Research and reflexivity: The discourse of female students completing teacher education

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Abstract

This paper explores the concept of reflexivity and its changing role for both the researcher and participants. A phenomenology was carried out following three female student teachers through their teacher training and how they managed their multiple roles. Twelve semi-structured interviews were carried out over the academic year to investigate the changing nature of identity. The discourses of the students were analysed to reveal the equilibrium/disequilibrium of the student teacher's identity and the impact on both the researcher and the researched.

Keywords:

Feminist theory, reflexivity, phenomenology, student teacher, agency, mothers

Introduction

The research followed three female student teachers as they progressed through teacher education. The main aim of the research is to investigate the female students' lived experiences of studying a Post/ Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) whilst managing their various roles. Three women, with phenomenologically different backgrounds, were interviewed at different times during the year. The phenomenology participants are part of a one year post graduate teaching programme that enables a graduate student to become a newly qualified teacher (NQT).

The methodological approach adopted, for this phenomenological study, is a combination of both feminism and critical realism. As Parr (2015) states this combination of approaches can be challenging however Satsangi (2012, p.200) argues critical realism can actually inform the feminist researcher as long as the relationship between the researcher and the researched is addressed. This combination of methodologies is known as 'feminist realism' and has a number of key features. Firstly, there is a belief that knowledge does exist independent of the mind and there are different interpretations of reality. Archer (2007) argues reality can be reduced but is not limited to the interpretations of discourse. Social structures exist independent of individuals but are also created and influenced by them. Secondly, there is the central belief

of empowerment of the individual and the ‘uncovering’ of the female voice. This uncovering of the female voice is a central feature to my research and one which has influenced my own empowerment.

Knowing who I am was paramount to my research as, by knowing yourself, you can address your own feelings and biases towards the study. The feminist paradigm rejects the idea that a researcher can be independent of the study and encourages the use of reflexivity when collecting and analysing data. Reflecting on the power relationship between the researcher and ‘the researched’ is central to this reflexive approach (Burgess-Proctor, 2015). Bourdieu (1993) also advocates reflexivity and a constant reflection on the research and the researcher’s positioning. This constant reflexivity challenges any preconceptions the researcher may have about the participant and social context.

Dual Reflexivity

Wrenn (2012, p.404) describes social identity as a product of the interaction of the personal identity with its surroundings, a coming together of the social and the personal, rather than two distinct identities. This conscious reflection of struggling identities gives the agent the agency or the power to recognise the influences of the social. The meaning of teacher identity has been difficult to conceptualise because there are many different perspectives (Sachs, 2005, Lizarraga, 2010, Gee, 2000, Wenger, 1998, Meierdirk, 2016). Teacher identity involves the role of the teacher and the individual’s adoption of the professional teacher identity. Beijgaard (1995) believes the professional teacher identity is derived from the teacher’s expertise in their subject matter, combined with their skills, knowledge and support for their pupils. This is balanced against the demands of the institutional setting, both at a macro and micro level. It is the reconciliation between the personal and professional side of teaching that produces the teaching identity (Pillen, Den Brok & Beijgaard, 2013).

Akkerman and Meijer (2011, p. 315) maintain, the student teacher’s identity changes but it is unknown as to ‘what is shifting and what determines the direction of the shift.’ According to Dang (2013), this is an area that is under-researched, but opines that it is the teaching environment that causes the change in identity, as the identity is constructed and reconstructed through interpretations and re-interpretations of the student teacher’s beliefs. Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly (2014) present a model of ‘work-related identity, loss and recovery’ that

conceptualises identity transitions within the workplace that can be applied to the construction of a student teacher's teaching identity during their school placements (Figure 1).

Figure 1 here

Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014) assert that when an individual joins an organisation there will be disruption to their work-related identity (WRI), which has been defined as: '...aspects of identity and self-definition that are tied to participation in the activities of work... or membership in work-related groups, organisations, occupations or professions' (Dutton, Roberts & Bednar, 2010, p.266). WRI is the sense of self that is related to the person's work or organisational membership. Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly state that a person's work life involves identity loss. As an individual negotiates through the workplace they experience disruptions to their WRI as they surrender their current self and enter the liminal period.

This WRI loss is represented by the loss of a value or an aspect of a professional identity. An extreme example would be an individual who experiences a workplace injury and has to rethink their work identity. A less extreme example might be a disagreement over strategies within the organisation. Whilst the WRI experiences disequilibrium the individual enters the 'liminal interval' (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014, p.67). The liminal period is a transition between the old and new self. During this disequilibrium period the identity lacks a connection with the social domain and features aspects of instability. Evans (2011) argues it is the reconciliation between the personal and professional side of teaching that produces the teaching identity. The teacher identity is constructed from the individual's adoption of the professional expectations of teaching combined with their own social identity.

