

## **Teacher Training in England:**

### **Exploring trainee teachers' perspectives on their professional identity formation**

**Karan Vickers-Hulse and Marcus Witt**

Page | 1

#### **Abstract:**

This chapter outlines research conducted by KVH as part of an educational professional doctorate; MW was one of her supervisory team. Participants were from two Initial Teacher Education (ITE) routes (School Direct and university-led) leading to a PGCE Primary teacher qualification. The research was set within the context of continuously evolving policy on the training of teachers and the subsequent impact on developing a professional identity. The introduction of new ITE routes in England (DfE, 2015) aimed to offer a wider range of pathways into teaching, attract more applicants and mitigate the impact of teacher shortages. The research discussed in this chapter explored the experiences of trainees on these routes and the impact on their professional identity formation. This chapter begins with an overview of the literature in the field of professional identity formation, followed by a discussion of the chosen methodology and methods. The chapter concludes with several recommendations for teacher training providers as well as recommendations for future research that may be useful for doctoral students interested in the field of professional identity formation. This chapter provides an illustration of doctoral case study research and insights to how practitioner research can capture the localised impact of policy shifts.

#### **Key words and phrases**

*Professional identity. Teacher training. Mentoring. Policy. Relationships.*

## **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on professional identity formation and explores the space between *becoming* a primary school teacher and *being* a primary school teacher. The research sought to explore trainee teachers' feelings about the formation of their professional identity during initial teacher education (ITE). Data was gathered at a time of change in the ITE model which resulted in a re-shaping of partnerships between schools and universities and the composition and content of courses. These changes followed several reforms to teacher education, including the Carter Review (DfE, 2015), which resulted in the growth of school based ITE routes such as School Direct (MMU, 2016). For this study, School Direct (SD) is defined as a school-led route into teaching that is run by a partnership between a lead school, other schools, and an accredited initial teacher education provider. Core PGCE (Core) provision is defined as led by a university as the accredited provider. Conroy et al. (2013) raised concerns about maintaining professional identity when faced with institutional change and Loughran and Menter (2019) described the move to school-led training as a shift away from complex professional conceptions and pedagogical expertise. This chapter examines the findings of research that explored how trainee teachers viewed the complexities of developing an autonomous professional identity in this landscape.

## **Research Questions**

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) suggest that research questions enable researchers to make the familiar strange which is a useful consideration for those exploring an area they know well. Through the voices of seven trainee teachers on SD and Core PGCE programmes at a university in the South West of England, the research aimed to address the following questions:

### **Research Question 1:**

What do trainee teachers say about what affects the development of their professional identity?

#### *Subsidiary Question:*

*How have past experiences in a trainee's personal and professional life shaped their values and beliefs?*

### **Research Question 2:**

To what extent do two different initial teacher education routes offer challenges and opportunities for trainee teachers in the development of their professional identity?

#### *Subsidiary Questions:*

*What do trainees say about the challenges and opportunities of SD and Core PGCE routes to teaching?*

*What experiences in placement schools have shaped trainee teachers' professional identity?*

*Does policy change have an impact on trainees' day-to-day work as a primary school teacher?*

### Literature review

Doctoral students read widely in their field of interest enabling them to “document, analyse and draw conclusions about what is known about a particular topic” (Machi and McEvoy, 2016 p.4); the literature review demonstrates how knowledge about a particular topic leads to a problem or a question. This review summaries key literature to explore how important themes within it were reshaped and refined throughout this study. Reviewing literature on teachers’ professional identity highlighted its centrality to, and impact on, teachers’ practice in the classroom as well as their commitment to the role (Cohen, 2009).

### Professional identity

The notion of identity is multi-faceted and includes personal, professional, and collective identity (Wright et al., 2018). The existing body of knowledge on professional identity is substantial and reveals that there is no single definition (Alsup, 2006; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2011). *Teachers’* professional identity has become a separate field of research; the concept of which has been interpreted in different ways (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). Hill’s (1994) observations linked personal and professional identities and tied the acquisition of a strong professional identity to job satisfaction and developing an identity within society. Van der Wal et al. (2019) discovered that the formation of a stable and positive professional identity was important to feeling motivated in the job role and affected the way that teachers felt and acted daily.

An added complexity for participants in this study was that many had formed professional identities in previous careers and were expected to ‘transfer’ skills to a new profession. Colliander (2018) argues that people moving between professions need to ‘transform’ rather than ‘transfer’ their existing professional identity. Although challenging, this can be positive, as trainees can draw on pre-existing professional identities to interpret new norms and respond to them appropriately (Buchanan, 2011). MacLure (1993) believes that professional identity formation continues throughout a teacher’s career, but is most intense whilst training. Before completing the transition to ‘qualified teacher’, trainees are expected to engage in professional communities and begin the process of professional identity formation (or *transformation* as described above). Without the complex knowledge and experiences of qualified practitioners; this can lead to the constant creation and recreation of their place within their current context (Wenger, 1998). Gee (2000 p99) suggests this “lack of complex knowledge” results in tensions and challenges in professional identity formation, particularly as trainee teachers can feel they already possess the necessary personal qualities and just need to be shown what to do,

rather than recognising the importance of their own experiences in the construction of their professional identity. Burn (2007) reflects that refinement within the two contexts of university and school placements create a trainee's professional identity, and these experiences and challenges help trainees *become* a teacher.

