

Becoming and Being a Teacher: A critical
exploration of professional identity formation
through an interplay of the contextual, situated
and relational

Kate Sida-Nicholls

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy.

September 2025

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived therefrom must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

Abstract

Teacher retention has become a national and international concern recently. A significant proportion, 25%, of early career teachers leave the profession in England after three years (DfE, 2024). In response, the UK government, as part of its Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019), introduced initiatives such as the Early Career Framework (DfE, 2019) and the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (DfE, 2024) to strengthen the teaching workforce. Critics say that these steps haven't helped keep teachers and that they promote a technocratic view of teacher professionalism, where "great" teaching is only defined by measurable skills. This technocratic approach, characterised by standardisation, accountability metrics, and a focus on measurable outputs, stands in tension with a broader body of research on teacher professional identity, which over the past three decades has highlighted the importance of teachers' perceptions, emotions, motivations, and attitudes in shaping their practices. This tension was echoed in the narratives of this study's participants, whose evolving sense of relational identity was crucial in navigating policy-driven demands and maintaining their commitment to the profession.

This longitudinal study, with data collected over three years, aimed to explore the professional identity of nine early career secondary school teachers in the Suffolk and Norfolk area as they navigated their individual, context-specific professional knowledge landscapes. The research participants were recruited from a trainee teacher cohort of a local SCITT teacher training provider just as they completed their teacher training programme. I adopted a qualitative stance employing narrative inquiry. Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1995) provided valuable lenses for understanding professional identity, highlighting how autonomy, resilience and professional confidence develop through situated experiences and relational interactions in school settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, one taking place each academic year with the research participants. This research method provided insight over time into the interplay between policy, school context and personal experience in shaping the professional identity of the participants

across critical early career stages. The findings demonstrate that supportive relationships, opportunities for autonomy and a sense of belonging within specific school contexts are crucial for building confidence and resilience in early career teachers. These conditions not only underpin the development of a robust professional identity but also play a pivotal role in teacher retention, enabling early career teachers to manage the emotional and professional demands of the role and sustain their commitment to the profession.

My ethical approach was guided by an ethic of care that prioritised the wellbeing, trust, and dignity of participants throughout the research process. My prolonged engagement enabled me to build rapport with the participants and gain a richer insight into their narratives. I addressed ethical dilemmas by maintaining ongoing transparent communication with the participants. I also navigated the tension between rich, authentic narratives and protecting anonymity by carefully removing or altering identifying details while preserving the integrity of their voices.

The study demonstrates that professional identity is not static but negotiated over time through a complex interplay of personal values, institutional pressures, and evolving self-perceptions. The findings highlight the significance of relational, situational and contextual factors in enabling early career teachers to develop and sustain a positive professional identity across their first three years of practice.

Drawing on longitudinal narrative analysis informed by self-efficacy and self-determination theory, the study illustrates how autonomy, trust, mastery experiences, and supportive professional relationships contribute to identity formation. While the research does not evaluate specific policy frameworks, the findings offer insights relevant to contemporary debates about teacher development. They suggest that approaches which prioritise relational support, contextual responsiveness, and sustained professional growth may be better aligned with the lived experiences of early career teachers than narrowly technical or competency-driven models.

By foregrounding identity as relational and constructed over time, the study contributes to understanding how professional commitment is fostered and sustained, with implications for long-term teacher retention.

Access Condition and Agreement

Each deposit in UEA Digital Repository is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the Data Collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission from the copyright holder, usually the author, for any other use. Exceptions only apply where a deposit may be explicitly provided under a stated licence, such as a Creative Commons licence or Open Government licence.

Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone, unless explicitly stated under a Creative Commons or Open Government license. Unauthorised reproduction, editing or reformatting for resale purposes is explicitly prohibited (except where approved by the copyright holder themselves) and UEA reserves the right to take immediate 'take down' action on behalf of the copyright and/or rights holder if this Access condition of the UEA Digital Repository is breached. Any material in this database has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the material may be published without proper acknowledgement.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	10
List of Abbreviations	11
Chapter 1 – Introductory Chapter	12
1.1 Introduction to the Study	12
1.2 Overview of the study	13
1.3 Poor Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in England	13
1.4 Strategies taken by the Government to address Teacher Retention Issues in England	14
1.5 Importance of the Professional Identity of Early Career Teachers	16
1.6 Research, aims, objectives and questions	17
<i>The title of this research</i>	17
Objectives	17
Research questions	17
RQ1 - What key experiences and events do early career teachers identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity?	18
RQ2 - What role does building informal and formal networks play in the development of a professional identity for early career teachers?	18
RQ3 – What challenges do early career teachers confront, and how do they navigate them as part of developing their professional identity?	18
RQ4 - What strategies are identified as being the most effective in facilitating the construction of an effective teacher professional identity in the first three years?.....	18
1.7 Researcher’s Background and Positionality	18
1.8 Theoretical frameworks	19
1.9 Application of the Two Theoretical Frameworks	21
1.10 Methodological Approach	22
1.11 Overview of the chapters	24
Chapter 2 – Literature Review	26
2.1 Introduction	26
2.2 Defining professionalism	28

2.3 Conceptualising the Professional Identity of the Teaching Profession	30
2.4 History of Education, Policy and Neoliberalism in England	35
2.5 Neoliberalism and the Reshaping of Teacher Professionalism	38
2.6 The Impact of the Education Reform Act and Debates about Professional Identity	42
2.7 ECF and ITTECF: Policy Design, Identity and the Professional Self	46
2.9 Towards Identifying Gaps in the Literature	53
2.10 Positioning the Current Study within the Literature	57
Chapter 3 – Theoretical Chapter	59
3.1 Introduction	59
3.2 Self-Determination Theory for Early Career Teachers	61
3.3 Autonomy and Its Impact on Professional Identity Formation	63
3.4 Competence and the Development of a Professional Identity for Early Career Teachers	65
3.5 Relatedness and the Creation of a Professional Identity among Early Career Teachers	67
3.6 Self-Efficacy Theory for Early Career Teachers	70
3.7 Teacher Self-Effectiveness and Identity Formation	71
3.8 Mastery Experience: the most powerful influence	72
3.9 Vicarious Experiences: Learning through observation	73
3.10 Social Persuasion: The Power of Encouragement	74
3.11 Emotions and Physiological States: Their Role	77
3.12 Understanding Early Career Teacher Identity via the Integration of Self-Determination and Self-Efficacy Theories	78
Chapter 4 – Methodology	81
4.1 Introduction	81
4.2 Research Paradigm	82
4.2.1 Ontological stance	84
4.2.2 Epistemological Approach	86
4.3 Methodological framework	87
4.4 Research Design	91
4.4.1 Method – Semi-structured interviews	91
<i>Table 2 - A summary of the first question asked across a sample of the participants across Years, 1-3 with my initial response.</i>	98
4.4.2 Online interviews and in-person interviews	100

4.4.3 Types of Questions	102
4.4.4 Use of Pen Portraits	103
4.5 Participants and Recruitment Strategy	104
4.6 Time Commitment	106
4.7 Ethical Stance and Relational Ethics	108
4.7.1 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity	109
4.7.2 Power Dynamics and Rapport-Building Strategies	112
4.7.3 Consent as an Ongoing Process	120
<i>Table 3 - Overview of some of the email responses to the request for the participants to review their transcripts and pen portraits.</i>	123
4.8.2 Rigour and Beneficence	127
4.9 Data Analysis	128
<i>Figure 1 – Example of the comments I put into the software to start tracking emerging codes.</i>	130
<i>Figure 2 -Photo of the printout of notes from the software for all of the transcripts – these notes were colour-coded and then turned into codes.</i>	131
<i>Table 4- Overview of the codes from the notes as shown in Figure 2.</i>	132
<i>Figure 3 – My reflections after listening to the transcripts for Year 1 and making notes in the software....</i> 133	
<i>Figure 4 – Overview of initial themes to the spreadsheet</i>	134
<i>Table 5 – Concise Informative Themes</i>	134
<i>Figure 5 – Final themes with links to initial themes</i>	135
4.10 Limitations of this Study	137
4.11 Concluding Comments for this Chapter	138
Chapter 5 - What key experiences and events do early career teachers identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity? (RQ1)	140
Catherine – Pen Portrait	140
Sally- Pen Portrait	142
Susie – Pen Portrait	143
Alice – Pen Portrait	145
5.1 Introduction	147
5.2 Importance of subject expertise within the context of a school	148
5.3 Being seen as a good teacher: how relationships shape competence and identity	151
5.4 Promotion, Leadership and the Shaping of Professional Identity	155

5.4.1 Catherine's Experience	155
5.4.2 James's Experience (Pen Portrait, Chapter 6)	156
5.4.3 Sally's Experience	158
5.4.4. Isaac's Experience	159
5.5 Personal Pivotal Experiences Affecting the Development of a Professional Identity	161
5.5.1 Navigating Motherhood and Professional Identity: The Impact of Maternity Leave	161
5.5.2 Moving Schools as a Search for Belonging and Professional Alignment	164
5.5.2.i Mandy: Seeking Professional Growth (Pen Portrait, Chapter 8)	164
5.5.2.ii Alice: From Crisis to Stability	165
5.6 Concluding Comments for this Chapter	167
<hr/>	
Chapter 6- What Role Does Building Informal and Formal Networks Play in the Development of a Professional Identity for Early Career Teachers? (RQ2)	169
<i>James – Pen Portrait</i>	169
6.1 Introduction	171
6.2. Mentoring as Formal Support for Early Career Teachers	171
6.2.1 Role of Mentoring	172
6.2.2. Mentoring Models and Workload	172
6.3 Benefits of Informal Support to Early Career Teachers	174
6.3.1 An Illustrative Example of Informal Support from a Colleague in Senior Leadership	175
6.3.2 An Illustrative Example of Informal Support from Colleagues	175
6.4 Fostering Ongoing Positive Relationships with Students and the Impact of Negative Relationships with Students	177
6.4.1 Importance of developing positive student relationships	177
6.4.2 Early Career Teachers' Perspective on the Importance of Building Positive Relationships with Students	179
6.4.3 When Relationships are Strained: Identity Costs and Recovery	180
6.5 Relationships with Parents and Early Career Teacher Identity	182
6.5.1 Positive Engagement as Identity-Building: Mandy and James	183
6.5.2 When Parent Engagement Threatens Identity: Catherine and Alice	184
6.5.3 Disengagement and Structural Barriers: Isaac and Audrey	185
6.6 Concluding Comments for this Chapter	187
<hr/>	
Chapter 7 – What Challenges do Early Career Teachers Confront and how do they Navigate them as part of developing their Professional Identity? (RQ3)	189

<i>Audrey – Pen Portrait</i>	189
<i>Isaac - Pen Portrait</i>	191
7.1 Introduction	195
7.1.2 Theoretical Framework and Key Arguments	196
7.2 Navigating challenges: Asserting Identity in a Culture of Compliance	196
7.3 Negotiating challenges: Identity Work in a Landscape of Tensions	198
7.4 Collaboration, Resistance, and the Shaping of Professional Identity	210
7.5 Concluding Comments for this Chapter	218
Chapter 8 - What strategies are identified as being the most effective in facilitating the construction of an effective teacher professional identity in the first three years?	220
<i>Mandy Pen Portrait</i>	220
<i>Tanya’s Pen Portrait</i>	222
8.1 Introduction	225
8.2 The Role of Context in Early Career Teacher Identity	225
8.2.1 Mentoring as a Contextual Strategy for Professional Identity Construction	227
8.2.2 Leadership as a Contextual Influence in Professional Identity Formation	227
8.3 Collaborative Culture at a School Level Context	230
8.4 Situatedness: Positioning within a Professional Knowledge Landscape	233
8.5 Strategic Compliance and Value Tensions	234
8.6 Negotiating Professional Knowledge Landscapes	236
8.7 Relationships: Foundations and Ongoing Professional Identity Resources	238
8.7.1 When Relationships are Absent or Fractured	241
8.7.2 Relationships as Sustained Resources	243
8.8 Concluding Comments for this Chapter	246
Chapter 9- Conclusion	248
9.1 Retention and the policy landscape	248
9.2 Identity Negotiation within Structural Contexts	250
9.3 Mentoring as a Relational Mediator of Professional Identity	251
9.4 Parental Engagement as an Arena of Identity Formation	252
9.5 Synthesis and Contribution	252
9.6 Implications for Policy and Practice	254

9.7 Final Reflection	256
Appendices	259
Appendix 1 – Letter to Early Career Teacher	259
Appendix 2 – Participant Information Form	261
You are invited to take part in a study on the professional identity of early career teachers in secondary schools	261
Appendix 3 - Informed Consent Form for Research Participants – Early Career Teachers	265
Appendix 4 – Online Application Form for Ethical Approval for Research Staff and Students	268
Researcher Information	268
Project Information	269
Research Participants	273
Data	274
Conflict of interest	274
Checklist of Documents for Ethical Application	275
Declaration	276
Appendix 5- Acknowledgement of AI and Digital Tools	277
Reference List	278

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the nine research participants who took part in this research study for three years despite COVID and other personal and professional issues; none of them left the study and I am very grateful for their time and contributions.