When a student teacher starts their teacher education they will have preconceptions of what a teacher is and the role of learning in the classroom (Pillen, Den Brok & Beijaard, 2013). Even before the course begins, students will have preconceptions about the profession. These preconceptions will be questioned during the PGCE course and critiqued until new knowledge is formed (Dang, 2013). This deconstruction of preconceptions is important for the student teacher, as it provides them with an opportunity to be reflexive and reflect on their own beliefs.

My positioning

In Reinharz's (1992) book on *Feminist methods in social research* the personal journey of the researcher is viewed as an important part of the research. By understanding the personal journey of the researcher a connection can be drawn between the 'journey' and the research itself:

Feminist research acknowledges that there is often a connection between the research purpose and the private life of the researcher; hence works are often framed with a preface or postscript highlighting such relevance. (Probert, 2006, p.7)

I situate myself as a white female lesbian feminist academic. I was brought up in a working class environment in South England, where I attended secondary school. My father was a mechanic and my mother was a factory worker. I was the first person in my family to progress to university and went on to read economics and politics. After university I completed a teacher education course and obtained an economics and business studies teaching post. My past is part of my habitus and influences my decisions and behaviour with regards to my research (Bourdieu, 1990).

Reinharz (1992) wrote one of the most significant books on the feminist approach to research. Her definition of feminist research is any method that is used by self-identified feminists. This position is broad, but it is expanded to include any research that has been conducted by feminist writing in journal articles and books. This definition is criticised in Dankoski's (2000) paper on *What makes research feminist?* because the term 'self-identified feminists' is a non-committal definition as it is left up to the individual to decide what they see themselves as. Dankoski (2000) goes on to suggest several factors that need to be addressed if conducting a feminist approach: the study should improve the lives of women and other marginalised groups; the research should not exploit the participants; and existing power differences should be challenged and uncovered. Uncovering power differentials is advocated by other writers but Frisby (2009) and Reason & Bradbury (2001) also incorporate the aims: reducing the power balance between the researcher and researched, challenging structural relations and engaging in reflexivity.

The female student teachers knew what I was investigating, how the research was conducted and the results. I believed it was appropriate for me to share the outcomes of the research with the participants. The participants were shown transcripts of the interviews and PowerPoints from lectures which have resulted from this research.

Research context

This research is situated at a Higher Educational Institution (HEI) in South East England. The study's participants were part of the PGCE programme. The PGCE is a full time, one year course that enables a graduate student to gain QTS. The HEI has a relatively small cohort of PGCE students with around 110 students enrolled every year. About one third of the PGCE year is spent at the university and the rest of the time the student teacher is in their placement(s). After the first three weeks of the PGCE course the student teacher will start at their first placement (phase 1) and after Christmas will start phase 2 and 3, with a placement in a different school.

Methodology

The phenomenological study consisted of three female student teachers who were interviewed in total 12 times during the year. The phenomenological study allowed me to focus on the female student teachers' perspectives on training to teach and revealed a deeper understanding of what participants were experiencing (Pilten, 2016, p.1425).

The following are summaries of the student teachers in the study (All names have been changed):

1. **Jane** was British. She had spent many years in Human Resources before applying for the PGCE course and had been a local government councillor for four years. Jane was 34 years old, married with two young children.
2. **Morag** was Irish and had a long term partner. She had a two year old daughter and came to England especially to obtain her PGCE. Her partner gained employment at a local firm during her PGCE year. Morag was 26 years old at the start of the course.
3. **Amel** applied for the PGCE course in the previous year but was rejected at interview due to a lack of knowledge of teaching. She reapplied for the course after spending a year as a cover supervisor in an inner city school in Portsmouth. She went to a tough inner city school herself

and then went to the local university. Interestingly, although British and from a white working class background, she embraced the Islamic faith after marrying a Muslim. Amel was 29 years old and had no children.

