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The transition from student to teacher: investigating the changing identities of trainee teachers

Phoebe Connolly

Supervised by: Dr Jeremy Oldfield

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ABSTRACT

Professional identity is the idea of combining one's attributes, beliefs, values, motives and experiences to create a personal identity in terms of a profession (Ibarra, 1999). This idea has been applied to specific professions such as teaching to create the area of teachers' professional identity. While there is a lot of current research surrounding this area, it is extremely limited in terms of focusing on trainee teachers' professional identity, thus the purpose of this research is to study the transition of identity from student to teacher, as individuals train to become a primary school teacher through a Post Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course. Six PGCE students participated in semi-structured interviews aimed to delve into the students' experiences of their course and being on school placements, to investigate what aspects of their teacher training have an effect on the changing of their identity. The data from these interviews were then analysed thematically. The main themes found from the data were: expectations versus reality, relationships and the reasons for wanting to teach.

KEY WORDS:	IDENTITY	TRANSITION	TEACHING	TEACHER TRAINING	THEMATIC ANALYSIS
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Introduction

“Identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon”, (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 108). An individual’s identity does not come from one aspect of their personality, but is a combination of everything that makes them who they are; the same goes for an individual’s professional identity. Both internal and external factors play a part in the formation of a teacher’s professional identity; what they bring to the role of being a teacher and what the school, government, or university course expects of them. The existing research in this area tends to focus on fully qualified teachers, often neglecting to look at where it is within a teacher’s career that they begin to change the way they identify themselves. Because of this lack of research, this study has chosen to focus on the transition of trainee teachers, in order to provide some insight into when and how this change in identity comes about.

Professional Identity

Teacher professional identity has become a huge subject in the field of education studies and educational psychology, emerging as a separate research area in the 1970s (Rus et al., 2013). Professional identity is something that is present in various fields, not just in the study of teacher education and goes to show how important one’s occupation is in this society as it is shown that it can become a core part of our identities.

Connelly and Clandinin (1997, 1999) have noted how closely teachers’ personal and professional identities are intertwined, suggesting that at a certain point in a teacher’s career, these identities may merge into one. It has also been found that teachers tend to use their own human experience as resources when teaching and Cowan (2009) has stated that student teachers’ experiences are often heavily influenced by their experiences of being pupils themselves with research suggesting that beginning teachers often identify more with the students than the other teachers (Pillen, Beijaard, and den Brok, 2013; Rajuan, Beijaard, and Verloop, 2008). This may be due to trainee teachers and beginning teachers being viewed as students, therefore continuing to identify as students, as they are being taught how to teach. This highlights the importance of looking at trainee teachers and their transition from student to teacher when researching teacher identity.

Teachers as Active Learners

Beginning teachers “are no more empty vessels than are children as they enter classrooms” (Hagger and McIntyre, 2006, p. 42). This presents the idea that as a teacher, trainee or qualified, you never stop learning on the job and it is a job that requires constant change and growth as the teachers adapt to provide the best education for their students. Much of the surrounding literature in this field looks at the importance of a school-based approach to teacher training, suggesting that student teachers need to be active in the process of forming their professional identity (Coldron and Smith, 1999). It has been suggested that practice is not only an influencing factor in becoming and identifying as a teacher but the only

important factor (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2004; Fish, 1995). This is supported by the fact that teacher training courses now involve a huge amount of time on a school placement to allow the students to be active in their training, as it prepares them for being in a classroom full time and being able to see themselves as a teacher.

Student teachers being active in their learning to develop a professional identity relates to the development of agency in teacher education (Soini et al., 2015). A major part of being a teacher is being seen as an expert who leads the students in their learning; however, trainee teachers both lead and follow as they learn to become a teacher (Lipponen and Kumpulainen, 2011), but learning in this practical environment is likely to assist them in developing their professional agency and therefore identity as they go through this transition. While the development of professional agency and identity is an important process in becoming a teacher there is often a concern among student teachers that their identity as a teacher will start to become their identity as a person. This concern about being able to harmonise their personal and professional life relates to the research found that student teachers often feel pressured by what a context demands of them in comparison to who they are or want to be (Timoššuk and Ugaste, 2010). This is a problem in teacher training courses, as they are very demanding and time consuming and often not what the students were expecting.