I would also like to thank Professor Sarah Richards who has been my supervisor throughout this six-year part-time study, and I appreciate her faith in me and continued support despite some difficult times. I also thank my previous supervisors for their time but especially, Dr Pallawi Sinha, who has been my supervisor since September 2024, as her optimism and detailed feedback have been incredibly helpful.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their continued support and understanding,, especially to my husband and son who have been part of all the 'ups and downs' of this research endeavour. I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents who will not be able to read this but were the initial inspiration and offered continued support for as long as they were able to. My stepfather also deserves a special mention, as without his continued moral and financial support, this thesis might not have been completed. I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues, as I have appreciated their interest and unwavering support in my research over a long period of time.

List of Abbreviations

CCF -ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2019)

ERA – Education Reform Act (1988)

ECF – Early Career Framework (DfE, 2019)

ECT – Early Career Teacher (first 3 years in the profession)

DfE - Department of Education (from 2010 onwards)

DfES - Department for Education and Skills (2001-2007)

ITTECF – Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (DfE, 2024)

ITE – Initial Teacher Education

ITT – Initial Teacher Training

NQT – Newly Qualified Teacher (term used for newly qualified teachers prior to 2019).

Pupil Premium – government funding to improve educational outcomes for disadvantaged pupils in state funded schools in England.

SCITT – School Centred Initial Teacher Training

SDT – Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000)

SET – Self efficacy theory (Bandura, 1995)

SLT – Senior Leadership Team

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

QTS – Qualified Teacher Status

PGCE – Post-Graduate Certificate in Education

PHSE – Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (curriculum subject)

Progress 8 – UK secondary school performance measure that assesses how much progress students make in their GCSEs from the end of primary school to the end of Year 11.

Chapter 1 – Introductory Chapter

Without knowing what has brought teachers to teaching, or what their imagined stories of teaching are, we wonder if we will ever know how we might keep them in the profession' (Schaefer and Clandinin, 2011, p. 292).

1.1 Introduction to the Study

The recruitment and retention of teachers in England is in a critical state (Worth, 2024). Despite more than a decade of concern, schools continue to face shortages, driven by rising student numbers, heavy workloads, and the impact of the cost-of-living crisis (Clark, 2024). Governments have been told to make long-term changes to pay, cut down on work, and make it easier to work from home (Worth, 2023), but these plans have not worked as planned. The National Foundation for Educational Research's 2024 report confirmed that both recruitment and retention remain under severe pressure, with workload intensifying since the pandemic (Worth, 2024). Early career teachers (ECTs) are particularly vulnerable: 32% leave the profession within their first five years (DfE, 2024).

Recruitment and retention of teachers is of national and international concern at this current time, specifically those within the first five years of qualifying as a teacher. There are extensive media reports of a current and impending teacher supply crisis in the United States (Perna, 2022), Germany (Bosen, 2023), Australia (Longmuir, 2023) and Canada (Loveless, 2023), highlighting a general attrition rate as high as 50% in the first five years worldwide (Gunn and McRae, 2021). In seven out of ten countries with data for public institutions, attrition rates for secondary school teachers are higher than those for primary school teachers (OECD 2021). By 2030, countries must recruit a total of 68.8 million teachers: 24.4 million primary school teachers and 44.4 million secondary school teachers. (Suarez et al., 2022). As international data suggests, the need for additional teachers is even greater at the secondary level, with a total of 44.4 million teachers needed by 2030, of which 27.6 million are to replace those who leave and an additional 16.7 million to ensure that every student is in a classroom with no more than 25 students per teacher on average (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2016, p.1). The consequences of this shortfall extend beyond workforce planning to the quality of education itself. Persistent recruitment and retention difficulties lead to larger class sizes, increased teacher workload, and greater reliance on underqualified or temporary staff (Ingersoll,

2001; Darling-Hammond, 2017). These conditions risk reducing the stability and continuity of teaching, particularly in disadvantaged schools where shortages are often most acute (Sutcher et al., 2016; Guarino et al., 2006). For students, the impact is profound: limited access to subject specialists, disrupted learning through frequent staff turnover, and diminished opportunities for building the sustained teacher–student relationships that are central to academic achievement and personal development (Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Podolsky et al., 2019; Hattie, 2009). In this way, teacher supply is not only a labour market issue but also a determinant of educational equity and student outcomes on a global scale. As a result, professional identity is both ‘malleable’ and complex, shaped through the interweaving of personal and professional selves (Lavigne, 2014, p. 33).

The intention of this study is to demonstrate that the construction of professional identity in the first three years is not achieved by completing the ‘learn that’ and ‘learn how’ statements embedded within government frameworks. Rather, identity develops through the interplay of personal values, professional relationships, and contextual realities. By focusing on teachers’ lived experiences, this research highlights the importance of supporting professional identity as a foundation for both retention and teacher quality.

1.2 Overview of the study

This chapter introduces the study and posits why it is both necessary and timely. It begins by outlining the national problem of teacher retention and the new perspective this research brings by focusing on early career teachers’ professional identity. It then considers government strategies to improve retention and examines how professional identity has been framed in policy and research. I also reflect on my background and positionality, explaining why this issue matters to me personally and professionally. The chapter then sets out the theoretical framework and methodological approach, showing how self-efficacy and self-determination theory, combined with narrative inquiry, provide the lens through which I explore the complexity of professional identity.

1.3 Poor Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in England

Teacher recruitment and retention are significant social, economic, and educational challenges in England, with direct implications for the quality and sustainability of the education system (Worth and Van den Brande, 2020; House of Commons Education

Committee, 2023–24). Over the past decade, England has faced mounting difficulties in maintaining an adequate teacher workforce (Allen, Bibby and Sims, 2018; Worth, 2021). Despite a series of government initiatives, including bursaries, scholarships, and professional development programmes, these measures have not addressed the underlying issues (DfE, 2019; National Audit Office, 2016). One persistent concern is the imbalance between rising student numbers and insufficient teacher recruitment, particularly in secondary schools where subject specialists are in greatest demand (Foster, 2019; Worth, Lynch and Hillary, 2018).

Attrition compounds these shortages. A significant proportion of teachers leave the profession early, often citing high workload, comparatively low pay, and accountability pressures such as Ofsted inspections. In 2022, around 40,000 working-age teachers left the profession, the highest level of attrition since records began (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023–24, p. 12). Retention is particularly fragile within the first five years: approximately a quarter of teachers leave within three years, with survival rates dropping from 87 per cent after the first year to around two-thirds after five years, a pattern largely unchanged over the past decade (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023–24, p. 11).

Recent statistics reinforce the scale of the problem. The proportion of new teachers leaving after just one year increased from 12.4 per cent in 2020 to 12.8 per cent in 2021. In the same period, 38,109 classroom teachers left state-funded schools, the highest number since 2016-2017 (Department for Education, 2023). Since it costs about £20,000 to train each teacher, these departures mean a loss of more than £70 million in capacity. However, the Commission on Teacher Retention emphasised in 2023 that there is neither a single driver of teacher retention nor a single solution to address it (Education Support, 2023, p. 13). Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that current strategies are failing to stem attrition, with more than one in five secondary teachers reporting that they are unlikely to remain in the profession over the next five years (Education Support, 2023, p. 11).

1.4 Strategies taken by the Government to address Teacher Retention Issues in England

The policy trajectory leading to the Early Career Framework (ECF) began with the Carter Review of Initial Teacher Training in 2015, which recommended the establishment of a

core content framework for ITT. Following this, a DfE Expert Advisory Group published the ECF in 2019, alongside the ITT Core Content Framework later that year. In 2021, the Department for Education launched the ITT Market Review to ensure that all providers delivered high-quality, evidence-based training. This process was described as a ‘turbulent time for providers’ (Worth, 2023), as accreditation became mandatory for all ITE providers wishing to continue offering ITT, leading to Qualified Teacher Status from 2024. By the end of the accreditation process in May 2022, 179 providers had been approved. However, 68 of the providers that were already accredited lost their accreditation, which raised serious concerns about the future supply of teachers.

The ECF was positioned as being at the centre of the Department for Education’s 2019 Recruitment and Retention Strategy (House of Commons Education Committee, 2023–24, p. 36). It set out a programme of structured support for new teachers in five core areas: behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and professional behaviours. From September 2025, the ECF is formally combined with the ITT Core Content Framework into the new statutory Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF, 2024). This requires ITT and ECT providers to ‘translate the framework into a carefully sequenced curriculum of training and professional development to support trainees and ECTs to build their expertise across all aspects of the framework’ (DfE, 2024, p. 4). The content is organised into standardised ‘Learn that...’ and ‘Learn how to...’ statements, intended to ensure that ECTs develop strong ‘mental models of great teaching’ (DfE, 2024, p. 6).

Despite the stated goal of improving the quality and consistency of teacher education, the evidence indicates a need for greater caution. Since the ECF’s introduction in 2019, recruitment and retention challenges have persisted and, in some measures, intensified (McClellan et al., 2024), suggesting that structural issues within the profession remain complex and multifaceted. Critics argue that the frameworks’ highly prescriptive nature narrows rather than enriches professional learning. The Commission on Teacher Retention (Education Support, 2023, p. 64) described government programmes as ‘overly prescriptive’ and akin to a ‘sausage factory,’ reducing teacher development to compliance with centrally mandated routines.

1.5 Importance of the Professional Identity of Early Career Teachers

Understanding the professional identity of new teachers is crucial, as ECTs' perceptions of themselves as professionals shape their sense of efficacy, their professional growth, and their ability to adapt to change and innovation in their practice (Nickel and Crosby, 2022, p. 318). Professional identity is not only central to how teachers approach their classroom practice but also to how they interpret, negotiate, and respond to wider educational policy (Karousiou et al., 2019). It is constructed through teachers' lived experiences, which are culturally and contextually situated across policy, personal life, and workplace conditions (Day and Kingston, 2008; Lavigne, 2013). As a result, professional identity is both 'malleable' and complex, shaped through the interweaving of personal and professional selves (Lavigne, 2013, p. 33).

For novice teachers, this process is particularly fragile. Professional identity is not developed in isolation but through opportunities for collaboration, reflection, and dialogue with colleagues (Clandinin and Husu, 2017). Where such opportunities are absent or where identity formation is reduced to compliance with prescribed frameworks, ECTs may struggle to develop the autonomy and confidence needed to sustain themselves in the profession. This links directly to the theoretical framing of this research. From a self-efficacy perspective (Bandura, 1997), identity influences whether ECTs believe they can enact effective practice in challenging contexts, while self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) highlights how professional identity is supported when teachers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met.