In the research analysis the discursive practices of the student teachers are focused upon. Attention is paid to the influence of social structures on the agency of the teacher thus concurring with Gee's (1990) viewpoint that discourse conveys a message regarding practice in a particular context. Fairclough's (2003) pioneering work on critical discourse analysis (CDA) is drawn upon to analyse the student's narratives. My choice of using CDA reflects a desire to gain insight into the student teacher's understanding of themselves and the context of their journey to professionalism. CDA can be viewed from a number of perspectives. Firstly, it may be viewed using the constructionist lens by analysing how discourse is socially produced. Discourse may be viewed critically where the analysis focuses on the dynamics of power and the ideology behind the discourse (Phillips & Hardy, 2002). As a feminist realist researcher, I am drawn to CDA as it analyses the powers that create the discourse within its social context. CDA can be used to show unequal power distribution which then leads to a greater understanding of the social context.

Research Analysis

The first cycle of the interview coding looked for utterances on reflexivity. This type of coding is known as *a priori* and refers to the use of a theoretical framework to complete the initial coding (Guest, 2007). Any utterances that reflected the equilibrium/ disequilibrium of the student's identity were highlighted with attention to any themes related to empowerment and female participation. The analytical process started by transcribing the interviews. There was nearly six hours of digital recordings, producing over 100 pages of transcriptions. The transcriptions were completed using *Word* and therefore in rich text format.

Identity disequilibrium

Throughout the research the three student teachers were asked how they were changing as individuals. The interview analysis found there were a number of factors that impacted on the student teacher. Power is not interpreted just as 'top down' and hierarchical, although this type of power is present, but as a strategic power that exists in day to day interactions. These day to day interactions, with other teachers and mentors, presented moments of conflicts when

ideologies clashed. Jane illustrates this finding when she found her belief about what kind of teacher she wanted to be did not match those of her school placement:

Yes, I think that's what it is, I have to be somebody I'm not and I have to be a harder person than I am, I feel, when I'm in... when I was at College A I felt that I could pretty much be more who I was and you know assert a bit of discipline here and there but mostly I didn't need to do a lot to keep them in line, whereas at School A's it feels very much like I have to be like a hard arse and I'm not that kind of person. I mean Miss M's been telling me, 'You must go in and you must *rule* them! And that's it.' And I'm just like, I'm not that kind of person, I'm actually quite soft, I don't actually like shouting and screaming and being horrible. So, I mean Miss B's quite scary, I don't know if you've ever seen her when she does her thing?

All the student teachers became more confident in the classroom over time. As they experienced situations they were able to address the problems. Amel commented on how she convinced herself that she needed to display more confidence in the classroom, as this was an expectation of being a teacher: 'I just ... took that step of, like, right I'm teaching now, and it all kind of settled in'. In this case the student teacher believed the institutional identity was a person who displayed confidence and she needed to achieve this. The institutional identity is the identity recognised by the institution, in this case the school/college. It is the identity the school/college advocates and recognises (Gee, 2000). There was disequilibrium in her teaching identity whilst her identity was being reformed to reflect this. The student teacher acts in a way they believe a teacher is supposed to act in that given environment and is highlighted in Morag's discourse below:

From phase 2 I've become a lot more relaxed, whereas before this I would have seen teaching as you know, OK, yeah, you have a lot of hours to put in and it is, can be, stressful, but I think now I've learned OK, let's not just get stressed over it. You know, the more stressed I was getting, the longer it was taking me to plan the lesson, and my problem is being creative with activities and I just found I could spend two hours sitting there going, 'What am I going to do?' and still having nothing by the end, whereas now I'm like, OK, just look at the topic and go back to ... go through it step by step and say, OK, that's' an activity ...' And I think the less stressed you are, the easier it is to go in and deliver it.

Morag alludes to being stressed in her first phase and not being able to cope. In lines 4-6 she comments on how she learnt to cope with the stress. She looks for confirmation of her statement by using the term 'you know' in line 6. Morag spends less time planning and this reduced the amount of stress and it made her a better teacher. There is a canonical narrative here about what makes a good teacher and in this case it is someone who is not feeling stressed. However, in lines 3 and 5, Morag comments on having to work long hours and be creative with

activities are part of being a teacher. Working hard is an expectation of teachers and one Morag has had to find ways to cope with. This is part of the 'institutional identity' that there is an expectation of working long hours by the school (Gee, 2000).

Morag became stressed as she was not getting her work done. She found that she could not complete all her lesson preparation in the evenings but coped by changing her lesson planning process. Around this time Morag entered the liminal period of identity change (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). She was finding there was much more work to teaching than she expected; she had not realised that teaching was so stressful and therefore had to find ways to cope and change her preconceptions of teaching.

