Beginning teachers' workplace experiences: their perceptions of and use of support

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Abstract
This paper, through a participatory perspective on learning, illuminates the experiences of beginning teachers, drawing on the perceptions of individual teachers. We place the 'subject' of workplace learning research centrally in understanding the relatedness between workplaces and novice employees/trainees. This paper builds on previous work by the authors of 37 semi-structured interviews with 17 beginning teachers in 19 schools aimed it trying to better understand issues of beginning teacher retention. This work explores an application of a framework for evaluating workplaces as from expansive to restrictive learning environments whilst examining individuals' responses to and agency in these environments. In addition to considering how invitational the workplaces were perceived by individuals, a consideration of their personal networks was also made as a way to explore their engagement with workplaces. This revealed networks both internal and external to their schools, and hence a broader view of workplace than is often conceived. Together these analyses allowed an examination of the relatedness between individual beginning teachers and the schools they experienced. This paper focuses on three pre-service teachers selected as those that each at some point considered not committing to the profession, examining their experiences during training in placement schools. We reveal the significance of ontogeny and expectation that individuals bring to the workplace, along with individuals exhibiting different agency. These beginning teachers indicate how individuals can be proactive in creating more expansive learning environments for themselves through the utilisation of personal networks, even when these are not offered. This approach we offer to other beginning teachers to re-evaluate their potential to become empowered as they begin their careers.

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Reinserting the 'subject' to workplace learning research

Much of the attention given to learning in practice settings and integrating those experiences into the curriculum has focused on the qualities of the two social and physical settings (i.e. the academic and the practice), and their respective contributions to learning. Here we focus on how learners make sense of, and integrate, their experiences across these settings, in this case between schools and a university Faculty of Education. In doing so, this paper draws on the experiences of beginning teachers, through a participatory perspective on learning. These individuals trained as secondary Science teachers on a PostGraduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) programme at a University Faculty of Education in the UK between 2005 and 2007. This paper draws on work with a sample of 17 beginning teachers – both pre-service and newly qualified (NQT) – who represented experiences across 19 schools. Through 37 semi-structured interviews these teachers were engaged to ascertain how they interacted with the school contexts in which they worked, with a view to better understanding teacher retention.

A sociocultural perspective is adopted here as a framework for an analysis which refers to earlier work assuming notions of novice professionals participating as apprentices in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Wenger et al. 2002). In this view novice teachers' learning is held to arise through strong, collaborative links between more and less experienced professionals. We argue for a broader view of 'community' than practice settings. This is in line with Evans *et al*'s empirical studies of workplaces which acknowledge the role of 'out of school' and 'boundary crossing' learning opportunities. This study hence adopts concepts of networks, rather than communities, to advance workplaces as sites of learning.

Taking a networking perspective allows a reinsertion of the 'subject' into workplace learning research, salient to understanding how individuals allege to engage with, and construct, knowledge through participation in workplace settings (Billett 2008; Hodkinson & Hodkinson 2003; Hodkinson & Hodkinson 2004). Going beyond arguably limited concepts such as communities of practice (Amin & Roberts 2008; Cornelissen et al. 2006) the focus here is on individuals as active constructive agents in less bounded views of workplaces. This is an attempt to understand the relatedness of workplaces and employees/trainees in the process of learning socially-derived practices such as teaching.

We begin by considering beginning teachers' learning as in need of support, and follow with an exploration of our view of workplace learning as unbounded when viewed from teachers' own experiences. A matrix representing relatedness between individuals' agency and their perceptions of workplaces is then presented, and exemplified through three vignettes. This allows an examination of both individual agency and workplace

responsiveness, whilst reflecting on the role of the university in beginning teachers' workplace learning.

Beginning teachers' learning: a need for support

As teacher educators in a university setting, we support pre-service and qualified teachers in their development, and as they move through into practice. These novice teachers bring recent relevant prior workplace experiences as well as a range of educational achievements. This 'ontogenitical dimension' to learning deserves greater acknowledgment when seeking to understand subsequent workplace participation, because it is central to how these novices experience and learn (Billett 2009). The process of becoming a teacher involves learning through social participation in both formal and non-formal ways. In our context, formal opportunities for support are offered by the Faculty in which they are enrolled. This is through interactions with subject tutors, link tutors (responsible for school-University partnership) and a website interface. Additionally in each school setting formal support is offered through subject mentors, professional tutors and a training programme run for all beginning teachers across a school.

However, learning through other kinds of participation also plays a significant part in becoming a teacher (Hoekstra et al. 2007; Hoekstra et al. 2009), including interacting on a daily basis with both experienced teachers in a school and other novice teachers. Others outside the school are also likely to offer advice and support. In response to advice and reflection on their experiences, novices may make adjustment and modification to their own practice, informed and challenged by their own beliefs and values (Eraut 2007; Hoekstra et al. 2009; Wilson & Demetriou 2007). Novice teachers may learn transformatively through being reflexive: that is they learn through action, reflection, reification (making explicit their learning) and dialogue (Hoekstra et al. 2009; Mansvelder-Longayroux et al. 2007).

Novice teachers also need to develop the capacity to make appropriate judgments in unique circumstances, in a personal response to negotiating what they experience through social engagement (Beckett & Hager 2000). Such negotiation involves teacher 'agency' through the degree to which these novices seek to take control of their lives (Biesta 2008) whilst engaged in working in a school. This interaction can be described as 'agentic' through making directed, effortful and proactive engagement in work practices (Billett 2001). The empowerment possible through such interaction is a claim we evidence and advance in this paper.

Our study was funded by the Gatsby Charitable Foundation, through its interest in furthering understanding as to how beginning teachers might be best supported and retained. In exploring these concerns, gaining a better understanding of their agency, and therefore responses to workplace experiences during training, three research questions arose:

    1. How can we conceptualise beginning teachers' perceptions of their school
       experiences as supportive workplaces?

2. How can taking an explicit networking perspective aid understanding of an individual teacher's response to their workplace experiences?
3. How can taking this integrated workplace-individual approach aid understanding of the dynamic processes of providing appropriate support for beginning teachers?

Addressing these questions requires a consideration of the bases upon which an explanation about personal perceptions and constructions of knowledge in practice settings might be advanced. Consequently, we now consider how views of the workplace and relational aspects of their learning can be conceptualised using notions of personal social networks.

Developing participatory perspectives to consider broader views of workplace

Developing notions of workplace

We began our work by considering the utility of participatory models of workplace learning and how these might be applied to consider the perspective of individuals. Much of the work in this area is derived from an apprenticeship model of participation in communities of practice proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991). More recently others have critiqued this view of individuals developing within a community of practice as too limited (Amin & Roberts, 2008; Cornelissen *et al*, 2006; Evans *et al*, 2006). Evans and colleagues seeking to advance this work raised three criticisms.

