Developing Professional Identity: From methods to messages
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Context

Previous research:
- substantive (essential) vs contingent stable/unstable
- lack of longitudinal 'real time' data
- varying degrees of attention given to macro/meso/micro structures, personal biographies & emotional factors.

A study of teachers' professional identity (VITAE):
- longitudinal data collected from 300 teachers over four years.
Dimensions of identity

- Professional dimension (e.g. long term policy and social trends)
- Situated dimension (e.g. specific school, department or classroom issues)
- Personal dimension (e.g. marriage, bereavement)
Scenarios

- Dimensions in relative balance
- One dominant dimension
- Two dominant dimensions
- Three dominant dimensions

Based on the degree of dominance that each dimension has in a practitioner's life at a given time (Day et al, 2007)
Scenario 1: relative stability
Situated dimension of identity

- Changing the situated identity leads to an instability in teachers' sense of professional identity.
- Re-evaluation of teaching and learning strategies = challenge and re-evaluation of professional selves.
- In spite of challenges, changes to situated dimension can have a positive impact e.g. increased levels of motivation, morale and job satisfaction. (Howard, 2013)
Professional dimension of identity

• Policy-driven teacher education programmes = high levels of accountability and little opportunity for consideration of trainee professional identity.
• Impact on sense of agency and power.
• Often rallying against cultural norms and values of placement community.
  (McKerr, forthcoming)
Personal dimension of identity

- Personal identity can be influenced by changes to the education environment.
- Dialogic relationship with others affects ways of thinking and being.
- Personal dilemmas are influenced by cultural and economic capital.
- Intra-emotional challenges experienced include anxiety, and loss.
- The development of specific personal qualities is vital. (Messenger, 2012)
Messages: for practitioners

- Maintaining a positive sense of identity is closely related to practitioners’ sense of well-being and agency.
- Practitioner identities are neither intrinsically positively or negatively stable, nor intrinsically fragmented, but will display characteristics of stability and/or fragmentation at difference times during a career.
Messages: for schools

- Variations in teachers’ identities occur in response to their capacities to manage the fluctuations in various Scenarios which exercise +ve and/or -ve influences on their effectiveness.
- School leaders need to establish structures and cultures which support teachers to sustain their sense of agency, well being and effectiveness in different stages of their career.
Messages: for policy

- Changes in identity will, in turn, have a direct impact upon commitment, resilience and the retention of practitioners.
- Teacher education policy needs to consider placing professional identity at its centre.
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