The placement school's culture had an impact on Amel's identity and narrative construction. She had a pre-notion of what teaching was and was surprised by what she found, as seen by her comment: '... it wouldn't be as target driven and so egotistical as I thought the business environment was, and I'm starting to realise that may not be the case.' The importance of target setting was a surprise to her. Amel went through what Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014) refer to as identity disequilibrium as her pre-notions of what a teacher is are reshaped by her experiences.

Amel thought teachers were also quick to criticise new initiatives: 'It can be quite difficult to convince someone of your opinion... I think teachers are quite quick to come in and say, 'Oh no I've tried that before; I don't think that'll work.' This critical culture can restrict the introduction of new ideas in the classroom. Amel overcame this obstacle, but only by being confident in what she thought and by maintaining her own beliefs on the role of a teacher. Amel did not seem to go through a long liminal interval of WRI loss as her changes in beliefs did not last (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). There was no evidence in her narratives of a long emotional struggle between identities. This may have been due to Amel managing to withhold many of her original beliefs, of what a teacher was, or she was unaware of how she was changing.

In her January interview Amel told a story which gave insight into why she believed the relationships with the pupil were so important: 'I think so, in that before... when I was at school I went to a bad school, I had friends which, at the time, was just ... I know I done stuff which I shouldn't have done, it was just not good, but... and I suppose the positive aspect of

that is that I'm not shocked by what any kids do'. Amel had been a non-conformist at school. She went to a 'tough' inner city school and got into trouble. It was not until she went to college that she refocused on what she wanted from life and engaged with education.

Identity Equilibrium

Morag talked about how she became more relaxed as the year progressed because she was allowed to teach the way she wanted. When the student taught the way they believed was right for them, they felt more at ease. She commented: 'now I find I'm not as stressed when I'm teaching' (Phase 2). Morag reiterated this feeling while on his second school placement:

... I think there is... much more need for self-control in terms of how your personality manifests itself within a school setting than maybe there would be in a work or a social setting, and you've got to be setting a good example all of the time without exception, would be my view. And that is changing me and I do think much more deeply now about, you know, not that I misbehave or anything outside of it all, but just in terms of ... how you conduct yourself and set a good example at all times really, so it's curbing any, you know, no casual swearwords within a school context.

All of the students remarked about the stress they felt when 'forced' to teach in a way they would not naturally do. It was evident that the student teacher's identity was constantly being remoulded during the PGCE year. The reshaping of their professional identity was the result of many forces including: the student's identity and who they are; and the school's perception of a teacher identity.

Jane reflected on how she learnt to 'process information...without emotion'. It seemed that by 'reflecting without emotion' the student teacher could reflect better. According to Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly's (2014) model of work-related loss and recovery, the period of liminality and identity reconstruction can be an emotional time. This liminal period is defined as 'the dynamic process of self-construal, a time in which a sense of 'who I was' gives way to a sense of 'who I am becoming' (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014, p. 67). During the liminal period the student teacher is mourning the loss of their identity as they reconstruct a new one.

All the participants experienced shifts in their identity and found they became more confident in themselves. Morag's husband commented to her that she was more confident: '(I'm) just probably more confident in myself and I have my own opinions now and I don't really care what anybody else thinks of me at this stage, I'm like whatever <chuckles>. I've definitely

become more assertive than I probably was, yeah definitely. Yeah I probably have changed yeah, even (my boyfriend) says it, you know there's a big change in you as, you know you, you actually like getting up and going to work now, before this was hassle, it was like I don't want to go to work, you know? Just, my attitude on life has changed an awful lot, yeah'. Amel reflected also on her changing identity '(I'm) much more confident, much more ... just ... yeah, whole ... I don't know. Much more confident that I can do things. I know before I would never have dreamed of walking into a classroom and just ... not my class, don't know who the teacher is, and felt confident or whatever, but now it just ... completely not an issue. It's just (I'm) much more confident'.

The student teachers told stories of their growing confidence. Jane commented on how she now had the confidence to go back into a shop and return items, something she would have never done before (May, 2011). Morag learnt how to 'switch off' when she went home after work which made her life easier. All the student teachers recognised that it was important not to get stressed over teaching. For a number it took a whole phase of the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme to realise just how important it was not to take problems home:

Probably from phase 2 I've become a lot more relaxed, whereas before this I would have seen teaching as, you know, OK, yeah, you have a lot of hours to put in and it is, can be, stressful, but I think now I've learned OK, let's not just get stressed over it. (Morag, Phase 2)

Amel reiterated Morag's comment and reflected (Phase 3):

Well I think what always stands me in good stead is I don't tend to look back too much or for too long..... so if there are issues going on, I'm always looking ahead rather than worrying about the detail of what's happened, and I think that allows you to sort of park a lot of things that might worry other people.

