Crossing borders in performative times: new teachers and the co-construction of professional identity in schools

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Introduction

The ways in which teachers construct their professional or work-related identity has been extensively studied, many recent researchers have focused in particular on the impact of the ways in which their work is managed and regulated. The global spread of performative ‘techno-bureaucratic managerialism’ (Apple, 2000, Ball et al., 1994), and its attendant regulatory frameworks, has been particularly influential in studies of teachers’ lives and work (Galton & MacBeath, 2008, Troman et al., 2007, Hall and Noyes, 2009). Many studies have explored the ways in which teacher identity is co-constructed with other professionals (Paechter, 2007) and the performative policy contexts that surround them (Riley et al., 2000), emphasising the citational practices which (re)produce and subvert discourses, and discipline subjects and their performance through the saturation of performers with power in particular subject positions (Gregson and Rose, 2000 in Madge and O’Connor, 2005)

There has, however, been less attention paid to the impact on teacher identity of teachers’ interactions with students and parents/carers (Fielding, 2004) and how teachers perform in the liminal social spaces of transition with these groups. Liminal zones allow transformation from one social status to another (Shields, 2003), as teachers move in complex ways between people (e.g. other teachers, senior staff, support staff, students, parents) of different status in a school. With each of these groups of people, except perhaps their own subject or year group peers, teachers are likely to play a peripheral role (Wenger, 1998), having to learn
to perform liminality successfully with each of them. This is particularly challenging for teachers new to a school (Pierce, 2007, Wilson and Demetriou, 2007), where their cultural knowledge of practice and power in that school lacks sophistication compared with other members of it.

This paper draws together a number of disparate but related themes emerging from our understanding of the ways in which teacher identity is constructed, with a particular focus on the impact of student interactions on new teachers (in the sense of both newly-qualified teachers and experienced teachers moving to a new school and thus experiencing a change of local institutional culture).

Liminality also emerges in another form for teachers new to a school. As they enter a school they have to become familiar with its contexts and processes, learning to negotiate these with their new colleagues (staff and students). They are particularly vulnerable to the impact of these new institutional contexts on their work-related identities. These contexts include not only the formal processes of an institution in its socio-political and economic contexts, but the informal social processes through which people co-construct their professional or work-related identities (Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009, Busher, 2005). In schools one of the major parties to this negotiative process are the students (Pane, 2009), who along with staff (and parents) are agents in the construction of a school as a community (Giddens, 1984). This process of co-construction includes both the work-related and personal identities of teachers and students.

In order to make sense of how teachers (re)construct their professional identities, it is important to understand the cultures and power processes of a school in which identity work for staff and students (Paechter, 2007, Benjamin, 2002) takes place. This involves understanding not only whole school cultures, but the ‘small cultures’ within (Holliday, 1999), the localised cultures that teachers construct with colleagues in subject areas and year groups and with specific groups of students.

Having explored the literature around these different aspects of teacher identity construction, we have come to the conclusion that there is a need for research which can be applied to teachers’ co-construction of identity with students as well as colleagues and wider social contexts. We conclude, therefore, with a discussion of possible approaches to investigating the complex dynamics involved in this process.
The emergence of performativity in schooling in England and Wales

The nature of teacher professionalism has been exhaustively researched, with a growing consensus around its positioning as a socially constructed and contested concept (Ozga & Lawn, 1981, Helsby, 1995). A key starting point for our thinking has been evidence that the emergence of performatve policies and practices in the UK, the overt intervention of state agencies in the regulation of teachers’ work and the advance of ‘marketisation’, has not had a significant effect on the traditional notion of a humanistic motivation, echoing Talcott Parsons’ view of a profession as a blend of altruism and intellectual engagement (1937, p. 366). This notion resonates strongly in recent studies of teacher motivation/identity (Scott et al, 1999, Carrington et al, 2000, Leaton Gray, 2006).