Although this study acknowledges the significant role of recent policy reforms in shaping the contemporary landscape of teacher development, it does not seek to evaluate the direct impact of specific frameworks on early career teacher identity. Instead, it focuses on how early career teachers narrate and construct their professional identities within the sociopolitical policy landscapes in which they work. The intention of this study is therefore to explore how the construction of professional identity in the first three years unfolds through the interplay of personal values, professional relationships, and contextual realities. While contemporary frameworks such as the ECF and ITTECF provide structured guidance for early career development, this study centres teachers'

lived experiences to understand how identity is constructed within and beyond the boundaries of formal policy prescriptions.

1.6 Research, aims, objectives and questions

The title of this research is ‘Becoming and Being a teacher: A critical exploration of professional identity formation through an interplay of the contextual, situated and relational.’

The aim of this study is to critically examine how secondary school early career teachers in England establish and sustain a professional identity within their first three years of teaching, drawing on their lived experiences and personal narratives to illuminate the interplay of contextual, situated, and relational factors.

Objectives

- To collect and critically analyse the personal narratives of early career teachers to explore how professional identity is formed and sustained in the first three years of teaching.
- To identify and interpret key themes and patterns in the narratives, with particular attention to the interplay of contextual, situated, and relational factors.
- To examine how early career teachers make sense of their professional experiences over time, drawing on self-efficacy theory and self-determination theory as analytical lenses.
- To generate recommendations, grounded in longitudinal narrative findings, for supporting early career teachers in constructing and sustaining a meaningful professional identity.

Research questions

My central research question guiding my study is:

In what ways do contextual, relational and situational factors shape early career teacher professional identity?’

From this primary research question, four research questions were developed:

RQ1 - What key experiences and events do early career teachers identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity?

RQ2 - What role does building informal and formal networks play in the development of a professional identity for early career teachers?

RQ3 – What challenges do early career teachers confront, and how do they navigate them as part of developing their professional identity?

RQ4 - What strategies are identified as being the most effective in facilitating the construction of an effective teacher professional identity in the first three years?

1.7 Researcher's Background and Positionality

I have worked in education since 1994, beginning as a classroom teacher and later moving into middle leadership, before taking senior leadership roles in both initial teacher education (ITE) and post-16 education. Teaching was not a career I originally aspired to, but one I entered after completing my degree and PGCE at Cambridge. My early experiences were marked by limited preparation, and I quickly discovered that professional identity is not gained at the outset, but is something forged through trial, error, and support. A pivotal moment came during my NQT year, when an 'inadequate' lesson observation led me to question my future in teaching. The headteacher's decision to call me personally that evening and encourage me to continue taught me the enduring importance of authentic leadership and relational support in sustaining professional identity.

Over eighteen years in schools, I combined classroom teaching with subject and pastoral leadership. I consistently sought to improve my practice through professional development but eventually felt compelled to contribute more widely. This led me into ITE, where I became Course Leader for a large secondary programme across Suffolk and Norfolk. This role expanded my understanding of the tensions ECTs face while we prepared trainees with evidence-informed practices; many encountered school cultures that were resistant to change, still relying on outdated strategies such as learning styles. The dissonance between evidence and practice left many trainees questioning how to align their values and aspirations with the expectations of their employing schools. These

moments highlighted for me the contextual and situated nature of professional identity, and the challenge for ECTs in sustaining autonomy and innovation without sufficient capital or support.

In response, I often encouraged trainees to act as a ‘burning light’ within their schools, to model collaborative, evidence-informed practice despite the constraints around them. Yet my growing frustration was that their ability to do so was frequently curtailed by institutional norms and hierarchical expectations. This reinforced my belief that retention cannot be secured through behaviour management or technical competence alone, but depends on teachers’ sense of autonomy, efficacy, belonging, and contribution. My reflections on these tensions, and the countless conversations I had with trainees, made me acutely aware that professional identity is shaped relationally, contextually, and within the situated realities of school life.

It was out of this professional and personal concern that I began my PhD in 2018, while still an ITE Course Leader. I invited the final cohort of trainees I worked with to take part in this three-year study, nine of whom became participants. My positionality is therefore shaped by both my professional journey and my commitment to understanding how ECTs establish a sustainable professional identity in the face of contextual constraints and relational opportunities.

I recognise that my own experiences as a teacher and ITE leader have inevitably shaped the way I view professional identity. My background gives me an insider perspective that helps me to empathise with participants and interpret their narratives with sensitivity. At the same time, it brings the risk of assuming that my experiences mirror theirs. To address this, I have worked reflexively throughout the research process, returning repeatedly to participants’ stories to ensure that my analysis privileges their voices rather than my own expectations.

1.8 Theoretical frameworks

This study is underpinned by two complementary theoretical frameworks: self-efficacy theory, derived from Bandura’s social cognitive theory, and self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Together, these frameworks allow me to explore how professional identity formation is shaped by both internal beliefs and external conditions.

Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986) supports the constructive ontology of this research, which views professional identity as a socially constructed phenomenon. Bandura defined self-efficacy as the 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (1977, p. 3). Self-efficacy shapes the decisions individuals make, the environments they enter, and the extent to which they persist in the face of difficulty. Those who have a strong sense of efficacy 'redouble their effort to master the challenges' (Bandura, 2000, p. 120). Self-efficacy is influenced by four main sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological or emotional states (Bandura, 1995). Applying this theory to ECTs provides a lens for understanding how these influences shape their confidence, their agency, and ultimately their professional identity.

Teacher self-efficacy, a more specific application of Bandura's work, is defined as teachers' beliefs in their ability to bring about student learning (Takahashi, 2011; Aldridge and Fraser, 2015). Research suggests that sustained effort in the face of difficulty strengthens both efficacy and professional identity (Day, 2018). For ECTs, professional identity is particularly fragile, as ideas and principles are not yet firmly rooted in authentic practice (Lamote and Engels, 2010). Interpretations of success or failure are deeply intertwined with efficacy beliefs, which in turn influence decisions about future action (Bray-Claire and Bates, 2003). International studies have reinforced this link: teachers with strong efficacy beliefs are more likely to adopt innovative practices, sustain motivation, and remain in the profession (Zee and Koomen, 2016; Klassen et al., 2011). Conversely, weak self-efficacy can contribute to unstable or negative professional identities (Hong et al., 2018).

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000) provides a second, complementary perspective. It identifies three psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, that are essential for intrinsic motivation, growth, and well-being. When applied to teaching, self-determination theory offers insight into how ECTs develop sustainable professional identities. Teachers, empowered by autonomy, experience control over their work, free from externally imposed frameworks or policy requirements. Competence is developed as ECTs refine their skills and gain confidence in their roles. Relatedness reflects the importance of supportive and collaborative

relationships with colleagues, mentors, and leaders, which foster belonging and strengthen professional identity. Meeting these needs not only supports identity formation but also contributes to motivation and retention, as teachers who feel autonomous, competent, and connected are more likely to remain in the profession.

Recent research in teacher education has highlighted the value of self-determination theory for understanding teacher wellbeing and retention. Jansen in de Wal et al. (2014) found that teachers' motivation and commitment were significantly enhanced when their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness were supported. Similarly, Collie and Martin (2017) demonstrated that self-determination theory offers a robust framework for linking teacher motivation to broader issues of identity, resilience, and attrition. These international studies strengthen the case for applying SDT to ECTs, as they show that psychological needs are directly tied to professional identity and long-term career satisfaction.

1.9 Application of the Two Theoretical Frameworks

Applying both frameworks allows this study to examine the formation of professional identity from dual perspectives: self-efficacy emphasises the internal beliefs that influence ECTs' self-perception as professionals, whereas self-determination theory focuses on the external and relational factors that either enhance or hinder their motivation.

Through the lens of teacher self-efficacy, this study examines how early career teachers' mastery experiences, feedback, and interpretations of success or failure influence their confidence and their sense of themselves as teachers. This framework helps to connect their narratives to how they build competence and agency in their early years.

At the same time, self-determination theory highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in supporting professional identity. For ECTs, the ability to make pedagogical choices, to feel capable in their practice, and to belong within professional communities is critical to sustaining their motivation and identity. This framework shifts attention away from external compliance with frameworks such as the ECF and ITTECF, and towards the psychological and relational conditions that enable teachers to thrive.

Taken together, these frameworks enable a critical exploration of professional identity as an evolving construct shaped by both beliefs about capability and the fulfilment of psychological needs. In this way, they provide a strong foundation for examining how ECTs navigate the interplay of contextual, situated, and relational factors in their first three years of teaching.

1.10 Methodological Approach

My study adopts narrative inquiry as its methodological approach, with semi-structured interviews as the primary method. Across three years, nine ECTs shared their experiences, challenges, and reflections on their professional lives. Narrative inquiry is particularly suited to this study because professional identity is not a fixed attribute but one that is continuously shaped by everyday interactions in classrooms, relationships with colleagues, and engagement in professional development (Lavigne, 2014). By collecting personal narratives, I was able to explore how these experiences contribute to teachers' evolving sense of self.

Professional identity is both malleable and complex (Lavigne, 2014). Using narrative inquiry allowed me to trace how teachers recounted and reinterpreted different phases of their journeys across the three years of this study. It also positioned participants as active interpreters of their own stories, offering detailed accounts of both successes and tensions. In telling their stories ECTs engaged in self-reflection, making connections between their actions and outcomes, and in some cases reshaping their beliefs about their role and competence (Morrison, 2013).

Reading these narratives offers insight into what teachers value most, what motivates them, and the dilemmas they face, all situated within wider socio-historical contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004). Teachers' perspectives are deeply shaped by their learning histories and biographies (Schellings and Beijaard, 2023). Dilemmas often emerged when teachers' imagined identities did not align with the realities of their work, leading to moments of conflict and uncertainty (Schellings and Beijaard, 2023). Such tensions were pronounced for several participants whose narratives revealed the dissonance between expectations and lived experience. Narrative inquiry also highlights how identity is constructed within what Clandinin and Connelly (1996, p. 25) describe as the 'professional knowledge landscape' of schools. This landscape encompasses both the

private space of the classroom and the more public professional spaces where teachers interact with colleagues and leaders (Lyons and Scull, 2023). Attending to these landscapes was essential in this study, as they reveal the interplay between individual identity work and the broader professional, cultural, and policy contexts in which teachers are situated. Narrative inquiry enabled me to capture not only the personal meanings that ECTs attached to their experiences but also how those meanings were negotiated within the shifting landscapes of schools, training frameworks, and national policy. In this way, the methodology is not simply about collecting stories, but about recognising how stories are lived, told, retold, and relived across the professional spaces that shape teachers' identities.

I have provided an outline underneath of key details of the research participants as I refer to them in Chapter 4, the Methodology chapter and the detailed pen portraits are shared in Chapter 5-8. All participants names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

Table 1 – Overview of the research participants

Name of participant	Teaching subject	Context
Alice	Modern Foreign Languages	Changed schools at end of Year 1.
Audrey	English	Employed at school with high number of Pupil Premium students.
Catherine	Modern Foreign Languages	Head of Subject and Head of Year.
Isaac	Science	Employed at school with high number of Pupil Premium students. Promoted to middle leader role during Year 2.
James	PE	Employed at SEND independent school.
Mandy	English	Changed schools at Easter in year 2.
Sally	Music	Promoted to middle leader role at end of Year 1.
Susie	Art	Maternity leave Dec 21 to Dec 22.
Tanya	Design and Technology	Had long COVID.

For clarification, I use the term ‘students’ throughout this thesis, rather than ‘pupils’ as it is the term that most of the research participants use as they are referring to young people aged 11-18 in secondary schools. The exception is when I refer to Pupil Premium (see Abbreviations) for definition of this term.

