# Tales from the Watershed: Using repertory grids in the study of teachers' mid-career identity

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# CONTENT OF PRESENTATION

- **The project**
- **Previous literature on teacher identity and career phase**
- **Research aims and questions**
- **Mixed methods design and methodology**
- **What next?**
- **References**

## THE PROJECT:

**To investigate the notion of mid-career primary teachers' professional identity using critical event narrative and repertory grid interviews**

## Characteristics of the study

- Small-scale exploratory study
- Built on findings from two previous studies
  - Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and Effectiveness (DfES)
  - Effective Classroom Practice (ESRC)
- Watershed: 8-15 years experience
- Case studies of a purposive sample of 18 primary teachers in the Midlands
- Mixed method approach
  - Critical event narrative (critical incident line & hierarchically focused interview)
  - Repertory grid interview

# PREVIOUS LITERATURE ON TEACHER IDENTITY

- Related to:
  - educational reform – e.g Day, Elliot & Kington (2005); Hammersley (2002), Woods & Jeffrey (2002); Day (2002);
  - Subject matter – e.g. Drake et al, (2001);
  - student-teachers development and conception of teacher identity – e.g. Walkington (2005);
  - teacher knowledge – e.g. Clandinin & Connelly (1999); Beijaard et al (2004);
  - teacher professionalism and professional development – e.g. Roberts (2000);
  - variety of roles within and outside the classroom – e.g. Day & Kington (2008); Beijaard et al (2004).

- Teacher identity is considered to be shaped and changed by and within a multitude of contextual and personal elements (Flores & Day, 2006). Some studies approach identity as a stable feature rooted in core sets of values and practices, while others approach identity as unstable, flexible and dependent on contextual or personal changes (Day et al, 2006).

# PREVIOUS LITERATURE ON CAREER PHASE

- Super (1957) essentially posits four identifiable stages: exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement.

- Although related to sequential life cycle theories (e.g. Erikson, 1964), Super and others have emphasised strongly that individuals do not proceed through the phases in a linear manner.

- Huberman (1989) suggested that, not only is there considerable variation in the timing of the stages, individuals can miss stages, revert to 'earlier' stages or remain in a single stage during a career. Huberman argued for a career stage model specifically for teachers' professional work comprising five phases:
  - career entry
  - stabilisation
  - experimentation
  - conservatism
  - disengagement.

- Huberman (1993) went on to identify that teachers' professional career journeys are 'not adequately linear, predictable or identical' (1993: 264).

# PREVIOUS MODELS OF TEACHER IDENTITY & CAREER PHASE

VITAE (Day et al, 2007):

- Identified six career phases (Day et al, 2006);
- The 8-15 phase is a key watershed in teacher professional development (Day *et al.*, 2007) - additional tensions in managing change in both professional and personal lives;
- Suggested that identity itself is a composite comprising interaction between professional, situational and personal factors:
  - professional dimension - reflects social and policy expectations of what a good teacher is and the educational ideals of the teacher;
  - situated dimension - is located in a specific school and context and is affected by local conditions (i.e. pupil behaviour, level of disadvantage), leadership, support and feedback; and,
  - personal dimension - is located in life outside school and is linked to family and social roles.
- Posited that it is the degree of dominance which these influences have on each dimension of identity (and the way teachers manage them) which determine the relative stability or instability of teachers' composite identities, and whether these are positive or negative.

# Model of identity

Figure 1: Scenario 1 – dimensions in relative balance
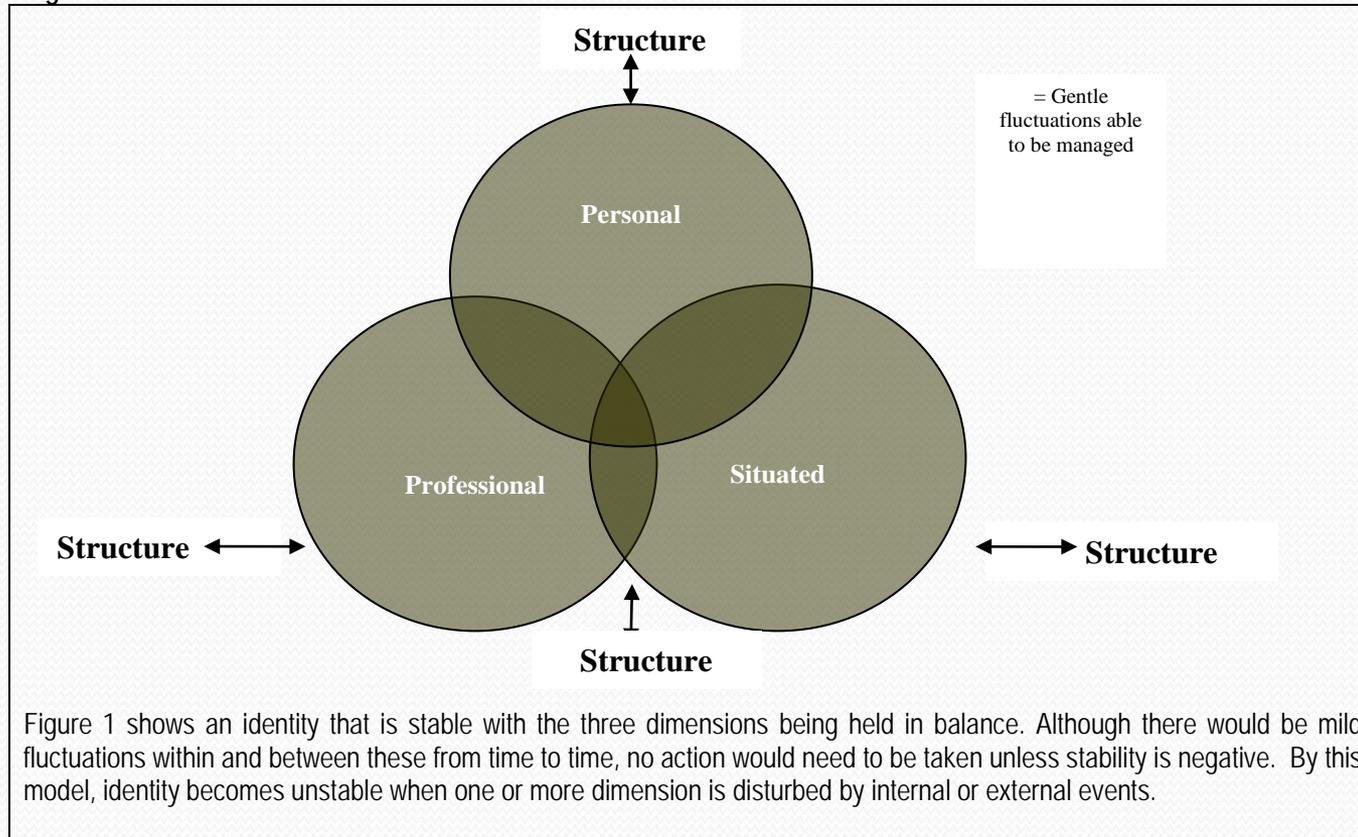