The 1980s and 1990s saw a flow of policy initiatives, justified through a rhetoric emphasising improving standards and increasing accountability that revolutionised the work of teachers and the ways in which their work is managed and regulated. The phenomenon of performativity in schooling has been extensively discussed elsewhere (Ball, 2000, Gerwitz & Ball, 2000, Mahony & Hextall, 2000, Brehony, 2005, Webb & Vuillamy, 2006), with three key strands emerging. Performative systems are characterised by a data-driven ‘audit culture’. Whilst advocates for educational accountability argue for its effectiveness (Tooley, 1993), critics argue that this has suppressed the notion of context-specific practice emerging through professional dialogue (Seddon, 1997) by requiring particular norms of practice, coupled with threats of discipline to try to enforce compliance, from teachers, students and institutions across the system, regardless of their applicability in particular local contexts. As performativity is always linked to definitions of transgressivity and normativity (Butler, 1993 in Madge and O’Connor, 2005) that discipline the body in a similar manner to that noted by Foucault (1977) for prisons, it results in “inauthentic practice and relationships…Teachers are no longer encouraged to have a rationale for practice…what is important is what works” (Ball 2003, p. 87).

The mechanisms of surveillance and discipline (Foucault, 1977) for educational professionals in England, are provided through the Office for Standards in
Education (Ofsted). This replaced the relatively benign and collegial monitoring regime of Her Majesty’s Inspectorate (HMI) in 1992, and was viewed by many as a deliberately antagonistic assault on professional autonomy (Maw, 1998). The more recent shift in inspection methodology to focus on schools’ self-evaluation rather than direct inspection of teaching, whilst being portrayed as enhancing professional judgement/autonomy, reinforces the external regulatory system with a self-surveillance regime (Ball, 2003) that is more corrosive of educational staff solidarity for hiding the real sources of power in this process (Lenski, 1986, Spivak in Morton 2003) that are embedded in the construction of the societal rules for holding to account teacher and student practice (Giddens, 1984). Instead of demonstrating the quality of their work in a triennial inspection visit, schools are under the constant gaze of the inspectorate, as school managers act as ‘the ever-present inspector within’ (Troman, 1997, p. 363).

Market levers are crucial to the neo-liberal model of governance, and these have been introduced into schools in England and Wales. Schools admissions policies view parents as consumers, encouraged to use ‘performative profiling’ (Ofsted reports and attainment league tables) to inform their choice (Ball et al., 1994, Gewirtz et al., 1995). By making the funding regime much more responsive to admissions at individual school level, schools have been commodified to an extent which virtually guarantees that professional judgement is undermined by a culture of ‘coercive compliance’ (Wilkins & Wood, 2009).

**Teacher identity in performative times**

Changing expectations about the work of schools and shifts in the composition of the student population are key environmental factors that challenge teachers’ sense of identity, effectiveness and wellbeing (Day and Kington, 2008). According to Day and Gu (2008) “teachers’ resilience, commitment and wellbeing must be examined and understood in terms of particular school and classroom contexts and cultures” (2008, p. 9). Teacher identity and self efficacy are bound up both individually and collectively with the performance of students’, although this can be related as well to the lens of students’ ultimate attainment or achievement as to the lens of Ofsted outcomes. Bauman’s (2004) theory of ‘liquid modernity’
suggests that the change of social situation transforms human experience and is a likely impact of the transitional experience of new and pre-service teachers.

Against this background, teachers’ identities (Giddens, 1991), have become complex and ‘fractured’ (Bauman, 2004). For some commentators, the growth of ‘distributive leadership’ has created the potential for school transformation through ‘collegial professionalism’ (Gronn, 2000, Coles & Southworth, 2005). However, a more common interpretation is that the erosion of autonomy has led to technicist, ‘incorporated professionalism’ (Barton et al., 1994, Troman, 1996, Day et al., 2006) in which teachers have become increasingly de-professionalised and compliant in their delivery of state-imposed initiatives.

A ‘middle ground’ between these dichotomous interpretations has emerged in the last decade arguing that the managerial discourse is vulnerable to challenge from a professional ‘democratic discourse’ (Sachs, 2003, p. 134-135). Sachs and others (Furlong et al., 2000, Whitty, 2002, Avis, 2005) explore the potential for a resistant or ‘transformative' profession that balances public accountability with professional autonomy. Sachs' model of the ‘activist identity’, countering/subverting the forces of managerialism through collegialism and collectivism has been particularly influential. Collegiality and collaboration has been widely viewed as crucial to the maintenance of core professional values and practices in managerialist institutions (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994, Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000).