1.11 Overview of the chapters

This thesis is structured into nine chapters. This first chapter presented an overview of the entire study. The following section outlines an overview of the next eight chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review situates the study within the wider field of research on teacher professional identity and early career retention. It examines historical and contemporary debates about professionalism, identity, and teacher development within changing educational contexts, including recent reforms such as the ECF and ITTECF. The chapter explores professional identity as a complex, relational, and situated construct shaped through personal histories, school environments, and broader policy landscapes. It identifies a gap in the literature concerning longitudinal, narrative accounts of how early career teachers actively construct and sustain their professional identities over time, particularly within contexts characterised by increasing standardisation and accountability.

Chapter 3: Theoretical chapter introduces the study’s two theoretical frameworks: self-efficacy theory and self-determination. Self-efficacy explains how ECTs interpret experiences and build confidence, while self-determination highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Together, they provide a dual lens for understanding how beliefs and conditions shape professional identity.

Chapter 4: Methodology chapter outlines the methodological approach, justifying the use of narrative inquiry and using semi-structured interviews with nine teachers over three years. It explains how narrative captures the situated, relational, and contextual dimensions of identity and reflects on ethical considerations and the researcher’s positionality.

Chapter 5: Research Question 1 focuses on the pivotal experiences and events that ECTs identify as shaping their professional identity. It shows how classroom successes and

setbacks, leadership opportunities, and personal turning points influence how teachers see themselves and their capacity to act as professionals.

Chapter 6: Research Question 2 examines the use role of formal and informal networks in developing professional identity. It demonstrates how relationships with mentors, colleagues, and peers provide affirmation, support, and challenge, and how the absence of these networks can leave teachers feeling isolated or marginalised.

Chapter 7: Research Question 3 investigates the challenges ECTs confront and how they navigate them. It highlights issues such as workload, accountability pressures, and policy tensions, and shows how teachers draw on resilience, relationships, and personal values to sustain their sense of professional self.

Chapter 8: Research Question 4 identifies the strategies that most effectively facilitate the construction of professional identity in the first three years. It argues that relational support, situated learning opportunities, and contextually grounded mentoring are central to enabling teachers to build sustainable and meaningful professional identities.

Chapter 9: Conclusion brings together the findings of the study and synthesises findings from a longitudinal narrative inquiry into how early career teachers' professional identities develop across their first three years in the profession. Drawing on the integration of Self-Determination Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory, the chapter demonstrates how identity formation emerges through the interaction of autonomy, competence, relatedness, and developing efficacy beliefs within relational and organisational contexts. It highlights the importance of supportive professional relationships, contextual conditions, and opportunities for mastery in enabling ECTs to develop confidence, agency, and a stable sense of professional self. The chapter concludes by outlining the study's theoretical contribution, reflecting on its methodological insights, and identifying implications for future research and professional learning in supporting early career teacher development.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the existing literature on teacher professional identity, with a particular focus on how identity is constructed, disrupted, and sustained during the early career phase. This focus is necessary because the early years of teaching are a formative period in which professional beliefs, practices, and relationships are established; yet they are also a time of heightened vulnerability to attrition and professional disillusionment. The formation of a robust professional identity is widely recognised by researchers as essential for teacher effectiveness, retention, motivation, and well-being (Beijaard et al., 2004; Day et al., 2006; Kelchtermans, 2009; Hong, 2010; Day and Gu, 2007; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011). However, the concept of professional identity remains contested, lacking a singular definition and exhibiting significant variation in its understanding and study. This literature review draws on theoretical, empirical, and policy-informed contributions to explore how ECTs make sense of their professional selves within increasingly complex and regulated educational landscapes. This focus directly aligns with the purpose of my research, which is to investigate the relational, contextual and situated factors shaping professional identity formation in the first three years of teaching and to understand how these processes influenced the capacity of the ECTs in this study to develop a professional identity.

The chapter begins by tracing the historical and sociological roots of professionalism, highlighting how evolving definitions have shaped the status and expectations of teaching. This provides a foundation for understanding how current policy frameworks and professional standards influence the identity formation of ECTs, setting the stage for analysing the tension between traditional conceptions of teaching and the demands of contemporary educational contexts. It then explores current understandings of teacher professional identity, outlining its shifting, context-sensitive nature and the interaction between individual agency and institutional structures. By doing so, it establishes the

conceptual foundation for understanding how relational, contextual, and situated factors shape identity formation in the early years of teaching, a critical period when 23% of new teachers in England leave within the first three years (Education Committee, 2024), emphasising the importance of professional resilience and retention. Drawing on theoretical, empirical, and policy perspectives that frame this study, the review then examines how professional identity is influenced by broader policy contexts, particularly the impact of neoliberalism, and critically analyses the longstanding effects of the Education Reform Act (1988) on teacher autonomy, judgement, and professionalism. A significant part of the chapter explores recent policy developments in England, specifically the Early Career Framework (ECF) (DfE, 2019) and the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) (DfE, 2024), considering their implications for professional identity development. While these frameworks aim to support retention and instructional quality, the literature reviewed in this study also highlights how their emphasis on standardisation, compliance, and prescriptive content can constrain teachers' autonomy and reduce opportunities for context-responsive professional growth, factors shown to directly influence the formation and evolution of professional identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). The chapter also foregrounds literature that identifies the positive conditions under which identity can be developed and sustained, such as mentoring, value alignment, professional agency, and supportive school cultures. These conditions are argued to foster teachers' sense of competence, relatedness and purpose, enabling them to adapt to challenges, maintain motivation, and remain committed to the profession over time (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018).

In synthesising these strands, the chapter draws attention to a core tension: while the literature increasingly recognises the relational and contextual dimensions of identity, there remains a limited exploration of how ECTs actively negotiate and make meaning of their experiences across time. This matters because understanding these ongoing processes is crucial for designing support that responds to a teacher's evolving needs, strengthens their professional identity, and ultimately improves retention during a period when attrition rates remain high (Flores and Day, 2006). This section provides the rationale for the present study, which seeks to address both theoretical and methodological gaps by using a longitudinal, narrative inquiry approach to explore how

professional identity is formed and sustained in the first three years of teaching. To lay the groundwork for this analysis, it is first necessary to consider how the concept of professionalism has been historically defined and contested across different contexts and how these definitions continue to shape expectations of what it means to be a teacher today.

2.2 Defining professionalism

In the early nineteenth century, a shift occurred from occupational groups rooted in the mediaeval guild system, where authority was based on ancient learning and texts, to emerging Royal Societies, which derived their legitimacy from new scientific knowledge. Key developments included the chartering of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1800, the establishment of the Institute of Civil Engineers in 1818, and the chartering of both the Pharmaceutical Society and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in 1844 (Burns, 2014). By the latter half of the century, this royal endorsement began to give way to a celebration of lived, practical expertise, epitomised by the image of the 'heroic or pioneering professional' (Burns, 2014, p. 5). This development also marked the beginning of jurisdictional competition between occupations, as professional groups sought to assert and protect their control over specific domains of expert knowledge (Abbott, 1988). According to Freidson (2001), this process established professionalism as a distinct 'third logic' of occupational organisation, separate from both state control and market forces, anchored in specialist knowledge, autonomy, and public service.

Early in the twentieth century, Nolin (2008) framed the role of the professional as instrumental to society's modernisation. This narrative contributed to a growing proliferation of recognised professions in official classifications and to the development of a hierarchical taxonomy of professions, semi-professions, and non-professions (Burns, 2014). Sociologists attempted to define the essential characteristics of professions during this time (Parsons, 1954; Shulman, 1988). Parsons' functionalist definition remains particularly influential, characterising the professional as emotionally neutral, achievement-oriented, loyal to a body of knowledge, and guided by service to the public good (Parsons, 1954). However, such models were built on elite professions like medicine and law and did not fully account for public sector roles with less formalised knowledge bases or more relational forms of expertise.

Occupations such as nursing, social work and teaching, often grouped as ‘semi-professions’, were typically feminised and undervalued (Nolin, 2008). As Witz (1992) and Davies (1996) argue, such classifications reflect not only distinctions in knowledge and autonomy but also patriarchal structures that devalue relational and emotional labour traditionally associated with women. For instance, in teaching, the role involves not only the transmission of curriculum knowledge and its academic, critical, reflective, and relational transmission but also responsibility for the personal, moral, and social development of children. This positions teaching as a holistic practice, requiring complex ethical judgement, rather than a practice merely centred on technical specialisation (Hoyle, 2001). Yet historically, it is specialisation, not holism, that has been most closely associated with professional status. The low prestige of teaching has also been shaped by the identity of its ‘clients’ in a neoliberal educational climate; working with children has often been perceived as less prestigious than working with adults (Hoyle, 2001). Within marketised education systems, where performance metrics, competition and economic status dominate, this perception is reinforced by policy discourses that position teaching as a service industry rather than an autonomous profession (Ball, 2003). These ideological framings help explain why the Chartered College of Teaching only received Royal Chartered Status in July 2017, a relatively recent acknowledgement of teaching’s professional standing compared with other established professions.

The definition of professionalism is not static but shaped by how governments, employers, and wider society construct expectations around accountability, authority, and legitimacy (Troman, 1996; Evans, 2008). Since the rise of New Public Management, characterised by marketisation, accountability and performance targets (Hood, 1991) many professions, especially in education, have been redefined through a performance-orientated lens. Teaching is now often framed through measurable outputs, standardised benchmarks, and external evaluations that risk marginalising the contextual, relational, and moral dimensions of practice (Ball, 2003; Sachs and Mockler, 2012). Evetts (2009) describes this as a shift toward ‘controlled professionalism’, where trust in professional judgement is replaced by bureaucratic oversight. Noordegraaf (2015) further notes that professionals increasingly operate in ‘hybrid’ environments, navigating tensions between

accountability demands and the need to respond flexibly to local context and learner needs.

While these expectations claim to raise standards, they can undermine the autonomy and ethical agency that underpin professional motivation and retention. Stronach et al. (2002) argue that professionalism must be redefined in ways that accommodate ambiguity, subjectivity, and ethical discretion. Sachs' (2001) similarly calls for a model of 'transformative professionalism' that empowers teachers as morally engaged, collaborative, and critically reflective practitioners. Without a foundation of institutional and public trust, attempts to improve recruitment, retention, and long-term commitment to teaching are likely to falter (Day and Gu, 2010; Gu and Day, 2007; Kelchtermans, 2005). As Van de Walle et al (2013) suggests, trust is not a peripheral concern; it is fundamental to sustaining the ethical commitment that genuine professionalism requires. In education, this means that when trust is embedded in relationships between teachers, leaders, students, and the wider community, it fosters collaboration, openness to professional learning, and a willingness to exercise professional judgement (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Conversely, a lack of trust can lead to increased surveillance, compliance-driven practice, and diminished autonomy, all of which can erode teacher morale, weaken professional identity, and ultimately impact the quality of teaching and learning (Sachs, 2001; Kelchtermans, 2005).

This evolving and contested understanding of professionalism sets the stage for a deeper exploration of professional identity. In particular, it prompts us to ask how teachers construct, negotiate, and sustain their identities in the face of competing expectations, policy pressures, and the lived realities of classroom life.

