The Teacher’s Journey: How Personal Conceptions of “Actual Self” and “Ideal Self” as a Teacher Change During Initial Teacher Training and In Early Years of Teaching

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the ways in which Beginning Teachers experienced changes in their individual self-concept as a teacher, also how their ideas about actual and ideal (possible) selves as a teacher, changed during a one-year course of teacher training (PGCE) and later when in post as newly qualified teachers. A 4 - stage, longitudinal study was designed to collect data at each stage using semi-structured interviews. Analysis indicates that Beginning Teachers formulate Actual and Ideal possible selves and that these two concepts evolve independently before eventually converging on a common concern with managing school situations day by day. Concerns with teacher actions, not personal characteristics, dominate the developmental process.

Keywords: Self-Concept, Possible Selves, Ideal Self, Actual Self, Self-Regulation, Teacher identity, Professional socialisation

HIGHLIGHTS

- Beginning Teachers formulate Actual and Ideal Possible Selves as Teachers
- The two concepts follow separate arcs of development over time
- Ideal possible selves focus on teacher action not teacher personality
- Actual possible selves are shaped early by context but consolidated later by experience
- The two concepts converge on common concerns with managing situations day by day

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the different ways in which a group of Beginning Teachers (BT’s) expressed ideas about changes in their individual self-concept as a teacher from the start of their course through to their early years in post as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQT’s). Individuals described their actual and ideal teacher selves and the evolving differences and similarities between these two kinds of possible selves.

Modern understandings about the self and the body view these as projects or endeavours that are never finished or complete, a kind of perpetual work-in-progress, (Lupton, 1998, p.92). This inherent indeterminacy, concerning the nature of the self, fits well with post-modern ideas about the problematic nature of knowledge in general (Kvale, 1992, p.21). The idea of a ‘life course’ as a trajectory, an arc through space and time, chimes with Demo’s (1992) measurement metaphor for self-concept as a “moving baseline with fluctuations across situations…and life stages” (Demo, 1992, p.304). This view of self accords with suggestions that individual change should be thought of, and researched, as “a continuous process of development” rather than a series of discrete increments (Willett and Singer, 1989, p. 428), (italics in
original) and that personal change is to be understood as “a transition or series of transitions between one
social condition and another” (Gould and Kolb, 1964, p.538). Research in the last twenty years or so, has
confirmed the self as something that is “dynamic – as active, forceful, and capable of change” (Markus and
Wurf, 1987, p.299), and that the self is closely connected with moral practices involving agency and
responsibility (Harré, 1987, p.41). Self-concept, therefore, is claimed to have “cognitive, perceptual,
affective and evaluative facets” (Hoge and Renzulli, 1993, p.449) and because it is both stable and dynamic,
and combines structural and process properties (Demo, 1992, p.304), it is a complex idea. Contemporary		theorizing, therefore, posits a dynamic, relational, developmental approach to self, suggesting that it exists as
a “particular kind of reflective, interpretive understanding – an understanding that is always embodied
and unfolding within an historical, sociocultural tradition of living (a life-world)” (Martin and Sugarman, 2001,
p.104).

The complex, reflexive, and interpretive nature of self-concept (within a life world) is represented clearly by
Markus and Nurius (1986) who suggest there are several ‘generic’ modes or forms of self-concept called
possible selves, “possible selves represent individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would
like to become, and what they fear becoming” (Markus and Nurius, 1986, p.954). Positive and negative
images of self can act as incentives for action; for example, the ‘feared future self’ (perhaps as a teacher
failing to cope with difficult groups of students) can stimulate and guide current action e.g. learning how to
teach student behaviour. Positive possible selves that are offset or balanced by a countervailing possible
self within the same domain e.g. succeeding and/or failing to become a teacher, are said to provide “maximal
motivational effectiveness” (Oyserman and Markus, 1990, p.112), therefore, visualising the positive and
the negative possible selves together appears to create stronger incentives for action. Possible selves link
motivation theory with learning theory as a way of explaining current behaviours, and, as a consequence,
could be thought of as comprising a behavioural ‘blue print for action’ (Robinson and Davis 2001, in Kerka,
2003). The combination of positive and negative possible selves linked with motivation and learning theory
provides a reasonable basis for supposing that the visualisation of the future self influences the operation of
the current or actual self in a reciprocal relationship (Markus and Nurius, 1986 p.957). If this conjecture is
correct, possible selves should play a central, systemic role in the self-regulation (SR) of self-concept on a
day-to-day basis and may be used as a way to explore teacher’s ongoing thinking and practice about the self
as teacher whilst they are in training, and afterwards when they are in post as a NQT. The notion of self-
concept behaving as a ‘moving base-line’ having structural and processual properties, (Demo, 1992, p.304),
offers a way to draw together, and engage with, a number of important ideas concerning the development of
teachers’ self-concept over time. For example, do teachers in training have changing conceptions of actual

and ideal self as a teacher and can these changes be tracked and documented? Do teachers use self-schemas
and self-regulatory strategies as described by Garcia and Pintrich (1994) in (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1994,
p. 135).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Joining a full time course of teacher training can be interpreted as a case of self-regulated behavior
involving some form of interplay between actual and ideal selves. To investigate this interaction, a 4-stage
longitudinal study followed a group of people joining a one-year full time Post Graduate Certificate in
Education (PGCE) course, tracking changes in actual and ideal teacher self through the training phase and
into their early Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) years.