Firstly, Evans and team sought to accommodate differences between institutional systems and how different workplaces might affect the experience of apprentices. In response they present a framework to analyse workplace settings, reproduced here as Table 1 with respect to teacher learning. Workplaces are considered on a continuum from restrictive to expansive, on the basis of nine criteria related to learning opportunities and workplace culture. As framed by the authors, these indicate how workplaces offer differing potential for individuals to participate, whilst not going as far as to consider their response to such opportunities. For example, in a restrictive learning environment individuals are conceived to work largely alone, conforming to prescribed normative practice and curricula. However, it should be noted with respect to this judgment, that working alone – say if framed as through inquiry and reflection – should not necessarily be considered a negative activity. By contrast, the framework presents an expansive learning environment as one in which diversity and individual concerns are celebrated, whilst collaboration and mutual support allow for sharing and development of ideas and practice.
[Table 1 here]

Secondly, Evans *et al* (2006) elevated the importance of formal education institutions and beyond-workplace sites of learning in addition to the immediate workplace community as being important to apprenticeship learning. As Granovetter (1973, 1983) suggests, beyond-workplace links can also offer new ideas and alternative perspectives to teachers, which can be used to challenge and help understand school-based experiences. Such roles of offering inspiration and perspective ground the aspirations of support given by teacher training institutions. Discussion of such 'out-of-school' or 'outside' school opportunities offers recognition of a broader conceptualisation of the notion of 'place' in the term

'workplace', more usually limited to the site, buildings and community of the immediate school (also noted by Amin & Roberts, 2008). Here, and consistent with others researching teachers in school-University partnerships and inter-school collaborations, thinking conceptualised in terms of networks rather than communities can be used to frame this broader view of sites for teacher learning (Lieberman 2000; McCormick *et al*. 2010; McLaughlin *et al*. 2008).

Thirdly, Evans *et al*'s work challenges the idea of a linear journey from novice to expert as being too simplistic with evidence suggesting that such linear pathways rarely exist. Instead, as noted elsewhere, personal professional development including career trajectories is often an iterative and meandering process (Fessler 2001). Consequently, when exploring pre-service teachers' experiences in consecutive workplaces as they move from placement to placement, the kinds of ideas that Evans and her colleagues propose are helpful. This is because they accommodate emphasis on personal experience across different social settings, which can in turn be used to account for diverse pathways between being a novice and experienced practitioner. One aspect not accommodated in the model is the potential for individuals to affect the workplace, for example overcoming apparently restrictive conditions. As foreshadowed, the concept of networks is helpful in explaining this process of learning. Networks can account for the rich associations and engagements through which novices negotiate their learning across settings, with the associated need to respond differently in each. An exploration of individual's networking activity might therefore reveal novice teacher agency.

A network approach to workplace learning

A network approach to understanding learning through work is important if individuals are considered to benefit from learning opportunities both within and beyond their immediate workplace. Networks are held to be a way of thinking about the connectivity and interactions between individuals, groups, organisations and, in some variants of network theory, also non-human actants. The educational research literature informing network perspectives does not yet present a coherent theoretical framework because conceptualisations are being drawn from a range of distinct analytical fields such as business, anthropology and sociology (McCormick *et al*, 2010). A particular branch of network theorists considers a network as an entity, for example Lieberman, who sees such networks as providing an organisational structure independent of, yet incorporating schools and/or universities (Lieberman 2000). This 'complete' view of networks, in which ontologically it is assumed that their nature and boundaries can be known, is often applied by social network theorists to studies of organisations (Burt 2001; Hakkarainen *et al*. 2004). On the other hand there is an ego-centric view in which there is no assumption that individuals have oversight of *the* entire network, or even that *an* entire network exists (Wasserman & Faust 1994). If such an ego-centric or personal network approach is taken, ontologically the boundaries of networks can only be revealed in relation to data as collected from individuals.

The latter approach was used in an empirical study of schools' educational networks as part of the UK TLRP funded 'Learning how to learn: in classrooms, in schools and in networks' project between 2002-2005. A network mapping tool was devised for school

practitioners to represent their view of their organisation's network (Fox *et al*, 2007). Even when representing their school's network this tool revealed the nature of personal networks and how individual networking activity was being enacted (Carmichael *et al*, 2006). It appears that using such approaches to considering social teacher engagement can complement the work on communities inspired principally by the work of Lave and Wenger (1991). Communities of practice foreground the value of strong links between teachers for their learning as they engage intensely and for mutual benefit. As indicated earlier we note the work of Granovetter who highlights the value to individuals, teams and organisations of weak links (Granovetter 1973; 1983), showing how it is often the weak links (or 'ties') that bring in new ideas and prevent inertia. Asking about their 'personal networks' allows teachers to reveal both their 'strong' collaborative links, possibly within tightly knit teams and/or communities, as well as 'weak' less regular, possibly even ephemeral connections to others. In taking their perspective, the scope of social interaction – their view of the nature of the workplace - can be illuminated from an individual's point of view.

In keeping with our interest in the agency of beginning teachers we have been influenced by the potential of Nardi *et al* (2000)'s work in advocating that individuals should be conscious and active in creating, maintaining and activating aspects of their personal network. From this point of view the onus and responsibility for using personal networks for personal gain eg. for support, to work on a project, or to develop an idea, reside with beginning teachers themselves rather than their viewing the workplaces as necessarily offering opportunities. This is arguably an emancipatory view for those otherwise being considered novices. As teacher educators this view resonates with our experience that beginning teachers have much to offer their placement schools. Bringing an ontogenitical dimension to this suggests that beginning teachers' personal networks might contain useful connections with those from prior experiences. In the case of career changers in particular we can show how such connections have been used, for example previous industrial experience drawn on to develop both within-class and extra-curricular work in school, and friends from other settings used as confidants offering emotional support (Fox & Wilson, 2009).

Revealing beginning teachers' use of personal networks alongside their perceptions of opportunities available for support allows consideration of a broad workplace as viewed from their perspective. Their use of school and Faculty contacts can be examined with regard to this. This opens the way to consider the potential for proactivity, for beginning teachers to act in ways for their own needs to be met.

The development of notions of individual-workplace relatedness

Evans *et al's* framework as presented in Table 1 provides one way to identify the extent to which workplaces are 'invitational' environments (Billett 2006). Taking an egocentric perspective, drawing on individual accounts (and therefore perceptions of experiences), alongside personal networks (interpreted as teachers' responses to such environments), allows a matrix to be constructed (see Table 2). Within the grid, particular individual-workplace interactions can be identified (Fox *et al*, 2010). The vertical axis presents an interpretation of Evans *et al*'s (2006) framework as represented by the empirical data

from our broader study of beginning teachers (BTs), headed 'BT's perceptions of school support'. It should be noted that this was adapted from the original framework, to allow individuals' sense of each workplace as a learning environment to be reflected, not solely the researcher's. The horizontal axis presents a personal network view of agency framed as the 'BT's approach to support'. We construe both axes as continua rather than categorisations to allow for unique, provisional and transient intersections between individuals and workplaces. As represented, however, these do not convey the dynamic inter-relationship in terms of responsiveness of individual to the workplace and vice versa.