2.3 Conceptualising the Professional Identity of the Teaching Profession

There is a broad consensus that professional identity is not a fixed concept but a socially and politically constructed one (Coldron and Smith, 1999; Cooper and Olson, 1996; Gee, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2009; Ayling and Wallace, 2025). Professional identity is fluid and evolving as it is formed through the interaction between a person and their context (Nickel and Crosby, 2022), as factors such as personal histories, school culture and relationships with others all play a crucial role in its development (Cordingley et al., 2019). Teacher identity, as an ongoing process, necessitates the continuous

interpretation and re-interpretation of experiences, mirroring the idea that teacher development is a lifelong pursuit (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). Teachers' professional identities are deeply rooted in their personal beliefs, life experiences, and socialisation processes, acting as a filter through which they perceive the importance of their professional work (Gu, 2023). In addition, the professional dimension encompasses the knowledge, skills, and values associated with teaching, including pedagogical expertise, subject matter knowledge, and ethical commitments (Lavigne, 2014). The reconciliation of personal beliefs and contextual demands is a recurring, internal process fundamental to the development of a professional identity, influenced both by self-initiated actions rooted in personal beliefs and external contextual factors (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004; Gu, 2023). For example, Sach's (2005, p.15) definition of professional identity is of a core framework that helps teachers construct their own ideas of 'how to be', 'how to act' and 'how to understand their work and its place in society'. This perspective incorporates self-awareness, vocational obligations and the aptitude for critical self-assessment, underscoring the pivotal function of teachers in recognising their sphere of influence and position within the educational community and wider society (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009).

When teachers' psychological needs are met, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, which can lead to a stronger sense of professional identity and a greater commitment to the profession (Brenner, 2022). A teacher who feels competent and supported in their role is more likely to see themselves as a successful and valued teacher, strengthening their professional identity (Canrinus et al., 2012 and Li et al., 2022). The development of an effective professional identity will encourage teachers to participate in continuing professional learning, enhance their teaching practices, foster commitment to the profession and decide to remain in it (Suarez and McGrath, 2022). As teacher professional identity affects teaching behaviour, reflecting on beliefs and previous experiences, teachers make more conscious decisions about their continuing professional learning (Zhao and Zhang, 2017). A well-developed professional identity is positively associated with teaching practices and the quality of teaching (Hanna et al., 2022), and there is an association between teachers who have a better perception of themselves and their professional identity and the quality of their teaching (Suarez and

McGrath, 2022). Teachers who preserved a robust sense of professional identity amid difficult circumstances demonstrated significantly higher levels of self-efficacy regarding their capacity to navigate challenges effectively (Gu and Day, 2007). Furthermore, external perceptions and expectations significantly shape the formation of professional identity (Hidarto and Christine, 2021). The way teachers perceive their roles, responsibilities, and professional standing within the educational landscape can greatly influence their sense of self as educators (Karim et al., 2023). Teachers' perceptions regarding their professional identity can change significantly from their initial experiences as beginning teachers, highlighting the impact of continuous learning experiences across their careers (Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt, 2000). A strong and evolving professional identity has been shown to enhance resilience and job satisfaction, both of which are critical factors in teacher retention, particularly in the first few years, when around 23% of new teachers leave in England within the first three years (Education Committee, 2024; Day and Gu, 2009; Hong, 2010). The professional identity of teachers is intricately connected to the social and cultural contexts in which they operate, reflecting the multiple and sometimes conflicting demands inherent in becoming a professional (Gu, 2023).

Notably, a teacher's dedication to teaching is maintained through their identity as a teacher (Karim et al., 2023). Their identity is comprised of multiple sub-identities, which can be related to their subject specialisation, the age of their students, or the specific roles they hold (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2004). These sub-identities can be harmonised to form an overall professional identity, and while some may be central, others may be more peripheral (Nickel and Crosby, 2022). The evolution of a teacher's professional identity is a nuanced and multifaceted journey, moulded by a confluence of factors such as shifting educational policies, the specific ethos and culture of the school environment, cumulative personal experiences both within and outside the classroom, and the quality of professional relationships forged with colleagues, mentors, and students (Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2004; Flores, 2013).

A widely cited framework for understanding the historical evolution of teacher professionalism is Andy Hargreaves' model of four distinct professional 'ages', which traces a common trajectory in many Anglophone systems (Hargreaves, 2000). The Pre-

Professional Age, spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, marked the emergence of teaching as a formal occupation. During this period, teachers worked in relative isolation, managing large classes with few resources and without systemic structures of support. A "grammar of schooling" became deeply institutionalised, including graded classes, ability grouping, and standardised age-based progression, forming rigid pedagogical routines that proved resistant to change (Hargreaves, 2000).

The Age of the Autonomous Professional followed the Second World War and continued until the mid-1970s, often referred to as the 'golden age' of teacher autonomy (Hargreaves, 2000; Buyruk, 2018). Education was positioned as central to civic cohesion, democratic stability, and equality of opportunity (Møller et al., 2024). Teachers were afforded significant professional discretion under what Whitty (2000) terms 'licensed autonomy', with trust placed in their capacity to exercise professional judgement in the interests of students. However, this autonomy frequently existed alongside professional individualism and limited collective learning, leaving teachers professionally isolated (Day, 2002).

The Age of the Collegial Professional emerged from the 1980s onwards, coinciding with the rise of neoliberal education reforms that introduced marketisation, managerialism, and external accountability regimes (Whitty, 2000; Day, 2002; Ball, 2003). The traditional model of individual autonomy was steadily eroded by performative cultures, where professional worth became increasingly defined by measurable outcomes and compliance with centrally determined standards (Ball, 2003). In response, many systems emphasised collaboration, shared responsibility, and institutional coherence as mechanisms to balance decreased autonomy with organisational demands. This period saw the rise of 'new professionalism', characterised by collective working cultures, whole-school policies, and increasingly standardised approaches to teaching practice (Hargreaves, 1994; Buyruk, 2018; Evetts, 2009).

Hargreaves (2000) refers to the current period as the Post-Professional or Postmodern Age, characterised by heightened tensions between competing forces. On one side are intensifying accountability mechanisms, centrally prescribed curricula, pervasive testing regimes, external surveillance, and market-driven reforms that seek to regulate and de-skill professional judgement (Day, 2002; Ball, 2003; Evetts, 2009). On the other hand,

there are efforts, particularly visible in the late 1990s and early 2000s under the New Labour government, to re-professionalise teaching by developing more flexible, adaptive, and ethically grounded forms of professionalism capable of addressing the complexities of contemporary schooling (Hargreaves, 2000; Sachs, 2001; Noordegraaf, 2015). This period saw policy initiatives such as the Workforce Remodelling Agreement (2003), the introduction of the General Teaching Council for England, and revised professional standards, which placed greater emphasis on collaboration, reflective practice, and professional growth. These reforms were intended to counterbalance the technician and performative professionalism that had characterised much of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Hargreaves' model reveals that professionalism is not a fixed, universal construct but a historically situated and politically contested concept. Each successive professional 'age' reflects a recalibration of professional autonomy, state control, and public trust, shaped by wider ideological shifts, particularly the ascendancy of neoliberal governance frameworks since the 1980s (Sachs, 2001; Ball, 2003). Importantly, professionalism has oscillated between models privileging teacher discretion and ones defined by standardisation and external accountability. These shifts have major implications for how teachers experience their work, construct their professional identity, and sustain long-term commitment to the profession (Kelchtermans, 2005; Eteläpelto et al., 2013). The model underscores that authentic professionalism requires more than technical compliance; it demands the capacity for ethical judgement, relational engagement, and contextual responsiveness, all of which are threatened when managerial logics dominate (Sachs, 2001; Evetts, 2009). As Eteläpelto et al. (2013) argue, professional agency is crucial to sustaining motivation, resilience, and identity development in challenging policy environments. Without meaningful trust in teacher expertise, ongoing cycles of de-professionalisation risk undermining both teacher well-being and educational quality (Kelchtermans, 2005; Day and Gu, 2010). For ECTs, this erosion of professional trust can limit opportunities to develop autonomy, competence and relatedness, key psychological needs for identity formation (Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Thus, Hargreaves' framework helps historicise shifts in teacher professionalism and exposes the enduring tensions that continue to shape debates about what it means to be a professional educator today. These historical trajectories did not emerge in isolation

but have been profoundly shaped by broader policy frameworks, political ideologies, and shifting state-market relations. In particular, the rise of neoliberal policy agendas from the late 1970s onwards has fundamentally altered the governance and regulation of education in England, recasting the terms of teacher professionalism. To fully understand how teachers attempt to construct and sustain their professional identities, it is necessary to first examine the policy transformations that have reshaped education in England over the past four decades.

2.4 History of Education, Policy and Neoliberalism in England

Education has long been understood as integral to the development of society. The ancient Greeks, often regarded as one of the world's greatest civilisations, viewed education as a 'socially controlled experience' (Lodge, 2014, p. 11), deeply intertwined with family, religion, commerce, law, and politics. Thinkers such as Kant (1900) argued that education should serve the benefit of society, with meaningful improvement occurring across successive generations. For Peters (1973), the teacher's role was to guide and facilitate children's learning by enabling them to explore a world already mapped out by those who came before. Similarly, Socrates and Plato saw education as the transmission of values and attitudes from those with greater experience to those with less (Tate, 2015). Across these historical perspectives, a common theme emerges: the purpose of education is to advance civilisation and improve society.

Over time, however, the purpose and practice of education have been redefined through successive ideological movements. The emergence of neoliberalism and New Public Management reframed education less as a public good and more as a vehicle for economic productivity, accountability, and measurable performance (Ball, 2003; Olssen and Peters, 2005). These shifts have filtered into the everyday realities of schooling, reshaping not only curricula and assessment systems but also expectations of teachers, increasingly required to embody efficiency, adaptability, and compliance, often at the expense of professional autonomy and the broader civic purposes of education (Apple, 2001; Ball, 2017). As such, the historical movement of ideas about education is not merely abstract: it directly influences the construction of teacher professionalism and identity in contemporary England.

This reorientation remains visible in contemporary political discourse. Nick Gibb, Minister of State for School Standards (2014-2021), declared that ‘education is the engine of our economy’ (July 2015), exemplifying the shift from education as child development and civic formation to education as a driver of national economic prosperity. This laid the groundwork for a post-war policy landscape in which education became increasingly tied to political and economic agendas, setting the stage for the erosion of professional autonomy and intensified state oversight that followed (Ball, 2017; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011).

The post-war period, shaped by the 1944 Education Act, afforded teachers a high degree of professional autonomy, reflecting a broader Keynesian settlement built on state intervention, full employment, and social democratic ideals (Dale, 2017). Teaching was positioned as a trusted, civic-minded profession within a wider welfare state framework, with limited central oversight and significant professional discretion. However, by the mid-1970s, this consensus came under increasing pressure. James Callaghan’s Ruskin College speech in 1976 marked a turning point in political and public discourse, raising concerns about falling educational standards, international competitiveness, and the need for greater state scrutiny (Dale, 2017).

The election of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative government in 1979 signalled a decisive ideological shift, introducing neoliberal policy frameworks that emphasised deregulation, competition, accountability, and market mechanisms (Davies and Bansel, 2007; Ball, 2008; Lingard, 2010). Kenneth Baker’s Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 was a landmark policy intervention, widely regarded as the most significant reconfiguration of English education since 1944 (Fisher, 2008). Baker presented the Act as designed to ‘raise standards, extend choice and produce a better educated Britain’ (Education Reform Bill, 1987: 771).

The ERA introduced wide-ranging reforms that dramatically curtailed teacher autonomy. The National Curriculum prescribed a rigid knowledge canon, displacing child-centred pedagogies with highly standardised content (Ball, 2008; Wyse and Torrance, 2009). Testing through SATs, the establishment of OFSTED inspections, and comparative league tables introduced new layers of external surveillance and performative accountability (Ball, 2003; Ozga, 2009). Grounded in neoliberal ideology and neoconservative

preferences for a small but strong state (Grey, 2007), these policies were designed to manage, finance, and control schools in the service of academic standards and national economic competitiveness (Lo, 2011). Harris (1982) argues that this shifted teachers from curriculum developers to state implementers, narrowing the scope for professional judgement and contextual responsiveness.