The overall research question for the empirical study was:

How are actual and possible selves involved in the development of self-concept as a teacher? What role
does self-regulation play in the process?

Particular questions for investigation included:

How is the Ideal Teacher concept formulated and described by the Beginning Teacher (BT) as a particular
form of Possible Self?

Do BT’s have a ‘feared’ possible self as teacher concept?
What happens to the Ideal Teacher concept over the lifetime of the PGCE course, does it stay the same or does it change?

How are perceived differences (the gap) between actual and ideal self as a teacher expressed and evaluated over the course of the PGCE?

How is the claim to be a teacher, i.e. the BT’s identity as a teacher, formulated and expressed at the start of the PGCE course, and what happens to it subsequently over the lifetime of the course, does it stay the same or does it change?

**METHOD**

The research approach was qualitative in nature. To provide credibility and validity, the study involved adults on a one-year teacher training course, and followed a single cohort from the start of the course, joining as a BT through to conclusion, in post, appointed as an NQT, (Calderhead and Robson, 1991), (McNally, Cope, Inglis and Stranach, 1994). To capture the essence of ‘change’ and ‘development’ in the context of BTs learning their craft, the research was planned as a longitudinal study of at least a year, carried out in ‘real time’, tracking a ‘moving base-line’ of experience associated with self-concept as a teacher, using repeated measures (Demo, 1992), (Huberman, 1989). This research made no claims concerning the relationship between the development of identity as a teacher and pupil learning or other behaviours, therefore only self-report data on teaching experience would be gathered and practical observations would not feature in the study. The choice of research and interview questions reflected a meta-interpretive framework based on the possible selves literature and a conceptual framework in which self-concept is theorised as having systemic properties (Smith, 2004; 2013).

**Participants**

A group of 19 Beginning Teachers was recruited during the induction week of a one year full-time PGCE (Secondary). See table 1 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numbers starting the study</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Mean Age</th>
<th>Prior Teaching Experience?</th>
<th>Numbers completing all 4 stages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>23 - 44</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10 Yes 4 No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27 - 32</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2 Yes 3 No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12 Yes 7 No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each respondent was given a pseudonym (Annie, Betty, Charlotte, David, Edward, Frank, Georgina, Harriet, Indiana, Julia, Kay, Louise, Mary, Norman, Olivia, Patricia, Queen, Rose, Sue) and an ID number (1 – 19) to facilitate coding and to protect their real identity.

**Research Design**

The PGCE course chosen for the study lasted one academic year and involved two separate placements for teaching practice along with attendance for lectures and tutorials. The data collection plan was to track a sample of BTs for the duration of the course and to conduct semi structured interviews with the sample at the four significant transition points A, B, C and D shown below in Table 2. Table 2 shows a schematic outline of the course design and the data collection points A to D.
Table 2: Schematic outline of the course design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period 1</th>
<th>Period 2</th>
<th>Period 3</th>
<th>Period 4</th>
<th>Period 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Induction,</td>
<td>Training &amp;</td>
<td>Training &amp;</td>
<td>Study &amp;</td>
<td>First Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation &amp; Pupil Teaching</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Course work</td>
<td>Appointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadowing Experience</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>for the end</td>
<td>as NQT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities School 1</td>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>School 2</td>
<td>of the course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A The period before actual teaching practice begins. The BT is following a process of lesson observation and shadowing, attending lectures and tutorials. The research focus here is on the experience of joining the course and preparing to teach, and the meaning this has for the BT.

B The period between the first and second teaching practice placement; the focus here is on the experience of teaching, for the first time, and the meaning of this experience for the BT.

C The period after the end of the second teaching practice placement and the start of the consolidation phase of completing assignments and records of achievement. The focus here is on the experience of teaching on a regular basis and the meaning this has for the BT.

D The period after the end of the course, the NQT is in post and teaching as a qualified professional. The focus is on the experience of teaching full time as an employed member of a school or college.

The interview history of the participants in the study is shown below in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary attendance details of the sample for the longitudinal study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of interviews at each stage</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 people (Betty, Kay, Louise, Norman, Olivia and Patricia) completed all 4 stages. Overall, 48 interviews were completed.

Measures

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews using open and closed questions and rating scales. The research/interview questions probed ideas about ideal and actual selves as a teacher and reflected the meta-interpretive framework based on the possible selves literature, also a conceptual framework in which self-concept is theorised as having systemic properties (Smith, 2004, p.56), (Smith, 2013, in press).
Data analysis

Analysis of the interviews utilised an inductive approach to coding and category formation during which an open mind was kept about the emerging issues (Butt and Raymond, 1989). The 48 interview transcripts were analysed using NVIVO Data Analysis Software. The coding and analysis procedures utilised three types of coding category as proposed by Richards (2005, p.88).

1. **Descriptive codes** for attributes e.g. age, gender, and ratings. An Attribute Table was created to record details of each Case, a case being one respondent.

2. **Topic codes** for allocating whole passages of text to a single topic, e.g. ideal teacher self, actual teacher self.

3. **Analytical codes** for concepts identified in the text arising out of the researchers’ interpretation and reflection on meaning.

