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## The teacher I wish to be: exploring the influence of life histories on student teacher idealised identities

Catherine Furlong\*

*St Patrick's College, Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland*

This paper examines the influence of life histories and apprenticeship of observation on the formation of student teachers' idealised identities. The life histories of 15 student teachers are decoded. Through eliciting from the student teachers the teacher they wish to be, the paper focuses on the interplay between the personal histories and ideal teacher identities for the future. The implications of the findings for initial teacher education are considered.

**Keywords:** teacher identity; idealised identities; professional identity; life histories; teacher education

### Introduction

The late 1980s and 1990s witnessed a burgeoning of research focused on student teacher identity examining in the main how teacher identity is formed, its robust nature and how teacher identity influences classroom practices (Brtizman 1992; Calderhead and Robson 1991; Connelly and Clandinin 1999; Holt-Reynolds 1992; Knowles and Holt-Reynolds 1991; Knowles 1992). While literature on teaching and learning foregrounds the importance of identity in teacher development, unpacking understandings of identity is a complex business. Student teacher identity is not static. It is generally accepted that student teachers must undergo a shift in their identities as they move through their initial teacher education and into life in the classroom and may well experience further identity alteration as they progress through their teaching careers (Alsurp 2006; Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004). Clearly, identity is not a fixed product of any individual but rather it 'is socialised and socialising process in which identities can be received as well as shaped' (Gunter 2002, 5). Perhaps as Maclean and White (2007, 48) contend, it is probably more accurate to refer to identity as a 'process of identification' in recognition of the relationality or interplay between self and the social setting. However, part of the notion of self is framed by the life history and apprenticeship of observation of each student teacher. Both the former and latter create a system of beliefs, values and attitudes which generate the basis for student teacher identity (Kagan 1992; Sugrue 1997). Where the life histories form a set of values which conflict with more progressive notions of teaching and learning, tensions may surface and interfere with policies for innovation and change (Eick and Reed 2001).

Teacher education usually tends to focus on the future pupils of the student teacher and not on the emerging professional identity of the preservice teacher

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\*Email: [Catherine.Furlong@spd.dcu.ie](mailto:Catherine.Furlong@spd.dcu.ie)

(Alsurp 2006). Teacher educators, while creating the conditions for learning present directly or indirectly predetermined images of what type of teacher they wish student teachers to be (Britzman 1991). These images are buffeted and shaped by the constantly changing educational landscape. While the images themselves may be held up to questioning or scrutiny, what also needs to be acknowledged is the tension that such images create between what we as teacher educators wish our student teachers to be, and who they themselves are or want to be. As Britzman (1991, 8) argues:

Learning to teach is not a mere matter of applying decontextualised skills or of mirroring predetermined images; it is a time when one's past, present and future are set in dynamic tension. Learning to teach – like teaching itself – is always the process of becoming: a time of formation and transformation, of scrutiny into what one is doing, and who one can become.

Self is therefore pivotal to future identity. Timostsuk and Ugatse (2010, citing Bullough and Gitlin 2001) argue that 'who you are as a person has a profound influence on what you will or will not learn in teacher education, but perhaps even more importantly, it shapes what you will be as a teacher' (1563). Thus, student teachers must ask this demanding question, what kind of teacher do I wish to be?

The paper provides an analysis of student teachers' identities. By examining the teachers they wish to be, an attempt is made to understand the role that their life histories have played in shaping the images of their ideal selves as teachers, images which in turn would inform their practice. Decoding the voices of 15 student teachers commencing the Post Graduate Diploma in Primary Teacher Education in Ireland enables the writer to examine their 'ideal' identities and the manner of their construction. The analysis acknowledges that personal narratives have been demonstrated to provide an important means of making explicit previously unexamined and tacit beliefs and preconceptions of student teachers: a touchstone for student teachers and researchers to explore their teacher identities and lay theories (Alsurp 2006; Cole and Knowles 1993; Knowles and Holt-Reynolds 1991; Calderhead 1987). The analysis also seeks to situate these identities within their atypical experiences of teaching and their 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie 1975).

### **Theoretical context**

To begin to understand identity is a complex task as it could be argued that the notion of identity suffers from conceptual pluralism. Varying disciplinary perspectives of identity exist within the literature – for example in sociology (Beck and BeckGernsheim 2001), in psychology (Erickson 1959) and in philosophy (Mead 1934). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive analysis of the literature in relation to identity, and more particularly student teacher identity, it is, however, necessary to highlight a number of key underpinning issues which appear to transcend the disciplinary fields. The introduction served to highlight a number of these, namely the notion of self, the dynamic nature of identity, belief systems, professional/role identity and the connection between personal life histories and identity (Pajares 1992).