### Mentoring and reflective practice

Colliander (2018) identifies the actions and attitudes of key colleagues in placement schools as critical in supporting trainees to become teachers and form a robust professional identity. Colliander (2018) and Bullough (2005) believe the relationship a trainee has with their mentor can support or hinder their growth in learning. Hobson et al. (2008) state that school-based practice is central to supporting the initial preparation, and professional identity construction of trainee teachers. As well as being evident in policy, research suggests that effective mentoring is essential in trainee development (Carter and Francis, 2001; Lindgren, 2005). Korthagen and Evelein (2016 p.241) provided evidence that the meeting of trainee teachers' needs (the "inner side of teaching"), was related to how they taught, (the "outer side of teaching"). Their findings call for more attention to the link between 'personal' and 'professional' identities and pinpoint the connection to mentoring to achieve this.

Loughran and Menter (2019) note that mentoring is important for the development of trainees' professional identity, and this can extend beyond the technical practice seen in classrooms to include reflection. Kervin and Turbill (2003) found that reflecting on experiences gave trainee teachers the confidence to act upon new learning they gained. Rawlings-Smith (2020) suggests that reflective practice becomes second nature, but the process of *how* this happens is difficult to teach. Trainees should be supported to reflect, not only in the moment, which Schön (1983 p53) refers to as "reflection *in* action", but, after a situation, which Schön (1983 p53) refers to as "reflection *on* action". A mentor can support trainees to transform reflections of experiences into possible classroom actions (Korthagen et al., 2006), which is often overlooked (Thompson and Pascal, 2012). Khalid (2014) and Coldwell and Twiselton (2019) found that the quality of placement experiences and the relationships built with mentors were vital to shaping trainees' sense of professional identity, valuing themselves as professionals and affecting their commitment to the profession.

### Learning Communities

Trainees have limited autonomy when selecting placements and Wright et al. (2018) identify that feelings of conflict, competition and 'outsiderness' are not unusual as trainees learn to negotiate a

new environment. Avalos (2011) suggests that adjusting a newly developed professional identity can be useful due to trainees' interactions with different communities and cultures. Negotiating position, expectations and interactions is an important facet of developing trainees' professional identity (Colliander, 2018), even though it may require trainees to sit with discomfort in the process. Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor (2015) state that trainees and teachers shared focus on pupil outcomes helps trainees to orient and locate themselves within communities of practice in schools. Colliander (2018) sums up the benefits of negotiating these communities and states that, above all, the professional identity formation of trainees is *enabled* by opportunities to engage in a variety of communities of practice in different settings.

**Theoretical framing:**

An adapted version of Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop's (2013 p.124) model of professional identity formation was used as the theoretical framing for the study on which this chapter is based.

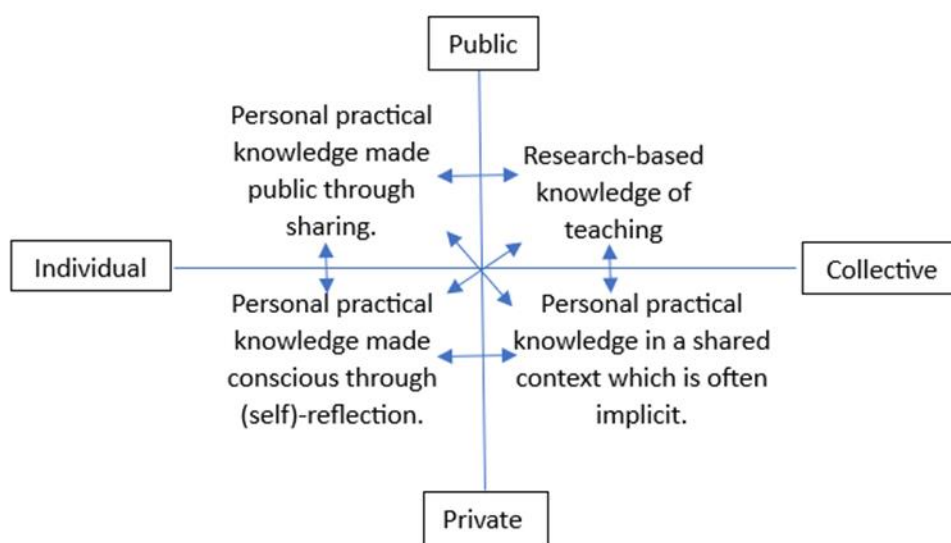


Figure 1. Representation of professional identity formation from a teacher's knowledge perspective, adapted from Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop's (2013 p.124).

