The personal and professional selves of teachers: stable and unstable identities

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In much educational literature it is recognised that the broader social conditions in which teachers live and work, and the personal and professional elements of teachers' lives, experiences, beliefs and practices are integral to one another, and that there are often tensions between these which impact to a greater or lesser extent upon teachers' sense of self or identity. If identity is a key influencing factor on teachers' sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness, then investigation of those factors which influence positively and negatively, the contexts in which these occur and the consequences for practice, is essential. Surprisingly, although notions of 'self' and personal identity are much used in educational research and theory, critical engagement with individual teachers' cognitive and emotional 'selves' has been relatively rare. Yet such engagement is important to all with an interest in raising and sustaining standards of teaching, particularly in centralist reform contexts which threaten to destabilise long-held beliefs and practices. This article addresses the issue of teacher identities by drawing together research which examines the nature of the relationships between social structures and individual agency; between notions of a socially constructed, and therefore contingent and ever-remade, 'self', and a 'self' with dispositions, attitudes and behavioural responses which are durable and relatively stable; and between cognitive and emotional identities. Drawing upon existing research literature and findings from a four-year Department for Education and Skills funded project with 300 teachers in 100 schools which investigated variations in teachers' work and lives and their effects on pupils (VITAE), it finds that identities are neither intrinsically stable nor intrinsically fragmented, as earlier literature suggests. Rather, teacher identities may be more, or less, stable and more or less fragmented at different times and in different ways according to a number of life, career and situational factors.

This article focuses upon the nature of and influences on teacher identities. It begins by discussing theoretical and empirical studies on identity which represent different historical and cultural perspectives in different change contexts. These focus upon (i) early notions of teacher identity; (ii) teachers' identities: personal and professional; (iii) the teacher, the pupils and the school; (iv) the multiple 'I': agency and structure in the early years of teaching; and (v) fragmented selves. Having

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focused upon these different but connecting thoughts regarding teacher identity, the article aims to further elaborate and challenge these notions, using illustrative findings from a recent research study, 'Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and their Effects on Pupils' (VITAE), in order to continue the conceptual discussion of the role of self and identity in teachers' work and lives.

(i) Early notions of personal identity

An understanding of teachers' selves, their cognitive and emotional identities, is central to the analysis of variations in teachers' work, lives and effectiveness in which structure (external influences) and agency (one's ability to pursue the goals that one values) are perceived to be in dynamic tension (Archer, 1996, 2000). The concepts of self and identity are often used interchangeably in the literature on teacher education. Both are complex constructs, not least because they draw on major research and theoretical areas of philosophy, psychology, sociology and psychotherapy. Earlier writers (e.g. Cooley, 1902) tended to position the self as a singular, unified, stable essence that was little affected by context or biography. These initial views on the construction of self focused on the ability of an individual to create a defining system of concepts. These concepts, which remained constant over time, were developed through the subjectively interpreted feedback from others, and were distinct and identifiable to an individual. Progressing from this fundamental principle, the connection between self-awareness and the perceived opinions of others began to develop as a major influence on the construction of self. This theoretical advance, which Cooley (1902) called the 'looking glass self', enhanced his initial opinions, as it situated the formation of self as part of a reflexive, learning process by which values, attitudes, behaviour, roles and identities are accumulated over time. Drawing on the individual's concern for how others relate to him/her, Mead (1934) believed that the self, though stable, was a continuous concept closely linked to social interactions and created through language and social experiences. Like Cooley, Mead furthered the discussion relating to self being part of a reflexive process, by suggesting that individuals create a 'generalised other'. This 'generalised other' was not only an accumulation of values, roles and identities, but was a combination of many different attitudes towards an individual which, when integrated, were reflected in the individual's attitude towards him/herself. For the first time, it was suggested that the self, though stable, could take on different approaches to different social experiences based on the particular part played by the individual.

These perspectives, though fundamental to our theoretical understanding of self, do not take into account the fact that people's lives are multifaceted. Goffman (1959) went some way towards addressing this issue when he presented the idea that each person had a number of 'selves', each one focusing on the execution of one role at any given time and situation (Goffman, 1959). He believed that the ability to adapt the self was essential in order to effectively communicate the social processes necessary within each situation. However, even in the light of this development,

these theoretical perspectives do not allow for a continuous, lifelong development of self which may undergo many changes over time. More than a decade later, referring specifically to 'professional identity', Ball (1972) usefully separates *situated* from *substantive* identity. He views the situated identity of a person as a malleable presentation of self that differs according to specific definitions of situations (e.g. within schools) and the more stable, core presentation of self that is fundamental to how a person thinks about himself or herself.

