power of high-stakes competition, resulting in the success and failure of competitor-participants (Carr 2015). Allied to this is the concept of managerialism, an organisational leadership philosophy that emphasises the importance of hierarchical oversight by a professional class of managers, characterised by bureaucratic measurement,

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intensive accountability and controlling diktat (Freidson 2004). Indeed, England represents a notable ‘laboratory’ in this regard (Gunter *et al.* 2016, p. 34) and is therefore an egregious example of a wider international trend.

Yet it might not solely be a case of simply tracing the deleterious effects of such performativity on teachers’ motivations to learn professionally. Instead, it may be that teachers’ motivations remain resilient or adaptive in such a context, with other work demonstrating various ways teachers can be agentic or resistant within high-stakes accountability contexts (Mittenfelner Carl *et al.* 2022). Likewise, motivation could form an important component in terms of Carter Carter Andrews *et al.*’s (2016) imperative of maintaining teacher professionalisation in a neoliberal environment. To this end, our analysis generates a new conceptualisation of teachers’ constitutive motivations to learn professionally, intended to be understood against a backdrop of neoliberal accountability and in juxtaposition to the performative impetuses of reward and punishment.

In the context of England, teachers who dissent from the neoliberal orthodoxy have tended to be marginalised or silenced (Stevenson and Gilliland 2015), leading to an absence of authentic teacher voice. Thus, the study is designed to be generative of teachers’ perspectives in rich and reflexive ways. The quantitative analysis of the structured survey element of the study asks: to what extent do teachers’ perspectives on their motivations to learn professionally align with the categories identified by the self-determination theory (SDT) framework? The qualitative analysis of the open response survey element combined with the teacher interviews asks: how do teachers perceive what motivates them to learn professionally? Both serve an overarching research question: what motivates teachers to learn professionally when working in such a high-accountability context?

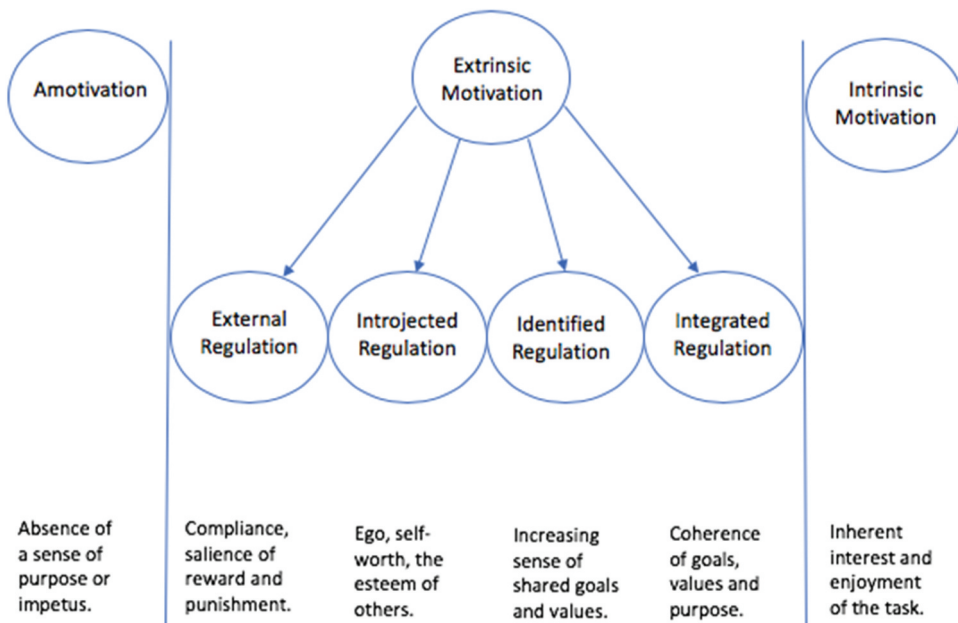
### **Teacher motivation and professional learning**

Jones (2021) recognises ‘there are many ways to approach how professional learning is conceptualised [and] . . . differing perspectives on professional learning and development’ (p.197–8). Likewise, Boylan *et al.* (2018, p. 121) note that authors refer to ‘professional learning and professional development using different, sometimes implicit, definitions of the terms’. Others suggest ‘attempts to distinguish clearly between professional development and professional learning and to atomise individual and corporate needs . . . are . . . both unnecessary and unfeasible’ (McMillan *et al.* 2016, p. 152), while some argue ‘activities . . . denoted as “professional development” vary widely in design’ (Noonan 2022, p. 4). Yet O’Brien and Jones (2014, p. 684) maintain that there is a ‘significant difference between the systematic career progression associated with professional development and the broader, more critically reflective and less performative approach to professional learning’. The present article acknowledges the complexities of these debates and that aspects of teacher motivation as analysed in this paper may be interpreted by different readers as falling within various legitimate and related definitions of professional development or professional learning. However, the concept of constitutive motivations seeks to describe and encompass the learning which teachers and teacher leaders seek to pursue for its own inherent value. In this sense, what is articulated by the present article is more akin to professional learning than professional development, as defined by O’Brien and Jones (2014). Likewise, the present article accords with Appova and Arbaugh (2018, p. 18) that ‘under the umbrella of “professional development” there are many activities that do not support, promote or motivate . . . professional learning’. Yet, at the same time, other work exploring the relationship between motivation and teacher learning has described this dynamic in terms of ‘professional development’ (McMillan *et al.* 2016) or else has used this phrase and that of ‘professional learning’ with a degree of inclusive flexibility (Noonan 2022). Thus, while the present article makes use of the term ‘professional learning’, it acknowledges there are definitions of ‘professional development’ which would relate closely with the content of this article. Further, this article aligns with ‘literature which supports the perspective that you can influence teacher learning and that teachers have at least some control over their own learning and behaviour’, but at the same time acknowledges ‘linear models . . . used uncritically’ (Jones 2021, p. 197)