Their model outlines the complex process that trainees go through from the perspective of building knowledge, and discusses the idea of evolving as a professional through combining collective, private, public, and individual knowledge. Wenger (1998) argues that individuals develop an identity as they become a valid member of a community of practice, where learning happens in collaboration with others and through activities situated in that community. Gee's (1999) conceptualisations of identity

based on the work of Wenger (1998) show the positive outcomes of trainees' involvement in different learning communities. Wright et al. (2018) state that having a sense of belonging to a community requires the ability to be able to participate in several different ways: personally, professionally, and socially. Moore and Hofman (1988) found that striving for quality in a school demonstrated a highly developed professional identity and that, teachers' positive perception of 'self' negated any poor working conditions or role-related stress. Framing these debates was significant in considering the methodological choices made and ethical considerations within this study.

### **Methodology and methods**

For this study, the researcher's position was qualitative and interpretivist. Mertens' (1998) definition of the interpretive paradigm is the belief that realities are multiple, socially constructed, and influenced by history and culture. The interpretivist paradigm aligns with researchers who value people's words and recognise that there are multiple realities and contexts that can be explored in qualitative research. It is hoped that the following discussion will be of use to readers who are contemplating a case study methodology in their own work. A case study methodology was used with interviews as the method of data collection. By choosing a case study as a methodological approach, researchers can provide multiple perspectives (Hamilton and Corbett-Whitier, 2013), whilst preserving the "wholeness and integrity of the case" (Punch, 1998 p.153). Choosing a methodology that is fit for purpose is an important consideration when selecting methodology and methods (Menter et al., 2011). A case study involves uncovering the particularities of a subject (Yin, 2013) and generates insights into "the dynamics present within single settings" (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.534). The case study approach provides the researcher with the opportunity to "study complex phenomena within their contexts" (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 544). Case studies have had an ambiguous place in education research (Reinharz, 1992) mainly due to their lack of generalisability, however, other post graduate researchers should note that there is value in case study research when the following apply:

- Aspects of the case are not yet fully understood (i.e. trainees on two different training routes within one institution).
- The case is a persistently problematic research area which has been widely researched yet is difficult to describe reliably, (i.e. professional identity formation).
- The case study can help us understand the case in a particular context (i.e. in one institution but other institutions may benefit from findings).

Perhaps most simply, a case study as a design frame means concentrating on one element and looking at it in detail, rather than parts (Thomas, 2016). In this case study, the 'element' refers to trainees

within a higher education institution who were on a post graduate teacher training route. As well as Reinharz's (1992) views above about the acceptability of a case study, Foucault (1981) referred to what he called a "polyhedron of intelligibility" which emphasises looking at an area of interest in a three-dimensional way to build a rich and balanced picture of the case being studied. A rather poetic description from Thomas (2016) resonated as justification of the case study as a design tool for this research study:

In a case study you should be able to smell human breath and hear the sound of voices.... much is gained as we add a separate viewpoint – one that moulds and melds the experiences of others through our own understanding.

Thomas, 2016 p.7

So, the researcher's voice and viewpoint remained important within the methodological approach to view the case from several angles. In this study, these angles belonged to the participants and the researcher. However, a case study is designed to allow researchers to understand the distinctiveness of a case which means making theoretical assumptions about what is typical within the population chosen. When considering the case and participants, it was necessary to consider resources and time. While purposive sampling was considered, this was dismissed and replaced with a sample from the population to allow the construction of a framework to answer the research question (Mason, 1996). A case study will not allow researchers to generalise or make assumptions that their findings are relevant elsewhere. However, if researchers are interested in the particulars of a case due to being intimately connected with it, or it is in an area they are interested in, situated in an institution or field they are familiar with, then it may be the right choice for their study. As recognised by Miles and Huberman (1994 p.27): "qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in depth". Therefore, this case was made up of a group of PGCE trainees across one academic year in one institution. The sample included core (university-led) and SD (school-led) trainees on the PGCE primary programme. Cohen et al. (2011) recommend a sample size of no fewer than 30 participants; yet Robson (2011 p270) views a sample as a "selection from the population" where a sample is used to represent the case. All trainees were invited to express an interest in being part of the research, with a need for only a small sample to interview in depth as a case study. This could be termed 'convenience' sampling which is commonly employed in both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The participants in the study were in the cohort being studied and were easily accessible to the researcher as someone in the education department (Lewis-Beck et al, 2004); contextual details for each participant can be seen in figure 2 below. Bell and Olsen (2016) state that samples such as this, although selected for convenience, are still representative of

the broader cohort population however, this means that the results are not able to be generalised but are simply representative of the case.

Each participant was given a pseudonym and agreed to have their data published.