Parallel to these perspectives, but in the psychoanalytic tradition, Erikson (1959) suggested three 'stages' in adult life which he characterised as crises: (i) distantiation (a readiness to defend one's identity against all threats); (ii) generativity versus stagnation (motivated and goal oriented or coasting, on the road to disenchantment); and (iii) integrity versus despair and disgust (a readiness to defend the dignity of one's own lifestyle against all physical and economic threats) (Erikson, 1959, p. 98). Erikson's theory provides insights into the inner, sometimes conflicting forces which affect identity during particular life phases. Importantly, it suggests that identity is 'never gained nor maintained once and for all' (Sikes *et al.*, 1985, p. 155).

(ii) Teachers' identities: personal and professional

Common to all this early research is a recognition of the importance of an understanding of self to beliefs, attitudes and actions, and thus the kinds and effects of such actions. In teacher education also, much research literature demonstrates that knowledge of the self is a crucial element in the way teachers construe and construct the nature of their work (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994) and that events and experiences in the personal lives of teachers are intimately linked to the performance of their professional roles (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Acker, 1999). Several researchers (Nias, 1989, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Sumsion, 2002) have noted that teacher identities are not only constructed from technical and emotional aspects of teaching (i.e. classroom management, subject knowledge and pupil test results) and their personal lives, but also 'as the result of an interaction between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural, and institutional environment in which they function on a daily basis' (Sleegers & Kelchtermans, 1999, p. 579).

There are, then, unavoidable interrelationships between professional and personal identities, if only because the overwhelming evidence is that teaching demands significant personal investment.

> The ways in which teachers form their professional identities are influenced by both how they feel about themselves and how they feel about their students. This professional identity helps them to position or situate themselves in relation to their students and to make appropriate and effective adjustments in their practice and their beliefs about, and engagement with, students. (James-Wilson, 2001, p. 29)

Geert Kelchtermans (1993, pp. 449–450) suggests that the professional self, like the personal self, evolves over time and that it consists of five interrelated parts:

- *Self-image*: how teachers describe themselves though their career stories;

- *Self-esteem*: the evolution of self as a teacher, how good or otherwise as defined by self or others;
- *Job-motivation*: what makes teachers choose, remain committed to or leave the job;
- *Task perception*: how teachers define their jobs;
- *Future perspective*: teachers' expectations for the future development of their jobs.

In his (1996) study of the career stories of 10 experienced Belgian primary school teachers, Kelchtermans found two recurring themes.

- *Stability in the job*: a need to maintain the status quo, having achieved ambition, led to job satisfaction;
- *Vulnerability*: to the judgements of colleagues, the head teacher and those outside the school gates, e.g. parents, inspectors, media, which might be based exclusively on measurable student achievements. As vulnerability increased, so they tended towards passivity and conservatism in teaching.

Thus, a positive sense of identity with subject, relationships and roles is important to maintaining self-esteem or self-efficacy, commitment to and a passion for teaching (Day, 2004).

In *Primary teachers talking: a study of teaching as work*, Jennifer Nias (1989) located the primary school teacher's self in the social context of education in England in the 1980s, which she described as encouraging 'individualism, isolation, a belief in one's own autonomy and the investment of personal resources' (p. 13). Nias's principal contribution was to identify a distinction between the personal and professional elements of teachers' lives and identities. She argued for the recognition of the former as being crucial to understanding teachers in their working lives. Incorporation of the identity 'teacher' into an individual's self-image was found to be accomplished over time. Early career teachers' substantial selves ('me') were experienced as relatively independent of their social self ('teacher') and her respondents were into their second decade of teaching before they were likely to have incorporated their professional role into their self-image and thus identify *themselves* as 'teachers' (p. 181). The majority linked 'being a teacher' with 'being yourself' in the classroom and school, although they defined this differently, for example, as finding your 'niche', as being the same person inside school and out, or as being unable to separate life events and experiences from events and experiences in school. Pivotal to that sense of belonging were the relationships they formed with their class: the sense of union and unity *they* had been able to create within the group and the investment *they* made in the lives of the children. Being yourself in school, then, was not so much connected with the practical aspects of teaching children skills and information, but rather in generating a sense of community, in integrating personal connections and professional connections between the teacher and the pupil.