Overall, the coding procedures were designed to move stepwise from unsorted data, through topic coding, towards the development of more refined categories, themes and concepts e.g. from initial, open coding, through to the emergence of theoretical concepts from saturated categories and themes (Hahn, 2008, p.6).

Closed questions and rating scales were also used in the research to explore aspects of personal change and their perceived importance to the individual concerned; however, these have not been used for this paper.

Sampling Issues

The study began with 19 participants committed to undertaking 4 interviews. During the research, a number of participants dropped out from the study altogether whilst some missed a stage(s). The notified reasons for drop out and intermittent appearances varied e.g. pregnancy, illness, pressure of work, and leaving the PGCE course. Appointments for interview were made by email and telephone. At stage 2, when it became clear that seven respondents were ‘missing’, a decision had to be made whether or not to prolong the stage whilst attempts were made to contact the ‘missing’ participants, and/or, to replace them. Prolonging the stage was not an option because the design dictated that interviews were conducted in the ‘window’ between placements. Bringing in new respondents was a possibility, however, at the time it was decided there would be a significant mismatch between their subsequent developmental ‘history’ and the others in the study.

FINDINGS

The formulation of **actual and ideal self as teacher** concepts was the phenomenon under investigation and these concepts developed in the following ways.

**Stage 1: The Beginning of the PGCE**

In the first week of joining the PGCE course, the profile of the **actual teacher self** resembled a ‘checklist’ of competences e.g. establish and keep control in class, practise differentiation, and encourage participation. Generally, however, the BTs did not yet know how to make these things happen, they knew *what* but they didn’t know *how*. Just by being on the PGCE, most BTs were ‘feeling more like a teacher every day’ and so self-concept as a teacher had started a process of transition. There were exceptions to this feeling of transition e.g. Louise already thought of herself as a teacher based on extensive knowledge and experience of teaching and training; Patricia reasoned that if she was employed as a teacher then she *was* a teacher. No one, however, used qualifications, subject knowledge, inspirational qualities or personality, in isolation, to substantiate the actual self as a teacher.

In contrast, the **ideal teacher self** was thought about in two particular ways; the *intensional form* described what the ideal teacher would do, whereas, the *extensional form* described what the ideal teacher was like as a person. The intensional form was the most prevalent way of talking about the Ideal Teacher; only three described their ideal teacher self, in extensional terms, as inspirational, caring, or charismatic.
Two BTs had developed a feared or negative possible self (Oyserman and Markus, 1990, p.112). They had encountered teachers they described as ‘shouters’ who were macho and authoritarian in style, or, ‘resigned’ who had become cynical, lazy and bitter:

‘I would dread to become a real authoritarian teacher, for some of them authority is everything, some teachers seem to just like shouting, they can't be enjoying it’ (Sue, Stage 1).

“I dread becoming bitter, within a couple of days of being in school I heard teachers referring to individual kids as loonies they're just crazy nuts and that really scares me, I don't ever want to use that terminology I want to know what's the matter with them” (Rose, Stage 1)

These BTs feared becoming like the ‘shouters’ and the ‘resigned’ and said they would leave teaching if they felt that was starting to happen.

The decision to join the PGCE was the beginning of a complex process of initiating and managing change. For most of the BTs the change process involved giving up existing, and sometimes well-paid, jobs, finding childcare, moving home and travelling across country. In other respects e.g. maintaining relationships, interests and ambitions, aspects of the Life World remained unchanged.

**Stage 2: After the First Teaching Placement**

After the completion of their first teaching placement, respondents were asked again about their actual self as teacher concept, in particular (i) how they compared to the particular teachers they had worked with, and (ii) whether felt like ‘insiders’ or ‘outsiders’ in relation the whole teaching profession?

(i) All BTs reported that they were becoming more like the other teachers they encountered in terms of developing practical classroom management skills; they were starting to understand the ‘how’ of teaching in terms of getting consistent results. Despite this, they remained different from their colleagues because they lacked long-term experience. ‘Experience’ had positive and negative connotations for BTs, they knew that long teaching experience was valuable, but they recognised that it could also bring about ‘mental fatigue’; for example, BTs felt differentiated and alienated from long serving teachers who appeared to have ‘given up’ on the job and the children. These were the ‘resigned’ teachers identified earlier in Stage 1:

“I am not like the teachers who sit around and moan about the kids all of the time. The staff room in my last school, I stopped going in there in the end because I thought it was like a place where you go to die or something, watching the clock, and when is the bell going to go.” (Patricia, Stage 2)

Long service as a teacher also meant being a long time away from outside ‘non-teaching’ work; in contrast, BTs could bring current and relevant experience from a wide range of business backgrounds to their teaching contexts. Long term teaching experience, therefore, was a positive differentiator only when it was coupled with positive professional attitudes and superior expertise as a teacher.

(ii) Irrespective of skills and experience, feeling like an insider or outsider to the teaching profession also depended heavily on context e.g. the way other teachers treated the BTs. As the context changed, the sense of being an insider/outside changed too; Louise definitely felt like an insider because of her contribution to the department, whereas Olivia and Sue now felt like outsiders because of how they were received at the new school placement:

“I think an outsider; I think I do now because I am starting at the new school, I mean previously at my last school I was made to feel very welcome in just things like having my own desk, having a physical space, actually makes you feel part of it, sort of spiritually, then you feel that you belong to a certain extent” (Olivia, Stage 2).