A central neoliberal innovation was the introduction of parental choice and market competition. Hargreaves (1994) describes how parents were recast as ‘consumers’, empowered to choose schools based on published performance data, thereby creating competitive pressures that were intended to drive improvement. Schools competed for student enrolment, while teachers experienced increased pressure to produce quantifiable outcomes that would enhance school reputations (Buyruk, 2018). The teacher-parent relationship was reconfigured from collaborative partnership to market-based accountability, with parents positioned as critical overseers of professional performance (Gold et al., 2001).

Critics argue that these reforms represented a systematic erosion of teacher professionalism, displacing pedagogical expertise with rigid compliance and bureaucratic oversight (Unwin and Yandell, 2016). Teachers became framed as ‘passive technicians’ (Strain, 2009, p. 152), tasked with delivering centrally prescribed curricula rather than exercising professional agency. White (2007) suggests this de-professionalisation could have been mitigated by allowing teachers meaningful influence over curriculum design and enactment, while Barber (1994) advocated for policy approaches that enable rather than mandate practice. The lasting impact has been to embed a culture of managerialism and performativity that continues to shape teachers’ working lives and professional identity (Ball, 2003; Connell, 2009), a legacy that, for ECTs, means autonomy must often be negotiated rather than assumed.

The election of New Labour in 1997 offered rhetorical commitments to social justice, inclusion, and lifelong learning (Labour Party, 1997; Alcock et al., 2008). However, many neoliberal policy mechanisms introduced under the Conservatives were retained and extended. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies further centralised control over pedagogy, while the Education and Inspections Act 2006 expanded the academies

programme, promoting greater institutional diversity and market competition (Tomlinson, 2013; Ball, Bowe, Gewirtz, 1995).

Education was firmly positioned under New Labour as an economic instrument for national competitiveness, embedded within globalised human capital discourses (MacDonald, 2005; Whitty, 2006; Furlong, 2008; Day and Smethem, 2009). This alignment was reinforced through international policy agreements such as the Lisbon Strategy (2000), which explicitly linked education to global economic positioning (Tomlinson, 2013). The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) provides a more recent example of this alignment, where research funding is closely tied to measurable gains in attainment and social mobility as proxies for economic productivity (Hordern, 2023). The global dimension of this policy agenda has been reinforced by comparative performance frameworks such as the OECD's PISA league tables (Boronski and Hassan, 2005; Ozga, 2009). Sahlberg (2011) argues that such international benchmarks have fuelled a Global Education Reform Movement (GERM), where narrow metrics of performance, standardisation, and performativity dominate policy frameworks across diverse national contexts. While these reforms have been presented as levers for driving up quality and efficiency, they have also generated significant costs. The narrowing of professional roles, intensified surveillance, and relentless outcome accountability have eroded teacher autonomy, well-being, and professional identity (Ball, 2003; Sahlberg, 2011). For more than a decade, researchers have noted that teaching continues to be regarded as a semi-professional occupation (Hargreaves and Flutter, 2013), and PISA (2022) data from the UK context show declining levels of life satisfaction among teenagers, suggesting the collateral effects of such policy models extend beyond teachers to students and broader educational purposes (Ingram et al., 2023).

2.5 Neoliberalism and the Reshaping of Teacher Professionalism

Across multiple international contexts, teacher professionalism has been increasingly shaped by neoliberal reform agendas characterised by performance measurement, accountability regimes, managerialism, and audit cultures (Reeves, 2018; Mayer and Mills, 2021; Lingard, 2010). These reforms have redefined professional work, shifting teaching away from its relational, reflective, and ethical foundations toward a more instrumental, outcomes-driven model (Ball, 2003; Sachs, 2016). Ball (2003) describes

this as the rise of performativity, whereby teachers' work is constantly monitored and evaluated against externally imposed targets, standards, and inspection frameworks. Standardised curriculum frameworks, pre-scripted pedagogies, and high-stakes assessments position teachers as implementers of externally determined content rather than autonomous professionals capable of exercising critical, context-sensitive judgement (Reeves, 2018; Mayer and Mills, 2021; Wilkins, 2011). Giroux (2011) warns that such technocratic reforms strips education of its democratic, ethical, and transformative potential by subordinating professional judgement to bureaucratic control. As a result, professional agency is eroded, and 'good teaching' is increasingly defined through test scores and procedural conformity rather than relational, creative or critical practice (Apple, 2005; Perryman, 2006; Mockler, 2011).

In England, the introduction of the National Curriculum, high-stakes testing, OFSTED inspections, and league tables under the 1988 Education Reform Act firmly institutionalised this performative culture (Ball, 2008; Gray, 2017; MacDonald, 2005). Teachers are subjected not only to hierarchical state accountability but also to horizontal comparison with peers within competitive school environments (Buyruk, 2018; Lo, 2012; Ozga, 2009). Lambert and Gray (2019) describe this as a 'culture of competitive performativity', where teachers navigate continual audits, inspections, and accountability pressures that reward compliance while discouraging professional innovation.

Ball (2003) identifies three interrelated policy technologies embedded within schools, the market, managerialism, and performativity, describing the latter as a mode of regulation that employs judgements and comparisons to measure the productivity of individuals, subjects, and organisations. Within this logic, teachers are encouraged to assess their own performance, enhance their value, and strive for measurable self-improvement (Ball, 2003). The resulting culture mirrors industrial management, positioning teachers less as autonomous professionals and more as operatives within a tightly controlled system (Day and Smethem, 2009). Efficiency, uniformity, and compliance become the dominant values, at the cost of trust, creativity, and relational judgement. The human and emotional labour of teaching is marginalised, replaced by

performative metrics that track ‘effectiveness’ through compliance with pre-defined benchmarks (Ball, 2003; Tickle, 2011). This industrial logic risks reducing the complexity of teaching and reshaping professional identity, framing teachers as deliverers of content rather than reflective practitioners. As Day and Smethem (2009, p. 142) observe, there is now a ‘vocabulary of performance’ in England as teachers are squeezed into the tunnel vision of test scores, achievement targets, and league tables — spending precious time, as Ball (2003) notes, producing and dealing with a baffling array of figures within a culture of compliance. The appeal of this model lies in its apparent simplicity: good teaching is defined as standardised, research-based instruction, verifiable through exam results (Reeves, 2018). Yet this focus leaves little room for professional agency or teachers’ own contextual judgement about what good teaching looks like in their classrooms (Reeves, 2018).

Such environments create what Ball (2003) terms ‘values schizophrenia’, the dissonance teachers experience when personal pedagogical values clash with institutional demands. Emotional labour, relational practice, and moral purpose become marginalised as external metrics increasingly define professional success (Day, 2002; Kelchtermans, 2005; Wilkins, 2011), increasing stress and burnout and contributing to attrition from the profession (Day and Gu, 2010; Schaap et al., 2021). This regulatory approach has altered teachers’ professional identity through the implementation of managerial controls and external accountability mechanisms, and it is these performative principles that have intensified inspection from bodies such as OFSTED and reinforced public perceptions that teachers cannot be trusted (Becher, 2024). The resulting uncertainty is acutely felt: being constantly judged ‘in different ways, by different means, according to different criteria, through different agents and agencies’ erodes professional confidence and authenticity, key elements in identity formation (Ball, 2006, p. 220).

Professional development initiatives such as induction programmes, lesson observations, and performance reviews, while formally aimed at supporting teacher growth, are often absorbed into these performative structures, functioning as instruments of surveillance rather than authentic professional learning (Lambert and Gray, 2019; Hobson and Malderez, 2013; Kennedy, 2007). When mentoring and appraisal

become narrowly tied to externally imposed standards, they risk reducing complex developmental conversations to compliance exercises that stifle professional reflection (Greany and Higham, 2018). As Hargreaves (2000) warns, focusing exclusively on standards reduces the significance of passion for teaching and care for students, components central to professional identity (p. 152). The emotional labour of teaching, which plays a crucial role in shaping professional identity (Hargreaves, 2001), is increasingly sidelined under a system that values efficiency over empathy (Day and Smethem, 2009).

This diminishment of care also undermines the feminised conception of teaching as an ‘integrated whole activity with overtures of nurturing, fostering growth, and caring’ (Ozga and Lawn, 1988, p. 333). The feminisation of the teaching profession deepened during the world wars, as women entered the workforce and teaching responsibilities expanded to include welfare tasks (Summerfield, 1987; Thom, 1998). Some argued this contributed to a perceived decline in teaching’s professional status, as welfare tasks were deemed low-status despite their obvious educational importance (Ozga and Lawn, 1988). These caring discourses proved damaging to women’s working conditions and career mobility: female teachers were portrayed as selflessly committed to children’s development rather than to personal finance or career satisfaction (Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007). This is a global phenomenon rooted in economic development, the position of women in society, cultural definitions of masculinity, and the value of childcare (Drudy, 2008, p. 309). In many Western societies, a cultural link between women’s homemaking responsibilities and their disposition toward nurture has long defined teaching as a woman’s profession (Drudy, 2008, p. 312; Sabbe and Aelterman, 2007). Drudy (2008) argues that the neoliberal focus on performativity is shifting the culture of teaching from femininity and caring toward performance management constructs that are more masculine in character and increasingly hostile to women (p. 316). Any ongoing efforts by policymakers to redefine the teaching profession must therefore recognise the significant contributions of women in shaping educational practice (Drudy, 2008, p. 316). Sachs’ (2001) model of democratic professionalism, characterised by collaboration, cooperation, and care, aligns more closely with values traditionally associated with women and stands in contrast to the managerialist and performative culture in which

many ECTs now operate (Drudy, 2008). Teaching is a ‘complex, caring, moral, cultural, intellectual, and moral endeavour’ (Day and Smethem, 2009, p. 149) that demands not only pedagogical competence but also the capacity to inspire, motivate, and engage learners.

Teachers respond to these pressures in different ways. Some internalise managerial discourses and adapt their practice accordingly, others employ ‘double agent’ strategies (Handsfield et al., 2010), outwardly complying with institutional requirements while privately sustaining personal pedagogical commitments. These identity negotiations reflect ongoing struggles for autonomy and authenticity within highly constrained professional environments (Mockler, 2011; Sachs, 2016). Variation exists at the institutional level, however. Some school environments actively cultivate collegial trust, distributed leadership, and reflective dialogue, offering protective buffers against rigid performative pressures (Mayer and Mills, 2021; Schaap et al., 2021; Wilkins, 2011). In these contexts, teachers report greater professional satisfaction, stronger identity development, and improved retention even within broader neoliberal policy landscapes (Lambert and Gray, 2019). Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997) offer valuable conceptual tools here: both highlight the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness for sustaining motivation and professional identity, and performative environments that undermine these psychological needs risk eroding teacher wellbeing, agency, and long-term professional commitment (Kelchtermans, 2005; Schaap et al., 2021; Lambert and Gray, 2019).

The sustained tension between performative accountability and professional agency remains a defining challenge for teacher professionalism in England, a tension that was significantly intensified by the Education Reform Act (1988), which marked a turning point in how teacher identity and autonomy were shaped by national policy.

2.6 The Impact of the Education Reform Act and Debates about Professional Identity

The Education Reform Act (ERA, 1988) marked a pivotal moment in the restructuring of England’s education system, introducing market-driven principles, increased central control, and accountability measures that profoundly reshaped the conditions under which teachers work (Ball, 2003). The cumulative impact of these reforms has been widely described as a reduction in teacher agency. Accountability policies and

performance metrics have reshaped the professional landscape, constraining teachers' sense of autonomy and control (Buchanan, 2015). Since the ERA, performance culture has intensified, linking educational practice to national and international economic priorities (Sachs, 2016). The dominant educational discourse is now one of 'efficiency' and 'productivity' rather than principles and values (Day and Smethem, 2009). When efficiency and productivity become the dominant benchmarks of success, the relational, ethical and context-responsive dimensions of teaching risk being marginalised, reducing opportunities for teachers to enact identities aligned with their values (Sachs, 2001). For ECTs, this can create tensions between their initial motivations for entering the profession and the performative demands of the system, with potential consequences for self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and retention (Kelchtermans, 2009).