Pseudonym	Age	Gender identity	Contextual information	Training route
Tom	31	Male	Parent. Worked as music teacher.	Core
Vicky	32	Female	Parent. Worked in finance.	SD
Louise	24	Female	Worked as a teaching assistant.	SD
Toby	23	Male	Worked as a teaching assistant.	SD
Sally	45	Female	Parent. Worked as solicitor.	SD
Layla	23	Female	Travelled after university before joining course.	Core
Jack	27	Male	Worked as a teaching assistant.	Core

*Figure 2 : Research participants and contextual data*

The method of data collection used in this study was interviews; this aligned with the social constructionist approach to the construction of knowledge as a way of understanding reality through experiences and perspectives. By not seeking to treat participants' accounts as true pictures of reality, it was possible to interpret their responses as "plausible accounts" of *their* reality (Silverman, 2010). Data collection involved three individual interviews with each participant, where a set of questions and areas for discussion were prepared but the conversation was allowed to flow. For the fourth and final interviews, focus groups were conducted due to logistics and participant need, and all participants were interviewed together. Thomas (2016) points out that adapting methods is common practice in qualitative research as the participant-researcher relationship progresses. This study was constructed with a clear timeline of data collection – moving from the individual interviews to the focus group conducted at the end of the study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) highlight the main principle of ethics as responsibility to participants and state that researchers should "operate within an ethic of respect for any persons involved in the research they are undertaking" BERA (2018 p5). The rights of individuals participating in this research were supported by these ethical principles. Ethical clearance was sought from the institution prior to participant recruitment or data gathering. Establishing quality research relationships is complicated by power, perception, ethics, and value systems. However, working with



a small sample allowed for a rich selection of data and made it easier to focus on building relationships. The fact that participants were able to select participation was intended to avoid selective sampling and the issue of bias, as outlined by Punch (2009), who believes these issues are prevalent as we are inevitably drawn towards subjects who share the same interests, values, and beliefs as us. Acknowledging, reflecting, and refining approaches and methods throughout the research process and being reflexive, attempted to mitigate these issues. Researchers conducting research within their own field, must be open to intensive scrutiny and values, beliefs, and personal interest must not only be declared but challenged on an ongoing basis (Van Heugton, 2004). Before beginning the first interviews, time was taken to fully explain, in writing and in person, the purpose of the study and what participation (or non-participation) would mean. Duncan and Watson (2010) state that research participants may not always understand the issues at stake and could go on to regret any disclosures made during the research process. Researchers have a duty of care to protect participants and ensure transparency with regards to research aims throughout the study and not just at the beginning. In summary, it is the researcher's responsibility to be open and honest and find ways to ensure that participants are aware of all possible and potential outcomes of their involvement.

### **Data Analysis**

The approach to data analysis chosen for this study was Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis as this aligned with research questions, and methodological choices. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis offers an accessible and flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a widely used approach in interpretative studies (Javadi and Zarea, 2016) but it has its critics e.g., St Pierre and Jackson (2014) who believe that its simplicity is a potential weakness. However, as Rubin and Rubin (2005) point out, it can be an exciting approach as themes and concepts arise as data is revisited and the researcher has an active role in the process of research and identifies the themes. The fact that a researcher is actively seeking out the information from data rather than waiting for it to 'emerge' fitted with the interpretivist approach and allowed the acknowledgement of decisions made with regards to analysis of data. Despite its critics, Javadi and Zarea (2016) believe that the theoretical freedom that comes from thematic analysis ensures that it is a flexible research tool that allows researchers to gather data in a rich way. Thematic analysis works well for researchers who like to have a structure to follow but also need some flexibility in their analysis; Braun and Clarke's model allows for both.

### **Key findings and recommendations:**

Five key themes were identified following a review of the literature and the data analysis process:

- motivation
- managing workload
- training route
- relationships
- identity

Although there were links between issues raised within each theme, these were kept separate for the purpose of presenting findings, and links were made in discussion of the analysis and subsequent recommendations for practice. The research aimed to draw out unique aspects to contribute to the existing body of knowledge about professional identity formation in trainee teachers. Examples of responses taken from data gathered in the final focus-group interview are shown below.

#### Motivation

Trainees were at the end of their training when the final interview was conducted, and it therefore focused on looking forward and reflecting on their time on the course. Toby reflected on the transition from his previous role as a teaching assistant to that of a teacher; he had stated in previous interviews that being a teaching assistant is what had motivated him to become a teacher.

Toby (Core)

*And I think the transition from being TA for a year to then suddenly having command over the entire class was something I had to learn to do. Because as a TA ...you know, the unspoken hierarchy or whatever. And I think it was just learning to sort of command respect and build up that rapport with the children that's...yeah, that I already had to some degree, so it wasn't too much of a transition to make thankfully from that experience.*

Toby uses the word 'transition' to describe moving from one role to another which links to Buchanan's (2011) notion of transformation. Despite having an existing professional identity as a teaching assistant, Toby had to navigate the new expectations of his role as a trainee teacher and recreate his place within the classroom (Wenger, 1998)

#### Managing workload

Participants identified that just making it to the end of the training demonstrated a certain level of resilience (during their training 10% of the cohort had dropped out). Louise highlighted the ups and downs of the training and how personal discipline had supported her in meeting deadlines.