Overall, BTs felt ‘included’ where schools structured or engineered the environment to accommodate new staff; for example by providing a personal desk and storage space and by including BTs in events and processes.
The intensional form of the ideal self as teacher concept had changed too, becoming more practice based, more practical, idiosyncratic, radical and independent in action. For example, the ideal teacher self could deploy a range of skills, decide independently which approach to take and knew when and how to take ‘risks’ during teaching sessions. In contrast, the extensional form of the ideal self remained a relatively insignificant component of self-concept as a teacher.

At stage 2, the gap between actual and ideal self as teacher was dynamic and capable of wide fluctuations:

“It's definitely closing but it's also oscillating, it changes on circumstance” (Norman, Stage 2).

Norman defined his ideal teacher as someone who is ‘always thinking about change and improvement’; consequently the gap fluctuated in line with his relative success in implementing new techniques in the classroom.

The gap was more than just a by-product of the changes in actual and ideal self, it had acquired a definite function of its own; it served as a motivator, a skills checklist for target setting, and contributed ideas to aid reflective practice; in other words, the gap had effectively become a vehicle for self-regulation. When BTs thought about the gap between current and ideal self (as a teacher), they not only visualised the differences as a ‘check list’ for improvement and change, they often specified the criteria that would tell them when they had achieved their targets. Part of Kay’s ideal self, for example, included always having ‘interesting lessons and making it fun’; something she quickly realised was beyond her ability at the early stages in her first school placement.

To complement the process of target setting, BTs were also using reflective logs and diaries to monitor and evaluate their own progress; for some BTs this process of incorporating target actions and behaviours into practice had started to work very well:

“I’m less conscious of trying to match up to the criteria and when I came back to rewrite my reflective record I had to remind myself of what all those things were, whereas at the beginning it was like a tick box, trying to be all of those things. I would hope at this stage you wouldn't have to think about it consciously” (Patricia, Stage 2).

Patricia identified very strongly with her pupils and learners, more so than with other teachers generally; her ideal teacher self was similar to close friends and colleagues who were teachers, but different from teachers at her school. The use of the ideal self as part of a motivating strategy worked well for Patricia as she became more proficient as a teacher and internalised skills and routines.

Overall, most of the BT’s reported that the gap between actual and ideal self at stage 2 was exciting, stimulating and acted as a spur for further action, for example, Norman envisioned the gap as a kind of ‘quest’ or ‘odyssey’ of discovery:

“I hope I never get there, in some ways, if I did get there then my ideas will change more I can't ever see myself getting to the stage where oh yes and I'm the ideal teacher, if you're the ideal teacher you never stop thinking about how you can improve, I think you’re always going to keep moving,” (Norman, Stage 2).

By Stage 2, the PGCE course process had started to ‘shape’ BTs behaviour by developing their teaching skills within the first school placement. As BTs engaged in the everyday process of living as a teacher, the Ideal Teacher construct became more focused on practical skills and competences; they noticed how other teachers behaved and were able to draw similarities and differences to their own situation. They could see how their practical skills could be developed rapidly in the short run (similarities with other teachers), but realised the need for long experience of teaching before they could identify fully with their peers (the differences). The way BTs were treated by peers and school managers affected their sense of being insiders or outsiders, e.g. their actual self as a teacher. Short run context was most critical at this point; they felt ‘insiders’ with close colleagues and department staff because these people made concrete efforts to integrate them into the every day life of the school; in contrast, they felt like ‘outsiders’ to the wider community of teachers because of the impersonal nature of the professional relationships. The way in which the gap between actual and ideal self was described and used suggests that the ‘gap’ construct linked the actual and
ideal self as teacher constructs flexibly, e.g. closing as some skills were mastered and widening when disappointment or failure was encountered.

**Stage 3: After the Second Teaching Placement**

Stage 3 took place after the second teaching placement towards the end of the PGCE one-year course. The 8 BTs interviewed were completing course work and getting ready to exit the course, some had secured a full time post to start in the coming September, others had not. This section presents a series of ‘mini case studies’ exploring BT’s perceptions of their position in the transition process.

The **actual self as a teacher** concept was explored using two contrasting questions. The first was relatively closed: At this moment, do you feel as if you are a ‘regular teacher’ now? The second was more open in nature: What kind of teacher would you say you are now? The answers suggested that BTs were making up their own minds about their status as a ‘teacher’ e.g. Betty was leaving teaching, Indiana, Louise and Norman had made the decision ‘I am a teacher’, however, Patricia, Frank, Olivia and Kay remained ‘in transition’. The three decision groups were as follows:

(i) **I am not a teacher**: Betty had decided to return to her previous career in social care work. Betty now felt like an outsider, like someone ‘looking in’ and talked about ‘using teaching’ rather than ‘being a teacher’. Betty acknowledged that she had learned a great deal from the course in terms of teaching techniques, but other kinds of change had eluded her:

“I was sort of expecting to have more of a real kind of vigorous passion for teaching, but I don't really have that” (Betty, Stage 3).