Figure 1 shows an identity that is stable with the three dimensions being held in balance. Although there would be mild fluctuations within and between these from time to time, no action would need to be taken unless stability is negative. By this model, identity becomes unstable when one or more dimension is disturbed by internal or external events.

# RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

## AIMS

- (1) identify and explain the impact of career phase on primary teachers' development and management of their professional identity using narrative and repertory grid interviews;
- (2) develop a theoretical model that describes the interactive relationship between critical events in teachers' careers over time and the moderating and mediating impact of these influences in order to develop resources appropriate to mid-career teachers;
- (3) contribute to the development of online and face-to-face provision for primary teachers by investigating variations in the needs and challenges faced during a career.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- i) What are the key critical professional, situated and personal events that impact on primary teachers' identity over time?
- ii) What are the coping and/or managing strategies primary teachers employ in adapting to these critical events, in different contexts and at different points in a career?
- iii) What are the key moderating and mediating factors that influence primary teachers' professional identity over time and how are these factors linked, if at all, to number of years in teaching?
- iv) What are the shared and/or unique patterns of professional identity development primary teachers experience during their career?

## MIXED METHODS DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

- Pragmatic-constructivist approach - founded on the understanding that people construct their identities through relations, choices, practices and language (Elliott, 2005):
  - The challenge for the teacher is not to find a single teacher identity, but rather to integrate the different roles and fragments of his or her professional and personal life in a meaningful way.
  - Concurrent, equal status, mixed methods design.
  - Design, instruments and approach to analysis built upon the methodology of the Effective Classroom Practice study (Kington et al., 2011; Kington et al., 2012; Kington, Reed & Sammons, 2013).
- Intention of making conceptual and empirical contributions to understandings about:
  - the nature of teacher commitment and resilience;
  - the challenges of sustaining positive professional identities at different times in their careers and in different school contexts;
  - teachers' quality retention and the governments' raising standards agendas.

# Summary of research design (procedural diagram)

**Quantitative data:**
- Critical incident lines
- Repertory grid interview

**QUAN data collection**

**QUAL data collection**

**Qualitative data:**
- Narrative approach interview
- Repertory grid interview
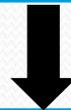
**QUAN data analysis**

**QUAL data analysis**

**Analysis:**
- Participant validation of rating/ranking
- Descriptive statistics and frequencies
- Comparison/synthesis with qualitative findings

**QUAN + QUAL Integration & Synthesis**

**Analysis:**
- Thematic analyses using Nvivo
- Coding using analyst triangulation
- Comparison of themes across instruments
- Comparison/synthesis with quantitative findings
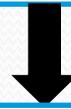
**Findings & Interpretation**

## Methods of data collection



Two main sources:

- Critical event narrative:
  - critical incident lines
  - narrative approach interviews

- Repertory grid interviews



**Repertory Grid for Personal Constructs Around Values**

| Value Label: | | | | | | | |
| Value Descriptor: | | | | | | | |

| Similarity Constructs | Initials | | | | | | Difference Constructs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | me | ideal | good | good | poor | poor | |
| | | | | | | | |
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**Notes:** (1) In eliciting the constructs, take the people three at a time and ask yourself the question, *"In terms of this value,* in what way are *two of these people similar* to each other and, in what way, is the third *different from the other two?"* Write the description of the similarity between the two on the left, and the distinguishing characteristic of the third on the right. (2) In each set of three, place a "O" under the person's initials for the two who are similar and a "X" under the initials of the person who is different.

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## Next steps: approach to analysis

- Qualitative interview data will be fully transcribed, coded, categorized and transferred into analytical matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) - refine emergent themes and identify patterns.

- Grounded theory coding techniques will be used to define, refine and specify influences, capture variations and emerging variables in the process of adaptation.

- Basic techniques will be carried out on all statistical data - explore the frequencies of different professional and personal events impacting upon teachers' identity.

- Individual repertory grid constructs will be analysed using appropriate software.

# Next steps: analytical integration

- Comparison of qualitative and quantitative items

- Qualitative analysis - 'quantizing';

- Quantitative data will be 'qualitized';

- For repertory grids, qualitative and quantitative findings will be compared.

- Use of Nvivo and attributes.

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# Thank you!

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