can be problematic because they do not capture the complexities inherent to professional learning (Strom *et al.* 2021). Thus, whilst motivation is presented in this article as a catalyst for professional learning, it is acknowledged this sits within an intricate web of factors affecting teachers' learning and development.

In common with a majority of SDT-informed studies, we consider motivation at the level of conscious, perceived motives and that 'to be motivated means to be moved to do something' (Ryan and Deci 2000, p. 54). It can be differentiated from morale, as this pertains to a state of wellbeing, rather than an impetus for action. Further, it is concerned with not simply the 'level of motivation (i.e. how much motivation), but also the orientation of that motivation (i.e. what type of motivation)' (Ryan and Deci 2000, p. 54). **Figure 1** sets out the SDT typology of six categories (Ryan and Deci 2000, 2020): amotivation (the absence of purpose or impetus), external regulation (reward and punishment), introjection (ego, self-worth, the esteem of others), identification (motivation through increasingly shared values), integration (a more fully internalised form of identification) and intrinsic motivation (inherent pleasure and satisfaction). These are considered to be on a continuum in the order given above, from more controlled to more autonomous motivations. It is worth noting that where identification ends and integration begins is a matter for considerable debate and some theorists go so far as to conflate these two categories (Gagné and Deci 2005). SDT considers that each of us is seeking to balance three basic psychological needs which influence the extent to which motivation is internalised: autonomy (being the perceived origin of one's own behaviour), competence (feeling effective within the particular environment) and relatedness (a sense of belonging through shared values and goals) (Ryan and Deci 2000).

The link between autonomy, competence and relatedness and the six constructs for motivation across the continuum in **Figure 1** may be understood as 'peoples' ability to internalise [being] affected by the degree to which they experience satisfaction of their innate psychological needs' (Ciani *et al.* 2011, p. 227). SDT holds that the greater the level of internalised motivation, moving in **Figure 1** from left to right, from more controlled towards more autonomous motivations, the more driven and effective an individual is within a given context (Ryan and Deci 2000, Ryan and Weinstein 2009).



**Figure 1.** The self determination theory framework (adapted from Ryan and Deci 2000, 2020).

Studies applying SDT to teachers have shown deleterious effects of controlling extrinsic motivators on teacher creativity (Ryan and Brown 2005), resulting in a narrowing of the curriculum (Sheldon and Biddle 1998) and transmission of negative pressure or motivational contagion from teachers to children (Ryan and Weinstein 2009). Gorozidis and Papaioannou (2014, pp. 9–10) found through SDT ‘if teachers are autonomously motivated towards training, they will be more determined to participate’ in PL. However, their investigation took place in an ‘educational system with low or no accountability for teaching’; thus, it does not consider motivation and PL within the high accountability environment of the present study.

Likewise, it should also be acknowledged that associations between teacher PL and motivation are not confined to SDT. Kaplan argues for a ‘dynamic’ theorisation of teacher motivation due to its inherent complexity (2013, p. 61). In specific regard to PL, such motivation is multifaceted, with Richter *et al.* (2019) having shown ‘that teachers exhibit not just one motivational orientation to attend PL activities, but several different ones at the same time’ (p.8), an argument echoed by the complex dynamic systems perspective of teacher learning articulated by Garner and Kaplan (2019) and the framework approach of Appova and Arbaugh (2018). An integrative and open approach to the theorisation of motivation is therefore important when considering the findings generated.

### **A mixed methods analysis of teacher motivation**

This mixed methods study seeks to gain insight into the motivational impact of high-stakes accountability in schools by asking those whose learning is under question. An online survey was employed to obtain a sample (N = 323) of teacher responses to Likert-type attitude scale variables. This survey included a qualitative open response section which participants could elect to complete (N = 68). In addition, a smaller sample of semi-structured interviews with teachers was used to generate more open-ended and in-depth responses (N = 7). The online survey and the semi-structured interviews both generate data from working teachers but are complementary sources (Bazeley, 2018) in that the survey enables the researcher, informed by SDT, to set the agenda, whereas the interviews, although using a pre-planned schedule of prompt questions, were designed to enable teachers to steer the focus of the discussion and raise issues based on their experience. This mixed methods design consisted of a convergent triangulation approach (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018), illustrated by Figure 2.