The Attraction of Teaching

Teaching courses are often oversubscribed, drawing in a large number of people from different courses and often even previous careers. And so what is it about teaching that is so attractive that people who already have an established career want to change to this different career path (Priyadharshini and Robinson-Pant, 2003). While teaching may be seen as an attractive career to many, it also has an extremely high dropout rate; this is most common during the year of training on a PGCE and the first few years of being qualified. One of the most common reasons for this seems to be that the expectations students have when first starting their teacher training do not always match up to their experiences (Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007). This may also be due to identity changes, while most people would start to identify as a teacher at some point, many people may never get to that stage. And so the development of professional identity may be able to explain not only why people may choose teaching over other careers but also why so many individuals tend to drop out of this career.

The Development of Identity

There is a vast amount of research looking into self-efficacy and how it is achieved in teachers; this is the idea of having belief in your own capacity to act as necessary to achieve your goal. In terms of teacher education, it is believed that mastery experiences, support and positive feedback from mentors are extremely important in developing self-efficacy (Moulding, Stewart, Dunmeyer, 2014). This relates to the development of teacher identity as it involves self-reflection through the support of others in order to develop a sense of

professional identity. Teachers have the power over their student's learning and the capability to shape and affect a student's performance and this is thought to be how teachers achieve self-efficacy (Kurt, Ekici, and Güngör, 2014). This also relates to the idea that wanting to teach and being fond of teaching tends to indicate a high success rate in teaching (Van Dinther, Dochy, and Segers, 2015) and those that do not experience this enjoyment may explain the high dropout rate during the first few years of qualification. This relates to the development of a teacher's identity, as if they do not really want to be a teacher, they are unlikely to identify or be identified by others as one. And so perhaps self-efficacy needs to be built alongside professional identity in order to fully transition into becoming a teacher.

The experiences of student teachers is considered to be a highly influential component of a teacher education programme, and teachers often consider the mentoring relationship to be extremely significant to the development of student teachers' identity (Izadinia, 2015). School placements and mentoring relationships involve the observing of successful teaching, and it has been found that having a good quality mentor not only allows the trainee teachers to observe their process of teaching, but also enables them to learn how to be a successful teacher and develop a successful professional identity. However, research has suggested that simply observing successful teaching does not equate to becoming a successful teacher (Margolis, 2007). This is stating that teacher training needs to involve a great deal of practical elements in order for students to not only identify as teachers, but to become high quality teachers, something that is already in place.

The Present Study

According to most of the research in this field, a combination of factors surrounding teacher training lead to an individuals' identity changing (Murray, 2013; Pillen, Beijaard, and den Brok, 2013; Rus et al., 2013). It is much too simplistic to look at from one viewpoint, which is why this research study aimed to combine a number of different themes highlighted in the background research to really explore the identity changes of student teachers. The existing research in this field focuses mainly on qualified teachers and their professional identity and so there seems to be a gap where the research on trainee teachers should be. This research study has aimed to fill this gap by focusing not only on trainee teachers' changing identities but also their personal experiences during their teaching degree that may lead or have led to them identifying as a teacher. It has been found that trainee teachers are often preoccupied and concerned about their developing sense of identities as teachers, as if they don't believe they are qualified to be a teacher until they can identify as one (Hobson et al., 2008). The research proposed to investigate whether this is true and how much importance individuals put on their identity in relation to their qualification and profession.

Methodology

This study used semi-structured interviews with students on a Primary Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) course. This type of methodology was chosen because it was thought it would allow an in depth exploration of the aims and objectives of the research question, without being limited by a strict structure that would come with a structured interview or questionnaire (Patton, 2002).

Recruitment

The PGCE students used for this research were recruited using an opportunity sampling method. The course leader for Primary Education Studies at one university acted as a gatekeeper and advertised the study to their students as well as students at another university being recruited through a professional connection. They were provided with an invitation letter with the full title for the research, a brief description of the study and the researchers contact details. This meant it was up to the participants to decide whether they wanted to take part or not, ensuring that coercion was not an issue when recruiting. A time for the interview was then arranged between researcher and participant that was most suitable for both parties.