**Teacher identity: a gender-based perspective**

One of the consequences of the performative view of teachers to homogenise the discourse of professionalism, overlooking the influence that various social factors (e.g. gender, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status) have on the way in which teachers and students perform their work-related identities in particular social contexts. A number of writers have critiqued existing models of ‘teacher professionalism’ and ‘professional identity’ as being built on gendered assumptions (Dillabough, 1999, Osgood 2006, Smith 2007). Dillabough (1999, p. 386) argues that we need to understand how ‘historically determined gender dualisms serve as identity-framing devices’ in the field of teaching, emphasises the notion of the teacher as ‘rational’ and ‘competent’ (ibid: p. 387). This
emphasis on the teacher as ‘a rational and instrumental actor’ (ibid: p. 373) can be seen to be disempowering of women teachers by constructing them “symbolically as that which stands in opposition to rationality” (ibid: p. 377).

In the performative discourse, the teacher is reconstituted as ‘Kant’s individuated ‘rational man’ – a teacher devoid of meaningful connections to those whom she is expected to educate’ (Dillabough, op. cit.: p. 379). Yet this is far from the reality that many teachers and students experience, especially in smaller Primary schools, where teachers are often as much a part of the local civic community as are the students and their parents (Jeffrey et al., 2008, Busher & Barker, 2003).

Dillabough echoes Ball’s notion of the ‘inauthenticity’ of the performative teacher when noting the ‘polarized identity discourses’ of teacher professionalism. The choice to either ‘maintain’ structures or to act ‘otherwise’ are key to understanding teachers’ decisions and actions in a culture of performativity, affording insights into how teachers view themselves and construct their identities in relation to the dominant culture. Sammons et al (2007, p. 694) emphasise the importance of ‘resilience’ in maintaining a strong sense of vocation and motivation. Teachers are not passive conduits of government policy; they mediate, interpret, resist and subvert government imperatives, bringing their own values to bear on the implementation of performative objectives. Personal agency can play a part in resisting and renegotiating the powerful policy reform agenda (Osgood, 2006), although powerful national and institutional policy discourses seek to present this as lacking legitimacy compared to the norms projected through the educational policies. These negotiations with policy objectives, work related demands from co-workers (including students) and demands from their personal lives contribute to the process of teachers’ identity development. The ‘concept of identity has reflective and active dimensions, encompassing both an individual’s professional philosophy and their public actions’ (O’Connor 2008, p. 118). For Sachs (2003), this demonstrates the activist professional in action.

Dillabough (op. cit.: p. 387) makes a case for understanding teachers’ identity as ‘discursively formed’, ‘constructing meaning through social mediation’. Whilst Smith (2010) stresses the importance of personal agency in women teachers’ career decisions; suggesting that by making a conscious choice to care, women teachers can exercise their personal agency by resisting dominant institutional structures and discourses (Smith 2007, 2010). Whilst dominant social and
institutional structures are very effectively maintained through ‘recurrent social practices’ (Giddens and Pierson, 1998, p. 76), agents can (individually or collectively) break the chain of constitution by exercising their ability to act ‘otherwise’ (ibid: p. 78).

The rationalist view of teachers as defined within the performative profession denies emotionality and makes scant reference to the caring aspects of teaching (O’Connor, 2008), despite evidence of the importance of relationships with pupils on teacher identity and motivation (Riley, 2009), on values based on an ethic of care (Vogt, 2002, Malm, 2004, Smith, 2008, Ballet & Kelchtermans, 2009) and the impact of positive experiences in fortifying motivation and resilience (Morgan et al., 2010).

Women teachers’ values relating to the ethic of care and positive relationships with pupils and colleagues strongly influence their career decisions (Smith, 2007, 2008). Many are strongly resistant to careers in school leadership, seeing this as espousing values underpinned by performativity and marketisation; they therefore opt instead for classroom-based careers in order to work in ways they prize and value (Smith 2007, 2010). O’Connor (2008) found that by making a choice to care for their students, the teachers in her study were able to ‘construct and maintain a sense of professional identity which cohered with their philosophical or humanistic beliefs about the teaching role’ (ibid.: p. 117), and that they were ‘influenced both by their need to sustain positive professional relationships with their students and by their individual beliefs about their role as a teacher’ (ibid. p. 117).

