**"Lazy, lazy teachers": Teachers' perceptions of how their profession is valued by
society, policymakers, and the media during COVID-19**

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Abstract

School closures during COVID-19 have led to close and very public scrutiny of how teachers have approached remote education. We know that teachers' perceptions of how their profession is valued are associated with morale and retention as well as student attainment. The current study, therefore, examined how teachers' perceptions of how others value their profession have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

Twenty-four teachers from English state schools were interviewed in June 2020, representing mainstream primary and secondary schools and a wide range of years of experience. A reflective thematic analysis of the interview data was conducted.

Four themes were identified: (1) heroes or villains?; (2) key workers or not?; (3) voiceless and disrespected; and (4) appreciated locally. Teachers reported discomfort and distress about media reports that asked them to be heroes and criticized them as villains when they questioned the safety of staff and students returning to school buildings. They resented the negative way in which their profession has been portrayed by the media, and the ramifications for public opinion. Teachers were also angry and frustrated by what they perceived as the government's refusal to consult with them as a profession, and their failure to communicate effectively. However, teachers also reported feeling more valued than ever by their students' parents.

Findings are discussed in terms of how to improve the situation during COVID-19 and recommendations for the future.

KEYWORDS: teachers, professional value, perceived appreciation, COVID-19, qualitative, thematic analysis

"Lazy, lazy teachers": Teachers' perceptions of how their profession is valued by society, policymakers, and the media during COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic has affected 93% of the world's workers (ILO, 2020) and presented major challenges to employers and employees, including those in the education sector. School closures during COVID-19 have affected approximately 63 million primary and secondary school teachers (International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2020), as well as approximately 1.5 billion students (UNESCO, 2020). In order to continue addressing the learning needs of children and young people, teachers have had to rapidly develop new skills to enable them to deliver remote teaching from their homes. In England, since the closure of school buildings to all but key workers' children and vulnerable students on 20 March 2020, teachers have implemented a variety of instructional strategies, ranging from sending paper-based workpacks to students' homes to delivering synchronous online teaching (Department for Education, 2020b). Moreover, they have been faced with new pastoral challenges as some children and young people are 'at risk' due to new or increased social, economic, and welfare problems at home (Author Citation, 2020).

Schools and teachers have needed to make continual changes in how they operate as the pandemic has taken its course (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). At the same time, the teaching profession has been subjected to ongoing public critiques, particularly around their response to national decisions about school reopenings. In England, on 24 May, the Prime Minister announced that primary schools would reopen to students in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS, ages 4-5), Year 1 (ages 5-6), and Year 6 (ages 10-11) from 1 June, and that secondary schools should open to up to one-quarter of students in Years 10 and 12 (ages 14-15 and 16-17) for "some contact" from 15 June. In response, the National Education Union (2020) initiated an appeal to the government to delay school reopenings — an appeal

which led to the profession being widely denigrated as “lazy” and “scaremongers” (Whittaker, 2020). Many teachers already believed that society does not value their profession (OECD, 2020) and the pandemic, and the way in which teachers have been portrayed during it, may have exacerbated these pre-existing negative beliefs.

Do teachers feel valued?

Society's perceived importance of individual jobs and professions has been subject to re-evaluation as a result of the coronavirus pandemic (Kramer & Kramer, 2020). The occupational prestige of the teaching profession has been relatively stable since the 1920s (Counts, 1925), remaining in the upper quartile of the range alongside some semi-professions (e.g., social work and librarianship) but below major professions (e.g., doctors and lawyers; Hoyle, 2001). Despite its relative rank order stability, teachers have long believed that their profession is not valued by society (Cohen, 1967). This belief has persisted into the present day and can be seen in the OECD's Teaching and Learning International Surveys which ask teachers from 48 countries/economies about the extent to which they believe that society, policymakers, and the media value their profession (TALIS; OECD, 2014, 2020). The latest survey found that, on average, only 25.8% of teachers believe their profession is valued by society, with longer-serving teachers more pessimistic than colleagues who are newer to the profession. There are between-country differences though (OECD, 2020): the highest perceived values were found among teachers in Vietnam (92.8%), Singapore (72%), and the United Arab Emirates (71.6%); and the lowest among those in the Slovak Republic (4.5%), Belgium (French community; 5.3%), and Slovenia (5.6%). England (28.8%), although slightly above the OECD average, showed a reduction in perceived value from the 2013 report (35.4%; OECD, 2014).