Participants

It was first proposed that eight participants would be needed after research into data saturation was looked at (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). However, after the first six interviews it was thought that sufficient data had been collected for appropriate analysis and so data saturation had been achieved. This piece of research is significantly smaller than the ones researched when looking at data saturation that suggest to start at ten interviews (Francis et al., 2010), which is why the appropriate amount of data was achieved earlier than expected. The interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, shorter than anticipated but it was believed that appropriate themes were found within a shorter amount of time.

It was decided that the research would only recruit students training to become a primary school teacher, as it was thought that there would be too much variation if the research involved a range of primary and secondary trainees. Also, as previous research showed that age can be an influencing factor of the experiences and identity of a teacher (Hobson et al., 2008) and as this research is looking at the transition from student to teacher, it was proposed that participants of this study should be directly out of an undergraduate degree so that they would have a lot of experience in being a student. However, with it using opportunity sampling this may have not been the case and the participants were not asked for their age when they came for the interview. The opportunity sampling method also meant that only female participants were recruited. However, it is believed that these were not issues for the analysis, as relevant data was still produced.

Materials

A list questions were proposed before the interviews took place, some examples of these questions are: 'what did you expect from the course before you started?'

and 'do you consider yourself a teacher, or do you still view yourself as a student?' A university ethics committee approved these questions prior to any data being collected. These questions were written with the knowledge of previous research in this field to ensure the interviews would collect relative research.

As the interviews were semi-structured and so not standardised, each interview was different and collected different data, as they were looking to find out about the personal experiences of the trainee teachers. Although the interviews provided a wide range of information, relevant themes were still found throughout the transcripts. The nature of semi-structured interviews also meant that questions were changed throughout the duration of them, depending on the participants' answers. This meant that themes that were thought to appear due to what had been shown in previous literature were not necessarily found and some unexpected themes were highlighted. This reinforces the fact that this research is providing something that may fill a gap left by previous research.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen because it was believed that it would allow the freedom and flexibility to analyse the data without any restrictions (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Before the commencement of the analysis, each interview was transcribed in full to make the data visible and so easier to analyse, with each transcript being read multiple times in order for the data to become familiar. The analysis method followed the Braun and Clarke model of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2013), following the process of identifying codes, which led to naming themes and subthemes. This data was then transferred into a thematic map, as seen in figure 1.

During the analysis process, an inductive approach was applied as the themes were not chosen to fit in an existing frame of research, but were looking individually at each interview. Also a semantic approach was used, as the themes were chosen and looked at literally, rather than trying to uncover the underlying ideas and meanings of them (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Ethics

An Application for Ethics Approval Form (AEAF) was completed and approved by an internal university ethics board prior to the commencement of any research being conducted. This was written within the guidelines for the British Psychological Society (BPS) code of ethics (*Code of Human Research Ethics*, 2010). The research was not expecting many ethical issues to arise, but nevertheless, conditions were put in place to ensure no harm would be caused to participants or researcher.

Participants provided informed consent before the commencement of the interviews, and were fully informed that the interviews and transcripts would be kept anonymous to protect their identities. Participants were also informed about

their right to withdraw from the study at any time up until a certain date, all of their rights were outlined on the information sheet, the consent form and the debrief form. The interviews took place at Manchester Metropolitan University in private interview rooms and so while the researcher was alone with the participants during the interview, university staff were nearby and aware that the interviews were taking place. It was believed that these measures put in place ensured the safety of all those involved in the research.

