Teachers’ Stories of Struggling: Reflections on a doctoral study. The implications of better understanding what it means to be struggling as a teacher.

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This paper presents the findings of doctoral research which explored what it means to be struggling as a teacher. A mix of methods was used to collect data from 14 secondary teachers in secondary schools in England; the use of an arts-based method, collage-creation, enriched the depth and breadth of loosely-structured interviews (Mannay, Creaghan et al, 2017). The research offers a new definition of struggling which puts the voices of teachers themselves at the heart of how struggling is conceptualised. Findings also indicated that teachers felt leaders did not really know them - or their individual circumstances - well enough to put effective support measures in place; teachers had very little say in the process. I argue that there has been a semantic drift in the meaning of the term support, which was experienced almost universally as unsupportive. Instead, support plans were experienced as imposed, impersonal and reductionist. School leaders have a ‘moral obligation’ to support all teachers, whether struggling or not (Tucker, 2001 and others). Given the complex emotional, affective and embodied nature of struggling found in this study, there is clearly a moral imperative for everyone in the education system to assist in the alleviation of struggling. One way to achieve this is, perhaps, for teachers and leaders to learn how to ‘soothe the struggle’ (Gilbert and others), for example by acting more collectively and compassionately (Lilius et al, 2011).