Why do teachers in England feel undervalued?

Both internal and external professional stressors contribute to teachers' low perceptions of how much their work is valued. Contextual and structural factors negatively influence teachers' perceptions, including continual growth in workload; ongoing pressure from above; unrealistic expectations from parents and pupils; and role ambiguity, which contributes to teachers persistently feeling that they have not done enough (Rice, 2005). National policy initiatives that influence teachers' working conditions and the boundaries of their professional roles often drive these contextual and structural factors (L. Hargreaves et al., 2007). Given that educational changes commonly bring about negative emotions (A. Hargreaves, 2004) and lower morale, job satisfaction, and motivation in teachers (Evans, 2000), these may partially explain teachers' belief that they are not valued by policymakers. Moreover, the media plays a significant role in how the teaching profession is portrayed and treated, which can then affect teachers' beliefs about how others view them. In most European countries, including England, the media has often portrayed teachers as lazy and lacking in commitment, and has relished scandalizing cases of professional misconduct that cause reputational damage (Carlo et al., 2013).

Do teachers' perceptions of their professional value matter?

Increasing international attention has been directed at teachers' perceptions of how they are valued because policymakers know these perceptions have significant implications for the supply and demand workforce model as well as the quality of the teaching workforce. Globally, there is a shortage of teachers and this is largely fuelled by high attrition rates (Dupriez et al., 2016), as high as 50% in the first five years of the profession (Ingersoll, 2003). High attrition rates have many significant consequences: replacing a teacher in an urban school district costs more than \$20,000 (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017) and it affects the quality and composition of the teaching workforce (Sorensen & Ladd,

2020). These consequences are linked with teachers' perceptions of how their profession is valued—teachers who feel underappreciated and disrespected may lose the motivation to work, especially in times of difficulty, which leads to lower occupational commitment, job performance, and potentially attrition (Carlo et al., 2013). The need to increase teachers' perceptions of how much they are valued is bolstered by evidence from PISA that the more highly teachers perceived their profession was valued by society, the higher their students' mathematics scores were (Schleicher, 2018). Therefore, teachers' perceptions of the value of their profession appear fundamental to the quality of educational systems and national economies. If perceptions have been affected by COVID-19 this may have significant implications for education moving forward. Given the seismic changes the education sector has been forced to make as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, the current study asks: *What has been the impact of COVID-19 on how much teachers in England believe their profession is valued by society, policymakers and the media?*

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Twenty-four teachers from mainstream state schools in England (11 primary and 13 secondary) were recruited to a longitudinal interview study using social media advertisements and existing networks. Our sample (18 females and 6 males) ranged in years of teaching experience ($M=13.96$, $SD = 8.97$), seniority (class teacher to executive headteacher), and subject specialism. Their time was financially compensated and the research was approved by the ethics committee of the researchers' university department. For more details on the participants, please see Author Citation (2020).

Interviews for 23 of the 24 participants took place online, using Zoom (2020), in a single week between Monday 8 and Friday 12 June, with one interview delayed to Thursday 18 June. This was one week after primary schools reopened to three year groups (EYFS, Year

1 and Year 6), one week before secondary schools reopened to two year groups (Years 10 and 12) and 11-12 weeks after all schools closed to most pupils on 20 March 2020.

Measures

Based on the OECD's TALIS questions on teachers' professional value (OECD, 2016), three semi-structured items were developed to ask participants how valued they felt by society, policymakers and the media, and whether that has changed during COVID-19. For example: *Do you think the extent to which society values the teaching profession has changed since the start of the pandemic? Please can you say a little about how and why?* Participants were asked to elaborate on their responses where necessary, using prompts. These questions formed one section of a longer interview (Time 2 in a longitudinal study) focused on participants' experiences of being a teacher at this time.

Analysis

Interview transcriptions were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). We took an inductive and essentialist approach to analysis as our research aim was to describe teachers' expressed experiences and views of working as a teacher during a global pandemic, rather than to seek latent meaning in their responses. Our coding process began with both interviewers (authors) immersing themselves in the transcripts and making initial observations prior to the lead author coding the full dataset. All codes were then collated, along with data extracts to support them, and discussed. We organized our codes into initial themes and reviewed and refined them to ensure they represented the data and addressed the research question. Proposed themes were checked back against transcriptions to ensure consistency with the data, before definitions and names were finalised and written up.