Analysis and Discussion

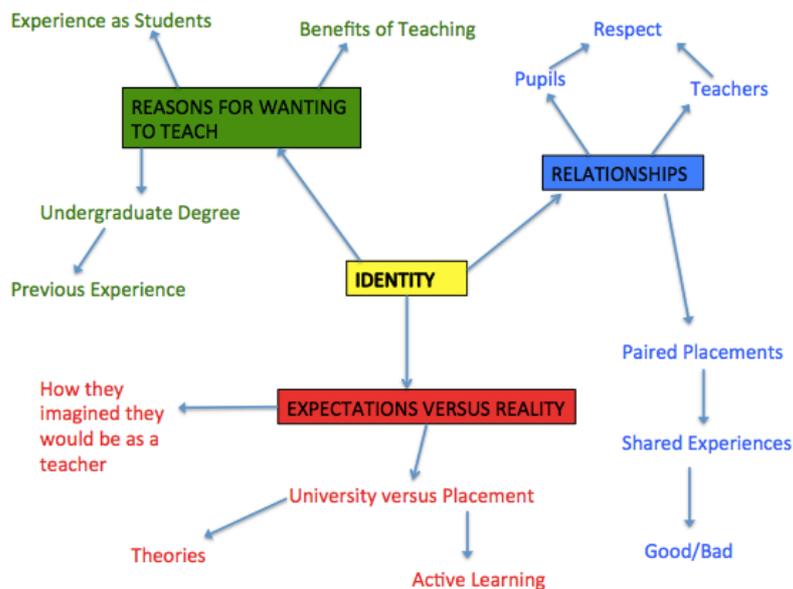


Figure 1: Thematic Map: presenting the main themes and subsequent subthemes that were identified through the analysis

Three main themes were found through the thematic analysis conducted in relation to the overarching theme of identity, with plenty of subthemes also emerging, shown above in Figure 1. The three main themes found were: Expectations versus Reality, Relationships and The Reasons for Wanting to Teach.

Theme 1: Expectations versus Reality

This theme emerged from looking at the participants' expectations of teaching prior to starting the course. This included how they imagined they would be as a teacher and how their university course may have guided these expectations and assisted in the placement aspect of the course. This was identified as a main theme in this research as it is thought that looking at how trainee teachers viewed themselves as teachers before beginning the course may affect how they then identify themselves throughout their training.

Expectations of Being a Teacher

Going in to a teacher training course it is natural to imagine how you might be as a teacher and it was clear from all of the interviews that these were things that the participants thought about. However, many of them found these expectations to be untrue, for example, as Beth said:

Beth [Interview 4: Lines 258-259]: “you don’t really know what you’re like before you start to teach, so I feel like I did have an idea to begin with but it has mostly changed”

Individuals will develop expectations of teaching from various different things, if like Amy, they have had previous experience of being in a teacher role then it is likely that they may be much more accurate in their expectations of themselves.

Amy [Interview 5: Lines 194-196]: “I think I kind of had an idea because I’ve taught drama for five years, like privately, so I knew what behaviour strategies I’d use, I knew what I’d be like with the children”

Previous research has found that student teachers often tend to have idealistic expectations about what it is to be a teacher and these do not always match with the reality once they are there (DiCicco et al., 2014). However, this is not necessarily seen in this particular research as this depicts quite a negative view of teaching in terms of expectations and none of the participants expressed the reality of their course being a negative experience even if it did not match with their expectations. The evidence found for this theme also reinforces why this particular piece of research decided to use a qualitative methodology, as when looking at something as personal as identity development, it is important to look at people individually. The different backgrounds of the participants may be an influencing factor in the development of their professional identity and will not only influence their expectations but may determine the accuracy of them.

University versus Placement

The trainees undertook a few weeks at university before their initial placement. While this time is about preparing the students for their placement and becoming a teacher, it is not seen by everyone as such a useful component of the course.

Amy [Interview 5: Lines 44-45]: “the time in uni, I think has been a bit of a waste of time”

This view comes in line with the idea that teachers need to be active in their training (Coldron and Smith, 1999). This allows them to not only learn to become a successful teacher by observing and learning from qualified teachers but to actively see themselves becoming a teacher in order to identify as one, which was also expressed by a number of participants.

Lauren [Interview 3: Lines 129-130]: “nothing is better than just going in and doing it yourself”

While the participants agreed with the previous research about the practical element of teacher training being extremely important, the university course may also be somewhat useful as it will teach the theories that can aid the students when going into their placement.

Beth [Interview 4: Lines 22-25]: “it’s a lot of theory and it doesn’t necessarily help you in teaching the children, so the theories there and you can take from it what you will, but sometimes you go and you kind of come away and you’re like I don’t know how I’d even teach that to a child and then you’re thrown into being in school again”

While the theories may be useful as a base, there seems to be a clear consensus among the participants that being in a classroom is much more useful to their development than learning about teaching at university. Previous research has found how influential school experience is for teacher training, as it allows the students to reinforce their beliefs about what a good teacher is as they learn to become one (Ng, Nicholas, and Williams, 2010). This is supported by the fact that teacher-training courses are made up of a majority of time on a school placement.