[Table 2 here]

Applying both analyses to an individual's data set enables possible placement within this matrix. Those allocated to the top, left hand corner reveal a 'win-win' situation in which individuals report themselves to be creating opportunities for their learning in addition to being offered a range of forms and locations of support. Individuals allocated to the bottom, right hand corner perceive both limited provision of support and exercise limited agency. What has become apparent from our data is the potential for individuals either to make environments more expansive for themselves or, conversely, not take up opportunities in environments others might consider expansive. The patterns for each individual over time and between individuals raise further questions. Any static product of such mapping, which simply presents the data (as in Table 2), is in itself less productive than an exploration of the dynamic interrelationships it represents. These we explore through vignettes. We recognise that, without ethnographic data collection approaches, these are based on necessarily partial data. Whilst the full evidence base of 17 beginning teachers for this matrix has been presented elsewhere (Fox *et al*, 2010) we now focus on three pre-service teachers. Through reviewing the inter-relationship between their perceptions of the workplace and their use of support whilst on work placement experiences, we explore the processes that resulted in them deciding to commit to the profession. We consider how ontogeny, aspiration and networking proactivity were influential in their retention.

The study: the beginning teachers and their experiences

As outlined earlier the aim of the larger longitudinal study was to understand how beginning teachers used support as a way of exploring why some teachers stayed in the teacher profession and others gave up during their Initial Teacher Education or in their first years of teaching. These three beginning teachers were chosen primarily because they all had, at one point, shown signs of wanting to leave the course or their teaching post. This sample also provided examples of teachers who differed in their networking activity and who were placed in a range of both highly expansive and restrictive school contexts. The case teachers were: Claire, a new teacher followed through from her PGCE into her first post; Dawn and Frank, both postgraduate beginning teachers on the PGCE programme.

Data were analysed both in terms of perceptions of school context, using Evans *et al*'s (2006) expansive – restrictive framework as presented earlier, and the beginning teachers' use of support, both in and out of school. As part of the overall study, semi-structured interviews were carried out termly with Dawn and Frank during their PGCE

training and in Claire's case an additional interview was conducted during her first year of teaching. The interviews probed what the new teachers perceived to be their needs, how they were supported, how they used support, what were their highlights and concerns and with which aspects of their practice they were most satisfied. In addition, Dawn and Frank were part of a larger group who drew network maps of their perceived support. These were generated and reviewed termly.

Claire joined the PGCE course after gaining a degree in medical science and working for 7 years in business. Her decision to apply for teaching arose from dissatisfaction with her former post and a desire to use her science knowledge more directly within her career. Frank was an MChem graduate which means that, in addition to three years at University studying Chemistry, he completed an industrial placement year. Frank also worked with youth groups whilst at University and, on graduating, spent a year working as an outdoor pursuits instructor. Dawn was a New Zealand national, educated to Doctoral level. Dawn moved to the UK 17 years before applying for the PGCE course. She had worked at various levels within the pharmaceutical industry in the UK for 13 years before taking a family career break, now choosing to retrain as a teacher. In the PGCE programme beginning teachers are placed in two schools, in term 1 for 10 weeks and terms 2 and 3 for 20 weeks. The schools are all partner schools within the Faculty of Education's PGCE programme. Table 3 summarises the demographic details of the schools and the beginning teachers' perception of each school using Evans *et al*'s framework.
[Table 3 here]
Transcripts of interviews were firstly analysed using a modified version of Evans *et al* (2006) expansive – restrictive framework. As outlined earlier we took a methodologically ego-centric approach in the study, in which beginning teachers were asked only about their own experiences. We therefore analysed transcripts using the following questions adapted from the framework.
Is there evidence that:
1. Expert and experienced teachers worked collaboratively with new teachers?
2. Expert, experienced and new teachers are mutually supportive?
3. There are opportunities to work beyond the department and school?
4. There is support for variation and scope for innovation in teaching approaches?
5. Teachers focus on teaching and learning as a dimension of normal working practice

Transcripts and network maps were then analysed for evidence of with whom individuals networked (the nodes), their location internal or external to the school and how (the links) support was used (Fox & Wilson, 2009). The three selected beginning teachers' experiences can be summarised in an interpretation of the matrix presented as Table 2. These need to be interpreted in the light of the order the schools were experienced, indicated by the direction of the arrows.
[Figure 1 here]
Whilst Claire considered her first school experience at Eucalyptus restrictive compared to Chestnut and Deodar Schools, her networking in all three workplaces remained limited. Frank experienced Blackthorn and then Acacia School, both considered to offer 'high levels of largely departmental-based support' (see Table 2) but increased his proactivity in terms of seeking support in the second school. Dawn was an active networker in both

Acacia then Fir Tree Schools, but found that whilst Acacia offered, as Frank had found, 'high levels of departmental-based support' she experienced only limited support from individuals in Fir Tree School. None of the schools were recorded as offering 'low levels of support' (see Table 2) and only Chestnut School was wholly expansive, offering 'high levels of school-based support' as outlined in Evans *et al's* framework. Exploration of these experiences and the dynamics between individuals and workplace are now presented.

Beginning teachers' individual experiences

Claire: expressing a desire for more independent support

In Claire's first school placement (Eucalyptus) she reported feeling isolated but was reluctant to draw on support from her mentor outside scheduled timetabled meetings, citing not wanting to 'bother' him. Instead she chose to consult her PGCE peers, another NQT and a teaching assistant, finding them easier to talk to 'more personally.' Beyond the immediate workplace Claire found support at this time at home from her husband, although she reported that he did not find it easy adjusting to her new pattern of working life, and could not always empathise with her experience. Talking to a family member who was a college lecturer was helpful and she maintained some contact with friends from the PGCE course via text or phone. Whilst Claire showed some agency in meeting her own needs in wanting support, her apparent sensitivity to placing demands upon colleagues perceived to be too busy appears to have been restricting her access to what might have been available.

Claire's second placement, in smaller Chestnut School, she found less 'hectic and highly strung' and quickly felt at home, commenting that staff were 'a lot more welcoming'. Here new trainees were introduced in a staff meeting, reflecting the school's emphasis on 'keeping everyone informed about what's going on.' She also reported a highly collegial department:

> 90% of the staff will come in to the staffroom at break time and we all literally sit round the table. There's always cakes, and somebody always makes the coffee – so there's always time for each other and to have a little winge or chat or not school-related stuff at all.

Claire had regular meetings with her mentor, with whom she got on well:

> I think I've been quite lucky … She's super organised, very efficient, willing to answer your questions and she always knew what needed doing when, so it just helps you organise yourself a little bit as well. She never sprung anything on us.

She also found staff willing to listen, answer queries and share resources more generally concluding that 'on a professional level they're all great'. This mutual support was indicative of an expansive learning environment. Additionally having another trainee in the department to 'sound off to' on occasions was also appreciated although Claire continued to be reluctant in approaching individuals because of 'how busy everyone is'. This reluctance only made her personal insecurity more entrenched.

> I don't want to look like I'm always seeking approval all the time… you do need somebody to give you a bit of a boost your ego – but you don't want to look like, 'Oh please tell me I'm

really good'… or sound needy.

Whilst not wanting to be judged as 'needy' she also wanted reassurance that she was performing well. Even when given positive feedback she still appeared to lack confidence.

> Sometimes I think I've got no idea how well I'm doing – I mean my report might be… good but maybe I'm a bit sceptical and I think, 'Well, they just do that to make it sound good; how am I *really* doing?'

Claire's first teaching appointment was at Deodar School, a large community school near her home. Claire explained how, as in her first placement, early familiarization had helped her to settle in easily:

> Well the start was pretty good actually because I went in this time last year… and I was in for a few days and in for the end of year lunch… and the guy who is second in department, he will be head next year, he's super-organised and he was able to give me my timetable, my class list, all the software that I'd need, you know, everything. So I did a lot of work with that in the holidays so when I started I felt a lot easier about things so it was really easy to settle in.