Central to an understanding of identity is the notion of self (Mead 1934). For student teachers to develop a sense of identity an exploration into self is necessary (Sachs 2005). In doing so they need to begin with an understanding, as Mead

(1934) suggests, that this notion of self is socially constructed. It is not a product that one possesses, but is buffeted and shaped as one progresses through life (Erickson 1968). Identity is formed through, and can be defined as, 'an organised representation of our theories, attitudes and beliefs about ourselves' (McCormick and Pressley 1997, cited in Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop 2004, 108). Taking McCormick and Pressley's understanding of self as a construct of attitudes, values and beliefs then self does not exist in isolation, rather the attitudes, values and beliefs have their origins in the life experiences of individuals and their memory and elucidation of same. Student teachers do not come to initial teacher education value free. As Bullough (1998) argues, life history has formed and shaped their belief system. Equally, student teachers do not arrive void of lay theories regarding teachers and teaching and learning (Sugrue 1997). Though most student teachers have no teaching experience prior to commencement of their initial teacher education programmes, all have been in the classroom as pupils. They bring with them an image of themselves as a teacher that is created by both their apprenticeship of observation and life histories as pupils (Knowles 1992; Sugrue 1997). These past experiences influence the creation of student teachers' identities and the associated attitudes, values and beliefs which will in turn influence their thinking and their practice (Beauchamp and Thomas 2010; Calderhead and Robson 1991; Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford 2005; Knowles and Holt-Reynolds 1991).

Concerns regarding the tenacity of student teachers' initial beliefs and lay theories about teachers and teaching are well documented. Clarke and Peterson (1986) pointed out that teachers' thoughts constitute a large part of the psychological context of teaching within which curriculum is interpreted and acted upon through teaching and learning. In the past it has been widely assumed that teachers can be programmed to implement desirable curricula effectively. Such approaches in teacher education have often met with failure which has sometimes been blamed on teacher resistance (Clarke and Peterson 1986). Calderhead and Robson (1991) argue that it is not teacher resistance but the strength/powerful influence of lay theories, their time in school and culturally embedded archetypes of teaching, which influence their construction of personal identities around teaching. They argue that beliefs are far more influential in determining teachers' decisions and behaviours than knowledge. Eick and Reed (2002) contest that while students commencing teacher education programmes become exposed to new theories; they view them, or indeed screen them, through their initial beliefs informed by their lay theories and apprenticeship of observation. Borko and Putman (1995, 52) argue that student teachers have 'already developed well-established systems of knowledge and beliefs relating to teaching and subject matter'. Thus, understanding the critically formative influences in student teachers' lives and the extent to which these are compounded and reinforced through student lay theories, atypical experience and their personal education has major significance for initial teacher education.

### **Socio-cultural context**

Since the early 1990s Irish education has been subjected to an unforeseen and unprecedented amount of analysis, re-appraisal, policy formulation, legislation and reform (Coolahan 2004). The consultative platform upon which many of these policy processes have been based has led to the creation of a high level of public awareness of, and engagement with education generally. There appears to be

collective agreement among educationalists and politicians alike that a high quality education system is a *sine qua non* if Ireland is to develop and flourish within the emerging globalised knowledge society. The latter ambition has foregrounded a key policy debate about performativity and accountability, raising fundamental questions about the state and schooling. Most recently this has been manifested with the publication of a National Plan for Literacy and Numeracy to address the low rate of both literacy and numeracy standards when compared with international levels (DES 2011). The overwhelming push of policy, at local and national levels, has been to increase pressure on accountability for measured student performance, paralleling societal trends toward an increased focus on productivity. Against this backdrop of fundamental changes in the needs and demands of education in Ireland in the last 10 years, teacher education and the identities of student teachers, is best considered as teacher education reflects the influence of the surrounding societal and more particularly education landscape.

Primary teacher education, while within the ambit of the university system, continues to be provided on separate campuses, in denominational institutions, despite the fact that there has been a burgeoning number of multi-denominational primary schools within the state. There are five such colleges of education, four of which are privately owned by Catholic bodies, while the fifth is owned by the Church of Ireland (The Anglican Church in Ireland). All of these institutions are state funded but not on the same basis. In addition in 2002, a private 'virtual' provider of a similar programme that was recognised by the Irish Government. This is a part-time postgraduate course which adds approximately 500 primary teachers to the market annually.