Identity

All of these subthemes reinforce what has been found in previous research that active teacher training on a school placement is the most valuable aspect of a PGCE course (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2004). However, while it is assumed that this will play an active part in the development of a teachers’ professional identity, this was not shown explicitly in this research.

The expectations an individual holds may lead their behaviour before starting their teacher training, and this is likely to influence the development of their professional identity. From this present research it is clear that the most influential aspect of teacher training is learning on the job. This way the student teachers no longer have to imagine themselves as teachers, as they can actively see themselves in this job role.

Lauren [Interview 3: Lines 269-271]: “I think the other day when I was looking at a job, I thought ‘oh my god, I’m really gonna be a teacher in September, I’m gonna have my own class in September”

Being able to see yourself as a teacher is a major component of becoming a teacher, and research has shown that being aware of your own development, including the development of professional identity is a major contribution of developing as a successful teacher (Conway and Clark, 2003).

Theme 2: Relationships

Relationships have been highlighted within the previous literature in this field as an important aspect within teacher training. This shows how important it is for teachers to learn from each other to change and adapt for the individual needs of their pupils (Alexander, Van Wyk, and Moreeng, 2014; Aderibigbe, 2013). Some research has suggested that peers, pupils and supervising teachers can be primary influencers on professional identity (Timoštšuk and Ugaste, 2010), providing evidence for the idea that experiences of trainee teachers are not individual and suggesting how important supervisors and mentors are in the teacher training process. This was decided to be a key theme as like the relative research has stated, it was identified in the transcripts as an important contributor to the participants' professional development.

Mentor Relationships

The previous theme highlighted the importance of school placements in teacher training, and part of these school placements is having a mentor, a qualified teacher, to support and guide the student through their placement. The student-mentor relationship has been highlighted in previous research and this current research as a crucial feature of teacher training. The mentors have once been in the same position the students are in and so can share their previous experiences of being a student teacher and their knowledge of being a qualified teacher to help them through their training.

Sarah [Interview 2: Lines 185-187]: “she said that when she was training she had a bit of a bad experience with hers so I think that made her want to be a good role model for me”

The support of a good role model in teacher training has been shown to be extremely significant, something Sarah's mentor has clearly identified. Student-mentor relationships provide both professional and emotional support (Rajuan, Beijaard, and Verloop, 2008) as well as the sharing of knowledge. This sharing of knowledge often happens actively in the classroom, showing the importance of having a good role model to identify with and actively learn from in order to become a successful teacher (Margerum-Leys and Marx, 2004), as is highlighted in the interviews conducted.

Chloe [Interview 1: Lines 44-46]: “all the other staff treated me as a teacher and made me feel really welcome, it was never a case of ‘you can't do that because you're a student teacher’”

Being seen as a teacher by others, especially qualified teachers, is likely to be very influential in seeing yourself as a teacher and research has found that student-mentor relationships are beneficial to both parties, as not only do trainee teachers learn from observing and working with their mentors, but seeing from the perspective of a student teacher can help the mentors with their continuous development of professional identity (Hawkey, 1998; Margolis, 2007). Research has also stated mentoring should continue throughout the first few years of

teaching as newly qualified teachers would appreciate that support as they ground themselves as teachers (Hirschhorn, 2009).

Paired Placements

Out of the interviews conducted for this piece of research, two of the participants had experienced being on a paired placement in a school. This means that they shared a class with another student teacher, equally sharing the teaching and workload.

Beth [Interview 4: Lines 126-127]: "I feel like it could have better prepared me for the next placement if I had been on my own"

The themes discovered here do not necessarily line up with themes previously found in this field. Research has found that students on paired placements are able to learn and develop together, and assist with each other's professional development. However, it provides unrealistic preparation for becoming a teacher when they have to work and teach alone (Gardiner, 2010), this is something that Beth identified, as she stated that she would have rather been on a single placement. Also, while paired placements can be useful and supporting for the students, this can also mean an increased workload for the mentor and a difficulty in providing the students with individual feedback and so may hinder their development.