Betty attributed this failure to develop a passion for teaching and an identity as a teacher to her deep distaste for the bureaucracy and the institutionalised nature of schools and teaching. She had felt pressured (to become a teacher) all the way through the PGCE and had finally decided to ‘use’ the teaching qualification but not as a teacher:

“I think there is a lot of pressure once you start on the course, to be hurled into a whole career in teaching, it's very difficult to step outside that, that's what I found, and I think well you know, it's not the be all and end all, there are other ways you can use this qualification you don't have to go in and automatically start teaching in the classroom” (Betty, Stage 3)

Although Betty had resisted that pressure, for the remaining BTs, their life-path continued on towards a career within teaching.

(ii) **I am a Teacher**: These BTs had decided they were ‘now a teacher’; their identity had crystallised and their views were presented as coming from ‘inside’ the profession. They could describe clearly what kind of teacher they were and what they wanted for themselves, from their students, and from the system. They were now creating their own context e.g. Indiana was now more ambitious, not just for himself, but also for the development of the department, for example putting on a school play.

Louise definitely saw herself as a teacher, an insider, as someone self-reliant who enjoyed the autonomy that came with the job and intended to act autonomously in future. Louise could draw on her long experience of teaching and training and felt that she could have done the job without the PGCE. Louise drew constantly on her experience of teaching adults and this coloured her views about the way to treat all learners, including children. Louise had constantly argued and differed with her PGCE tutors over her approach to teaching; the ‘teacher – trainer’ dichotomy had played a large part in this conflict of opinions.

Norman had simply decided that the transition period was over and he was now a teacher:

“Its just a choice you make in your head, I am now clear that I am a teacher.” (Norman, Stage 3).
(iii) Not yet a Teacher? In contrast to the above, straightforward, declarations of identity status, Patricia, Frank, Olivia and Kay still harboured doubts and fears about their ability. In terms of their insider/outside status they still looked outside of the world of teachers to other groups with which they could associate themselves professionally.

Patricia remained ambivalent about the world of teachers and teaching, she was in the world of teaching but seemingly not of that world. Patricia felt like a teacher, was certain she could teach, but she still identified more with the students than with other teachers. Patricia rejected the idea of a teaching ‘community’ and referred to teaching as ‘a job’; she still harboured fears about becoming ‘institutionalised’ becoming just like other teachers, like the ones she met at the ‘school disco’. Patricia had a more fluid and flexible view of the actual self as a teacher, than that presented above by other BTs such as Louise and Norman.

Frank shared Betty and Patricia’s distaste for the process of ‘institutionalisation’ that affected people who’d been in the profession (teaching) for a long time; he felt they became ‘regular’ teachers through force of habit and declared that he hadn’t been in teaching long enough for that to happen. Frank still felt on the ‘outside’, he thought about all the other things he could do, and this encouraged him to think about himself as a member of many groups, not just teaching and teachers:

“I’ve definitely got things in common with teachers in general, quite a lot of things in common, so I'd say generally I would count myself in that group but then I count myself in lots of groups, of designers of artists photographers of people interested in computers and I think teaching is another aspect which I count myself as part of” (Frank, Stage 3)

Olivia knew how to teach but felt that she was almost, but not quite yet, a teacher because of her age and her acknowledged inconsistent approach to different kinds of classes:

“I’m still perceived as quite young by the pupils and younger than I am, so I think they think they can get away with things and I don't know how to deal with that sometimes, still a bit unconfident, but it depends on the class as well, I am quite different depending on the children I've got, so I suppose I’m maybe inconsistent.” (Olivia, Stage 3).

Although Olivia felt like a teacher, she identified more with the ‘scared’ NQTs, who were ‘on their own’, rather than the other more established teachers she met in the staff room. Olivia had visions of creating a democratic and ‘safe’ learning environment for her pupils and in that sense had sophisticated and ambitious aims about teaching and learning; however, because she felt unable to achieve those aims she had not fully internalised the idea that she was now a teacher.

Kay still felt that she needed a much longer experience of teaching before she could take on the ‘mantle’ of teacher and make the claim with inner authority. There was a clear distinction between what she said publicly and what she felt about her self, as a teacher.

I: so if you met a stranger and they asked you what do you do, what would you tell them?
R: Teacher,
I: and would that feel okay?
R: No, that would be a little bit misleading; it is true but not quite fully true.”

(Interview Excerpt), (Kay, Stage 3)

Kay’s identity, as a teacher, remained ‘context bound’ in such a way that if the context changed then so did the identity.

Whilst the Actual Self as Teacher concept was still capable of differentiating between the BT’s, the Ideal Self as Teacher concept had achieved a unified form across the group. The ideal teacher profile was now more concerned with how things were done and the concept of professionalism. The extensional form had disappeared from the scene and the ideal teacher concept was solely intensional in form. The ideal teacher profile now reflected three particular, though related, ways of thinking about the life and work of a teacher; the values and approaches underpinning practice; the persona or role–like qualities of teachers and teaching; finally, wider issues about lifestyle and how one lived one’s life as a teacher.

(1) Values: The ideal teacher considered fairness, consistency, routine and discipline as the ‘roots’ of good practice; these values shaped and informed the way the ideal teacher approached classroom interactions.
(2) **Professional Role**: The ideal teacher came to class prepared to teach a good lesson and knew exactly what had to be done, what routines and systems needed to be in place for this to happen. The ideal teacher would know everything about her class, the students, their names, how they react together, and so the ideal teacher was able to manage the classroom situation on the basis of a sound understanding and knowledge of all the key variables.