Their involvement in activities within the school also provided them with 'personal and emotional satisfactions within their working lives rather than outside them' (p. 18). However, this integration of identities, and the concomitant levels of

commitment to work which it signals, produced a 'paradox'; that is, teachers' investments in their work, their levels of commitment—understood as 'a readiness to allocate scarce personal resources' (Lortie, 1975, p. 189, cited in Nias, 1989, p. 18)—led to increasing demands upon them for ever-greater investment. This in turn resulted in a reduction of satisfaction when these demands could not be met. A second key contribution of Nias's research, therefore, concerned differences in commitment between teachers' performance and motivation. As in Lortie's (1975) research, commitment demonstrated involvement and activity in work beyond the immediate demands of the post. It was through reference to levels of 'commitment', also, that the teachers distinguished between those who were seen to 'care about the children' and 'take the job seriously' and those who did not, between those who were 'real teachers' and those whose interests were elsewhere, between those who are 'professionals' and those who are not (Nias, 1989 pp. 30/32).

A third area to which Nias's research draws attention are the tensions and contradictions in the primary teacher's role, which are principally produced through the opposition between the impulse and requirement to 'care and nurture' and the impulse and requirement to 'control'; the conflict between the values which inform individual teaching and the teaching of children as individuals, and the institutional requirement to control, manage and teach children in a group, meet externally established 'standards', and deliver a curriculum. She concluded that 'teachers' inevitable inability fully to satisfy their own consciences and their wider audiences leaves them feeling simultaneously under pressure, guilty, and inadequate' (p. 193).

Nias's work within the primary school context can be seen as a foundational study which furthers understandings of personal, professional, emotional and organisational components of identity, how this connects to individual agency and its interplay with structure. Although she maintains the concept of the continuous and stable 'substantive' 'self, she does, nonetheless, acknowledge and draw attention to the social contingency of identities and the complex interweaving of teachers' rationality, emotional responses, personal dispositions and structural locations. For Nias, all of these, together with the institutional organisation of the school, are implicated in the production and acting out of teachers' 'work identities'.

(iii) The teacher, the pupils and the school

Douwe Beijaard's (1995) research with 28 secondary school teachers in the Netherlands draws upon and adds to Nias's insights on teacher identity. For Beijaard, the concept of identity refers to 'who or what someone is, the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others' (p. 282). Drawing on the work of Sikes *et al.* (1991), he examined three main features of secondary school teachers' professional identities: the subject that teachers teach, their relationships with pupils, and their role or role conception. Beijaard argued that for secondary school teachers, professional identity is derived, in the first instance, from the subjects that they teach, which have a strong and ongoing influence on their perceptions of themselves as professionals. With Sikes

et al. (1991), he noted that relationships with colleagues in the school who also teach the same subject have particular significance to teachers, together with the different statuses of particular subjects. He also found that changes concerning the status of particular subjects in schools can have profoundly negative effects on the teachers' professional identity. Fundamental to the growth of teachers' professional development was the establishment of relationships with pupils which involve both closeness and distance—whilst teachers should show pupils personal interest and respect, they should at the same time keep a personal distance from them. He found that the teachers who experienced poor relationships with pupils tended to perceive themselves as inadequate in their contributions to the organisation of the school and that teachers' positive perceptions of their contributions were largely attributed to a positive school cultural environment, their involvement in extra-curricular school activities and in the development of school policy making.