Lucy [Interview 6: Lines 85-87]: "I felt like that either it was more of a struggle to get my own ideas across because we had to share everything between us and also that there was always a bit of a rivalry where she wanted to undermine me a little bit"

Perhaps what has been highlighted here that may have been previously missed is the idea of competition and rivalry between student teachers. Sharing a classroom seems to have highlighted some negative experiences and while this may not be an accurate representation of all student teachers' views, it does show that it is much too simplistic to state that peer relationships are always positive. However, even this negative experience of sharing a class may influence the development of identity, as Lucy and Beth may have discovered the kind of teacher they did or did not want to be based on their experience of being on a paired placement.

Identity

The relationships that develop during the teacher training process may be very influential in the transition of becoming a teacher; these would include the peer relationships, relationships with mentors and other teachers and relationships with the pupils.

Lauren [Interview 3: Lines 220-222]: “you have to think like a teacher because the children need to look up to you and see that you’re their teacher”

This quote from Lauren shows that professional identity is an extremely important part of being a teacher, you cannot just act like a teacher as if you do not truly see yourself as a teacher, neither will anyone else.

Lucy [Interview 6: Lines 45-46]: “I think at the beginning I felt more like a student but that was partly because the, one of my class teachers kept referring to me as a student, which wasn’t that helpful”

Not only do you need to act like a teacher for other people to see you are one, but you need to be treated like a teacher in order to fully identify as one, these two things are interchangeable. This just shows how important other people are when looking at something as personal as the development of identity and how many different areas can have an effect in this transition of identity (Hobson et al., 2008).

Theme 3: Reasons for Wanting to Teach

There may be many reasons as to why individuals choose to partake in a teaching degree and this was found to be a significant theme in this research due to the participants reasoning and previous experiences of teaching seeming to greatly effect how they saw themselves as teachers.

Benefits of Teaching

There are many perceived benefits and drawbacks to becoming a teacher which have been looked at in some previous literature, one of the most common benefits seems to be the desire to work closely with children and make a difference in their education (Ramirez, 2010). This has come across in the interviews in this current research, and may also relate to the previous theme of expectations versus reality, as many of the participants views on the benefits of teaching came from their previous experiences and expectations before they started the course.

Beth [Interview 4: Lines 50-51]: “I just really enjoyed it, really liked being around children and just teaching them”

The desire to work with children seems to be one of the most common reasons for going into primary school teaching, at least within this research. The six participants came from different background degrees, three studied psychology, one studied Spanish and English, one studied early years and childhood studies and one studied linguistics, yet they all share this mutual passion.

The student teachers’ reasons for wanting to teach might be informed by their experience of being students themselves, as previous literature in this field has

identified this idea that student teachers often base their teaching off their experience of being a student (Cowan, 2009).

Chloe [Interview 1: Lines 16-18]: “there was a maths teacher, it was in high school and he was just incredible, I hated maths until I had him and he was just amazing and I loved maths after that and I wanted to be able to do that to kids, you know bring the fun into education”

If, like Chloe, the trainee teacher had a positive experience with a teacher, or being a student in general, this is likely to not only inform their decision to become a teacher themselves, but to focus wholly on what they perceive to be the benefits of teaching. This may also determine the kind of teacher they would like to be as often individuals tend to teach how they were taught, both by their teachers when they were students and by their mentors as they learn to become teachers (Oleson and Hora, 2013).

Undergraduate Degree

Three out of six of the participants in this research studied psychology for their undergraduate degree and had looked into becoming educational psychologists before deciding on teaching.

Lauren [Interview 3: Lines 9-12]: “originally I wanted to be an educational psychologist and that was like the route I wanted to take...and then I just kind of thought hmm actually I think teaching might be a bit more suited to me”

There may be many reasons why students go into teaching after studying something like psychology, as this often involves the study of people and can be seen as closely related to teaching as it is often applicable to a wide variety of situations.

Chloe [Interview 1: Lines 108-110]: “it’s absolutely prepared me a lot more than say someone who did a maths degree, they’ll know the stuff for maths but nothing else, you can apply what you learn here to everything”

It is difficult to say whether it was studying psychology that drew these students into teaching, as even with this small sampled research, it is clear to see that teaching attracts people from a variety of undergraduate degrees. However, for these participants, they see their background in psychology as not only influential to their decision to teach but believe that it has given them an advantage over other students, which is interesting to look at.