There are essentially two routes into primary teaching, thus two programmes. The more established of these is the Bachelor of Education three-year degree programme (BEd). The second programme is a postgraduate diploma (variously named) that is full-time and of 18 months in duration. As its title suggests, it is open to graduates, and while those with humanities degrees are the vast majority, other degrees are not excluded. Thus, as more opportunities have arisen within the economy as a whole, a greater variety of graduates have chosen to enter primary teaching. The content of the postgraduate diploma mirrors the education component of the three-year BEd degree programme, albeit more intensified since it is completed during a period of 18 months. The structure, despite many additions and changes to the programmes subsequently, has continued to remain largely unaltered. A systematic review of initial primary teacher education occurred in 2002 where one of the report's key recommendations was to extend the BEd programme to four years and the postgraduate programme to two (Kellaghan 2002). Consistent with international policy, a Teaching Council was established in 2006, and it commissioned another review of initial teacher education which resulted in the publication of *Criteria and guidelines for initial teacher education* (Teaching Council 2011). Key changes promoted in the document are the introduction of a four-year BEd programme and a two-year graduate diploma in primary teacher education with increased time in schools. The former and latter provide an opportunity for all providers to think again about the conceptual framework structure of their programmes.

Against this back drop one might well ask how are student teacher identities perceived within this socio-cultural context? Sugrue (1997), examining the narratives of teaching and teacher identity in an Irish socio-cultural context, argues that

two opposing constructions of teacher identities exist, the traditional and the progressive. The traditional teacher is strict, presents a stern face, is distant from learners, insists on strict adherence to rules, sticks to the letter of the law in relation to a very prescribed curriculum and demands accuracy without recognising the learner's perspective. This notion is underpinned by the teacher being perceived as the 'owner' of knowledge with no sense of knowledge being shared or co-constructed. The progressive tradition in contrast challenges this notion of knowledge being located within professionals, individuals and groups. The progressive teacher displays a child-centred education focus and facilitates children's learning in a non-essentialist manner.

### Methodology

Since the focus of this exploratory study is on the key shaping forces which influence the idealised identities of student teachers, a qualitative approach with a strong life history bias was selected as the most appropriate means of generating data (Goodson and Sikes 2001). The life histories included all the experiences and influences which the student had prior to entering teacher education. Semi-structured interviews to gather the life histories from 15 entrants to a Post Graduate Diploma in Primary Teacher Education form the basis of the data for analysis in this study. All entrants to the programme completed a short questionnaire to enable the researcher to compile a comprehensive database of the students on the course. From this 15 were chosen by age, location within the country, position in family and qualification. Table 1 shows the participants in the study and documents their initial degrees which are reflective of the wide-ranging intake onto postgraduate programmes as alluded to earlier. Student names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those involved. Within interviews of the selected participants particular attention was paid to the learning history of each individual tracing a chronological account of their lives and professional experiences.

The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. Student teachers were provided with an opportunity to read their interview transcripts and to make

Table 1. Participants in the study.

	Student	Degree
1.	Emma	BA
2.	Nigel	BA
3.	Mary	BA (Journalism)
4.	Jan	BA
5.	Di	BA (Business)
6.	Pat	BCL
7.	Breda	BA (Public relations)
8.	Maria	BA (Business)
9.	Niamh	BSc (Sports science)
10.	Anita	BA (Business)
11.	Molly	BA (Psychology)
12.	Emma	BA
13.	Fiona	Nursing degree
14.	Sue	BA
15.	Ellen	BA (Humanities)

changes for accuracy if they felt it was necessary. None of the candidates chose to do so. Interviews were entered in NVivo (Version 8), qualitative data software, and a system of open coding was adopted. This generated a total of 27 categories, a number that is significantly greater than anticipated given a degree of homogeneity within the Irish education system. However, one of the strengths of using software for data coding and analysis is the instant ‘audit trail’ it provides through a combination of ‘sources’ and ‘references’ (Linclon and Guba 1985). The 27 categories were further coded for personal histories (data relating to past experiences in teaching and learning particularly in schools and the beliefs and values emanating from these) and idealised identities by using a grounded theory approach (Charmaz 2006; Corbin and Strauss 2008). Thus, three data clusters were immediately evident, and these are used in the present context to generate four themes: personal qualities of teachers, teaching as a relationship, teaching and learning and classroom management. Cross-case analysis was conducted for common findings and dissonance. Significantly, in the case of each of the four themes, each interview had a contribution to make, thus all voices are given a place in the choir of student teacher identity formation.