The ERA imposed a highly prescriptive National Curriculum and set out detailed assessment requirements, sharply increasing state control over both what teachers teach and how they assess students (Harris, 1989). This represented a move away from locally determined curricula and teacher autonomy, embedding legal and policy sanctions for non-conformity and drastically limiting teachers' professional discretion (Harris, 1989). Much of the teacher's role was transformed from curriculum design and innovation into curriculum delivery, while managerial professionalism, characterised by performance indicators, standardised criteria, and public accountability mechanisms, became the prevailing professional norm (Day and Smethem, 2009). Teachers were expected to manage classes efficiently to meet externally set goals, document their achievements, and participate in formal accountability processes. This paradigm echoed the language of industrial management, emphasising efficiency, targets, and benchmarking rather than the trust-based professional practices developed by teachers themselves (Day and Smethem, 2009). Such shifts have been widely argued to narrow teachers' professional identities, reconfiguring them around externally imposed performance metrics rather than intrinsic values and pedagogical judgement (Ball, 2003; Sachs, 2001) and, over time, to erode autonomy, constrain context-responsive practice, and diminish the moral purpose that sustains long-term commitment to the profession (Kelchtermans, 2005; Day and Gu, 2010).

It is within this context of productivity and competitiveness that we are facing a recruitment and retention crisis in teaching in England as the number of trainees entering teacher training is ‘further below target than at any point in the last decade’ (Worth, 24th March 2023), although there have been signs of positive growth of a 12 per cent increase in applications for 2024-2025 (Worth, 7th May 2025). The National Foundation for Educational Research’s (NFER) fifth annual Teacher Labour Market report highlights how problems with teacher recruitment and retention have intensified since the pandemic (Worth, 2023), as the government only reached 59% of the target for trainee teachers for 2022-23, down from 2021-2022 (UK Parliament Committees, 20 March 2023). Furthermore, for 2024-2025 secondary recruitment is overall nearly 40 per cent below target (Worth, 7th May 2025), despite Labour’s pledge to recruit 6,500 teachers by the end of parliament, which, according to the National Audit Office (2025), is a ‘significant challenge’. NFER data also show that women continue to make up the majority of applicants to initial teacher training, particularly in primary education, with men remaining under-represented (Worth and Faulkner-Ellis, 2022). This persistent imbalance not only highlights the gendered nature of teaching but also raises questions about the profession’s place within broader labour market hierarchies, where work coded as ‘female’ is often undervalued and associated with lower status (Acker, 1994; Skelton, 2002). The reliance on women to sustain the teaching workforce suggests both the resilience and appeal of the profession, but also its vulnerability to structural inequalities and policy pressures.

The impact of neoliberal reforms on professional identity has significant implications for teacher retention. Identity is closely linked to job satisfaction (Kelchtermans, 2009), and when teachers struggle to reconcile their values with policy demands, they may either disengage or leave the profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2011). This makes it all the more important to acknowledge that teachers’ work is a ‘complex interplay of personal, professional and political dimensions’ (Mockler, 2011, p. 518), a complexity that cannot be captured by compliance with a set of professional standards.

This focus on performativity and accountability with strict controls and assessment have all been factors in the ‘de-professionalisation of teachers’ work’ (Gray, 2017, p.194). Professional autonomy and judgement are undermined, and ‘teaching is thus reduced to

a technical rather than an ethical, critical or creative act' (Clarke and Phelan, 2015, p. 267). Instead of having a rationale for their practice, teachers are now required to produce measurable and improved outputs and performance, and 'what is important is what works' (Ball, 2003, p. 222). In practice, this often means lesson observations focus on the demonstration of clearly defined learning objectives, the use of data-driven progress measures, and the ability to evidence student improvement through assessment scores or target grade tracking, rather than on professional judgement or pedagogical reasoning. The moral and relational dimensions of teaching, central to sustaining commitment and self-efficacy, risk becoming marginalised, weakening teachers' capacity to see themselves as agents of change within their professional communities (Kelchtermans, 2005; Day and Gu, 2010). Robertson (1996, p. 51) goes further, defining teachers as 'the new saleswomen and salesmen for the economy' as the discourse of schools has moved from curriculum, teaching and learning to efficiency, effectiveness, competencies and accountability (Smyth et al., 2017, p. 8). This reframes teachers as implementers of predefined outputs rather than autonomous professionals, narrowing their identity to that of policy enactors rather than educational architects (Buchanan, 2015), and contributes to a move away from collaborative professional cultures toward an ideology of autonomous individuals operating independently of each other (Smyth et al., 2017, p. 50), ultimately diminishing teachers' sense of motivation, efficacy, and job satisfaction (Day, 2002, p. 685).

In summary, the new managerial professionalism prioritised behavioural compliance, over the intellectual and attitudinal dimensions of professionalism, undermining traditional values such as collaborative decision-making, subject expertise, and care for individual student needs (Sachs, 2001; Hargreaves, 2000). Trust in professional expertise was replaced by monitoring and measurement against centrally determined targets, and 'what works' displaced discussions of ethics, creativity, or equity (Ball, 2003, p. 222). Many teachers have adopted what Hall and McGinity (2015) describe as 'adaptive professional compliance', accepting managerial controls as inevitable rather than challenging them. Where resistance does occur, it is often limited: teachers facing a conflict between personal values and policy pressure tend toward reluctant compliance,

resulting in what Hall and McGinity (2015) term ‘restricted’ professional identities, where opportunities for practice outside neoliberal norms are severely diminished.

Mockler (2011) argues that the focus by successive governments on ‘what teachers do’ rather than ‘what teachers are’ is intentional because it is much easier to quantify, measure and mandate what a teacher does rather than ascertain what the professional identity and moral purpose of a teacher are, which is one of the motivations for this study (Mockler, 2011, p. 525). This distinction matters: it shifts attention away from the complex, relational, and values-driven nature of teaching, reducing professional identity to a set of externally mandated tasks and leaving little space for agency, autonomy, or the development of moral purpose that sustains teachers over time. It is precisely this gap that motivates the present study.

While these historical and policy analyses provide important context for understanding contemporary debates about professionalism and identity, this study does not seek to determine the direct causal impact of specific policy reforms on the participants involved. Rather, these developments form part of the broader landscape within which teachers construct and negotiate their professional identities.

2.7 ECF and ITTECF: Policy Design, Identity and the Professional Self

Although the participants in this study entered teaching prior to the implementation of the Early Career Framework (ECF) and the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF), these reforms form part of the contemporary policy landscape in which early career teacher development is currently situated. This section therefore does not evaluate the direct effects of these frameworks on the teachers in this study. Rather, it reviews the existing literature on their design and reception in order to contextualise ongoing debates about standardisation, professional learning, and identity within the English education system.

The influence of neoliberal policy logics on early career teacher development in England has been widely discussed in relation to the ECF (DfE, 2019) and ITTECF (DfE, 2024). These reforms mark a significant reconfiguration of how early career support is conceptualised, delivered, and experienced, embedding a standardised and prescriptive approach to teacher development. Ovenden-Hope and Kirkpatrick (2025, p. 30)

characterise these reforms as explicitly reflecting neoliberal ideology. While designed to address longstanding concerns around retention and instructional quality, both frameworks raise important questions about professional identity formation in the early years of teaching, particularly in terms of autonomy, agency, and the relational and contextual dimensions of practice.

Both the ECF and ITTECF prescribe a detailed set of ‘learn that’ (evidence-informed content) and ‘learn how to’ (practical strategies) statements, which are closely aligned to the Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2011). Although intended to ensure consistency and evidence-informed practice, emerging research suggests that the frameworks’ structured design may not always reflect the diverse and situated realities of ECTS (Walker et al., 2024; Murtagh, Dawes and Rushton, 2022). In a large-scale study, Ovenden-Hope and Kirkpatrick (2024) found that both ECTs and mentors experienced the ECF as overly generic, describing its one-size-fits-all design as poorly aligned with the varied realities of school settings. Such findings have been interpreted by scholars as raising concern about flexibility, subject specificity and contextual adaptation.

Similarly, Ford et al. (2022) found that some ECTs perceived the ECF as overly directive and rigid. When professional development is framed around fidelity to externally imposed scripts rather than reflective practice, it risks being interpreted as a compliance task rather than a meaningful opportunity for growth. Within this literature, concerns are expressed that highly prescriptive formats could have implications for autonomy, authenticity, and context-sensitive professional learning, dimensions widely recognised as central to identity development (Kelchtermans, 2005; Day and Gu, 2010). It is important to note that these interpretations arise from the emerging research base rather than from the empirical findings of this study.

From a theoretical perspective, some scholars situate the ECF and ITTECF within broader neoliberal reform patterns characterised by accountability, performativity, and standardisation (Ball, 2003; Olssen and Peters, 2005). Within this framing, teacher development can become increasingly codified and centrally regulated. Hordern et al. (2024) describe this as an ‘expert system’ approach privileging codified knowledge delivered with fidelity. In such models, ECTs may be positioned primarily as recipients of validated techniques, potentially narrowing opportunities for situated judgement (Mayer

and Mills, 2021). Turvey (2024) suggests that these frameworks can operate as ‘double texts’, presenting clarity and certainty while obscuring the complexity of pedagogical decision-making. These analyses contribute to ongoing academic debate about how professional learning frameworks interact with teachers’ evolving sense of professional self.

For example, a ‘learn how to’ statement within the ECF instructs ECTs to create ‘a positive environment where making mistakes and learning from them... are part of the daily routine’ (ECF, 2019, p. 8). While the intention is developmental, scholars note that such statements do not specify how adaptation should occur across subject, phase, or context. This absence of contextual nuance has been interpreted in the literature as potentially limiting opportunities for pedagogical interpretation and ethical judgement, both of which are frequently associated with robust professional identity formation (Sachs, 2001; Evetts, 2009).

Within this body of scholarship, the frameworks are sometimes described as reflecting ‘managerial professionalism’ (Sachs, 2016), emphasising compliance, accountability, and measurable outcomes. Researchers have raised questions about how such technical-rational approaches align with the relational motivations that many early career teachers report as central to their professional self-concept (Hordern and Brooks, 2023). Ball’s (2003) concept of ‘values schizophrenia’ is frequently invoked to describe potential tensions between institutional expectations and personal pedagogical commitments.

It is also important to acknowledge that policy reforms have been associated with measurable attainment outcomes and international benchmarking improvements. However, scholars caution against interpreting such outcomes as straightforward indicators of educational success, noting that high-stakes assessment environments can privilege measurable attainment over broader educational purposes (Au, 2011; Grek, 2009). Within the literature, debates continue regarding how such performance orientations may interact with teachers’ understandings of relational, inclusive, and creative dimensions of practice.

Research on workload and mentoring structures further complicates this picture. Policy evaluations and empirical studies suggest that rigid scheduling and prescriptive mentoring requirements can generate additional pressures (DfE, 2021; Walker et al., 2024). Ford et al. (2022) report that some ECTs struggled to engage fully with all components of the framework. Scholars argue that when professional development does not sufficiently reflect relational, subject-specific, or contextual dimensions of teaching, teachers' sense of professional belonging and self-efficacy may be affected. Conversely, research consistently demonstrates that responsive mentoring, relational trust, and contextual sensitivity are associated with stronger identity development and retention (Kelchtermans, 2005; Mansfield et al., 2019).

While critiques exist, there is also growing discussion within the field about how such frameworks might evolve. Ovenden-Hope and Kirkpatrick (2024) and Ford et al. (2022) identify practitioner calls for greater flexibility, contextual responsiveness, and space for reflection within structured systems. Emerging research suggests that professional learning frameworks may benefit from balancing clarity and rigour with autonomy and dialogic engagement (Greany and Higham, 2018; Schellings and Beijaard, 2023). These debates highlight ongoing tensions within teacher development policy rather than settled conclusions.

