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Context, Consciousness, and Caution: Teachers of history and the exploration of sensitive and controversial issues in practice.

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Abstract

This thesis is about primary and secondary school teachers of history. Previous research conducted by Kitson and McCully (2005) indicates that there is a reluctance by some teachers to engage with the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. In response to this, I have explored teachers' experiences of teaching such issues in state schools in England since 2010. Turner Bisset's (1999) research on the knowledge that teachers draw on when teaching history has been used as a theoretical frame and I have considered how this knowledge is used in the context of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. A bounded case (Stake, 1995) was adopted as a methodological approach. The research was conducted in two phases. In Phase One, two focus group interviews were undertaken, and six unstructured individual interviews were held in Phase Two. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data drawing on Turner-Bisset's (1999) research as structure. Individual interviews were presented through a series of personal responses. The research demonstrated how the context of the school is fundamental in influencing teachers' practice, particularly in light of political changes in society. Self-surveillance was identified as a key strategy, adopted in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Recommendations are made relating to policy and the need for clearer guidance for teachers to support them with their practice. Further recommendations relate to supporting trainee teachers through embedding opportunities for teaching about sensitive and controversial issues in courses, as well as the establishment of school-based champions to support a network of good practice.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

1.1 Starting with the self

I believe that recognising who you are and your unique experiences is essential in understanding how your position shapes any research, be it consciously or unconsciously. As such I present myself as a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010) who identifies with: the importance of listening to and representing the voices of the participants, committing to ethical principles through all decision making, and realising social justice through education. The term socially conscious researcher will be discussed further in Chapter 3 and will be referred to throughout this thesis. However, before this, it is vital for the reader to have some understanding of my positionality and how my previous experiences have informed this research.

Griffiths (1995) uses an analogy of a spider's web to present a theory of identity; this was particularly useful for considering the impact of my own identity on this research project. Griffiths (1995, p. 2) states that identity is complex and therefore,

> "the metaphor of the web can throw light on the idea of the self and its politics. It, too, is made of nearly invisible, very strong threads attached to the circumstances of its making and under the control of its maker".

This has led me to consider how my own 'web' has been constructed. I have always considered myself to be a feminist and this was in contrast to my family background where my parents identified with traditional roles. My mum was a 'stay at home mum' to myself along with four other siblings. My dad was the primary breadwinner. My family is very female-dominated with three out of my four siblings being female. Being the youngest sibling with three older strong, hard-working and independent sisters, contributed to the construction of myself as a feminist. Growing up in South Wales during the Miners' Strike also contributed to this; women's voices were starting to be heard, and growing up in a Labour heartland certainly contributed to my sense of social justice. During my time as a primary school teacher, it was no accident that I sought to teach in areas with high levels of social deprivation, as my core beliefs about teaching as a form of social justice were so closely related that I was unable to separate them. Staying true to my core values of social justice is part of my moral and ethical purpose and therefore permeated all aspects of my personal and professional life. There have been times where I have

lived "in-between the spaces of the web" (Griffiths 1995, p. 23) but have found that returning to my values and beliefs is very much part of my identity.

Before moving to the role of a teacher educator in a university setting, I had been a primary school teacher in the South Wales Valleys. High levels of social deprivation were prevalent in the schools I taught in, thus influencing my values and beliefs about education as a form of social justice. During this time, I specialised as the humanities coordinator, drawing on both my passion for humanities and my subject knowledge of the discipline that derived from my first degree, which focused on history and geography. While working in these schools was challenging at times, my beliefs about education allowed me to work with children who were engaged and interested in the world in which they lived. The rationalisation of the coal industry had decimated the South Wales Valleys. These children were often the third generation from families not to have secured employment. The children often had political beliefs that would spill over in the teaching, particularly in history and geography. I believe that it was working with these children that initially led me to consider not only the purpose of education, but how to create an environment in which sensitive and controversial issues could be discussed in a manner that reflected the experiences of the children in the particular school context. I aimed to make a connection between these individuals and their environment through my teaching of history.

My interest in how to tackle sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom began to change and develop as I moved into the role of a teacher educator. Both my subject knowledge and working with students from different backgrounds made me consider approaches and how different issues may be sensitive or controversial to groups of students. My research interest is therefore inspired by working with passionate and enthusiastic trainee teachers, teachers and children, who have both challenged and developed my thinking about the teaching of history and sensitive and controversial issues. I am particularly interested in how teachers navigate the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues and how this relates to their school context.

The complexity of engaging with such personal reflections and experiences has contributed to my researcher identity. My experiences are unique, and as such, I recognise how the research process and each experience has influenced my view of the world. In the same way, I am aware that it will also influence my view of others and so the need for reflexivity is an essential part of my research: recognising and acknowledging throughout my positionality which is

influenced by my unique experiences and perspective. Having reflected on these experiences, I will now introduce the context of this research, outlining its context and focus.

1.2 Introduction to the research

This thesis is about teachers of history in England from Key Stages 1- 5 (age 4-18) and their experiences of teaching sensitive and controversial issues, primarily through the history curriculum. Since 2010, there have been several education policy changes in England. This thesis will consider the following policies: The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012); The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013); the White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) and The Prevent Strategy (2015). These policies have shaped the current education practice and provided new challenges for teachers when engaging with sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. One particular challenge has been changes made to the Teachers' Standards in 2012 (see appendix 1). This saw the introduction of Fundamental British Values which The Department for Education issued non –statutory guidance on how to develop these values in school through exploring children's social, moral, spiritual and cultural understanding (SMSC). British Values are defined as: democracy; the rule of law; individual liberty and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith (DfE, 2012). The introduction of British Values to the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) has increased the expectation of teachers to explore issues that may be sensitive and controversial. Mansfield (2019) argues that this has fallen largely within the remit of teachers of history, therefore relevant to be explored within this research project.

1.3 Terminology

There is some consensus within literature that there are no universally held or agreed definitions as what makes a sensitive and controversial issue (Historical Association, 2007), (Oxfam, 2019). While this is a helpful starting point in developing this research project, it is important to acknowledge here that terminology that surrounds the terms sensitive and controversial is applied in a complex way. For example, the Teaching Emotional and Controversial Histories report in (Historical Association, 2007, p.3) provided a working definition of emotive and controversial issues as:

> "The study of history can be emotive and controversial where there is actual or perceived unfairness to people by another individual or group in the past. This may also

> be the case where there are disparities between what is taught in school history, family/ community histories and other histories. Such issues and disparities create a strong resonance with students in particular educational settings."

Within this definition, use is made of the terms emotive and controversial, thus recognising the relationship between emotion and controversy.

Wooley (2010), Oxfam (2019), and The Crick Report (1998) just use the term controversial within their discussion, they do not add the term emotive or sensitive. However, Stradling *et al.,'s* (1984, p. 5) definition is of interest as they state that a controversial issue is an issue that may be politically sensitive, making a connection to the working definition provided by the TEACH report (2007). Similarly, Hand and Levinson (2012) use the terms sensitive and controversial issues within their work. Here, the term sensitive could be viewed as a synonym for the term emotive in as much that being sensitive or emotive is a response that may emerge from the discussion of controversial issues. Furthermore, Brauch, *et al.,* (2019) use the terms 'hot' or 'cold' to relate to sensitive topics which have the potential to trigger powerful responses and have a particular focus on the term sensitive. To add coherence to this thesis, I will be using the terms sensitive and controversial as overarching terms as viewed and enacted by the participants in this study which has been informed by the literature.

1.4 Setting the context of this research

Within the National Curriculum for History (DfE, 2013) it is implied that teachers will need to consider sensitive and controversial issues that emerge through its content. The terms sensitive and controversial issues are complex, and this will be explored in Chapter 2. Previous research by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) found that the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues is not straightforward, and some teachers avoided teaching them. However, this research and more recent research by Brauch *et al.,* (2019) took place in countries that had experienced recent conflict, and it was this conflict that made teaching sensitive and controversial issues challenging. My research, which has taken place since 2010 in England- a country which has not experienced recent conflict- highlights that the teaching of these issues is still incredibly complex. I recognise that the context where these sensitive and controversial discussions take place is crucial. Therefore, this project has been informed by socio-cultural theory considering the work of Rogoff (2017). A key focus within this context is to explore how teachers are consciously aware of how their practice may be viewed by 'others'.

I have also drawn on the work of Turner- Bisset (1999) who identified several knowledge bases that teachers use within the classroom to teach history. I have re-focused these bases to conceptualise a framework of how these relate specifically to sensitive and controversial issues. In Chapter 2 the knowledge bases have been used as an organisational strategy to structure the literature review, starting with an overview of these bases.

In Chapter 3, I present my methodological approach of a bounded case study (Stake, 1995) to explore teachers' experiences. The research was conducted through two phases; Phase One, two focus group interviews and Phase Two- 6 individual interviews. The data was analysed using Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis for Phase 1; this will be presented in Chapter 4. Phase Two will be presented as a series of personal responses in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will provide conclusions to this research, consider limitations and opportunities for future research.

1.5 Research Questions

The research questions for this project are:

Question 1: In relation to history teaching in state schools: How do teachers define the terms sensitive and controversial in relation to history teaching and learning?

Question 2: How does policy impact on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues?

Question 3: What do teachers of history say about the challenges and opportunities for teaching sensitive and controversial issues in practice?

Question 4: How far does the exploration of sensitive and controversial issues in key literature match professionals' experience and practice?

These four research questions have informed how I have approached the research project. The questions were constructed through my engagement with the literature and growing understanding of the complexity in defining the terms sensitive and controversial within the teaching of history and how or if this was reflected in practice. The social and political context of this research dictated that it was important to reflect on the policy for education since 2010 and how this influenced current practice.

1.6 Structure of the thesis

Chapter 1 has outlined the purpose of this research topic. It has explored my positionality, and my values and beliefs about the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. I have shared my research questions whilst providing a brief overview of the research project.

Chapter 2 This chapter has used Turner- Bisset's (1999) research which found that within the teaching of history, teachers drew on several knowledge bases within their practice. Her knowledge bases have been used to provide a structure for the literature review. This was a useful strategy as I recognised the different forms of knowledge that were used within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues and it allowed me to explore relevant research and draw on theoretical positions such as socio-cultural theory (Rogoff, 2017), funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005) and layers of surveillance (Page, 2016).

Chapter 3 This chapter will outline the methodological choices implemented in this research project. My research was situated in the interpretivist paradigm and used a bounded case study (Stake, 1995) as a methodological approach. Methods selected were focus group and individual interviews. The focus groups were carried out at the start of the research and are referred to as Phas e One of the project. The focus groups were followed by individual interviews in Phase Two. I will demonstrate how thematic analysis has been used to analyse data, primarily using Braun and Clark's (2016) five-step analysis. The findings from the individual interviews are presented as a series of personal responses.

Chapter 4 This chapter will return to the research of Turner – Bisset (1999) and the data analysis will be discussed using knowledge bases. This has been selected as an organisational strategy that will provide greater coherence to the complexity of teachers' practice in relation to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Chapter 5 This chapter will present a series of personal responses from the individual interviews- Phase Two of the research. Here the data and the analysis of the data will be presented together as personal responses demonstrating the interconnectedness of the knowledge bases in practice.

Chapter 6 The final chapter of the research will draw together my findings, and answer my research questions. In doing so I will identify my unique contribution to knowledge in this field. I will acknowledge the limitations of the research and consider how this will impact on my future practice both as a researcher and a teacher educator.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction to the Literature Review

Any discussion of knowledge and understanding is complex. In order to make sense of the literature surrounding this thesis, I have drawn on the work of Turner – Bisset (1999) which will be discussed in this chapter. From here I will consider how I have adapted this work in order to structure the literature review.

A starting point in this research has been to reflect on my own experiences of supporting teachers and trainee teachers to develop their competency and confidence in teaching history. As part of this, I have needed to consider subject knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1985) and how these are manifested in classroom practice. The need for me to deconstruct my own understanding of knowledge has been essential if I am to fully understand what is happening when teachers are teaching sensitive and controversial issues. My understandings have been influenced by these experiences and my Masters in Education dissertation which considered the work of Turner- Bisset (1999), who identified a number of knowledge bases that teachers use in their everyday practice in relation to the teaching of history. While my Masters research focused more generally on the teaching of history, within the findings I had some further thoughts about how these knowledge bases could support research surrounding teachers' experiences of sensitive and controversial issues.

Research by Kitson and McCully (2005) demonstrated how a continuum could be used to identify teachers' practice in relation to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Their research broadly highlights how teachers can adopt characteristics within their practice where they are identified as avoider, container or risk taker when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Turner- Bisset (1999) and Kitson and McCully's (2005) research are both important in developing a deeper understanding of the fusion between the knowledge bases that teachers adopt within their teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. These key pieces of research will help me answer my research questions and further advance insights provided by these models. My research will consider how these models are shaped by the current policy for education and how useful they might be in framing different approaches to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues- bringing greater clarity to the tensions teachers face in engaging with these issues.

Turner- Bisset's (1999) research was conducted after a raft of changes to teacher education including the introduction of standards in 1997 which teachers needed to demonstrate within their classroom practice. This was a precursor to today's Teachers' Standards (2012), and the importance of these standards will be discussed later in this chapter. Changes also included the introduction of the National Curriculum (DfEE, 1998) and testing; and an increased control of teacher education which involved closer partnerships with schools and universities so that there would be a shared understanding of what beginning teachers need. Turner- Bisset (1999, p.39) referred to these changes as "government interference in all aspects of education".

Teacher competency was a starting point in Turner- Bisset's research (1999, p.40) as she viewed the competencies of the Standards (DfEE, 1997) as "somewhat instrumentalist, if not reductive approach to teacher education". She viewed the Standards (1997) as a simplistic understanding of the different knowledges that teachers use within their classroom practice therefore, positioning teachers as technicians with a set of competencies that they demonstrate within their teaching. While these professional competencies support teachers from novice to experienced, Turner- Bisset (1999, p. 40) describes them as "impoverished" as she states that the criteria are too general and do not explore the different knowledges that teachers use in the classroom. She provides an example where she considers what could be inferred from the term 'subject knowledge': is this the same as knowledge for teaching? What is an adequate level of subject knowledge? Furthermore, the list of competencies implies that teachers can either do them or not and this does not allow for problematisation of what is happening. Therefore, these competencies do not fully explore the knowledge bases that are needed for teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Turner- Bisset's (1999) research provides a model of teachers' knowledge bases that are used in the classroom which illustrates the complexity of understanding teachers' professional knowledge. These knowledge bases build on earlier work by Shulman (1985) where he used the term Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK); this is an amalgam between content and pedagogy, which could be used as a starting point in understanding how different knowledge is manifested in practice. While the concept of PCK has been re formulated by several educational theorists (Peterson *et al.,* 1989, Mc Diarmid *et al.,* 1989, Ormrod and Cole, 1996) these will not be discussed here. My focus is to consider how Turner- Bisset's (1999) research

on her knowledge bases will help me further understand and problematise how these relate to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. This is important as an underpinning concept of her research is that it is impossible to distinguish between content knowledge and pedagogy. She states that all knowledge is presented pedagogically; using this as a lens I will identify the range of knowledge bases used within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

2.1 The Knowledge Bases

Turner Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases (see fig.1 for a diagram of these bases) are fundamental in developing my understanding of the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. I will be adapting the knowledge bases in order to use them as an organisational strategy for my literature review and as a framework for analysis. However, it is important to present a synopsis of these knowledge bases before I show how they have been adapted.

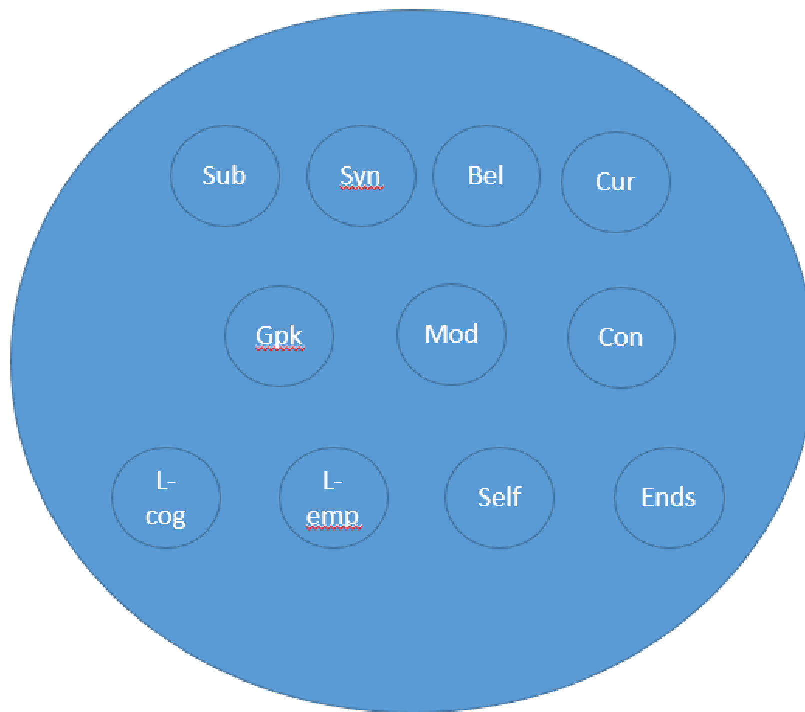


Fig 1. **1 Turner- Bisset (1999) Knowledge Bases.**

Explanatory Key

Sub- substantive knowledge

Syn- syntactical knowledge

Bel- beliefs about history

Cur- curriculum knowledge

GPK- general pedagogical knowledge

Mod- models of teaching

Con- contextual knowledge

L-cog- cognitive development of learners

L- emp- empirical knowledge of learners

Self- knowledge of self

Ends- knowledge of educational ends

The Knowledge Bases Explained

Substantive knowledge

This form of knowledge is made up of facts and concepts. Within these sit the organisational framework used to construct disparate information which shifts particularly when new knowledge or constructions of the past emerge.

Syntactical subject knowledge

Syntactical structures are: the means, process and procedures within the discipline of history such as enquiry, analysis, evaluation, interpretation, bias, reliability and the search for the truth.

Beliefs about the subject

Teachers' beliefs about a subject influence what and how they teach

Curriculum knowledge

Curriculum knowledge is knowledge of the policy that teachers are expected to follow within their teaching.

Knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values

This base is how teachers may view the reason for education which relate to their values.

Knowledge of learners

This category can be described as both understanding the cognitive and empirical characteristics of learners. The cognitive aspect of this element would include knowledge of child development. Empirical knowledge is how a teacher may understand children's observed behaviours in the classroom.

Knowledge of self

A strong sense of self is an important knowledge base for teachers. For teachers to thrive, they need to invest heavily in themselves. Teachers need to be reflective as teaching is a profession in which the self is a crucial element.

General pedagogical knowledge

General pedagogical knowledge, is knowledge about teaching which is usually developed from classroom experiences. This may include knowledge of behaviour management and classroom organisation.

Knowledge/ models of teaching

This category could be described as personal beliefs about teaching rather than teachers' beliefs about the subject of history and how it should be taught. This may come from teachers' experiences and knowledge about teaching and from their own experiences as a learner.

Knowledge of educational contexts This knowledge is largely to do with knowledge of schools, classrooms and settings. It is informed by a range of contextual factors that impact on teachers' behaviours. These include: size of school, catchment area, the class size.

I am aware that fitting literature into neat compartments could be viewed as a simplistic approach to structuring a literature review. However, after much writing, redrafting and thought, using Turner- Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases offers a coherent way to organise my writing. Using her headings as a starting point, I will begin to demonstrate how these bases can be used to construct a coherent narrative. I have interpreted these knowledge bases for the purpose of this research into the following categories:

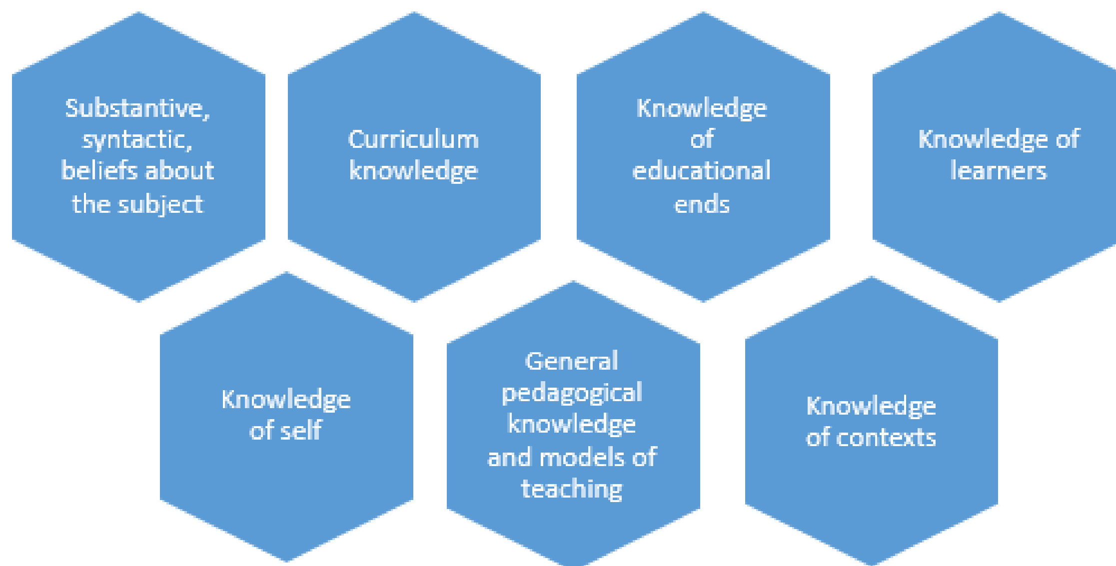


***Fig 2.* 1 My interpretation of Turner- Bisset's Knowledge Bases (1999) that have been used to structure my literature review.**

As you can see from the diagram Fig.2.1 I have amalgamated three of the knowledge bases as this brings greater clarity to the subject of history, the learner as an individual and the pedagogical skills required for teaching. The diagram shows these bases as a honeycomb formation, each one a tile that can be put together in any order with no hierarchy and may shift dependant on context. This is important for my research because I will argue that this better represents the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues within current social and political contexts.

2.2 Knowledge of Educational Ends

In this section I will focus on a range of literature that considers definitions of sensitive and controversial issues, expanding on my initial discussion in Chapter 1. I will start by outlining why the teaching of these issues may raise challenges for teachers.

2.2.1 Challenges for teachers

Kello (2016) states that many teachers are underprepared and uncertain when teaching sensitive and controversial issues and there are many reasons for this: fear of emotional responses of the children, perception of pressures, responses by the community or feelings of restraint by their own values, identities and beliefs. It is essential to have a clear understanding of the terms sensitive and controversial as defined in the literature. Kello (2016, p. 35) states that teaching sensitive and controversial issues is of growing interest across a range of curriculum subjects. Despite this, I am going to focus on definitions that relate specifically to history. As discussed in Chapter 1, the terms sensitive and controversial are sometimes used interchangeably, however at other times they are separated for a more nuanced understanding. Therefore, I am going to start with definitions that have emerged from the literature in relation to the term sensitive.

2.2.2 Sensitive issues

Kello (2016) refers to sensitive issues as divisive topics that bear on central aspects of group identity, or that relate to painful or disgraceful events in a group's past. Sheppard (2012, p.1 cited in Goldberg, *et al.,* 2019) uses the term 'difficult histories' which refers to events 'rooted in trauma, suffering and violent oppression' which have the power to elicit strong emotional reactions in the classroom. Evans, Avery and Pederson (1999) have interpreted the term sensitivity as one where there is an irrational fear or shame of disrupting unspoken norms. These definitions have some similarities as the language used tends to imply a negative emotional response. Furthermore, Foster (2013) states that engagement with sensitive issues can motivate discussions, critical thinking and increase empathy towards the 'other'. Evans, Avery and Pederson (1999, p. 221) claim 'that the greater the distance from the individual lives

of students the … less chance of emotional involvement’. However, sensitive issues are not fixed but fluid and may be subject to issues which arise in specific contexts. An example could be recent debates about the refugee crisis which may be personally sensitive to children in the classroom who are newly arrived in England.

2.2.3 Controversial issues

Woolley (2010) suggests that there is no universally held point of view when it comes to deciding what is classed as a controversial issue. He states that any issue can become controversial when people have different values and beliefs. Similarly, The Crick Report (1998, p. 56) states that a controversial issue is “an issue [about] which there is no one fixed or universally held point of view. Such issues are those which commonly divide society and for which significant groups offer conflicting explanations and solutions”. While Woolley (2010) and the Crick Report (1998) suggest that there is no clear definition of a controversial issue, further definitions indicate that issues of scale need to be considered. Below are five different definitions that all relate to notions of scale.

- When a group of people start from different premises, hold different key beliefs, understandings, values, or offer conflicting explanations or solutions that are rationally derived from the premises (Crick, 1998; Oulton, Dillon, & Grace, 2004).
- When it involves a substantial number of people or different groups (Crick, 1998).
- When the issue is not capable of being settled by appeal to evidence because it is a majority held belief (Stenhouse, 1970; Stradling, 1984).
- Bailey (1975) cited in Dearden (1981, p. 3) suggests that an issue can be deemed to be controversial “if numbers of people are observed to disagree about statements and assertions made in connection with the issue”.
- Stradling *et al.,* (1985, p. 9) defines a controversial issue as “those issues on which our society is clearly divided and significant groups within society advocate conflicting explanations or solutions based on alternative values”.

For the purpose of this theses, a controversial issue will be considered to be a large-scale issue that effects groups of people, whereas a sensitive issue implies a more personal response.

2.2.4 Engaging with sensitive and controversial issues

Davies (2017) states that the study of history is essential for living in a democratic society and that sensitive and controversial issues emerge within the teaching of history. It is important to recognise how this is played out in the classroom context where sensitive and controversial issues are combined in complex ways. Davies (2017) suggests that issues that are sensitive and controversial should be taught so that children are able to make links with the past and the present. These issues could elicit an emotional response by children and teachers may need to plan for this. Cross and Price (1996) stipulate that the inclusion of sensitive and controversial issues in the curriculum should help to prepare future citizens for participating in their resolution. Goldberg *et al., (*2019) argue that children are going to meet sensitive and controversial issues before and after they leave school therefore, schools have a duty to support children in developing their understanding of such issues. The Crick Report (1998, p. 8) asserted that the inclusion of citizenship education in a democratic society should be part of preparing children for life as an adult. Millar & Hunt (2002) argue that the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues within the school setting will better support children and enable them to become informed decision makers.

Barton and McCully (2007, p. 13) state that if a democratic society depends on "the ability of citizens to take part in reasoned discussion then…it is our job as educators to develop this ability in our students". This implies that taking part in discussions which are controversial should enable children to be critically reflective, to question claims of neutrality and to be tolerant of uncertainty. In the case of sensitive and controversial issues within history, this would also require the ability to prepare children to question narratives of the past and how these narratives have been constructed.

Cowan and Maitlas (2017, p. 32) argue, discussing sensitive and controversial issues as part of education is a crucial part of any curriculum which should promote "the development of knowledge, critical skills and values. Rosenberg (2007) suggests what children learn in school can influence their decisions about personal choices, attitudes, values, and that children should be encouraged to make choices and take responsibility that impact on society. The Education Act (1996) outlined that children must be presented with a balanced discussion and not just one side of a sensitive or controversial issue.

It is worth considering how and where information comes from to support the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues, particularly in light of current discourses about alternative truths and fake news, whereby knowledge or information could be problematic. Geddis (1992, p. 171) makes the claim that if knowledge is not seen as morally and politically neutral, then children need to learn skills which allow them to "uncover how particular knowledge claims may serve the interests of different claimants". If they are able to take other points of view into account while developing their own position on issues, "they need to attempt to unravel the interplay of interest that underlie these other points of view" (Geddis, 1992, p. 171). The challenge therefore, when teaching sensitive and controversial issues, is to recognise that knowledge may be presented to elicit a dominant ideology. Therefore, introducing children to multiple perspectives is an essential part of the pedagogical approach when teaching about sensitive and controversial issues.

Education then, has the opportunity to take a prominent role in developing skills such as critical thinking, and rights and responsibilities. For example, if young people are to take an active role in a democratic society, they must be able to process and understand sensitive and controversial issues such as migration, and global conflict. Therefore, sensitive and controversial issues must be developed by rigorously studying the past. Davies (2017, p. 263) states that while it may not be the intention of teachers to indoctrinate pupils "it is important to recognise the importance of academic rigour that enables teachers to reject prejudicial claims on the basis that there is a lack of evidence for those claims". A secure knowledge and narrative should exist with children if they are to be able to make reasoned judgements and conclusions about the past. Having outlined the definitions of sensitive and controversial issues defined in literature, the discussion will now move to discuss substantive, syntactic and beliefs about history.

2.3 Substantive, syntactic and beliefs about history

Turner -Bisset (1999) refers to both substantive and syntactical knowledge in order to consider history as a discipline. I am acknowledging that syntactics in history are, interpretation, rigorous testing of evidence, enquiry, analysis, evaluation, empathy and search for truth. Within this section I will start by discussing the importance of historical interpretation.

Interpretation involves working with many of the other syntactical components of history. The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) states that identifying and analysing historical interpretations

are essential skills that need to be developed. This acknowledges the subjectivity in how the past is, and continues to be, constructed.

2.3.1 Historical interpretations

Chapman (2017) argues that historical interpretations are potentially controversial. It is important to engage with critical thinking in order to understand the diverse ways in which individuals and events have been constructed in dominant historical narratives. Chapman (2017) suggests that within history the ability to engage critically with historical interpretations should enable children to evaluate and compare historical claims.

Historical interpretation is mentioned at all key stages of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) which implies that this is a skill that should be taught. Chapman (2017) has considered the aims of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) in regard to historical interpretation as:

- Understanding that the past has been interpreted in different ways
- Explaining why the past has been interpreted in different ways
- Evaluating different interpretations of the past

Chapman (2017, p.101) suggests that this interpretation should begin with an understanding of how the past has been constructed as children may have "tacit understandings based on their everyday epistemologies, that are likely to impede the development of their understanding of historical interpretation". A single source therefore is inadequate in this context and belies a simplistic notion of interpretation. Lee and Shemilt (2004) argue that the past should be described as fluid and therefore historical interpretations are problems that need to be solved. These interpretations, Chapman (2017) argues, are reflective of social and cultural contexts which are also subject to change. Therefore, notions of truth or truths are questionable as new constructions are created. Consequently, it is essential for teachers to challenge children's assumptions and provide multiple sources/ perspectives if they are to fully embrace their understanding of the past.

Haydn (2017) argues that truth is an important but problematic part of school history, this supports Chapman's (2017) concerns of an over simplistic version of history being taught. Haydn (2017) argues that children need to be specifically taught that interpretations of the past

may differ; this is further problematised as the notion of truth is often absent within the teaching of history. Truth, in this instance, is not one where children are expected to get the right or correct answer, but more that their interpretations are such that they develop “an understanding of truthfulness or veracity, in the sense of ethical importance of making an honest attempt to provide the most accurate explanation possible from the evidence provided” (Haydn, 2017, p.170).

The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013, p.1) does not refer to truth, but focuses on historical enquiry and how historical evidence, when used rigorously, can support historical claims. Historical enquiry demands multiple constructions are explored. Here, the emphasis is on children’s intellectual and cognitive understanding on why some of these constructions are more valid than others.

Haydn (2017, p.172) argues that good history, one which develops a more truthful or ethical account of the past, occurs when several sources are drawn upon. Wong (2001) recognises that an important element is the quality, integrity and honesty of source analysis. More importance needs to be placed on selecting evidence with ethical purpose. Haydn (2017) warns that without careful selection of sources, there may be harmful effects on democratic societies because children need to be aware how the past may be deliberately distorted for unscrupulous purposes. Haydn (2017) suggests that children need to be taught about polemic and understand the importance of selective citation of sources. Or, that the past can be edited or simplified to tell a particular version of the past for a specific purpose. Paulson (2015) suggests that history needs to be more inclusive and the selection of multiple sources play a vital role in this. Jordanova (2000) argues that collective historical understanding of past events often go unchallenged in public as some versions of the past maybe more palatable than others. An example of this could be the nostalgic interpretations of the British Empire as all powerful in opposition to the lived experiences of those in colonised countries.

A starting point in producing valid constructions of the past begins by exploring the concepts of truth, objectivity, and knowledge which will now be discussed. Jordanova (2000, p.95) argues that truth is about accuracy and precision. While it is possible to produce some accounts of the past which could be seen as truth, “yet truth also carries connotations of completeness of an account that is by any standards, absolutely satisfactory”. It is important to acknowledge the provisional nature of history; yet this does not mean that the historical knowledge is unimportant, only that the concept of truth does not seem to be productive.

The ability to be objective implies impartiality which Jordanova (2000) refers to as a chimera, simply stating that to be objective in history is not attainable, particularly in a subject where at its core is interpretation and evaluation. The term objectivity, Jordanova (2000) states, is not helpful because it implies that evidence can be viewed without bias. However, the process of sifting and weighing up evidence is nonetheless an important part of constructing historical knowledge. While subjectivity, Jordanova (2000) argues, can indicate pejorative connotations as it can imply a view that is partisan, emotive or insubstantial and therefore cannot be trusted to be truthful. The binary perspective of subjectivity or objectivity is perhaps not helpful for an historian. In essence, the ability to construct knowledge lies between these binary positions with a commitment to construct evidence as truthful, ethical and realistic.

The construction of knowledge then needs to deconstruct the term knowledge in history. It can have a variety of meanings such as "awareness, information, understanding, insight, explanations and wisdom and that these involve distinct relationships between knowing and known" (Jordanova, 2000, p 95). Therefore, information is not knowledge but an in depth understanding of a carefully constructed past.

The need for carefully constructed historical interpretations through exploring multiple sources, is essential. Sensitive and controversial issues by their very nature are created by opposing views and necessary to be explored in relation to this research. When considering opposing interpretations, an empathetic response may form part of classroom discussion, therefore I will now discuss the role of empathy within history.

2.3.2. Empathy

The term empathy used within the context of history has long been debated (see Jenkins and Brickley 1989, Cunningham, 2005 Lee and Shemilt, 2011). Empathy raises the question of whether we can ever 'know' the past; or whether one must go beyond the 'facts' and gain an understanding of motivation and intention. In developing children's historical understanding, using empathy seems reasonable. However, an effort needs to be made to develop how we see the world through the eyes of others, in our attempt to understand and explain their actions and attitudes. The functional nature of the empathetic process can be elusive in terms of integrating cognitive, and emotional concepts. The concept of empathy in history education involves children attempting to think within the context of individual and collective actions (Berti, *et al.,* 2009). An example could be where children 'dress up' as an evacuee from World War 2;

this could present a simple view of history and ignore the complexity of children's experiences which were not always positive.

Empathy in history is understanding people's experiences from the past by trying to assume their values and ideas. This supposedly offers an opportunity to generate an understanding of why people acted as they did. Berti, *et al.,* (2009, p278) suggests that empathy in history is an important procedural concept in historical investigation. However, Blake (1998) argues that the term historical empathy can be counterproductive as this does not help children develop sophisticated understandings of past actions. Returning to the example of the evacuees, children maybe constructing unreliable interpretations of past lives as the emphasis is on imagination rather than source interrogation. Engaging in empathy can produce many epistemological challenges. Attempts at historical imagination of understanding what it was like in the past are also an interpretation and a construction of new meaning. Therefore, children's understanding of social phenomena impact upon their learning. Understanding how children construct these phenomena in history is an important consideration in supporting their misconceptions and initial starting point of past events.

A further complexity in developing children's empathetic understandings of the past is their limited lived experience. Berti *et al.,* (2009) suggest that there is a need to consider specific actions of people and groups which are in contrast with those of ones' culture and appear especially cruel, that are morally or intellectually inferior. History is in part an attempt to understand how and why people acted as they did, but developing this understanding is complex. For example, trying to empathise with a Nazi concentration camp guard maybe very difficult for children. Without an understanding of the complexity of the Nazi regime, children may be offered a deficit or simplistic explanation of why people or groups acted as they did. This is further complicated by questions of morality. Thought is required in order to consider if it is right to ask children to engage in historical empathy of this kind. Children would need to understand that people in the past did not view the world as we might view it in today's context. Cunningham (2005) argues that empathy or engaging in historical imagination without evidence would be morally compromising. From this discussion I would suggest that asking children to reconstruct others' feeling can be sensitive and controversial. If teachers are to engage with empathy, thought is needed to consider who, and what children are permitted to empathise, sympathise and identify with (Rets, 2015).

2.3.3 History and identity

Barton and McCully (2005) state that history plays an essential and important role in establishing individual and community identity. Therefore, when individuals construct identities which may be in conflict with others, this can be said to create community tensions. Therefore, history education can offer acceptance of historical events and individuals through adopting fewer partisan approaches by exploring different perspectives of issues that are seen to be sensitive and controversial. Barton and McCully's (2005) research found that the relationship between history and identity formation was complex and they rejected simplistic notions that students may discard history all together or construct new narratives. Barton and McCully (2005) found that students select aspects of the curriculum that are most relevant to them and as they construct their identities, a range of factors come into play such as religion, social class, context of the school, gender and geographic region.