### **Survey development**

In developing the survey instrument, the word ‘motivation’, or a root variation upon it, was integrated within each item statement and the selection of other keywords used was informed by evaluation of previous surveys based on SDT (for example, Fernet *et al.* 2008). The survey instrument was designed to be concise, with three prompt statements developed to match each of the six constructs for motivation within the SDT framework and a seven-choice response range (Gorozidis and Papaioannou 2014). Examples of prompt statements are provided for identified motivation, ‘I would be motivated to be a better teacher by performance management processes which have a clear benefit to children’; for integrated motivation, ‘I would be motivated to be a better teacher by knowing my educational values are shared by my school’s managers’; for intrinsic motivation, ‘I am motivated to be a better teacher when enabled to enjoy developing for its own sake’. The open prompt: ‘Please use the box below to add any other thoughts that you wish’ was used for the qualitative element of the survey. The initial draft of item statements for the survey instrument was discussed informally with a range of working teachers at different primary and secondary schools. The instrument was then tested by distribution to a single alumni year group of qualified teachers. This pilot indicated a plausible instrument: ordinal alpha = 0.803745, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity = 626.7 (df = 153;  $p < .001$ ), and Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test = 0.7948. The main survey was sent to the remainder of the alumni email database, covering 15 qualifying cohorts

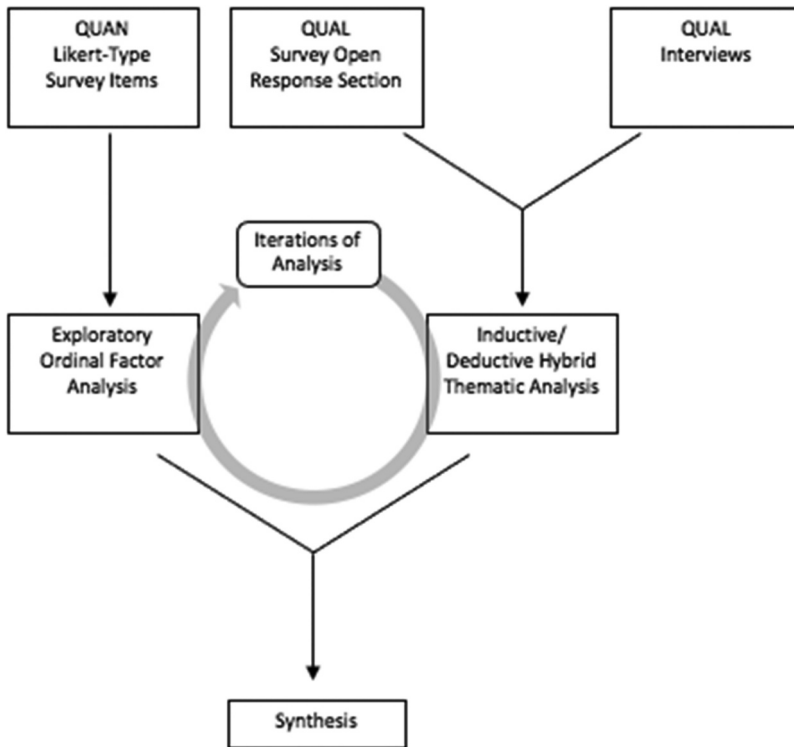


Figure 2. Overview of mixed methods study design.

and thus reaching working teachers with between 1 and 15 years of service. Alumni were invited on the basis that ‘Given the performance management of the profession, your voice as a teacher is important. This survey therefore seeks the opinions of teachers on what motivates them to learn and develop professionally’.

### **Rationale for ordinal factor analysis**

We employed an ordinal factor analysis (Lorenzo-Seva and Ferrando 2015) suitable for Likert-type data (Jamieson 2004), alongside a non-parametric equivalent for the examination of variance between groups, Kruskal–Wallis tests. We used Parallel Analysis and Unweighted Least Squares with Promin rotation (Lorenzo-Seva and Ferrando 2015), as these methods are considered suitable for ordinal data. The internal reliability of the scale was assessed with the strong result that ordinal alpha = 0.803745 (Gadermann *et al.* 2012).

### **Semi-structured teacher interviews**

Semi-structured interviews facilitate ‘discovery or elaboration of information that is important to the participant’ (Gill *et al.* 2008, p. 291), whilst simultaneously affording thematic focus. Participants were initially asked about their broad motivational stance in relation to their learning as teacher, allowing for a multiplicity of responses. In the second stage, teachers were asked ‘To what extent are your motivations to develop shaped by the school you work in?’ Finally, participants were asked ‘Does performance management motivate you to be a better teacher?’. Throughout, neutral prompts were used to provoke in-depth responses by teachers.

In respect to participant selection, firstly, teachers were approached with varying years' service. Second, they were drawn from an approximately equal balance of primary and secondary age-phases. A third factor was that they be participants currently working in standard state education contexts in England. Finally, the individuals invited to interview were identified through informal networks, without involving school managers (due to the high-stakes accountability focus). A total of 7 in-depth interviews were conducted, which included male and female teachers of differing years of experience. They did not have a managerial relationship or personal connection with the researchers. Interviewees had not been approached to complete the survey. Interviews were conducted at a university setting so teachers were more comfortable discussing questions of power and performance outside of their own managerial environment.