Results

Using reflexive thematic analysis, we identified four themes in the interview data: (1) heroes or villains?; (2) key workers or not?; (3) voiceless and disrespected; and (4) appreciated locally. Overall, participants perceived two very different reactions to teachers:

I think there's young families who are really appreciating what we're doing, and certainly we see that in our school. And then, there's this kind of online just nastiness of 'we've got to blame someone so we'll blame them sat at home on their full pay doing nothing' and ... honestly it's, it's not nice. (Participant 17)

This dual response was encapsulated in our four themes, which focus on the media, policymakers and local communities, as perceived by teacher participants.

Theme 1: Heroes or villains?

This theme focuses on how teachers said they see themselves as being represented to, and perceived by, society during the COVID-19 pandemic and has a particular emphasis on the role that the media has played in this. Participant 2 summed up the general feeling succinctly, saying: *"I think that you're either vilified or you're held up as heroes, and we're not either"*. Participants referred to a headline in a national tabloid newspaper that explicitly asked them to step up and be heroes, and described feeling criticised for even questioning whether returning to school premises in June 2020 was a responsible and safe decision.

The heroes/villains narrative was said to be triggered by three factors: (1) the government announcement that schools would begin to 're-open' from 1 June; (2) the response of Teaching Unions to this government announcement; and (3) a 'learning gap/crisis' narrative that has been widely discussed among politicians and practitioners.

Once the announcement was made that schools should re-open to some year groups from 1 June, teachers perceived a great deal of pressure to embrace this change, regardless of any health and safety concerns for themselves or their pupils. Teaching Unions stepped in to

support their members but, although participants appreciated their support and viewed it as well-intentioned, many said it caused further reputational damage and did not accurately represent teachers' views. Participant 9 said: "*The teachers are coming across as this whinging, work-shy group, who don't want to go back to work*" and Participant 13 commented that: "*my Union was telling me that I shouldn't have any discussions with my senior leadership about the return to school when I just thought that was completely counterproductive*". Participant 3 said: "*sometimes the way it's portrayed it seems like it's a bit of a petty battle and teachers get a bad press*".

Participants also objected to the way in which concerns about learning loss and a potentially growing gap between more and less advantaged pupils was presented in the media, and how the 'crisis' narrative implied teachers were at fault for not stepping up to be heroes.

...people are very worried about this learning gap and ... although I feel that very keenly, I also feel very keenly the many years of austerity, and various other things that have deeply affected our vulnerable children, and I have not forgotten those. (Participant 16)

In other words, teachers reported feeling that lockdown was exposing pre-existing problems rather than, necessarily, causing them. Reporting around the June 'reopening' and lockdown as a 'crisis' for children and young people was seen as fuelling the widespread perception that teachers had not worked since schools closed to most pupils on 20 March 2020. Participant 4 said that people think: "*you're all lazy sods and need to go back to work*" and Participant 17 said: "*it's coming from this hateful, even spiteful reporting ...*".

Participants said they felt the degree of negativity in how teachers have been portrayed as a profession depends to some extent on what you read. However, all agreed that they have been misrepresented, misunderstood and presented as villains who passed up the opportunity to be heroes. They resented the prominent voices of individuals who are not

teachers in fuelling negative narratives and the widely-shared suggestion that schools have been closed and that they are “*lazy, lazy teachers*” (Participant 22).

Theme 2: Key workers or not?

This theme is focused on how participants said they feel about how the teaching profession has been represented in the media and perceived by the public. There was clear evidence of confusion around whether teachers were ‘key workers’ or not. Several participants described being denied benefits offered to other key workers — such as a fixed appointment for a gas company to repair a boiler — and asked: “*So what do we say to all those frontline key workers? You [your child] can’t come to school today?*” (Participant 1). More than this though, they reported feeling hurt that they were not treated in a similar way to National Health Service (NHS) or supermarket staff who were clearly recognized by the media as essential workers.

We just want to be acknowledged that actually, it's not just the NHS and I'm not in their position, but actually they could only do some of what they're doing because we are here all day every day. And I think that's where it's been hurtful. (Participant 1)

In fact, although it is clear in government guidance that teachers are key workers (Department for Education, 2020a) there was a great deal of uncertainty around this among participants and a feeling that, even if they were, they were not treated as such. This led to teachers comparing themselves to clearly recognized key workers and feeling disheartened by what one participant described as “*not much grace shown [to teachers]*” (Participant 6).