History teaching is much more than covering content. Barton and McCully (2005) suggest that an enquiry approach should be encouraged in order to understand a range of perspectives, to recognise different interpretations and draw conclusions after analysing a range of sources. This approach would allow for the construction of a greater understanding of a variety of social, cultural and political backgrounds. Barton and McCully (2005) also suggest that this leads to questioning the approaches of understanding the present through exploring the past, or alternatively understanding the past by examining the present. Neither approach allows for passive absorption of knowledge or demands children to engage with empathetic understandings of the past. Therefore, the development of historical understanding "involves the selective appropriation of socially and culturally situated knowledge that groups and individuals use for social purposes" (Barton and McCully, 2005, p. 90). Using key concepts such as chronology and cause and consequence, individuals bring order to events from the past looking at how and why they occurred, while making connections with facts and broader themes and patterns. Therefore, learners do not retain a body of knowledge but examine their own constructions of concepts and themes and connections between these and their individual identities. This implies that children can make connections between their lives and the past without the reliance on empathy.

2.3.4 National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) and Identity

In this section I will discuss who the National Curriculum (DfE,2013) is for in order to consider how teachers and children engage with school history. Barton and Levstik (2004) argue that the curriculum for history should prepare children to be responsible, active citizens who contribute to a democratic society. Therefore, the curriculum should reflect the past of the learners. Wilkinson (2014, p. 419) introduces the concept of the absent curriculum. His research found that the curriculum had been "prone to privileging curricular presence to the exclusion of curricular absence". He suggests that there has been a philosophical oversight known as 'ontological monovalence' by focusing on what content is present in the curriculum to the exclusion of what is absent. Both the prescribed content and the absent content are part of a duality of an adequate ontology of curriculum, any curriculum is a representation of "some group's vision of legitimate knowledge" (Apple 1993, p. 222). Therefore, it is likely that if a group or individual cannot find points of self-identification with the grand narrative of the school history curriculum, then achieving a sense of national belonging could become problematic (Guyver, 2014). Wilkinson (2014) recognises that gaps and absences in the curriculum can have an impact on both educational achievement and educational motivation.

Harris and Clark's (2014) research found that there was a mismatch between what pupils are taught and their lived experiences. The school curriculum did not build upon children's existing knowledge, or support them in constructing knowledge: knowledge was instead presented as unchallengeable facts. Harris and Clark (2014) built on the work of Grosvenor (2000) and Gundra (2000) who found that the school curriculum was presented through a behaviourist approach which led to the exclusion of certain groups from the curriculum. Whilst this research was conducted in the context of secondary aged children my research extends this by focusing on experiences of both primary and secondary teachers.

In summary, this section of the literature review has problematised the constructions and interpretations of the past. Within this is has been outlined how empathy, to develop children's awareness of the past, is morally and cognitively complex. The final section considered what content is taught and how this may relate to learners' sense of belonging. Now, I will turn my attention to discussing the policy context of this research in order to discuss how teachers' practice is both shaped and influenced by policy.

2.4 Curriculum knowledge- The Policy Context

Turner- Bisset (1999) uses the knowledge base of curriculum knowledge to consider the role of a national curriculum as a policy. The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) outlines the content that teachers are expected to cover from Key Stage 1-3. Therefore, this knowledge base, described as curriculum knowledge will consider the impact that policy has on the participants in this study. The policies that will be explicitly explored will be the Government White Paper (2010), The Teachers' Standards (2012) and the National Curriculum for history (2013) and The Prevent Strategy (2015).

The aim of this section of the literature review is to elucidate how these policies have influenced and shaped the current context of education and ultimately have influenced and impacted on the participants in this study. These policies will be discussed with regard to the challenges and opportunities that they create for the participants when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Educational policies are the focus of considerable controversy, and it would be reasonable to suggest that, "policy has become highly politicised" (Olssen et al., 2004, pp. 2-3). Policy is amorphous and hard to define. Ozga, (2000) suggests that there is no single definition of policy but one possible definition could be to view policy as the actions of government which in turn filter down into schools and become part of teachers' practice. As this occurs the original aim or intention of the policy may become blurred.

2.4.1 The Importance of Teaching (2010)

The first policy to be discussed is The Government White Paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (2010). This is relevant to this literature review because it outlined a number of changes to education which are critical to this research; namely increased accountability for teachers (Lumby and Mujis, 2014) and the introduction of Multi Academy Trusts (MAT). To begin with I will critically consider this policy as part of the political landscape for education.

The Importance of Teaching (DfE, 2010) set out legislation and arguments in support of changes to education at all levels, it presented an agenda for change described as "radical reform of our schools" (DfE, 2010, p.4). As mentioned, one of the recommendations from the White Paper was for schools to become federated as part of MATs, this potentially creates more autonomy for teachers as they are not required to follow the National Curriculum for History (DfE, 2013). In addition, the focus on the core subjects of English and maths has

increased accountability for teachers. Ball (2018) suggests that these changes were not novel, however both the rapidity and depth of change have resulted in a 'system shift' for education since 2010. A sophisticated stance was adopted by the Coalition Government (2010-2015) in terms of presenting an agenda of restoration. Restoration in the context of education implies repairing the perceived political damage on the education system from the previous government. This restorative agenda, Ball (2018) argues, could be called 'policies of nostalgia' which can be reviewed by looking at three distinctive strands for education: curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. Ball (2018) argues that policy climate is constructed both strategically and rhetorically; in addition to this the way in which "the different moves and initiatives 'join up' is a discourse of restorative reforms" (p.105). Ball (2018) further suggests that these policies present a duality of changes, for example, freedom and control, a giving away and taking away of professional judgements and teacher autonomy. The reform agenda also rests on duality by using praise and blame - a celebration of 'good' practice and a relentless derision of blame at 'under- performing schools'.

The rhetoric of the White Paper (2010) demanded that performance results were improved. Apple (2000, p.5) uses the phrase 'official knowledge' to explain the knowledge that schools need to concentrate on in order to pass exams; he states that "the process of defining official knowledge is a site of conflict over the relations between culture and power in class, race, gender and religious terms". In this case, the relentless pressure of exam performance, benchmarking and comparison making has resulted in many schools focusing their attention on the examination requirements. Ball (2018, p.106) argues that this focus narrows the curriculum to "official knowledge". Underperforming schools are vulnerable to being taken over by other schools or MATs. This context also has implications for teachers as they become managed through judgments made on their performance as measured by results.

Ball (2018) argues that any curriculum reforms are closely linked with assessment. Changes to education have included a mix of reform and restoration since the White Paper (2010). There have been sweeping changes to GCSE, Phonics Reading checks and more recently, times tables testing in primary school have been introduced. Ball (2018) argues that the volume and form of these changes to assessment have come under heavy criticism from teachers, parents, teachers' unions and professional partners. The criticisms from these stakeholders suggest a dichotomy between government policy and those who experience it, thus creating an environment where teachers and schools enact a performativity agenda. Furthermore, the

teacher's control over the content, sequencing and packaging of classroom knowledge has become weakened and under scrutiny.

Lumby and Mujis (2014, p.546) discuss how the planned changes of the White Paper (2010) have been communicated and remark that the use of language has been to "limit and deaden thought in the audience". Lumby and Mujis (2014) argue that the White Paper's (2010) rhetoric requires little thought by the reader and that arguments are presented logically and credibly which seek to motivate the reader into agreement with the speaker. They state that this is an example of constrained discourse which surrounds much of government policy. The White Paper (2010) implies that by making changes to teachers and learning, educational institutions and their relationship to the economy, England's global position in education will improve. Therefore, these changes are creating an increased expectation for schools and teachers to be accountable for educational outcomes. Here the implication is that economics and education are inseparable. I would argue that it is questionable whether education is for the sole purpose of creating a work force; I believe that there is an ideological battle here about the purpose of education. This is relevant to this study because it has implications for the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues as this increased focus on accountability for teachers mitigates a more holistic approach to education.

The White Paper's (2010) focus on education as qualification denies the importance of social justice and equity. Ball, (2013, p. 31), suggests that, "education is not simply about economic policy, it is also about social policy, social discipline and nation building"; he goes on to state that "education is a discursive bundle which ties together values, rigour, discipline and freedom and these links to excellence, competition and prosperity" (2013, p.4). Apple (2003, p. 28) supports the debate between economics and education by stating that, "the common prescription of education, as the key to change, ignores the fact that the form and content of education are affected, and in some cases determined by the actual systems of political decision and economic maintenance." Therefore, what lies behind policy and curriculum is a "complex nexus of political and economic power" (Apple, 2003, p.8), which in turn shapes the context for education and ultimately moulds and impacts on teachers' classroom practice.

Forester, Payne and Ward (1995) saw policy as a contested arena in which different actors struggle to impose their views, and involves an analysis of competing discourses which relates directly to the dominant discourse of economics and education. Apple (1993) suggested that educators have investigated knowledge as academic achievement, directly linking with

economics, though he argues that that education is a socialisation mechanism. The achievement model is not problematic until the knowledge which is accepted as the norm is questioned, this acceptance makes this 'official' knowledge needed to pass examinations very powerful.

Increasingly, teachers have become more accountable and their work more prescriptive as a consequence of government involvement within education policy as outlined above. Ozga, (2000) suggests that teachers are scapegoats for society's ills, and media rhetoric portrays teachers as a potential problem for policy makers, and that teachers need to be performance managed if they cannot reach expected competency standards.

Ball (2018, p.214) argues that schools and teachers are expected to be both innovative and conservative, to deliver social mobility and social cohesion. Notably, the way that teachers have been presented in the White Paper (2010) is interesting as teachers are portrayed as "virtuous but victims" (Lumby and Mujis, 2014, p. 533). At times, the teaching profession is discussed in positive terms; however, there is a dichotomy between this and the proposed actions which unquestionably make teachers more accountable. This increased accountability is important to acknowledge as part of this research because this will impact on what is taught and why, in relation to history and the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Having explored, *The Importance of Teaching* (DfE, 2010) as a policy which has shaped the current context for education, the discussion will now move to The National Curriculum for history (DfE, 2013).

2.4.2 The National Curriculum for History (DfE, 2013)

The National Curriculum for History (DfE, 2013) is an important policy that needs to be explored as part of this research as it is shapes teachers' history practice. The content of the curriculum needs to be considered with regards to the challenges and opportunities this creates for teachers when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Harris and Burn (2016) state that in the case of history, designing a curriculum can be particularly contentious. This is because an individual's awareness of history is linked to their sense of identity and this is often reflected in the content of a curriculum that is taught.

Maddison (2017) argues that the National Curriculum for History (DfEE, 1999) was long overdue for revision. He further suggests that National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) provided opportunities for children to study a range of different topics, this unquestionably created opportunities and challenges for teachers. Particularly affected were primary school teachers

of history as they are more often than not generalist teachers of history. Maddison, (2017, p. 9) suggests that these challenges or issues “threaten the very success of the new curriculum [National Curriculum, DfE, 2013) in ensuring as noted in the ‘purposes of study’… that pupils receive a ‘high quality history education’, which will help them ‘gain a coherent knowledge and understanding of Britain’s past’”. Teachers’ in-depth subject knowledge of specific periods of history is essential in order for the implementation of the new curriculum (DfE, 2013) to be effective. In acquiring in-depth knowledge, Lambert (2010) emphasises that teachers cannot assume that knowledge will be ‘picked up along the way or that such knowledge does not matter’ (p. 2) therefore highlighting the importance of substantive knowledge.

Furthermore, within the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013 p.64) the aims and objectives of the history curriculum for schools include to ‘understand that different versions of the past may exist’, and ‘in how interpretations of the past have been constructed’. These statements suggest that in order for this to be achieved, a number of pedagogical principles must underpin teaching, for example; interpretation; understanding of validity of sources and understanding evidence.

The content of the curriculum (DfE, 2013) is statutory in terms of historical periods, however within this there is some flexibility. For example, there is a list provided of significant individuals and events in Key Stage 1. However, teachers may choose to teach an alternative to those suggested. While there is little evidence as yet as to how this has been interpreted for the 2013 curriculum, it is perhaps worth noting that when Florence Nightingale was mentioned as a significant person in a previous curriculum (DfEE, 1999), a very large number of schools and teachers taught this at Key Stage 1 (Temple and MacGregor, 2009). This suggests that if an event or an individual is named then this is more likely to be used by teachers. Bracey *et al.,* (2011, p. 374) add to this and argue that the inclusion of particular significant individuals “by implication suggests that pupils should have a fixed canon of topics which are ethnocentrically focused on an English perspective”. Bracey *et al.,* (2011) state that this could raise issues about how people from different cultures may be perceived within any national culture. As they note, “this issue is critical where it leads to the exclusion of particular communities in constructions of the past” (2011, p. 374). Guyver (2014) also states that the appearance of certain topics in the curriculum may be politically motivated; he outlines how the focus of the curriculum is largely centred on British history, with some options for studying the wider world prior to 1066. The expectations of the National Curriculum for history (DfE, 2013) could therefore present challenges for teachers in developing an inclusive curriculum.

The literature review will now move to discussing the third policy the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012)

2.4.3 The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012)

The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) outline clear expectations that all teachers must meet in order to be an effective classroom teacher. There are eight standards in Part One which relate more directly with teaching and accountability, whilst Part Two of the Standards focuses on teachers' professional values. An important part of Part Two of the standards is the requirement for teachers to uphold British Values which is characterised as, "not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" (DfE, 2012, p.2).

This, I feel, is an essential policy to be explored as part of this research. These standards (DfE, 2012) both guide and shape teachers' practice as Gove (2011) stated that the revision of the standards (DfE, 2012) was part of an initiative designed to be used as a performance management tool by head teachers. Lander (2016) suggests that radical changes to the teaching profession since 2010 have resulted in a school led system that fosters a neo-liberal ideology which is framed around the marketisation of education. Such a context neglects opportunity to foster a more holistic approach to education and the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Part Two of the standards (DfE, 2012), with their focus on the teaching of British Values, could be viewed as an opportunity to develop teachers' practice in relation to sensitive and controversial issues. However, this could raise some challenges for teachers. Lander (2016, p. 276) argues that as a consequence of Part Two, teachers have become marginalised and a performativity agenda is in place as British Values are assessed by OFSTED. Furthermore, I believe that there can be an overlap between history and British Values and Mansfield (2019) suggests that the teaching of these values has fallen to teachers of history which is important to this research. It is particularly contentious because much of the discussion in classrooms relating to British Values has implications for both teachers and children as teachers are now expected to prevent extremism through their teaching. Much of the skills within the teaching of history consider different constructions of the past and an understanding of different perspectives, this has some overlap with the teaching of British Values curriculum. Lander (2016, p.329) however, suggests that there has been a lack of training in supporting teachers on how best to deliver British Values, which has resulted in "nostalgic imperialist constructions of Britishness". Lander (2016) argues that this potentially leaves teachers

vulnerable as through their naïve interpretations of Britishness contentious discussions both inside and outside of the classroom due to recent changes in wider policy may occur.

2.4.4 The Prevent Strategy (2015)

In February 2015 the government published a new Counter Terrorism and Security Act (2015) in which teachers had a legal duty to recognise children who would be potentially vulnerable to extremism and to prevent them from being part of terrorist activity. This, combined with the requirements for teachers to teach fundamental British Values has, as Smith (2016, p.298) states, "changed the face of education policy". While the full extent of these changes has yet to be realised, the statistics for referral to Channel (the government's anti-radicalisation scheme) are noteworthy. Dickens (2015, p.8) reports that half of all the referrals of children in 2015 came from teachers; in 2012-2013 this was as low as 8%. In reality this means "more than two pupils are now referred every school day". From the perspective of the teacher this indicates that this policy is having a significant impact as practice has been politicised.

Guidance included in the Prevent strategy (DfE, 2015, p. 5) state that:

> "it is not intended to stop debating controversial issues. On the contrary, school should provide a safe space in which children, young people and staff can understand the risks associated with terrorism and develop the knowledge and skills to be able to challenge extremist arguments".

This guidance, on the one hand, encourages teachers to discuss sensitive and controversial issues. However, on the other hand it implies that sensitive and controversial discussions may lead to comments that could be viewed as alarming. This is supported by Mansfield (2019) who argues that there is a tension for teachers who are expected to promote British Values while they monitor pupils for pejorative comments which could indicate that children are vulnerable to extremism. Elton-Chalcraft *et al.,* (2016, p.1) argue that as a consequence of this policy teachers are seen as "state instruments of surveillance".

In this section I have used Turner- Bisset's (1999) knowledge base of curriculum knowledge as a structure to begin to demonstrate how four key policies have shaped the current political context for education. The first policy presented was the White Paper (2010) *The Importance of Teaching*, which has changed the focus of education where teachers have now become more

accountable. The National Curriculum for history (DfE, 2013) outlined content that teachers are expected to cover. Furthermore, the content of the curriculum (DfE, 2013) has a largely British Focus and due to the introduction of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) places children and teachers in a precarious position as their understanding of Britishness may be naïve (Elton Chalcraft *et al.,* 2016) yet comes under scrutiny from various stakeholders. This scrutiny is further exacerbated by the Prevent Strategy (2015). This policy context, since, 2010, demonstrates the complexity that teachers face when teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

2. 5 Knowledge of Learners

Turner- Bisset (1999) refers to knowledge of learners as both understanding the cognitive and empirical characteristics of learners. The cognitive aspect of this element would include knowledge of child development. Empirical knowledge is how a teacher may understand children's observed behaviours in the classroom. Therefore, it is important to consider what knowledge children bring with them to the classroom. This is of particular importance as part of my epistemological construction of knowledge considers how children do not arrive at school deficient of knowledge. The knowledge that children do bring with them to the classroom can raise both challenges and opportunities for teachers so therefore this knowledge is relevant to be included as part of this research. This section will now explore children's funds of knowledge (FoK) a term first used by Moll and Greenberg (1992). This section will also consider how this form of knowledge creates a number of complex issues for teachers.

The concept of FoK first originated in Tucson, Arizona in the early 1980s (Moll and Greenberg, 1992). The FoK approach was used as a means of reducing the gap between homes and schools. Llopart and Esteban- Guitart (2018) describe this gap in classrooms where deficient thinking in education takes place. This deficit thinking was attributed to the idea that "low school performance among underrepresented students was caused by underlying linguistic, economic and cultural limitations" (Llopart and Esteban- Guitart 2018, p.145).

Therefore, in order to understand more about the concept of deficient thinking in classrooms an approach was needed which challenged assumptions and misunderstandings of different households. There was a need to create mutual trust between teachers and families in order to establish a spirit of cooperation that could diminish prejudices and stereotypes that may have existed. In order to understand children's FoK teachers were required to visit the homes of the

children in their class in order to understand more about socio-cultural practices. It was hoped that this would support children's learning experiences in the classroom. The use of home visits challenged traditional power dynamics where the teachers are often positioned as an expert, in contrast parents and families were used as an intellectual resource. The FoK of these families was the result of their lived experiences including their social interactions- acknowledging that human beings and their social worlds are inseparable. As a result of this, mutual partnerships between homes and classroom were established and teachers were more able to provide learning activities that built on children's FoK and therefore challenged the notion of deficit classroom experiences for some children. Moll (2005, p.276) argues that school practices need to reflect broader societal issues such as "social class, ideology and power…. and funds of knowledge".

While it is important to recognise children's FoK, David (1999) asserts that sometimes their perceptions are ill- informed, and therefore teachers may need to acknowledge this. Scoffham (1999) argues that media, television news and films about people and places are powerful in influencing children's views. While Scoffham was writing in 1999, it is important to acknowledge both the availability and the rapidity of news accessibility through the media and social media have increased. Therefore, the perceptions that children may have of people and places is likely to have increased by the amount of information that children are exposed to. Scoffham (1999) argues that children often accept bias and stereotypes that they see in the media. While, Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) recognise that children's views are often heavily influenced by their families. This can in turn be problematic and or challenging to deal with in the classroom if the views that they present are pejorative.

Catling and Martin (2011) suggest the knowledge that children bring to school is legitimate and powerful in its own right. Therefore, it should be developed alongside powerful knowledge, a term referred to by Young (2008) as knowledge that only schools can provide. Catling and Martin, (2011) argue that children's existing FoK are naïve, yet purposeful in establishing a foundation to extend learning. Schools therefore should provide learning experiences which develop this knowledge. They further suggest that 'powerful knowledge …is insufficient in the primary context' (Catling and Martin, 2011, p. 319). If teachers do not see the relevance of children's FoK then they are unlikely to teach in a way that extends this.

A contributing factor to add to this dilemma of how best to develop children's FoK is the idea that teachers may have a problem in separating the differences between knowledge and

information. Catling (2006, p. 139) suggests that when teachers think about the subject that they teach, they focus their attention on “knowledge as information rather than knowledge as understanding”. This implies that knowledge may be presented factually without developing contextual understanding. Catling and Martin (2011) refer to developing contextual understanding as a form of pedagogical reasoning where knowledge may be presented in the classroom as understanding in context. Further supporting children’s development of substantive and syntactical knowledge within history.

2.5.2 Teachers’ Response to Children’s Funds of Knowledge

In order to develop contextual knowledge, teachers’ need to understand more about the children that they teach. Traille (2008) suggests that teachers often arrive into classrooms without knowing very much about the children in terms of where they come from, their experiences, needs and identity. Teaching and learning are highly complex where a number of interactive processes compete and interact. The teacher, the content of the lesson, the context, resources, children's FoK and beliefs are all components that need to be considered. In order to teach effectively, teachers would need to consider these factors and how they may impact on the lesson and knowledge construction of the children. Having drawn attention to children’s FoK, I will now consider how this form of knowledge has implications when teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

Alexander and Weeks – Bernard (2017, pp. 480-481) state that issues of race have been an ‘absent presence’ within the curriculum for history and this has implications for teaching citizenship education as an aspect of history. The celebration and promotion of Britishness within the curriculum often ignores children from diverse backgrounds, as a hegemonic perspective of white Britishness is often taught. Therefore, the curriculum can often create a lack of inclusion rather than promoting it. Traille (2011, p.16) acknowledges that “classrooms are a cornucopia of diversity” and that this diversity exists in terms of gender, social class, religion and ethnicity. This diversity can be visible or invisible and this brings challenges to the history classroom as it raises debates about “ownership, belonging, Britishness, Citizenship and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy” (Traille, 2011, p.16).

Traille’s (2008,) research focused on the views of African- Caribbean children and their parents, exploring attitudes towards the teaching of history in school. Traille (2008) claimed that children and parents from the hegemonic majority viewed the teaching of history as a way

of generating personal understandings of the contemporary social world. In contrast, children and parents from African- Caribbean backgrounds viewed the teaching of history as a way of marginalising their identity and social legitimacy (Traille, 2008, p.9). Therefore, different understandings of the purpose of history need to be carefully considered if situations are to be avoided where children who are not from the hegemonic majority have to negotiate classroom environments in order to seek "social acceptance" (Traille, 2008, p.20). Therefore, it is important for teachers of history to understand children's experiences when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. While Traille's (2008) research focuses on children from African-Caribbean backgrounds, this indicates that teachers may need to be sensitive to children's FoK. Teachers may need to tap into preconceptions and misconceptions of what children think and what parents may want from a history lesson. In order to deliver an inclusive history curriculum that reflects society, teachers must develop an inclusive classroom environment where diversity is celebrated.

Levistik (2000) draws similar conclusions to Traille's (2008) research by acknowledging that children from different ethnic backgrounds often experience feelings of exclusion from the dominant narrative. In some cases, children appeared to be actively resistant to what they encountered in the school classroom. Levistik (2000, p. 286) states that developing a history that is inclusive is a necessity in the classroom rather than "a theoretical nicety".

Having outlined the need for history to be inclusive the difficulty now arises as classroom discussion may need to explore sensitive and controversial issues. In order to do this, teachers need to recognise what and when children are capable of understanding. Husbands and Pendry (2000) claim that teachers have sometimes underestimated the extent to which children have the maturity to engage with sensitive and controversial issues in history. Similarly, Ross (2007) argues that the research shows children from primary age are capable of dealing with political issues.

Historically, childhood has been constructed with a romantic or protectionist view (Kehily, 2013). This positions learners as vulnerable and without agency, implying that they are not cognitive or emotionally able to discuss complex issues. On the other hand, if teachers position childhood as preparation for adulthood then this should encourage discussion of sensitive and controversial issues. For the purpose of this research it will be essential to consider how teachers position children along a continuum between these binary positions. The Cambridge Primary Review (Alexander *et al.,* 2010) found that schools that taught sensitive and

controversial issues helped children feel more positive about their future. Sensitive and controversial issues are important in themselves and to omit opportunities for discussing them is to leave a wide and significant gap in the educational experiences of young people (Crick Report, 1998 p.56). Traille (2007) argues that it is not so much an underestimation of children's capability, but that the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues has been avoided. In Traille's (2007) study the students felt strongly that the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues should not be avoided, however it was how these issues were taught within the classroom that was important. The students and their mothers commented that the topic needed to be handled sensitively and that the classroom environment needed to be a safe place where views and understanding could be presented and challenged. Traille (2007) acknowledges that teachers need to examine their own views and beliefs about the past and how this relates to (or not) the children in the classroom. Levstik's (2000, p. 287) research revealed that during classroom discussion children often used the first-person plural "we". Traille (2007) states that pronouns are "shape- shifters" and this use of partisan language is often unhelpful in classroom discussion as it raises the question of who are "we". Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the importance of language and how it may have different meanings in different contexts. Language then is part of teachers' subject pedagogy that they need to teach diverse history.

2.5.3 Conceptions of Childhood

In order for children to become responsible, tolerant and knowledgeable there is a need for sensitive and controversial issues to be discussed with children which is supported by both Hand and Levison (2012) and the Crick Report (1998). The discourse of how children are conceptualised is important within this discussion. Conceptions of childhood are contested as theorists have endeavoured to construct a view of the child that is attuned with their view of society. Wright (2015, p.3) advocates that this is partly in an attempt to formalise children's social positions and therefore these social positions shape our views of childhood. Kehily (2013) states that there is no universal understanding of childhood and suggests that childhood is a product of culture and as such will vary across time and place. The romantic notion of childhood stems from Rousseau (cited in Wright, 2015) and the idea of childhood sexual innocence being critical to the romantic conception of childhood. If a romantic or protectionist view of childhood is presented then children are positioned as without agency and protected from any discussions that could be potentially upsetting. This is likely to have a significant impact in terms of the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues as teachers are unlikely to

engage with these issues for fear of upsetting children. Alternatively, if teachers position childhood as a stage in preparation for adulthood then it is more likely that they will teach issues that are sensitive and controversial. The positioning of childhood presented here, protectionist or in preparation for adulthood, are binary. The reality, is more complex than this, as how children are conceptualised is one factor of influence within this discourse as other factors impact on teachers' decision making.

To summarise, this section has outlined the complexity of understanding children's FoK in relation to how teachers approach the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. FoK and powerful knowledge are sometimes viewed as competing rather than as an amalgam of how they can be used to develop learners' understanding. A further complexity is how teachers may position children as ready capable learners or as without agency.

2.6 Knowledge of Self

Having outlined the position of children and how their FoK are important to consider in relation to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues, this section will now introduce research by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) who categorised teachers by the way they approached the teaching of history. These categories provide a helpful way in to understanding more about how teachers approach the teaching of sensitive and controversial histories. Both Kitson and McCully's (2005) and Magill's (2016) research took place in countries that had experienced recent conflict, which they identify as a key factor in teachers' decision making.

Kitson and McCully's (2005) research took place in Northern Ireland, which had experienced recent conflict. Their research focussed on what historical topics teachers had included in their teaching. They also considered why some topics had been excluded from the curriculum and what justification was used in determining these choices. Within the research they identified three categories of teacher: the 'avoider', 'container' and 'risk taker'. The research found that teachers' prior experiences linked directly with these categories. Characteristics of the avoider included the avoidance of teaching topics which could be potentially sensitive or controversial, and a belief that the purpose of teaching history was for children to get better at history. This limited not only the choice of topic but also the pedagogical strategies used to develop the learner. The teacher as a 'container' found that although controversial issues were taught, they were contained, to avoid contentious debate. Topics were taught as directed in schemes of work and did not focus on topics relevant to the learners. The teacher as 'risk taker' fully embraced the difficulties and complexities of teaching history. They were able to make links between the

past and present and looked to develop opportunities which challenged children's pre-existing ideas.

Magill (2016) builds on earlier work by Kitson and McCully (2005) outlined above. She presents a model which examines the relationship between history taught in school and the recovery of historical memory in Spain. She identifies categories of teachers; avoiders, containers, risk takers and adds a fourth category of activists. Before problematising these categories I will outline the context of Magill's (2016) research as she also draws on research in post-conflict countries; in this case Magill (2016) refers to the Spanish Civil War and the dictatorship of General Franco.

In her research Magill (2016) made comparisons with other countries who had experienced recent conflict such as Apartheid in South Africa and the troubles in Northern Ireland. In the case of South Africa, education had been used as an instrument of oppression and division with school history playing a role in this. Similarly, Magill (2016, p.260) argues that "history as an uncontested body of knowledge was a major tool for legitimizing the state, under Franco, the goal of education was not the liberation of the individual but the subordination of the individual". Therefore, Magill (2016) argues that the teaching of history in post conflict society needs to link past and present if children are going to develop their historical understanding and awareness of contemporary society. Magill (2016) questions to what extent children can really understand the present if they do not critically question the past. This is supported by McCully (2012, p.151) who argues that "history teachers must not collude with social amnesia by avoiding sensitive aspects of the past" or present the past as truth rather than considering different interpretations of the past.

Magill (2016) acknowledges that there is evidence to suggest that history teachers in Spain believe that the study of history needs to help children better understand the society in which they live. However, some teachers tend not to make connections between the study of Spain's problematic past and aspects of contemporary society. Magill's (2016) aim was to investigate why some teachers felt uncomfortable and uncertain when faced with teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Magill's (2016) research demonstrated that professional development opportunities were lacking for teachers to engage with sensitive and controversial issues.

Returning to the categories that Magill (2016) identified; avoider, container, risk taker and activists, the avoider category has been adapted from the earlier work of Kitson and McCully's (2005) research to include 'natural avoiders' and 'reluctant avoiders'. Magill (2016) found that

both types of avoider tended not to teach and selected topics that would not be considered to be sensitive and controversial. By contrast, reluctant avoiders embraced the complexity of teaching but were constrained by a number of factors such as peer pressure, fear of reprisal and lack of support from their schools. Whereas the natural avoiders rejected the complexity and difficulties of teaching sensitive and controversial issues within history. The 'containers' did not purposefully avoid teaching topics, however Magill (2016) found that they did not seek out opportunities to teach sensitive and controversial issues. The risk takers in Magill's (2016) research tended to create opportunities to tackle the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. While they fully embraced the complexity and difficulties of teaching sensitive and controversial history, they actively encouraged the use of critical thinking skills with children in the classroom. The 'activists', an extension to the continuum, were similar to the risk takers in that they sought out opportunities within the curriculum to teach controversial issues. However, the activist sought to take a standpoint in the classroom which enabled them to share with children their own strongly held views. These categories will now be discussed in more depth.

2.6.1 Avoiders

Magill (2016) argues that it is almost impossible to completely avoid Spain's historical past and teaching sensitive and controversial issues can emerge. However, in spite of this, Magill (2016) found that some teachers in Spain preferred to avoid these discussions. One reason provided by these teachers was that the history syllabus was vast and there was pressure to teach to the test supporting an agenda of accountability. Further factors impacting on teachers' decision-making included concerns that they may be influencing children's political views. Teachers reported that they were worried about causing upset or offending children, parents, colleagues and the school community. Magill (2016) further states that in the case of Northern Ireland, teachers have tried to present their professional identity as politically neutral. Some teachers in Ireland wanted to avoid situations that made them feel uncomfortable (McCully and Montgomery, 2009). Magill (2016) refers to research undertaken in Rwanda and South Africa that further suggests that teachers' concerns stem from causing a divisive atmosphere in the classroom. They fear potential reprisal from parents and the community. Kitson and McCully's (2005) research, in Northern Ireland, found that this fear of reprisal was often unsubstantiated. However, the participants in Magill's (2016) research provided examples where such reprisal

from parents and colleagues had occurred. As such this had influenced their future teaching and teachers were now more likely to avoid teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

2.6.2 Containers

Magill (2016) found that teachers did not encourage children to fully engage with the root of the sensitive and controversial issues and they contained the possibility of emotive or upsetting discussions. Some teachers in this category would encourage children to discuss their grandparent's experiences during the Civil War, however this would only occur if children brought this subject up. Furthermore, these discussions were not explored in depth or there were few attempts at linking to ongoing legacies of the war. This has similarities with Kitson and McCully's research (2005) where teachers contained any possible emotive discussion and focused more on the historical processes. An approach was adopted in the classroom where the skills of being an historian took centre place rather than a deep engagement with the past and the present.

2.6.3 Risk takers

The teachers in this category confronted uncomfortable truths and challenged children's misconceptions and preconceptions. The teachers sought to develop a critical stance in the classroom where children could understand the complexities of the past rather than being presented with a simplistic narrative of the past. One participant actively looked for contradictory evidence to develop children's interpretation of the past and how this links to present day Spain. Furthermore, teachers drew on children's FoK and where children often repeated things that they had heard about the civil war, teachers' saw their role as challengers to this. The participants in this category recognised that risk taking involves discussing uncomfortable or inconvenient truths.

2.6.4 Activists

Magill (2016) found that in this category, of activist, the participants tended to present a more dogmatic view on the Franco dictatorship. As a consequence of this, the teachers' avoided debate or discussion. One participant issued a disclaimer stating that the children should not be upset by the discussion and this period of history was to be treated the same as any other. This does not allow for any personal sensitivity or attachment to this period which could be rather

troubling. This particular participant then proceeded to outline his views on the Franco war and identified himself as an expert on the subject where his views were presented as 'truth'. The participant did not seem to be wary of reprisal and this could be as a result of the context where this discussion took place. His comments were unlikely to be challenged in this particular context. Another participant in Magill's (2016) research seemed to be aware that teachers can sometimes manipulate children's thinking and wanted children to make up their own minds by presenting a range of sources. In spite of this awareness, Magill (2016) found that the sources presented reflected the teacher's viewpoint and as such were accepted as truth. These teachers, Magill (2016) states, adopted an activist stance where impartiality was rejected and they openly stated their own value positions. In addition, both teachers prompted discussions that were meant to shock children- be it consciously or unconsciously they may also have sought to influence their political views. While the activists were keen to acknowledge that they wanted their children to think critically about the past, their own views on the issues superseded this. Therefore, these teachers were not acknowledging that history is a socially constructed interpretation of the past and their own values and beliefs became more important than the teaching of history as a critical interpretation of the past.

2.6.5 Exploring teachers' beliefs and values

Connelly and Clandine (1999) discuss how teachers' personal experiences and beliefs directly influence their practice; both consciously and subconsciously. Guyver (2000, p.7) suggests that there is a direct correlation between teachers' beliefs about the nature of history and related values and attitudes that affects how the subject is taught in terms of both content and pedagogy. Furthermore, research by Shulman (1987) and Turner-Bissett (1999) on Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) found that teachers adapted their teaching according to the context of their school, and their beliefs about teaching. This implies that the context where the teaching takes place is significant in developing teachers' beliefs.

Halse (2010, p. 32) argues that the school context is an important consideration in teachers' decision making. She states that, "schools are sites of contestation pervaded by a range of discourses, and discourses have moral and political effects because they institute particular realities, establish regimes of truth, and organise particular ways of thinking about the world". These social relationships are therefore constructed and can limit or broaden the possibilities for thoughts and actions. Halse (2010) suggests that in order for teachers to further understand their practice they need to engage in the process of reflection; being engaged in reflective

activities can help teachers problematise classroom issues and become more confident in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

"The influence of a teacher's background and experience contributes to different interpretations of official policy. Thus, it could be argued that the curriculum cannot be imposed from above, but develops from the reality of different encounters within the educational context" (Harnett, 2001, p.11). The way teachers choose to teach and what they teach is therefore influenced by: their educational background, social class, economic climate, political context, place of study and their own experiences as a learner, as well as their own personal interests, beliefs and values. This has some similarity with children's FoK and it is important to acknowledge this. Teachers' beliefs and experiences shape their conceptions of how and what they should teach. These lead them to select specific content as well as strategies in their teaching (Smith 2005). Evans (1994) acknowledges the importance of a number of factors that may influence teachers' work practice and these include: family, personal backgrounds and teachers' own beliefs and values on their professional identities and work practices. Evans (1994) suggests that there is a close relationship between a teacher's personal and professional identity.

Ball and Goodson (1985), Britzman (1991) and Hargreaves (1994) suggest that it is likely that teachers' previous careers and life experiences shape their view of teaching both inside and outside of school. Their identities and culture have a profound and important impact on their beliefs and values and are drawn from a range of sources, including and, somewhat more importantly, through involvement in socially constructed activities.

Summary

In this section I have identified how research, in post-conflict areas, by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) have categorised teachers in relation to their approach to teaching sensitive and controversial issues. These approaches are shaped by a range of experiences and this in turn impacts on teachers' decision making in the classroom. The chapter now turns to discuss Turner – Bisset's (1999) knowledge base of general pedagogical knowledge and models of teaching.

2.7 Knowledge of Models of Teaching and General Pedagogical Knowledge

In this section I will consider the role of pedagogy in supporting the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Having reflected on the importance of context in the previous section, pedagogy in the form of discussion will be unpacked. There are a number or roles that a teacher

may consider as part of their pedagogical approach such as being neutral, presenting a balanced approach, disclosure of views and using Devils' Advocate as a strategy.