### ***Inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analysis***

Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report patterns in the data from the open response prompt question in the online teacher survey and for the transcripts of the teacher interviews. The approach adopted was inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analysis, using both inductive reasoning to generate a coding frame and themes but also applying existing themes taken from our theoretical framework using a deductive reasoning approach to code data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). This hybrid approach therefore constitutes the use of both responsive and pre-ordinate codes. To avoid suppression of variation or theoretical bias, the inductive analysis was entered into first, with the integration of the theoretical framework at a more secondary stage of analysis. In the first stage of analysis, two coders worked separately on the same extracts of raw data and used comparison to gradually establish an agreed coding frame and pursue inductive generation of themes (Braun and Clarke 2006). For the theory-led, deductive element of the thematic analysis, three stages were followed: to establish the themes 'through reading and contemplation [of] the theory'; to check the 'compatibility with the raw information' through pilot coding; and 'to determine the reliability of the coder' through testing (Boyatzis 1998, p. 36). Inter-rater reliability was through Cohen's Kappa = 0.874, indicating a robust level (McHugh 2012).

## **Quantitative survey findings**

### ***Respondent rate and range***

Respondent rate was low (9.8%) as anticipated when employing a university alumni database of contacts (Lambert and Miller 2014) but possessed the advantage of inviting teachers directly without involving school managerial structures. Likewise, the number of respondents (N = 323) was appropriate for factorisation. Similarly, Lambert and Miller (2014) emphasise the value of the broad respondent range generated from the use of an alumni database. The range in length of years' service and roles of the sample of respondents is important because these are potentially interesting variables influencing the different forms/intensity of performance management experienced and this again proved encouraging. Data were screened for anomalies resulting from issues such as apparently intentional mis-responding or entry error through analysis of repeated numeric patterns (leading to the removal of four cases, resulting in N = 319).

### ***Descriptive statistics***

Initial descriptive statistics (see Table 1) indicated a significantly higher perceived motivation in relation to those individual measured variables for the identification, integration and intrinsic aspects of the SDT continuum. Conversely, there was a lower perceived motivation towards the individual measured variables for external regulation and introjection, though some variables are worth a slightly longer pause. There was a mildly higher perceived motivation towards a variable



measuring for external regulation which specifically referenced the prospect of greater pay reward (V3), suggesting this may carry more motivational traction than previously envisaged. Similarly, there was some higher perceived motivation towards some introjection variables, again suggesting that notions of ego and esteem may carry motivational potency. Considerable ambiguity emerged in respect to the amotivation aspect, perhaps due to considerable variation in response to performance (with some, for example, being demotivated by it and others adopting a stance of resilience).

**Table 1.** Initial descriptive statistics of teachers' motivational dispositions towards professional development.

	Amotivation V1	Amotivation V2	Amotivation V3	External Regulation V1	External Regulation V2	External Regulation V3
Median	4.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	5.00
Skewness	-.109	-.141	.136	.532	1.214	-.365
Kurtosis	-.967	-.767	-1.087	-.888	.616	-1.018
Range	6	6	6	6	6	6
	<b>Introjection V1</b>	<b>Introjection V2</b>	<b>Introjection V3</b>	<b>Identification V1</b>	<b>Identification V2</b>	<b>Identification V3</b>
Median	5.00	3.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Skewness	-.657	.135	-.946	-1.413	-1.109	-1.301
Kurtosis	-.615	-1.284	.330	2.603	1.773	2.420
Range	6	6	6	6	6	6
	<b>Integration V1</b>	<b>Integration V2</b>	<b>Integration V3</b>	<b>Intrinsic Motivation V1</b>	<b>Intrinsic Motivation V2</b>	<b>Intrinsic Motivation V3</b>
Median	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00	6.00
Skewness	-1.641	-1.830	-.934	-1.802	-1.171	-.874
Kurtosis	4.091	5.356	1.109	4.259	1.666	1.277
Range	6	6	6	6	6	6

### Ordinal factor analysis

Initial indicators for the viability of a factor analysis proved very encouraging, with ordinal alpha: 0.792125, Bartlett's test of sphericity = 1636.5 (df = 153; p = 0.000010) and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test = 0.79263. Parallel Analysis recommended the extraction of three factors when real-data % of variance was compared with the random % of variance (31.1/14.8; 20.0/13.5; 13.1/12.3). In respect to robustness of fit, the subsequent factorisation reported strong indices for a three-factor model: RMSEA = 0.038; NNFI = 0.977; CFI = 0.985; GFI = 0.985; RMSR = 0.0433. Taken together, these indicators suggest a plausible factorisation.

The first extracted factor (see Table 2) shows a clear cluster characterised by teachers' motivational responsiveness to identification and integration, alongside a strong association with intrinsic motivation. This association of these three elements in the SDT continuum might be a consequence of shared facets of each, such as the (relative) degrees of autonomy and internalisation. These findings agree with Wilkesmann and Schmid (2014) who found an 'empirical merger between intrinsic and identified motivation' (p.14).