(3) **Life style**: The ideal teacher was also not just in the school, the ideal teacher was now a part of the school, involved in the whole life of the school, the school was an integral part of the ideal teacher’s lifestyle. The ideal teacher also knew that, as a part of that lifestyle, they would change and develop and therefore accepted the idea of continuous personal growth.

The defining quality of the ideal teacher profile at Stage 3 was ‘professional life style’ representing a rounded and holistic vision of the ideal teacher.

The gap between the ideal self and actual self as a teacher at stage 3 continued oscillating because different skills and abilities were developing differentially. The ‘see-saw’ phenomenon, in which the gap closed then opened, was particularly associated with a ‘honeymoon’ effect e.g. at the start of the second placement BTs felt as if they were doing well and making progress, then, as the term progressed, BTs came under increasing pressure from the PGCE workload and from the school itself e.g. preparation, marking, attending meetings. The workload built up rapidly and so BTs often had to adopt a ‘survival mode’ of operation, just getting by the best they could.

“I found the short period after the honeymoon period where I thought to myself ‘things seem to be getting away from me here’ I just don't know quite where to begin to put it all back, but as the year has gone on, and especially as I have spent three weeks now in a school where I know I'm going to be working, I'd see the gap closing” (Indiana, Stage 3).

Most of the BTs were starting to experience great satisfaction when teaching performance was good and they got a glimpse of what successful teaching was all about. However, this often increased the anxiety and the depression when the teaching didn’t go so well and attention had to be switched back to polishing the basics. Patricia was very aware of the ways in which she (self) regulated her feelings and emotions about her pupils when she spoke about ‘allowing’ herself to start liking the pupils more because she knew she was going to be with them for a much longer period of time as their ‘proper’ teacher:

“I've noticed already that I like these kids more than I like any of the other kids in any other school, and that's not favouritism I think it is because I have allowed myself to, because I know that I'm going to be with them, and I just didn't want to get attached to the other ones” (Patricia, Stage 3).

At stage 3, all 8 BTs recognised improvements in their teaching arising out of the extended practice effect, there was also increased confidence because a number of BTs had been offered jobs with the school and knew they would be teaching the students in the future. Paradoxically, as the improvements set in, other frustrations would also arise because BTs couldn’t (were not allowed to) exercise their full autonomy and this frustration would not resolve itself until the BTs were in post.

Overall the BTs awareness and understanding of the dynamic interplay between the actual and ideal self as a teacher was more advanced, complex, and clearly expressed and elaborated at this point, than at the equivalent time in Stage 2.

**Stage 4: In Post as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs)**

At Stage 4, the 9 respondents interviewed talked about four kinds of knowledge they now possessed about themselves as teachers:

- **Metacognitive knowledge** about teachers and teaching, what they do as teachers and why they do it
- Understandings and self-schemas about themselves as teachers
- **Self-regulatory practices** as a teacher, and in life generally
- **Reflections about education and teaching** and more broadly about the self
This analysis draws on ideas about the role of self-schemas and self-regulatory strategies as used by Garcia and Pintrich (1994) in (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1994, Ch. 6).

**Actual Self as Teacher** The NQTs talked about their interest in the teaching process and in particular the importance of managing student relationships proactively e.g. creating a dialogical approach that avoided confrontation and allowed students to learn to like their teachers. They accepted the importance of engaging with the complex administrative systems and processes that underpinned the whole life of the school. Their self-schemas as teachers reflected a calmer more confident self, more in control of their lives. This emotional stability stemmed from knowing they could actually do the job, through gaining respect and self-respect in relation to their peers, and from the knowledge that they were building a more secure and stable future for themselves. They talked more explicitly about the kinds of self-regulatory strategies they used to control their lives and to maintain a positive possible sense of self. Finally, all of the NQTs could identify a signature characteristic that was typical of their teaching persona.

**Ideal Self as Teacher** The ideal self as teacher profile portrayed a sense of someone who was good at the job but had to work very hard to stay on top of the situation. The ideal teacher was very experienced and worked expertly in class; decision making was fast and her judgement sound, the ideal teacher knew how to handle people, how to deal with mistakes, how to react to kids who tried or didn’t try, she understood what to praise and when. Classes ran smoothly. The ideal teacher kept the subject material fresh and interesting by introducing new ideas and also by making connections between everyday life and the curriculum. Children enjoyed these lessons. The ideal teacher self had full control, managed her classroom presentation very carefully and presented a balanced mixture of discipline and humour, not too soft, not too scary. This teacher relied on good preparation and sound organisation to deliver lessons that were going to be interesting for the pupils; the ideal teacher was reliable in meeting deadlines and knew how to make things happen in class and in the school. Even when hard pressed and overloaded, the ideal teacher self was tough and resilient and had developed self-confidence and a range of coping strategies; she was still able to manage and succeed when pushed and stretched to the limit.

Overall, the defining quality of the Stage 4 ideal teacher self was consistent delivery; this teacher was committed to making things happen in the classroom everyday, day by day. There were, however, significant changes in the ideal teacher profile compared to Stage 3. The ideal teacher now had a more short-term view of what the job of teaching was all about. The earlier, more reflective, concern with longer-term vision, values, autonomy and personal growth had been subsumed within a very busy and crowded process of daily living. The ideal teacher self had become a total pragmatist and was focused on personal delivery as part of a large and complex school system.