Teachers should be able to recognise the complexity of the context and the communities in which they teach; and this needs to be carefully balanced if they are to challenge preconceived ideas about the past; both present challenges for teachers. Teachers must therefore be prepared to discuss any preconceptions or misconceptions rather than avoiding discussion. Some events and issues are likely to be more relevant to children if they are more recent and worthier of news coverage, thus creating a resonance worth debating. For example, at the time of writing, the Brexit debate was a focus in the media and children wanted to talk about it. Despite this, Mitchell (2013, p. 232) provides a cautious note in recognising that schools in England are "not a neutral vehicle for the teacher to use as he or she wishes", nor is it easy to tackle deep engagement with sensitive and controversial issues. Mitchell (2013) further suggests that there are some issues which are 'super complex' and do not have clear cut answers. Therefore, answers given are likely to be value laden, so making sense of them requires value judgements both by teachers and by the children they teach.

Mitchell (2017, p. 234) argues that teachers' values are linked to facts, and depend on beliefs about knowledge as being socially constructed. Therefore, knowledge "is constructed by people, and a matter of value judgement and interpretation as well as power and control". In recognition that knowledge is a social construct this may help teachers to take a "critical and morally careful approach to the curriculum".

Stradling *et al.,* (1984) state that controversial issues are an integral part of the English school curriculum and escaping or avoiding them is not an option. While their work was first published in 1984, I have found it very relevant to the development of my understanding. How a school decides which issues to focus on and what pedagogical approaches are used depends on a variety of factors which may include relevance to children's FoK.

Kello (2016, p. 36) further suggests that research has shown that pedagogical challenges lie within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues in history and this a consequence that past issues "are usually deeply entrenched in layers of national and social identities…" which may be central to children's identities. Stradling *et al.,* (1984, p. 5) state a controversial issue is an issue that may be politically sensitive, where there may be suspicions, anger or concerns raised by parents and members of the school community. With this in mind the pedagogical approach used by teachers is of great importance. The views of the school community

(including parents, teachers, children, school leaders, governors) are factors which influence teachers' pedagogical decision making. Therefore, if there are likely to be tensions from the school community the focus may not be on the issue itself, but the professionalism of the teacher and the pedagogical strategies used. This can be compounded by different value positions being presented in the classroom; this may be more challenging for the teacher (Mitchell, 2017).

Hand and Levinson (2012) suggest that in any teaching of sensitive and controversial issues the selected pedagogical approach, such as discussion, should enable children to consider different answers. The teacher does not manipulate the discussion so that the children come to the 'right' answers, or is not seen to be the expert on the issue being discussed. Discussion will allow the individual child to draw their own conclusions in light of the evidence being presented and discussed in the lesson. Hand and Levison (2012) suggest that the use of dialogic pedagogy (discussion) allows a child a voice and can open up awareness of other viewpoints.

Hand and Levinson (2012) state that discussion is very valuable in considering different points of view which are essential skills in a democratic society. If only one viewpoint is presented this does not count as a discussion and will not move children on in developing critical thinking. "Discussants must also be receptive or responsive to opinions other than their own" (Hand and Levinson, 2012, p. 616). It is not enough just to rehearse established viewpoints but rather to create an atmosphere where open mindedness and generally being willing to listen to others is important. Discussants then, must be open not only to change but to developing their own knowledge and understanding of the issue. Hand and Levinson (2012) state that reasonableness, peacefulness, truthfulness and orderliness are required dispositions in order for this to take place.

Davies (2017) argues that sensitive and controversial issues are not just defined by the topic being covered in the lesson but also the resources used to support this. The selection of resources needs to be relevant and purposeful and be part of how children construct their own interpretation of the past. An example could be the Holocaust. One teacher may select an image of a corpse as a historical source, while another may select an image of a guard at Auschwitz. Both approaches may be appropriate depending on the context of the school, the maturity of the pupils, the teacher's values and beliefs about the Holocaust and the teacher's constructions of childhood. The resources and sources used form part of teachers' pedagogical approach. In

addition to the sources, Hand and Levison (2010) state that a dialogic approach must be used to support the resources and this discussion must be underpinned by contextual awareness.

2.7.1 Disclosure of views

Barton and McCully (2007) use the term 'disclosure dilemma,'. This is where teachers decide whether or not to share with children their value position. It is often assumed that children will contribute to a class discussion and state their own value position. In the spirit of reciprocity, it could be reasonable to suggest that teachers share their views with the children. If it is an expectation for teachers to share then this could leave children vulnerable to indoctrination. In addition, not all values and beliefs may be appropriate to be shared or teachers may be unaware of their own value position.

Stenhouse (1975) cited in Mitchell (2017) used the term 'political neutrality', implying that teachers should not present their own value position, rather let each child work out their own position. Much of teachers' values and beliefs may be unconscious; therefore, one could question how much a teacher can actually be politically neutral. It may also be difficult to be politically neutral if your own value position is very strong on an issue. Mitchell (2017) suggests that complete neutrality is unrealistic and it may be possible to reveal your value position without influencing others. For example, when discussing sensitive and controversial issues, one of the roles of the teacher is to ensure that a fair debate can take place, presenting a balanced approach. This emphasises the importance of democracy in the classroom and places trust in the professionalism of the teacher. The principles of a democratic curriculum invoke debate, discussion and dialogue and an underlying moral judgment. However, Stradling *et al.,* (1984, p.7) state that the views of the teacher are perhaps stronger than they realise and that it may be "insuperably difficult" for the teacher to present their own viewpoint. This raises questions about how best to present a more balanced approach as part of teachers' pedagogy.

Stradling *et al.,* (1984, p. 5) suggest that teachers may need to "provide a conceptual framework, skills in discussion and a critical, analytical approach" to discussing issues that are sensitive and controversial. Whilst acknowledging that achieving this can be challenging, Stradling *et al.,* (1984) further suggest that the ability to discuss issues, while considering the opinions of others, is a necessary skill needed for adulthood. For this to be achieved, a balanced

approach to discussion is required where alternate opinions are sought and discussed. However, achieving a balanced approach is perhaps a simplification of this complexity.

Stradling *et al.,* (1984) suggest that a further pedagogical approach that could be used in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues is the role of Devil's Advocate. This approach could be used in two ways. Firstly, the teacher may challenge children's views and present a more balanced approach. Secondly, a teacher may hide their own value position by not admitting that the position of Devil's Advocate is their own; there maybe a variety of reasons for this. For example, a teacher may be uncomfortable with children and parents knowing their real views. It is worth considering that some teachers may not play the role of Devil's Advocate if some prepared viewpoints are socially unacceptable.

In addition to the pedagogic strategies mentioned, it is worth considering if there are some sensitive and controversial issues that it would not be appropriate for teachers to adopt a neutral or impartial viewpoint of. Education has a social justice element and therefore requires teachers to support children in considering how they can influence social change. In Part Two of the Teachers' Standards (2012) it states that teachers must uphold the rule of law; in order to do this there would be times that neither considering a spectrum of views, or being neutral would be appropriate. Such a situation becomes complicated if the children or the teacher have personal beliefs that may contradict this. For example, a Catholic teacher is unlikely to be part of the prochoice movement; however, since 1967 abortion has been legal in England therefore, a teacher would need to acknowledge this.

In summary, this section has reflected on the different roles within discussion that a teacher may take when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. It is important to recognise that these roles are complex. A teacher may adopt a different role depending on a variety of factors.

2.8 Knowledge of Education Context

This section will outline how socio- cultural theory supports this research, as the context where sensitive and controversial discussion take place is an important consideration. Furthermore, this context will be viewed using the lens of surveillance (Page, 2016) and consider the pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) of teachers as they engage in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

2.8.1 Socio-Cultural Theory

Piaget (1972, p. 146) claims that the relationship between the individual and the environment is intertwined and cannot be separated from one another; "the individual and society are bound together through the social relationship between individuals living and past". Similarly, Dewey (1916, p. 344) states that "every individual has grown up and always must grow up, in a social medium". Therefore, without an understanding of such mutuality one cannot understand the impact of the social worlds that individuals inhabit.

Socio-cultural theory provides a helpful lens to study the teachers within this research project. This theoretical position focuses on the school context where teachers are situated. Socio-cultural theory (Rogoff, 2017) does not disregard the acquisition of knowledge; however, it recognises that this knowledge is acquired in and shaped by the context where it takes place. McNamara and Conteh (2008) identified learning as culturally contextualised and as situated in social and historical frameworks. They argue that learning is socially constructed rather than focusing on acquiring a set of specific skills. Within socio-cultural theory there is recognition that there are many influences that may impact on teachers' decision making, such as family, the school, the media, language, social class to name but a few (Rogoff, 2017). These factors are fluid and subject to change based on both internal and external factors. Teachers are actively engaged in the process of negotiating these factors of influence. Therefore, teachers' lived experiences may impact on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Socio-cultural theory sees the learner as actively engaged in the learning process, where knowledge is socially constructed.

2.8.2 Surveillance

Caluya (2010) argues that surveillance has become embedded in all aspects of society and as a consequence of this, surveillance is situated within the context of power. Of interest to this research is how Caluya (2010) refers to a post- panoptic society to exemplify how surveillance has increased beyond Foucalt's (1977) theory of power and the panopticon. Foucault (1977, p.201) argues "to induce in an inmate [the teacher] to a state of conscious and permanent visibility assures the functioning of power". This form of social control is of particular interest to this research within the context of education and the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Caluya (2010) uses the term 'pedagopticon' to describe how teachers' awareness of their pedagogical decision making may be viewed by others. While it is not the intention to

theorise the work of Foucault as part of this research project, it is important to acknowledge that this awareness of consequences could be described as the result of a form of surveillance.

Caluya (2010) suggests that there has been a widening net of surveillance as a result of technology in all its forms from CCTV to social media. However, Caluya (2010) argues that it is not just technology but there has been a 'rhizomatic growth' of surveillance in its many forms. This metaphor recognises both the potential for the positive and negative aspects of surveillance- in this case surveillance as a multi directional web of connections to protect individuals, or a pervasive weed rooted in covert behaviour. The implication of the latter being that teachers can be even more accountable for what happens in the classroom. This accountability has implications for the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. As a consequence of this growth in surveillance, Wersch (2002) suggests that a particular narrative can become dominant when it fits the hegemonic group in society. Foster (1997, p. 1) also considers how dominant groups close down discussion and seek to replicate their view of 'correct versions of the past'. Foster (1997) draws attention to fears of communism in the USA and he shows how teachers became fearful of being accused of anti-Americanism and communist or socialist sympathies from 1947- 1954. In this period, known as the 'Red Scare', the "prevailing zeitgeist" where organisations- including schools- were seen as a serious threat to society. This 'Red Scare' resulted in many teachers being disciplined, forced out of their jobs or teaching a curriculum that did not discuss sensitive or controversial issues. To avoid accusations and suspension or dismissal it was safer for teachers not to mention some topics than tackle them, for example race equality or communism.

As Foster (1997) shows, throughout this period (1947- 1954) in the USA, a real risk to employment and social position existed for any teacher or school administrator who was accused of un-American activities. To some extent a legacy of this problem remains, and can be seen in the USA's ongoing education system. Within this system, teachers need to seek approval for the curriculum and teaching resources; school boards are often controlled by parents connected to ideologically driven, often right-leaning and religiously conservative pressure groups (Foster, 1997). As a result, textbooks in the USA tend to avoid sensitive and controversial issues and often do not challenge dominant interpretations of the past.

Page (2016) acknowledges that it is almost impossible to write about surveillance without acknowledging Foucault and the panopticon. For Foucault (1977), panopticon became the central metaphor for surveillance in modern society, a potential gaze that creates self-discipline

amongst citizens, workers and the institutionalised. Technology and the mass media have engendered such massive changes in surveillance since Foucault (1977) that while surveillance cannot ignore the panopticon as a starting point, Page (2016) argues that there is a move towards a post-panopticon which can help understand surveillance within the context of schools and classrooms.

Page (2016) reasons that surveillance within the context of education is not new and has taken various forms. Page (2016) provides categories of surveillance: vertical, horizontal and self. Vertical surveillance could refer to surveillance in the form of Ofsted, the schools' inspectorate, and the strategies of senior leaders within schools such as watching back CCTV, undertaking teaching observations and learning walks. Page (2016) also suggests that vertical surveillance may include the actions of students who use mobile phones to record teachers. Horizontal surveillance concerns other teachers in terms of peer observation in classrooms but also more routine forms such as informal staffrooms conversations. This category of horizontal surveillance also includes parental surveillance, which operates directly or through parental networks and collective action (Posey-Maddox, Kimelberg, and Cucchiara 2014). The final category of surveillance is intrapersonal, or self-surveillance which is enacted through reflective practice and self-monitoring. In this research I am particularly interested in considering how teachers are engaging with self-surveillance activities.

Parents, Page (2016) argues, are an important factor in horizontal surveillance as they survey the work of teachers in a number of ways- parent teacher conferences, children's assessment and children's narratives of teacher' practice and direct contact with teachers through phone, email or face to face conversations. According to Hassrick and Schneider (2009), parental surveillance seeks to determine the activities and efficacy of teaching, though it is worth noting that, however well-intentioned, parental surveillance can also undermine teachers and erode trust relations.

Page (2016) argues that self- surveillance begins with the internalisation of disciplinary surveillance. Baszile (2008) also identifies that a common form of self-surveillance is reflective practice often undertaken as an internal activity. Page (2016) further suggests that self-surveillance can also be found embedded within the risk culture of schools. With perceptions of declining trust in the profession the transparency of teachers' practice, including the scrutiny of lesson plans, evaluations, formal and informal observations, allows for senior leaders, peers, pupils and visiting parents to view the activities of teachers in situ. In this context Page (2016)

argues that teachers are consciously aware of how their practice may be viewed by various stakeholders.

Page (2016) acknowledges that the growth of technology has further implications for teachers. While education is traditionally framed on children watching the teacher, the ubiquity of mobile technology, Page (2016) argues, has transformed the watching into surveillance. Children's recordings of teachers can be edited and uploaded to the internet for scrutiny by a mass digital audience. Page (2016) recognises that children using such technology as a form of surveillance is not encouraged by schools. Yet conversely, head teachers simultaneously encourage students' surveillance of their teachers framed through official reflexive activities that give agency to 'student voice' such as the school council. Page (2010) argues, the notion of self- surveillance is perhaps the form and practice that most defines the surveillance of teachers as distinct from the context of Foucault's (1977) panopticon. Foucault (1991) argues that the gaze moves inside and discipline becomes internalised to produce 'docile bodies'. Self -surveillance activities that teachers engage with, Page (2016) argues, is a form of surveillance that "panopticism cannot account for in contemporary surveillance". This is because teachers are the active agents and willing participants within the surveyed contexts. Bauman and Lyon (2013, p.23) argue that the "primacy of social society – the primary purpose of surveillance – has moved the prospect of being watched from a menace to a temptation: the 'promise of enhanced visibility, the prospect of "being in the open" for everybody to see and everybody to notice, chimes well with the most avidly sought proof of social recognition, and therefore of valued – meaningful – existence". Returning to Caluya's (2010) metaphor of surveillance as a rhizome a shift can be identified from teachers viewing surveillance as pervasive weed to a web of protection.

Hardy (2015) adds a further lens to Caluya's (2010) metaphor of surveillance. He argues that teaching is an inherently risky profession and this surveillance has particular implications in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. The powerful observer does not need to be present in order to influence teachers' practice. Therefore, there is no need for teachers to be constantly observed by others as they modify their teaching in a range of ways including sometimes being silent to sensitive and controversial comments with regard the teaching of history. Within such a context the surveillance shifts from enjoying a web of protection to negotiating the pervasive weed of accountability.

Savenije and Goldberg (2019, p.40) suggest that teachers adopt a number of reasons for silencing such as "forgetting, denial, self –deception, memory bias, self- preservation and censorship". In regard to teachers' choice of sources, silences can be produced when selecting and interpreting them to support a particular viewpoint. This process contributes to a construction of a selected historical narrative. Therefore, teachers can be considered to be gatekeepers to the ways in which these historical narratives are presented to the children in their classes. This could be seen as reinforcing a dominant dialogue.

These dominant dialogues, Foucault (1969) argues, are created to the detriment and exclusion of alternative dialogues. Therefore, "silences thus empower those who silence and disempower those who are silenced (Savenije and Goldberg 2019, p.39). Savenjie and Goldberg (2019) further state that such a 'fear' may render a significant number of issues within the history curriculum as sensitive and controversial. So, when a sensitive or controversial issue is formally included in the curriculum, teachers may fear repercussions from 'others' for teaching it. This sense of perceived or actual threat can raise anxiety or an uncomfortableness that makes the issue sensitive for teachers (Kello, 2016). Furthermore, as well as an anxiety about how this is perceived by others, many teachers have concerns about causing upset to children by facilitating an emotive response thus silencing any further sensitive discussion (Goldberg *et al.,* 2019). The teachers' role and the sensitivity of the topic are context dependent and this may lead to teachers acting as 'gatekeepers' of sensitive and controversial knowledge through their voicing and silencing of a chosen narrative.

2.8.3 Context dependant teaching

So far, I have considered how teachers' practices are influenced by a number of factors: children's and teachers' FoK, curriculum knowledge with a focus on policy, their knowledge of history as a discipline and how teachers are aware of how their practice may be perceived by others. Turner- Bisset's (1999) research demonstrated how important the school context was as a factor of influence which I will now discuss in more detail.

Maclellan (2008) considers the importance of the school context and uses the term pedagogically literate teachers. Maclellan (2008) argues that the term pedagogical literacy is an important cognitive tool for a developed conceptualisation of pedagogic content knowledge. This is based on a teachers' ability to engage with literature pertaining to research and theory. Being able to be pedagogically literate is, for Maclellan (2008), an essential feature of being a

professional teacher. Pedagogical literacy is a reflexive concept which evolves through pedagogic content knowledge- this reflexivity is the essential means through which teachers are able to develop their pedagogic reasoning. Pedagogically literate teachers are able to 'read' the classroom and adapt their teaching to the context and needs of the children based on their engagement with theory, research and reflective practice.

Maclellan's (2008) work is centred around how, through the cognitive tool of literacy, teachers are able to engage with pedagogic development. She argues that being aware of professional literature can empower teachers to design their own representations of knowledge rather than absorbing representations that have been preconceived by others. Furthermore, she states that the process of deep reflective thinking is necessary for mindful learning. Maclellan (2008) refers to the work of Pring (2000) who identified teaching as a craft where skills and competencies are situated within a positivist position. Pring's (2000) view of teaching for Maclellan (2008) does not consider how teachers views and beliefs influence their practice. Maclellan (2008) suggests that Pring's (2000) position does not consider the school context where teachers may be socialised into specific ways of working.

Maclellan (2008) refers to a constructivist position of learning where learners are able to establish an order, and to some extent a predictability, to their social worlds- in this case the classroom. When teachers' experiences do not find a predictability and orderliness to their social worlds, Maclellan (2008) argues that teachers can experiences cognitive disequilibrium. This disequilibrium leads to adaptation of their experiences in order to find a solution. Maclellan (2008) further states that teaching and learning are different, so while the intention may be for learners to learn, the teacher cannot guarantee that learning has taken place. The focus then shifts to the teacher to refine their pedagogical approach by using reasoning and judgement so that learning can take place. This involves a synthesis of subject matter and pedagogical knowledge or PCK (Shulman 1986). PCK is unique to teachers as it represents the ability of the teacher to transform content knowledge into activities that are pedagogically powerful and that can be adapted to the needs of a learners in their specific context.

PCK can be considered to be a way of thinking by the teacher that can transform learning -this could be viewed as a form of pedagogic reasoning. PCK continue to develop as teachers gain experience and reflect on their teaching. Maclellan (2008) provides an example of how a teacher may lower her voice as a behaviour for learning strategies or use stickers as a form of reward, this teacher has found these strategies useful in her past experiences. Chan and Elliot

(2004) state that when teaching is viewed as a craft it often fails to acknowledge the complexity of the teachers' role with one aspect being the specificity of the context. This specificity forms part of a teachers' understanding of rules, procedures, principles and ways of working- and the active construction of meaning in a specific school context. Being pedagogically literate is therefore the fundamental competence of being able to teach, understand and adapt to the context.

By contrast, Maclellan (2008) argues that being able to adapt to a specific context is itself inadequate if the teacher does not engage with professional literature that can be used as a frame of reference; a teacher could remain pedagogically vulnerable when tried and tested strategies fail to be successful. Maclellan (2008) stipulates that, in order to be pedagogically literate, teachers must be able to access and use specialised research in the form of pedagogic knowledge. This engagement with key literature will enable teachers to theorise, and hypothesise about reasons for success or failure of pedagogic practices. The information, ideas, language in professional texts all influence teachers' perceptions, allowing pedagogically literate teachers to critique and construct texts that can transform their thinking and classroom practice. A further facet of becoming pedagogically literate is the ability for teachers to engage with reflective writing – another form of literacy where the relationship between thinking and writing is plausible. Maclellan (2008) adds a cautionary note that reflective writing will only support teachers in becoming pedagogically literate if they are able to challenge their usual conceptions of teaching and learning. One such challenge can be a change in context at a number of levels of their practice.

While the fusion of pedagogy and content are well documented characteristics of teaching, pedagogical literacy takes this into a further dimension by evidencing teachers' reasoning about what is academically situational and subjectively appropriate in the particular teaching situation. It is at this level that various cognitive processes transform the knowledge into an accessible format for learners. Pring (2000) suggests that perceptions and ways of thinking in specific contexts is particularly important. Without this the teacher could remain pedagogically vulnerable when tried and tested practices fail to work in different contexts, which may require teachers to draw on a range of skills. This is not to say that one set of set of skills are more useful than another. However, it does demonstrate the complexity that different contexts may create. Pedagogically literate teachers are able to adapt to a range of contexts and it is this professional expertise that transforms a way a teacher represents their professional knowledge and allows them to understand challenges inherent to their contexts. Therefore, teachers'

understanding of the context determine their actions and this is a necessary component of engaging with the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Brauch*, et al.,* (2019) argue that the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues is context specific and frame their discussion around the notion of 'hot' and 'cold' issues. The historical content being taught or discussed within lessons can be classed as a 'hot' sensitive topic which may have the potential to trigger powerful responses. This maybe in contrast to other topics which Brauch *et al.,* (2019) class as 'cold'. Cold issues are said not to be significant or relevant to the children within the class- there is no personal attachment to the issues therefore this does not trigger an emotional response. Brauch *et al.,* (2019) suggest that the character of sensitivity is highly context dependent and can become sensitive in changing social contexts.

In summary, this section has considered the place of socio- cultural theory with relevance to this study, paying specific attention to concepts of surveillance. The role of the teacher has been discussed with reference to their conscious awareness of their practice as well as being gatekeepers of learning experiences. Finally, the importance of context was outlined with regard to the need for teachers to be pedagogically literate.

2.9 Conclusion to the Chapter

The literature review has outlined a number of knowledge bases that are helpful in understanding the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues and relate to the research questions as outlined in Chapter 1. It has been necessary to define what sensitive and controversial issues are in the literature, and be aware of the problematic nature of these terms as this research will explore such definitions within the current context for education in England. This chapter has reflected on how key policy changes in England (since 2010) have shaped teachers' practice. As such, it has been important to acknowledge how policy has been influential to professional experience and practice. This research now hopes to consider the importance of the links between these policies, practice and context. As such further exploration of FoK, pedagogical strategies and surveillance particularly in relation to sensitive and controversial issues. This research will also consider key research by Kitson and McCully (2005), Magill (2016) and Turner- Bisset (1999) with a view to revaluating the usefulness of their models within the context of my research. This literature has also informed the methodologies and analysis that follow in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 : Construction of the research design, outlining my approach to this research

This chapter provides a detailed overview of the methodological approach taken in this research project. Within this, it should be noted that while there is a specific ethical section towards the end of the chapter, I will be referring to ethics throughout. Ethical considerations happen at all stages of the research, and this chapter reflects this. I discuss the underpinning theoretical position of being a researcher and consider my methodological approach, method of data collection and story of the data collection and subsequent analysis. Following this is a discussion of ethics and positionality.

A methodology outlines a researcher's approach that has come to inform the proposed research design. Each decision taken represents a different part of this methodological paradigm. The design of this project has been shaped around the underpinning research questions, my epistemological position, and my own personal experiences as a teacher; which ranges from working with young children and trainee teachers in a university setting. The chapter will begin by providing a detailed discussion on the conceptual framework adopted. Secondly, justification will be provided on the decision to adopt a qualitative case study approach, followed by the reasoning for selecting focus groups and unstructured interviews as methods of data collection. Further to this, I will present my approach to data analysis and outline my rationale for the way in which the analysis of the data will be organised. The chapter concludes with a discussion concerning how researcher positionality led to robust ethical considerations.

3.1 Conceptual Framework

While I acknowledge that the identification of a research framework is somewhat challenging, I aim to outline how my values and beliefs have come to shape and influence the research project. Silverman (2016) suggests that conducting and presenting research is a means of telling a 'story' in an alternative format. While the use of the word 'story' has different meanings when it comes to research, I have interpreted it as outlining, stage by stage, how this research project was constructed. This construction is also a personal reflection of my developing identity as a professional and a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010) in the field of education.

3.1.1 Socially conscious research

Schoorman and Bogotch (2010) argue that there is a need to reconceptualise the role of the researcher by exploring our relationships with participants in terms of power and ethical

practices. One way they suggest is for researchers to be socially conscious and consider the role of social justice as part of their research. In Chapter One I identified myself as a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010) who acknowledged the importance of listening to and representing the voices of the participants, committing to ethical principles through all decision making, and recognising social justice with education. Pillow (2003) reveals that social consciousness has emerged as a result of the tensions within qualitative research. She draws on the work of Geertz (1988, p.135) who describes these tensions as “epistemological foundations [that] have been shaken by a general loss of faith in received stories about the nature of representation.” Pillow (2002) questions who benefits from the research and whether representations are valid. Schoorman and Bogotch (2010) suggest that researchers should examine their complicity during the research process by committing to the principles of socially conscious research.

This is supported by Van Maanen (1989) who calls for a critical philosophy of action in educational research. Berger (2015) believes that social consciousness is best initiated by educational research that instils critical social consciousness and critical thinking. With this in mind, I have adopted the principles of reflexivity as a socially conscious researcher; Berger (2015) argues that these forms of reflexivity are a researcher's consciousness.

In Chapter 2, I considered the role of the teacher as a gatekeeper of knowledge. This relates to Schoorman and Bogotch (2010) who acknowledge the work of Freire (1996) and his commitment to the social constructions of power and privilege. Freire's (1996) research focused on the emancipatory nature of pedagogy. Schoorman and Bogotch (2010, p. 250) state that these principles could be applied to the research process by asking critical questions "such as whose knowledge is represented, whose perspectives are omitted and who benefits from such selections?" It is equally important to consider who is being represented in the curriculum and this research.

The aim, therefore, is to make transparent my research positionality by demonstrating how all the methodological decisions have come together in order to try and create an accurate representation of this research. The unfolding of the research ‘story’ has been vital for me to consider as a novice researcher, the decisions made have needed to create a coherent narrative so that I can follow through my initial thoughts at the beginning of the research design to the conclusions at the end. Thompson and Gunter (2010) argue that a research identity is neither stable or fixed, but more fluid, dialogical and unstable as the research progresses. Thompson

and Gunter's (2010) state that such a research role emerged as they reflected on their role as researchers and teacher educators. They suggest that using binary language such as insider or outsider researcher is problematic as it does not allow for the duality of the researcher roles and how this can change through the research process. The idea of being an outsider in research can be viewed as advantageous, as they may bring fresh eyes to the research process. However, Geertz (1973) suggests that these fresh eyes can enable researchers to misinterpret local meanings. During the data collection of the individual interviews, I first presented myself as an outsider to the individual school environments. However, once the information had been shared, I was in the position of having privileged insider information about the school. Furthermore, some of the schools were known to me as I had visited them in my role as a teacher educator to conduct school observations with trainee teachers. So, it was essential to acknowledge the duality of my role and how it changed.

3.2 Interpretivist Paradigm

I will now discuss the research paradigm that underpins this research. In its purest form, a paradigm can be explained as a model for researchers to follow when designing a research project. Besides, Mukherji and Albon (2015) argue a paradigm is a way of seeing and interpreting the social world either through qualitative or quantitative research. Depending on the chosen paradigm, this then shapes how social research projects are conducted and highlights the researcher's epistemological positioning.

Due to the aims and objectives of this research project, an interpretivist paradigm was chosen as the central epistemological position. Other paradigms, such as positivism, would define a single 'truth' rather than a commitment to representing the complexity of multiple truths from a research context. Mack (2010) states, interpretivism is sometimes referred to as constructivism, as it often emphasises the ability of the individual to construct meaning of their research. This construction is attributed to the fact that social reality is viewed from multiple perspectives and is interpreted differently by individuals and social groups (Mack, 2010); and this was important to acknowledge when listening to the voices of the participants and interpreting their meaning. My position as a researcher in the interpretivist paradigm was to, therefore "understand and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants" (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). Thomas (2016) argues that social reality is constructed differently by each person in each situation they face. These behaviours and practices are contextually shaped by the social and cultural setting of the participants. Consequently, this situates the

research project within a socio-cultural perspective and recognises that the experiences provided by the participants are not only dependant on the context of the setting where the discussions took place; in addition to this discussion was sometimes a result of the context of where the participants taught lessons.

Patton (2002, p. 59) describes socio-cultural theory as a "complex system that is greater than the sum of its parts". Taking this into consideration, the participants' experiences of teaching sensitive and controversial issues may be recognised as being somewhat different, and their experiences are likely to reflect this. I, therefore, acknowledge here the socially situated nature of this research. Besides, classrooms are not culturally neutral; they promote culture, specific values and ideas from dominant social groups (Rogoff *et al.,* 2017). What develops in a school context can have a distinctive, "coherent paradigm of socialisation practices and community values [and/or school values] (Rogoff *et al.,* 2017, p. 876). Being a contextually aware and reflexive researcher is key to expanding my understanding of teachers' experiences concerning sensitive and controversial issues.

Rogoff *et al.,* (2017, p. 878) state that in the past, data has often been gathered and interpreted from the perspective of the cultural values and practices of the researcher. Accepting this view would result in serious issues arising, as it "negates the strengths of individuals and cultural communities by judging other practices by the assumptions and value system of the dominant community". Furthermore, within the interpretivist paradigm, rules and meanings are not assumed to be transparent for all participants in the same way as a researcher's understanding of an issue. My role, therefore, required an understanding of the most suitable approach in order to interpret what the participants had to say. Consequently, I adopted a reflexive approach throughout the data analysis process and presentation of the data. I recognised from my own experiences as a teacher and from being immersed in this research that different school settings and communities develop practices that "overlap, conflict and transform" educational practice. I felt that it was important to acknowledge the need for reflexivity in order to understand how people and their school communities simultaneously contribute to individual development and changes in cultural practices (Rogoff, 2012, p. 235).

3.3 Theoretical Positions

The discussion will now move to how social constructionism and socio-cultural theories have supported the research design Sfard (1998) suggests that theories of learning are not fixed and

are subject to change. By recognising this, I have considered how this affects my theoretical position as my research developed. My research needed to be situated within a theoretical paradigm; this following section will demonstrate the complexity of applying a specific paradigm to the research and will highlight the navigation through the narrative of knowledge and learning.

Learning has long been associated with an acquisition of knowledge and Sfard (1998) draws on the work of Piaget (1954) and Vygotsky (1978) in stating that their theories are centred on acquisition and units of knowledge that can be accumulated. Learners can be both passive or active recipients of knowledge; the active recipient of knowledge is supported by the conception of learning as a member of a community whereas the active learner can communicate in the specific language of the community and respond to the norms and values of that community. In this case the community is the classroom and the school setting of the participants. I recognise that knowledge construction is context and value-laden and can be situated within social constructionism, which will be discussed in more detail below. Sfard (1998, p. 11) states that to give "full exclusivity to one conceptual framework would be hazardous." I will now outline the theories of social constructionism and socio-cultural theory which have informed this research.

3.3.1 Social Constructionism

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009) state that social constructionists adopt a comprehensive and multi-faceted perspective. Social constructionists are primarily concerned with how reality has been viewed through a social lens. They reject the existence of purely rational, objective knowledge, arguing instead that knowledge arises from processes more related to ideology, interests or power. Crotty (2003, p. 42) defines social constructionism as "the view that all knowledge and therefore, all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon social practice … transmitted within an essentially social context." Humans construct meanings as they engage in the social world that they are interpreting. Without this, Crotty (2003) suggests there would be no meaning in the social world, meaning or truth cannot be described as objective. For example, through language, individuals make sense of their social worlds in different ways.

Berger and Luckman (1966, p. 56) suggest language is vital in the building up of a social stock of information and that individuals create their reality, the institutions and their legitimisation through their talk. These ideas were central to my research design as I was trying to make meaning from the discussion during the interviews that teachers share about their experiences

in relation to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. This has enabled me to understand more fully the experiences they have to share.

In the analysis process of the research, I have considered how the participants talk about their "experiences [which] do not constitute a sphere of subjective reality separate from and, in contrast to the objective realm of the external world" (Berger and Luckman, 1966, p. 65). Social constructionism demonstrates that seemingly natural phenomena are not at all natural. However, Crotty (2003, p. 45) further states that "because of the essential relationship that human experience bears to its object, no object can adequately be described as in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object". With this in mind, constructionists argue that there "is no truth or valid interpretation; there are interpretations that can be useful" to answer research questions (Crotty (2003 p. 48). As a researcher, it has been part of my process of analysing these interpretations to establish and make sense of the information provided by the participants.

During the interviews, the research participants were sharing the voices of the culture that they associated themselves with. As a socially conscious researcher, I therefore had to listen to the many voices they presented. This has been a fundamental part of this research, as I recognised myself as a qualitative socially conscious researcher using a social constructionist perspective. I, therefore, acknowledged that this research was situated within social constructionism, however, due to the contextual nature of my research; it also drew on socio-cultural theory which will be discussed in the next section.

3.3.2 Socio-Cultural Theory

The socio-cultural perspective provided a helpful lens to study the teachers who took part in this research project. The focus was more on the school context where the teachers were based, rather than the acquisition of knowledge. I recognised that socio-cultural theory does not disregard knowledge. However, for this research project, it was essential to acknowledge the context of where the research took place. Pollard (2004) states that human beings construct understanding and learn from social interactions within socio-cultural settings.

Furthermore, he suggests that people interact together based on meanings. These meanings and "shared understandings are generated through shared experiences and negotiation, become socially patterned and sustained through cultures" (p. 5). Learning is therefore culturally contextualised and nested in historical and social frameworks which are further influenced by

factors such as: school, social class, the media, policy, language and parents. The teachers who took part in this research project made explicit reference to their lived experiences concerning the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. While social constructionism acknowledges the interaction between people, adding this additional layer also acknowledges the importance of context and the complexity this brings. As a result, I view the individual as developing a sense of identity, and this influences the way they act with other people. The individual gains meaning of accepted values of the social worlds they inhabit. It has therefore been necessary to recognise that the relationship between the individual/s and the environment is interlinked and impossible to separate.

3.4 Qualitative Research Design

The purpose, of a methodology, is not to justify why an approach was the best fit, but rather to justify why the approach was essential and unavoidable in this form of research and of "the context and purpose of this particular enquiry" (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p. 21). Collecting qualitative data requires researchers to be 'active, reactive and adaptive' while matching research methods to each unique project (Patton 1987, p. 18). Qualitative approaches are particularly useful when researching with teachers in the field of education, as they allow for rich descriptions in words to unfold (Robson, 2002, p.138). Qualitative research is an umbrella term for a range of methodological traditions, designs, strategies and analysis that could sit within the interpretivist paradigm. Quantitative research can be considered to be more positivist in nature, though this is not always the case. Qualitative research can be seen to support methodologies which "highlight the political nature of education research" (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p. 145). It was essential to acknowledge this element in my research design and recognise that this research contained political elements. The field of qualitative research can be complicated, changing and may lend itself to multiple methodologies and research practices. Punch and Oancea (2014) suggest that researchers must recognise how complex social relations may be. As my research involved complex social relations, it demanded a more qualitative approach; this further supports using the lens of socio-cultural theory.

3.5 A Case Study Approach

When starting this research project, many of my earlier assumptions about research were based on practicalities, such as how, when and where would I be able to bring this research project to life. However, having reflected on my experiences, I have been able to recognise that my earlier

decision making in my methodological construction did, in fact, carry "deep and articulated assumptions" (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p. 25). With this in mind, it was pertinent not only to recognise this, but also consider how my methodological choice was an underpinning principle of the research. I had initially considered different methodological approaches such as action research, evaluation, and life history before concluding that the adopted methodological choice was so embedded within the research questions, that a case study not only seemed the most appropriate but was inextricably part of my position as a researcher.

Thomas (2016) explains that for interpretivist researchers, a classic methodological approach lends itself to case study, as this form of research could be viewed as a particular approach to answering questions about a particular phenomenon. In this instance, the exploration of the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues since 2010 in England.