Beijaard also noted the significance of pupil agency in this process. Drawing also on the work of Riseborough (1985), who maintains that the perceptions and behaviours of pupils are 'instrumental in the generation of differential rates of teacher "achievement", vertical and horizontal promotion, "satisfaction", absentee-ism, nervous breakdowns, "deviance", resignation, etc. (Riseborough, 1985, p. 262, cited in Beijaard, 1995, p. 283), Beijaard proposed that pupils' attitudes and behaviour may have profound effects upon the teacher's 'self' ('me') *and* his/her structural position at the meso (organisational) level as 'adult', 'parent', 'teacher'. The more personal and professional selves are integrated into teacher identity, the more this is affected by positive or negative pupil behaviour. Beijaard's findings also point to the importance of teachers' experience being taken into account in research on personal histories and their 'substantial' selves. Like Sikes (1992), he found that 'teachers of similar age and sex share similar experiences, perceptions, attitudes, satisfactions, frustrations, and concerns, and the nature of their motivation and commitment alters in a predictable pattern as they get older' (Sikes, 1992, p. 40, cited in Beijaard, 1995, p. 284).

For Beijaard, then, as with Nias (1989), an important element of teachers' identities related to their experiences of school. Like Rutter *et al.* (1979), Galloway *et al.* (1982); Mortimore *et al.* (1988); Pollard (1985) and Woods *et al.* (1997), he found that the culture of the school, its internal dynamics and organisation, enable or constrain the achievement of 'satisfaction', 'commitment' and 'motivation' and impact upon teachers' constructions of their teacher identities and the acceptance or rejection of the identity 'teacher' as an aspect of self.[1] He suggested that teachers have high stability in their careers 'when they have a good relationship with pupils and when they function well in the school organization' (p. 292), and that a change to one of these aspects results in a period of instability within the teacher's career. His research showed that, overall, the teachers' actual perceptions of their professional identities were influenced in a positive manner by:

> (1) the transition in schools from teacher-centred towards pupil centred education, (2) schools' directedness towards pupil counselling, (3) the co-operation between colleagues in general and between those who teach the same subject in particular, (4)

the possibility of having additional jobs in but also outside the school, and (5) the opportunity to influence the development of school policy. (p. 288)

Negative influences included:

> (1) colleagues (for example by the feeling that one's subject is not taken seriously by colleagues or as a result of different levels of previous education), (2) effects of mergers (for example by possessing no adequate teaching style when one has to teach other categories of pupils, in particular pupils of schools with a 'lower status' and (3) the school organization and its structure (often criticised for being obscure and insufficiently open, it remains unclear whether this is really the case or a reaction of teachers to personal frustrations). (pp. 288–289)

The most important contributions by Beijaard's research to understandings of teacher identity, then, concern (i) the interplay between teachers' relationships and interactions with their pupils, (ii) their perceptions of their subject status, (iii) the influence of the school environment, and (iv) the relationship between these and stability or instability of identity.

(iv) The multiple 'I': agency and structure in the early years of teaching

In Canada, Cooper and Olson (1996) and Reynolds (1996) investigated the interconnections between the personal and professional elements of teachers' identities exposed by Nias and Beijaard. Their work goes beyond these, however, by its identification of 'multiple selves' of teachers, which, they suggest, are continually reconstructed through the historical, cultural, sociological and psychological influences which all shape the meaning of being a teacher.

Cooper and Olson argued first that with pre-service teachers the self is not yet substantive but constructed through an ongoing process of experience which is temporal and grounded in daily living; and second that meaning is created by individuals through processes of interaction, where the self is neither fixed nor standing still, but is rather an ever changing entity:

> identity formation is an ongoing process that involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of our experiences as we live through them—suggesting that focusing on transactive relationships rather than linear models might provide a deeper understanding of the multiple 'I's of teacher identity … teacher identity is continually being informed, formed, and reformed as individuals develop over time and through interaction with others. (p. 80)

From this perspective, Cooper and Olson asserted that a fundamental problem for teacher identity lies in the tensions teachers experience between their personal knowledge of children, which includes their own childhood histories and memories, and rationalist models and constructions of knowledge; and they argued that pre-service teachers' actions are not strictly determined by present circumstances nor tightly constrained by the past. Rather, 'they are creating their world while also being shaped by it' (p. 83).

The importance of their work to thinking about variations in teachers' work and lives is the significance they attach to the influence of the past (identities) upon the

present (identities) and the part played by emotion. Drawing upon student teachers' narratives of experience, Cooper and Olsen concluded that teachers' emotional identities may be suppressed as they are encouraged to take on a prescribed role which 'entails suppressing personal voice in favour of an objective and distanced voice' (p. 87). This supports Nias's (1989) work and suggests that, in the early phase of their career, teachers have little agency in the shaping of their identities, and, moreover, that the 'interactional processes' in which teachers' selves are constituted have little impact upon the structures (educational or otherwise) through which their identities are lived out.