**The Gap between Actual Self and Ideal Self as a Teacher, at Stage 4** Six themes emerged concerning the way the respondents viewed the perceived gap between their actual and ideal self as a teacher.

(i) The idea of a gap remained valid as an idea and was recognised as an important issue by all respondents.
(ii) The multi-faceted nature of the gap at stage 3 had gone, the gap now focused on a particular troublesome issue e.g. control; the gap was now ‘monolithic’ rather than multivariate.
(iii) NQTs no longer talked about their philosophy of teaching or the values that underpinned practice in terms of their actual or ideal self.
(iv) There were marked differences in the way the ideal teacher image was formulated. Four people used a real person to create the image, someone who was an exemplar or expert in the particular (teaching or managing) problem they faced. Two used a collage of people and ideas to create a composite image; their ideal teacher was a ‘virtual’ role model. Two others had dispensed with an ideal image altogether and focused directly on describing the problem and their way of dealing with it. Only one person (Betty) had reverted to the extensional form of the ideal teacher.
(v) All of the NQTs used some form of self-regulatory strategy as a way of building up energy to deal with the perceived gap between the actual and ideal teacher self.
(vi) All of the NQTs were dealing with the gap alone, there were no indications that NQTs were receiving institutional guidance or support with continuing professional development (CPD).
DISCUSSION

From the start of the longitudinal study there was evidence of a difference between the intensional and extensional form of the ideal self as teacher concept (IST) as reported by BTs. They talked about IST mostly in terms of teacher actions not teacher personality and this separation persisted through to the end. The trainees appeared to focus on building their skill base before changing other core qualities. This finding accords with (a) investigations of the image of the ideal teacher amongst student and beginning teachers in education colleges in Israel where subjects formulated their ideal image around conceptions of practice rather than personality (Arnon and Reichel, 2007, p.458-459); (b) conclusions that modern professionalism in teaching is moving towards more outcome focused technical aspects of teaching (Day, Stobart, Sammons and Kington, 2006, p. 85); and (c) understandings of the ways in which particular skill sets can be changed through a process of ‘deliberate practice’ (Ericsson, 2002, p. 30). Although Arnon and Reichel (2007) focused on actual and ideal images of self as a teacher, they made no mention of the possible selves literature or constructs. In contrast, the findings in this current study suggests that possible selves provide a useful context for accommodating models of ‘deliberate practice’ allied with target teacher actions and skills. The ideal teacher ‘role model’ that is enduring, useful and influential for trainee teachers as a possible self, is the ‘skilled practitioner’, not the memorable ‘character’. It appears that BTs prefer a ‘blueprint’ not a ‘portrait’ to guide the way action and behaviour (not personality) should develop as a teacher (Martinez, Sauleda and Huber, 2001, p.966).

The rate of transition of identity as a teacher was rapid. Most BTs at Stage 1 estimated it would be many years before they would be able to make a confident claim to be a teacher. In practice, the (self-reported) transition time was much shorter, in most cases taking less than one academic and/or calendar year. Reported changes in AST and IST happened relatively quickly; therefore, if the period between the 4-stage interventions had been longer, the transition process might have been obscured or even lost all together (Demo, 1992); also, memory may have begun to distort the reality of what happened and when, (Huberman, 1989). What the data shows, however, is that the two types of possible self as teacher (AST) and ideal self as teacher (IST), evolved separately with the IST ‘one step ahead’ of the AST. The IST became more than a ‘skilled teacher’ by developing a professional ethos and embracing teaching as a career not just a job. The AST followed this line of development but reflected more the shift from outsider to insider and the confidence that came with a growing base of teaching experience. This dynamic scenario fits with Demo’s ‘rolling base line’ model or metaphor for self-concept very well (Demo, 1992, p.304) and accords with the idea that learning to be a teacher resembles “an evolving form of membership” within a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.53). Although data were collected at each of four stages in this study, there is no reason, a priori, to believe that development of identity over the PGCE was, in itself, a staged affair. The data suggests that AST was mainly concerned with developing classroom skills up until Stage 3, the end of the second school placement. After that time, when the respondents changed status from BT to NQT, the emphasis changed towards managing people and situations day to day. In contrast, IST moved initially from ‘competent’ to ‘expert’ in the way it was formulated; it then gradually broadened its concerns with philosophical issues, wider professional concerns and with teaching as a ‘life style’ rather than a job, before finally converging with AST in a day to day concern with managing, problem solving and keeping classes running smoothly and pupils happy. The two constructs eventually converged on a pragmatic day-to-day approach to management but took different trajectories on the way. Pre-service experience was concerned mostly with developing teaching skills (pedagogy), whilst in-service experience became more concerned with managing situations (control). Is this shift of interest from pedagogy to control a universal pattern of development? In a similar, 2 year, longitudinal study of the development of teacher identity, Watzke (2007) also found that teachers become more concerned with managerial aspects of teaching as they become more experienced. Unlike the current study, however, Watzke found that teacher ‘concerns’ (concerns with self-task-impact) emerged in a complex and recurring way, rather than as a linear, staged, process during their development as teachers (Watzke, 2007, p.106). His main finding, that teacher concerns evolved cyclically was not replicated in the findings of this current research perhaps because Watzke’s study used 6 application points, not 4.
The relative relationship between AST and IST (the notion of twin track development) as discussed above might suggest a lagged developmental model in action, e.g. IST in period 1 determining the properties of AST in period 2 and so on. In practice, however, the AST never evolved into an exact replica of the IST from the previous period. The AST in stage 2, for example, was not a carbon copy of the IST described in stage 1. The interpretation placed on this understanding is that the AST was not simply playing ‘catch up’ with the IST; the two trajectories were independent and could evolve at different rates and in different ways, this dynamic feature is termed ‘paired independence’. Paired independence allows for both convergence and divergence of AST and IST over time; however, the nature of the gap between the two also changed in terms of its composition. Respondents noted fluctuations in the ‘gap’ between AST and IST, they also reported that the gap became less homogenous and more fragmented as BTs became more fluent and practised in some aspects of teaching more than others, however, in stage 4, the ‘gap’ again reflected concerns about a singular or particular issue that was troublesome or of concern to the NQT. The gap, therefore, served different purposes at different times; it acted as a skills checklist, a motivator, a comparator, also an aid to reflection and self-regulation. Norman, Olivia and Kay, for example, were all aware of what they needed to improve on and how they might do so; how long it might take was another matter. Because the two constructs moved separately, the relative distance would fluctuate. As everyday teaching performance improved (AST moved towards IST), so the understandings about what was possible as a teacher would also move (IST would move away from AST). When Edward and Norman found ‘new’ more rigorous or successful role models to act as a comparator, the perceived gap between actual and ideal self as a teacher increased. This meant that absolute performance might improve whilst the relative performance stayed static or even worsened at times. Trainee Teachers could actually be getting better at teaching whilst feeling (mentally and physically) that their performances were getting worse compared to other people or standards. This way of looking at teaching performance places the milestones for ‘measuring’ development internally ‘in the head’ as well as externally ‘in the environment’. It also suggests (not surprisingly) that exposure to a range of teachers and teaching methods is necessary to enhance the chances of finding positive new role models, but can also be unsettling.