Case study is an approach that assumes an in-depth understanding and deep immersion with the subject (Stake (1995), Flyvberg (2006), and Yin (2014)). Thomas (2016) describes interpretivist research and a case study approach as natural partners, as they each seek for rich, intensive understanding of the phenomena being researched. Stake (1995) suggests that a case study provides the opportunity to study the particularity and complexity of an issue. Furthermore, Flyvberg (2006) argues that the case study produces the type of context-dependent knowledge that research on learning shows to be necessary when looking at a phenomenon in depth. As outlined in Chapter 2, the context of the participants' experiences and the current context for education has been recognised as crucial for understanding this research.

Yin (2014, p. 16) articulates that a case study is an empirical inquiry that "investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-world context" and "explores the boundaries between the phenomena and the context which may not be clearly evident." A case study approach enabled me to understand a real-world 'case' which involved asking important contextual questions- again supporting socio-cultural theory. One of the strengths of using a case study has been that it enabled the capturing of multiple perspectives from the participants, which provided an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. In this research, a "collective case study" or a "bounded case study" as defined by Stake (1995, p. 4) was the most appropriate as it enabled me to research "commonalities and uniqueness". This bounded case study includes teacher participants of history in England, who shared their experiences of teaching sensitive and controversial issues in September 2016. These teachers were from a

range of schools and represented different age phases, from Key Stage 1-5. Thomas (2017, p. 21) refers to a bounded case study as a rich picture with boundaries. It allowed for the exploration of the particular rather than the general. The in-depth analysis of the particular enables what Foucault (1981, cited in Thomas, 2017) describes as a three-dimensional picture, or a 'polyhedron of intelligibility'. Similarly, Flyvberg (2001) describes such analysis as 'getting close to reality' by maintaining contact with the subject(s) of a study. It is this 'reality' that made the case study approach particularly useful, as it "eschews methodological formulae and endorses and stimulates a critical, creative approach to" understanding these teachers' experiences (Thomas, 2016, p. 6). A bounded case study therefore allowed for clarity with specificity rather than obfuscation (Simons 2009).

Riessmann (2008) suggests that a case study methodology allows a researcher to engage closely with the personal experiences of those stories which are often unheard or untold and enter the perspective of the participant. In this case listening to teachers' experiences of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Consequently, a bounded case study enabled me to facilitate these teachers' experiences which highlighted issues that were tied up with identity and power and "with the relationship between individual agency" and society (Bathmaker, 2010, p. 1). This was important in giving teachers agency in terms of both power and autonomy by listening to their classroom experiences and representing their voices. I aimed to "make the strange familiar" (Goodley et al., p. 67) which involved getting to know the participants and capturing their experiences to make sense of the professional and personal contexts they were familiar with. A case study allowed the teachers' voices to be heard and enabled me to undertake an in-depth exploration of their experiences. This was important as a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010) as I acknowledged, the importance of listening to and representing the voices of the participants, committing to ethical principles through all decision making, and recognising social justice within education.

3.6 Purposeful Sampling

The participants in the research project were selected through purposeful sampling. Emails and information (see appendix 2) were sent out to teachers who were either known to me through informal history networks or were contacts or colleagues of teachers. Ten teachers responded positively to being part of this research.

Purposeful sampling enabled me to research with participants who were readily available and enthusiastic teachers of history. Though I acknowledge that these teachers had already identified an interest in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues which could be viewed as a limitation within the sample, this enabled in-depth information gathering, necessary for exploring this phenomenon in-depth (Perry and Nicholls, 2015). This purposeful sampling provided a small cross-section of the teaching population as the participants were made up of teachers from Key Stages 1-5. The participants were available and had rich information which would benefit this research. While representativeness was not sought, the participants were selected from different groups in terms of age, gender and type of setting, therefore, providing credibility and diversity to the bounded case study. Flick (2015) states that decisions about sampling in qualitative research above all refer to the persons or situations. Sampling decisions did not end once the participants were selected as issues of school size, similarities, differences, context, settings and so on were factors to be considered in the analysis process. Here the decision made concerning sampling was not abstract but rather part of the essential criteria of the research.

3.7 Participants

I was aware that because I was asking participants to discuss their experiences about the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues, the nature of these experiences could possibly be sensitive to the participants. I adopted an upfront approach to this and provided a disclaimer at the start of the focus groups and interviews. I stated that the participants could share their experiences, and they could decide what was appropriate to share during the interview. With this in mind, during the focus group interviews, there was a shared understanding and recognition that there had been times when participants had found teaching, complex and sometimes emotional. Some teachers, during the focus groups commented that they did not often have the opportunity to share with colleagues their practices.

Both the focus groups and individual interviews aimed to recognise and value the teachers as skilled practitioners and professionals, and this resonated with my ethical stance as a researcher. I agreed with the principles outlined by Pillow (2010) who argues that developing reciprocity by doing research 'with' rather than 'on' will equalise the relationship whilst acknowledging that establishing relationships solely for research purposes or 'faking friendship' is ethically wrong. I ensured that I considered this throughout the research process (Jessop, 2008) and further ethical decisions made will be discussed later in this chapter.

Participant information sheets were provided, which outlined how participants were able to withdraw from the research project which included email contact detail of both my supervisors (appendix 2). I also completed an ethical consent form which was presented to the university ethics committee, and consent was granted for the research to go ahead. Verbal and written consent was obtained at the start and during the research process. It was essential to maintain anonymity, and I chose to do this by using pseudonyms for both the individuals and the schools. I had considered changing some of the experiences disclosed, such as changing the topic of the Ancient Egyptians to The Vikings. However, this was not possible as the topic; participants were discussing, was integral to their experiences. I briefly considered changing the gender of the participants so that a further layer of anonymity was provided. However, I did not feel very comfortable about this. To further provide anonymity to the participants, the focus group data was analysed using thematic analysis. The individual interviews were presented as a series of personal responses where school and participants names were anonymised.

I was also aware that this research project was subject to the "readiness of the participants and [their] desired level of involvement" (O'Sullivan, 2004, p.30). Huisman (2008) suggests that full collaboration may work in some situations. Whereas, in others, it may place unnecessary burdens on the research participants who may not have time to spare or much interest in the project. All the participants were offered the opportunity to take part in individual interviews. However, not all participants took up this opportunity, and six individual interviews were conducted. Through email conversations, it appeared that time constraints made this difficult for some participants to engage with interviews, so I did not pursue this. Once the data had been analysed, I provided an opportunity to share my findings with the participants. Two participants attended the meeting; those who were unable to attend stated this was due to work commitments.

3.7.1 Research Participants

Figure three provides a summary of the participants who took part in the focus group and interviews, detailing their teaching experience and the context of the school they teach within. This information demonstrates not all the participants who took part in the focus group interviews took part in the individual interviews as outlined earlier. However, one participant, Robert, was unable to attend either of the focus group interviews, but he took part in an individual interview. While there are many contextual factors that could be considered concerning the participants what bounded participants in this case study was that everyone

outlined that their experiences of teaching sensitive and controversial issues had been challenging.

Name	Teaching Experience	School Context	Age Phase	Focus Group	Individual interviews
Sammy	10 years plus	large inner-city academy	Secondary	1	No
Rebecca	Less than 5 years	large primary semi-urban academy	Primary	1	Yes
Charlie	Less than 5 Years	large primary academy, urban	Primary	1	Yes
Mike	Less than 5 Years	large secondary academy, urban	Secondary	1	Yes
Nate	Less than 5 years	large urban primary academy	Primary	1	Yes
Emma	Less than 5 years	independent school- urban	Secondary	2	No
Kate	More than 5 years	independent school- urban	Primary	2	No
Jim	Less than 5 years	large primary academy	Primary	2	Yes
Robert	More than 10 years	large inner-city secondary school	Secondary	No	Yes

***Fig 3.*1 Summary of Participants' Profiles**

3.8 Introduction to Interviews

The interview allows the researcher to explore an individual or groups' perception, meaning, and definition of situations and constructions of reality (Punch and Oancea, 2014). During the conversation of the interview, the interviewer and the interviewee "grasp for meaning" together (Forsey, 2002, p. 372). Interviews may vary from highly structured, standardised to free-flowing with many other forms in between; they can produce accounts of people's lived experiences. Holstein and Gubrium (2016, p. 69) suggest that interviews are a social encounter where knowledge is actively formed and shaped.

King and Horrocks (2010) identified three types of interviewing: Realist interviews - primarily focused on detachment and neutrality;

Contextual interviews - which are interested in the context of the interviewee's experience;

Constructionist interviews - which involve the co-construction of meanings by interviewer and interviewee;

For this research, the focus group and individual interviews were both contextual and constructionist and were conducted in two phases as realist interviews would not support this research. The first phase of interviews was with two focus groups and were unstructured. I had prepared some questions as prompts but found after the initial discussion these were not needed as conversation flowed freely, and I did not want to disrupt the discussion. Subsequent individual interviews in Phase Two, were also unstructured, which allowed for participants to take ownership of their conversations and allow for in-depth exploration of interviewees' experiences and interpretations. In this case, I did not prepare prompts as I did not want to influence the direction of the conversation. It was vital for me to listen to teachers share what they felt was necessary, thus giving them a voice. The unstructured interview enabled the interviewee to construct their account of their experiences. Punch and Oancea (2014, p. 185) refer to the unstructured interview as "a way of understanding the complex behaviour of people without imposing any prior categorisation that might limit the field of enquiry". I recognised that these conversations were unlikely to take place before establishing a purposeful and dialogic relationship between the researcher and the participants prior to the interviews taking place. At times this was more difficult than I anticipated, particularly at the start of an interview where I was trying to put the interviewees at ease. The unstructured interview allowed for

elicitation and authentic accounts of subjective experiences. With this in mind, I resisted sharing my personal experiences so that the interview could be as neutral as possible

3.8.1 Focus Groups

The first phase of data collection was through two focus group interviews (see fig.3). Thomas (2013) suggests that the term focus group has been used interchangeably with group interviews and identifies two critical differences between them. In a group interview, the researcher is likely to take a lead role in the discussion, asking key questions. However, in a focus group, the researcher aims to facilitate or moderate the discussion among the participants. This formed part of my rationale to conduct focus group interviews as I was aiming to generate a discussion that all participants could be involved in.

I needed to recognise the behaviour of individuals in that some may dominate the discussion or say rather little. I was also aware of what Thomas (2013) calls 'risk shift phenomena' where individuals may behave differently in a group than they would individually, or that they may disclose something that they would not have in an individual interview. The opportunity to follow up the focus group interviews with individual interviews provided the participants with another opportunity to share information with me or raise any questions about what had been discussed during the focus group. The social environment of sharing information within a focus group discussion appeared to hold congruence within my underpinning theory of knowledge construction, as I shared with the participants that I was not looking for a right answer, but wanted to understand more about their experiences.

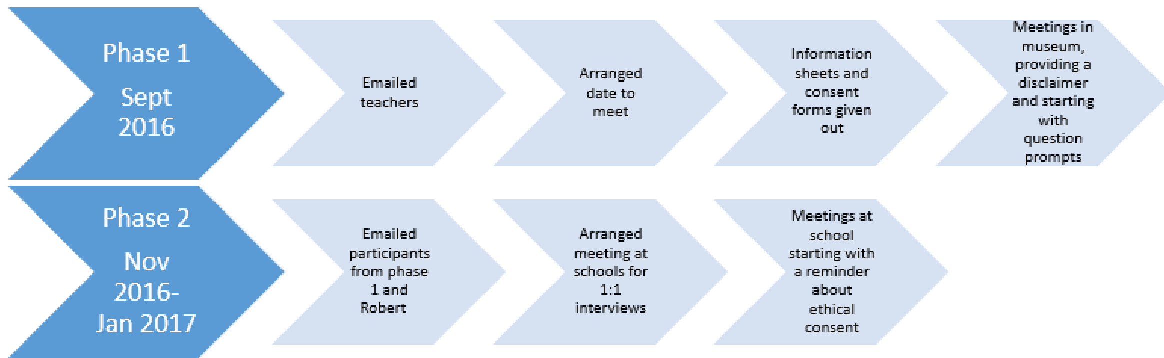
The focus groups interviews were held in a local museum, a venue that was an accessible and central location. Table and chairs were set up in such a way that all participants were able to see one another; I chose to sit randomly where there was a space after the participants had sat down. This allowed participants to choose where they sat during the interview. The focus group provided an opportunity for participants to understand other participants' issues and concerns. It also provided an opportunity to share their experiences with one another to form the beginnings of what Lave and Wenger (1991) would call a 'community of practice'. I felt at the time that the focus groups made up of teachers with a shared interest in history was a valuable opportunity for the participants to discuss their classroom experiences.

Aurini *et al.,* (2016) define the focus group as a method of understanding and describing an issue from the perspectives of the participants; they are an opportunity for multiple participants to interact with others through dialogue. Focus group discussions are a particularly rich source of data collection. I was, therefore, able to collect an abundance of data at one time. I found the focus group discussion extremely useful in answering my research questions, which allowed me to explore further issues raised in the discussion during the individual interviews in Phase Two. Morgan (2012) states that while focus group discussions facilitate an opportunity to listen to not only what individuals are saying about a topic, but also how their feelings, opinions and thoughts were formulated. As conversations developed, this seemed to form a supportive platform for sharing experiences.

3.8.2 Unstructured Individual Interviews

In Phase Two of data collection, I used unstructured individual interviews. Aurini *et al.,* (2014) state the primary purpose of the in-depth personal interview is to focus on the individual alone. In recognising this, I sought to understand the subjective feelings, thoughts and experiences of the participants individually—this method allowed for data collection while seeking to understand individual perspectives which were contextualised within their experiences. Aurini *et al.,* (2014, p 45) suggest that "in-depth interviews facilitate the comprehensive exploration of multifaceted issues, allowing you to connect these to personal circumstances".

The interviews were held in the school settings of the participants; this was a pragmatic decision based on the time constraints of the teachers involved and had an ethical dimension in terms of power. I had considered holding the interviews at a central setting such as the museum (in terms of accessibility) or at my place of work. However, I felt that the participants would be more comfortable in their own personal setting. I provided the participants with a choice as to where they would like the interviews to take place, and they all chose their own setting, which they stated was due to time constraints.



Phase 1 September 2016	Phase 2 November 2016-January 2017
Emailed teachers who taught history and were known to me or colleagues in informal professional networks.	Emailed participants from Phase 1, including Robert
Arranged a date to meet	Arranged to conduct unstructured interviews in participants' school settings
Participants provided with participant information sheets, right to withdraw and consent forms	Reminded participants of the ethical consent form, information sheet and right to withdraw
Focus groups held at the museum, with space arranged appropriately	Conducted interviews
Introduced the research to participants, providing a disclaimer.	
Prompt of 'how do you define sensitive and controversial issues?' was asked with unstructured discussion following.	

***Fig 4.*1 Story of the data collection**

3.9 Thematic Analysis

Silverman (2016) argues that there are many different approaches to analysing qualitative data, with thematic analysis being just one of them. While most approaches set basic guidelines for researchers to follow, Silverman (2016 p. 332) states that any approach would need to be

covered in a heuristic fashion that starts with a “close inspection of a sample of data about a specific issue”. Thematic analysis is a method that enabled me to capture the meaning within the data by providing a strategy for interpreting and organising the data to “create a narrative that brings together the commonalities and differences in participants’ descriptions of their subjective experiences” (Crowe et al., 2015, p. 87). The data from this project was analysed using a thematic approach, where I sought to find patterns of meaning. Clarke and Braun (2017, p. 297) state, “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning” within qualitative data. They state that this may be considered unusual as an approach to analysing qualitative data as it is “unbounded by theoretical commitments”. They further state it is a suitable analytic tool that can be used across a range of theoretical frameworks and research paradigms. It was ideally suited to my research as I was aiming for an organic approach to theme development. This approach allowed me to take an active role in the analysis as I sought to understand patterns and meaning across the data. I did not approach this process with pre-conceived themes as this was method was in keeping with my position as a socially conscious researcher. Clarke and Braun (2017, p. 297) further suggest that thematic analysis provides an "accessible and systematic approach” to generate themes from qualitative data. This allows for the generation of a critical framework which can “interrogate patterns within personal and social meanings … and to ask questions about the implications of this (Clarke and Braun, 2017, p. 297).

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that there are five key approaches to thematic analysis:

- Become familiar with the data
- Generate initial codes
- Search for themes and potential themes
- Review themes and check for examples that do not fit
- Refine themes, generate propositions and look for complexities common with a thematic approach

This five-step guidance provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) gave a robust guide that was used to support thematic analysis of both the focus group interviews and the individual

interviews in Phase One and Two respectively. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility and this was a key consideration in choosing this method for analysing the data from the focus groups and the individual interviews. Rubin (1995, p. 226) claims that analysis is exciting because “you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews”.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge my theoretical positioning and values in relation to qualitative research. I did not subscribe to a naïve realist view of qualitative research, where the researcher can simply 'give voice' (Fine, 2002) to their participants. As Fine (2002, p. 218) argues, even a 'giving voice' approach "involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments". There was a need during the analysis process to return to my theoretical framework and methods in order to consider how I was analysing the data and acknowledge the decisions that I made in this process. Therefore, in capturing themes concerning the research questions, I needed to find, locate and acknowledge a pattern of responses or meaning within the data. The analysis was not coded without theoretical considerations, and here I returned to my underlying epistemological position of interpretivism. While I identified a position of power as an interviewer as outlined above, I also recognised my position of power as an analyst, acknowledging here my role as a socially conscious researcher. An account of themes ‘emerging’ or being ‘discovered’ is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the active role that I played in identifying the patterns and themes, selecting which were of interest, and reporting them to the audience (Taylor and Ussher, 2001, p. 4).

3.9.1 Thematic Analysis in Practice

This section discusses how I analysed my data using thematic analysis. I felt that it was necessary to outline the rigorous analysis process that was undertaken. Tuckett (2005) states that if we do not know how people went about analysing their data or what assumptions informed their analysis, it can be difficult to evaluate their research. As a result, I will demonstrate the analysis process undertaken, which followed the framework outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) which was mentioned earlier in this chapter.

I have outlined how thematic analysis has been used to analyse the data from the focus group interviews and how this also formed the initial analysis of the individual interviews. Each stage of the analysis process will be outlined, and in addition to this, exemplars from each stage will be available as appendices. I have made the decision to include this because I wanted to

demonstrate the robust level of the analysis that has taken place. I will firstly consider the analysis of Phase One of data collection.

3.9.2 Phase One; Setting the Context

The focus group interviews were a crucial part of this research, both in terms of developing my understanding of the nature of sensitive and controversial issues, and in terms of developing the next stage of the research into Phase Two. As a researcher, I was aware of the need to continually reflect on my research and research processes (Pillow, 2010). Stenhouse (1975) reminds researchers of the need to be self-critical as the research progresses. The focus groups allowed me to listen to teachers to discuss a range of issues that have had an impact on their decision making in the classroom. As the focus group interviews took place shortly after the Brexit referendum (June 2016), the participants shared their personal classroom experiences of this time. Therefore, there was a need to consider this as part of my research. The primary focus of this research was situated within the discipline of history; however, it was essential to acknowledge that this research contained elements of the participants' experiences of teaching 'British Values'.

3.9.3 Stage 1; Familiarisation with the Data

The focus group interviews were carried out at the local museum, as this was seen as an accessible venue for the participants (Aruni et al., 2016). Following the focus group interviews, I had some immediate thoughts about the discussion that took place; this provided valuable reflection time before the data was formally transcribed (Reissman 1993). Following the focus group interviews, I constructed field notes which became 'a reservoir of [my] memos about analysis, thoughts and directions for further data collections' (Tuckett, 2005, p. 78; see appendix 4, figure. 1). This reservoir became a storage facility of my initial thoughts about the data, and while I do not refer back to these notes explicitly, they were an important scaffold in identifying the research narrative. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) describe the procedure of creating field notes as pre-analysis of the data and consider this an important part of the process.

Following my initial engagement with the data, the next stage was to transcribe it into words, I decided to use a professional transcriber for this process. This decision to use a transcriber was based purely on a pragmatic basis in terms of time. I was aware it would take a considerable amount of time to analyse the data, and having the opportunity to use a professional transcriber ensured the data would be ready for prompt analysis. Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) recognise that the transcription process may cause 'slippage' as it is dependent on the skills of the transcriber. Being aware of this, I checked the transcription for accuracy. I immersed myself in the data by repeatedly listening to the spoken words on the recording (see appendix 4, figure 2 for notes taken during this process).

Braun and Clarke (2006) state there is no single, concrete way to conduct a thematic analysis on data nor transcribing the data itself. However, I did recognise that the process must be both rigorous and thorough. The transcription provided an orthographic account which was a verbatim copy of all verbal and non-verbal utterances. I gave all the participants a pseudonym to protect their identity and following this I counted the times that the participant spoke during the interview on the transcript; an example of this has been provided in the appendix (see appendix 4, figure 3) and direct quotations in the main body of this thesis will also indicate this number in order to make the data traceable. This process enabled me to identify what was said in context and recognise how different voices may have been more prominent in the interview. Furthermore, as a socially conscious researcher, I was aware that the less prominent voices had important experiences to share.

4.9.4 Stage 2; Generating Initial Codes

Once I became familiar with the data from the focus groups, the next step was to generate initial codes from the data set. Codes identified a feature of the data that was of interest to this research and would help answer the research questions. Drawing on the work of Miles and Hubberman (1994), I organised the data into meaningful groups where the data had some common features or contextual factors. At this stage of the analysis, I recognised that these codes would eventually be formed into themes and that working in this way was part of the process of engaging with thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006). I worked on a systematic basis where equal time and attention was given to all sections of the data.

Coding was completed manually using coloured pens to indicate different codes. Then, I used a grid to help me organise this initial coding (see appendix 4, figure 4). At this point of the analysis, I constructed as many codes as I was aware that codes generated would be helpful in stage 3- of the analysis (searching for themes). This form of analysis is called 'inductive analysis', (Hammersley, 1992) which is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame or any analytical preconceptions. Rapley (2016, p. 332) argues that coding is complex and can take many forms and does not necessarily fit into a 'neat label'. As part of being a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010), I recognised that my deep engagement with the data was formed by my previous experiences. These experiences had been formed by my own values and beliefs about education as a form of social justice and from engaging critically with the literature of sensitive and controversial issues. An example of initial coding can be seen in appendix 4 (see appendix 4, figure 4). The next stage of this analysis process was to search for and thus select themes.

3.9.5 Stage 3; Searching for Themes

A theme captures something important about the data that is related to the research question. It represents a response, pattern or meaning within the data set. There are no specific criteria on what counts as a theme in terms of the proportion of the data that it represents. In the model, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest researcher judgment is needed to decide on what classifies a theme and suggest a degree of flexibility is required. Furthermore, the importance of a theme should be seen as whether it captures something important in the data that relates to the research questions. In this instance, I was attempting to capture important elements relating to how teachers talk about sensitive and controversial issues. I was consciously aware that I was looking for patterns, frequency, and commonalities across the data set, as discussed by Ripley (2016). Ripley (2016) suggests that this process will often involve finely coding the data, refining the data and then looking to move these codes into themes and sub-themes.

This phase of analysis began once all the data had been coded. The next step was to use all the data and sort it into potential themes. Essentially, this process was to analyse the codes produced in stage 2 and then collate all the relevant data extracts to form a theme. This was achieved by cutting and pasting extracts onto different pages until they formed a coherent theme. I referred to these as 'theme piles' as identified by Braun and Clarke (2006) (see

appendix 4, figure 5 for an example of this). Following the collection of theme piles, these then seemed to take a more coherent shape. This was a recursive process and figure 5 (see appendix 5) demonstrates an example of this.

3.9.6 Stage 4; Reviewing Themes

This stage of the process involved refining the themes I had identified. I was aware that the data used in the themes needed to form what Braun and Clarke (2006 p. 65) refer to as a 'coherent pattern'. I needed to be sure that the themes reflected the meanings in the data set as a whole. At this point, I revisited the uncoded transcripts and listened to the entire data set once again. This was a valuable process in confirming the chosen themes. I was aware that this process could be repeated several times. However, I did not want to over- analyse the data or create unnecessary codes. At the end of this process, I was confident that the themes produced created a coherent account of the data that best represented the voices of the participants. There was some data that fitted into more than one theme and was, therefore, dual coded - an example is provided in (appendix 4, figure 6). Data did not always fit into neat themes. However, I found that recognising this messiness allowed a more rigorous analysis. The interconnections that were being made between the themes allowed for a deeper understanding of the process (Ripley, 2016). I felt that this was an essential part of analysing the data.

3.9.7 Stage 5; Defining and Naming the Themes

This stage of the analysis process was concerned with defining and refining the themes. This involved identifying the quintessential nature of each theme as well as defining what aspect of the data was captured in each theme. I was aware that each theme would involve a detailed analysis so that a coherent account could be told about the data.

I did not feel that analysing all codes as a separate theme added anything further to the discussion as they had been included within other themes. For example, there were a small number of codes related to power and decision making, and relationships and British Values. When looking at power and decision making, the comments made were mainly the same as

those related to constructions of childhood. Similarly, the codes that related to British Values were primarily related to the discussion on Brexit which appeared in most themes.

Following this rigorous step-by-step analytical process, the final themes identified from the focus group interviews were (see appendix 5 for the full data of each theme):

1. Exploring and Defining the Terms ‘Sensitive’ and ‘Controversial’

2. Reflections from Classroom Practice;

2.1 History as an Opportunity to Discuss Controversial and Sensitive Issues;

2.2 Disclosure Dilemma;

2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues.

Influential Factors that Impact on Teachers’ Decision Making in the Classroom

3.1 Constructions of Childhood;

3.2 The Influence of Parents;

3.3 Unexpected Discussion;

3.4 The Significance of the School Context.

While the themes were analysed separately, I saw them as interconnected to the overall theme of the research on exploring sensitive and controversial issues.

3.9.8 Presenting the Thematic Data of the Focus Groups

In Chapter Four, I conceptualised the thematic data in order to create a coherent discussion framed by Turner Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases. I was aware that trying to fit data neatly into a pre-existing structure could potentially compromise my research and restrict the voices of the participants. Therefore, whilst the data has been presented with reference to the themes, it has also been analysed in relation to the Turner-Bisset’s (1999) knowledge bases with explicit reference being made to the connections between themes and bases. Foot notes have been provided in order for data to be traceable to the themes.

3.9.9 Phase Two; The Individual Interviews

From the focus group discussions in Phase One of this research, it became apparent that the school and the current national context for education were factors of central importance in understanding the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Braun and Clark's (2006) thematic analysis was used as a way of analysing the data in the focus group interviews, and I had used this as my initial method of analysing the data from the individual interviews. I had initially identified four broad themes; accountability, sensitive and controversial issues, history as a subject and British Values. I had some concerns about presenting the analysis in this way because it did not demonstrate the complexity or the richness of the participants' unique experiences. More significantly, in this way of working the themes were decontextualized from the individual accounts of the participants. I felt that their experiences were more nuanced, individual, complex and subject to several contextual factors. As a socially conscious researcher this led me to reconsider how I might make sense of the data so that the participants' experiences, thoughts and feelings could be recognised. Furthermore, I needed to consider how the context had shaped their understandings. The personal context of their experiences seemed to be central to their accounts, and for this reason, the socio-cultural theory of Rogoff (2017) seemed appropriate to consider which will be referred to in Chapter Five.

The individual interviews have been presented as a series of personal responses that can take the form of a 'snapshot' scenario (Bloor, 1991) or a story, or an account that unfolds through a series of stages. Hughes (1998) describes this as a form of narrative or development approach, which is different to narrative analysis. The first step in utilising personal responses is to clarify their purpose. In the case of this research, I aimed to achieve an insight into the social components of the participants' interpretive framework and perceptual processes. I used personal responses to demonstrate the unfolding of a participants' particular account of their experiences. This, I felt, gave voice to the unique experiences of the participants- thus recognising the social action of the individual interview. Schutz's (1970) describes how personal responses can be systems of perceptual relevance or a perspective of the participants' reality. Schutz (1970) identified three types of perceptual relevance; topical, interpretive and motivational as being integral to the individual's perception. Topical relevance relates to the extent to which a social situation becomes problematic for the individual. This can be as a result of the individuals own volition or interests or whether a situation is made prominent by them being constrained. Interpretive relevance is drawn up from their discreet stock of knowledge

which the individual has acquired up until the precise moment in which cognition occurs. These are deemed prominent to this situation. Finally, motivational relevance is two-fold; both the issue and the participants' reflection on that issue of sharing their experiences. In this case, topical relevance was a common factor which was explored through each personal response.

The interview situations did not merely involve the participants recalling previous experiences or speculating about future ones. The interviews were a social action, and the sharing of individual accounts illuminated the information provided. The interview was contingent upon both the interviewer and the interviewee being aware of each other as a unique individual with their own subjective experiences and stream of consciousness. Therefore, cognition was a process recognised as constantly reshaped through social encounters, the individual's stock of knowledge and systems of perceptual relevance being in a constant state of flux as they were added to, revised and reinterpreted through everyday life.

Personal responses offer rich potential for exploring specific life experiences of the participants. They have a correlation with narrative construction which is an approach to social research in which data are configured into any of a variety of diachronic or storied formats. In this instance, I am organising the data by synthesising it into a personal response, because I believe that recasting the data in this way is an act of construction which demonstrates the highly complex characteristics of these educational stories. I have aimed to construct these responses as a socially conscious researcher, where I recognised that each person's experiences were unique and helped to illuminate the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

I am aware that my ethical stance and focus of this research has included the need for teachers' voices to be heard and their experiences to be shared. I have aimed to make explicit the perspectives of the participants and in so doing have used several extracts from the individual interviews. This provided the focus of the unique experiences of each participant in context.

Silverman (2016) suggests that the use of narrative as a form of analysis in qualitative research can result in multiple interpretations of the use of narrative. He draws on the work of Brooks (2001), who used the phrase 'promiscuity of the idea of narrative' in public discourse. Here the narrative may be used situate comments out of context. I ensured I did not do this. De Fina (2003, p.13) defines the use of story or personal response as a form of narrative inquiry that recounts a discreet event or experience. Therefore, telling stories typically recounts discreet moments or an episodic narrative: they are suitable for listening to the experiences of the

participants. While Silverman (2016) suggests that writing up the data in this way can often ignore the constraints of the setting of the participants, for this research, the context where these experiences took place was of the utmost importance and essential to understand this project.

I acknowledged that the construction of personal responses had enabled me to present rich and contextualised stories; a potential limitation would be that some data was discarded. However, as the individual interviews followed the focus groups, there was an overlap and some repetition of the discussion in both interviews. Therefore, I did not feel that exploring this overlap again added anything to the findings. The process was both complex and messy but necessary while I sought to 'live in the detail' of the data while having 'an eye on the broader picture' (Rapley, 2016, p.339). Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10) argue that there is always a need to engage in the process of data reduction which they describe as,

> "selecting, focussing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data… data reduction is the form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards. And organises data in such a way that final conclusions can be drawn and verified".

There are six personal responses presented in Chapter 5, which demonstrates the complexity of the experiences of the participants. Each personal response had something illuminating to say where the participants reflected on their classroom experiences concerning the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

3.10 Ethical Considerations

Thomas (2009) states that ethics is about the conduct of a researcher's work. There are several competing ethical considerations that as a socially conscious researcher, I have needed to consider. I adopted an attentive and reflexive approach as the research unfolded and was guided by the BERA ethical guidelines (2014). O'Leary (2010, p. 1) believes that a researcher cannot rely "on a defined set of rules" to carry out research, but should be "constantly assessing, re-assessing and making decisions about the best possible means for obtaining trustworthy information … and drawing credible conclusions". This is particularly pertinent within the field of education as outlined by Pillow (2010), where I was aware of the potential impact of my position and power.

I maintained transparency around my work and reported my findings with integrity; this constitutes an ethical code which underpinned the research. In recognising this, my positionality was interwoven with the purpose of this research and was thus acknowledged at

the outset. Punch and Oancea (2014, p. 58) state that research ethics “is a branch of applied ethics focused on the specific contexts of planning, conducting, communicating and following up of research”. These could be seen as the values and principles which guided and shaped the research so that ethical decisions were made throughout. Ethical challenges could have arisen at each stage of the research project and adhering to a set of ethical guidelines enabled me to be mindful that other ethical constraints may appear such as, "legal, methodological, political, and economic" (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p. 58).

Punch and Oances (2014, p.60) suggest there are three main questions that would support the ethical consideration process:

- Duties – what is the right thing to do in this case?
- Consequences – what are the likely consequences of the courses of action?
- Virtues – what is morally right?

The emphasis is on the researcher to carry out their research with a sense of moral duty; and these questions served as a useful reminder as I was able to problematise the decisions I made. I needed to be reflexive in my approach to maintain ethical integrity by frequently asking and reflecting upon the best course of action. As a socially conscious researcher, I followed what Punch and Oancea (2014, p.61) suggest as “intellectual impartiality, benevolence [and] honesty” grounded in moral integrity and excellence in research.

As outlined earlier, ethical consent was sought via an ethical approval committee - this was the starting point and met the minimal expected requirements. Ethical approval was the beginning of securing a “value base which ensures that research is constructed in ways which have moral integrity and hold the rights of the research participants in high regard” (Clough and Nutbrown, 2012, p. 197).

3.11 Positionality and Reflexivity

This research aimed to be inclusive, democratic and dialogical; this meant all voices of the participants and their interests were represented (Kushner, 2000). A reflexive approach was needed to be consistently applied in order for this to be maintained. I was critically aware of

my own positionality, and I aimed, to the best of my ability, to adopt a systemically reflective approach as a socially conscious researcher (Pillow, 2010).

These experiences have situated the research broadly in a social constructionist and socio-cultural approach. However, I intended to be open-minded and reflexive as to what the research would reveal and unfold. Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p. 10) state how we choose to "conduct our enquiry, the nature of the questions and the moral intents are expressions of our positionality" and this, in turn, has governed the way I carried out my research. Stenhouse (1975, p. 87) defines research as "systematic, and sustained, enquiry planned and self-critical". With this in mind, the research brought about some change, either within my understanding of the issues being researched or with the participants. Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p. 16) recognise that "policy, practice and professional development are all politically oriented or motivated arenas and have the desire to influence developments in these areas of work [and this is] political,". I aimed to show how this research has much to say about the current context for education and implication for the teaching community in terms of understanding more about teachers' experiences of teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

In order to further understand my positionality, I looked at the work of Clough and Nutbrown (2012, p. 26) where they suggest that a radical approach is needed in terms of both looking and listening. This approach required me to explore beyond the familiar, the known and "make the familiar strange". 'Radical listening' they argue, supports researchers' own understanding of their research position and ensures they give careful attention to all the voices in their research. This would involve trying to understand something which may lie behind what teachers say and what this means in different social contexts and school settings. This further links with the perspective that all educational research has a political element. Listening to the participants' voices was, therefore, an inherent part of this research. In my research, I took an active role in the research process, therefore, the position and subjectivity of the research needed to be made explicit to the participants. This relates to my interpretivist approach to the research.

In addition, it was important to acknowledge the role of power within the research process. I had power in a number of ways, including the ability to influence, shape and divert the route of the research and its subsequent conclusions as previously stated. Flyvbjerg (1998, p. 227) states that the "relationship between knowledge and power is commutative: not only is knowledge power, but, more importantly, power is knowledge". Power can therefore influence and determine what counts as knowledge; this can be seen as the dominant interpretation of

knowledge. The integrity of the knowledge produced is questionable if power relationships were not actively considered during the research process - it was my responsibility to manage "power, politics and ethics actively" (O'Leary 2010, p. 42). Power is generated in many ways "that come from being in a position of control and authority" (O'Leary, 2010, p. 43) including being in a position to carry out research in the first instance. The purposeful sampling added a further dimension of power as the participants were known to me or active within the history teaching community - this created a moral dilemma and could have potentially affected the relationship between myself and the participants if I had not adopted a reflexive stance.

Milner (2007) suggests that there needs to be further discussion between researchers' roles, responsibilities and positionality and that researchers must be more accountable to the communities with whom they conduct research. He warns of the danger both "seen and unseen and unforeseen" (Milner, 2007, p. 389) in the practice of research and further supports the need for reflexivity. This remained a consideration throughout the research process and was returned to many times in order to prevent researcher bias. I adopted the role of facilitator during the focus group and individual interviews. While I aimed to make this role transparent to the participants, I was conscious that they were aware of my other professional roles such as, a teacher educator, a provider of continuous professional development, and a 'specialist' in humanities education. Each of these roles carry meaning for both the researcher and the participants and therefore had potential power implications. Two of the participants had previously been students at the university where I work. I felt it was important to make the participants aware that I was a novice researcher and was interested in what they had to say about their experiences in the classroom. I always adopted a collaborative learning approach in the classroom, and I hoped the participants who were known to me could see this in the way that I conducted the interviews. For the participants that were new to me, I found engaging in informal discussions before the interviews began helped put them at ease; I was very keen to acknowledge their professional experiences, and this seemed to work well during the focus group and individual interviews. One participant was known to me through another route where I had worked with them on a previous project. The participant articulated in the interview that they would like to be involved in further research opportunities as they felt it was valuable in developing their practice. I was aware of the time demands placed on teachers, and I was flexible in terms of my availability to meet with them at a time of their convenience. I was also aware of the length of the interviews both during the individual interviews and focus group

interviews. As a facilitator, I guided the discussion and allowed it to come to a natural end, I did not ask further questions once the interview concluded.