Beyond this confusion about their key worker status, participants were angered and depressed by the school ‘reopening’ narrative. They expressed outrage that the media was pushing for them to go ‘back to work’ when, in reality, teachers have been working — either from home or in school with key workers’ children and vulnerable pupils — throughout the

pandemic. Some schools had even stayed open at weekends and during the school holidays as a contribution to the national effort to support the NHS.

I don't think people really appreciate the fact that we've been open every single day, bank holidays included. And so I feel that that is something that's very much lacking and nationally, I feel that we've had a bit of a tough deal in that situation. (Participant 3)

Unsurprisingly, this amplified the perceived injustice of the “*lazy, lazy teachers*” narrative. As Participant 21 put it: “*If they wanted me to go on holiday at full pay, they should have said that. That would have been lovely.*” Many concluded that they are easy targets and that teachers are often used as scapegoats, or political footballs, and that ‘teacher bashing’ is not new. One teacher, close to retirement, commented that:

It wasn't until the scientists waded in and said, in actual fact it isn't safe, that they backed off. But ... very quickly the tabloid press turn on teachers ... you know, it's a constant story I think, over my career. (Participant 8)

In terms of how negative public opinions about the teaching profession made them feel, teachers reported feeling hurt, under-appreciated, under immense pressure, and manipulated. Many described a decision to ignore the media, in the interests of self-preservation. As Participant 7 put it: “*You shouldn't read anything because you could get horribly depressed and angry ... If you are a Twitter user, oh my goodness, you could be torturing yourself.*”

In spite of this raft of negative feelings, expressed by all participants, they also reported some positive feelings about how well those teachers who had appeared in the media had represented the profession, and how the Unions — even if they got the tone wrong — tried to support them. Finally, they pointed out that schools and teachers have been there for children and families when many other institutions have not, and that they are proud of having provided a service throughout the pandemic. Participant 4 said: “*Everything else is*

shut. The social services are shut, the children's centre is shut, the hospital is, you know, you can only go if the GP's shut ... we are still open". They retained a sense of optimism that, at some point, their contribution may be realised and appreciated. *"And, you know, the fact that we feed children and we care for them. I think there has been an eye-opening appreciation [of] how much schools do other than teach"* (Participant 20). In the meantime, however, the prevailing sense captured by this theme is that teachers have been unfairly treated, and that this hurts individual teachers as well as the teaching profession.

Theme 3: Voiceless and disrespected

Theme 3 focuses on the relationship between the teaching profession and the government and makes clear that bridges need to be built. Participants' comments suggested that the already strained relationship between policymakers and the profession has been stretched even further during COVID-19 and that teachers are angry with the government, feeling unheard, disrespected, and *"done to"* (Participant 7).

Participants expressed a shared view that the UK Department for Education (DfE) has not consulted with them and has shown little interest in hearing their views. Instead, they have relied on a small in-group, leading to accusations of cronyism.

I think they still think that they know it all and ... they've got a collective body of people that they like ... who advise them in ways that they like, and they carry on taking that and anybody else who disagrees is ... of no value or importance. (Participant 4)

Participants said that policymakers have shown no trust in teachers' expertise and that this has led to a lack of joined up thinking and a raft of poorly considered policies which are harmful to pupils as well as staff because they are unfeasible in practice. They reported feeling that policymakers neither respect nor care about teachers and that government disrespect has been particularly manifest in the way in which the DfE has communicated with the profession throughout the pandemic. Teachers, particularly members of senior leadership

teams, expressed strong criticism of the timings of DfE communications and the fact that policies were announced to them at the same time as the public.

So no, I don't feel listened to. I don't feel that the guidance is clear. I don't feel that I want to sit and listen to a daily update, an update on the BBC, to find out what I'm supposed to be doing as a leader. We should be being communicated with before the public hear it.

(Participant 7)

Furthermore, they perceived DfE communications to be confused and confusing, often contradicting guidance from Public Health England.