Issues of teacher agency and its relationship to social and educational structures for teachers in their early years were explored further by Celia Reynolds, (1996). She suggested that teachers' selves are both constructed in their identities and constructive of them (Davies, 1993). In an application of this 'subjectification' model to longitudinal data collected from beginning teachers in Ontario, Canada, Reynolds and her colleague identified three problems: (i) although beginning teachers had accepted that '[a]t this early stage in their work as teachers, their primary goal was to "blend in" to their surrounding landscape in order to survive "induction" and to be "enculturated" as a "good teacher" according to prescribed definitions and scripts' (p. 75), interviews with the teachers three years after their teacher education showed that this view had changed. They had found a diversity in the 'landscapes' of schools which confounded earlier definitions and challenged them to assert their own sense of agency; (ii) through exposure to a variety of schools, the teachers experienced conflict and confusion. 'Many of them began to question previously held beliefs about themselves and about their students. A few expressed concerns about the dominance of a discourse which they now saw as robbing individuals of the "potential to become something other than what has been predicted"' (p. 75); and (iii) as they progressed, teachers found that pupils and parents did not fit the images that they had previously held whilst training. These three 'scripts' of 'constraint' highlight the shifting sands of personal experience and school cultures on which identities are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in the early years of teaching.

(v) Fragmented selves

The concept of an 'active' agential teacher self, as suggested by Reynolds through her metaphor of the 'landscaper', was also proposed by MacLure (1993) through her empirical research with 69 teachers at the beginning of a period of radical systemic reform in England. Critical of earlier notions of an essential or substantial 'self', MacLure advocated a post-structuralist understanding of identity which is formed and informed through the 'discursive practices' and interactions in which individuals engage. Here identity is not a stable entity that people possess, but rather, is constructed within social relations and used by individuals as an interactional resource. This view is not dissimilar to those expressed by Beijaard, Olson and

Cooper and Reynolds. However, it locates teacher identity in a particular view of broad, social movements.

Whilst MacLure found that teachers' reactions to, and perceptions of, current educational reforms were influenced by the local contexts and circumstances of individual teachers, she argued that teachers themselves were also involved in partially reconstructing their context according to their *biographical projects*, i.e. 'the network of personal concerns, values and aspirations against which events are judged and decisions made' (p. 314). In this respect, her work is similar to that of Kelchtermans. Her research goes beyond this, however. It reveals that even within career phases, teachers' identities differ:

> Avril felt her youth to be a problem. Conscious of being young enough to be the head's daughter, she thought he did not give her enough responsibility. Shelley, on the other hand felt too old: stuck the same job since she qualified, she had given up the idea of promotion, and felt jaded and lacking in the energy she had when she was younger. Both Shelley and Avril were 27. (p. 316)

She suggested that such variation will also occur 'within the accounts of any single person, according to the concerns of the moment' (p. 316): that age may be irrelevant in some activities but an impediment in others and so people may feel differently about it at different times. This suggests a 'continuing', but not a 'substantive' self, in that personal concerns, values and aspirations are also subject to change through experience and interaction which include, but are not necessarily dominated by, external reform events. MacLure further argued that even 'general-ised predispositions or allegiances amongst sub-groups of teachers—whether of age, seniority, primary/secondary, arts/science etc.'—could not be captured, as 'features of context, or stratifying factors such as age, subject affiliation or seniority, took on different meanings for each teacher' (p. 314).

Like Beijaard, MacLure found that context was a strong influence. Many of the teachers reported feelings of alienation from the values and practices and their institution, their local education authority, or with central government, and for some, this had meant that they were no longer able to reconcile their identities with their job and had either taken the decision to retire early, resign, or had experienced long periods of stress-related illnesses. Others expressed a desire to leave their jobs but felt trapped within them, and many other teachers conveyed their sense of occupying a spoiled identity through 'golden age' accounts 'that compared the dissatisfactions of the present with the satisfaction of lost past' (p. 318). She argued, however, that the teachers constructed their different relationships to 'the community' according to their 'current and anticipated projects' (p. 315) and other characteristics such as their age, and also identities, for example, as primary or secondary school teachers.