The co-construction of identities and cultures in schools by teachers and students

Social learner theory proposes that inter-group behaviour is always preceded by some social categorisation activity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This is not only for the well established reasons of ‘cognitive simplification’ but also because such categorisation involves the allocation of the self to one of the available groups, with corresponding implications for the search of some social coherence and self enhancement (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social Identity Theory posits that attitudes and behaviours of members of one group towards another are governed by the strength and relevance of the members’ social identity (Haslam et al, 2000).
A key element in the process of co-construction of identity is the negotiation between the participants of meanings, and practices and the constant emergence of identities through this process. This involves participants in constant role taking, role exchange and negotiation of shared symbols and shared meanings. Since the interaction between students and teachers concerns individuals performing institutional roles as Goffman’s account suggested (1991), the negotiation that goes on is between individuals and their institutional role as well as between individuals and between institutional roles. Participants who arrive in a school and participate in its institutional life have already some understanding about the roles which they may take (through previous direct experience, the portrayal of similar roles in the media, relatives’ or friends’ accounts of their experiences in such roles).

These perspectives contribute to understandings of the notions of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998, 2004) that attempt to explain how people create purposeful work-related communities and identities in institutions to which they are attached. These communities develop norms of practice to guide their members which help to clarify who are the core members of a group and who the peripheral members performing liminality. Practice here includes use of language, values demonstrated, norms upheld by a group, as well as more commonplace understandings of particular actions used, and arise from the views held by core members of a group within particular socio-policy contexts.

Nias (1990) asserted that teachers’ professional communities of practice were grounded in ‘wholeness’ between perception of self and occupation: they held a shared sense of belonging because their professional identity was bound up with personal identity.

School-based communities of practice can exist in several forms for teachers in subject areas or as Year groups or across an entire school (Pierce, 2007). They offer viable ways for existing staff and newcomers to integrate into a school’s professional culture. Teacher communities “operate at multiple levels within a school, complementing and reinforcing teachers’ work” and contributing “uniquely to teachers’ knowledge base, professionalism, and ability to act on what they learn” (McLaughlin and Talbert, 2006, p. 5). These communities help build and manage knowledge, create shared language and standards for practice and student outcomes, and sustain aspects of a school’s culture that are vital to
continued, consistent norms and instructional practices. These communities are communities of practice that actively and routinely meet and reflect on teaching practice and collective work and interests in formal and informal ways.

Students as well as teachers develop such communities in schools. Paechter (2007) has shown how students in schools construct practices of being boys and girls, while students in different Year groups or in different subject areas have clear ideas of what it means to construct practice in those social groups. For pupils in classrooms, the process of developing an identity is interrelated to learning. “As learning is mediated through their social identity, this identity is in turn integrated into their cognitive models” (Wortham 2006, p. 21). Eckert (2000) refers to such models as markets of available identities. An example of which might be the ways in which the traditional ‘transmitter/ acquirer’ model of teacher-pupil relationships may be undermined by new technologies and shifting pedagogies.

The identities constructed in specific school cultures are influenced by collective presumptions shaped by students’ and teachers’ beliefs about gender, faith, ethnicity, social class, norms about work-related identity and power. Learning is also influenced by social, historical and cultural factors, so academic and cognitive activities presuppose and create social identities (Wood, 2000). The identities socially constructed in schools become part of our sense of our-selves and our perception of others. Holland & Lave (2001) describe the use of socio-historical categories as ‘enduring struggles’ between and among people, emphasising the contested nature of identity. Wortham (2006) however, considers how wider socio-historical identities impact on social and cognitive identity of the pupils within a classroom situation and how this can lead to ‘silent washing’, the embedding of stereotypes into developing identities, as documented in Osler’s (1997) account of Black teachers lives. This can be seen in the evidence of the persistent under-achievement of some groups of minority ethnic pupils (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000), findings that are relevant to other minority cultural groups, too.