Louise (School Direct)

*I think, you know like some of the undergraduate students who come to school as well, like they just seem so bright and breezy, and then you're thinking 'I'm doing your entire degree in 9 months' and they're like 'are you really stressed', and I was like...at times I felt really stressed and other times I was like 'no, it's alright, I just get on with it' like you know, crack on, don't stress about it, because you know if you keep stressing and putting things off you won't ever do it.*

In some cases, workload can be a barrier to developing reflection. Schön (1983 p53) highlights the importance of “reflection *on* action” where trainees reflect on a situation after it has happened. Times of stress that Louise refers to above can result in insufficient time or headspace for deep, meaningful reflection that impacts practice. However, when discussing workload, it was evident that Louise demonstrated a high level of reflection as she was able to see challenges faced as a way to develop practice. This links to Kervin and Turbill’s (2003) ideas that reflecting on experiences (both positive and negative) gives trainees the confidence to act upon their new learning and eventually leads to reflective practice being second nature (Rawlings-Smith, 2020).

#### Training route and the impact on identity

It was thought that participants may respond differently to questions regarding their training route when in a group environment, but responses were consistent with those from individual interviews. SD participants expressed surprise at the limited input they had for some areas of learning.

Vicky (School Direct)

*Like phonics...can you imagine teaching phonics with only half a day's training?*

There seemed to be an agreement that the course had not met the trainees’ expectations.

Louise (School Direct)

*We're going to take you, we're going to mould you, we're going to train you, you know when any jobs come up, we'll let you know. I wasn't told. (Friend) told me that there were two vacancies at my first training school, I didn't even know. I was told I would be in UWE 6 days...6 days!*

Sally (School Direct)

*And it's how they're sold, like the partnerships, it's just complete... false advertising.*

Toby (School Direct)

*I was under the illusion that we'd have more time in school as well, which just simply isn't the case at all.*

Although Wright et al. (2018) identified that trainees have limited autonomy when selecting placements, they do have the ability to select which training route they choose. SD trainees' responses indicated that, despite recruitment and advertising suggesting that they would be welcomed into and become part of the community within the school, or schools they were joining, they felt like outsiders. As mentioned in the literature review, Wenger (1998) believes that individuals develop an identity as they become a valid member of a community. Therefore, this lack of belonging to the community had an impact on their professional identity formation.

#### The impact of relationships on forming an identity

Having reached the end of their training, participants were able to look back over the nine months and reflect on what had affected relationships with mentors and children.

Participants mentioned the impact that moving placement schools had on their practice, as they often preferred one of the schools they had been placed in over another.

Layla (Core)

*So, I got rated a 'good' and I'm really annoyed about it because I think if I had been in my second placement school for the longer placement I would have got 'outstanding'.*

Jack (Core)

*But I found it...well both I really enjoyed, but the second one I was in I did pretty well with, but they were difficult. But I was given more opportunity to do what I wanted to do.*

Moving schools for the second placement was identified as having an impact on relationships. Louise and Layla both referred to 'liking' their school contexts.

Louise (School Direct)

*I think changing schools for my second placement was quite pivotal for me. Because I wasn't particularly ecstatic at my first one, then I found a school that I really liked.*

Layla (Core)

*I'm not quite sure why I preferred my middle school. I think it's one of those things where it's just you know. But I think I was more me in my second school...*

The role of the mentor in school was significant in terms of whether a trainee ‘liked’ a placement school which aligns with Coldwell and Twiselton’s (2019) view that the support, reflection and relationships provided by mentors is vital to shaping a trainee’s sense of professional identity and how valued they feel.

### Professional Identity as a teacher

As four participants had secured jobs by the time the final focus group was conducted, at this stage there was some discussion of future roles and the interview process, as well as feeling valued and supported in a school environment. Louise spoke about the idea of being ‘different’ in the classroom.

Louise (School Direct)

*But I don’t think I’m crazy different. And I think it’s quite important to be authentic in front of your children so that they know that it’s OK to be you and be an individual, like I’m not just going to turn my personality off when I walk in the classroom.*

Jack followed on from this discussion and mentioned the importance of working in a school which allowed you to be yourself.

Jack (Core)

*And I mean if you find a school that brings out the things that you don’t want or don’t like about yourself, I suppose you stay clear of that school.*

Sally referred to not feeling valued in her placement school and relates back to the idea of being mis-sold the notion of joining a community. This affected her confidence when looking for teaching posts.

Sally (School Direct)

*I think that’s the main reason that I didn’t like my main placement school, I felt like a student, I felt like a visitor, all the time I felt like I wasn’t included.*

Layla (Core)

*And I visited quite a few schools before I even applied to one because I was keen to sort of get that feeling that I got when I walked into my second placement school of ‘wow I really want to work here’. So yeah, I think it’s quite important.*

This feeling of being part of a community, belonging and being valued was a recurring theme as trainees negotiated the different communities of practice they encountered during their placements. (Colliander, 2018).