On this basis, MacLure asserted that rather than attempting to explain teachers in terms of 'sociological, contextual, subject or occupational categories', it is more useful to place them in 'the categories which people chose in order to explain *themselves* (p. 316), and how they use these categories in the construction of identities. Contrasting the teachers in the 'Teachers' Jobs and Lives' project with

those within Nias's (1989) study, which took place in a more stable policy context, MacLure argued that the teachers in her study appeared to be more varied in their senses of themselves, much less secure in their identities as teachers, and less committed to teaching as a career. In doing so, she was acknowledging, perhaps, that in the period since Nias's work, teachers have more frequently come to occupy positions of increasing constraint. This need not imply that all teachers have a reduced sense of 'agency' per se. Agency is still exercised, for example, if teachers continue to teach within the constraints of any given school environment or set of policies or initiatives, or if they find 'room to manoeuvre' within these. An increase in constraint can be seen to imply, however, that the 'opportunity costs' attached to teachers' agency (Archer, 1996) have changed—that the 'costs' for teachers of asserting their agency in order to achieve their particular individual and/or professional satisfactions are now higher, for example, in respect of their personal relationships, health and well being, and the quality of learning which they provide for their pupils. The importance of MacLure's work is that, like that of others (Day & Hadfield, 1996), it indicates that teachers' identities are, in some cases, less stable, less convergent and less coherent than is often implied by notions of a 'substantive self'.

Variations in identity

Research, then, seems to reveal different but connecting notions of teacher identity. It is clear, for example, that primary school teachers' personal and professional identities are closely connected and that they contribute to motivation, commitment and job satisfaction. For secondary school teachers, subject and its status are related more closely to identity. For all teachers, identity will be affected by external (policy) and internal (organisational) and personal experiences past and present, and so is not always stable.

Teachers will define themselves not only through their past and current identities as defined by personal and social histories and current roles but through their beliefs and values about the kind of teacher they hope to be in the inevitably changing political, social, institutional and personal circumstances:

> For a given individual, or for a collective actor, there may be a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self representation and social action. This is because identity must be distinguished from what, traditionally, sociologists have called roles, and role sets. Roles … are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organisations of society. Their relative weight in influencing people's behaviour depends upon negotiations and arrangements between individuals and those institutions and organisations. Identities are sources of meaning for the actors themselves, and by themselves, constructed through the process of individuation. The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. (Castells, 1997, pp. 6–7)

The effects of the interaction of biography, experience and context in the construction and reconstruction of identity seem, however, to be disputed. For

some researchers (e.g. Nias, Beijaard), teachers have a relatively stable identity, rooted in core sets of values, beliefs and practices. For others (Cooper & Olson, Reynolds, MacLure), teachers' identities are essentially unstable, their temporary stability likely to be affected at any time by either their own 'biographical projects', change in their working environments or a combination of the two. Additionally, although all are present in each of the research projects, more or less cognisance is taken of:

- macro structures: broad social/cultural features usually referred to in discussions of social diversity and/or government policy as it is implicated in the order of an education service;
- meso structures: the social/cultural/organisational formations of schools and teacher education;
- micro structures: talked of in terms of colleagues, pupils and parents;
- personal biographies: values, beliefs, ideologies.

Whilst these studies disagree over the issue of whether identities are substantive (essential) or contingent, all are limited by both their lack of longitudinal 'real time' data and the fact that none seek to address possible relationships between identity and teachers' effectiveness. These limitations, however, are addressed by recent research (VITAE) which, whilst noting the complexities and instabilities of teachers' personal and professional lives, identifies four groups of teachers and relates these to effectiveness: those who have stable, positive or negative identities and those who have unstable, positive or negative teacher identities. Within each of these four groupings perceptions of life and work, external policy, school leadership and culture are perceived to be key positive and negative influences. Focusing on these factors has allowed the identities of particular groups of teachers working in particular sets of circumstances and through different life and career phases to be associated with one or other of these dimensions; and the addition of pupil attitudinal, behavioural and attainment data has enabled hypotheses to be made between identities and effects on pupils.