Conversely, the second extracted factor resulted in the emergence of a motivational cluster characterised by externality, performance and control: What is apparent here is an observable association of introjection and external regulation. Fernet *et al.* (2008) have noted a similar blurring of external regulation and introjected motivation, which is perhaps understandable, being characterised as they are by external control, instrumental activity and a sense of performance. In relation to the first extracted factor (the identification/integration/intrinsic cluster), it may then be possible to discern an important basic dichotomy.

Finally, for the third extracted factor, the notion of amotivation as a distinct construct would be entirely consistent with SDT, as amotivation is concerned with the absence of motivation and therefore conceptually different from extrinsic motivation.

**Table 2.** Ordinal factor analysis of teachers’ motivational dispositions towards professional development.

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Intrinsic Motivation V1	0.649		
Intrinsic Motivation V2	0.717		
Intrinsic Motivation V3	0.505		
Integration V1	0.621		
Integration V2	0.714		
Integration V3	0.581		
Identification V1	0.337		
Identification V2	0.627		
Identification V3	0.568		
Introjection V1		0.552	
Introjection V2		0.564	
Introjection V3		0.579	
Extrinsic Regulation V1		0.529	
Extrinsic Regulation V2		0.304	
Extrinsic Regulation V3		0.739	
Amotivation V2			0.702
Amotivation V3			0.737

Loadings below 0.300 omitted. Amotivation V1 was excluded from analysis due to weak loading on Factor 3.

**Kruskal–Wallis tests and post-hoc Dunn/Bonferroni tests**

Kruskal–Wallis tests, appropriate for ordinal data, were employed to identify any meaningful variation between groups, with post-hoc Dunn–Bonferroni tests identifying specific statistically significant pairwise combinations (where Kruskal–Wallis tests identified the possibility of differences). No significant differences emerged in respect to the constitutive motivation of teachers according to various variables relating to school type, years of service, roles and responsibilities or gender, suggesting a commonality of perspective in terms of motivational dispositions.

**Quantitative results summary**

In sum, the survey analysis presents a dichotomy between more autonomous and internalised motivations (identified/integrated/intrinsic) and more controlling, external forms of motivation (external regulation/introjection). In terms of the motivation for teachers to learn professionally, there is a clear higher perceived motivation in relation to the identified/integrated/intrinsic grouping. There is a lower perceived motivation towards external regulation/introjection. However, ambiguities remain in terms of the motivation to learn induced by financial reward (external



**Figure 3.** Inductive thematic coding of interview data.

regulation) and ego/esteem of others (introjection). Amotivation appears to sit apart from this dichotomy, which is consistent with the SDT framework.

### Qualitative survey and interview findings

This section presents the combined inductive/deductive hybrid thematic analysis of the qualitative data from the single prompt question included in the teacher survey (N = 68) and from the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews with teachers (N = 7). Participants are presented as follows: years of service, gender, age phase, data source – interview/survey open response.

#### *Inductive thematic analysis*

The inductive thematic analysis identified two key themes: sense of professionalism and experiences of managerialism and these included five and three sub-themes, respectively (see [Figure 3](#)). This section presents some insights into the ‘sense of professionalism’ inductive theme which in the later synthesis strongly informed the development of the new construct of the constitutive motivations of teachers.

The theme of sense of professionalism included the sub-element of trust – often expressed as a lack of trust: ‘I don’t feel like that’s trusting me as a teacher to be truthful . . . that makes you question do they trust us to be doing what we should be doing? Probably not. Quite demotivating I would say’ (2 Years’ Service, Female, Primary, Interview). It is striking to note the intensity of the scrutiny to which this teacher finds herself subject, and the feelings of mistrust it engenders, but important also to observe that the interviewee appears to be describing something to which the staff body is subject, rather than the intensive management of a ‘failing’ teacher. In other words, this absence of trust was considered appropriate for competent and able teachers. In contrast, though more rarely, other teachers reported high levels of professional trust and the motivational value of this:

Current school - lot of trust in staff, small amount of monitoring, big whole school impact. Fantastic results. Outstanding school. Previous school - extremely intrusive monitoring. Bullying management. Low staff morale. Horrendous demotivating performance management system. (3 Years’ Service, Female, Primary, Survey Open Response)

Thus, this teacher reported contrasting situations in two schools in which they had worked, positioning trust as an institutional rather than national element of schools as workplaces. Overall, high levels of professional trust were perceived by teachers as motivating.

Teachers’ professional autonomy was also identified as an element of the sense of professionalism theme. Whilst related more generally to an aspect of the SDT framework as already discussed, the idea of teachers’ autonomy as professionals proved salient in its own terms to the theme of sense of professionalism and thus warranted distinct consideration. This was seen by teachers as motivating: ‘Thank goodness I work in a school where motivation is linked to personal development and a degree of autonomy’ (10 Years’ Service, Female, Primary, Survey Open Response). However, such comments proved to be quite isolated, with secondary teachers in particular reporting what they felt to be a high level of management control, resulting in a sense of uniformity of approach or an imposed structure, with this having restrictive consequences in respect to exercising professional autonomy and on their associated motivation for growth: ‘I think in schools and there’s an element of everyone’s got to do it [the same way] . . . I think that’s maybe what I feel there’s a problem with’ (9 Years’ Service, Female, Secondary, Interview). Overall, the freedom to make professional choices was associated by teachers with the motivation to learn, but such autonomy appears to be often felt by its absence.