Page | 14 In summary, the key findings emerging from the data were that:

- Participants entered their training aware of the challenges of the training route as well as the teaching profession.
- Previous experiences supported participants in assimilating what they saw in classrooms into their professional identity.
- Effective communities of practice supported participants in maintaining motivation through training - participants need a 'safe space' to communicate.
- Workload impacted on participants' stress levels.
- SD participants felt their route was mis-sold and would not choose this route again; all participants identified no differences in the training routes in terms of expectations, workload and experience.
- Relationships with mentors in school impacted on participants' professional identity formation. The effectiveness and quality of mentoring was identified as well as the importance of 'feeling valued'.
- The personal and professional identity need to adapt during training for participants to feel secure entering the teaching profession.

The research revealed that training route is not an indicator of success with regards to the formation of a secure professional identity. There was no marked difference between comments from those on core or SD routes in terms of their professional identity. Professional identity evolves over time and this study acknowledges that trainee teachers will experience tensions in the development of their professional identity. This study found that tensions arise when the expectations of their training route are not clear to trainees; do not feel appropriately supported in their development by mentors and are struggling to manage their heavy academic and professional workload. Friction can appear when a trainee's personal and previous professional selves are not valued in the formation of their new professional 'teacher' identity. This study did not aim to simplify the process of developing a secure professional identity in trainee teachers, but rather seek to develop an understanding of the views of trainee teachers on two different training routes. Alsup (2006 p.5) sums up the process of forming a teacher's professional identity as "difficult, messy and complex" and the findings acknowledge that this is inevitable and, in fact, probably necessary. Referring back to Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop's

(2013 p.124) model of professional identity formation, this study agreed that the different facets of a person's identity cannot easily be separated from each other and are extrinsically linked and affected by contextual factors.

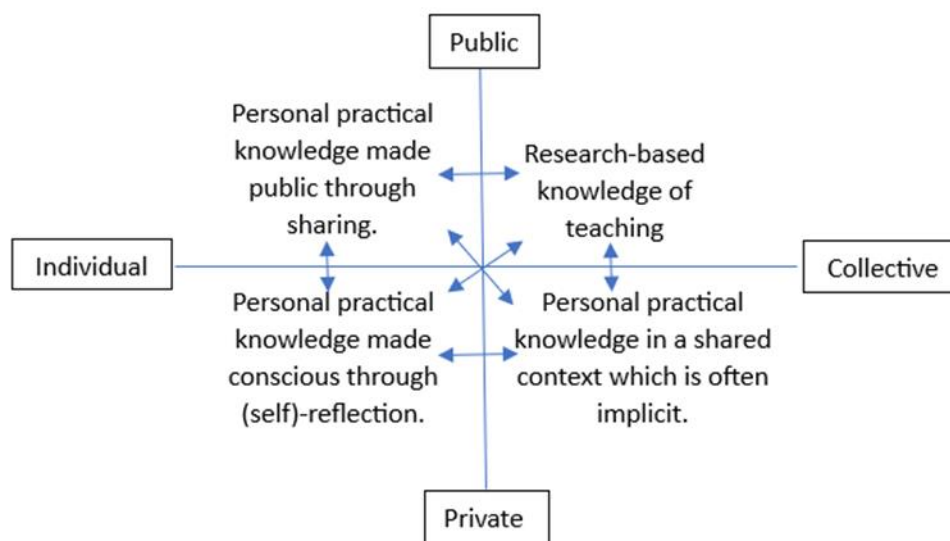


Figure 3. Representation of professional identity formation from a teacher's knowledge perspective, adapted from Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop's (2013 p.124).

Even though professional identities are shifting, evolving, and being challenged constantly, this study found that if a trainee develops at least one robust relationship (a professional buddy), has effective mentoring, and feels valued in the school and in their role then they can usually rise to the challenge. Teacher educators have a duty to trainee teachers, not to make training simple, but to acknowledge the challenges faced by trainees and ensure that their needs are being met to nurture and protect the future workforce.

### **Conclusion:**

This research began with the notion that the formation of professional identity is complex and contested. Whilst conclusions were drawn, the conclusions and 'answers' to the research questions are indicators of the possible impacts of the training routes on a trainee's professional identity formation. Elliot and Kushner (2017, p.161) claim that data "represents the people – their hopes, fears, aspirations and failures". Findings represented the feelings and views of participants as they moved through their PGCE training routes and showed that there is no single blueprint for success in

developing a robust professional identity. Each participant had a nuanced interpretation of what they needed based on their personal identity as well as a set of reflections on their own professional practice and experience. The recommendations, therefore, should be viewed as discussion points for teacher educators, teachers, and policy makers to prompt deeper reflection on the nature and content of teacher training routes to create the right environment for personal growth.

Future studies could adapt the approach taken in this research over a longer period and across multiple institutions and training routes as this would enable the research to focus on professional identity formation beyond the initial training course. Doctoral students interested in the field of professional identity formation or research that explores the impact of policy changes on practice should consider how framing the theoretical and policy debates in their field will allow them to consider the most appropriate methodology and approaches.