Agency defined as, 'one's ability to pursue the goals that one values' (Archer, 1996, 2000) in relation to each form of identity is concerned with the fulfilment of these identities, their reconstruction where necessary; and managing critical incidents and trends which may threaten them or which need to be managed. There is also a degree to which agency is expressed by the extent to which people can live with contradictions and tensions within these various identities. It is the combination, therefore, of the variations in teachers' work and lives, in addition to the strategies adopted by teachers to deal with any arising tensions between them, that determine the individual identities for each teacher and which in turn may have a direct or indirect, positive or negative impact on pupils (Figure 1).

A further consideration in the discussion of teacher identity is that of emotional factors. Whilst these factors are implicit in the studies previously discussed, there is insufficient consideration of the strength of their influence. For example, reforms have an impact upon teachers' identities and, because these are both cognitive and
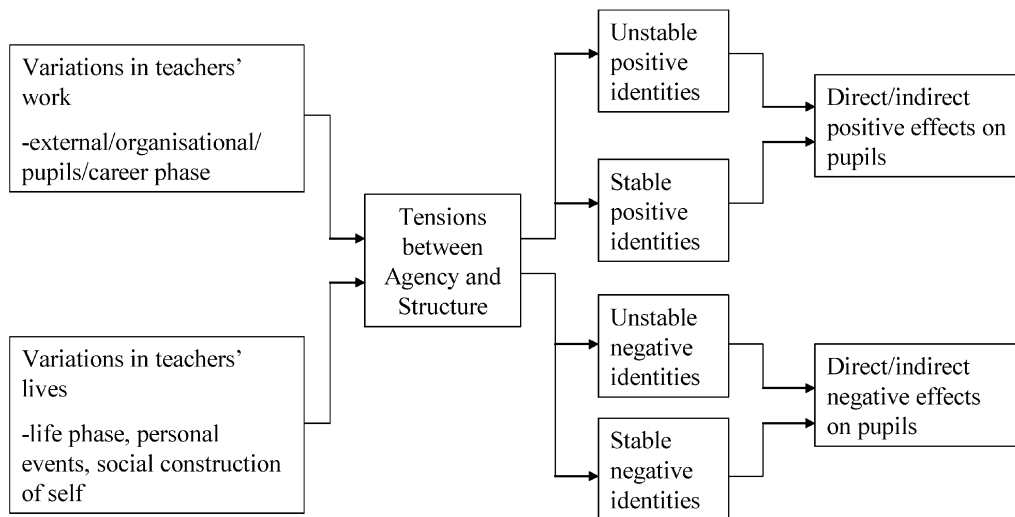
Figure 1. Hypothesising relationships between variations and effectiveness

emotional, create reactions which are both rational and non-rational. A significant and ongoing part of being a teacher, then, is the experiencing and management of strong emotions. We know, for example, that the emotional climate of the school and classroom will affect attitudes to and practices of teaching and learning. Teachers (and their students) experience an array of sometimes contrasting emotions in the classroom. It is surprising, therefore, that this dimension of identity has been given relatively little attention in much of the research.

In a review of empirical research, Sutton (2000) found that love (as a social relationship) and care, surprise and joy, anger, sadness and fear, excitement and pleasure in students' progress and achievements are among the most commonly cited emotions. Because of their emotional investments, teachers inevitably experience a range of negative emotions when control of long-held principles and practices is challenged, or when trust and respect from parents, the public and their students is eroded. Kelchtermans (1996) has also reported on teachers' feelings of *vulnerability*, engendered when professional identity and moral integrity are questioned either by policy changes, parents, inspectors, or colleagues in the light of unrealistic expectations or their failure to help students achieve higher standards. In England, Jeffrey and Woods (1996) found *professional uncertainty*, confusion, inadequacy, anxiety, mortification and doubt among teachers when they investigated primary school teachers' responses to an external (Office for Standards in Education) inspection, associating these with 'dehumanisation' and 'deprofession-alism'. Other negative emotions are: frustration; anger exacerbated by tiredness, stress and students' misbehaviour; anxiety because of the complexity of the job; guilt, sadness, blame and shame at not being able to achieve ideals or targets imposed by others. Emotions play a key role in the construction of identity

(Zembylas, 2003). They are the necessary link between the social structures in which teachers work and the ways they act:

> emotion is a necessary link between social structure and social actor. The connection is never mechanical because emotions are normally not compelling but inclining. But without the emotions category, accounts of situated actions would be fragmentary and incomplete. Emotion is provoked by circumstance and is experienced as transformation of dispositions to act. It is through the subject's active exchange with others that emotional experiences is both stimulated in the actor and orienting of their conduct. Emotion is directly implicated in the actor's transformation of their circumstances, as well as the circumstances' transformation of the actors' disposition to act. (Barbalet, 2002, p. 4)

The literature cited so far suggests that identities are a shifting amalgam of personal biography, culture, social influence and institutional values which may change according to role and circumstance. They depend upon:

> the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, [which] takes place in the context of multiple choice … Reflexively organised life planning … becomes a central feature of the structuring of self identity. (Giddens, 1991, p. 5)

Thus, the ways and extent to which reforms are received, adopted, adapted and sustained or not sustained will not only be influenced by their emotional selves but will exercise influence upon them.

Conclusion

The architecture of teachers' professional identities is not always stable, but at certain times or during certain life, career and organisational phases may be discontinuous, fragmented, and subject to turbulence and change in the continuing struggle to construct and sustain a stable identity. Indeed, today's professional has been described as, 'mobilizing a complex of occasional identities in response to shifting contexts' (Stronach *et al.*, 2002, p. 117). Such mobilisations occur in the space between the 'structure' (of the relations between power and status) and 'agency' (in the influence which we and others can have); and it is the interaction between these which influences how teachers see themselves, i.e. their personal and professional identities. Stronach *et al.*'s (2002) research with nurses and teachers, like others before it (Nias, 1989; Bowe & Ball, 1992; Kelchtermans, 1993; Hoyle & John, 1995; Hanlon, 1998; Furlong *et al.*, 2000; Friedson, 2001), claims that 'professionalism' is bound up in the discursive dynamics of professionals attempting to address or redress the dilemmas of the job within particular cultures (p. 109). Their reading of professional identities and their own data from teachers in six primary schools in England, though limited, and 'walking the tightrope of an uncertain being' (p. 121), resonates with much other empirical research on teachers' plurality of roles (Sachs, 2003) within work contexts which are characterised by fragmentation and discontinuities (Huberman, 1995) and a number of tensions and dilemmas (Day *et al.*, 2000) within what is generally agreed to be increasingly intensive external audit policy cultures (Power, 1994) which are present in many developed nations.

Teachers in all countries need support for their commitment, energy and skill over their careers if they are to grapple with the immense emotional, intellectual and social demands and as they work towards building the internal and external relationships demanded by ongoing government reforms and social movements. The picture of teachers in English schools involved in the VITAE project gives cause for concern and hope—concern because it is clear that there *are* variations in perceived effectiveness which relate to life events, age, experience, phase of schools and their socio-economic status; concern because of the high levels of professional stress which, for many, are having negative effects upon their personal lives; concern also as to whether such levels can be sustained without loss of some of the best teachers or loss of their energy, commitment and sense of purpose. Yet there is hope, too, because of the high levels of commitment and agency, often against the odds, which many teachers' accounts reveal.

The VITAE research does suggest that some teachers themselves do seek and find, in different ways, their own sense of stability within what appears *from the outside* to be fragmented identities, and that the capacity to sustain such stability is directly associated with a combination of positive factors to be found within personal life situations and school working contexts (Day *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, it suggests that neither stability nor instability will necessarily affect their effectiveness.

Sustaining a positive sense of effectiveness to subject, pupils, relationships and roles is important to maintaining motivation, self-esteem or self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and commitment to teaching; and although this research shows consistently that identity is affected, positively and negatively, by classroom experiences, organisational culture and situation-specific events which may threaten existing norms and practices (Nias, 1989; Kelchtermans, 1993; Flores, 2002), successive reform implementation strategies have failed to address the key role played by these, and thus, paradoxically, fail to meet the standards' raising recruitment and retention agendas which they espouse.

Note

1. Whilst Beijaard does not include relationships with head teachers within 'socialising with colleagues in the school', school effectiveness studies have repeatedly pointed to the significance of effective leadership in schools (Stoll & Fink, 1996; Mortimore *et al.*, 1988), with some researchers demonstrating the negative impact upon teachers' selves and identities that can arise as a result of deteriorating relationships between head teachers and their staff (Evans *et al.*, 1994; Evans, 1998).

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