She immediately felt part of the team developing a sense of belonging, which strengthened both staff and student motivation:

> There were a lot of new staff [last] September including a new head of department,...but we've come together really well – [in] March we moved into a brand new science block...The building itself… was a really horrible place and the kids didn't like it and I think over the years it meant that the kids just really hated science for that reason. Since we've moved over, their attitude is just gradually turning round – it's just all round lots better, it's really good.

She found the acting head of department enthusiastic, friendly, and approachable. Additionally she found two other beginning teachers, both in their second year of teaching in the department, particularly helpful, and drew on friendships with NQTs in other departments with whom she had prior connections. Claire was conscious that she was continuing to display reserve in her relationships with other staff, preventing her from developing relationships socially:

> I don't meet anybody outside of school, even though they've just started going for a drink after school on Fridays in the last few weeks. I do really like everybody - I think I put a bit of a shield up with people, maybe I don't allow myself to be as friendly as I should…

During the year, support outside school diminished as Claire's husband found it difficult to reconcile the amount of time she was spending on work-related activity. She was finding competing demands increasingly difficult to manage and began to look for alternative posts carrying a lighter workload. Claire acknowledged that when difficulties arose, she tended to be a 'battle through on my own type person' and so remained resistant to seeking support. Her anxiety built until she finally alerted her head of department. She was pleasantly surprised to find him to be supportive in both understanding the pressures that she was facing, and affirming her value as a member of the team. Claire cited not raising her needs earlier as a result again of not wishing to be judged and found wanting:

> I don't want anyone to judge me...Sometimes I just want someone to listen and offer a metaphorical hug or pep talk! And someone who has time to listen, without a whole load of their own issues to worry about.

Claire's account of remaining under-confident but preferring to work in a largely self-contained way until the point at which she found her workload to be unmanageable saw her about to leave the profession, at least as a classroom teacher within her first qualified year. This raises questions about what was needed to allow her to feel less judged and so more willing to be supported in Chestnut and Deodar Schools which, in her view, were being highly supportive. It may have been from clues in this account that being helped to manage her expectations would be helpful, and how to manage her work-life balance. However whether this is something that could be helped in school or picked up by Faculty during training is open to question. Claire was keen to include the suggestion that a non-subject or management related counsellor be available for NQTs.

Frank: needing to belong before committing to teaching

Frank's first placement was in a rural village comprehensive school (Blackthorn). Frank maintained strong social, beyond-workplace connections, which he used to act as sounding boards for his experiences. Frank's parents are former teachers and he reported that he actively sought out their opinions and advice. At the start of his PGCE programme he had concluded that he would be very disappointed if he could not use his experience of sports in his job. He kept in regular contact with two former colleagues from his previous work in an Outdoor Pursuits Centre, now 'close friends':

> I talk to my mum quite a lot about teaching and about how things are going. And I talk to a couple of close friends on the phone. [Annie] is on a PGCE at another University and I know her because we worked together last year so she is on a similar type of trajectory. [Edward] I also met last year. He still works there and I talk to him about what things are like and teaching.

Frank was heavily committed to sporting activities joining University teams and beginning to work towards qualification as a Duke of Edinburgh scheme leader[1]. He also befriended other PGCE students from a range of subject disciplines within his College. Frank's social networking was in part guided by his identity as a sportsperson and partly through those with links to his local church. Frank reported high levels of in-school support in Blackthorn School offered through formal systems for pre-service training, but focussed within the Science department.

His network map, drawn early on in the placement, forms Figure 2. He also found support for planning and feedback from the class teachers with whom he worked, singling out two experienced teachers (Gail and Stan) in the department.

[Figure 2 about here]

Frank also talked about how helpful the technicians in the department were and how he interacted effectively with a small set of Science teachers as part of helping with the after-school Science club. Another trainee in the Science department, Anju, and he shared

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[1] The Duke of Edinburgh award scheme is a national scheme run for young people, often in schools, in which they need to show commitment to and development of community, personal and self-sufficiency skills.

ideas on how to solve problems including recommending which teachers to observe. However, on balance, Frank concluded that members of staff in Eucalyptus School were quite reserved, making him question whether he belonged there:

> I do find that my relationships here are all very professional. It may be just me, but they are not very forthcoming about what they are really like and I do find that a bit frustrating. I don't think it is a problem with [the three staff I have just mentioned] as chatting with them is quite fine…Perhaps it is because I am a student and it is not worth their time.

Frank singled out two trainees from History and English (Mike and Jen) that he knew from other contexts as being particularly supportive. Despite the appreciation of support in school, on balance Frank used external sources of support more. This was both in terms of the 'nuts and bolts' of teaching and career advice, referring often to friends and his parents and including Faculty support both from his tutor and subject specialist lecturer. This may have been linked to his lack of a full sense of belonging to this first school placement but also Frank confirmed that he was still at this time reflecting with his family and friends as to how committed he was to teaching as a career. The lack in being 'forthcoming' Frank referred to of the staff in the department might have been a response to Frank's own reservation at this point.

Frank's second placement was in Acacia School, a large urban comprehensive where he was more explicit about the sort of support he needed, citing classroom management, lesson planning and 'needing to feel part of something that I agree with the values and ideas of'. Time in the Science staff room, with technicians, sharing lifts, attending staff social events and the weekly football sessions were all appreciated social occasions.

> I like the Science department here as a whole. It is quite busy but the staff all support each other. I like what [my mentor] is trying to do with the department and I like that it is not overly organised so you feel that you must be weeks ahead...There is a bit more drama here perhaps but it is definitely less controlling than [Eucalyptus school] - for the staff and pupils.

This flexibility within the department enabled Frank's involvement in pastoral care and in making productive links with the PE department – which extended his professional identity as a keen sportsman.

Even after six weeks of this PGCE placement, Frank's network map (Figure 3) was much denser than that drawn in Eucalyptus School. Whilst similar people were indicated external to the course and to both course and school, these links were reported to be weakening in their importance. Teaching some PE, developing his role as a Duke of Edinburgh scheme leader and playing staff football regularly, helped Frank marry his core interests in sport with his teaching career, as he had originally hoped. Frank was offered a teaching post during this placement and was able to negotiate teaching both Science and PE. The opportunities for Frank to develop his professional identity in a way that matched his aspirations is in part an expression of the school operating as an expansive environment (see Table 1) although it also appeared to be related to Frank's own agency in exploring such boundary crossing.

Dawn: showing agency to support clear aims for practice development

Dawn experienced Acacia School the term before Frank and was placed with another trainee, Georg. From the outset Dawn was very keen to collaborate with other trainees but, although she did some joint planning with Georg, did not have the opportunity to share classes with him. She actively made contacts with the wider PGCE cohort in school during this term, one of whom, Freda, was similarly returning to work after a career break.