The storage of research data was carefully considered. Interviews were recorded and immediately saved to a password-protected computer and deleted from the handheld device. All interviews were transcribed using a university recognised transcription service. Any paperwork was kept in a locked draw within my university office. All data will be destroyed following final dissertation submission.

3.12 Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological decision making used to underpin this research project. I have presented my rationale for qualitative research, my methodological choice of a bounded case study and my methods of data collection: focus group interviews and individual interviews. My ethical stance has been a continuing theme in most sections of this chapter, and I have outlined my positionality that influenced this research. In addition to this, I have described how thematic analysis has been used to analyse the focus group interviews and how the construction of a series of personal responses form the analysis and presentation of the data from the individual interviews.

Chapter 4: Discussion of the data from the focus group interviews

4.0 Introduction

I have chosen to present the analysis of the thematic data by returning to my amended version of Turner- Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases with explicit reference made to the themes from which the participants responses have been extracted (full thematic analysis can be found in appendix 5). In Chapter Two I represented the knowledge bases as interconnected tiles; there was no hierarchy and each tile was discreet- however, there was an emphasis on interconnectivity. This is important to acknowledge here as the thematic data has been analysed across and within the knowledge bases. I recognised that making decisions about how to present the analysis of thematic data was complicated. My aim was to organise my discussion

in a coherent way as a solution to a complex issue; a model attempting to represent the messy and challenging process of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Using my amended version of Turner- Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases is one way of conceptualising teachers' thoughts and actions and can provide clarity and coherence of the thematic data. The model was a useful organisational tool however, as a socially conscious researcher I recognised that it needed to reflect the voices of my participants and I acknowledged the fluidity that using it demanded.

4.1 Knowledge of Educational Ends

This knowledge base was outlined in Chapter Two and relates to the overall theme of Exploring and Defining the Terms Sensitive and Controversial which was identified as part of the data analysis process. For the purpose of this second stage of analysis the data from the theme will be framed around this knowledge base and will be divided into three parts. Firstly, I will discuss participants definitions of the term sensitive, secondly, I will discuss the term controversial. The last section will consider the relationship between these terms.

4.1.1 Defining the Term Sensitive

Within the literature review, using the knowledge base of Knowledge of Educational Ends I focused on defining sensitive and controversial issues. This section will first consider the term sensitive.

Brauch *et al.,* (2019) suggest that there are 'hot' sensitive topics which have the potential to trigger powerful responses that can shape discussion within the classroom. While Brauch's *et al.,* (2010) research reflect on post conflict contexts, the participants in this research had a similar understanding of this term. An example of this, is Sammy when she stated that:

> 'what might be triggers to people, so things that might set others off' (Sammy, 5. This has been extracted from theme 1- Exploring and Defining the Terms Sensitive and Controversial).

Here she is aware that sensitive discussions can initiate powerful responses.

Kello (2016) refers to sensitive issues as divisive topics that bear on central aspects of group identity, or that relate to painful or disgraceful events in a group's past. Here the emphasis is on groups rather than an individual. What further complicates the teaching of issues that are likely to be sensitive is outlined further by Brauch *et al.,* (2019, p.112) who argue that when it comes to the teaching of sensitive issues within history, competing epistemologies can emerge. Kate's comments exemplify this:

> 'Because maybe a controversial issue is something that affects *everyone*, whereas it might be sensitive for somebody but not sensitive for other people maybe?' (Kate, 17, Extracted from theme 1).

Kate is acknowledging the personalised nature of sensitive issues where some people or groups are more likely to be affected by the discussion.

Brauch *et al.,* (2019, p. 234) further state that issues can become sensitive "in changing social contexts. Thus, the character of sensitivity is highly context dependent". Sammy reflects on her experiences of teaching the same lesson of the Arab- Israeli conflict in two very different contexts; one in a rural setting in Yorkshire and the other in an inner-city school which was more diverse. Sammy recognised that the change in context was impacting on the delivery of this sensitive issue when she stated:

> 'oh this is a bigger can of worms than it was last time I was teaching it' (Sammy, 5, Extracted from theme 1).

Children in the two schools Sammy had taught in had different FoK and as a consequence some children were more personally sensitive to this issue. Sammy's use of the term 'can of worms' indicates that she acknowledges the complexity of two different contexts and suggests that she may need to adapt her approach within her teaching. It should be noted that there are a number of other knowledges bases that Sammy's comments could relate to. I will draw on these in following sections. Whilst previous research by Brauch *et al.,* (2019) was focused in areas of conflict, this research suggests that the specific context where the discussion of sensitive and controversial issues takes place can create many challenges. This maybe because England is not homogenous, there are many different communities, issues, and tensions which will be further discussed within this chapter.

Goldberg, *et al.,* (2019, p. 96) uses the term 'difficult histories' when referring to sensitive issues. They describe them as events 'rooted in trauma, suffering and violent oppression' which have the power to elicit strong emotional reactions in the classroom. This has resonance with the definitions shared during the focus group discussion where the participants recognised

that the classroom discussion could be emotive. Rebecca notes, teaching sensitive issues can instigate 'stress and… upset' (Rebecca 11 Extracted from theme 1.). While she did not specifically state why this might be the case, it could be inferred that when Rebecca used the word 'upset' it resonated with the notion of children's personal sensitivity as discussed. However, when she used the word 'stress', this could be viewed in a number of ways: the sharing of partisan views could cause stress if one of the children held a different position; or if the discussion got very intense; or even if it ignored certain perspectives.

In terms of the post conflict context of Brauch's *et al.,* (2019) research, what is noteworthy here is that the participants understanding of sensitive issues are similar to those defined in the literature. However, as discussed earlier within this knowledge base the context for this research took place in England and data was collected in 2016. While England had not experienced conflict in the sense of the Arab- Israeli example provided by Sammy, it was clear that there were a number of tensions that existed and these offered similar challenges to the work of Brauch *et al.,* (2019).

4.1.2. Defining the Term 'Controversial'

This section will now discuss the participants definitions of the term controversial. Stradling (1985, p. 9) defines a controversial issue as, "those issues on which our society is clearly divided and significant groups within society advocate conflicting explanations". Rebecca states that a controversial issue provided 'opposing opinions' (Rebecca, 3 Extracted from theme 1). There seemed to be some congruence between definitions that emerged during the focus group and those that appear in the literature.

The participants from the focus group discussed how a controversial issue is one where there is likely to be conflicting explanations that are similar to definitions such as those expressed by Bailey (1975), and Stradling (1985) as outlined in section Chapter Two. Sammy (5 Extracted from theme 1.) states that 'people are likely to have a strong opinion', and Kate (Extracted from theme 1.) argues that 'a controversial issue is something that affects everyone' which could cause 'a large disagreement'. Kate and Sammy share a similar understanding of the term controversial. However, they extend these definitions by recognising the potential impact of controversial issues as they used words such as 'negative' (Sammy, 1 Extracted from theme 1.) to describe how children may feel during discussions. This could be as a consequence of views shared which Rebecca (11 Extracted from theme 1.) described as potentially 'extreme or ill balanced'.

Mike's definition of a controversial issue was centred around how past events have been interpreted. Some interpretations could cause a sense of perceived injustice which corresponds with the definitions outlined in the TEACH report (2007). Mike (1 Extracted from theme 1.) further suggested that 'severity and frequency of historical events' makes something more controversial. Mike did not acknowledge the potential impact that one off event and their interconnected nature with social, political, and economic landscape have.

4.1.3 Relationship between the terms Sensitive and Controversial

As outlined earlier in this knowledge base I have demonstrated how the participants defined the terms sensitive and controversial as discrete terms. However, there was a general consensus that there was a relationship between the terms and there was some interchangeability with them. Rebecca stated that it was difficult to 'pre empt' (Rebecca, 12 Extracted from theme 1) what is going to be sensitive and or controversial and this is dependent on the context because of the different views that may be expressed. Wooley (2010) suggests that there is no universally held point of view when it comes to deciding what is classed as a controversial issue, and any issue he states can become sensitive or controversial when people have different values and beliefs. The participants felt that this made it difficult to pre-empt a discussion that could emerge in the classroom, thus adding further complexity to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

While it may be difficult to pre empt, Stradling *et al.,* (1984, p. 5) defines a controversial issue as an issue that may be politically sensitive, where there may be suspicions, anger or concerns. Charlie extends Stradling *et al's* (1984) definition by stating that it is not just political views but also 'race, religion and political views' (Charlie, 2 Extracted from theme 1.) that may make something sensitive and controversial thus making connections between the two terms. This connection was echoed by Jim (12) when he stated that 'controversial, is like, big isn't it, very sensitive'; this indicated that Jim viewed the term controversial as a bigger issue and acknowledged that the scale of the issues correlated with the scale of the sensitivity.

Kello (2016) argues that there are different kinds and degrees of controversiality; some issues may be controversial from a historical perspective, while other issues divide different groups in society. These do not have to be viewed as binary positions and divisions in society may stem from the past. Jim (12) made the point that 'you want to almost shy away' from

controversial issues -this acknowledged that divisions within society are complex to discuss. This could also indicate that there is an option not to teach controversial issues and furthermore it would be useful to consider if 'shy away' could create further tensions by silencing any discussions and dividing groups within the classroom.

4.1.4 Summary

In the base of Knowledge of Educational Ends, I have shown how the participants definitions of the terms sensitive and controversial have been discussed as discreet terms. The terms were then analysed making connections between them. While there was some correlation with key literature used, there was also acknowledgment that many of the challenges previously defined in the backdrop of conflict by Brauch, *et al.,* (2019) were also identified within this research context.

4.2 Substantive, Syntactical and Beliefs about History

This knowledge base particularly focuses on history as a subject. There are three parts to this section; historical interpretations, empathy and the relationship between history and identity. I will identify throughout this section how this base is supported by themes identified in this research.

4.2.1 Historical Interpretations

Historical interpretation is mentioned at all key stages of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) which implies that this is a skill that should be taught. However, Chapman (2017) suggests that historical interpretations are potentially controversial. This is echoed by both Kate and Mike in the comments below.

> ' I think probably lots of History is controversial' (Kate, 27 Extracted from theme 2.1- History as an Opportunity to Discuss Sensitive and Controversial Issues).
>
> 'everyone can interpret acts and things that have gone on in history in different ways, so I think interpretation can always be quite controversial' (Mike, 1 extracted from theme 2.1).

Kate's comments suggested that there is some history that is not controversial and this questions how she views the link between history and interpretation. It suggests that she is accepting of some historical interpretations without question. Whereas Mike stated that all

history is controversial because all history is an interpretation: it is how the past has been interpreted that makes it controversial.

Lee and Shemilt (2004) argue that controversiality stems from how the past has been interpreted. Consequently, the past should be described as fluid and therefore historical interpretations should be problems that need to be solved. Mike reiterated this position by stating:

> 'if it's something that's frequently happening throughout history and then obviously the severity of those historical moments as well need to be considered and how history is interpreted' (Mike, 1).

Mike saw the consideration of historical moments and frequent events as key to interpretation and as problems that need to be discussed in depth in order to fully understand these historical events. Without this, a simplistic version of history is taught which Chapman (2017) argues is problematic. Charlie (30 Extracted from theme 3.1- Constructions of Childhood) referred to this simplistic version in the context of teaching World War 2. Here he was only able to teach a 'snapshot' and Nazi Germany was taught as information providing rather problematising sources and gaining a deep understanding.

While Charlie did not provide any further context of why a 'snaphot' was delivered to the children (this could be due to multiple factors such as time restraints) what is important is that he acknowledged that this snapshot did not provide detailed understanding of this event by considering the complexity of the context.

Hayden (2017) argues that children need to be specifically taught that interpretations of the past may differ; this is further problematised as the notion of truth is often absent within the teaching of history. Whilst the notion of truth was not directly referred to during the focus group interviews the related notion of bias was. Sammy (13 Extracted from theme 2.2- Disclosure Dilemma) discussed how all sources have the potential to be biased and that she tells her children to look out for this when she teaches history. Bias, in this sense, has been used to further understand how the past has been interpreted from a particular perspective.

Haydn (2017) suggests that children need to be taught about different interpretations of the past for example, that the past can be edited or simplified to tell a particular version for a specific purpose. Jordanova (2000) argues that collective historical understanding of past events often go unchallenged in public as some versions of the past maybe more palatable than others.

Sammy (12. Extracted from theme 2.3- Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issue) provided the example of the teaching of the British Empire and how felt that there was pressure to deliver a more palatable version: 'you know the push is to deliver it as the glory'.

She felt that the government wished to celebrate some past events, in this example she referred to the British Empire. Sammy acknowledged that this can be difficult because of the political position of many teachers. Sammy commented that most teachers are a 'a bit lefty' this inferred that a more left-wing perspective makes some events less palatable.

4.2.2 Empathy

Berti, *et al.,* (2009, p278) suggests that empathy in history is an important procedural concept in historical investigation. In the knowledge base – Knowledge of Learners, Rebecca (14. Theme 3.1- Constructions of Childhood) stated that she felt that children in her year 2 class were unable to empathise due to their age. However, in the literature review the term empathy was considered in relation to its complexity and not just children's cognitive ability. It was noted that thought is required in order to consider if it is morally right to ask children to engage in historical empathy. Cunningham (2005) argues that empathy or engaging in historical imagination without evidence would be morally compromising.

Emma (1 Theme 2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues) not only acknowledged that evidence should be used but this evidence also raised important questions about what was appropriate to use. Emma discussed how she has concerned about using photographic images of Vietnam and the Holocaust with regard to consent from the people in the images.

Rets (2015) suggests that teachers should question what children are permitted to empathise, sympathise and identify with. Asking children to reconstruct others' feeling can be sensitive and controversial. Below, Emma identified how she made a connection between empathy and emotive responses and noted that:

> 'when you don't actually see those images it's harder to relate to' (Emma, 1).

Emma did not appear to question whether it was appropriate to ask children to empathise with the people in the images of the Holocaust or Vietnam. However, she suggested that in order to enable empathy, sources needed to be carefully chosen and an emotive response supported the development of sophisticated understandings of past actions.

4.2.3 History and Identity

Barton and McCully (2005) state that history plays an essential and important role in establishing individual and community identity. However, this can be context dependant. Barton and McCully (2005) found that students select aspects of the curriculum that are most relevant to them and as they construct their identities a range of factors come into place such as religion, social class, context of the school, gender and geographic region. Sammy (5. Theme 3.4- The Significance of the School Context) reflected on her teaching experiences from two very different school contexts where she taught the same content. She noted not only how categories highlighted by Barton and McCully (2005) impacted on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues but extended these categories to include politics. Sammy's students in Yorkshire did not appear to have any connection with Palestine and the Arab Israeli conflict unlike those in the inner city school. However, both groups selected aspects of the curriculum that were most relevant to them.

4.2.4 Summary

The knowledge base of Substantive, Syntactical and Beliefs about History has considered how interpretation is a key component in the teaching of controversial and sensitive issues. Within the concept of empathy, we saw how Rebecca felt that her children in year 2 were unable to empathise and how Emma selected images that were used to promote an emotive response. Emma did not question if children should be asked to empathise with past events. Identity was considered in relation to how children responded to particular topics.

4.3 Curriculum Knowledge

In the literature review I considered four key policies: Government White Paper (2010), The Teachers Standards (2012), the National Curriculum for history (DfE, 2013) and the Prevent Strategy (2015) as these policies shaped the context for this research. Interestingly, explicit reference to these policies was not made by any participant in the focus group interviews. However, implicit reference was made to the content that could be used with the National Curriculum for History (DfE, 2013); professional practice and the implementation of British Values which is stated in the Teachers Standards (2012). The omission of direct reference to

policy may be indicative of teachers focus on their daily practice rather than wider political contexts.

4.3.1 National Curriculum (DfE, 2013)

During the focus group interviews the participants provided four specific examples of content that had the potential to be sensitive and controversial: The Bus Boycott, Slave Trade (Charlie, 5), World War 1, (Nate, 31) and Guy Fawkes (Sammy 19) (All three: Theme 2.1 History as an Opportunity to Discuss Sensitive and Controversial Issues.

In the case of Charlie, the events that he cited had a particularly strong local connection. Nate referred to World War 1 as data was collected during the centenary and Sammy was interviewed in November when Guy Fawkes was likely to be taught about. This illustrates that controversial and sensitive issues can be identified for teaching to local, and time specific contexts. It is worth noting that none of these events or individuals are explicitly mentioned within the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) at the key stage that the teachers were working at. This suggests that the curriculum has flexibility within its content and that individual teachers do select content that have the opportunity to engage with sensitive and controversial issues that are relevant to the context they are being taught in.

4.3.2 Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012)

In Part Two of the Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012) it clearly states that teachers should:

*not undermine fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs

* ensure that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law.

These particular standards pose some challenges for teachers and during the Brexit vote in 2016, this was made explicit. Both Nate and Charlie who were Year 6 teachers found this a

difficult time as they were unsure how, or if, they should respond to children's comments and questions about politics. Nate (2 Theme 2.2- Disclosure Dilemma) commented that 'because I just didn't think I could answer' and Charlie (10 Theme 2.3 -Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues) stated that he could not 'form an opinion towards them [children] or anything'.

While the Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012) are very clear, the application of them is more difficult. Magill (2016) identified how some teachers in her research were identified as 'activist'. These teachers explicitly selected sources, avoided different perspectives and promoted their own view point, this could be seen as exploiting children's vulnerability and is not the position that Charlie and Nate took. However, what Charlie and Nate did acknowledge was teachers are in a powerful position of influence the point of which vulnerability and exploitation occurs being unclear. This predicament also raises questions about self-surveillance and protectionism which will be considered later in this chapter.

In terms of teaching British Values, Lander (2016, p.329) suggests that there has been a lack of training in supporting teachers and this potentially leaves teachers vulnerable. Lander (2016) argues that naïve interpretations of Britishness may cause contentious discussions both inside and outside of the classroom. While Charlie and Nate did not refer explicitly to a lack of training, Charlie's experiences of teaching British Values provided an interesting insight into how he approached it; protecting his position by using ready -made resources.

Charlie (18 Theme 2.1 History as an Opportunity to Discuss Sensitive and Controversial Issues), used the phrase 'I don't have to worry…[they] packaged it up very objectively' when using such resources. This implied that he had shifted his personal responsibility and therefore felt in a protected position which was in contrast to his previous comments with regard to the Brexit Referendum. Through the resource he seemed to have ensured that he did not express his personal beliefs with were upholding the teaching standards. This appears to have distanced the personal.

However, Nate (27 Theme- 2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues) questioned the use of this ready-made resource as he felt that this only provided 'a naïve interpretation of Britishness', Lander (2016. p. 67) with regard to the delivery of British Values. This supports the idea that a naïve perspective of British Values can be presented in the classroom and indicates that some teachers are aware of it.

4.3.4 Summary

This knowledge base had considered how policy has been interpreted by the participants from the focus group. I have identified that teachers use policies but do not refer to them explicitly with regard their daily practice. The participants recognised that within the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) for history there were opportunities to teach about individuals and events that could facilitate a sensitive and controversial discussion. Latterly, the position of participants with regard to their own beliefs was presented in how and if they should respond to children's comments whilst upholding the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012). Finally, I have identified that the teaching of British Values can make participants uncomfortable and one strategy to combat this was to use ready-made resources.

4.4 Knowledge of Learners

I will now discuss how the base of Knowledge of Learners was evident within the focus group discussion. This base included the concept of funds of knowledge (FoK), a term used by Moll and Greenberg (1992) and how children are conceptualised within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. This section will first focus on how this research has extended the understanding of children's FoK as an influential factor in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

4.4.1 Funds of Knowledge

My research has considered the term FoK with a particular focus on the knowledge that children bring to the classroom, specifically related to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. The context of this research has broadened understandings of children's FoK as they are not just defined by cultural and economic status as (Llopart and Esteban-Guitart 2018) state but they are also subject to the influence of political discussions taking place in society at the time. I have previously stated that the data was collected shortly after the Brexit vote (2016) and this significant contextual factor shaped comments from teachers about children's FoK.

Kate (2 Theme 3.1- Constructions of Childhood) recognised that the political nature of children's FoK can make classroom discussions particularly 'sensitive' because:

> 'They've been brought up in a house with whatever particular values and beliefs' (Kate 2).

Kate acknowledged that the children's FoK emerging from the home are politically informed and this is a factor that teachers would need to consider in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

In addition to this, teachers felt that children's FoK were often fragmented because the children were 'getting snippets of information' (Rebecca, 14 Theme 3.1- Constructions of Childhood) and using 'magpie phrases' (Nate, 12 Theme 3.1- Constructions of Childhood). Nate felt that these partial pieces of information could only come from the home. Rebecca added to this and commented that because of the fragmented nature of the children's FoK 'they can't understand it at that age'. This suggests that Rebecca makes a connection between children's FoK and their cognitive ability.

Catling and Martin, (2011) state that children's existing FoK are immature yet purposeful in establishing a foundation to extend learning. Participants in this research commented on developing children's FoK. On the one hand, teachers saw themselves as the facilitator of developing children's knowledge with Kate commenting that:

> 'it's our job to waken up all those other sensitive issues '(Kate, 2).

On the other hand, Rebecca expressed concerns about children's ability to engage with complex issues stating that:

> 'there was lots of confusion and worry, they didn't understand what was going on' (Rebecca, 14).

Again, Rebecca referred to child development. She referred to the children in her class being 'only year 2' and this indicated that she positioned these children as too young to engage with particular controversial and sensitive issues. Rebecca noted as a year two teacher her 'daily contact with parents' enabled her to have a better understanding of children's FoK. She commented:

> 'I kind of know what's going on for my families,' (Rebecca, 5 Theme 3.2- The Influence of Parents.)

This is one way that teachers know their children -through awareness of everyday knowledge. It could be argued that this relationship changes as children get older and teachers have less informal contact with parents as Rebecca recognised. She stated that:

'as a secondary teacher you don't necessarily know what's going on in …. Unless somebody's specifically phoned you or come in to see you' (Rebecca, 5).

While everyday knowledge is useful, a deeper understanding of children's FoK is needed when engaging with sensitive and controversial issues. Traille (2008) suggests that teachers often arrive into classrooms without knowing very much about the children in terms of where they come from, their experiences, needs and identity. Nate (31 Theme 1- Exploring and Defining the Terms Sensitive and Controversial), reflected on his experiences of teaching about World War 1 and not knowing the particular history of children in his class. He provided an example of a child he knew to be of German descent and commented that:

'you don't know her history' (Nate, 31).

Nate indicated that not knowing her history could be problematic in the teaching of World War 1. Not knowing the child's experience, needs and identity (Traille, 2011) places both the child and the teacher in a potentially fragile position. Recognising the diversity of the classroom is essential and Traille (2011, p.16) acknowledges that "classrooms are a cornucopia of diversity". She notes that diversity exists in terms of gender, social class, religion and ethnicity and this is dependent on knowing children's FoK.

During the Brexit Referendum in 2016, teachers in this research commented that children's everyday knowledge was shaped by what was happening in the political landscape. This adds a further dimension to children's FoK as their everyday experiences that emerged from conversations at home moved into the classroom where political identities were shared. Charlie (2 Theme 1- Exploring and Defining the Terms Sensitive and Controversial) made explicit reference to this and noted how political views and individual circumstances formed part of children's FoK and this extends Traille's (2011, p.16) 'cornucopia of diversity'.

Children's FoK have been identified by the participants as a significant factor in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. The influence of both everyday knowledge and deeper knowledge which is based on needs, experience, identity and politics have been discussed. I will now consider how children have been conceptualised as being ready and able to discuss sensitive and controversial issues.

4.4.2 Conceptions of Childhood

Historically, childhood has been constructed with a romantic view that positions children in need of protection (Kehily, 2013). This positions learners as vulnerable and without agency, implying that they are not cognitive or emotionally able to discuss sensitive and controversial issues. Conversely, Hand and Levison (2012) state that children are ready to discuss more complex topics. In the previous section I shared Rebecca's (14 Theme-3.1 Constructions of Childhood.) comments, about how she positioned year 2 children as incapable of discussing sensitive and controversial issues. Rebecca positioned children more from a protectionist perspective as she felt that they were unable to understand different points of view or empathise due to their age. Furthermore, Rebecca considered that understanding of the world at this age to be limited and she feels that this makes discussing complex issues problematic. However, Kate (27 Theme-3.1 Constructions of Childhood.) adopts a different position recognising that as children get older they are ready to discuss issues that are more complex. She also indicated that young children – those in year 3- were able to discuss issues but not in the same depth as the children she taught in year 7. This suggests that the protectionist position is not binary but can be understood on a sliding scale.

Nate (10 Theme-3.1 Constructions of Childhood.), a year 6 teacher, recognised that teachers have agency to decide whether children are ready to discuss sensitive and controversial Issues. He noted that the decision was also subject to a number of gatekeepers such as senior leaders and parents. Nate suggested that his Headteacher made decisions based on how he felt parents would respond to issues being taught. Nate felt that this questions teachers' professionalism and this shifts the power to the parents. Participants in this research identified two reasons why children may be placed in a protectionist position; first by teachers and secondly through the relationship between various stakeholders. This poses challenges for teachers who have positioned children as cognitively able to discuss sensitive and controversial issues.

In order for children to become responsible, tolerant and knowledgeable it has been recognised by Hand and Levison (2012) and the Crick Report (1998) that there is a need for sensitive and controversial issues to be discussed with children. Husbands and Pendry (2000) claim that teachers have sometimes underestimated the extent to which children have the maturity to engage with sensitive and controversial issues in history. Similarly, Ross (2007) states that

primary age children are capable of dealing with political issues. Kate's comments seem to be in congruence with the work of Ross (2007) where she acknowledged FoK emerge from different sources and the home can provide a biased view. She noted that children in her class:

> 'haven't been aware of all the possibilities' [and that] 'it's our job [teachers] to waken up all those other sensitive issues' (Kate, 2 Theme-3.1 Constructions of Childhood.).

The use of the word 'job' suggests that Kate sees the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues as part of her professional role. Kate acknowledged that through the teaching of sensitive issues some children may become upset. However, Kate did not suggest that they should be avoided and this upset may be a useful starting point for children to begin to engage with sensitive issues. This was echoed by Nate who suggested that children were able to discuss sensitive and controversial issues and that children were aware of:

> 'how that will affect other pupils in their class' (Nate, 12 Theme-3.1 Constructions of Childhood.).

Nate (12) recognised that by Year 6 his children were broadening their FoK by listening to the news and 'want[ed] to form an opinion on it'. This is in contrast to earlier discussions where the emphasis was on parents as the main source of children's FoK.

4.4.3 Summary

I have demonstrated how children's FoK are an important consideration in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues within the base of Knowledge of Learners and are influenced by constructions of childhood.

4.5 Knowledge of Self

Knowledge of Self refers to how teachers sense of self impacts on decisions made in the classroom, particularly relating to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) categorised teachers by the way they approached the teaching of history as a sensitive and controversial issue by exploring teachers values and beliefs. These categories provided a helpful way to understand more about how teachers approached these issues. It was noted that both Kitson and Mc Cully's (2005) and Magill's (2016) research took place in countries that had experienced specific conflict. However, my research has taken place in England, a country that has not experienced recent conflict but has

experienced a number of political, social, and economic changes that pose challenges for the participants in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Kitson and McCully's (2005) research took place in Northern Ireland, which had experienced recent conflict. Within the research they identified three categories of teacher: the 'avoider', 'container' and 'risk taker'. The research found that teachers' prior experience linked directly with these categories. Magill (2016) built on earlier work by Kitson and McCully (2005) and presented a model which examined the relationship between history taught in school and the recovery of historical memory in Spain shaped by the Civil War. She provided a fourth category: activists.

I will now draw on each of these categories and consider them in relation to participants responses being mindful that this is a useful structure rather than assuming a direct correlation.

4.5.1 Risk takers

Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill's (2016) research found that the teachers they identified in this category confronted uncomfortable truths and challenged children's misconceptions and preconceptions. The teachers sought to develop a critical stance in the classroom where children could understand the complexities of the past rather than being presented with a simplistic narrative. From the focus groups, examples of risk taking were provided; these included using images with the intention to shock, expecting children to be upset in order to engage with historical empathy, considering how a particular issue is approached, and the way in which counter narratives were presented to the hegemonic position by playing the role of Devil's advocate.

Previously in this chapter I discussed how Emma (1 Theme 2.3- Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues.) used images in her teaching of the Holocaust and Vietnam. She deliberately selected emotive images in her teaching in order to provide uncomfortable truths. Kate recognised that teachers have a choice in how they approach the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. This implied that the same issue could be taught in different ways, some more risky than others. Sammy (12 Theme 2.2 Disclosure Dilemma) provided an example of choice with regard to the teaching of the British Empire. She felt that the emphasis on

celebrating the Empire is an expectation by the government, and that teaching it in this way does not challenge uncomfortable truths. Instead it provides a simplistic explanation of the past. Part of her rationale for adopting a riskier approach with multiple perspectives was because of her sense of self and acknowledgment of her political position being 'a bit lefty'. Here the politics were informing her choice of approach.
A further risk-taking strategy can be seen with regard to how Mike (6 Theme 2.2 Disclosure Dilemma) used the strategy of Devil's Advocate in order to counter children's responses. In this instance, Mike commented that his responses to children's comments were reactionary rather than being planned or politically informed. With this strategy he has been able to provide different perspectives which indicated that Mike felt this was a useful way of generating discussion. However, due to the unplanned reactionary comments this strategy may have left Mike in a vulnerable position because his comments may not have been supported by evidence.

4.5.2 Containers

In this category Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) found that teachers did not encourage children to fully engage with the issues being taught and they contained the possibility of emotive or upsetting discussions. This indicates a contrast to the above section where I discussed strategies of risk taking in the form of teacher's position and resources used: this could facilitate unplanned, emotional responses. However, it could be argued that without taking the risk of challenging uncomfortable truths, children are at risk of not being able to understand the past because of the choices that teachers make. I previously problematised Charlie's (18 Theme 2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues) use of readymade resources to discuss Brexit. Of particular interest were the comments made with regard to the use of Twinkle- who mass produce teaching resources. Charlie suggested that the responsibility for the discussion had been shifted to the resource maker and therefore he could resolve himself of any responsibility. His use of the words 'appropriate', 'objectively' and 'easier', were key indicators that Charlie felt this was a more straightforward way of teaching about British Values and this enabled him to be more confident in his teaching. However, Charlie neglected to consider that he had selected this resource due to his trust in Twinkle. As a result of this trust, he had considered this resource to be 'objective'. Charlie's lack of questioning of the use of this resource in teaching has the potential to limit learning and may indicate a quick fix to a solution rather than providing an opportunity for children to engage critically with a discussion about British Values. Without questioning the content can

potentially place the teacher in a vulnerable position. Not all participants were comfortable with this approach and Nate (27 Theme-2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues) recognised that the selection of sources needed careful consideration.

In addition to containment through the choice of resource, Jim (1 Theme-2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues) reflected on how he contained learning through the negotiation of children's questions. Jim articulated how, through his teaching about flags, raised the possibility to develop a deeper teaching opportunity about colonialism. While Jim's intention had been to teach about flags and their associated country, the children were very curious and appeared to want to know more about the relationship between flags and Great Britain. This was unplanned, and his comments-initiated containment of the discussion. He used the words 'loose' and 'loosely' to demonstrate the tokenistic discussion that occurred in the classroom around the topic in question. While Jim recognised that this was an opportunity to engage with a deeper discussion, it also indicated two types of containment, planned in the case of Charlie and the use of readymade resources, and unplanned in the case of Jim.

4.5.3 Avoiders

While some participants used strategies of containment in their research, Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) identified categories of avoider. Within Magill's (2016) research she identified teachers who were 'natural avoiders' and 'reluctant avoiders'. Magill (2016) found that both types of avoider tended not to teach or chose topics that would be considered to be contentious. Reluctant avoiders acknowledged the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. However, they were reluctant in facilitating these because of external factors. By comparison, the natural avoiders rejected the complexity and difficulties of teaching history and provided a simplistic approach. Rebecca (14 Theme-3.1 Constructions of Childhood) provided an example of this when she commented that she avoided sensitive and controversial issues because she did not want to 'confuse' or 'worry' children in her Year Two class. She felt that the children were unable to 'process and understand'.

Rebecca's concerns seem to stem from the fact that she felt her class would not be cognitively able to understand sensitive and controversial issues. Rebecca's rationale for avoidance was from a protectionist position where she used child development as a factor in her decision making. This indicates that there is a potential relationship between avoider and protectionist.

Emma (3 Theme-3.1 Constructions of Childhood) provided a further example of avoidance when she commented that teachers may use homework to avoid discussions of sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. She suggested that teachers may shift the responsibility to parents. She gave the example of her son: each year being given homework that involved identifying a country, a flag and a culture. Emma felt strongly that discussion around identity, including culture should take place in school with the teacher and should not be avoided.

Emma and Rebecca's comments provide examples of when teachers may use strategies of avoidance. This resonates with Magill's (2016) category of natural avoiders. During the research no explicit mention of reluctant avoiders was noted within the teaching of history. However, when Nate (2 Theme-2.2 Disclosure Dilemma) and Charlie (10 theme-2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issue.) refer to the teaching of British Values in the context of Brexit they imply this reluctance with regard to the sharing of their personal political views.

4.5.4 Activists

Whilst, risk takers, containers and avoiders have been discussed, Magill (2016) identified a further category of teachers as 'activist'. In her research, activists presented a one-sided view that related specifically to their value position. Activists did not seem to be wary of reprisal and seemed to be aware that they could manipulate children's thinking. However, in returning to Part Two of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012), it clearly states that teachers should have 'mutual respect and tolerance' while ensuring 'that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils'. The activist position would seem to oppose these Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012). In my research, Sammy (13 Theme-2.1 Disclosure Dilemma) openly shared her own value position and actively encouraged children to recognise this in the sources she used within her teaching. However, this is in contrast to Magill's (2016) research as Sammy recognised that her own beliefs influenced her teaching but they were not more important than engaging with the teaching of history so therefore did not oppose the Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012).

4.5.5 Summary

In this section I have made specific reference to the work of Kitson and Mc Cully (2005) and Magill (2016) as a way of discussing the analysis of the data from the focus groups. I recognised that trying to neatly fit my research into these categories is problematic. Both Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill's (2016) research was with secondary teachers of history and was

conducted in countries that had experienced recent conflict. As mentioned, their research took place in Northern Ireland and Spain respectively which raised specific community tensions. Using these categories has been helpful in identifying some similarities of the characteristics that the participants in my research had. This suggests that even without conflict of this kind, there are a number of similar challenges and responses to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. In both contexts, teachers can be seen to adopt risk taking strategies- in this case the use of resources to shock, to expect upset, to present a counter narrative and in applying their teacher agency. Within the category of containment, two different forms were identified- planned and unplanned. The avoider category identified how teachers may adopt a protectionist position as a rational for avoidance; on the one hand, avoiding discussing any issue that would cause upset; and on the other hand, setting homework that required parents to have conversations that would avoid having these discussions in the classroom. The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) have been considered in relation to Magill's (2016) category as teacher as activist.

4.6 General Pedagogical Knowledge and Models of Teaching

Earlier in this chapter I discussed how risk taking can be used by adopting the role of Devil's Advocate. I will now consider different roles that the teacher may take when teaching sensitive and controversial issues, and return to the role of Devil's Advocate once more.

4.6.1 Devil's Advocate

This approach could be used in two ways. Firstly, the teacher may challenge children's views and present a more balanced approach. Secondly, a teacher may hide their own value position by not admitting that the Devil's position is their own; it was noted in the literature review that there may be a variety of reasons for this. During the focus group interviews another way of using the approach of Devil's Advocate became apparent. Mike (6 Theme-2.2- Disclosure Dilemma) recognised that the position of Devil's Advocate can be used to promote debate and questioning. Hand and Levinson (2012) suggest that in any teaching of sensitive and controversial issues the selected pedagogical approach, such as discussion, should enable children to consider different perspectives. However, Mike stated that he used this strategy to

go against his own opinions and did not provide multiple perspectives. While Mike did not state specifically why he did not share his own views on the issues being discussed, there may be a number of reasons for this: he may have wanted to protect his own values position; he may have been concerned about the response to this from others such as parents, SLT (Senior Leadership Team in school); he may have had concerns about influencing children's decisions and opposing the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012). He further elaborates about the role of Devil's Advocate by stating how:

> 'whatever the students believe I just counter it' (Mike, 6).

Using this approach, Mike was able to present a contrasting perspective within the discussion. His intent was to look for a range of reactions from the children. This could be considered a strategy to ensure that multiple perspectives were discussed or, could be interpreted as a reactive rather than a planned approach to tackle deep engagement. While Mitchell (2013) recognises that it is not easy to tackle deep engagement with controversial issues, I would extend this and argue that teachers should be cautious about adopting a reactive approach to children's comments. While it could be used as a protectionist strategy, Mitchel (2013) states that the role of the teacher should be to present evidence that enable children to draw their own conclusion. The pedagogy of discussion should enable children to be aware of other viewpoints not just counter arguments employed in reaction to their comments.

Hand and Levinson (2012) state that discussion is very valuable in considering different points of view. However, where only a counter viewpoint is presented, limited discussion may result that does not support children in developing a deeper understand of issues. While Mike appeared to be facilitating the presentation of more than one viewpoint, I would suggest it is not enough just to present counter arguments. There is a need to create an atmosphere where open mindedness and generally being willing to listen to others is adopted. This is in line with the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) that make reference to the need for tolerance of those with different views and upholding an atmosphere of mutual respect. In this case, Mike appeared to be the only person offering a different perspective and without evidence to support the discussion. Without this evidence, discussants may not be open to change or to develop their own knowledge and understanding and tolerance of different perspectives.