Pseudonyms are used in the thematic analysis to protect the identity of the participants. As a further protection to participants, data are judiciously used or edited without altering their meaning materially (Hammersley and Atkinson 1983). For the purpose of clarity in the empirical section of this paper, the four themes are presented and analysed sequentially, though the conscious intention is to render the analysis cumulative, while setting up a conversation between the evidence and the theoretical and socio-cultural perspectives articulated above.

## Findings

In responding to the query of the teacher they wished to be, four main themes emerged:

- Personal qualities of teachers.
- Teaching as a relationship.
- Teaching and learning.
- Classroom management.

### Personal qualities

Sugrue (1997) argues that the concept of ‘good’ teachers within the Irish primary school tradition is premised firstly on the ‘strong personality’ of the individual teacher. It is not surprising therefore, that the personal qualities of teachers with particular reference to the affective domain were portrayed as qualities of the teacher they wished to be. Jan, who graduated with a BA degree, encapsulates this in her comments: ‘I would like them to think that I was approachable, that I had a sense of humour, that we can have a laugh together...’. Approachable seems to be a recurring thread. Niamh too wants the children to feel that they can approach her ‘with whatever it is they have to approach her with’. For her it is important that the children can ‘come to her’. In elaborating on this, she appears to see herself as a child: ‘The teacher I want to be is someone that the children come to, someone who is one of the children’. This notion of being at the level of the children reso-

nates with Fiona's narrative. She comments, 'I'd like to be somebody that the children could approach. A friend to the children in my class'. She too equates approachability with being at the level of the class. In examining the narratives of Molly, Fiona and Niamh, but particularly Molly's, this notion of inspirational friendship with the children and approachability seems to be fuelled by their time in schools. She has a very positive lived experience of primary school. She recounts the memories of her favourite teacher:

My favourite teacher was Sr Angeline because she was so quiet and so sweet. I think she was my junior infant teacher. She had a jackdaw in the class that she used keep in a cage, he was called Max. So every time she wanted the class to be silent we'd have to sit and listen to Max making noise. So it was a very clever tactic.

Again the personal qualities dominate her description – 'quiet', 'sweet' and 'clever'. She was unable to remember ever disliking any of her primary teachers. She comments: 'I was lucky I guess. I had really nice and kind teachers to us all'. The converse was true of her experience of her post-primary teachers. Many she recounts did not have any sense of understanding and 'never tried to reach out to us as teenagers'. The latter viewpoint of 'reaching out' may go some way towards explaining her desire to be approachable and be 'at their level'.

The data also revealed other progressive perspectives of good teachers or the teachers they wished to be. These included being warm, caring, kind and enthusiastic. The participants' apprenticeship of observation has evidently influenced the identification with the positive qualities which lie within the affective domain. Jan's time in school was not positive. She recollects the cruel nature of one of her teachers:

I remember my first year in school we had a nun. She was just awful. She would pretend to cut our hair off. People would be crying. She would thump us on the head if we couldn't write our letters or numbers in a straight line. I remember one little girl had big long plaits and she would take her up on her knee and face the class and she would say, 'Now, I'm going to cut all your lovely plaits off'. The little girl would start crying.

Perhaps in reacting to this experience she advocates being remembered as 'very good', 'kind', 'fair' and 'with a sense of humour'. While one could argue that these are progressive qualities which they would like to underpin their idealised teacher identities lie some equally traces of the more traditional personal qualities, most notably strict and firm are also referred to. Jan remarks that she wants to be 'firm with the children to a degree'. Maria too wishes to be 'a reasonably firm teacher'. It is interesting that both temper the word firm, as if they wish to avoid the oppressive school regime and archetypal teachers of the past in Ireland (Banville 1986; McCourt 1996; Sugrue 1997).

While attempting to disassociate themselves with this archetypal teacher and to align themselves with the more progressive facilitative approach to teaching with an underlying commitment to care and, they still use the word 'firm' indicating perhaps that the dominant teacher archetypes are still influential, albeit in a subliminal manner. Despite the fact that more progressive personal qualities dominated the student narratives, they were not exclusive. Echoes of the past emerged through the wish to be strict and firm with the children. These almost run contrary to the qualities of being 'approachable' and 'a friend'.