> Freda is studying at Canterbury and Simone is on the SCITT1 route. Then there is Amy who is Art, Freda is Maths and Simone is Dance but her tutor is [a Science teacher] so her registration group is here. I have met her through the PGCE group but then when she was in this week and [her tutor] wasn't I was able to give her a bit of a pat on the back and say 'It'll be all right. I had to deal with that last week'…I have met Simone through professional studies but Freda doesn't come to professional studies very much because she is [further on in her course] but I go and seek her out because she is just upstairs.

Dawn went on to team-teach cross-curricular lessons with Amy, an art trainee. This boundary-crossing was counter culture, i.e. not an example of the school offering her such opportunities as such, as the links were entirely Dawn's initiative. However, as with Frank, Dawn found those in the Science department, from the mentor and head of department through to the technicians, supportive in allowing such initiative and it is this aspect of culture that could be classed as expansive. Dawn was not so positive about the teaching she observed. She reported some Science teachers to use a narrow and prescriptive range of approaches but other individuals were much more receptive to her wanting to develop practice such as through group work, role play and practical work in their classes. She particularly valued the feedback and mentoring sessions with her mentor, Gordon and another very experienced teacher, Leanne. Dawn had quickly worked out from talking to the technicians and observing lessons that Leanne was someone she wanted to train with and successfully negotiated this with her mentor;

> The technicians told me that people who have done a lot of lessons with [Leanne] have said that they felt very 'Got at!' but I said that I wanted to do more in that class. I see her feedback as positive as forewarned about these things is forearmed in one sense and on the other, I don't care. How can I possibly know all these details of something I haven't done before.

Here we see Dawn identifying individuals as offering her a more expansive professional learning environment rather than the department (or school) as a whole. In fact beyond the department she found very little support, in particular from pastoral staff with whom she needed to interact in helping a form tutor, and again in particular the Heads of Year.

As in all the placement schools formal support was available for all beginning teachers outside the Science department through weekly professional studies sessions led by a senior leader. These Dawn found useful for learning about school ethos but, in particular, and as with Frank in Blackthorn School, also as a valued opportunity to develop relationships with peer trainees. Beyond individuals in the department she cited these as her next most productive relationships including; Georg, Freda, Simone and Amy in school; Jamie and Serena from the Faculty and Mark, Dominic and Adrian through her College.

> I think the[se relationships] started similarly where you have one conversation and it leads on to another conversation and in this case I think the initiating conversation was that she went to the same school that my children are at school so, again, there is some common ground.

Because of her desire to develop particular pedagogical approaches little modeled within the department it was to these other beginning teachers that Dawn turned, using opportunities to meet with them after professional studies sessions in school and, as Nardi *et al* (2000) advocates, being active in creating opportunities to meet with them, at home or through her College, to facilitate exchange of ideas.

Dawn's second placement was in Fir Tree School; a rural community college. She joined with high expectations of continuing to work with class teachers and trainees to develop her pedagogical interests. In particular she was undertaking a small-scale research project at this time into developing argumentation skills and effective group work. She also wanted to look for further cross-curricular opportunities. On joining the school however, Dawn found very quickly that her pedagogical practices were criticised by, in particular, her mentor and that a set of prescribed expectations were to be imposed on her. Even more so than in her previous school Dawn observed teaching she found difficult to identify with and, in this case, a reluctance to support her in her development of practice. She also found the technicians less well-resourced and knowledgeable than Acacia School. Dawn found that the Science area was not a place she felt comfortable, or even able, to linger to chat to staff. She sought out the central staff room and here found teachers from a range of subjects that she could talk with as well as PGCE peers from across the school (Bryony and Tamsin) with whom to reflect and collaborate. She went on to tutor Sophie, a NQT supply teaching[2] at the school, through her A-level Chemistry exam and developed a particularly strong relationship with Kim, team-teaching in the Maths department with her. These relationships are represented in her network map forming Figure 4.

[Figure 4 about here]

One of the biggest problems Dawn articulated in her reports of limited support from individuals, was the lack of both timely and constructive feedback from the teachers with whom she taught.

> The feedback I get is not helpful in that it rarely says 'You could have tried this or this'.

In the third term, when asked to rank her most needed areas for support, she noted firstly that the school did not cascade expectations of how to interpret the National Curriculum and that lesson planning was difficult in the absence of clear schemes of work, and secondly that she retained difficulties in resolving ideological differences about classroom management and student motivation with what she saw in the school. In some ways therefore Dawn considered the school even less than restrictive in the sense of it not even prescribing and imposing approaches (see Table 1). She also experienced practical problems such as accessing resources available on the school's intranet and access to the Science block between lessons. For dealing with IT issues she turned to other teachers such as;

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[2] Supply teaching in the UK is where teachers are bought in, often via a personnell agency, to cover teaching due to staff absence.

> [Matthew] because he is not a real person either[3] so he is often in the staff room and he is Geography and History and [Larry] is Geography too and he has been really useful with IT things too. He is the one who often comes up with little ideas to sort things out for me like that.

To solve the access problem she found a Science teacher who did not spend time in the Science area but who would lend her a key;

> I didn't find [Samuel] for a long time as he feels similarly unwelcome in the science tea room. He too is a Chemist and he has folders and he has keys but he doesn't go into the Science area, he sticks to the main staff room. He is my 'main man' now so I can go from there and get into the Science block.

In all cases of her need for support, Dawn reported she needed to make the effort to resolve these. In addition to those across the school who were helping her, by term 3 she cited that her greatest support was from outside school: her sister-in-law, Faculty staff and Georg (now in another school). When Dawn was visited 7 weeks into this placement she was considering leaving the course and had been relying heavily on tutor and subject lecturer support from the Faculty (refer to Figure 4). Discussions took place between tutor, mentor and professional tutor to try and gain a clearer understanding of the issues that Dawn reported and the expectations of her. Dawn was able to refocus on her values and hopes for teaching, which she did by the conscious and proactive networking with identified individuals across the school outlined above.

A summary of these experiences
These three vignettes show the complexities of alignment between individuals and their workplace use of support. We have seen how all three beginning teachers considered leaving the profession during these early years. That they have not done so has been an interaction between their decisions to exert agency and their workplaces' responses to them; workplaces being considered in a broader sense than just the school itself. In Claire's case, staying required her to admit she was not coping with the workload and her head of department being able to change this to accommodate her. In Frank's case, he needed the school to accommodate the social and sporting aspects to his identity, making him feel that he belonged. Whilst gaining support from a wide social professional network, this appeared largely due to Frank's own proactivity. Crucially his decision to take up a post at the school was related to the school responding flexibly to his aspirations. Dawn came from a scientific background with clear views of the teaching and learning she wanted to explore and was disappointed in both schools to find little of this practice modeled. She developed a cross-curricular approach, making links with teachers and trainees both within and beyond school in a way that was counter-culture. Whilst this was accommodated in her first school, she needed to draw on Faculty staff in the second where she found the workplace too difficult to reconcile her beliefs with the support she was being offered.

Exploring the significance of these unique individual-workplace accounts

Reviewing the accounts of the three beginning teachers represented, we reflect on aspects of their unique workplace experiences that might have more general pertinence to those trying to understand and support these teachers so furthering beginning teacher retention (our final research question). First, we highlight the importance of ontogeny and the impact of expectations and aspirations on an individual's agency. Second, we raise the significance of considering how individuals perceive workplace contexts, illuminated by how the same individual can respond differently in different work settings. Third, we consider the significant role played by the broader workplace beyond the school setting, including various aspects of university Faculty support, before moving on to consider the implications of these findings.