Devil's Advocate can be used as a strategy to avoid disclosing your personal values and beliefs. Barton and McCully (2007) use the term 'disclosure dilemma,' to consider an alternative position that teachers may adopt. This is where teachers decide whether or not to share with

children their value position. Already I have briefly discussed how teachers have shared some of the challenges with stating their own value position, I will now discuss these in more depth as a pedagogical strategy.

4.6.2 Teachers' Voiced Positionality

It is often assumed that children will contribute to a class discussion and state their own value position. Already we have seen how Mike used the position of Devil's Advocate as a way of not sharing his own value position with the children. However, it could be argued that in the spirit of reciprocity it might be reasonable to suggest that teachers share their views with the children. Sammy (13 Theme-2.2 Disclosure Dilemma) reflects on her position and acknowledges that she is conscious and comfortable in sharing her own value position with her A Level class. It is unclear if she does this with the children she teaches in earlier key stages. Her rationale for this approach is due to the specific requirements of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) and the need to teach about bias, reliability, validity and interpretation. Sammy's disclosure of her own values is in contrast to Stenhouse (1975) cited in Mitchell (2017) who used the term 'political neutrality'; this implies that teachers should not present their own value position. They further state that much of teachers' values and beliefs may be unconscious. However, this does not appear to be the case with Sammy who is very clear about her intentions for the children to be able to recognise bias when reading history. Mitchell (2013) questions how much a teacher can actually be politically neutral and that it may also be difficult to be politically neutral if your own value position is very strong. Stradling *et al.,* (1984, p.7) state that the views of the teacher are perhaps stronger than they realise and that it may be "insuperably difficult" to avoid this. Sammy (13) acknowledged that her bias is:

> 'I'm quite feminist, I'm quite left, I'm quite anti-church - kind of anti-religion'.

Sammy outlined her very clear value position, however after stating this she commented that she 'will try to keep it out'. This suggested that Sammy was aware of her professional responsibilities in as much that she was in a powerful position as the teacher. She seemed to imply that she did not expect children in her class to support her values but that making her values visible was important. This could be because she valued a range of perspectives in her classroom and encouraged the recognition of that diversity to be discussed in a safe, tolerant

place. She seemed to be representing a more democratic classroom which has an underlying moral ethos and supports Part Two of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012).

4.6.3 Teacher's Silenced Positionality

So far, we have seen two positions adopted by teachers in this study- the role of Devil's advocate and how a teacher shared her position with her class. Nate (2 Theme 2.2- Disclosure Dilemma) adds a further complexity to this positioning when he referred to a specific time he taught shortly after the Brexit Referendum (2016). In his comments he was unsure how/if he should respond to children's questions.

Mitchell (2013) suggests that there are some issues which are 'super complex' and do not have clear cut answers. While Brexit could be considered to be 'super complex' the media discourse presented a simplistic binary position that the public were either voting to leave or remain in the European Union. Answers given by the teacher about this issue were likely to be influenced by their personal and political decisions. In this instance, if Nate had shared that he had voted leave or remain this would have created an immediate response from his class. His comments acknowledged his awareness that his reaction could cause tensions within the school and the community and this made responding to children's questions a sensitive and controversial issue. While teachers should be able to recognise the complexity of the context and the communities in which they teach, burgeoning political activity creates a number of challenges for teachers. This is an example of how some events and issues are likely to be more relevant to children if they are more recent. While this may create a resonance worth debating, it can potentially put a teacher in a difficult scenario where they may not want to share their positionality as this would mean disclosing their political views.

4.6.4 Summary

This section has considered the role of the teacher in how they navigate the complex dilemma of disclosing their values with the children in their class when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Mike, Sammy and Nate provided three examples which highlighted the complexity of disclosing views with children. Mike discussed how he used the role of Devil's advocate as a way of generating different views to those presented by the children. However, his responses were reactionary and I outlined that this can create a number of problems. In

Sammy's case, she stated that she was comfortable in sharing her views with the children in her A Level class and her rationale was in part to recognise bias within the teaching of history. She further acknowledged that she had a well-developed sense of self and had adopted particular political positions. By comparison, Nate recognised the political sensitivity of the Brexit context and felt unable to respond to children's questions. Stenhouse (1984) used the term disclosure dilemma as a way of highlighting that this is a complex issue, and my research highlights how current events in society may further problematise this dilemma.

4.7 Knowledge of Context

Whilst pedagogical strategies, in the form of a disclosure dilemmas, have highlighted how context is a factor of influence in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues, Turner Bisset (1999) identified context as being an important and discreet knowledge base.

My research identifies that context is multi layered: the children's FoK; the context of the classroom, school and catchment area; the context of what is happening currently in society and the policy context are all factors of influence when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. The findings from the focus groups reflect the multi-layered nature of the context and the importance of being pedagogically literate as identified by Maclellan (2008), a term she uses to describe how teachers draw on theoretical knowledge to solve problems that emerge in their classroom. She argues that without pedagogical literacy, teachers are pedagogically vulnerable when previous practice does not work in different contexts. The multi-layered nature of the context reflects the work of Rogoff (2017) on socio – cultural theory and her lenses of micro (the children and the teacher), meso (the catchment area of the school) and macro (current societal issues and policy).

4.7.1 Changes in Political Contexts

Charlie (3 Theme 3.4- The Significance of the School Context) commented about the context of his school being in a catchment area which was 'quite EDL [English Defence League]', and how the context of the classroom had been shaped by children's FoK. He described how the children made comments such as 'letting them in [referring to Muslims]' during the recent Syrian crisis. The comments from the children raised some challenges for Charlie in how he responded. The children's comments may have been influenced by the far-right position of some members of the community and Charlie (2 Theme 3.4- The Significance of the School Context) recognised that because of these views this caused a number of specific tensions relating to 'race, religion, [and] political views'. Charlie's comments about Syrian refugees related specifically to what was being discussed in the media at this time. In this example the context was impacting at a number of levels, micro, meso and macro.

Jim's school, by contrast, had a more diverse catchment in terms of greater number of migrants from Eastern European countries. Jim (4 Theme 3.4- The Significance of the School Context) felt that this context made discussion particularly sensitive with regard the Brexit Referendum (2016), and commented it made it 'a very, very, very sensitive time'.

These examples demonstrate how changes in society impact on classroom practice. In the example of the Brexit referendum, society at this time was polarised by a leave or remain discourse. While this may not be viewed as a time of conflict, in the sense in the context of Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill's (2016) research, it could be viewed as a time of political unrest which is a form of conflict.

4.7.2 Context and Pedagogical Literacy

Earlier in this chapter I discussed Sammy (5), who reflected on her experiences of teaching a lesson about the Arab- Israeli conflict in two very different schools, one that she described as rural and one as more urban and diverse. She commented on how different the lesson was in terms of children's understanding and their FoK. She was able to adapt her teaching to reflect the needs of the learners. Sammy (19 Theme 2.1 History as an Opportunity to Develop the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues) provided a further example of pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008)

when she discussed Guy Fawkes and how this could be seen to be more sensitive and controversial at the meso level where the religious communities may be polarised.
Sammy shows characteristics of being a pedagogically literate teacher (Maclellan, 2008), which could be viewed as a necessary component in teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Maclellan (2008) argues that teachers can use theoretical knowledge to solve problems within their classrooms including contextual knowledge. However, I would argue that even a pedagogically literate teacher may not be able to transfer past experiences when teachers are faced with the need to apply immediate solutions to political change such as the Brexit context.

4.7.3 Summary

In summary, I have outlined how context is multi-layered and has links with socio cultural theory due to the different scales; micro, meso and macro. I have presented examples that demonstrate the complexity of these layers and how they emerge within classrooms. This provides challenges to the teacher and the need for a pedagogically literate approach to be successful. However, this approach may provide limited success when responding to immediate political changes in society.

I have previously referred to the work of Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill's (2016) research on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Their research was situated in countries that had experienced specific conflict and I highlighted how political binary positions such as the Brexit Referendum (2016) could be viewed as a time of conflict.

4.7.4 Surveillance

In the literature review I referred to the work of Caluya (2010) and Page (2016) and considered how surveillance is embedded within school practice. Page (2016) provides a model of surveillance: vertical (referring to Ofsted and SLT), horizontal (referring to peer, parents and children) and interpersonal or self-surveillance (self-monitoring and reflective practice). While Page's (2016) work discusses more general aspects of teachers practice, surveillance has a particular importance within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. While I have

already drawn on many of these conversational extracts from the identified themes, I will now return to them using the lens of surveillance and consider how teachers are consciously aware of their practice and put self-protectionist strategies in place.

Sammy (13 Theme 2.2- Disclosure Dilemma) was happy and confident in sharing her own values with the children that she taught. However, she acknowledged that she needed to 'keep it out' and this suggests that she was conforming to professional expectations and not engaging in anything that may have been considered inappropriate or extreme. Traits that could be considered verging on activism were silenced, resulting in Sammy self - surveying her comments which is in line with the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012).

Nate (2. Theme 2.2- Disclosure Dilemma) undertook a similar strategy by not responding to children's questions that asked him to reveal his political position when discussing Brexit. He too engaged in self-surveillance in front of the children. A further strategy of self-surveillance is that of Devil's Advocate, this protection comes in three forms: first, the teacher is able to protect themselves by not disclosing their own views; second, the teacher is able to challenge children's comments without fear of a known position; third, that if children or parents have concerns about what has been discussed then the teacher can say that they were playing the role of Devil's Advocate. This strategy can be used to create a mirage where the teacher can be protected, thus simultaneously acknowledging and deflecting the power of surveillance. Self-surveillance does not happen in a vacuum and, Nate (10 Theme 3.1 Constructions of Childhood) recognised that his practice was shaped by both vertical (the head teacher) and horizontal surveillance (the parents).

4.7.5 Summary

In this section I have considered how teachers in the focus groups have used surveillance strategies in a number of ways. Self-surveillance can be used in the disclosure of views, and the role of Devil's Advocate. Vertical surveillance can be seen to be active by monitoring from the Headteacher. All strategies could impact on the content of what is being taught and this may have implications in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

4.8 Summary of the Chapter

In this chapter I have presented the themes from Phase 1, the focus groups' discussions, these have been organised around my amended version of Turner- Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases. Each knowledge base has been discussed discreetly in order to create a coherent narrative. From the analysis it was evident that there was a strong interconnection between the knowledge bases and the themes identified in this research. In Chapter Five I will present and analyse the data from Phase Two of this research -the individual interviews -as personal responses. This strategy will allow me to consider individual experiences and how this interconnectivity may play out in practice.

Chapter 5 : Personal Responses

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present and analyse Phase Two of the research- the individual interviews. This involved conversations with six participants and I selected key examples of the teaching experiences that were shared. As outlined in Chapter 3, I reflected on my rationale for presenting the data as personal responses which I felt further highlighted the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. In Chapter 4, I used the discreet knowledge bases for analysis to identify which knowledge bases were present in my amended version of Turner-Bisset's (1999) model which were informed by themes identifies through thematic analysis. While essential for determining what knowledge is used within the participants' teaching, it could be argued that this strategy presents an abstract version of the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Therefore, an extension of this analysis was required. In this chapter, I have used individual examples of practice and explored these in-depth. I aimed to represent how the knowledge bases, in reality, are interconnected, and this demonstrates the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. As such, I have combined the data and analysis to represent the holistic experiences of these participants and further explore issues identified in Chapter 4. In the final section of the chapter, I have provided a summary which considers the interconnected nature of the bases and how they are manifested in practice which further demonstrates the interconnectedness of the knowledge bases as they emerge in practice. I have

needed to include some additional information which I have indicated by the use of square brackets.

5.2 Robert's Personal Response

Robert is a secondary school history teacher with 15 years teaching experience. He was unable to take part in Phase One of this research, however, provided a personal response for Phase Two. He describes his school catchment area as formed of a population intake which is liberal, diverse and middle class, and this indicates that Robert may approach his teaching with an expectation of what children's FoK are. It could be argued that Robert is drawing on his pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) and anticipating how children may respond to his teaching of sensitive and controversial issues in this context.

Robert is consciously aware that discussing an issue that is sensitive and controversial can have several consequences for him. He commented:

> 'I suppose the sensitive stuff, the controversial stuff, is an issue because basically the parents get involved, and if parents get involved then generally speaking so do higher up people at school then get involved, it moves out of your classroom into a….and I suppose these days it then gets on to Facebook and other social media …'(Robert, 19).

As discussed previously Caluya (2010) and Page (2016) considered how surveillance is embedded within school practice. Page (2016) provided a model of surveillance: vertical (referring to Ofsted and SLT), horizontal (relating to peer, parents and children) and interpersonal or self-surveillance (referring to self-monitoring and reflective practice).

Robert refers to horizontal (parents) and vertical surveillance (SLT) (Page, 2016). Page (2016) suggests that vertical surveillance is most commonly used as a top-down form of surveillance. However, Robert mentions the use of Facebook and other forms of social media used by parents and children, which are a form of horizontal surveillance. Robert recognises how his actions within the classroom have the potential to be surveyed and makes a direct correlation between surveillance and the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. His comments indicate a lack of control in what happens once discussion moves out of the classroom and mentions SLT and social media. Robert has been able to identify that these levels of surveillance are connected

and could have repercussions for him. It is implicitly implied that 'others' (SLT and parents) could view his practice and decide that he has done/said something wrong. This surveillance could have an impact at many levels and scales: children questioning him in the classroom; parents questioning him face to face and on social media; SLT questioning his professionalism.

Robert is also aware of how the pedagogical strategy of Devil's Advocate can be used to challenge views or present a range of different perspectives within his teaching; he states:

> 'Well I suppose experience. You get better at [teaching sensitive and controversial issues]it with experience, in that I suppose you can cover your back. If you say something controversial because it slips out you can always say 'I was just playing Devil's Advocate'' (Robert, 53).

Robert's use of Devil's Advocate draws on his pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) as he acknowledges how his experience has informed present practice and that he has been able to adapt his pedagogical strategies as a result of this experience. However, it could be argued that Robert's use of his pedagogical literacy is being manipulated for a different purpose than Maclellan's (2008) original intention. While Maclellan's (2008) pedagogical literacy was used to support teaching and learning for the benefit of the child. Robert uses it to protect himself as he is consciously aware of how his teaching may be interpreted and this is an acknowledgement that not all of his comments in the classroom can be carefully planned and that teaching needs to be responsive.

Robert also discusses how he perceives his role has changed concerning Prevent (2015) training. He recalls how he had not had training of this kind in his previous teaching career and that he was not happy about it. One reason for his concerns stems from the underlying ethics of the policy and this training. He comments:

> ' We're almost being like East German informant type people ' (Robert 29).
>
> 'And whereas if we saw a vulnerable kid we'd look out for them and like talk to them, like talk to their parents. Now it's shop them to the police ' (Robert 30).

Robert's comments indicate that he views the reporting of vulnerable children as being like an 'informant'. His position seems to echo Elton-Chalcraft's (2016) concerns when she uses the

term to describe teachers as “state instruments of surveillance”. These comments demonstrate how Prevent (2015) has impacted on his practice. Robert uses state control as a metaphor for current legislation which implies that he is uncomfortable being in the role of the surveyor of children’s comments. Being so openly opposed to official policy could be viewed through an activist lens and while Robert does not fit Magill’s (2016) category of activist, he does indicate that he is aware of surveillance in his school context and this could be seen to silence his activism in practice.

The aims of the Prevent Strategy (2015) are clear and are presented as being straightforward: It is a teacher’s responsibility to refer children whom they consider to be vulnerable to radicalisation. On the surface, this could be seen to be a simple matter of identifying a child and putting in place necessary safeguarding practice. However, in practice, this can be more complex.

In terms of the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues during class discussions, it is an expectation that several views will be shared. If children make comments that are viewed to be pejorative or extremist or controversial during the discussion, this could leave them being referred to Prevent and this makes such teaching more complicated as teachers have to negotiate a pedagogical tightrope that has policy implications.

During classroom discussion, Robert describes how he challenges children’s comments.

> ‘You know kids who didn’t want to talk about Islam because they hated Muslims or….it was a bit like ‘well let’s explore that, let’s talk about it’ and ‘actually that idea of yours is exactly the same’ and ‘would you say that if there was one here’. I think challenging kids, …. Because there is a point where you do need to challenge kids’… ‘people can label us as being bad for doing it, but I think it’s people with no teaching experience that ever say it’ (Robert 55).

In challenging children’s ideas, Robert is upholding the Teachers’ Standards (2012) concerning creating a tolerant environment where children respect each other. The fact that Robert refers to ‘people with no teaching experience’ indicates that as a professional, Robert is aware of how others could survey his actions. In this case, it is suggested that non-teachers do not really

understand the complexity of teaching and the demands of the Teachers' Standards (2012). However, Robert's strategy for challenging children's comments could be viewed as a risk-taking strategy, as highlighted by Kitson and McCully (2005).

Summary

Robert's personal responses demonstrate different layers of surveillance that he is consciously aware of, and this enables him to put protectionist strategies in place. He is mindful of how the Prevent Strategy (2015) and Teachers' Standards (2012) have impacted on his practice, and this suggests that while policy aims appear straightforward, they are complex in practice- particularly regarding the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Within Robert's personal response, several knowledge bases are implicit.

5.3 Charlie's Personal Responses

Charlie is an upper Key Stage 2 teacher working with pupils aged 10 and 11, in a primary school. He described his school as challenging in terms of the 'Right-Wing' nature of the school's catchment area and identified that there were a number of English Defence League supporters in the locality. This context has raised some challenges for Charlie as through the conversation, it became apparent that Charlie's views were in opposition to this political position. In this section, I will consider these challenges in detail and how they affect the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

> ' if they're saying 'my dad says that Muslims are this, they're that, you shouldn't let them into the country, like Nigel Farage is like the Messiah', do you know what I mean, it's hard to judge on how to respond to that. …[what I really wanted to say was] Your dad's fucking wrong, your dad's wrong, like 'tell him he's wrong, I'm going to tell you he's wrong, he shouldn't be saying that'
>
> ….you do worry slightly about that come back that if you fully argued against that and then they went home and said that 'the school's being' (Charlie 41).

Stradling *et al.,* (1984) refers to how complex it is for a teacher to be politically neutral in the classroom. Charlie articulates what he would really like to say and acknowledges that this is not appropriate. However, he does seem to imply that his views are right in that he would want to tell a parent that they are wrong. The strength of his opinion is evident in his use of strong language. The views expressed by the children appear to be in direct contrast to Charlie's views, and it is this that makes it very difficult for Charlie. While finding these comments repugnant, at the same time, Charlie does not challenge them and does not respond. One of the possible reasons for not challenging these views appears to be the fear of reprisal from parents. He is consciously aware of the need to self- survey (Page, 2016) his responses.

Not responding to the children's comments could also have repercussions for Charlie as what the children say is pejorative. While the comments about Farage (leader of UKIP at this time) are opinion, the comments about 'Muslims not being let into the country' are racist, both of which could be the product of FoK from the home, media and peers. This example demonstrates the complexity of dealing with challenging comments teachers have to negotiate and respond to. There are several possible ways for dealing with this, for example:

- Providing silence by not reacting- to stop the conversation
- Providing alternate perspectives- to challenge children's perspective
- Referring comments to a school safeguarding team to decide how they proceed with the racist comment.

The teacher's decision making on how they interpret children's comments is dependent on context and will be influenced by the pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) of the teacher. While all teachers work towards creating a safe, tolerant environment where respect for different views is required, (The Teachers' Standards, 2012) Charlie's comments highlight the complexity of this in that his fear of reprisal takes precedence over creating a safe, tolerant environment of respect. In this instance, it would appear that Charlie has tried to create a safe environment for himself; however, by not responding to racist comments, this leaves both the children and Charlie in a vulnerable position. By adopting a place of silence, Charlie has not upheld the Teachers' Standards (2012) or followed internal and external safeguarding procedures.

While Charlie is uncomfortable in sharing his political views on current issues, during his interview, he provided an example of his recent teaching of the Tudors through debate where his views were shared. Perhaps Charlie viewed this as a safer, or what Brauch (2019) refers to as a 'cold' topic, and this may be because of the historical distance and could, therefore, be considered less sensitive. Charlie commented:

> '…so they were having such a big debate…'
>
> '[at the time] you'd have had to like probably pretend you were one way or the other'… 'right, you must convert back to Catholicism' or 'if you are a Protestant you must become a Catholic'… And we talked about like would you feel that strongly that you'd say 'no, I'm sticking to my guns' …
>
> '[if you felt] very strongly about something then this could ultimately mean death in the Tudor times…And then they [the children] all said that they'd lie and just be Catholics (Charlie, 36).
>
> "And I was like 'me too, I would as well' (Charlie 37).

Charlie appears to be unaware of how modern Catholics may have a different perspective on this period of history in comparison to those who are secular or the protestant majority. He does not appear to regard this topic as sensitive and controversial. Charlie seems to have presented a simplistic interpretation of the past (Chapman, 2017) as some Protestants at this time may have lied. Still, some were so centrally tied to their religious beliefs that they would have instead suffered a horrible death than convert.

While debate can be viewed as an opportunity for risk-taking (Kitson and McCully, 2005), in Charlie's case it appears that all children ended up with the same viewpoint, and this suggests a containing of the discussion. Which is further emphasised when Charlie disclosed his own opinion leading to all of the children agreeing with him and this may be a naïve interpretation of what was actually going on in the classroom. The fact that all the children agreed may not have reflected the children's true belief as peer pressure, Charlie's disclosure and unconscious power relations, as well as misunderstandings, could have impacted on children's position at that moment.

Summary

McCully (2007) discussed a disclosure dilemma and questioned whether teachers should share their own views with the children. Through these two examples, I have identified how Charlie is happy to share his views when he does not adopt a particular religious position on a historical issue. By contrast, when he has strong political views on current events, he decided not to share his views.

5.4 Rebecca's Personal Response

Rebecca is a Key Stage 1 teacher whose school is part of a Multi-Academy Trust. In this personal response I will consider how Rebecca reflected on her recent teaching about the Ancient Egyptians. Rebecca describes how she feels uncomfortable about teaching this content to her year two class:

> 'this a content that's not appropriate for us…because it's not explicitly in Key Stage 1' (Rebecca, 7).

Earlier in the interview, Rebecca discussed how the content and planning of this teaching sequence was provided to her by a member of the curriculum design team. In the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) the Ancient Egyptians is a Key Stage 2 topic. However, schools can choose to teach an event 'Beyond living memory' which does permit them to select the Ancient Egyptians if they wish at Key Stage 1. Rebecca's comments illustrate that she feels the content of the Ancient Egyptians is more suitable to children in Key Stage 2. This reference to the National Curriculum (2013) by Rebecca indicates that she felt that the policy should protect her from teaching content that she deems as unsuitable. This position shifts responsibility to policy and away from the teacher.

During the topic of the Ancient Egyptians, one of Rebecca's key enquiry questions was, 'is it right to unwrap a Mummy?' which Rebecca believed had the potential to be both a sensitive and controversial issue. She recounts how she experienced a disclosure dilemma within this topic and describes how she felt 'vulnerable' through teaching the Ancient Egyptians.

Rebecca did not want to disclose her opinion to the children during the discussion of the Afterlife as she was consciously aware of the potential repercussions of her teaching.

> 'Yeah. When I said I felt vulnerable, I felt like number one it could be exposing my opinion and my belief, and that's kind of I suppose leaving myself open for…I don't know what really'(Rebecca, 2).

Rebecca's comments, can be viewed as an act of self-surveillance however, it is not clear what Rebecca felt the consequences could be. These feelings of vulnerability may be due to Rebecca being pedagogically vulnerable, a term used by Maclellan (2008) to describe teachers whose previous experiences were inadequate to support her with this topic. Rebecca had no prior experience of teaching about the Ancient Egyptians, her planning had been provided to her from a member of the SLT, and she was uncomfortable with the enquiry question as this related explicitly to a discussion about death, and the Afterlife. All of this fed into Rebecca's vulnerability.

In addition to the above, Rebecca had strong personal beliefs about the Afterlife.

> 'So, I didn't want to sort of say my opinion. But basically, yeah, I was feeling vulnerable about giving my opinion, but then also feeling vulnerable about how to manage that conversation without saying…without that coming out, having to manage what I said without my opinion coming out….' (Rebecca, 4).

Rebecca was reluctant to disclose her opinion with the children and this indicates that she is not drawing on the strategies of Devil's Advocate. Still, she is trying to remain neutral which Stradling *et al.,* (1984) acknowledged is incredibly tricky. It would appear that Rebecca felt that she did not have the pedagogical skills to manage children's opinions about the Afterlife, which illustrates that in this case, she may be pedagogically vulnerable.

Within the teaching of the Ancient Egyptians, Rebecca had some concerns that the enquiry question could lead to an awkward conversation about death, dying and what happened after death.

> 'And then I suppose vulnerable in case anything came up that was very sensitive that other people found difficult, like you know about death and bodies, so yeah that's kind of what I meant when I said 'vulnerable' really' (Rebecca, 4).

Rebecca acknowledges that she is concerned about issues that her children may find personally sensitive. Being aware that some children may be personally sensitive during classroom discussions is an essential consideration in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Rebecca's vulnerability was highlighted when she reflected on an unplanned incident during her teaching of the Ancient Egyptians. She recalled when a child brought a book into school from home. Rebecca stated that this was troubling for some children when the child showed their class an image of an unwrapped Mummy. She stated:

> 'so that's what [happened] lots of emotion, there was lots of emotion from that and it was quite shocking to the children. …' (Rebecca, 7).
>
> ''Yeah. Because it wasn't something that we'd done here, it was something that had happened at home because of the link, and then we kind of had to then deal with the…manage that situation…. Because it was all about emotion of….and fear, you know, it was all kind of it went down the worry road' (Rebecca 12).
>
> '[I went to talk to the parents] just to let you know we have been talking about this as you know, this came up today so expect your child to probably talk about it' (Rebecca 32).

Rebecca describes how she felt it was necessary to speak to the children's parents to inform them that their children were upset about some of the content of the book. Rebecca was very clear that this upset during the lesson was not caused by her and thus wanted to distance herself from responsibility. Rebecca provided an example of unplanned learning, and as a consequence of this, she responded to an issue over which she felt she had little control. In light of this, it would appear that it was the unplanned nature of the image being shown to children that caused further tension for Rebecca. She uses vocabulary such as 'emotion', 'worry', 'fear', and 'shocking' which indicate how stressful and uncomfortable she found this situation.

One interpretation of this situation could be that Rebecca was genuinely concerned that the children were upset and wanted to support them. An alternative reading of the situation could

be that this is indicative of Rebecca engaging in self-surveillance (Page, 2016) by pre-empting parental come back. These interpretations do not have to be viewed as binary positions but interrelated and adds to the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

Summary

In Rebecca's personal response I have demonstrated the complexity of a disclosure dilemma. In the teaching of the Ancient Egyptians, Rebecca felt unable to share her own opinion on the Afterlife. I have provided examples of when Rebecca could be seen to be engaging in self-surveillance: by looking to policy to protect her; by containing the discussion; and by speaking to parents. However, her practice may have been motivated by a genuine concern for children's cognitive development and wellbeing. Once again, a simple binary position cannot be inferred, and this further highlights the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues.

5.5 Jim's Personal Responses

Jim is a Year 3 primary school teacher, in a school which is part of Multi Academy Trust. In his personal response, Jim explores his recent experience of teaching about current affairs which he describes as a sensitive and controversial issue through the teaching of British Values. Jim decided to use 'First News', a weekly newspaper designed for 7-14 year-olds which can support learning in the classroom. He focused on an article and videoclips about Donald Trump (the President of the United States) which discussed the travel ban and the women's rights protests which were prevalent in the media at the time. Jim felt that through the use of his resources the children:

> ' got a really good grasp about Trump and his politics from that' (Jim 94).

Jim recognises that any newspaper is likely to contain bias; however, First News is an understood and accepted form of media for school use, he commented:

> I didn't want my own negative views superseding and clouding over what the actual facts are so, to go on 'First News', that to me although it could be seen as having some bias,' (Jim, 48).

Jim justifies the use of an article about Trump as he did not want to disclose his 'negative' views about the President and this suggests that Jim would have found it difficult to share a neutral viewpoint. Jim explicitly selected and used sources that supported his views. Media coverage in the UK at this time did not present Trump in a positive light. However, there is a potential tension here as Jim did not provide alternative narratives around Trump to the children, which is an essential consideration in the teaching of controversial issues. This example has some of the characteristic noted in Magill's (2016) research which identified the category of activist. Magill (2016) suggests that activists present information that is in line with the teachers' own strong views without concern for giving a balanced discussion. Jim describes his school as one which has the support of parents. Activists identified in Magill's (2016) research taught in contexts where parents were likely to hold similar views to the teacher, so there was less fear of reprisal. In Jim's context, this could indicate that the parents may also share similar opinions about Trump or that they have trust in the teacher and are likely to support him. My research has identified that disclosure dilemmas can be used as a self-protectionist strategy (Page, 2016). However, in this case, Jim never explicitly disclosed that he was anti- Trump, and this could be interpreted that Jim did not feel that he needs to disclose his views explicitly as he had chosen sources that do this. A different interpretation could be that Jim is wary of being explicit about his political position, while a further reading could be that Jim feels safe in this context as his views are in line with those of parents and position of activism could be adopted.

One child also took on this activist role in response to class discussions by writing a letter at home, which followed the anti -Trump discourse. Jim comments that he thought that this was a:

> 'great idea, that sounds great to me' a bit of extra writing from that point of view, not a political…' (Jim, 49).

Jim's enthusiasm for the learning to be continued at home could be related to his own political views and how the children were now in agreement with him. Jim's approach to the teaching about Trump led to the children taking on the role of activist, which was likely to be supported at home, by their peers and by their teacher. Jim commented that:

> 'the class thought it [a letter written at home by a child] was fantastic' (Jim, 49).

It would appear in this case that children's FoK were similar to Jim's and this facilitated an opportunity for children to engage with a more activist approach. Following the discussion and the writing of the letter, Jim decided to use the social media platform of Twitter to share his teaching about Trump.

> 'I tweeted on Twitter …. 'oh, after reading First News, my class has been a hive of political discussion, a buzz with political discussion' something like that. And they [a national newspaper] retweeted it, and the editor retweeted it and said, 'it's great how young minds get some…[knowledge of current affairs]'

'it was Saturday and I was feeling relaxed, I didn't have my school head-on…' (Jim, 51).

The act of tweeting seems to raise tension in Jim's thinking. On the one hand, he tweeted about how the discussion was political, but in earlier comments, he stated that the child's letter lacked any political focus. Jim first described how the letter written at home was a bit of extra writing and 'not a political…' task, and this seems to be in contrast to the focus of the lesson in which, unquestionably, the content was political; gaining facts about a world leader for non- fiction writing. Jim was aware of how his professional identity changed between home and school. The use of the words 'didn't have my school head-on' indicate that even though Jim was tweeting about his work, he did not seem to think of this in a professional context. He refers to feeling 'relaxed', and as a consequence, he makes decisions that he may not have done if he had been at school.

The retweeting of information that Jim shared ended up with a journalist writing an article about Jim, the school and the letter written by a child at home as a piece of homework and this appeared in a popular online paper. Jim did not seem to have any regrets about using Twitter to share class news, and this form of social media is encouraged by his school. However, what is shared and in what context has implications on how teachers' professionalism may be framed, and this raises questions about who decides what is appropriate to be shared on social media. In this instance, the children, the teacher and the parents did not seem to be concerned about the content of the discussion that had taken place in the class or the media coverage that followed. However, there were some concerns about the political nature of Jim's Tweet by the MAT, Jim commented:

> '[the problem was management thought we were] looking like we're taking sides in a political[discussion]…' (Jim, 60).

> '[it gave the] school maybe some publicity that we didn't want and almost landed me in quite hot water. Yeah, I think there were conversations about that higher up' (Jim, 61).

The MAT expressed some apprehensions about the repercussion of Jim's tweet. One concern was that Jim had not followed the press coverage protocol once the tweet had reached an online newspaper. A further concern was that senior leaders within the MAT did not think that the school should be seen to be taking sides in current political debate. In this example, the actions of the MAT could be viewed as a form of vertical surveillance (Page, 2016).

As a consequence of what happened, Jim's immediate response was to change his lesson plans for the following week. He had initially planned to do some follow up work on the letter with the class but decided against this as he felt that he did not want to create any more tension with those higher up in the MAT. This can be viewed as a conscious act of self-surveillance (Page, 2016).

Summary

In Jim's personal response I have outlined how he avoided a disclosure dilemma by selecting sources that supported his own personal views about Trump. This could be said to have some similarities with the category of activist identified by Magill (2016). Furthermore, I highlighted how his practice was constrained by vertical surveillance, and as a consequence, Jim adopted self-surveillance strategies (Page, 2016).

5.6 Nate's Personal Responses

Nate is an upper Key Stage 2 teacher, and described the catchment area of his school as being quite diverse. Nate's personal responses centre on his strategies and discussions with the children in his class relating to World War 1. His personal responses are useful in understanding how a range of teaching strategies can be used to support the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

During his recent teaching about World War 1, Nate was able to make connections between his earlier discussion with the children about the Brexit elections.

> 'We said 'OK well you have to be 18 to vote' and they said 'but you can join the army at 16'. And a lot of them saw that correlation as quite a negative thing, like 'oh but if you can go and die for your country' they knew what it meant to be in the army, then why shouldn't you be able to vote for certain things and stuff like that. A lot of them felt that way' (Nate, 32).

There was an apparent tension here for both Nate and the children in his class in looking at legislation about voting age. Nate shared that the children had an emotional response to the age that you could join the army (16), and they were able to recognise both the tensions and unfairness of those who make political legislation. Nate had facilitated an opportunity for children to discuss current issues that they viewed as controversial through the teaching of World War 1. However, this teaching moment could have been an opportunity for Nate to discuss the difference between being able to join the army (at 16) and being on the frontline (at 18). This omission could be interpreted as, on the one hand, that Nate's subject knowledge did not have this level of detail. On the other hand, it could be seen that he is consciously manipulating or simplifying the information that he is providing to the children to frame a current debate- making connections with past and present political topics.

During Nate's teaching of World War 1, his pedagogical approach had been to select an image that represented the number of casualties during the Battle of the Somme.

> 'each person represents a certain amount of people that died in the Somme on the first day. And they [the children] were quite shocked I think' (Nate, 24).

It would appear that his selection of this teaching resource enabled the children to connect with the severity and horror of the battle. He recognised that this had an emotional response, and commented that the children said:

> 'I'd be scared'. They understand the fear of it all. Yeah it did hit home…' (Nate, 27).

Nate's teaching intention seems to have been successful in that the children recognised the severity of the Battle of the Somme- 'it hit home'. However, he had some reservations about his pedagogical approach as he said:

> 'I was worried a bit about it ….' (Nate, 27).

Nate wanted the children to have what Chapman (2017) refers to as an in-depth understanding of the Battle of the Somme. To do this, he felt it was important to share a visual representation that reflected the number of casualties. Nate revealed that he was 'worried' about the children's emotional responses though he does not disclose what he was worried about. In this case, he did not change, adjust or put protectionist strategies in place, and this could be interpreted as Nate drawing on his previous experiences of teaching about World War 1. This is as an example of pedagogical literacy in action (Maclellan, 2008).

Later on, in the teaching sequence, Nate took the children on a field trip where they could experience trench life.

> 'Like last year we went on a trip to Morfa Bay [World War 1 visitors centre] and they've got the mock-up trenches… And that was really good because it was really good for the children to get engrossed in that 'wow this is really what trench life was like' (Nate, 22).

Nate's intention was for the children to have a first-hand experience and referred to the trip as being 'good'. He clearly felt that this immersive approach was useful in supporting children's understanding of frontline warfare. However, it should be noted that engaging in this sort of activity could be considered to be sharing a sanitised version of history, and perhaps Nate's comments about this are naïve. Berti *et al.,* (2009) argue that children's lived experiences are often limited and as a result, they may need to rely on their imaginations rather than engaging with a range of historical sources. Due to the horrific nature of trench life, it is questionable if children should be asked to empathise about or imagine trench life and whether this is morally acceptable.

So far, I have considered Nate's pedagogical strategies of selecting a visual resource and providing an immersive experience in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. I will now discuss how children's FoK created a dilemma for him to negotiate in his teaching of World War 1.

The FoK that children bring into the classroom are important for teachers to acknowledge as part of their discussions- if this knowledge is inaccurate and not explored as part of the teaching then the children may leave confused and with misconceptions. Nate reflects on his recent teaching where the children had some misconceptions:

> 'A lot of them had the misconception about Hitler being involved, because we were looking at the First World War, not the Second. 'So, when did Hitler come into it?', I was like 'well no he didn't'. And then conversation came from there like 'oh didn't he kill the Jews?' and all that, you know all these titbits of knowledge they know…. Yeah. And then obviously then that promotes controversy in itself, I mean how far do you go into the details? 'Oh, Hitler killed Jews, didn't he?' it's how much do you break that down and say 'yeah but…' and you explain it more. But obviously it's then going off on a tangent when you're trying to teach something else' (Nate,18).