### Teaching as a relationship

Three sub-themes were identified within this category, namely; issues of respect, the desired to be remembered and valuing the individual. Each will be considered in turn.

#### *Issues of respect*

Respect is commonly seen as ‘deference to status and hierarchy; as driven by duty, honour and a desire to avoid punishment, shame, or embarrassment’ (Lawrence-Lightfoot 1999, 9). Respect often implies ‘required expressions of esteem, approbation, or submission’ (9). Breda sees the importance of ‘some sort of a relationship especially in the primary school’. The relationship is characterised by trust and understanding, but within this relationship exists an expectation that students ‘do not cross the line’ so to speak: ‘You trust them and they understand you and know your limits and know what you are about’. Breda goes on to say that she would like a good relationship with all of her students and in tandem with this she would like ‘the children that I teach to respect me’. So, while the importance of good pupil–teacher relationships are emphasised within student teachers’ constructs of identities, a power imbalance remains. In response to the question ‘What image do you have of a teacher?’ Mary illustrates this view:

A figure of respect. Somebody you look up to so that when they tell you something or advise you, you can take their word and you’ll know that they are right and telling you for your own good.

Traditional views of respect tend to highlight a deferential and status bound interpretation. Mary endorses this traditionalist construct of the teacher as the all-knowing pedagogue: the children looking up to the teacher and respecting her. She tempers this view somewhat when she remarks that ‘I know that nobody is right all of the time but they would have your best interests at heart. I think someone that the children respect’. Similarly Jan exemplifies the tensions in the student teachers’ understanding of respect. She wants the children to enjoy learning and be able to have fun but at the same time she requires respect from them. She would ‘like them to think that I was approachable, that I had a sense of humour that we can have a laugh together as well as learn together and with that have respect for what I say. If I say no talking or whatever that they will do that’.

Central to the relationality of teaching for the student teachers are views of respect. While the students want pupils to respect them, their perceptions of respect, as articulated in the interviews, tends not to be about creating regularity, empathy and connection, but creating a sense of indebtedness (Midobuche 1999). Their interpretations of respect demand expressions of esteem.

#### *The desire to be remembered*

The wish to be remembered and leave a lasting impression is reiterated throughout the student teacher interviews. In her account of the teacher she wishes to be, Ellen emphasises the importance of ‘making an impact and [being] remembered like I remember that teacher’. The teacher she is referring to is her favourite teacher in primary school who made things enjoyable and interesting, and ‘never moved onto

something else until she knew we understood it'. The desire to be remembered emanates from a very positive apprenticeship of observation with this particular teacher. Molly too had a very positive apprenticeship of observation and would like children to remember her as 'Somebody who leaves the pupils with nice memories. When they think of me a couple of years later they will remember they had a nice experience and they learned a lot'. Her recollection of primary school is very positive: 'I don't remember ever disliking any of my primary school teachers... I had really nice and kind teachers to us all'. Jan hopes that children will remember her for more positive reasons: 'that they will say about me afterwards that she was very good and she was kind and fair and she had a sense of humour and they enjoyed themselves as well'.

Jan's experience in primary school, on the other hand, makes her want to do things differently. She remembers one of her teachers for negative reasons: 'You weren't allowed talk or offer opinions. There was nothing like that. It is so different nowadays'. Particularly in terms of children with difficulties she describes the reaction of one of her teachers: 'she would thump us on the shoulder if we couldn't write our letters or numbers in a straight line. I remember her alright'. Student teachers are expressing their desire to be remembered, largely for making learning enjoyable and being fair to all students. Their own life histories, both positive and negative inform this desire. Where their apprenticeship of observation has been positive students articulate a wish to emulate this for other pupils, but where the experience has been negative they wished to provide an alternative experience for future pupils.