Where these collective identities are about different groups of people they can become institutionalised and coercive (Appiah,1992). Ladson-Billings (2004) highlights the links between teachers’ conceptualisation of the curriculum and frequently inadequate understanding of the constraints pupils face. Many studies highlight the racism that some teachers exhibit (Bhatti, 2004, Bohpal et al., 2009) as well as the cultural differences that play out in classrooms where majority
ethnic teachers interact with minority ethnic pupils. Bordieu (1974) regards this as a ‘symbolic market’ which attributes different values to different identities. Hernandez Sheets (2003) echoes other social justice research when she claims that “we tolerate excuses of poverty and racism rather than focusing on the academic failure our children face daily” (p. 111). Critical Race Theorists continue to argue that government policies are designed to perpetuate the dominance of a white middle class social identity through racist practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995, Gillborn, 2008, Mirza, 2009).

Self-conceptions of identity enter personal and social worlds through social discourses, so accounts that locate identity inside the mind may discount the social ground on which identity is built, maintained, and altered (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Consequently it is essential to understand the ‘social ground’, including the policy contexts, on which identity is built. The “groundwork” for classroom interaction is laid outside the classroom, and outside the school. Many of the structural arrangements that inform it, such as the asymmetrical social relationships of the classroom (one teacher, a number of students of about the same age), the hierarchical relationship between teacher and pupils, the timetable, the subject matter that should be taught/learned, are laid down by powerful social and policy discourses outside the classroom. “The customary spatial and architectural arrangements – rectangular rooms, aligned benches, pupils who face the teacher but not one another, etc. - complement this structural groundwork’ (Vanderstraeten, 2001, p. 273).

The visible nature of this ‘reproductive pedagogy’ (Bernstein, 1975) means that within the target driven climate of performativity students are made aware of expectations on themselves as learners and those imposed on the teacher as professionals (Bushar, 2009). Diligent students may be perceived by teachers as having a positive identity within a performative organisation but a negative identity by their fellow students. Diligent and negligent students pass judgement upon the teachers’ and students’ performances and create localised models of academic practice with their fellow students.

However, “identity formation is not fixed but continuous and often contradictory. It involves negotiating changes and affirming continuities. It is a process that draws on everyday place-based gender identities as much as on ‘fictitious’ representations in the disembodied world of cyberspace” (Madge and O’Connor,
A major aspect of this is the construction of cultures in schools by groups of people to identify what counts as core and peripheral practice for their groups (communities of practice) (Wenger, 1998, 2004). Peripheral practices are constructed in space and time and indicate how participants in different groups in a school may perform liminality, move through it, or remain within it. Wortham, (2006, p. 18) shows that early in the year pupils and teachers are unsure how to identify individuals or what to expect about their academic knowledge and behaviour. Because they lack specific information they must draw on widely circulating models (stereotypes) to interpret each other’s behaviour. As the academic year proceeds more robust local models of identity emerge. Gee (2000) refers to these models as ‘discourses’; presupposed ways of speaking and acting that are associated with certain types of people. Bernstein’s (1971) language codes theory shows how the language people use in everyday conversation both reflects and shapes the assumptions of a certain social group. Furthermore, relationships established within the social group affect the way that group uses language, and the type of speech that is used.

The co-construction of cultures and identities by staff and students is affected by flows of power in schools. Senior leadership teams in schools often restrict democratic participation by students and teachers in shaping institutional practices, but expect them to adhere to policies (Deakin et al., 2004). Students in some Year groups exclude others from taking part in various activities. Staff and students respond to this by developing strategies and skills to effect change (Busher, 2006). Some of these may be the progressive adoption of democratic processes (Carter and Osler, 2000).

On the other hand, democratic participation of students can be fostered through institutional structures such as a school council, although there is a need to focus on real issues to avoid tokenism (Fielding, 2004). A ‘transformative’ approach to the distribution of power in education organisations legitimates stronger student influences on the construction of schooling. Ruddock and Flutter (2004) propose five ‘advocacies’ to achieve this: helping students to develop their identities and individual voices; allowing young people to ‘speak out’ about matters that concern them; recognising that in the task of change, students are the ‘expert witnesses’; policy-makers and schools understanding and respecting the world of young people; preparing young people to be citizens in a democratic society’ (p. 101).
Performing liminality: Teachers co-constructing social reality in their (new) schools

Teachers new to a school come in many forms. Some are novice teachers fresh from initial teacher education whilst others are experienced teachers moving between schools for whatever reason. Some novice teachers are just beginning their first career, others may be mid-life career changers (Pierce, 2007). Lortie (1975) described the development of teacher identity as a process of socialisation, involving school experiences as well as social and cognitive factors. Its construction is an active, not a passive process, involving the agency of the teacher, as well as the actions of others in the school (Glazier, 2009). It is a negotiative process in both the classroom and the school (Pane, 2009). The influence of others on teacher’s sense of identity is crucial, as “interpersonal worlds are organised around distinct sets of role relationships: teachers with students, teachers with other teachers, teachers with parents and with their line managers” (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 20).

