DOING JUSTICE: FINDING THE BEST METHODOLOGICAL FIT TO ENABLE THE VOICES OF WOMEN TEACHER TRADE UNION ACTIVISTS TO BE HEARD.

Jean Laight
Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds, UK

The professional status of teachers in England has been a hard-fought battle since Victorian times. In England today, the role of the teacher has become increasingly uncertain, causing the professional status of teachers to be threatened and teachers to feel undervalued and under attack from the media and government agenda. As a result, some teachers believe that the most effective way to protect their profession is to fight back through teacher trade union activism. The doctoral research that this paper discusses investigates the role of teacher trade union activism in the lives of women, as women make up over 75% of the teaching profession and often have the burden of care in their domestic lives.

In order to collect data, 11 women teachers who are active trade unionists within the National Union of Teachers (NUT) were interviewed to find out how they navigate and negotiate the changing nature of teachers’ roles and how they manage to construct an effective balance to their life and work. They were initially asked, ‘Why did you become a teacher?’, and prompts were generated as their stories unfolded, to find out how, and to what extent, their activism may have arisen as a response to changes in teaching, how changes in teaching may have informed their sense of professional identity and sense of self, and how, and to what extent, their trade union activism may have informed their professional identity and sense of self.

To be able to express these women’s stories appropriately and effectively, this paper seeks to discuss the best methodological approach to use in order to do justice to the lived experiences of these women through the stories they have to tell. In passing these stories on, a tacit agreement is implied, in the hope that the researcher will take responsibility to enable the women’s voices to be heard. Methodologies, including narrative analysis, phenomenology, critical discourse analysis, ethnography and auto-ethnography, are discussed, resulting in the decision to use narrative analysis with a phenomenological approach, drawing particularly on the work of Zembylas regarding teacher identity, emotion, resistance and self-formation.