### *Valuing the individual*

Equality of respect – or equality of respect for difference – is an emerging theme in feminist and post-modernist writing in particular (Gilligan 2007; Irigaray 2008). Equality of respect for difference is concerned with the recognition of individuals in their own right and not in terms of how they compare with dominant groups, or the beliefs of dominant groups. Contrary to the transmission model of teaching whereby all children are treated in a homogenous manner, as 'vessels to be filled', transcript data from this research *suggests* that student teachers place a value on the recognition of individual difference and the importance of each child reaching his/her potential. Their role is to:

... draw out everything that is there in the kids. Not just academically bright kids, but for the other children who were always in my time made feel awful and marginalised. To give them self-esteem and make them feel that they are just as worthwhile as anybody else. That they all have talents and try and develop those talents. (Jan)

This is in sharp contrast to Jan's experience of school where: 'Fear dominated the whole thing' and informed her desire to be different: 'So if I ever get to be a teacher I really, really hope I would never have that attitude'. Di sees the biggest challenge for teachers as 'trying to facilitate all the different levels of ability of all the children'. This is in contrast to her apprenticeship of observation: 'When we were in school it was just one level for everyone whereas you have to meet the different needs of all the individuals in the class as best you can'. The emphasis here is on teacher responsibility for student learning, as opposed to blaming the individual for not conforming to the expectations of the institution. Di continues

that she must 'work to the best of my ability and do the best I can for children'. Similarly, Molly sees her biggest challenge in becoming a teacher as the need to 'take an individualistic approach to students'. Again, her apprenticeship of observation appears to be informing this concern for the individual pupil: 'I remember one teacher who humiliated a pupil, a pupil who had a stutter and the stutter obviously became worse'. The humiliation and embarrassment caused to this pupil has stayed with Molly and informs her desire to respect and value individual difference.

Molly describes the really good teachers that she had as those who were 'creative, understanding, kind and showed sensitivity to their pupils'. For her it was important that teaching was non-didactic and utilised a variety of pedagogical approaches. The good teachers she remembered 'offered different learning strategies to the kids to learn'. The importance of a variety of approaches is again emphasised, this time in her description of 'really bad teachers':

I don't remember any bad teachers in primary as such. The secondary school teachers that didn't offer us the learning strategies. They expected us to learn a lot of information, to learn without offering us strategies to learn that information.

The recognition of individual difference, using multiple approaches to teaching and learning, is fuelled by her apprenticeship of observation in both primary and second-level contexts. In her assessment of the essential qualities of a teacher, this emphasis on individual difference again comes to the fore. For Molly, a teacher must be innovative and creative and 'somebody who looks at their pupils and colleagues as individuals, doesn't teach under the illusion that there are stereotypes in this world. That everybody is an individual'. This is a progressive perspective which runs contrary to the modernist notions of unchallenged truths, classroom homogeneity and lack of respect for difference (Leistyna, Woodrum, and Sherblo 1996, 341).

Mary too in her description of 'bad teachers' highlights their lack of respect for difference. For these teachers, there is a lack of recognition that individuals have different strengths in different areas, or Gardner's (1983) notion of varying 'intelligence profiles'. She states that such teachers 'didn't appreciate that people learn at different levels. That some people were good at one thing but not *as strong at something else*'. Again the rejection of the stereotypical and the modernist legitimisation of one voice is clear. Mary's respect for the individual is born out of her apprenticeship of observation which typified modernist beliefs around homogeneity and objective truths (Leistyna, Woodrum, and Sherblo 1996).

### Teaching and learning

Progressive notions of teaching and learning dominate the narratives of the student teachers. In the constructs of the teachers they wish to become, they focus mainly on the heuristic and non-didactic modes of teaching and learning. Emma wished to 'facilitate' student learning and 'instil in children a want to further their own education themselves' or as Niamh describes it 'that the children are interested in learning and that they want to go out and learn more'. These views may be reactionary to their lived experience of teachers such as those described by Mary: 'Moving very fast through things just to get the work finished. This page had to be finished whether you understood it or not, it had to be done', or perhaps it is a result of their very positive time in school, as experienced by Emma:

Our fifth class teacher, the principal at the moment was very good... We did a lot of music and drama and play... I suppose she just structured her lessons towards practicality rather than just sitting down learning at the desk, getting bored. She allowed us to explore and develop our own projects. She set us a lot of projects and tasks to do on our own and then come up and get help from her.