Teaching is frequently positioned as a vocation and it might be expected to hear some reference to this from many participants but with varying degrees of authenticity. It was striking, therefore,

the extent to which this element of vocation was *prominent* among participants, rather than simply *present*. This motivating sense of vocation was often also seen to be expressed in opposition to demotivating performativity: 'What motivates me to be the best teacher possible are the children in my class. Regardless of performance management processes, the children remain my focus and always will' (8 Years' Service, Female, Primary, Survey Open Response). To gain a sense of the real salience of this element in the data, a number of other representative quotations are provided: 'I think the progression of that rounded child rather than a score on a piece of paper is the real motivator for me as a teacher' (2 Years' Service, Female, Primary, Interview); 'mostly that we are generally making a difference in someone's life' (3 Years' Service, Male, Secondary, Interview); 'that's kind of the motivation behind it, that I'm helping them have a good start in life' (10 Years' Service, Male, Primary, Interview); 'I teach to the best of my ability because I care about the growth of the children I teach' (3 years' service, Male, Primary, Survey Open Response). Thus, the sub-theme of vocation was considered a highly potent impetus for PL by participant teachers.

Motivation through professional collegiality was an element developed within the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, though this was not apparent in the survey open response analysis. It proved most evident among primary age-phase colleagues, taking the form of a culture of mutual self-improvement. This was acknowledged to be a process not without difficulties, but one which was felt to be an authentic driver of real learning: 'The hardest thing is telling a friend where they need to improve. But I think we're getting round that now . . . and I think it's having that mutual respect again' (12 Years' Service, Male, Primary, Interview). Collegiality was also identified as a motivating factor by secondary teachers and, for some participants, it extended beyond the confines of their immediate school to a wider PL network.

Motivation through professional wellbeing was again an element developed chiefly through analysis of the interview data rather than the survey open response data. Well-being was linked to a feeling of safety through the idea of a degree of job security commensurate with professional work, with individuals reporting that they were motivated by this: 'Anybody coming to apply for a job who doesn't have a Masters level and you have got one, maybe you've got the edge' (10 Years' Service, Male, Primary, Interview). This aspect did contrast with other elements of the 'sense of professionalism' theme as it was more instrumental in nature as explicitly linked by the participant to status and employability (and thus is not included in the subsequent synthesis related to constitutive motivations), yet it did seem related to a sense of professional status as an overarching theme and is thus reported.

This paper focuses on the constitutive motivations of teachers, which was strongly shaped by the theme of sense of professionalism in [Figure 2](#). However, for completeness in reporting the study, the analysis generating the second theme shown in [Figure 2](#), experiences of managerialism, is summarised concisely here. In both the survey open responses and the analysis of the semi-structured interviews, a prominent element of unfair judgement was in evidence, including a sense of being judged against ever more unachievable targets, with this engendering demotivation. At times, this sense of unattainability appeared to entail a perception of an opacity to the judgements to which teachers were subject, and in some cases, the judgements seemed arbitrary or inconsistent, arrived at by a distant managerial cadre. An additional related experience was of managers arbitrarily altering performance targets due to external influences, in particular from changes to the school inspection system. The notion of proof was a related recurrent theme here, with teachers describing being compelled to generate spurious data and other 'evidence' for performance purposes. Overall, the analysis showed a strong demotivating influence of teachers' experiences of managerialism.

In summary, it is important to note that inductive thematic analysis showed how sense of professionalism is intertwined with the ideas of collegiality and autonomy and within a high-accountability context, the issues of trust and wellbeing are also significant. Above all, the perhaps somewhat old-fashioned idea of teaching as a vocation is strongly represented in the teachers' perspectives and cannot be ignored by those responsible for PL in schools.

### **Deductive thematic analysis: applying the SDT framework**

The motivational categories in this section are taken from SDT (see [Figure 1](#)) as top-down deductive reasoning themes applied within the analysis. In this paper, we focus on identified, integrated and intrinsic motivations.

Intrinsic motivation, meaning inherent interest/satisfaction and enjoyment was sometimes expressed as love of subject by some secondary teachers:

I like it. Is that a taboo to say? I like being a teacher. I mean, one of the reasons why I'm a history teacher is cos I love history. Every day I get to speak about history ... yeah, I actually just love it, hence why I'm a history teacher. (3 Years' Service, Male, Secondary, Interview)

For both primary and secondary teachers, male and female, new and experienced, another key expression of intrinsic motivation appeared to be the pleasure teachers claimed to derive from their interactions with young people. There was a clear sense of a need to enjoy the dynamic and creative nature of the work: This emphasis upon creativity was also evident with teachers with a greater number of years' service: 'I think it's the creativity side. I can't stress that enough ... I love being creative and thinking of different ways to approach it' (9 Years' Service, Female, Secondary, Interview). Importantly, such a sense of motivation appeared to remain potent (if latent) even in high-accountability contexts where its absence was felt: 'What is needed is more ability to innovate, adapt, and work outside the confines of curriculum and exam-based requirements' (8 Years' Service, Female, Secondary, Survey Open Response). Thus, the inherently creative and interpersonal nature of teaching appeared to motivate teachers to seek continuing professional learning. This sense of intrinsic motivation was a strong presence in the data.