First, in terms of ontogeny, these three beginning teachers reflect three different starting points for teaching. Claire applied mainly through dissatisfaction with her previous career, Frank was exploring teaching as only a possible career and Dawn changed career with very clear aspirations for her practice as a teacher. A strong desire to work socially with others in the profession inspired Frank to commit to teaching in Acacia School and found Dawn the support she needed, even when she found this lacking in Fir Tree School. Claire preferred to be self-sufficient as a beginning teacher and was least able to cope with the pressures experienced. It therefore appears important that the workplace in some way allows for beginning teachers' aspirations to be accommodated if they are to feel 'at home' and commit. The relationship between individual and workplace is in fact a dynamic. Whilst we acknowledge that individuals bring expectations and experiences it has been interesting to outline how workplaces, at least from the beginning teachers' perspectives, responded to meet these aspirations. We recommend that those in schools charged with supporting beginning teachers might more fully consider what pre-service teachers bring to the workplace. We have shown how Nardi and colleagues would advocate that beginning teachers should be encouraged to draw on prior relationships to support them with their current needs. They should also be encouraged to be proactive about making new connections in their workplaces to meet these needs, being agentic in making the workplace work for them. This could be both in terms of finding the personal emotional support required, but also for developing their professional knowledge and understanding, especially where those links are with other educational professionals or subject-related connections. A summary of the sources, in terms of network nodes, and forms of support, in terms of function, used by the three beginning teachers in this study forms Appendix 1. Exploring the nature of these relationships (links) in terms of their development and purposes is ongoing work for the authors.

Second, we conclude from these three vignettes that it appears possible to increase the degree of an individual beginning teacher's agency during their training despite different perceptions of contexts. Teachers such as Frank and Dawn were able to use their own networking activities to meet their particular needs despite perceiving their workplaces as other than expansive. We also note, as indicated by Evans *et al* (2006), that this need not be seen as linear development and show that this is rather a dynamic between individual effort and workplace responsiveness. We note that use of the matrix proposed is itself not

sufficient to represent this dynamic. In the broader study, in which workplaces were not as flexible as Acacia School was to Frank and more similar to Dawn's experience in Fir Tree School, decreasing agency was also reported by individuals. In these cases Faculty staff were relied on heavily in order that these beginning teachers complete the course (Fox *et al*, 2010).

Nardi and colleagues (2000) advocate that beginning teachers should be advised to think more consciously about using their personal network links very explicitly to solve their needs. They suggest strategically creating a personal network, working at maintaining links through keeping in touch and activating parts of this network to solve workplace problems. In Claire's case this might see teacher educators encouraging her to take responsibility for finding those who might offer her the alternative perspectives and advice she sought.

It has been shown that, as predicted by a novice-expert model of apprenticeship, learning from and with experienced teachers is indeed valued. Other established teachers feature strongly in these beginning teachers' accounts (Appendix 1). However this was only the case as long as feedback was constructive and timely and the beginning teachers were allowed scope to experiment with their practice. For meaningful support to be given it appeared that both formal forms of mentoring and tutoring together with a more social and responsive opportunity for dialogue was what was appreciated. This valued dialogue was often to be found in interactions with peer trainees and other beginning teachers. Sometimes such interaction was offered by a school, as in the case of 'muffins and sandwiches' at Blackthorn School, and sometimes was rather 'engineered' by trainees, such as through sharing lifts or seeking out peers in staff rooms or related to professional studies sessions. It should be noted that due to the bias of this study towards exploring the social dimension to learning the role of reflection and personal inquiry in response to a workplace has been under-explored.

Third, it was noted in all cases that access to external sources of support was valued (see Appendix 1). This shows how, as predicted by Granovetter, Faculty tutors and peers were used for inspiration (termed cognitive support) to complement that gained within school. Much of the emotional support, coming often from family and friends, appeared particularly useful if these sources had some appreciation for the demands of the teaching profession. Absence of this kind of support, or unwillingness to use support available in school and in Faculty, compounded problems such as in Claire's case. In some instances, where the school was not perceived to be providing clear enough expectations or ideas for practice, beginning teachers actively sought Faculty support. This was either from lecturers as 'experts' or from peers on the course with whom respected relationships had been developed. Such peers were important in the social dimension to their support, offering chances to spend time together and compare notes. It would be interesting to research on what basis these peer relationships had developed as their significance to the beginning teachers was clear. Faculty support could also be brought in more formally in cases where practice concerns were noted by the school.

To address our final research question about the implications of exploring the interplay between individuals and their workplaces we highlight a number of aspects for the beginning teachers, their teacher educators and those in schools. It seems useful for the beginning teachers to be encouraged to be explicit about their expectations and aspirations and to share these with those in schools. As articulated by Claire, familiarisation with each placement appears an important phase and can be used to reflect on how early impressions of a particular school as a workplace relate to previous workplace experiences, if any, and to individual aspirations. It may be that using a framework such as presented in Table 1 could raise expectations of what an ideal workplace might look like if it is to act as an expansive learning environment for their development. It will be important that this awareness-raising is also carried out with beginning-teachers' placement schools if the mismatches of expectation and experience outlined in this paper are to be avoided. This may stimulate debate in some schools as to how well they match the characteristics for an expansive workplace. In any case, the aspects featured in the accounts presented here as being particularly important to fulfil are fourfold: making trainees feel that they belong; supporting their experimentation with practice; allowing them opportunities to boundary-cross; and allowing that they need alternative perspectives without being judged.

This study has revealed how beginning teachers should be encouraged by teacher educators to take control of their lives (Biesta, 2008) and, by being effortful (Billett, 2001), go some way to meeting their learning needs themselves, rather than relying on their workplace. They should be encouraged to be proactive about making new connections in their workplaces to meet their professional needs, draw on Faculty personnel and use their own existing contacts. The findings of the study in many ways therefore overturn an uncomplicated view of these beginning teachers as passive novices. It appears that some beginning teachers feel better equipped and motivated to do this whilst others need encouragement and help in developing what might be considered networking skills. This might be by being encouraged to build relationships with staff in other departments (as Frank), collaborating with other trainees across subjects (as Dawn) and taking advice from 'outsiders' (as Dawn and Frank). Conversely schools should be encouraged to acknowledge the value of these broader networks of support and, in line with developing more expansive learning environments for all staff, encourage and facilitate their use.