While progressive views of teaching and learning may be as a result of either their time as a pupils with the 'good' or 'bad' teacher, what is not in doubt from these narratives is the pervasive power of their apprenticeship of observation in formulating their lay theories or constructs of their teacher identities. The latter is again reinforced through the narrative of Pat. He wishes to be 'professional' in his approach to teaching and learning. Professionalism is a contaminated concept due to its many connotations and definitions (Freidson 1988; Solder 1990). Nias (1989, 34–6) in her research on primary teachers talking, clearly indicates that professionalism may operate at two levels: the professional teacher who is committed to achieving high standards constantly seeking to increase their own knowledge and expertise, often referring to acknowledged experts for help and advice, or the professional teacher aspiring to high standards by being concerned about reliability, punctuality, efficiency and classroom competence. It is unclear as to what level Pat would align himself. However, what is apparent is that his comment appears to be illustrative of his apprenticeship of observation. At third level he pursued a degree in law. In discussing professionalism in relation to his experience of working in the area, he remarked 'you lived by the sword'. He does not expand on what exactly he means by professional within an educational context, rather he indicates that he wishes to extend this approach to all the relevant stakeholders. This notion of lifelong learning may be inherent in Pat's comment relating to professionalism, but it is more explicitly conveyed in Fiona's narrative. She wishes to be somebody who is motivated throughout her career 'interested in the subjects that I'm going to teach, encouraging. Somebody who will develop continuous professional development'.

Current expectations of teachers require more than traditional expertise in subject matter and knowledge. Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan (1996) argue that commitment to the norms of continuous improvement is essential to the postmodern teacher. Many of the participating students, as illustrated, endorse this view.

### **Classroom management**

In constructing their idealised teacher identities classroom management issues emerged as yet another core issue for these students. Classroom management was bound up with care, facilitation and with one other arguably less desirable condition of control. Maria endorses the importance of controlling her class: 'I think you really have to be a good planner... You lose control if haven't got your plan. It leads to discipline problems and all that'. She is adamant that 'you really have to just take control of your class'. This view is shaped by her formative years in the classroom. In recalling her favourite teacher she says:

My favourite teacher was probably my fifth and sixth class teacher Mrs Dolan. She was a very strict and cross teacher, but she was a really good teacher. You learned for her. I really admired her for that. The school wouldn't have had discipline problems but she was just really strict. All you copybooks had to right. I really agree with that and still do to a great extent that the teacher has to be in charge.

For Maria strictness and control are perceived as essential features of being a good teacher. This view is shared by Ellen whose biggest challenge is in the realm of classroom management. She stresses the importance of being in control from 'day one': 'I personally think that if you get there at the start of the year and you lay down rules... it makes it a lot easier'. She highlights further the need for 'good classroom management to control the situation'. The co-existence of commitment to care with the need to control in the ideal teacher identity may be problematic as it may make it difficult for student teachers to develop their independence, autonomy and security to reframe their professional identity (Hargreaves, Earl, and Ryan 1996).

### **Discussion and implications**

The foregoing analysis highlights a tension between two opposing constructions of teacher identity: traditional and progressive. Within the student narratives there seems to be a 'push and pull syndrome' embedded in the constructs of the teachers they wished to be. Student teachers on the surface espouse the progressive view fuelled by their atypical experiences and apprenticeship of observation. They wish to be informal, communicative and facilitative of children's learning in what appears to be in a vague and undefined way. However, they appeared pulled back by the traditional more modern teacher archetypes who were rigid, didactic and very evidently in control. This notion seems to be driven by their apprenticeship of observation exclusively.

If we were to construct a picture of the teacher the students wished to be (idealised identities) from their combined narratives one could argue that it would be: the caring, warm, approachable teacher who facilitates children's learning, but who is firm and in control. A teacher, who commands respect, yet is remembered fondly. To say that there is a balance between the two perspectives within their constructs of their teaching identities would be inaccurate and belie the reality of a dominant progressive view. However, to ignore the more subliminal influence of the traditional lens would ensure that the data analysis is flawed. Tension between the two constructions of teacher identities exists. While one may ask if the two are in conflict, what is perhaps more important in the debate is the robust nature of these lay theories and their sources.

Few disagree that 'pre-service teachers... [lay theories] are well established, tenacious and powerful' (Holt-Reynolds 1992, 344). Student teachers entering pre-service teacher education, as illustrated already, possess both a body of preconceptions about teachers and teaching and a very strong sense of what it means to be a teacher (Alsurp 2006; Beauchamp and Thomas 2009, 2010; Britzman 1992; Eick and Reid 2001; Sugrue 1997). Their life histories, apprenticeship of observation, and atypical teaching experiences have contributed to their early socialisation. This in itself is not problematic. What is problematic, however, is the tenacity and pervasive power of student teachers' lay theories and pre-service constructed teacher identities, formed in the absence of understanding of educational theories or pedagogical principles. This raises a significant concern for teacher educators. Student teachers enter pre-service education with their lay theories of teaching and learning shaped by their life histories. These are largely ignored, with an unashamed attempt to replace them by privileging what we as teacher educators regard as more scientific and more grounded theory and researched based versions (Alsurp 2006;

Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Britzman 1986). This may possibly be as a result of the teacher educator's own apprenticeship of observation as a teacher educator. The supplanting of the more grounded theories on the more robust lay theories of the students may be likened to laying a veneer on a wooden surface. The veneer is not as robust as the wood beneath and may easily be chipped away by the pervasive culture of the school in which newly qualified teachers find themselves. They may indeed be 'washed out' by the culture of the workplace or by survival tactics:

... where coping with unprecedented change the educational theories of teacher education become displaced and the lay theories become the theories of practice, or put more simply the student teachers revert to the way they were taught themselves. (Burke 1992, 116)

By operating this 'veneering' procedure educators are operating out of what Johnson (1992, 134) describes as a 'deficit view of the student' rather than acknowledging the understandings, attitudes and beliefs that the student brings.

It becomes necessary therefore to raise the following two questions. First, how can teacher educators begin to interrogate the lay theories of the students? Second, how can teacher educators support a dialogue between student lay theories, their idealised identities and the broader sphere of teaching and learning? It is not sufficient just to acknowledge the existence of lay theories, recognising the extent to which these early experiences in schools impact on student teachers' concept of self before they begin teaching, nor is it that the 'push and pull syndrome' between progressive and more traditional identities are still evident in the narratives of student teachers in Ireland. Rather, it is the recognition, while difficult, that changing these beliefs which inform identities is necessary. Change is possible, but these lay theories of traditional rather than progressive notions of teaching and learning need to be confronted or 'shattered' (Chong, Low, and Goh 2011). Constantly challenging them through the creation of cognitive dissonance is key (Alsurp 2006). As student teachers' concepts of teacher identity are created and recreated through the provision of discursive practices and opportunities for critical reflection and inquiry within initial teacher education are therefore important. The creation of these opportunities could allow for dissonance which may lead to change. Failing to do so may mean that the 'veneering' as alluded to earlier remains just that, and that their decisions and behaviours as teachers are being informed by what lies beneath.

To be reflective about the type of teacher one wishes to become, as Czeriawski (2011) acknowledges, requires 'others' to provide opportunities for reflection and inquiry. The significant 'others' in this equation are the teacher educators. In enabling student teachers to have a strong understanding of self as professional and formulate their identities, the teacher educator needs to have a strong sense of his/her own role and professional self. Research in this area would suggest that among teacher educators there is dissonance between identities, with some retaining their former teacher identity, while others taking on an identity defined by their disciplinary area in which they work (Furlong and O'Brien 2010; Young and Erickson 2011). Competing teacher educator identities suggest competing values and beliefs systems which in and of themselves may be unproblematic. However, if these values and beliefs give rise to alternative conflicting approaches to professional identity formation within and an institution engaged in initial teacher education this may well be problematical. If some teacher educators acknowledge the understandings

that a student brings with them to initial teacher education and begin to explore ways of enabling students to reflect and build upon these, while others privilege and mandate some other needs just because they think them to be more sophisticated or fall within a traditionally sustained disciplinary ways of knowing (Becker 1989), it may mean students being left in a very ambiguous space. Equally the question may well be raised that if teacher educators have not explored their own identities (Furlong and O'Brien 2010) how then can they assist in aiding their students to do so?

To return to the socio cultural context of Ireland in which this research took place. It is not heartening to see that the finding of Sugrue (1997) are echoed in part in this study which indicates that the traditional constructions of teacher identity still exist today and play a role in the idealised identities of the students, despite the change and innovation which has take place in the interim. The new criteria and guidelines for teacher education as issued by the Teaching Council (2011), and centrally the expansion of the duration of initial teacher education courses, presents a timely opportunity for teacher educators to examine how they facilitate opportunities for students to critically evaluate their lay theories with regard to teaching and learning, and to explore the teacher they wish to be. Given the new research on teacher educator identity teacher educators too need to engage in a critical examination of the part they play within this process of identity formation.

### Notes on contributor

Catherine Furlong is a senior lecturer in Education in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, where she is co-ordinator of the BEd programme and Chair of the MEd Programme Board. Her research interests include initial teacher education, educational leadership, teacher appraisal and identity formation – student and teacher educator.

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