Identity

While teaching may draw in a range of different individuals due to a variety of reasons, it is difficult to say whether these various reasons equate to differing transitions in identity. Previous research has outlined some of the main

motivators for individuals undertaking a PGCE course, these included own positive experiences in school, inspiration from own teachers and mentors and passion and interest in working with children (Younger et al., 2004), which have been mirrored by this current research.

Sarah [Interview 2: Lines 15-16]: “when I was in primary school I just loved it and I wanted to be a primary school teacher then”

Research has found that those who not only want to be a teacher but plan to do so for their whole career will have a greater sense of identity as a teacher and are less likely to drop out compared to those who have switched careers into teaching or those who picked teaching with little thought (Watt and Richardson, 2008). Therefore, looking at the motivations of trainee teachers seems to be an important aspect of teacher professional identity. However it is almost impossible to highlight the main motivators for all student teachers, as individuals will choose teaching for their own personal reasons.

Discussion

Limitations

This research has provided some insight into the transition of identity of trainee teachers, however, it is a significantly small study, using only six participants from two universities in the North West of England and so will not be representative of the general population of trainee teachers. It is also looking at something very personal and individual and so while it can state some evidence about the transition of identity, it may be presumptuous to state that this is true of all trainee teachers. Previous research has stated that the experiences of student teachers can be vastly different based on their training course, their gender and whether they are going into primary or secondary teaching (Purcell et al., 2005). As this was a small study it concentrated only on those on a PGCE course to do primary teaching and the nature of the sampling method meant that only female participants were recruited.

Implications of Research

This research may be a considerably small study but it has still highlighted an important aspect of teaching education. This will be beneficial to trainee teachers as it may make them more aware of their own development. It may also be beneficial to qualified teachers to reflect back on their development in order to see how they have got to where they are and what they can do to develop further. Looking at the individual experiences of trainee teachers is not just useful in terms of identity changes, but it may also benefit education studies and teacher training courses, as it has highlighted what these students find most useful in terms of their development as a teacher and so may have implications for future trainee teachers and their expectations and preparations of the training.

Future Research and Considerations

While it is believed that this research has filled a gap in the relevant area, as aimed, there is still thought to be some research missing in this field. For example, this research, due to the opportunity sampling method used, included only female participants. This may be representative of the general population, as it seems that primary teaching is a female dominated field. However, this means that male student teachers may have a very different experience of their training and their development of professional identity and so this may be a very interesting field to explore in future research.

This current research also recruited younger participants, as it was focusing on their transition from student to teacher and so was looking for participants who recently concluded their undergraduate degree. It may be of interest to other researchers to look at the identity changes of older student teachers, who may be changing careers as this may present an interesting transition of identity, not from student to teacher, but from another profession to teacher.

Concluding Points

This research has successfully identified key themes and subthemes that contribute to the identity transition of trainee teachers, all of which relate to teacher professional identity, often interlinking with each other in this area. This research is concurrent with previous research in this field, but still fills a gap that may have been left, as it has uncovered some thought to be new themes in the area of teacher professional identity in relation to the transition of identity from student to teacher experienced by trainee teachers.

Reflexive Analysis

Reflexivity is essential in qualitative research, as the in depth nature of the research would involve the researcher being personally linked to the topic, as we, as humans, are often aware of ourselves in relation to the research (Finlay and Gough, 2003). In relation to this current research, I was aware of myself as not only the researcher and interviewer but also a prospective teacher with a personal interest in the participants' experiences.

I chose this area of research as I am extremely interested in the idea of becoming a primary school teacher in the future. I researched into teaching education and found the area of teacher professional identity extremely interesting. I also felt that this area could be beneficial to my own career in the future when I study for a PGCE. This may have also meant that my questions were bias towards my own personal gain rather than for the purpose of the research, however, either way I still believe that the interviews achieved what they aimed to do in terms of the research. The interviews also gave me an insight into teaching that could be extremely useful when I go through the process myself and has taught me that what I thought I knew about teaching was not necessarily true.

Before this research I was a novice with interviews, having previously only conducted a couple in previous years of my degree. Because of this I feel like I may have missed out on some questions that could have been beneficial to the research and perhaps did not prompt the participants enough to get the most information out of them. Despite this I still feel like enough information was produced from the interviews to be able to conduct an in depth analysis.

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