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Table 1: Framework for an analysis of sites for teacher learning taken from Figure 3.1, p.53 in 'Improving Workplace Learning' (Evans et al. 2006)

EXPANSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT	RESTRICTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
Close collaborative working with colleagues	Isolated, individualist working
Out-of-school educational opportunities, including opportunities to reflect and think differently	No out-of-school time to stand back. Only narrow, short training programmes.
Explicit focus on teacher learning as a dimension of normal working practice	No explicit focus on teacher learning except to meet crises or imposed initiatives
Supported opportunities for personal development going beyond school or government priorities	Teacher learning dominated by government and school agendas
Colleagues are mutually supportive in enhancing teacher learning	Colleagues obstruct or do not support each others' learning
Opportunities to engage with working groups inside or outside of school	Work restricted to 'home' departmental teams within school
Opportunity to extend professional identity through boundary-crossing into other departments, school activities and schools	The only opportunity to boundary cross associated with major change of job
Support for variations in ways of working and learning, for different teachers and departments	Standardised approaches to teaching and teacher learning are prescribed and imposed
Teachers use a wide range of learning approaches	Teachers use a narrow range of learning approaches

Table 2: A matrix for mapping the relationship between teacher agency and perception of support available in a workplace[i]

BT's approach to support / BT's perceptions of school support	Highly proactive networker	Active networker	Limited networker
High levels of school-based support			
High levels of department-based support			
Limited support - from individuals			
Low level of support			

Table 3: School details for the placement schools

School	No. Science staff	No. pupils on roll	Age Range	Demographics of the school	Perception of new teachers **Expansive - Restrictive**
Acacia	16	1825	11 -18	Co educational large urban comprehensive school	Expansive (Dawn and Frank)
Blackthorn	12	1345	11 -16	Co educational rural village comprehensive school	Expansive (Frank)
Chestnut	10	650	13 -18	Co educational rural comprehensive school	Expansive (Claire)
Deodar	15	1500	11 -18	Co education large community school	Expansive (Claire)
Eucalytpus	15	1650	11 -18	Co educational large inner-city multi-cultural comprehensive school	Restrictive (Claire)
Fir Tree	13	1050	11 -16	Co educational rural community comprehensive college	Restrictive (Dawn)

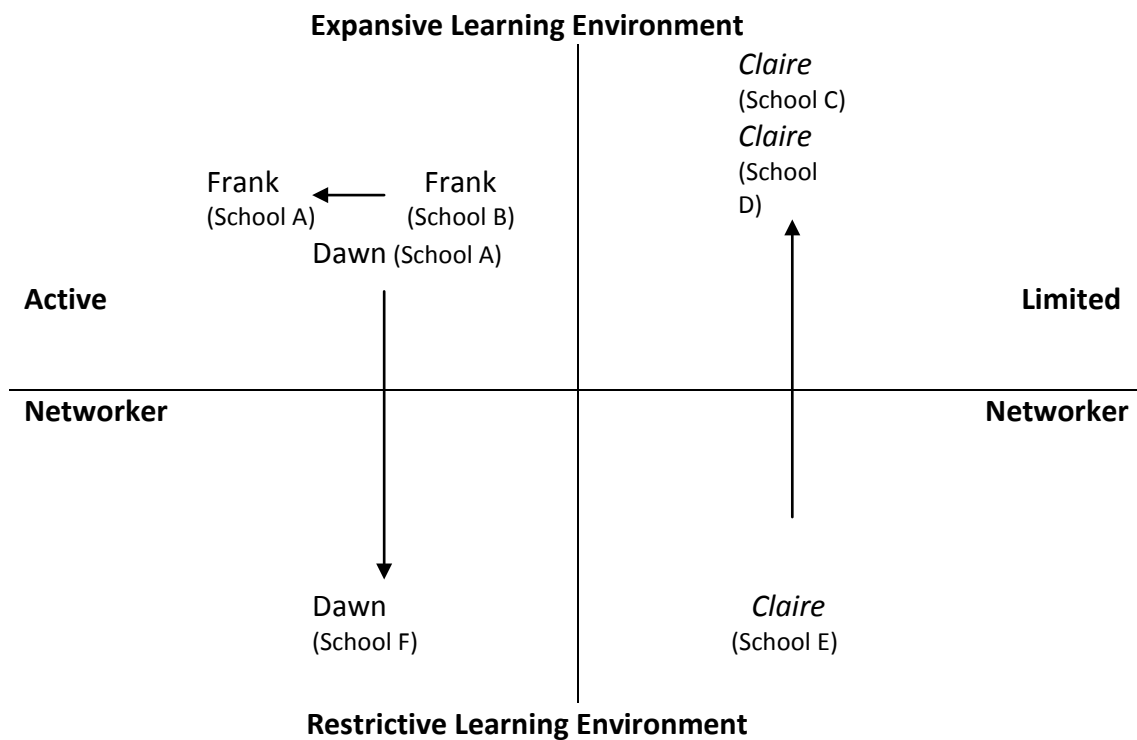*Figure 1: Situating the three cases within the analytical matrix*

Expansive Learning Environment

Claire
(School C)

Claire
(School D)

Frank ← Frank
(School A)   (School B)
Dawn (School A)

Active   **Limited**

Networker   **Networker**

Dawn
(School F)

Claire
(School E)

Restrictive Learning Environment

Figure 2: Frank's network map - week 4 of the placement in Blackthorn School
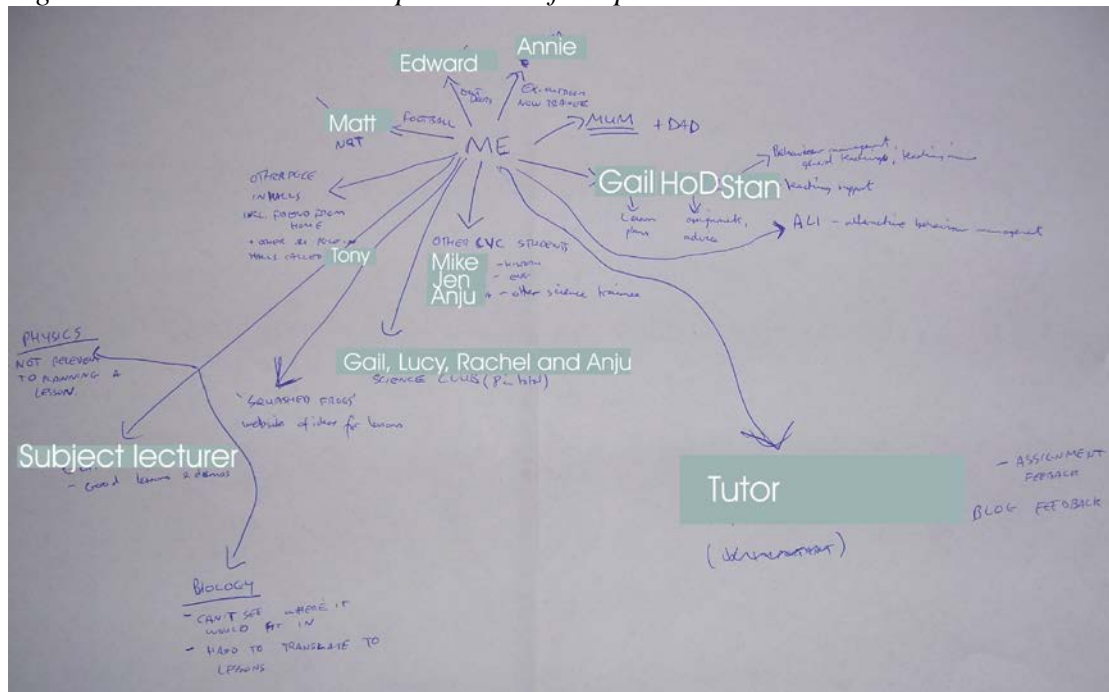