Liminality helps explain how the rite of passage known as beginning teaching involves the suspension, even temporary loss, of professional identity (Pierce, 2007). This same rite of passage applies to new but experienced entrants to a school. In this form, liminality is a dramatic cultural phase where the new member gradually develops a more sophisticated understanding of a new institution in an effort to gain accepted membership of it. It is a phase of cultural initiation, “which has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (Turner 1969, p. 94–95 in Pierce, 2007). During this liminal stage, new members of an institution are caught between the intense engagement with students in classrooms, the muted compliance tacitly expected of newcomers by other adults in the new school, and a lack of knowledge about how the system in the new school works. It is a disconcerting phase, that challenges participants’ work related senses of identity. Given the complexity of these role relationships, new teachers inevitably experience a period of identity adjustment, and their ability to manage this transition may determine their wider resilience; difficulties in transition may be a
factor contributing to the high drop-out rate of early career teachers (Day & Gu, 2008). The perceived gap between notions of teaching developed in teacher education institutions and the ‘real world’ of teaching may be a particular challenge (Pinto & Monteiro, 2002), whilst McCormack & Gore (2008) suggest that transition from training to teaching requires finding “...a professional place within the culture of the school”. New teachers must undertake complex behavioural and conceptual professional learning in order to interpret and interact within the context in which they find themselves (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002). This transition from training or previous school requires active participation in “…the practices of social communities and the construction of identities in relation to these communities” (Wenger 1998, p. 4). Teachers are shifting their identity and behaviour constantly, as they are “…caught up in a variety of differing encounters, each of which may call for different forms of appropriate behaviour” (Giddens 1991, p.190). Giddens sees identity as not just fluid, but fragile, being “created and continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day to day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions” (Giddens and Pierson, 1998, p.186).

**New teachers’ agency and the co-construction of work-related identities**

Successful established teachers have a professional identity for which they are respected and recognised by their students, peers and community for their knowledge, pedagogy competency and contribution to their school and education (McCormack & Gore, 2008). However, early career teachers are often subjected to a range of practices and relationships imbued with techniques of power that can affect their actions, beliefs and sense of themselves. Developing a socially recognised identity as a ‘proper’ teacher constitutes a highly valued working condition for any beginning teacher, so criticism and confusion caused by school micro-politics can increase feelings of vulnerability and lower self esteem considerably (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002 cited ibid 2008). Although new teachers’ relationships with colleagues can enable them to understand the dominant school and community culture and values, many report feelings of exclusion, isolation and negativity (McCormack & Gore 2008, p. 6). Socialisation into a school’s culture then becomes an interpretative and interactive
process between the teachers and the new context of school as an organisation (Jurasaite-Harbison, 2009). Wilson and Demetriou (2007) discuss the various strategies that teachers new to a school develop to enhance their learning about the school in order to become accepted members of the school community. Korthagen (2004) suggests that identity is dependent on a person's feelings about a job and how this allows them to be part of a profession. The theoretical foundations and the related research suggest that individuals will thrive in environments that support their specific preferences (Bretz & Judge, 1994). There is an emotional response to the capacity to conform to the school norms in the desire for a sense of belonging. How the 'self' is reflected in a new community of practice and the relationships one can build with colleagues and pupils are only adopted without struggle if they are reaffirming of personal values and beliefs.

**Discussion of possible methodological approach**

The complex social dynamics outlined here suggest a social interactionist perspective (Mead, 1934) would be most effective in providing an understanding of how teacher identity is co-constructed in particular social and policy contexts, adopting the sociolinguistic view of identity as, ‘dynamic, inter-subjective, constructed moment by processes, intentions moment through social interaction, and, at the same time, subject to existing ideologies and perceived social constraints’ (Mayes, 2010, p.195).