There's basically been a kind of edict from the DfE every day or two. And ... that often contradicts the previous one, or gives additional information that may or may not clarify or may or may not confuse what they've been given. (Participant 13)

This perceived lack of respect for their expertise and time led participants to conclude that the government does not see them as a profession and has no interest in their wellbeing. There was a sense that they have come to expect this, over many years of being treated as a “political football” (Participant 4), but feel let down because, in the context of the pandemic, they wanted leadership: “we all wanted to get to a point where we were having reasonable, well thought-out guidance. That's what we wanted. That's what we needed, and we weren't getting it”. (Participant 2). Some participants expressed sadness that a disrespectful and non-inclusive approach means that the period of lockdown represents a wasted opportunity: “I think we've wasted this opportunity to, to address ... the good things and the not so good things in schools and in teaching, and we've ... missed that opportunity for a teacher's voice in all of this”. (Participant 2)

It was very clear across all interviews that teachers feel their relationship with government is dysfunctional, or broken, and that they do not feel they have a voice in how education policy has been made in England either during COVID-19 or prior to it.

Theme 4: Appreciated locally

However, participants said that they do feel valued by their own school communities. It was clear that almost all participants felt more highly valued than ever before by their pupils' parents. For example, Participant 14 joked: *"we've had a message saying I can't believe you've not throttled my child ... that really made me chuckle."* Some reported that the home-school relationship had been strengthened. As Participant 11 put it:

Before I think there was that thing where 'you get six weeks holidays and get holidays throughout the year and you finish at half three and start at nine' and there was that kind of prejudice around teaching. And now I think that that's starting to shift ... and that it's quite a tough job.

However, a minority of participants expressed a concern that the wave of parent appreciation may not last and, indeed, was already diminishing at the time the interviews took place.

I think they've gone to being quite fed up that their kids are still at home, still needing home-schooling, and I think parents have now switched to thinking teachers should be doing more to support their children learning from home. (Participant 19)

Overall, however, teachers felt very highly valued by the communities they serve. Some also reported satisfaction that some Local Authorities had listened to and supported teachers by not 'reopening schools' on the date set by the UK government, but on a date by which headteachers told them was safe: *"I'm glad that you know, local authorities are listening to teachers and their concerns and you can definitely see an influence there"*. (Participant 17). In this sense, teachers felt valued and appreciated at the local, if not the national, level.

Discussion

Work, including the perception of how one's work is valued, has changed as a result of COVID-19. Teachers, who already felt underappreciated (OECD, 2020), reported pandemic-linked changes in how they believe society, policymakers, and the media value them. The four themes identified in their interviews highlight teachers' anger and frustration about underappreciation from government and media negativity, but also their appreciation for evidence — mainly at the local level — that their profession matters to some.

Teachers were angered by the media's portrayal of them as heroes or villains. It is easy for the media to dramatize situations, especially during a crisis (Llewellyn, 2020). The media's portrayal of teachers often swings between extremely positive and negative (Hansen, 2009), and we observe a similar phenomenon during COVID-19. Despite teachers' clearly expressed understanding that drama 'sells', and their awareness that they can curate their own news consumption, they recognized that negative press for the profession can have a negative effect on them as individuals (L. Hargreaves et al., 2007) and can be a source of mental health difficulties (Gao et al., 2020), which explains why some of our participants chose to disengage. Although the media is an important channel for voicing the concerns of the public and raising awareness, our data suggests that the current portrayals may be having a more negative impact on teachers' personal and professional lives than is necessarily intended.

Furthermore, teachers were confused as to whether they were key workers or not, even though the government included them in the official list of key workers (Department for Education, 2020a). Teachers are also included in a list of occupations known to be significantly at risk of exposure to infection and disease (Baker et al., 2020). In the context of a pandemic, teachers' confusion around their key worker status appears to have led to them questioning whether they or their work is appreciated or valued. At the root of this lies the contrasting treatment of other key workers. In England, the NHS has received weekly claps

of appreciation from the public, children have painted and displayed rainbows to support NHS workers, and critical care workers have been awarded blue badges by the government to mark the nation's appreciation of their work during the pandemic (Wood & Skeggs, 2020). However, no national recognition has been given to teachers. In fact, as our data shows, teachers believe that many people think they have not worked at all. Authentic appreciation of people's work is essential for boosting morale (White, 2014). Thus, prolonged public disregard for teachers' continued work throughout the pandemic may lead to low motivation and commitment and, ultimately, to some individuals leaving the profession (OECD, 2020). Given that high teacher attrition has significant financial, educational, and societal consequences (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hanushek et al., 2016; Sorensen & Ladd, 2020), engaging in steps to recognize teachers as essential workers, and showing appreciation for their work, would be beneficial.