In Nate's class, children brought with them a limited understanding of the role of Hitler in World War 1 and Two. While Nate wanted to ensure a deep and secure engagement with World War 1, he was torn between needing to explain contextual facts about World War 2, while getting the children to understand the content of World War 1. Misconceptions can add further complexity to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Further examples were provided by Nate of this when the children adopted partisan language:

> 'We rather than 'the British'. They weren't looking at it from an objective point of view, they were looking at it for 'so we beat the Germans, didn't we?' (Nate, 17).

Nate is consciously aware that the comments from the children about Hitler and reference to 'we beat the Germans' are not issues that he can simply address. He recognised that using children's FoK can result in going off-topic, and this is a dilemma that teachers may face in their teaching. In these examples, the children's misconceptions and accepted collective narratives are essential considerations in his approach to teaching and are not simply resolved.

Summary

In Nate' personal response I have identified how the teaching of World War 1 allowed connections to be made between past and present and how these are influenced by children's FoK. Nate reflected on his pedagogical approach, however, due to his pedagogical literacy (Maclellan) he had the confidence to continue despite his reservations. Dealing with misconceptions in a timely way raises challenges, and Nate was aware of this.

5.7 Mike's Personal Responses

Mike is a secondary teacher who primarily teaches history. His personal responses focused on the strategies he used when teaching about the Holocaust to upper Key Stage 2 as a transition assembly and Key Stage 3 and 4 as part of their curriculum.

Mike had recently taught about the Holocaust to children in Key Stage 2, 3 and 4. He described both the changes he made to the content and the pedagogical strategies used to engage children with the Holocaust in a progressive manner. Mike commented:

> ' We made quite a significant change to the assemblies with the younger ones [upper key Stage 2] in the fact that…. with the older ones [Key Stage 3 and 4] we'd tried to get them to understand and grasp the significance of how many people had been murdered ….

Mike acknowledged that he made several changes to the assembly for the children in Key Stage 2 stating that:

> 'I think primary school students need to have some concept of what went on but to be honest I don't think it should be….it needs to be sugar coated obviously, but it needs to be….it needs to be dealt with sensitively'.

Mike demonstrated his pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) by adapting his teaching because he felt that 'it needed to be sugar coated', and this can be interpreted as Mike wanting to present a more sanitised version of the Holocaust, this implied that the children had a partial

picture of this event and raised challenges for the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. If the Holocaust is 'sugar coated' it infers a desensitisation of the topic. The ramifications of this could be that children do not fully understand the seriousness and magnitude of this event. While Mike is aware of the need for progression in historical understanding, this could still result in an extended period of misunderstanding until they are provided with further information. Mike has positioned Key Stage 2 children in need of protection and therefore he aimed to provide a deeper contextual understanding through exploring the life of an individual (Berti *et al.,* 2009) -in this case, Anne Frank. He described his approach:

> 'I took the Anne Frank sort of angle with the younger ones and had them…So we had a 3D sort of scale model of the scale dimensions of the attic where Anne Frank went and just had the younger students come into the attic and crowd them all in and then sort of talked them through it using that angle' ….'And I think that approach worked really well because they could empathise to an extent but we weren't going into the graphics or nature of the gassing by the end, but just trying to get them to understand the sort of fear involved and then the sort of segregation and the desperation that was involved in the sort of process of the persecution' (Mike, 7).

Whilst the younger children may have received a simplified version of history, through his teaching he wanted the children to understand the fear of being in hiding during the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people. Mike made a conscious decision to focus on the fear and persecution rather than what happened in the extermination camps. As a result of this focus, Mike felt that the children had some empathy for Anne Frank. He acknowledged that the children could empathise with the fear and persecution to some degree but it is questionable whether this was empathy or sympathy. Blake (1998) argues such historical empathy is counterproductive as this does not help children develop sophisticated understandings of the past. This suggests that Mike recognised that full engagement with empathy may not be possible and this is supported by the work of Berti, *et al.,* (2009).

With the older children, Mike adopted different pedagogical approaches. One strategy was to create a visual representation of the number of deaths that occurred as a result of the Holocaust.

> 'We used a box to show a million dots on the screen and then obviously showed 6 million dots [to represent the number of deaths in the Holocaust, taught to Key Stage 3 and 4] and tried to get them to understand and make comparisons to how many people

> that was populated in the country, and really get them to try and grasp that idea'(Mike, 7)

This is in contrast to his approach with Key Stage 2 children. On the one hand, he used a significant figure and on the other a significant collective experience. The emphasis on Anne Frank provided an individual that the younger children could relate to without experiencing the more distressing aspects of her life as a Jew at the time. The focus on six million dots could be viewed as a more abstract concept of introducing the scale and severity of the Holocaust to the older children. This distancing may suggest that this is a way of protecting children as the focus is on the number of casualties, not the individuals that these dots represent. An alternative interpretation of this approach could be to demonstrate the severe scale of the event – so that the children can visualise this.

During his teaching, Mike described how he felt that when teaching sensitive and controversial issues he provides a disclaimer before revealing any information.

> …'And then sort of do give them a disclaimer, like all the groups are told 'this is an upsetting topic and there's some upsetting material and content here'
>
> 'if you want to speak to people about it afterwards that's important', so just setting that scene I think, it's almost just that will upset certain students and trigger….you know' (Mike, 9).

The use of a disclaimer and signposting to further support may indicate that Mike is preparing children for issues that they may find upsetting. On the one hand, this could be seen as part of his professional role in supporting children's wellbeing. On the other hand, it may indicate that Mike is using this as a form of self-protection. Mike recognises that some children will be personally sensitive to this topic. Within his disclaimer, he tells the children that the expected emotional response is to be upset. However, he does not acknowledge that some children may not be upset. This could imply that Mike felt that children are without agency and raises questions as to whether, when teaching sensitive and controversial issues, we should pre- empt the emotional response that we expect from children. A further strategy that Mike employs in his teaching of sensitive and controversial issues is his use of language.

> 'I was very conscious when I was teaching … I'm always quite careful with my words' … (Mike, 27)

Mike uses the words ‘conscious’ and ‘careful’ which indicate his awareness of his use of language during his teaching and this can be viewed as a form of self-surveillance.

Summary

In Mike’s personal response I have reflected on his pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) and highlighted how this can be observed in a number of ways. These include: careful use of language, adaptations of teaching to different age groups; awareness of children’s wellbeing; how children are capable of some empathy; providing a disclaimer; being aware of the personal sensitivity and being able to adopt self-surveillance strategies where appropriate.

5.8 Summary of the chapter

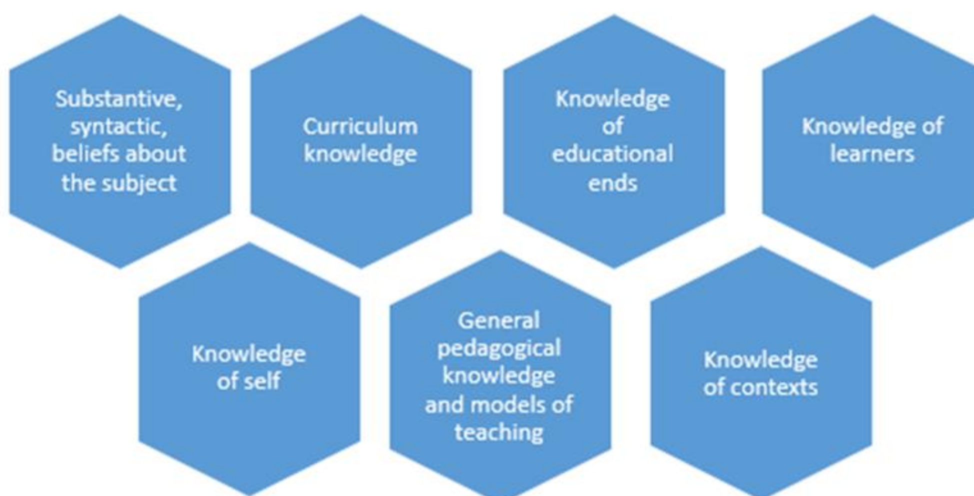


Fig 1. **1 Knowledge bases amended from Turner- Bisset’s (1999) Knowledge bases**

In this chapter, I have provided an in-depth focus of six individual’s practice through their personal responses. Explicit reference has not been made to the knowledge bases in Fig.1, however, they are implicitly evident in these responses. I am now going to consider how my

amended version of Turner- Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases can be used to conceptualise the complexity of teachers' practice in relation to sensitive and controversial issues. These knowledge bases are one way of conceptualising teachers thinking and through this research, I have found that each knowledge base is not fixed but fluid and dependant on context. I am now going to consider examples from the personal responses to demonstrate the complexity of the interconnectedness of the knowledge bases.

All personal responses provide evidence of Knowledge of Contexts that are time and space-specific, similarly, they all relate to the teaching about sensitive and controversial issues and therefore the Knowledge of Educational Ends is also evident. Robert's personal response has demonstrated how policy, such as the Prevent Strategy (2015), has had an impact on his practice, and this relates to Knowledge of Curriculum. However, the impact of policy also relates to the choice of pedagogical strategies such as Devil's Advocate and how Robert was aware of surveillance at a range of levels (vertical -social media and SLT -and self-surveillance). Therefore, the base of General Pedagogical Knowledge and Models of Teaching was interconnected with the base of Knowledge of Contexts.

In contrast, Charlie's personal response also related to the base of Knowledge of Curriculum but this time the focus was on the Teachers' Standards (2012). Whereas the impact on Robert's practice was linked to the base of General Pedagogical Knowledge and Models of Teaching, here the impact relates to the base of Knowledge of Learners as the children's FoK proved to have the larger impact on his teaching practice. In Robert's case, the base of Knowledge of Curriculum informed his practice whereas in Charlie's case it silenced it. Both teachers made specific reference to the school context however for Charlie this was particularly challenging as the 'Right-Wing' nature of the context was in contrast to his political views.

Rebecca provided a further example of a policy which is situated in the base of Knowledge of Curriculum as she makes explicit reference to the National Curriculum (2013). Whereas Robert felt constrained by policy, Charlies response demonstrated the complexity of upholding the Teachers' Standards (2012) in practice. Rebecca, by contrast, felt that the policy of the National Curriculum (2013) should protect her by providing more age-appropriate topics. Rebecca's

concerns can be seen in the base of Knowledge of Learners where she felt that her children were not cognitively able to understand, in this instance, the teaching about the Ancient Egyptians. Here the bases of Knowledge of Learners and Knowledge of Curriculum are explicitly interconnected and context-dependent.

Jim provided the only example of what Magill (2016) would categorise as an activist teacher and this relates to the base of Knowledge of Self. In Magill's (2016) research, she acknowledged that activist teachers were likely to be supported by parents and the school context. This indicates that there is an interconnectedness between the bases of Knowledge of Self and Knowledge of Contexts. In Jim's case, the context was seen to be enabling in his teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. However, for Charlie, it was disabling.

Nate provided an example of how children's FoK could emerge in the form of misconceptions and this raised challenges for his pedagogical approach. Therefore, this suggests that there is an interconnection between the bases of Knowledge of Learners and General Pedagogical Knowledge and Models of Teaching. Furthermore, Nate's teaching about World War 1 indicated that through his choice of pedagogy he acknowledged that there was an emotional response from the children. This example further highlights that the bases of Substantive, Syntactical and Beliefs about History, and Knowledge of Learners and General Pedagogical Knowledge and Models of Teaching are interconnected.

Mike and Nate demonstrate different pedagogical approaches used within their teaching of history such as the focus on an individual (Anne Frank); role-play; and visual imagery. Both Nate and Mike aimed for what Chapman (2017) describes as a deep engagement with history. This further strengthens the interconnectedness of the bases of Substantive, Syntactical and Beliefs about History and Knowledge of Learners and General Pedagogical Knowledge and Models of Teaching.

In this section, I have demonstrated how many of the knowledge bases are interconnected and have suggested that the base of Knowledge of Educational Ends, where sensitive and controversial issues is situated, was evident in all personal responses. However, such a claim should not be oversimplified and there is a need to recognise the nuances within.

Having previously mentioned that policy is embedded in the base of Knowledge of Curriculum, and linked to the context I will now focus on the tensions within a policy that may shape teachers' practice. Within the Teachers' Standards (2012), Part Two states that teachers need to support the teaching of British Values and Jim's personal response suggests that this can be an opportunity to teach sensitive and controversial issues. However, in Robert's personal response he suggests that the policy of Prevent (2015) can limit opportunities to teach sensitive and controversial issues as different points of views aired during classroom discussion could be interpreted as pejorative, inciting hatred or extremist.

A further example of how the base of Knowledge of Educational Ends can be examined is though the personal responses of Rebecca and Charlie. Both Rebecca in her teaching about the Ancient Egyptians and Charlie in his teaching about the Tudors have engaged in teaching history through the distant past Berti *et al.,* (2009) state that topics from the distant past are likely to be less sensitive. However, both of these topics had a religious element to them which suggested that sensitivity was apparent. Rebecca recognises that the religious element to this topic (the Afterlife) could be a sensitive topic to some children. In contrast, Charlie did not find the religious element (Catholics v Protestants) problematic and he did not acknowledge the possible personality sensitivity.

In this chapter, I have presented six personal responses which highlight the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues in practice. I have considered the interconnectedness of the knowledge bases and this has provided a useful strategy of conceptualising the complex nature of teachers practice.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction to the Chapter

In this chapter I will return to research questions and answer each one in turn. I will then consider recommendations for policy and practice for when teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. Following this, I will reflect on the limitations of this research before finally considering how conducting this research impacted on my professional development and future practice.

6.1 Question 1: In relation to history teaching in state schools: How do teachers define the terms sensitive and controversial in relation to history teaching and learning?

This research saw participants identify a relationship between the terms sensitive and controversial. In the literature these terms are often used interchangeably, however participants had a clear understanding of the terms of sensitive, controversial and the relationship between sensitive and controversial. Sensitivity was defined largely as personal attachment to an issue, whereas controversial was associated with more divisive issues that would affect larger groups. However, participants recognised that a personally sensitive issue could become controversial because of an attachment to the issue. Conversely, if teaching a controversial issue this may be more personally sensitive to some people than others. By discussing controversial issues participants recognised that they could cause; disagreement, upset or make children feel negative. Stradling *et al.,* (1985) also acknowledged this divisive nature of controversial issues. When combining the terms, the participants considered how, due to the personally sensitive nature of these terms, they could be difficult to pre-empt children's responses. With such complexity, Jim noted that teachers may be reticent to engage with the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

In this research I have demonstrated that a teacher's definition of a sensitive and controversial issue can be shaped by current political events in society, in this case the Brexit Referendum (2016). This sits in contrast to research by Brauch *et al.,* (2019), Goldberg *et al.,* (2019) whose definitions have been shaped by a post conflict context. Similarly, Kitson and Mc Cully (2005) and Magill's (2016) research was also conducted in this context. England had not experienced

conflict of this kind, but teachers were recognising similar situations and responses. My research has demonstrated that the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues in England is just as complex and can raise challenges for teachers.

The participants recognised that sensitive and controversial issues were embedded in a political context and this is supported by the work of Stradling *et al.,* (1985) who acknowledges the political nature of sensitive and controversial issues. However, Charlie extended the contextual nature of this definition to include issues of race and religion. A further extension of Stradling *et al.,'s* (1985) definition came with regard to the acknowledgement of changes to geographical location. Sammy provided the example of teaching the same lesson in a rural and urban school with very different responses from the children due to nuances in social and cultural experiences. This corresponds with Brauch *et al.,* (2019) who considered 'hot' sensitive topics and how they can emerge in changing social contexts. This was further echoed by Sammy who recognised that some topics could be 'hot' sensitive topics that were 'triggered' by what Kate referred to as 'personal sensitivity'. To this end, my research demonstrates that the definition of sensitive and controversial issues can be seen to be informed by context: political, social, cultural, personal and geographical.

My research has highlighted when discussing definitions of sensitive and controversial issues, participants made no reference to policy, research or documents from subject associations, all participants drew on their experiences to define the terms.

6. 2 Question 2: How does policy impact on the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues?

In order to answer this research question, I will draw on the following policies: The National Curriculum (DfE, 2013); the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) and The Prevent Strategy (2015).

6.2.1 National Curriculum (DfE, 2013)

My research has demonstrated that the policy of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) has influenced the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. It is important to note that there was little explicit mention of this policy. The omission of direct reference by the majority of

participants may be indicative of teachers' focus on their practice and overall use of the policy for guidance rather than using this policy as a daily prescriptive document.

My research has highlighted that teachers are able to use the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) to suit their context; for example, the participants used local history (Bus Boycott), centenaries (World War 1) and annual events (Guy Fawkes). This indicates that teachers are able to employ their agency in the planning and delivery of their history curriculum which is an important factor when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Through participants responses, I have identified that individual teacher's confidence is an essential component to the inclusion and implementation strategies used. Conversely, the wording of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) implies that teachers will need to engage with the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues but does not explicitly make this clear. The policy does not provide any guidance in how teachers should engage with these issues. On the one hand, this implies that teachers have agency. However, on the other it may leave teachers feeling uncomfortable as this research has demonstrated that teachers may feel 'vulnerable' or want to 'shy away' from the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

Rebecca, the only participant to explicitly mention the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) in her personal response, stated that the policy should protect her and her children from teaching topics that had the potential to be sensitive and controversial. In this case, she was referring to the teaching about the Ancient Egyptians. It is worth noting that within this topic there are themes that could be sensitive and controversial to teach, such as questioning if it is right to open a sarcophagus. Similar themes could be framed without engaging with sensitive and controversial issues, such as the development of hieroglyphics.

While participants have implicitly indicated that the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) provides agency for teachers in terms of what and how it is taught, this was not the case for all participants. This highlights that there is difference in the implementation of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) in practice which are dependent on school contexts.

6.2.2 The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) and The Prevent Strategy (2015)

Mansfield (2019) argues that the teaching of British Values has largely fallen to teachers of history and my research has demonstrated how the values are explicit within the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012). There was no specific mention of these standards in the focus group or individual interviews but implicit references were made with regard to participants practice. The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) provide clear guidance of teachers' professional responsibilities inside and outside of the classroom. However, my research can conclude that when applying this policy in practice, greater complexity is demonstrated. This is particularly evident with regard to Part Two which states that teachers must show a level of professionalism within and outside school. Teachers must negotiate a number of identities, for example, parent, friend, partner. However, the standards demand the teaching identity is maintained at all times. My research has demonstrated the difficulty some teachers have in balancing these identities when not in the classroom. Jim revealed that teaching decisions made on the weekend may not have been made if he had been in school and surrounded by colleagues.

A further layer of complexity that has emerged within my research is with regard to the context at different levels. I discussed how both Charlie and Nate were unsure if they were able to or how to respond to chidlren's questions at the time of the Brexit Referendum (2016). The wording in the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) aims to ensure that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability. This raises questions about who decides if teachers share their personal beliefs and whether this leads to the exploitation of children in their classroom. In this case, both Charlie and Nate felt it was safer not to share their views due to the political sensitivity in society at this time. In addition to this the context can add further difficulties. The local area where Charlie was working was identified as having Right Wing support of Brexit, this was in contrast to his personal views and he was worried about reprisal from parents. However, Sammy explicitly shared her personal views as a strategy for getting her children to understand bias of sources within history and this demonstrates that personal views have been shared directly. By contrast, Jim was also able to share his personal and political views indirectly by selecting sources that reflected his position. In his school context, it appeared that the children and the parents would be largely supportive of his position and this is in contrast to Charlie's context.

Findings from this research have also indicated that the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) can be confusing as individuals are having to implement the standards through a lens of potential contradiction. Participants found it difficult to "be tolerant to those with different faiths and beliefs" whilst simultaneously ensuring that personal beliefs were not expressed in ways which exploited vulnerability. What was omitted from the participants' understandings of being tolerant was the reference to "the rule of law" and how expressing opinions "might lead them to break the law" (DfE, 2012). This was articulated in Charlie's Personal Response who referred to racists comment made by the children within the context of discussing the Brexit Referendum (2016) and his difficulties in how to respond. These difficulties of interpretation are exacerbated by the Prevent Strategy (2015) particularly when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. If there is to be an exploration of different points of view teachers may be left with concerns about children's comments if they are pejorative or racist. This was further acknowledged in Robert's Personal Response where he demonstrated his reservations about the Prevent Strategy (2015). He viewed his role as 'spying' on vulnerable children and this indicated that some teachers are questioning the aims and implications of The Prevent Strategy (2015).

6.3 Question 3: What do teachers of history say about the challenges and opportunities for teaching sensitive and controversial issues in practice?

This section will focus on a number of challenges and opportunities teachers experienced when facilitating the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. These include the subject of history, children, pedagogy and surveillance which will be considered in turn.

6.3.1 History

The analysis from Phase One and Two of this research has demonstrated that within the teaching of history there are both opportunities and challenges when teaching sensitive and controversial issues. Whilst the participants acknowledged the need for deep engagement with history topics (Chapman, 2017) this provided some challenges in terms of using sources. My research has identified that some participants selected images to provoke an emotional response and develop feelings of empathy within their teaching. There was some recognition that these

sources raised challenges- for example, the need for ethical consent when using images of people in vulnerable positions.

Furthermore, my research acknowledges that the participants felt that, within history, there were many opportunities to teach about sensitive and controversial issues and the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013) offered some flexibility. However, they recognised that how the past is interpreted is in itself controversial and context dependant. Furthermore, some participants felt that they needed to present a sanitised and more palatable version of history. They recognised that sources were biased and this was used as a way to understand constructions of the past. Due to how the past has been constructed, some participants acknowledged these created challenges when teaching history.

Further challenges to the teaching of history identified in my research relate to the emotional responses to sensitive and controversial issues; children may be ‘upset’, feel ‘negative’ and have opinions that could be ‘extreme or ill balanced’. Such circumstances were identified as potential triggers which may result in sensitive and controversial issues being avoided rather than taught.

6.3.2 Children

Within this research I have identified how children’s FoK are manifested in the classroom. This term originated from the work of Moll (2005) who acknowledged that children’s FoK could be used to bridge a gap between home and school. In my research, I also identified how not knowing about children’s FoK could have specific implications within the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. recognised that children’s FoK could be used to make a positive contribution to children’s learning, I have demonstrated that drawing on these FoK within the context of teaching about sensitive and controversial issues is more complex. Participants recognised the importance of their professional role in presenting a range of perspectives that could be in contrast to children’s existing FoK. While this could be argued to be good practice the participants were aware that what was being discussed could have repercussions from parents.

In previous research, Llopart and Esteban- Guitart (2018) stated that knowledge from home was used positively to inform learning. However, in the context of this research I have identified how some children’s comments influenced by the home, media and community were pejorative with regard to themes being discussed. As a result of this, my research has indicated

that when teaching about sensitive and controversial issues children's FoK are contested or silenced rather than embraced and I have identified a number of situations which has led to teachers' questioning their practice about how to respond to children's comments.

My research identified that children drawing on partial information influenced by home was problematic for the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. In this case, the participants commented that comments of this kind shared by children were particularly challenging during the Brexit Referendum (2016). I argue that teachers should be mindful of changing social and political contexts when approaching the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. Not only are these situations difficult to navigate due to their complexity, but children are coming to the classroom with partial information which may sit in contrast to a teachers' own political and social standpoint.

While some children may have partial information, I demonstrated how others come to the classroom with misconceptions regarding historical topics of a sensitive and controversial nature; in this instance the teaching of World War 1 and confusion of key historical figures. This could be viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity to address misconceptions. However, I have identified that by changing the focus of the planned teaching could result in topics being discussed in less depth.

My research acknowledges that the position of gatekeeper also offers challenges and opportunities. A challenge because the teacher may need to seek permission to teach a sensitive and controversial issue or, an opportunity because they have the support of senior leaders; this could be viewed as a form of protection for the teacher. Protection strategies were also identified within this research with regard to how children were positioned. The majority of participants felt that children were able to participate in the discussion of sensitive and controversial issues and they viewed supporting this as part of their professional role. However, there was recognition that both pedagogy and the focus of what was being taught shifted in relation to age. Rebecca stated that children were sometimes constructed as cognitively unable to understand sensitive and controversial issues.

6.3.3 Pedagogy

This research has identified a number of pedagogical strategies that teachers employed within their teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. These strategies will now be discussed as both challenges and opportunities.

A disclosure dilemma was highlighted by Barton and McCully (2007) as one of the challenges that teachers may need to consider within their teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. This research brings a greater depth of understanding to this strategy. My research has identified that a disclosure dilemma is complex and can take various forms; actively sharing their position explicitly; actively avoiding sharing their own position; actively sharing their position through the explicit selection of sources without necessarily openly acknowledging this; being unsure if they were allowed to share their own position; and dealing with the emotional repercussions when children express views that are in contrast to the teacher's.

While I have identified that a disclosure dilemma is challenging, it was noted that disclosure could also be considered to be an opportunity to teach specific skills of interpretation when using sources, such as dealing with bias.

Stradling *et al.,* (1984) identified how the role of Devil's Advocate could be used to develop alternative perspective and challenge dominant views. This was seen as an opportunity to provide multiple perspectives to deepen understanding of sensitive and controversial issues. What Stradling *et al.,* (1984) do not consider is how this role is used as a form of protection by teachers. While Page (2016) acknowledged that teachers engage with self-surveillance practice I have found that the role of Devil's Advocate is a successful strategy that can support teachers while protecting them from external and internal scrutiny.

In addition to disclosure dilemmas, Maclellan (2008) argues that teachers need to be pedagogically literate. Whereas her research recognised generalised practice e.g. classroom management, my research identifies how teachers need to be pedagogically literate in changing

social and political contexts. Teachers not only need to reflect on their own practice but also need to incorporate an understanding of the social and cultural contexts at a local scale. When faced with a problem in the classroom such as behaviour management, Maclellan's (2008) solution is for teachers to draw on theory. With regard to the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues, I would argue that such a response may have limited impact particularly when teachers are faced with a changing social and political context such as the Brexit Referendum (2016). This research has identified a number of ways in which the participants drew on their pedagogical literacy in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. One example was being able to adapt to different contexts and school settings which enabled teachers to respond to children's FoK appropriately. A second example was when teachers were able to gain confidence from their previous experiences of teaching the same topic in the same setting with a different class and this quietened reservations about the emotional nature of the discussion. My research also identified that without experiences to draw on and having a secure pedagogical literacy practitioner may find the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues challenging. This was particular evident in the case of Rebecca who stated that she felt really vulnerable when teaching a topic that she was unfamiliar with.

So far, I have indicated that participants used a range of pedagogical strategies within their teaching. A point of interest to note is that while the participants in this research study were teachers from Key Stage 1 to 5, there were no discernible difference in approach and practice to teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. Had the data identified differences in approaches and practice this would have been interesting to explore further.

6.4 Question 4: How far does the exploration of sensitive and controversial issues in key literature match professionals' experience and practice?

This research has identified how Turner- Bisset's (1999) knowledge bases and the models presented by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) have been useful in the exploration of teaching sensitive and controversial issues in state schools in England since 2010. In answering this question, I will outline how useful this previous work has been to my research. I will first refer to the work of Turner- Bisset (1999) and then highlight how the specific base of Knowledge of Self can be explored through the models identified by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016).

6.4.1 Exploring the Knowledge Bases identified by Turner- Bisset (1999)

This research considered the work of Turner- Bisset (1999) and her identification of knowledge bases that are evident in the teaching of history. In my research I used the bases in the context of the teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. This provided a structure and coherence to the organisation of my research. Initially bases were amended and used to structure the literature review, this was then followed by considering how these discreet bases were evident in teachers' practice. My research has demonstrated that the discreet bases could be identified in the thematic data which provided further insight into the complexity of teacher's practice. This complexity was further highlighted when teachers' practice was considered more holistically and a range of bases became evident in their personal responses; the changing prominence of the base being dependant on the content and context.

The use of these bases has provided one way of conceptualising teachers' thinking, the construction of their thoughts and actions and has provided clarity and order to their practice. While a number of bases were identified in their responses some bases such as Knowledge of Contexts was evident in all participants personal responses.

6.4.2 Exploring the research by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016)

This research has drawn on work by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) who between them identified teachers into the following categories: avoiders- reluctant and natural; containers; risk takers and activists. Their research was conducted with teachers in Northern Ireland, and Spain respectively- countries which had specific tensions as a result of recent conflict. This section will now draw together conclusions from my research that relates to these categories and their relationship with policy.

Activists

Magill's (2016) activists had very strong political opinions which impacted on the professional decisions they made in relation to teaching. Activists in Magill's (2016) research did not seem to be concerned about reprisal for their approach because they felt that the school context would support them. My research has identified two participants who showed similar characteristics to this. Jim had strong political views and selected sources to use in the classroom that reflected his position. He did not seem to be wary of reprisal when presenting this in practice and like Magill's (2016) activists he worked in a school context that shared his political position. Jim negotiated his personal beliefs but it is questionable whether presenting a dominant argument would support the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012).The standards state that teachers must ensure that "personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law".

The relationship between expressing one's personal beliefs and exploiting pupil's vulnerability is not clear neither is the point where one becomes another. At no point did Jim concede the exploitation of children yet providing a single narrative could, in some circumstances, be seen to exploit their vulnerability and potentially lead them to break the law. This research has shown how this is a professional tightrope that teachers walk where policy may be interpreted as ambiguous and context dependant.

A further example of the complexity of being an activist was shared by Robert in his personal response. Robert outlined very clearly that his views were in direct opposition to the Prevent Strategy (DfE, 2015). This questions how teachers can uphold a policy that they deem to be controversial and harmful to children. Whilst Robert did have strong political convictions he did not fully fit with Magill's (2016) characteristics of an activist because he demonstrated an awareness of how his practice could be viewed through the lens of surveillance in his context. As such, his potential activism was silenced through protectionist strategies and this research begins to show that Magill's (2016) category of activist can be shaped by the Teachers Standards (DfE, 2012) which may constrain teachers' activism in practice.

Risk Taker

Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) identified risk takers as teachers who fully embraced the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues and such practice was seen in my research. However, greater insight into this category has been enabled by the identification of Devil's Advocate, and the use of disclaimer tactics as particular strategies that some participants used within their teaching. These strategies challenged children's opinions, but more importantly were used to protect teachers from reprisal. This supports the work of Page (2016) who refers to teachers using self- surveillance. My research has identified that risk taking can involve teachers practising protectionist strategies and this brings into question why they need to protect themselves during the teaching about sensitive and controversial issues.

Container

Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) identified the category of container. Practitioners who demonstrated these characteristics did not allow sensitive and controversial conversations to develop. This strategy limited the potential for discussion and having to field difficult questions. In my research, containment was observed in two ways: unplanned and planned. Planned containment was seen through the use of ready-made resources which distanced the teacher from responsibility of content. I have argued that this may leave teachers vulnerable as resources may have a particular bias or may not reflect the complex nature of what is being discussed. In the case of unplanned containment, this was identified when children's questions were partially answered and then shut down as they did not follow the teachers anticipated line of enquiry. As a socially conscious researcher I acknowledge that dealing with unplanned discussion is an integral part of being a teacher and having to work within specific time frames makes this difficult. However, planned containment through the use of ready-made resources is more problematic. These may not explore sensitive and controversial issues in any depth, or they could be biased or misleading- this could make teachers and children vulnerable.

Avoider

Kitson and McCully (2005) identified the category of avoiders which was further developed by Magill (2016). In her research, teachers could be characterised as natural or reluctant avoiders when teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. Both of these discreet categories were identified in my research. However, Rebecca demonstrated aspects of being both a natural avoider and a container simultaneously. Whilst she openly shared her concerns about children's cognitive ability (natural avoider) she also limited any discussion that involved sharing her own opinions about death and the Afterlife (container). While Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) used a continuum to identify different characteristics of teachers of history, my research has identified that this continuum is more fluid than these models initially suggested. A teacher can adopt different characteristics at different times within and between topics and this is often shaped by the school context. Further examples of this were provided. Charlie avoided responding to children's comments about the Brexit referendum (2016), and contained the discussion on British Values by using ready -made resources. He also displayed some of the characteristics of risk taker by using a debate to discuss the Tudors. A further example can be seen by Jim who contained an unplanned discussion of colonisation, but demonstrated characteristics of being an activist in his teaching of British Values.

How useful is this model?

The categories identified by Kitson and McCully (2005) and Magill (2016) are useful in framing different approaches that teachers adopt in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. However, my research has demonstrated that these categories and policy and practice are shaped by current context. Furthermore, there is a fluidity between the categories and this is dependent on issues being taught. This brings greater clarity to the tensions that teachers face in the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. These categories have enabled me to understand, in detail, the decisions that teachers have made in depth and problematised their practice in greater detail.

Surveillance

Page (2016) acknowledged surveillance at a number of levels referring to the accountability agenda (such as no notice OfSTED inspections) for more general, everyday aspects of teaching. This research has highlighted how teachers also adopt a range of self-surveillance strategies within their teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. These include: being Devil's Advocate; providing a disclaimer; selecting ready-made resources; pre-empting reprisal from parents and changing planned practice to avoid further scrutiny and adopted a position of silence.

6.5 Recommendations and implications for policy, practice and personal professional development

Policy

This research has considered how the policies of the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), The Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) and The Prevent Strategy (2015) have been influential on teachers' practice in relation to teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. I would recommend that with regard the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013), guidance should be amended to reflect the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues. In addition, further clarity is required in order guide teachers to engage with these issues at a deeper level.

This research has brought greater clarity to the relationship between the policy of the Teachers' Standards (DfE, 2012) and practice when teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. To support teachers, it is necessary that the standards in Part Two provide additional guidance that acknowledges the complexity of teaching sensitive and controversial issues particularly at times of social and political change. With regard The Prevent Strategy (2015), recognition needs to be made that reflects the difference between activism or voicing a controversial opinion, and possible terrorist intent. Within the teaching of sensitive and controversial teachers should be able to facilitate discussions that embraces different perspectives with confidence.

This research has identified that a recognition of the school context is essential in the teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. As such, I would recommend that school policy should encourage a positive relationship between teachers and parents with the planning and teaching of sensitive and controversial issues. This would embrace a shared understanding that different points of view must be explored to support learners understanding of complex issues.

Practice

In order to support the teaching about sensitive and controversial issues I recommend that further training is needed within initial teacher training and continued professional development. This training would need to reflect the complexity and context specific nature of individual schools and support teachers in recognising the essential skills of pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) in teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. Further to this training it would be essential to provide ongoing support for teachers as issues, questions and tensions arrive. I would suggest that this is supported by a local network of sensitive and controversial school-based champions in order to create a professional community of practice.

In order to engage with the complexities of teaching about sensitive and controversial issues there needs to be a shared understanding between all stakeholders that supports and in-depth understanding and this needs to be reflected when allocating curriculum time.

Personal, professional development

As a result of this research journey I have developed my personal and professional understandings of research which will enable me to better support students in a number of ways. I will now be able to share evidence informed practice when teaching about sensitive and controversial issues-such as highlighting different pedagogical approaches; the importance of context at a number of levels; and making explicit the need to consider children's FoK. This has supported the continuing development of my pedagogical literacy (Maclellan, 2008) which in turn has enabled me to feel more confident in supporting both undergraduate and postgraduate students with their research projects. I feel that it is important to share my findings from this research within my university setting to inform programme design for teacher training and professional development for teachers by sharing my research informed practice with professional subject networks. I will also disseminate the findings from this research to a range

of audiences through conferences and academic journals. These journals will be directed at both researchers and professional teachers which will exploit the power of the education community by strategic dissemination and will combine both the depth and breadth of the study.

Fig. 5 Table of Recommendations

Policy	**Practice**	**Personal and professional development**
Clarify the complexity of teaching about sensitive and controversial issues in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2013).	Ensure that all trainee teachers are provided with training on teaching about sensitive and controversial issues as part of their course requirements.	To draw on my evidence based research to inform my professional practice when working with both students and teachers.
Clarify the complexity of teaching about sensitive and controversial issues in the Teachers' Standards (2012) Part Two.	Ongoing CPD should be provided for all teachers who engage with teaching about sensitive and controversial issues.	To share my pedagogical literacy and how this has become established through both practice and research with students and teachers.
Within the Teachers' Standards (2012) there needs to be an acknowledgement that changes in society are often reflected in classroom conversations and this immediacy is difficult to plan for.	Establish school based champions for the teaching about sensitive and controversial issues who will work with a range of stakeholder to ensure that there is a shared understanding about the need for this to be embedded as part of the curriculum.	To confidently support students in establishing research projects at both undergraduate and post graduate levels.
Greater support for teachers when implementing the Prevent Strategy (2015) with regard to the challenges of balancing open discussion and controversial opinions in the classroom and whether such opinions negate a Prevent referral.	School base champions to work with SLT to ensure adequate time is allocated for curriculum coverage where sensitive and controversial issues can be taught.	To disseminate findings through conferences and academic journals.
	Establish local networks for school based champions to support teachers and share best practice in delivering education about sensitive and controversial issues.	

6.6 Methodological considerations and future opportunities for further research

As the study was constructed, methodological considerations, choices and decisions were made through my research journey. The choices made impacted on the nature and direction of this research. The clear timeline of data collections, using two focus group interviews which were followed by six individual interviews was a strength of the research providing an opportunity for a very focused analysis. Future studies could adapt this approach to interview teachers over a longer period of time which would provide further insights into their classroom experiences and their development on the under-researched nuances of pedagogical literacy. It would be useful to include the use of a reflective diary as a method to further understand teachers' experiences.