Within the qualitative data analysis, identification and integration appeared to deserve treatment as a single category, rather than two distinct areas. Identification and integration seem to be in effect soft and hard forms of the same motivational phenomenon, namely the extent to which organisational goals and values can/should be internalised by individuals. Some participants spoke very positively as to the extent to which goals were aligned (or rather, were in a process of alignment) and this influenced their motivation to learn professionally: 'I like the vision that the school has, yeah I'd say that's what gets me out of bed in a morning' (2 Years' Service, Female, Primary, Interview). However, many teachers questioned the authenticity of the shared vision in their schools (because of a mismatch between stated and actual goals, or a sense of *simulated* collegiality) and expressed ambivalence towards alignment with senior leaders: 'I think most teachers are motivated by the pupils we serve ... [but] ... the worst managers exploit this goodwill' (3 Years' Service, Female, Secondary, Survey Open Response). In sum, identification/integration appears to be perceived by a range of teachers as a potent and important source of motivation to learn professionally, but it is fraught with challenges that may inhibit genuine alignment of values between teachers and school leaders.

The analysis of data pertaining to the deductive themes of external regulation, introjection and amotivation are not discussed in detail because of this article's focus on constitutive motivations, but a summary is offered here. Amotivation was much more apparent in some of the survey open response data, characterised by various references to intensive performativity leading to the absence of motivation and departure from the profession. Introjection was more ambiguous and was suggested by some teachers to be a motivator to learn professionally. This was often expressed through prominent references to the importance of the esteem in which a teacher is held by both his/her colleagues, but also his/her managers. Nonetheless, the extent to which introjection motivates and the extent to which it motivates *effectively* are arguably different questions, and some teachers expressed a degree of inner conflict on this score. External regulation, characterised by reward and punishment, proved to be a pervasive phenomenon, though the extent to which participants perceived themselves to be (a) *subject to* and (b) *motivated by* external regulation appeared to vary to some degree (though there were fewer variations by age-phase as a whole and

minimal evidence of variation by gender). In sum, external regulation represents a complex motivator for teachers, with reward proving ambivalent (though salient) and punishment demotivating in the extreme. Similarly, there is the question of whether it motivates teachers in the sense of conforming to a culture of performativity, or genuine professional learning.

### Synthesis: constitutive motivations

This section presents a synthesis focused on a new formulation of teachers' motivations to learn professionally as *constitutive motivations*. Aristotle makes a distinction between constitutive and instrumental actions (Trans. Ross 1994). Constitutive actions are those activities performed for their own sake, whereas instrumental actions are those where the ends and the means are not the same. Modifying this distinction for the purposes of the present study, we posit the notion of constitutive motivations as a key hypernym (umbrella term) which allows for the most effective synthesis of the findings, allowing for a rich interplay between existing theory and inductively generated themes.

In the qualitative data, it proved difficult at times to disaggregate a sense of moral purpose or of educational goals from feelings of the inherent satisfaction or pleasure derived from the role of the teacher. This same blur was reflected in the quantitative data through the first factor extracted by the analysis, which merged the SDT categories of identified, integrated and intrinsic motivation. This shared finding across the two data strands is suggestive of the difficulty in disentangling the motivations of those who work in the public sector or otherwise moral areas of endeavour, where there is perhaps a strong likelihood of such impetuses being blurred. These impetuses for PL are also closely linked to other notions, such as vocation, collegiality and autonomy. When these various factors are taken together, there is hence the need for a new concept expressive of this complex of motivations towards PL, which we propose as constitutive motivations. The overarching concept of constitutive motivations can be defined as *the motivation of the thing in itself*. In other words, what such notions of vocation, pleasure and autonomy have in common is that the individual is motivated by them *in themselves*. Teachers also reported their greater motivation to learn professionally through the sense of alignment which characterises the identification and integration categories of SDT, even where there was no clear or obvious reference to intrinsic motivation in the form of enjoyment or inherent satisfaction. Taken overall, it is apparent across the analysis of both data sources that constitutive motivations, combining identification, integration and intrinsic motivation, alongside the notions of autonomy, trust, vocation and collegiality, are highly potent as an impetus for PL for those teachers who participated in the study.

Particularly compelling in respect to the importance of constitutive motivations is the extent to which it may (or may not) be undermined in practice. The quantitative variables allowed as much for the *potential* that teachers could be motivated by such drivers, rather than simply that they *were presently* motivated by them in their current school context. When this is then linked to the qualitative analysis, it is striking the extent to which teachers feel that constitutive motivation is often not achieved in practice, noting a lack of alignment and relatedness, an absence of autonomy and an inhibition of the inherent satisfactions of the role. The silencing of teachers' voices powerfully articulated by Stevenson and Gilliland (2015) and the undermining of teachers' professionalism described by Carter Andrews *et al.* (2016) seem to align with the combined analysis. These depictions of marginalisation and obedience are of pertinence, because, in such a culture, the likelihood of these constitutive motivations to learn professionally being actually enabled seems remote. Likewise, there is a concern over inauthentic autonomy offered to teachers in a manipulative fashion, present in the qualitative data in relation to the deductive themes of identification/integration. For Carr (2015) this represents a 'vehicle . . . [in the service] . . . of super-ordinate performance goals' (p.74–5). The present study's synthesis recognises this description of performativity in 'a more motivationally-acceptable guise' (Carr 2015, p. 70).