Finally, excellence in any domain requires a long and heavily structured period of training and practice, followed by a, largely self-driven, regime of deliberate practice throughout the career (Ericsson, 2002, p.17). In the current study there was little evidence that BT’s were thinking about their future or ideal self as a teacher, beyond teacher training, as something that involved ‘deliberate practice’ as defined by Ericsson. The PGCE appeared to stimulate changes in AST and IST because the trainee was moving between placements, meeting new people and settings, and was engaging in a process of ‘reflective/deliberate practice’. Post PGCE, ‘settling down’ in a school, becoming established and working with the same colleagues for long periods of time may have been good for ‘continuity’ from the schools perspective, but did little to stimulate a gap between actual and ideal performance within the NQT. What was also noticeable was that schools provided little or no support for reflective practice aimed at developing the individual; any INSET provided was designed to improve institutional practice and procedures rather than individual development and performance.

All of these factors will have played their part in the process by which IST and AST appeared to converge on concerns with coping rather than changing, once the NQT was in post.

**CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

BTs require a critical mass of supervised teaching practice hours to ensure that basic teaching skills are mastered and can be demonstrated; also, that BTs have time to make the cognitive and emotional transition from ‘outsider’ to ‘insider’ as members of the wider teaching community. Substantial teaching experience was a key factor in giving BTs a sense of ‘experience parity’ with their longer serving colleagues; ‘long experience’ was the key differentiator between the trainee and the professional.
The working context and perceived status of BTs varied widely within and between different placement schools. These variations affected the rate at which BTs developed ideas about their actual self as teacher (AST) e.g. as ‘insider or outsider’, and the development of ideas about teacher ‘professionalism’.

Trainee teachers require a solid base of practice teaching hours before becoming totally immersed in the pressurised ‘day to day’ routines of school life. Safeguards are needed to prevent trainees becoming absorbed into the mainstream teaching force should the school come under pressure e.g. from inspections, staff absences and shortages. Even without these ‘crisis’ pressures, BTs are at risk of being drawn into a full professional role for other reasons. Schools are semi-closed ‘communities of practice’ where the pressures on BT’s to become ‘insiders’ as quickly as possible should not be underestimated. Once BTs became NQTs, totally immersed in a highly pressured environment, their AST and IST possible selves converged on a concern with managing and coping on a day-to-day basis. It appears that little has changed since Charles Desforges observed that the salient feature of teachers’ knowledge is “to close down on, rather than profit from, experience.” (Desforges, 1995, p 385)

Deliberate practice supported by coaching and mentoring was provided on the PGCE, but was not a significant feature of NQT experience. Schools did not generally support deliberate or reflective practice; NQTs knew what they should be doing, about reflective practice, however, they generally undertook little structured or regular reflection by themselves or with others, when left to their own devices. This study suggests that a ‘PGCE Programme Narrative’ for the recruitment, induction, and training of BTs and NQTs should focus less on concerns with individual personality and charisma as key factors in development, and focus more on creating substantial, varied and extended periods of teaching practice supported by well defined models of reflective and deliberate practice. The key to a prolonged and creative developmental phase of training is to generate dynamic tension between the phenomenal world of the actual self as teacher (AST) and the noumenal world of the ideal self as teacher (IST), thereby creating a ‘gap’ between the two. The ‘twin track’ model of development, involving the creation and management of a gap between AST and IST, offers a practical way to structure and manage the process of in-service teacher training and professional development.

REFERENCES