For teacher educators, this research questions the impact of relationships and communities during trainees' busy and challenging PGCE year. Findings showed that if there are different routes to becoming a teacher, the key aspect is 'sameness' and a shared experience rather than 'othering' routes such as School Direct. In focusing on one cohort of trainee teachers, in one institution, the PGCE course was viewed from the perspective of the trainee teachers at the start of their journey to being a professional entering the teaching profession. Identifying the demands of building relationships in schools and the impact of effective mentoring, enabled reflection on the realities of training as a teacher and provided evidence regarding the conflict that exists between the trainees' idea of what they need to succeed and the reality. Alongside the existing body of work on professional identity, this study offered a focus on the significance of a relationship in supporting trainee teachers in developing a secure professional identity.

### **Moving forward**

In the past decade, the government has introduced several reforms to teacher education, including the Carter Review (DfE, 2015), the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019), and the introduction of the Core Content Framework (CCF), the Early Career Framework (ECF) and the new suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs) (DfE, 2021). The most recent reform was a review of Initial Teacher Training provision, the ITT Market Review, which resulted in established and new providers having to apply to be accredited to deliver teacher education with some well-established teacher education providers losing accredited status. These reforms are set against a backdrop of an ongoing teacher supply crisis. This research highlighted that the training route was not significant to



the formation of a professional identity but that what was important was professional relationships, feeling valued and high-quality mentoring. These factors *can* be developed, nurtured, and maintained despite yet more policy change that threatens to add further pressure, bureaucracy, and accountability in schools (Skerritt, 2021). This study considered how teacher educators can support trainees to move from *becoming* a primary school teacher to *being* a primary school teacher.

## References

- Alsop, J. (2006) *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*. NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Baxter, P., and Jack, S. (2008) Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), pp. 544-559.
- Beauchamp, C and Thomas, L. (2011) New teachers' identity shifts at the boundary of teacher education and initial practice in *International Journal of Educational Research* 6(13), pp.17-32.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P., and Verloop, N. (2003) Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 20 (2), pp. 107-128.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2013). The emergence of research on teachers' professional identity : a review of literature from 1988 to 2000. In C. J. Craig, P. C. Meijer, & J. Broeckmans (Eds.), *From teacher thinking to teachers and teaching : the evolution of a research community* (pp. 205-222). (Advances in research on teaching; Vol. 19). Emerald Group Publishing Ltd. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3687\(2013\)0000019013](https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-3687(2013)0000019013)
- BERA, (2018) *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. British Educational Research Association. London: BERA

Buchanan, R. (2015) Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability. *Teacher and Teaching*, 21(6), pp. 700-719.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. 3 (2), pp.77-101.

Page | 18 Bullough, R. V., Jr. (2005) Being and becoming a mentor: school-based teacher educators and teacher educator identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 21 (3), pp. 143–155.

Burn, K. (2007) Professional knowledge and identity in a contested discipline: challenges for student teachers and teacher educators, *Oxford Review of Education*. 33(4), pp 445-467.

Carter, M. and Francis, R. (2001) Mentoring and beginning teachers' workplace learning. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 29(3), pp. 249–262.

Cohen, J. L. (2009) Getting recognised: Teachers negotiating professional identities as learners through talk in *Teaching and Teacher Education* 26 (2), pp473–481.

Cohen, L. Manion, L, Morrison, K. and Bell, R. (2011) 7th ed. *Research Methods in Education*. Oxon: Routledge.

Coldwell, M. and Twiselton, S. (2019) The 2019 General Election and the teaching profession in England *People, Place and Policy*. 13(2), pp. 71-74.

Colliander, H. (2018) The experienced newcomer - The (trans)forming of professional teacher identity in a new landscape of practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 69 (1), pp. 168-176.

Conroy, J., Hulme, M and Menter, I., (2013) Developing a 'clinical' model for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*. 39 (1), pp. 557–573.

Department for Education (2015) Carter Review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/carter-review-of-initial-teacher-training>

Department for Education (2019) *Teacher workload survey 2019 Research report*. London: Department for Education.

Department for Education (2021) Initial Teacher Training (ITT) Market Review <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/initial-teacher-training-itt-market-review-report>

Duncan, M and Watson, R. (2010) Taking a stance: socially responsible ethics and informed consent in Savin-Baden, M and Howell-Major, C. (eds) (2010) *New Approaches to Qualitative Research: Wisdom and Uncertainty*. London: Routledge.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989) Building theories from case study research. *The Academy of Management Review*. 14(4), pp. 532-550.

Foucault, M. (1981) Questions of Method: An Interview with Michel Foucault. *Ideology and Consciousness*. 8(1), pp. 3-14.

Gee, J. P. (1999) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*. New York: Routledge.

Gee, J.P. (2000) Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education*. 25(1), pp99-125.

Hamilton, L. and Corbett-Whittier, C. (2013) *Using Case Study in Education Research*. London: Sage.

Hill, T. (1994) *Developing a career in primary education*. London: David Fulton Publishers.