Nonetheless, there were less frequent instances within the qualitative data where, contextually, teachers did perceive their constitutive motivations were fostered or at least not suppressed by school leaders, even in the present neoliberal environment, resulting in an impetus for PL, such as some of the more positive teacher perspectives in the inductive themes of trust, autonomy and collegiality. Similarly, even where constitutive motivations to learn professionally are at least partly suppressed or inhibited in practice, they nonetheless appear to persist beneath the surface and are not eliminated, suggesting they can be rekindled, such as the description of latent intrinsic motivations in the qualitative data and the higher perceived motivation in the identified/integrated/intrinsic grouping for the quantitative data. Likewise, Gorozidis and Papaioannou's (2014) identification of the potency of autonomous PL (albeit in a low-accountability context) also appears to remain valid for teachers who experience intensive accountability. The cultivation of constitutive motivations for PL can thus provide one means to address Carter Andrews *et al.*'s (2016, p. 170) call to 'consider strategies for professionalising teachers and teaching' in the face of such performativity.

Thus, this study would support McMillan *et al.*'s view (2016, p. 164) that professional learning which 'privileges teachers' personal choice, charges schools with providing empowering communities of practice' and would similarly align with Appova and Arbaugh (2018, p. 17) who argue professional learning should be 'part of teachers' daily work – without compromising their teaching and their students' learning'. However, at the same time, each of these studies makes some positive reference to mandatory PL, whether 'overall, teachers suggested that accountability and PD requirements are helpful for motivating them' (Appova and Arbaugh 2018, p. 17), or recommending 'an overarching system of compulsory professional development' (McMillan *et al.* 2016, p. 164). The present work finds minimal evidence to support such a view and would juxtapose such measures against the constitutive motivation to learn.

Our overall synthesis broadly supports Ryan and Deci's (2000) basic contention that there is a continuum of negative-to-positive forms of motivation when applied to PL, with more productive and constructive forms of motivation being characterised by increasing autonomy, relatedness and internalisation. Constitutive motivations appear to provide potent and authentic impetuses for teachers to learn professionally. Given the nature of these constitutive impetuses, the present neoliberal educational context is fraught with motivational ambiguity and conflict (Carr 2015), where the pursuit of performance obstructs the fulfilment of more meaningful motivations to learn professionally.

## Conclusions and implications for practice

The theorisation of teacher motivation needs to be 'integrative' (Kaplan 2013, p. 61). The concept of constitutive motivation thus provides an overarching hypernym (umbrella term) which facilitates this integrative approach and provides a means of understanding teachers' impetuses for PL within a high-stakes accountability context. The analysis indicates that constitutive motivations represent efficacious impetuses for teachers to learn professionally and this concept contributes to a composite theory of teachers' motivations informed by, but broader than, SDT. In this way, the evidence for constitutive motivations within our analysis reveals the strong influence of teachers' sense of vocation and commitment to children and to teaching itself, even in the conditions of high-stakes accountability so prevalent in England. Constitutive motivation thus allows for contrast with the instrumental motivation of *something else* that is so characteristic of high-stakes accountability. The analysis has demonstrated that constitutive motivations are productive, supporting meaningful PL for teachers.

An implication of the findings is that schools should focus on supporting the constitutive motivations of teachers. There are instances of school leaders who have proven able to foster and harness the benefits of constitutive motivation, despite the dominant national culture of performativity. This entails creating the 'humanizing spaces that advance professionalization rather than detract from it' (Carter Andrews *et al.* 2016, p. 170) and 'a more democratic approach' to PL (Heystek and Terhoven 2015, p. 637). The motivational gains derived from such an approach also need to be shared by emphasising the *efficacy* of such practices as much as their humanity. This

empowerment of teachers needs to occur in an authentic fashion, rather than in a superficial or manipulative way which ultimately serves performative goals. To this end, the present study would also support Brown and Weber's (2016, p. 185) call for PL which is consciously positioned away from the 'high-stakes standards-based accountability reforms'. Yet it is not simply a question of being empowered by others, but rather that the present study advocates teachers taking the initiative in terms of PL, with constitutive motivations providing an important component for such agentic and autonomous activism (Mittenfelner Carl *et al.* 2022).

## Limitations

The strength of this study is the mixed methods combination of a larger sample of teachers through an online survey combined with in-depth engagement with a small sample of teachers through the interviews, yet a limitation is the relatively low survey response rate. This was partly a consequence of using a university alumni database to avoid having to communicate with teachers via their managers. The small sample of teacher interviews used to generate the qualitative data is a further limitation as it only allowed a partial range of teachers in relation to their school context. Likewise, this is the first use of a new survey instrument and no doubt there is scope to refine some of the items but also to test the instrument with different samples of teachers working in different contexts.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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