This finding was emphasised through discourse analysis as the students' responses became more confident as the year progressed. They used the 'I' term more in their utterances rather than the third person and took greater possession over their comments by the end of the year. When they discussed an upsetting experience they tended to use the third person and were less likely to take ownership of the lessons that were unsuccessful. However, by the end of the course, the student teachers were more inclined to admit their failures. They had become less emotional and more critical about their own teaching:

Looking back on what I've done and being critical, but being positive as well, so seeing both sides of the equation. So looking, you know, from my point of view what it felt like standing there and teaching, but also what it would've been like as a child to sit there and receive that teaching, but also someone who's looking at that lesson observing it, what would they have seen? So it's looking at the situation as a whole, sort of... from different people's point of views and thinking... or getting a broader picture of what I'm doing and not just seeing it as me standing in front of that class delivering a lesson, because that isn't the way it's perceived by everyone.

The discourse of the student teacher revealed who they were and who they were becoming. Their identity changed during the PGCE year and at times displayed conflict. The students rejected some of the ideals of the institutional identity whilst accepting others. Their discourse revealed the claiming and rejecting of the different identities and the conflict that ensued from this.

Feminist themes

The research raised a number of important themes related to feminist participation and empowerment. The importance of the student teacher's family was evident from the narratives. When the student teacher is reflexive there is a questioning of their own teaching identity. This liminality can be a difficult period as Jane pointed out: 'I feel like I'm having to be somebody I'm not and it's actually a lot of pressure being a person I'm not all the time... The student uses discourse to recreate their new identity and confirmation from an 'other' (Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014). This 'other' ranges from friends, parents to grandparents. This support and 'sounding board' was an important part in the student teacher's finishing their training and in some cases the key to completing the year.

There were many references to the importance of the family in supporting the student teacher. This support came in many forms but the student teachers found it necessary to reflect with their family. This reflection was important as it did not have the constraints associated with reflecting with those involved in making judgements on the student's performance. Being able to reflect with others outside the inner community, of the course, was important for the students because, as Amel stated:

...you're very conscious that you're being assessed and appraised all the time and you, you might not necessarily want to be as open within that process as you might be if you were a permanent fixture within the department, so you're sort of trying to... faking it

good to keep... manage your own PR within the situation...

Amel explained that reflecting within the inner circle was limited, due to social constraints. These constraints reflect the nature of the 'social fields' the students find themselves part of. The educational environment consists of power struggles in different social fields: the classroom, subject departments, school management and the macro power struggles between outside agencies. These social fields are social spaces, with their own rules and regulations. Agents will compete and jostle within these social spaces to try and change the rules of the game (Bourdieu, 1990). All the agents in the 'inner fields' have power over the student teacher and contribute to his/her grading and assessment.

The reflection with 'others' was free from the influence of power and the need to impress, although there will be a power struggle within every social field. The importance of the family was not restricted to reflective freedom. The support of the family for those student teachers who had children was paramount. This support ranged from help with the children when they were ill to actually caring for one of the student teacher's young daughter enabling her to complete the course.

The interview analysis showed that the female student teachers with children relied heavily on their parents. Both Jane and Morag not only talked through their problems, with their parents, but the parents often helped with childcare. Jane admitted that she 'boxed up' her role as a mother whilst at school. This was a part of her that she 'put aside' during the work day. It is not unusual for parents to 'box up' their home life when at school. Halford and Leonard's (2006) argued that in many jobs it would be seen as a weakness if parents did not fully focus on work. They found in their research on nurses that the latter left their parenting identity at home and did not resume it until leaving work. They referred to this phenomenon as 'separate identities' and actually found a tendency towards separate identities stronger in the male nurses (Halford & Leonard, p.171, 2006).

In the February interview Jane was asked how she was coping with the course. Her response was: 'So everything I do, the house, has just like been chaos; the children have been, you know, all of it and then the work, and the school and you feel like you've just gone backwards 'cause you've gotten to almost the point you were in phase 1 on the day you started'. When Jane's children were ill she felt unable to take time off teaching and left her children with her parents.

Being a mother is part of Jane's identity, it is always there, but she is managing to distance herself from it while on her placement. This distancing from the 'mother identity' was similar with Morag. Jane also relied heavily on her parents to help out: 'cause my parents are very close and I have to balance that relationship as well 'cause they're my child carers and so I also have to ... sounds awful but I have to sort of remember to stop in and have a cup of tea with my mum at the end of the day...'. Jane knew she was relying on her parents to help with the children and so it was important to show her appreciation. Her husband was less supportive and helpful at home.