Hobson, A. Ashby, P. Malderez, A. and Tomlinson, P. (2008) Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and what we don't. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 25(1), pp. 207–216.

Jackson, A. and Mazzei, L. (2012) *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative research: Viewing Data Across Multiple Perspectives*. London: Routledge.

Javadi, M. and Zavea, K. (2016) Thematic analysis and its pitfalls in *Journal of Client Care: An International Nursing Journal*. 1(1), pp33-39.

Kervin, L. and Turbill, J., (2003) Teaching as a craft: making links between pre-service training and professional practice. Faculty of Social Sciences: Papers.

Khalid, F. (2014) The Impact of Teaching Practice Experience in Shaping Pre-Service Teachers' Professional Identities. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 5 (20), pp. 423 – 434.

Korthagen, F. and Evelein, F. (2016) Relations between student teachers' basic needs fulfilment and their teaching behaviour. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 60(1), pp234-244.

Korthagen, F., Loughran, J., and Russell, T. (2006). Developing fundamental principles for teacher education programs and practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(8), pp. 1020–1041.

Lewis-Beck, M. Bryman, A. and Futing Liao, T. (2004) (eds) Convenience Sample. *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Social Science Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Lindgren, U. (2005) Experiences of beginning teachers in a school-based mentoring programme Sweden. *Educational Studies*. 31(3), pp. 251–263.

Loughran, J., and Menter, I. (2019) The essence of being a teacher educator and why it matters. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*. 47 (3), pp. 216-229.

Machi, L.A. and McEvoy, B.T. (2016) *The Literature Review: 6 Steps to Success (3rd Edition)* London: Corwin

Maclure, M. (1993) Arguing for yourself: Identity as an organising principle in teachers' jobs and lives. *British Educational Research Journal*. 19(4), pp. 311–322.

Manchester Metropolitan University (2016) The beginnings of school-led teacher training: New challenges for university teacher education. <http://www.esri.mmu.ac.uk/resgroups/schooldirect.pdf>

Mason, J. (1996) *Qualitative Researching*. London: Sage.

Menter, I., Elliot, D., Hall, J., Hall, S., Hulme, M., Lewin, J. and Lowden, K. (2011) *A Guide to Practitioner Research in Education*. London: Sage.

Mertens, D. M (1998) *Research Methods in Education and Psychology. Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. London: Sage.

Miles, M. and Huberman, M. (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. London: Sage.

Moore, M. and Hofman, E. (1988) Professional identity in institutions of higher learning in Israel. *Higher Education* 17(1), pp. 69–79.

Rawlings-Smith, E. (2020) Techniques for mentors to support early career teachers' reflective practice. *Teaching Geography*. 45(2) pp. 53-55

Page | 20 Reinharz, S. (1992) *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Richardson, P. and Watt, H. (2008) Motivations, perceptions, and aspirations concerning teaching as a career for different types of beginning teachers. *Learning and Instruction*. 18(1), pp. 408-428.

Robson, C. (2011) *Real World Research*. Sussex: John Wiley and Sons.

Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I. S. (2005) *Qualitative Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action* . Basic Book Inc.

Silverman, D. (2010) *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practice Handbook* (3rd edition). London: Sage.

Skerritt, C. (2021). Pressure, bureaucracy, accountability, and all for show: Irish perspectives on life inside England's schools. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 69(6), 693–713.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2020.1839014>

St Pierre, E. and Jackson, A. (2014) Qualitative data analysis after coding. *Qualitative Enquiry*. 20 (6), pp. 715-719.

Thomas, G. (2009) *How to do your research project: A guide for students in education and applied social sciences*. London: Sage.

Thomas, G. (2016) *How to Do Your Case Study: 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. London: Sage.

Thompson, N., and Pascal, J. (2012). Developing critically reflective practice. *Reflective Practice*, 13(2), pp. 311–325.

Twiselton, S. (2004) The role of teacher identities in learning to teach primary literacy. *Educational Review*. 56(2), pp. 157-164.

Van der Wal, M., Oolbakkink-Marchand, H., Schaap, H. and Meijer, P (2019) Impact of early career teachers' professional identity tensions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. 80(1), pp. 59-70.

Van Heugton, K. (2004) *Managing insider research: learning from experience*. *Qualitative Social Work*. 3 (203), pp203-221.

Wenger, R. (1998) *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wenger-Trayner, E., and Wenger-Trayner, B. (2015) Theory. In Wenger-Trayner, E., Fenton O'Creedy, M., Hutchinson, S., Kubiak, C. and Wenger-Trayner, B (Eds.), *Learning in Landscapes of Practices* (pp. 13-29). Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Wright, V. Loughlin, T. and Hall, V. (2018) Exploring transitions in notions of identity as perceived by beginning post-compulsory teachers. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*. 23 (1) pp. 4-22.

Yin, R. (2013). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Critical Perspectives on Educational Policies and Professional Identity: Learning from Doctoral Studies

Section 2: Interrogating Approaches to Becoming, Being and Developing as Education Professionals  
[section lead editor – Waller]