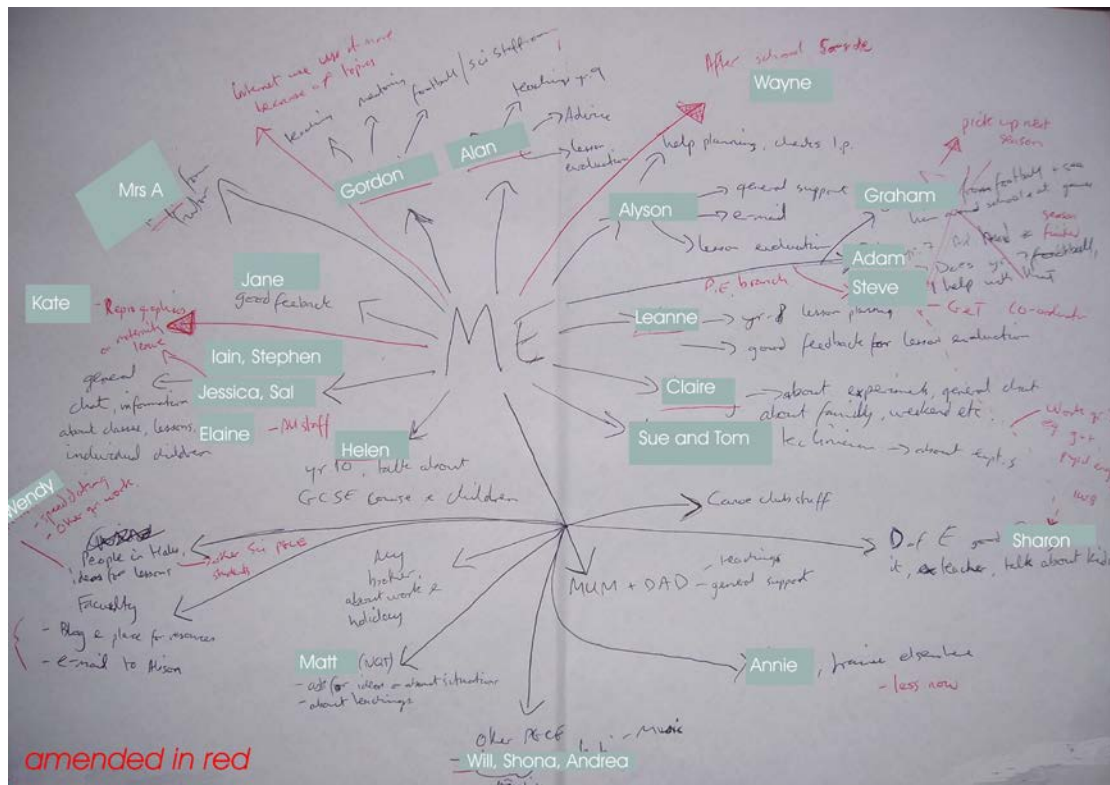*Figure 3: Frank's network map - week 6 in Acacia School; amended week 14.*
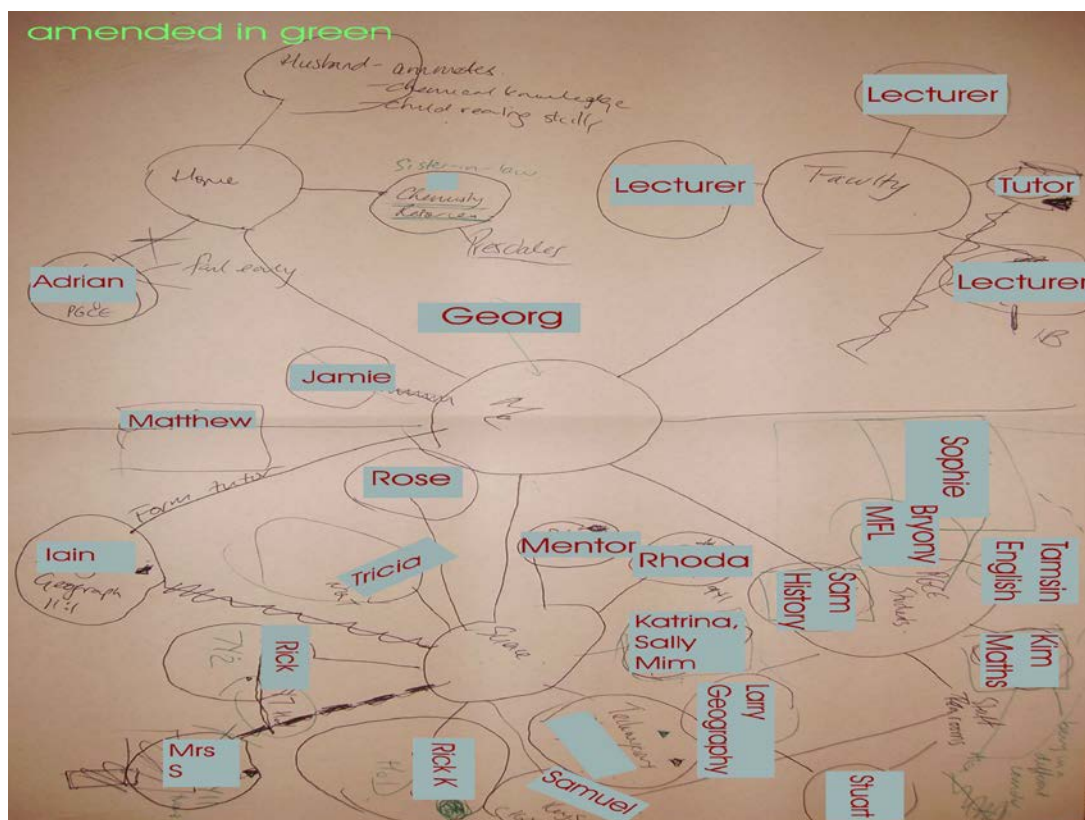
Figure 4: Dawn's network map - week 7 in Fir Tree School; amended week 13.

School / Term	In school			Beyond School Networks		
	Ideas / Cognitive	*Support / Social*	*Support/ Affective*	*Ideas / Cognitive*	*Support / Social*	*Support/ Affective*
Emma						
School E / Term 1	None	New teachers Teaching assistants	None	Teachers in the family University tutor University Peers	Other PGCE students	Partner
School C / Term 2	Mentor and other teachers	Mentor and other teachers	Mentor	Teachers in the family University tutor University Peers	Other PGCE students	Partner
School D/ First Post	Middle leaders Colleagues	Colleagues	Middle leaders	Teachers in the family University tutor University peers	Other new teachers	
Frank						
School B / Term 1	Mentor and other teachers	Mentor and other teachers	Limited	University tutor University peers	Former outdoor pursuit colleagues Sporting teams PGCE peers Church activities	Parents (also teachers)
School A / Term 2	Mentor, other teachers and technicians	Mentor and other teachers in science and PE departments	Mentor and other teachers	University tutor University peers		Parents (also teachers
Dawn						
School A/ Term 1	Mentor and other teachers	Mentor and other teachers	Mentor and other teachers	University tutor University peers	Other PGCE students	Partner
School F/ Term 2	None Self-initiated , cross-department collaboration	Other new teachers in the school IT technical support	Negative feedback	University tutor University peers	Other PGCE students	Family members University tutor

Appendix 1: Sources of school support and network nodes