Social problems are being revealed and exacerbated during COVID-19, as is the difficult relationship between government and the teaching profession, especially with recent national decisions leading to teachers feeling voiceless and disrespected. Educational change is linked with emotional responses (A. Hargreaves, 2004) and is known to lower morale and job satisfaction in teachers (Evans, 2000). Our data shows a growing divide between "us" and "them" in the context of educational decisions and change, with teachers feeling the government does not value their expertise enough to consult with them in any meaningful way. Maintaining this hostile emotional distance will not be fruitful for anyone. Open and collaborative conversations are fundamental to closing this distance between the profession and the government. The government has launched consultations regarding how the pandemic has impacted assessments during 2020 and 2021 (e.g., Ofqual, 2020a, 2020b) as well as the education sector more generally (UK Parliament, 2020). More of this type of consultation is needed. There will inevitably be complex decisions to be made as the

pandemic progresses and all parties should seize this opportunity to work together to ensure decisions are grounded in understanding of how schools work in practice.

There is, however, promising evidence that teachers' work is appreciated locally. Our findings support the observation that the closer an actor is to the teacher (e.g., pupils, parents, and local press vs general public and national press), the greater the appreciation of their work (Carlo et al., 2013). Stronger home–school relationships appear to have been forged in some areas during COVID-19 and this presents a fantastic opportunity for schools and families to work more closely than ever moving forward. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1992) ecological systems theory, children have potential to grow within multiple nested and interacting systems, including the home and the school. Positive relationships between homes and schools can have a positive influence on students' academic achievement, as they offer parents the opportunity to participate in school decision-making (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2017). Thus, school, parents, and pupils may all benefit from building systematic strategies to maintain the positive relationships built during lockdown.

Practical Implications

Recognition of teachers' efforts and performance can bolster their morale (White, 2014) and their desire to stay in the job (Ashiedu et al., 2012). Recognition of the need to acknowledge the value of the teaching profession is not new (Carlo et al., 2013; IBF International Consulting, 2013). Increasing salaries has often been proposed as a possible strategy, given that teacher salaries are lower than other professionals with less education (Lortie, 2002), and are correlated with social status (Dolton et al., 2018). However, turning to the case of Finland, teacher salaries are just above the national average yet the profession has a similar social status to physicians and lawyers (Sahlberg, 2015). A similar argument can be made for the cases of Estonia and Lithuania, in which the teaching profession has a good public image yet their salaries are among the lowest in Europe (Carlo et al., 2013). Given the

economic crisis that presents itself with the coronavirus pandemic, salary increases are not likely to be a feasible strategy in the short-term.

Appreciation for the teaching profession can be shown in other ways. The OECD (2020) recommended to policymakers that in order to strengthen the teaching workforce, constructive dialogues between policymakers and the teaching profession must take place, especially on the issue of working conditions. At a time when various assumptions about work are being challenged, including that teachers cannot work from home (Kramer & Kramer, 2020), countries should begin discussions on how teachers' working conditions can be improved (e.g. flexible working arrangements). Furthermore, as educational changes inevitably involve teachers as implementers or recipients of change, providing ways for teachers to participate in shaping national education decisions will be helpful for all parties. Specifically, it will assist teachers to feel that they are enactors rather than victims of bureaucracy (Gratch, 2000), and it will assist policymakers to ensure that national decisions are feasible, appropriate, and effective in diverse contexts (Bangs & Frost, 2012). Given current friction between government and the teaching profession (e.g., Whittaker, 2020), a greater openness to collaboration between the two parties is recommended for effective planning and implementation of national educational strategies and decisions.

Limitations and Future Directions

Teachers often have more negative perceptions of how their profession is valued than is necessarily accurate (Rice, 2005), and it may be the case that our interviews elicited perceptions that are overly negative. Thus, future studies are encouraged to triangulate the data presented here by gathering the views of pupils, parents, and policymakers as well as teacher self-reports. A mixed methods approach (Johnson et al., 2007) may be beneficial, wherein individuals' qualitative responses can be validated against their quantitative responses. Lastly, the data is cross-sectional and was captured during a pandemic, a time of

great uncertainty for all. Thus, a longitudinal comparison of responses at a different point in the pandemic's trajectory as well as beyond the pandemic would be useful.

Conclusion

Teachers, who already felt unappreciated, seem to feel even more so during the coronavirus pandemic. As essential workers, teachers have worked, and will continue to work, to provide education to their students. In doing so, they risk exposure to the virus which, for some, is deadly. Working in an environment with an enhanced risk is, in itself, sufficient reason to acknowledge and appreciate the inherent value of our teaching profession.

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