Acknowledging the contextual nature of the research was a further strength of the study. The data was collected at a particular time, shortly after the Brexit referendum, and this clearly highlighted the importance of recognising current contexts and the influence on data. I feel that this provided a particular understanding of how teachers mediate current political and social issues in the classroom which supports the socio-cultural theory underpinning this research.

The chosen methodology was a bounded case study; a deliberate choice in relation to the specific focus of this research project. The case study was bounded by location, time and the experiences of the participant's relating to teaching about sensitive and controversial issues. While I acknowledge that my findings are not generalisable the analysis process was conducted with integrity and strengthens my commitment to being a socially conscious researcher. A bounded case study has enabled me to have a detailed and in depth understanding of the participants' experiences in relation to these issues and on reflection my methodological decisions of using a bounded case study were appropriate.

When conducting further research, I will consider how the voices of children, parents and members of the SLT within schools would be useful collaborators on projects. These stakeholders could be more comprehensively involved in the research design of future studies,

and extend and strengthen my findings. This would enable a deeper understanding of the choice's teachers are making when they plan teaching about sensitive and controversial issues and how this is viewed by other stakeholders. Talking with these groups would value new research opportunities and the perspectives of collaborators.

The small-scale nature of this research could be viewed as a possible limitation; I acknowledge the inner-city context where this research was conducted. However, it has produced detailed and in-depth understanding from the participants of this particular context. Future research could extend into different locational contexts and scales. The purposeful sample used could also be seen to be a limitation; only working with self -identified passionate teachers of history, however, this was a necessary and integral part of this research which could be adapted for future research.

6.7 Personal reflection

I recognise that I have experienced many thought-provoking experiences along this research journey and these experiences will shape my future practice. While I was unaware of the nature of my own self-surveillance practices before conducting this research, I am now more transparent in the strategies that I use with students when engaging in classroom discussion that could be viewed as sensitive and controversial.

Throughout this research I have acknowledged that I have many professional identities and therefore I have needed to be both reflective and reflexive as the research progressed. This merging and shifting of identities reflect the web of identity as identified by Griffiths (1995) which I drew on in Chapter 1.

At times this has been challenging as these identities were not fixed. Some comments participants made during the interview could have led me to provide guidance and support as a teacher educator. However, I resisted providing advice during the interviews as this was not part of my role as a researcher. At the end of the interview I did offer further correspondence through research, resources and conference attendance. As my findings became clearer I did make changes to planned teaching sessions and lectures where I emphasised particular features

of the research or shared key literature that I had found beneficial thus further merging the two identities.

6.8 A final note

At the time of writing there are a number of changes taking place within education. The new *Ofsted Framework* for schools (DfE, 2019) outlines the need for a 'Broad and Balanced' curriculum, where foundation subjects will have a more prominent role than they have had since 2010. While this can be viewed as a positive move in terms of curriculum coverage it has implications for the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues which should be considered in future research.

Appendices

Appendix 1 : Teachers' Standards (DfE2012)

Department for Education

Teachers' Standards

PREAMBLE

Teachers make the education of their pupils their first concern, and are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in work and conduct. Teachers act with honesty and integrity; have strong subject knowledge, keep their knowledge and skills as teachers up-to-date and are self-critical; forge positive professional relationships; and work with parents in the best interests of their pupils.

PART ONE: TEACHING

A teacher must:

1 Set high expectations which inspire, motivate and challenge pupils

- establish a safe and stimulating environment for pupils, rooted in mutual respect
- set goals that stretch and challenge pupils of all backgrounds, abilities and dispositions
- demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils.

2 Promote good progress and outcomes by pupils

- be accountable for pupils' attainment, progress and outcomes
- be aware of pupils' capabilities and their prior knowledge, and plan teaching to build on these
- guide pupils to reflect on the progress they have made and their emerging needs
- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how pupils learn and how this impacts on teaching
- encourage pupils to take a responsible and conscientious attitude to their own work and study.

3 Demonstrate good subject and curriculum knowledge

- have a secure knowledge of the relevant subject(s) and curriculum areas, foster and maintain pupils' interest in the subject, and address misunderstandings
- demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the subject and curriculum areas, and promote the value of scholarship
- demonstrate an understanding of and take responsibility for promoting high standards of literacy, articulacy and the correct use of standard English, whatever the teacher's specialist subject
- if teaching early reading, demonstrate a clear understanding of systematic synthetic phonics
- if teaching early mathematics, demonstrate a clear understanding of appropriate teaching strategies.

4 Plan and teach well structured lessons

- impart knowledge and develop understanding through effective use of lesson time
- promote a love of learning and children's intellectual curiosity
- set homework and plan other out-of-class activities to consolidate and extend the knowledge and understanding pupils have acquired
- reflect systematically on the effectiveness of lessons and approaches to teaching
- contribute to the design and provision of an engaging curriculum within the relevant subject area(s).

5 Adapt teaching to respond to the strengths and needs of all pupils

- know when and how to differentiate appropriately, using approaches which enable pupils to be taught effectively
- have a secure understanding of how a range of factors can inhibit pupils' ability to learn, and how best to overcome these
- demonstrate an awareness of the physical, social and intellectual development of children, and know how to adapt teaching to support pupils' education at different stages of development
- have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them.

6 Make accurate and productive use of assessment

- know and understand how to assess the relevant subject and curriculum areas, including statutory assessment requirements
- make use of formative and summative assessment to secure pupils' progress
- use relevant data to monitor progress, set targets, and plan subsequent lessons
- give pupils regular feedback, both orally and through accurate marking, and encourage pupils to respond to the feedback.

7 Manage behaviour effectively to ensure a good and safe learning environment

- have clear rules and routines for behaviour in classrooms, and take responsibility for promoting good and courteous behaviour both in classrooms and around the school, in accordance with the school's behaviour policy
- have high expectations of behaviour, and establish a framework for discipline with a range of strategies, using praise, sanctions and rewards consistently and fairly
- manage classes effectively, using approaches which are appropriate to pupils' needs in order to involve and motivate them
- maintain good relationships with pupils, exercise appropriate authority, and act decisively when necessary.

8 Fulfil wider professional responsibilities

- make a positive contribution to the wider life and ethos of the school
- develop effective professional relationships with colleagues, knowing how and when to draw on advice and specialist support
- deploy support staff effectively
- take responsibility for improving teaching through appropriate professional development, responding to advice and feedback from colleagues
- communicate effectively with parents with regard to pupils' achievements and well-being.

PART TWO: PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A teacher is expected to demonstrate consistently high standards of personal and professional conduct. The following statements define the behaviour and attitudes which set the required standard for conduct throughout a teacher's career.

- Teachers uphold public trust in the profession and maintain high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school, by:
  - treating pupils with dignity, building relationships rooted in mutual respect, and at all times observing proper boundaries appropriate to a teacher's professional position
  - having regard for the need to safeguard pupils' well-being, in accordance with statutory provisions
  - showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others
  - not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs
  - ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law.

- Teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach, and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality.

- Teachers must have an understanding of, and always act within, the statutory frameworks which set out their professional duties and responsibilities.

The Teachers' Standards can be found on the GOV.UK website: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teachers-standards

Appendix 2 : Participant information sheet
Title of research:

Context, Consciousness, and Caution: Teachers of history and the exploration of sensitive and controversial issues in practice.

What's the research about?

I am currently studying for my EdD, my research will focus on how trainee teachers make pedagogical decision in the classroom with specific reference to the teaching of sensitive and or controversial issues. I am interested in finding out about your values and beliefs about the teaching of history and sensitive and or controversial issues by exploring critical incidents in your teaching and in your email history.

What am I being asked to do?

I am inviting you to participate in a focus group interview with a small number of students and two individual interviews over the next few months. Each interview will be approximately 30 min long. The group interview and individual interviews are voluntary and there is no pressure for you to participate and participation is voluntary. You can also consent to be part of the focus group interview only. The research will be separate from my teaching role and the interviews will be held separately from any teaching activity.

Will my views be made public?

Obviously your identity will be known in the focus group as the other participants and the researchers will be present. The interaction will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and a transcript of the data will be made available on request. I will analyse the interaction provided in the transcript. The speakers' identities will be anonymised on the transcript through the use of pseudonyms.

What will happen to the findings?

The study will be reported at conferences and in a journal article and the anonymised data will be used to explore the research questions for my EdD.

How can I give my consent to participate in the study and can I withdraw from the study at any time?

If you are interested in participating in the research, once you have finished reading this information sheet I will ask you to complete the consent form attached. You will have the right to withdraw from the research at any point, the final date for withdrawal will be two weeks after the final interview. You can withdraw your data by emailing sarah.whitehouse@uwe.ac.uk , there are no detrimental consequences for you if you withdraw from the research.

You can give your consent by signing the attached form please tick if you wish to be part of the focus group only, or the focus group and interviews. A copy of the consent from will be given to you for reference.

How will I find out about the research once it has been completed?

There will be an opportunity to attend a dissemination event for students once the research has been completed.

Who can I talk to about this research?

If you wish to find out more about the research please get in touch by email sarah.whitehouse@uwe.ac.uk

Or if you would prefer to contact my research supervisors please get in touch with Jane.andrewsEDU@uwe.ac.uk

Or Penelope.harnett@uwe.ac.uk

Appendix 3 : Consent form
Title of research:

Context, Consciousness, and Caution: Teachers of history and the exploration of sensitive and controversial issues in practice.

What's the research about?

I am currently studying for my EdD, my research will focus on how trainee teachers make pedagogical decision in the classroom with specific reference to the teaching of sensitive and or controversial issues. I am interested in finding out about your values and beliefs about the teaching of history and sensitive and or controversial issues by exploring critical incidents in your teaching and in your family history.

What am I being asked to do?

I am inviting you to participate in a focus group interview with a small number of students and three individual interviews over the course of the next 15 months. Each interview will be approximately and hour long. The group interview and individual interviews are voluntary and there is no pressure for you to participate and participation is voluntary. You can also consent to be part of the focus group interview only. The research will be separate from my teaching role and the interviews will be held separately from any teaching activity.

Will my views be made public?

Obviously your identity will be known in the focus group as the other participants and the researchers will be present. The interaction will be recorded using a digital audio recorder and a transcript of the data will be made available on request. I will analyse the interaction provided in the transcript. The speakers' identities will be anonymised on the transcript through the use of pseudonyms.

What will happen to the findings?

The study will be reported at conferences and in a journal article and the anonymised data will be used to explore the research questions for my EdD.

How can I give my consent to participate in the study and can I withdraw from the study at any time?

If you are interested in participating in the research, once you have finished reading this information sheet I will ask you to complete the consent form attached. You will have the right to withdraw from the research at any point, the final date for withdrawal will be two weeks after the final interview. You can withdraw your data by emailing sarah.whitehouse@uwe.ac.uk , there are no detrimental consequences for you if you withdraw from the research.

You can give your consent by signing the attached form please tick if you wish to be part of the focus group only, or the focus group and interviews. A copy of the consent from will be given to you for reference.

If you are happy to participate in the research please tick the relevant category below and sign and date.

Focus group interview only

I have read the participant information sheet and I agree to participate in the focus group.

☐

Focus group and individual interviews

I have read the participant information sheet and I agree to participate in the focus group and interview.

☐

Please sign and date here :

How will I find out about the research once it has been completed?

There will be an opportunity to attend a dissemination event for students once the research has been completed.

<u>Who can I talk to about this research?</u>

If you wish to find out more about the research please get in touch by email sarah.whitehouse@uwe.ac.uk

Or if you would prefer to contact my research supervisors please get in touch with Jane.andrewsEDU@uwe.ac.uk

Or Penelope.harnett@uwe.ac.uk

Appendix 4 : Data analysis examples from the focus groups

***Fig 1.* Field notes from observation**

Field notes from observation
September 2016- notes following the focus group interviews. I hadn't realise how much the participants wanted to talk about wider issues that had had an impact on them and the children in the classroom. The immediate impact of Brexit was quite astonishing and teachers talked about what was happening on the playground and home discussions which filtered into the classroom. I will need to consider how I explore this further in Phase 2.

***Fig 2.* Comments and thoughts from listening to the transcripts (January 2017)**

Comments and thoughts from listening to the transcripts (January 2017)
Some of the participants sounded quite emotional they used words such as vulnerable- this use of emotional language needs further thought-this could be a starting code. The participants talked quite a lot about the unplanned nature of the discussion in the classroom – is there a way that we prepare teachers for this? How can you plan for unplanned? Will this be a code- I'm keen to listen to this again. Some differences but more similarities between primary and secondary participants. The context of the school/classroom came up a lot…need to consider socio cultural theory in more depth.

***Fig 3.* An example of the numbering of the focus group interview**

An example of the numbering of the focus group interview
Sammy (1) So maybe things that makes the students feel different in a negative way. **Rebecca (3)** Controversial opposing opinions. **Nate (1)** Yeah, that have been voiced, not just like in the media as well but amongst ??? groups of parents, you know where they come from and different social aspects.

Sarah (5) And sometimes if you don't know the children in your class you might just stumble on something that they sensitive that you didn't know about. **Rebecca (4)** I guess that would be quite interesting wouldn't it, whether there's a difference at the beginning of the year and at the end of the year in how you teach it, how you approach things, when you know them better. **Sarah (6)** Yeah. And I wonder if that's different for Key Stage 3 and 4 colleagues to Key Stage 1 and 2 colleagues, because you are with your class all the time, whereas you're with different classes and they have different teachers. So I wonder if that makes it….

.

Fig 4. **Initial coding from focus groups**

Initial coding from focus groups	
Mike (1) I've not actually written a definition, not really, I've just sort of written some key words, I was sort of thinking about like **'severity and frequency of historical events', s**o if it was one off events**, I don't know if they would be necessarily as controversial bu**t if it's something that's frequently happening throughout history and then obviously **the severity** of those historical moments as well need to be considered and **how hist ory is interpreted.** So everyone can interpret acts and things that have gone on in history in different ways, **so I think interpretation can always be quite controversial.** And then obviously if there's the ??? and **obvious links with students at the time, so if we're talking maybe about**	Controversial issues in history Severity of the event One off events less controversial How history has been interpreted and by whom School context refugees

things around refugees for instance, that would be a key topic that would obviously **be sensitive to many students in the school.**	
Charlie (3) Yeah we had some comments from kids sometimes regarding…obviously it was a lot about Syrian and sort of refugees and stuff and that kind of stuff, and there's a lot of…**we've had some training** on it and stuff, there's quite a strong **right wing context around the catchment area** that we're in and it's quite EDL sort of stuff. And obviously the children of that are coming to the school and you hear quite a lot of comments about 'letting them in' and you know those sorts of comments about sort of Muslims and stuff. **And you get the picture that there's a lot…that that's controversial. And it's like some of the comments, you're like 'ugh…' they're tricky to approach.**	Refugees School context- specific issues like EDL Recognition that issues are tricky
Charlie (4) Yeah that was a big thing, the Brexit thing. I taught a lesson on it about it and it was very much '**oh mum and dad, they're voting this** and that', and sort of whatever the context was, so it was a very much Brexit context. And I think we did a school mock election, **the Remain votes got through because they started making teachers vote I think. So there's quite a strong sort of right wing context which**	Brexit- divisions Teachers voted Right wing context

could cause…yeah could be controversial or whatever.	

Fig 5. **Data from focus group coded**

Data from focus group coded	**Emerging theme**
Nate (10) I again wrote something similar 'anything that may be sensitive', so a child or anything, this would be sort of the headteacher's view of it if you will, I know what my head would say. 'Anything that a child's parent maybe feel they do not want taught', you know because I think that's sometimes we have to think about it from the parent's point of view. For the child, it might go straight over their head, but their parent might say 'well I don't want them fed this idea' when it's like…I mean there are some families I know who withdraw their children from sex education because they want to instruct? them in their own way, or at a different age, older or younger. So that's one thing. **Charlie (5)** I remember ….. had some issues getting his dissertation project through his headteacher didn't he? The teacher…was it about the black ??? boycott maybe or some black history slave trading maybe? **Sarah (17)** And that's why his topic happening, because it was black history month and he said something about black history and the children went 'what's black history'. So it was a great time for him to introduce the topic and he did do the Slave Trade really well actually.	**Construction of childhood**

Charlie (6) But I remember the headteacher of the school, it was hard to get it past him to teach it. So that's a good point **Rebecca (13)** It's also useful to think about where your children's perspective is, or their lens is. So the children I teach it's very much a localised, their view of the world is very localised, or even younger it's just me, you know that's all they're really thinking about, and to be able to empathise with other people or even understand a different view is difficult. So that would be very different if I was teaching something in secondary where their view of the world is very different. **Mike (2)** Mmm, they've formed a wider view haven't they? **Nate (12)** I think I've found in Year 6 you sort of have those children who are getting to know that sort of worldly view. They understand what they hear in the news and they want to form their opinions on it, they are able to think about how that will affect other pupils in their class.	

Fig 6. **Data and Themes**

Data	**Theme**
Charlie (5) I remember ….. had some issues getting his dissertation project through his headteacher didn't he? The teacher…was it about the black ??? boycott maybe or some black history slave trading maybe?	Constructions of childhood

Charlie (5) I remember ….. had some issues getting his dissertation project through his headteacher didn't he? The teacher…was it about the black ??? boycott maybe or some black history slave trading maybe?	History as a sensitive and controversial subject

Fig 7. **Organising the data**

Theme **Constructions of childhood**	**Organising the data within this theme**
Nate (10) I again wrote something similar 'anything that may be sensitive', so a child or anything, this would be sort of the headteacher's view of it if you will, I know what my head would say. 'Anything that a child's parent maybe feel they do not want taught', you know because I think that's sometimes we have to think about it from the parent's point of view. For the child, it might go straight over their head, but their parent might say 'well I don't want them fed this idea' when it's like…I mean there are some families I know who withdraw their children from sex education because they want to instruct? them in their own way, or at a different age, older or younger. So that's one thing. **Charlie (5)** I remember ….. had some issues getting his dissertation project through his headteacher didn't he? The teacher…was it about the black ??? boycott maybe or some black history slave trading maybe? **Sarah (17)** And that's why his topic happening, because it was black history month and he said something about black history and	Power Decision making Parents view Parent's choice Power Agreement A child's perspective When are children ready to empathise

the children went ‘what’s black history’. So it was a great time for him to introduce the topic and he did do the Slave Trade really well actually.	Readiness Influences their view- funds of knowledge
Charlie (6) But I remember the headteacher of the school, it was hard to get it past him to teach it. So that’s a good point	
Rebecca (13) It’s also useful to think about where your children’s perspective is, or their lens is. So the children I teach it’s very much a localised, their view of the world is very localised, or even younger it’s just me, you know that’s all they’re really thinking about, and to be able to empathise with other people or even understand a different view is difficult. So that would be very different if I was teaching something in secondary where their view of the world is very different.	Parents-Children constructed as vulnerable and in need of protection Don’t want to cause upset
Mike (2) Mmm, they’ve formed a wider view haven’t they?	
Nate (12) I think I’ve found in Year 6 you sort of have those children who are getting to know that sort of worldly view. They understand what they hear in the news and they want to form their opinions on it, they are able to think about how that will affect other pupils in their class.. I suppose it can come from parents as well. I mean during Brexit there were a lot of kids I heard who had the sort of magpie phrase, the sort of things you would hear their parents say.	
Rebecca (14) And also, because the children I teach are only Year 2, when that happened there was lots of confusion and worry, they didn’t understand what was going on. And their parents were ‘like this’ and they’re getting snippets of information that their…they	

can’t understand it at that age. And so I suppose that’s where our role in whatever we are providing for them is that kind of awareness of what are they taking away from it, are they going to be confusing it with something else and, I don’t know, is it going to cause worry that they can’t process or understand?	

Appendix 5 : Final thematic data from the focus group interviews

1. **Exploring and Defining the Terms 'Sensitive' and 'Controversial'**
2. **Reflections from Classroom Practice;**
   2.1 History as an Opportunity to Discuss Controversial and Sensitive Issues;
   2.2 Disclosure Dilemma;
   2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues.
3. **Influential Factors that Impact on Teachers' Decision Making in the Classroom**
   3.1 Constructions of Childhood;
   3.2 The Influence of Parents;
   3.3 Unexpected Discussion;
   3.4 The Significance of the School Context.

Theme 1: Exploring and Defining the Terms Sensitive and Controversial

During the focus group discussions, the participants were asked how they would define the terms sensitive and controversial. This theme will be presented with regard to three definitions that became apparent through the analysis of the date: sensitive; controversial; sensitive and controversial.

Defining the term Sensitive

> 'I guess it is going to be different for every person isn't it?' (Rebecca, 1).
>
> 'What's going to be sensitive to one person won't be obviously sensitive to another, or controversial' (Rebecca, 2).
>
> 'Yeah. Is 'sensitive' more personal than 'controversial' maybe?' (Kate, 16,).
>
> 'Because maybe a controversial issue is something that affects everyone, whereas it might be sensitive for somebody but not sensitive for other people maybe? I don't know.' (Kate, 17).

‘sensitive’ issues seem to me to be kind of better in a small group’ (Jim, 13)

‘And then, yeah, the sensitive issues, kind of the stress and the upset’ (Rebecca 11),

‘But under sensitive [I think] ‘triggers’, that’s a big thing at the moment isn’t it, what might be triggers to people, so things that might set others off’ (Sammy, 5).

Defining the term ‘Controversial’

‘Controversial opposing opinions’ (Rebecca, 3).

‘And then controversial things that are like key things that people are likely to have a strong opinion about – so anything that they might have a strong opinion about’ (Sammy, 5).

‘So maybe things that makes the students feel different in a negative way’ (Sammy, 1).

‘I was sort of thinking about like ‘severity and frequency of historical events’, so if it was one off events, I don’t know if they would be necessarily as controversial but if it’s something that’s frequently happening throughout history and then obviously the severity of those historical moments as well need to be considered and how history is interpreted’ (Mike, 1).
It’s something that’s going to cause a large disagreement I suppose isn’t it?’ (Kate, 15).
‘Because maybe a controversial issue is something that affects everyone’ (Kate, 17).

‘quite extreme or ill balanced’ (Rebecca, 11).

> ‘So, you may have an idea about what you think might be controversial or might be sensitive, but actually until you actually do and you get these opposing viewpoints and opinions of feelings, then it becomes a sensitive issue’ (Rebecca, 12).
>
> ’But it’s difficult to kind of pre-empt it in a way because you don’t know what something’s going to evoke in somebody until you embark upon it (Rebecca, 12).
>
> ‘historical topics or issues that have potential to cause stress or upset to those being taught … and individual circumstance might be contextual’. He provides examples such as ‘race, religion, political views…’ (Charlie, 2).
>
> ‘controversial, is like, big isn’t it, very sensitive, you want to almost shy away’ (Jim 12).

Theme 2: Reflections of Classroom Practice

Through analysis, classroom practice was found to be presented in an interrelated way and presented through three sub themes.

2.1 History as an Opportunity to Discuss Sensitive and Controversial Issues

Opportunities to discuss sensitive and controversial issues within history accounted for a considerable amount of discussion within the focus groups. Therefore, I have organised this by grouping conversations around what was being/ could be taught, and how teachers approached this.

> ‘… was it about the Black Bus Boycott maybe or some black history slave trading maybe?’ (Charlie, 5).

‘We’re teaching World War 1, I’ve got a girl who is part German in my class and it’s just like … you know. You don’t know her history’ (Nate, 31).

‘I did look at the Guy Fawkes one and thought that would be sensitive in different … say in Bristol maybe not so much but if you taught, say, in Springbank in Glasgow that might be very much a controversial thing to think about’ (Sammy, 19).

While participants identified specific topics as noted above in addition to this they saw the subject of history as more broadly controversial.

‘So, I think probably lots of History is controversial’ (Kate, 27).
‘it’s which route you choose to take and it’s making those choices about what the children are ready for’ (Kate, 27).

‘children find that quite exciting because Romans are soldiers’ (Kate, 27, line 3),

‘But that choice element, and it’s interesting that that’s their parent’s choice that they opt out of sex education, but we make the choice about whether we are going to talk to them about particular things in history, RE, geography, whatever it is’ (Kate, 14).

‘so, everyone can interpret acts and things that have gone on in history in different ways, so I think interpretation can always be quite controversial’ (Mike, 1).

‘severity and frequency of historical events’, so if it was one off events, I don’t know if they would be necessarily as controversial but if it’s something that’s frequently happening throughout history and then obviously the severity of those historical moments as well need to be considered and how history is interpreted’ (Mike, 1)

‘most things in history tends to be controversial, aren’t they?’ (Charlie, 28).

2.2 Disclosure Dilemma

In addition to the content being taught, participants recognised that personal values informed discussion with children.

> 'So, I find, particularly when I'm teaching A-level, if I've got an opinion about … so I always try to put forward my own biases to my student' (Sammy, 13).
>
> 'look, when you're reading history you should be thinking about the bias of the person that you're reading because everybody's got one, you just need to find out what that is' (Sammy, 13).
>
> 'So, my bias is, I'm quite feminist, I'm quite left, I'm quite anti-church - kind of anti-religion that sort of thing, so bear that in mind when you're listening to me speak because that may come across, and I will try to keep it out' (Sammy, 13).
>
> 'So even just going against your opinions, just playing Devil's Advocate really promotes some good debates and questioning and learning' (Mike, 6).
>
> 'whatever the students believe in just counter it and see what sort of reactions and the sort of arguments they can come up against that' (Mike, 6).
>
> 'we did put it out to them occasionally' … 'Have you got any questions about it' … and I did find myself saying to them 'I don't know, I don't know', either because I couldn't answer them because I didn't know honestly, or because I just didn't think I could answer' (Nate, 2).

2.3 Strategies for Developing the Teaching of Sensitive and Controversial Issues.

Participants discussed three risk taking strategies that they used in the classroom. These were: use of resources to insight an emotive response; choosing to present an un/sanitised version of the past; challenging dominant views by taking the role of Devil's Advocate.

‘It’s the same showing photographs from the Holocaust or from Vietnam and things like that, when some people don’t obviously agree with you showing children those images, but actually because of the person, there’s a person behind that and they haven’t given their sort of consent and things for it’ (Emma, 1).

‘But I suppose it’s the idea that yeah sometimes you do need to be upset to get past the other sort of issue and actually really empathise. When you don’t actually see those images it’s harder to relate to’ (Emma, 1).

‘… I think lots of the controversy comes from how you choose to attack it, where you might take on’ (Kate, 27).

‘… and the British Empire is a really good example of that because the government, you know the push is to deliver it as the glory isn’t it, but I think as teachers that’s a really difficult hard sell because most teachers are a bit lefty’ (Sammy, 12).

‘What’s really good is just going for Devil’s Advocates’ (Mike, 6).

Whilst resources were used to insight an emotive reaction, participants also sometimes used ready-made resources in order to distance themselves of any responsibility. Nate commented explicitly on this particular approach. In addition to this, both Charlie and Jim closed down opportunities for discussions that could support the teaching of sensitive and controversial issues.

‘I found the best way to do the Brexit lesson we did was, there was a big thing about it on Twinkl, so I got it off there because I knew it would be appropriate and you can have your discussion from there’ (Charlie, 18).

'because obviously they packaged it up very objectively and it was just like designed to people at like Key Stage 2, so I was like that's easier, I don't have to worry about sort of how it's going to be presented on the board so much and you could just go from there' (Charlie 18).

'Funny what you say about Twinkl as well, our British values lead set up a display and he said 'oh I got it off Twinkl, it's fine' and there is only one non-white person on the British values board, and it was Jessica Ennis-Hill, you know after figures like Dickens, Shakespeare, Churchill – Churchill being on the £5 note, that's another big one as well' (Nate, 27).

'Yeah, and in terms of obviously speak about it very, very sort of like … not sort of objectively with kids, don't form an opinion towards them or anything, I mean like give off an opinion. But then it was like between staff and parents, there was like a real thing, it was like sort of between certain members of staff and others, and people had put complaints in and stuff. And it was … phew' (Charlie, 10).

'I had a discussion with a child about that, or a couple of children, in a loose … well no, about colonialism, because we were looking at flags. They said 'oh why have these flags got the Great Britain flag on the top', I said 'well we used to own them, or we used to control them but we don't any more' (Jim, 1).

Theme 3 : Influential Factors that Impact on Teachers' Decision Making in the Classroom

Through discussion it became apparent that participants recognised a number of factors that could impact their decision making in the classroom.

3.1 Constructions of Childhood

From the focus groups, participants discussed how what was taught was often a result of a discourse around the position of children. For example, sometimes children were positioned without agency and decisions were made for them by parents, teachers and headteachers about what could be discussed in the classroom.

> 'I know what my head would say. 'Anything that a child's parent maybe feel they do not want taught', you know because I think that's sometimes we have to think about it from the parent's point of view' (Nate, 10).
>
> 'For the child, it might go straight over their head, but their parent might say 'well I don't want them fed this idea' (Nate, 10).
>
> 'I remember … had some issues getting his dissertation project through his head teacher, didn't he? The teacher … was it about the black bus boycott maybe or some black history slave trading maybe? (Charlie, 5).
>
> 'But I remember the head teacher of the school, it was hard to get it passed him to teach it' (Charlie, 6).
>
> 'It's also useful to think about where your children's perspective is, or their lens is. So the children I teach it's very much a localised, their view of the world is very localised' (Rebecca, 13).
>
> '… and to be able to empathise with other people or even understand a different view is difficult' (Rebecca, 13).
>
> 'So that would be very different if I was teaching something in secondary where their view of the world is very different' (Rebecca 13).

‘And also, because the children I teach are only Year 2, when that happened there was lots of confusion and worry, they didn’t understand what was going on’ (Rebecca, 14).

‘And their parents were ‘like this’ and they’re getting snippets of information that their … they can’t understand it at that age’ (Rebecca, 14).

‘And so, I suppose that’s where our role in whatever we are providing for them is that kind of awareness of what are they taking away from it are they going to be confusing it with something else and, I don’t know, is it going to cause worry that they can’t process or understand?’ (Rebecca, 14).

In addition to the comments above, participants also discussed how children were capable of participating in discussions about sensitive and controversial issues.

‘I think I’ve found in Year 6 you sort of have those children who are getting to know that sort of worldly view. They understand what they hear in the news and they want to form their opinions on it, they are able to think about how that will affect other pupils in their class’ (Nate, 12).

‘I suppose it can come from parents as well’ (Nate, 12).

‘I mean during Brexit there were a lot of kids I heard who had the sort of magpie phrase, the sort of things you would hear their parents say’ (Nate, 12).

‘That’s probably the sensitivity of the fact that it comes from parents, a lot of the views’ (Kate, 2, line 1) … They’ve been brought up in a house with whatever particular values and beliefs’ (Kate 2).

‘it’s our job to waken up all those other sensitive issues isn’t it, we’re introducing lots of other things that they might not have heard before’ (Kate, 2).

‘you do listen to your mum and dad don’t you and you do take in what mum and dad say, but if mum and dad feel particularly strongly one way or the other then perhaps you haven’t been aware of all the possibilities’ (Kate, 2).

‘sometimes, someone becoming upset is what causes them to have a conversation they need to have as well though isn’t it. So, it might be that your little chap in your class one day will be affected by something but that causes him to talk to you, which needs to do that. Sort of sometimes you can come quite close to a sensitive issue and it’s quite useful to talk about it’ (Kate 11).

‘And I think lots of the controversy comes from how you choose to attack it, where you might take on … probably for you, you probably take on more of the controversy with sixth form and Year 7s because that’s the … do you know what I mean, I’m looking at Year 7s and going ‘oh they can cope with more than the Year 3’s can cope with’ obviously’ (Kate, 27).

‘And you can take on that controversy as much as you want, or not. So I think probably lots of History is controversial isn’t it, it’s which route you choose to take and it’s making those choices about what the children are ready for’ (Kate, 27).

‘It was more like a very much information sort of thing from the Nazi Germany propaganda like ‘this is what they did and how they did it’ rather than getting into very much detail about the sort of controversies of it. It was almost like a snapshot of what they did’ (Charlie, 30).

‘I suppose it can come from parents as well. I mean during Brexit there were a lot of kids I heard who had the sort of magpie phrase, the sort of things you would hear their parents say’ (Nate, 12).

‘I think their parents have talked to them quite a bit’ (Jim, 4).

And their parents were ‘like this’ and they’re getting snippets of information that their … they can’t understand it at that age’ (Rebecca, 14).

‘They’ve been brought up in a house with whatever particular values and beliefs ... Because particularly with the EU, there were a lot of views coming out and you thought ‘you’ve heard that over breakfast’ (Kate, 2).

3.2 The Influence of Parents

Participants recognised the changing relationship between teachers and parents due to current affairs (e.g. Brexit). It was also recognised that parent and teacher relationship alters between the primary and secondary phase.

‘Yeah it was dreadful. The day when I pushed open my door and I knew that I was going to see the child of one of my…the parents of one of my children in the class who I knew she’d be devastated about what had happened’ (Jim, 5).

‘So I knew, I could see it, I could see the parent who was standing by the other parent said ‘I don’t want this person to be in….’ (Jim, 5).

‘I don’t know whether you’re better able to understand what’s going on in their lives more because you have that daily contact with parents. So, I kind of know what’s going on for my families, I’m guessing as a secondary teacher you don’t necessarily

know what’s going on in …. Unless somebody’s specifically phoned you or come in to see you’ (Rebecca, 5).

‘I don’t think we’ve ever had to do that in the senior school or ask the question to anything. I suppose parents won’t even necessarily be aware they’d be studying it at all or anything’ (Emma, 3).

The final section will focus on Emma who comments on both being a teacher and a parent.

‘I think I find the difference between the junior school is having … I’ve got a son who is in Year 2 and the thing that I would like to sort of know more about what they do in the junior schools and infant schools. He often comes home, because at the beginning of every year for the last 3 years he comes home with…we have to suddenly identify with something, we have to identify with a country, a culture, … and I’m like ‘OK so draw his flag’ (Emma, 3).

‘I actually resent that idea as a parent, and so I wonder what other parents and how they deal with it, that I have to then say ‘OK what culture?’ I have to think up a culture that we suddenly have … I find it almost sensitive but I don’t get bothered by it really …’ (Emma, 3).

‘Because I see that as being quite controversial but interested that it [the homework] seems to be a recurring theme each year that … because it makes me think that they’re [the teachers] seeing it [the homework] as a way round it [the discussion], when I actually think that it’s the opposite’ (Emma, 3).

3.3 Unexpected Discussion

This section will consider to what extent participants recognised that some discussion cannot be planned for.

> 'But it's difficult to kind of pre-empt it in a way because you don't know what something's going to evoke in somebody until you embark upon it. So, you may have an idea about what you think might be controversial or might be sensitive, but actually until you actually do and you get these opposing viewpoints and opinions of feelings, then it becomes a sensitive issue. But beforehand you don't know' (Rebecca, 12).
>
> '… and you sort of think about the children in the class as well, and you don't know necessarily their backgrounds or what their religions are' (Emma, 17).
>
> 'Yeah. Today one of the children in my class told me first of all his gran had died yesterday, and he didn't come up to me and just say it, he just came and sat down on the carpet and doesn't normally give much away, he didn't say anything, he just said 'my gran died yesterday'. And I said 'oh' and he caught me totally off guard. I was like 'is everything OK, how are you feeling, it's really terrible news' (Jim, 7)

3.4 The Significance of the School Context

During the focus group interviews, the participants referred to the context of their school and the impact this had on decisions they made in the classroom. In addition to this, the participants commented on how outside influences can infiltrate the discussion with children.

> 'So, issues like race, religion, political views are quite strong around our catchment area, like local and social context' (Charlie, 2).
>
> 'Yeah, we had some comments from kids sometimes regarding … obviously it was a lot about Syrian and sort of refugees and stuff and that kind of stuff, and there's a lot of … we've had some training on it and stuff, there's quite a strong right wing

context around the catchment area that we're in and it's quite EDL [English Defence League]sort of stuff' (Charlie, 3, lines 1-4).

'And obviously the children of that are coming to the school and you hear quite a lot of comments about 'letting them in' and you know those sorts of comments about sort of Muslims and stuff' (Charlie, 3, lines 4-7).

> 'I think what I felt in the classroom just a couple of times, once or twice I think at one school and particularly in my last term in my old setting, when the EU Referendum came up, that was a very, very, very sensitive time' (Jim, 4).

'And obvious links with students at the time, so if we're talking maybe about things around refugees for instance, that would be a key topic that would obviously be sensitive to many students in the school' (Mike, 1).

'So, I have moved from a very white rural school to a very diverse school and I was teaching my same lesson about the Crusades that I have taught for the last 5 years and then making that link forward to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and then looking at the class and thinking 'oh this is a bigger can of worms than it was last time I was teaching it'. And that caused quite a lot of discussion because a lot of these students do have an opinion about Palestine because they do know about that already, whereas my students back in Yorkshire were like 'where's Palestine' (Sammy, 5).

'Yes. Yeah it caused a lot more … it was great, the lesson just went 'from …' like all the way over here instead of going this way, but yeah it was a good discussion' (Sammy, 6).

'I did look at the Guy Fawkes one and thought that would be sensitive in different … say in Bristol maybe not so much but if you taught, say, in Springbank in Glasgow that might be very much a controversial thing to think about' (Sammy, 19).

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