Morag moved to Portsmouth with her partner and two year old daughter but decided in her first term to send her daughter back to Ireland to stay with her mother:

...if I had (my daughter) here with me I don't think I would manage as well. I definitely wouldn't be able to do the planning and preparation for my lessons, 'cause I'd be coming home and trying to get her settled, get her to bed and then settle into it, whereas this way now I ... can actually take work home, I know I can have that break, that I have lessons planned for when I come back (Feb, 2011).

Morag found it very difficult teaching and being a mother. She came home from school and spent all her time looking after her daughter instead of completing school work. She found that sending her daughter back to live with her grandparents meant she could work in the evenings and 'catch up' lesson planning. Morag's partner initially changed his work patterns to help out with childcare: 'Dave changed his working times so he now works from home all the, well not all the time but at least three days', but even this was not enough and Morag eventually made the decision to send her daughter to her mother to be looked after until the end of the course.

Morag managed being a mother by sending her daughter to live with her grandmother for the duration of the PGCE course. Larson (2000) suggests the expectations of the modern day mother are changing. Becoming a mother presents many challenges from being the main carer to constantly being tired. These challenges are still present, but in the modern era mothers are also juggling these demands with a career. They are torn between the demands of motherhood and work. Christiansen (1999) argued that mothers find it important to maintain an occupational identity as individuals build their identity through their occupation. Although, an individual has a number of identities and roles to perform others may see one as more

important. This may reflect the societal importance of being solely a ‘mother’ and that it is not set in high regard as opposed to having an occupation.

Conclusion

During the PGCE year the student teacher revises their preconceptions of teaching and reconstructs their teacher identity as they encounter various events that may destabilise their teaching identity. There will be tensions between their personal teaching identity and the professional identity that are ‘played out’ during the liminal period. During this time the student tries to reconcile what is expected of them by different educational establishments with their own values and beliefs through reflexivity.

When the students engaged in reflexivity they were reflecting on their own identities and how they were changing. As Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly’s (2014) WRI model illustrates the movement from identity equilibrium to disequilibrium is again cyclical. This is supported by the narratives as the student teacher questions who they are on many occasions throughout the PGCE year. This takes the form of a series of WRI loss/ recovery models joined up as the identity continues to change in and out of equilibrium but does not revert to the original identity (Fig.2).

Figure 2 here

In Conroy and O’Leary-Kelly’s (2014) model of WRI loss/ recovery it is a ‘workplace event’ that causes the individual to then enter the liminal period. With the student teachers the same is true as there is usually something that they confront in their placement that causes them to question themselves. This conflict sends them into the liminal period and a period of reflexivity. For example, Jane found it difficult to align with the strict rules and the management style of school A. She engaged in critical reflection and realised the impact of the school’s expectations on her. She subsequently entered a liminal period as she adjusted to the school’s expectations. Once she realigns her teaching identity she leaves the liminal period, and regains equilibrium.

The importance of the student teacher's family was evident from the narratives of all the student teachers. There were many references to the importance of the family in supporting the student teacher through the PGCE year. This support came in many forms but the student teachers found it necessary to reflect with their family. This reflection was important as it did not have the constraints associated with reflecting with those involved in making judgements on the student's performance. The reflection with 'others' was free from the influence of power and the need to impress, although there will be a power struggle within every social field. The importance of the family was not restricted to reflective freedom. The support of the family for those student teachers who had children was paramount. This support ranged from help with the children when they were ill to actually caring for one of the student teacher's young daughter enabling her to complete the course.

Expectations of the way I act, behave and my beliefs are instilled in me over many years. I no longer see identity as fixed and predetermined. I believe identity to be fluid and constructed by society and its rules and regulations. Sometimes it is only when stepping 'outside of the box' that life can be seen more clearly. When part of a school/ university culture it is hard to question that it could be different, because it is difficult to see that it could be. It is easy to become blinded by the day to day workings and suppress your own values to comply with the norm. Ball (2003, p.221) refers to this as 'values schizophrenia' - when a teacher suppresses their personal values in order to conform to the performance culture and I could see this not only in the student teachers but also myself.

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Figures

Figure 1: A model of WRI loss and recovery (Adapted from: Conroy & O'Leary-Kelly, 2014, p. 70)

Figure 2: Spirals of reflexivity