To investigate more incisively the interactive processes between participants in particular policy and social contexts critical incidents will be chosen in addition to a focus on the negotiations of everyday life in schools. These critical incidents will be the entry to a school of teachers new to it, whether they are novice teachers or experienced teachers.

Such a study requires in depth knowledge of the conditions within which participants interact as well as the trust of the participants towards the researchers. So we shall adopt an ethnographic approach and a series of case studies.

Because of the nature of the project it will collect sensitive data which participants are likely to feel uncomfortable to share. Guaranteeing confidentiality and the anonymity of participants is a paramount obligation for this study. Furthermore we will seek students’ and parents’ informed consent for conducting interviews with
students and a letter will be sent out to parents outlining the aims and methods of the study.

The study will investigate:

- the perspectives of all interacting parties (teachers and students) of how they interact with each other, i.e. teachers interacting with teachers (of varying levels of formal status in a school) and other staff as well as teachers interacting with students.

- a number of ongoing and evolving micro-interactions: the interaction and negotiation of understandings of work-related roles, of interpretations of the school's rules and rituals, of the expectations and the involvement of individuals and groups with an interest in the interaction between students and teachers (‘stakeholders’).

- ‘role exchange’ and the viewing of a situation from the perspective of the ‘other’ involving also the viewing of the ‘self’ from the same perspective. The understanding of ‘self’ and the identity is shaped through this ‘egocentric empathy’ (Kakos, 2008).

- the ‘asymmetically contingent’ nature (Hargreaves, 1972) of the interaction between students and teachers and the role of social power in the formation of their roles. In these interactive processes power is not simply applied but is negotiated between the different parties.

- how the external and internal social and policy contexts of these negotiations are perceived by the participants to impinge on them on the co-constructions of identity that emerge through them

- notions of egocentric empathy, power, external conditions (rules, rituals, policies etc), and expectations (participants' expectations from themselves and from the others).

**Data Collection**

The study will use individual semi-structured individual interviews with participants to allow them to project their own views of the discourses and the identities which are emerging through their interactions with each other. This includes the investigation of participants’ perceptions of each other’s identity and the description of the ‘self’ through the identity of others (egocentric empathy).
Interviews with the same teachers and students will be conducted through a period of time in order to capture developments in the emergence of identity and alterations associated with time, experience and the changing environment in which participants operate.

To help teachers develop their thinking about the construction of identity they will be invited to construct an illustrated diary (physically or electronically) about key incidents in their lives. They will also be invited to let researchers observe some of their interactions in classrooms, school public spaces, and staff rooms, to help researchers better understand the stories they tell about their construction of work-related identity.

We will also collect observational data. The aim of such observations is twofold: to draw a picture of the settings and processes within which teachers and students interact and the ways that identities are performed within the context of interaction with each other; to allow researchers to develop an ‘insider’s view’ of the conditions and processes that teachers and students refer to in their interviews and facilitate the discussion and the researchers’ understanding. Some of this information will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with participants who are in position to observe the interaction between students and teachers such as teaching assistants and senior staff and governors. Some will be gathered through classroom observations using semi-structured methods while other school space observations, monitoring the out-of-classroom interaction between teachers and students (breaks, outings, assemblies), will use unstructured approaches recorded in field notes.

**Data Analysis**

The adoption of an interactionist approach in this study implies also that participants should direct the analysis of the evidence and that we should remain aware about the effect that the researchers’ own presence and agenda has in the interaction and the co-construction that it is studied.

The need for a systematic method for analysis of complicated data suggests the use of an approach similar to the model of analysis that was developed for a similar earlier study (Table 1). For the purposes of the analysis, the researchers’ are considered as participants and notes that are kept during the data collection stage will be analysed systematically. All evidence will be coded and themes will
be drawn through a ‘scanning process’ in which the researchers will be moving forwards and backwards between the raw evidence and the developing analysis (Ebbut, 1987).
Power(P) – Empathy(E) – Expectations(EX) – External Conditions (EC)

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#### Teachers’ interviews with observers

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#### Other

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### Other Evidence

- Teachers’ interviews
- Students’ interviews
- Interviews with observers

#### Overarching Themes

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References


ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-23-1281. Swindon: ESRC