In summary, the literature surrounding the ECF and ITTECF reflects broader debates about standardisation, agency, and professional identity within contemporary education systems. While this study does not evaluate these frameworks directly, these discussions provide important contextual background for understanding how questions of autonomy, relational support, and identity construction are currently positioned within English teacher development discourse.

2.8 The Significance of a Positive Professional Identity in Teacher Retention

The current body of literature highlights that the development of a strong professional identity during the early years of teaching plays a critical role in influencing whether teachers remain in or leave the profession. Scheopner Torres (2020) highlights how a positive professional identity is closely associated with greater motivation, higher self-efficacy, and stronger commitment to the profession. These qualities, frequently cited as

predictors of job satisfaction and persistence, appear to support teachers in sustaining their engagement, finding meaning in their work, and managing the emotional and practical challenges of the role (Scheopner Torres, 2020). Abramson and Schachter (2024) found that a resilient professional identity enables teachers to navigate the everyday pressures of the role and sustain their commitment to the profession, particularly in the first five years when attrition risk is highest. Their work underscores that professional identity is shaped by the extent to which core identity motives, such as meaningfulness, efficacy, belonging, authenticity, and continuity, are satisfied. Fulfilling these motives increases the likelihood of teachers staying in the profession; failing to do so increases the likelihood of attrition. Importantly, Abramson and Schachter (2024) conclude that teacher attrition is not simply a response to external working conditions, but a deeply personal decision rooted in whether identity needs are being met.

The link between professional identity and self-efficacy has been identified as particularly significant in understanding teacher retention. Teachers with a well-developed sense of professional identity often report higher levels of self-efficacy, a belief in their capacity to manage classroom challenges, support student learning, and navigate institutional demands (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001; Klassen and Chiu, 2011). Qu (2024) and Thomas et al. (2019) both note that self-efficacy is a key predictor of persistence in the profession, especially in contexts marked by high workload, policy reform, or limited institutional support. When teachers experience alignment between their internal values and their perceived competence, they are more likely to sustain motivation and cope constructively with adversity (Gu and Day, 2007). This interplay of identity and efficacy contributes to a sense of professional agency, defined as the capacity to act purposefully and make decisions that shape one's practice and environment (Eteläpelto et al., 2013). Research suggests that it is not simply the presence of difficult conditions that prompts attrition, but the absence of resources, internal and relational, that enable teachers to manage them meaningfully (Day and Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2005).

Teachers derive meaning and affirmation through their interactions with students, colleagues, and school leaders (Kelchtermans, 2009; Mommers, Schellings and Beijaard, 2021). Feeling part of a community of practice reinforces belonging and

protects against isolation, which is a significant factor in early career attrition (Steadman, 2024). When school cultures affirm professional identity through trust, collaboration, and recognition, teachers can experience greater job satisfaction, wellbeing, and engagement (Hanna et al., 2022; Cordingley et al., 2019).

The importance of situated affirmation, where teachers' contributions are recognised within the specific context of their work, is a recurring theme in retention literature (O'Shea, 2021; Towers et al., 2022; Gu, 2023). This suggests that school leaders should create opportunities for teachers to share their practice, receive feedback, and participate in decision-making processes (Karim et al., 2023). Contextual factors such as leadership style, collegiality, and alignment between institutional and personal values all play a role in shaping whether teachers perceive their identity to be respected or undermined (Nadelson, Booher and Turley, 2020; Towers et al., 2022). Where dissonance arises between institutional expectations and a teacher's evolving sense of self, the risk of disillusionment and probability of departure increase (Cordingley et al., 2019; Steadman, 2024).

Professional identity also functions as a motivational anchor, particularly when it is underpinned by a strong moral or social commitment to education. This sense of purpose is often closely tied to the specific contexts in which teachers work, including the social and cultural needs of their students, the ethos of the school, and the broader community environment (Day and Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009). When teachers perceive alignment between their personal values and the contextual realities of their professional setting, they are more likely to sustain motivation, even in the face of policy pressures or resource constraints. Conversely, when the context constrains opportunities to act according to one's values, such as in highly standardised or accountability-driven environments, this misalignment can lead to disillusionment or attrition (Hong, 2010). However, Abramson and Schachter (2024) note that teachers who frame their work as part of a larger mission are more likely to sustain high levels of engagement, even during periods of stress or change.

This adaptive capacity is crucial for sustaining professional longevity, particularly in evolving or challenging educational contexts where flexibility, reflection and alignment with personal values support resilience over time (Gu and Day, 2007; Kelchtermans,

2005). Such environments support adaptation and nurture intrinsic motivation, reinforcing a deeper connection to the profession (Day and Kington, 2008; Ryan and Deci, 2000). This aligns with Cordingley et al.'s (2019) argument that identity-informed professional development is more impactful than decontextualised continuous professional development, as it speaks to who teachers are becoming, not just what they do. Given its central role, supporting the development and maintenance of professional identity must be a strategic priority for retention policy. Too often, educational systems address attrition through short-term workload management or procedural reforms, without engaging with the deeper identity work that sustains teachers' motivation and purpose over time. Steadman (2024) and Cordingley et al. (2019) argue that professional identity must be considered a long-term developmental process, requiring relational trust, contextual sensitivity, and institutional commitment.

Systems that recognise the relational, contextual, and situated nature of identity are better positioned to create sustainable environments in which teachers can grow, adapt, and remain (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Day and Gu, 2010). For example, Scotland's *Professional Standards for Teachers* (GTCS, 2021), Wales's *Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership* (Welsh Government, 2017), Finland's autonomy-driven, research-based teacher education model (Sahlberg, 2015), and New Zealand's culturally grounded *Teaching Council Standards* (2017) all foreground professional trust, collaboration, and contextual responsiveness, supporting teacher agency and long-term retention.

Taken together, the literature suggests that the development of a robust, contextually supported professional identity may play a significant role in supporting ECT retention. While external working conditions are undoubtedly influential, multiple studies indicate that it is the extent to which identity needs, such as authenticity, belonging, and efficacy, are fulfilled that often determines whether teachers remain in the profession. Professional development, mentoring, and leadership practices that are relationally grounded and responsive to the lived experiences of ECTs appear to increase the likelihood of sustained engagement.

However, while existing research highlights the importance of relational and context-sensitive support, there remains a lack of sustained focus on how such practices

influence the long-term construction of professional identity, particularly across the crucial early years of a teacher's career.

2.9 Towards Identifying Gaps in the Literature

While existing research offers valuable insights into the structural and policy conditions shaping ECTs' identities, notable gaps remain in the literature. Much of the discourse has focused on the systemic constraints imposed by neoliberal reform or the outcomes of standardised frameworks (Ball, 2003; Gu, 2023), yet there is less attention paid to how ECTs themselves narrate, navigate, resist, rework, or reimagine their professional identities within these structures (Stronach et al., 2002; Lambert and Gray, 2019; Schaap et al., 2021). The interplay between personal agency and institutional control is still under-theorised (Groenewald and Arnold, 2024), particularly from longitudinal, relational, or narrative perspectives that capture identity as a lived, unfolding process. This section critically explores these under-researched areas, identifying conceptual and empirical gaps in the field and positioning the current study as a response to these limitations.

Despite widespread recognition that professional identity is central to ECTs' well-being, agency, retention, and instructional effectiveness, the literature reveals a persistent lack of definitional consensus. Researchers have approached professional identity from multiple perspectives, often focusing on constituent elements, such as beliefs, values, emotional resilience, and professional knowledge, rather than converging on a shared conceptual framework (Hong, 2010). As research on professional identity comes from many scientific disciplines, cognitive psychology, sociology, socio-cultural and social psychology each bring its own definition, language and focus (Beijaard et al., 2023). This conceptual fragmentation reflects the broader agreement that identity is not a fixed trait but a complex, multi-dimensional and context-sensitive construct that incorporates personal histories, moral purpose, lived experiences, and socio-professional interactions. Beijaard et al. (2004), for instance, define professional identity as a fluid configuration of subject matter, pedagogy, values, and contextualised experience. Akkerman and Meijer (2011) similarly argue that professional identity comprises multiple 'I-positions' formed through interaction and situational engagement, creating both internal coherence and multiplicity. Olsen (2016) takes a dual perspective, portraying

identity as simultaneously a stable construct and a shifting process shaped by reflection and experience. Eteläpelto et al. (2015) centre agency within this construct, highlighting how identity is actively constructed through teachers' negotiation of roles, expectations, and workplace contexts.

The absence of a unified conceptualisation of professional identity presents significant challenges for both research and practice. Without a shared definition or robust theoretical framework, studies often risk fragmentation, tending to isolate identity into discrete variables or fixed categories rather than conceptualising it as a contextual, relational, and evolving process. This limits the field's ability to systematically examine how identity develops over time, shapes ECT practice and experiences, influences career trajectories, or informs the design of effective, evidence-informed interventions for supporting ECTs. As Alsup (2006) highlights, many early ECTs enter the profession with only a vague or culturally inherited conception of what a teacher is. These inherited 'scripts' are frequently superficial and fail to prepare new teachers to internalise and embody a professional identity (Alsup, 2006). Instead, they may find themselves merely performing a role rather than engaging with teaching as an authentic expression of self, leading to a sense of dissonance or fragmentation: 'simply playing a role, not taking on an identity' (Alsup, 2006, p. 36). This underscores the urgency of developing more nuanced, theory-driven, and context-sensitive research that can account for the complexity of identity formation in the early years of teaching and provide meaningful guidance for policy and practice.

Much of the literature on ECT professional identity is dominated by problem-saturated narratives, emphasising tension, fragmentation, and emotional strain (Pillen, Beijaard, and den Brok, 2013; Kelchtermans, 2005; Hong, 2010; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). However, alongside these problem-focused accounts, there is a growing body of work that acknowledges the potential for professional identity development to be a generative, affirming, and resilient process (Day and Gu, 2010; Rodgers and Scott, 2008; Clandinin et al., 2009; Mansfield et al., 2019). These studies suggest that identity can be shaped positively through supportive relationships, reflective practice, and values alignment, particularly when positioned within enabling institutional cultures. This perspective also informs the present study, which explores how ECTs construct professional identity not

only in response to constraint but also through opportunities for agency, connection, and contextual affirmation. The dominant focus on conflict in the literature has often resulted in professional identity being conceptualised as fragile and under threat (Pillen, Beijaard and den Brok, 2013; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), rather than as a fluid and evolving construct that can be intentionally nurtured through relational, contextual, and reflective experiences (Day and Gu, 2010; Rodgers and Scott, 2008; Clandinin et al., 2009).

Schellings et al. (2023) examined the use of identity workshops and reflective assignments designed to help ECTs convert 'identity tensions' into opportunities for professional growth. These interventions provided valuable insight into the emotional and cognitive complexity of early career teaching, with participants frequently reflecting on experiences of uncertainty, role conflict, and a perceived mismatch between personal values and institutional expectations. Stress related to classroom management, performance pressures, and feelings of inadequacy were recurring themes, as was dissonance between idealised visions of teaching and the realities of everyday practice. While such reflections helped surface underlying identity challenges, the authors acknowledge that the framing of the activities may have unintentionally reinforced a deficit narrative. Participants tended to focus predominantly on what was difficult, problematic, or misaligned, with fewer accounts of resilience, affirmation, or growth. Schellings et al. (2023) suggest that a more balanced approach, incorporating opportunities to recognise and articulate strengths, achievements, and moments of alignment, could have offered a more generative foundation for identity construction. This highlights the importance of designing identity-focused interventions that make space for both vulnerability and affirmation and that recognise professional identity as not only shaped by struggle but also by success, connection, and meaning-making.

Other studies have highlighted how negative experiences, such as unmet expectations or emotionally charged classroom events, can be transformed through sense-making processes. Nichols et al. (2016) stress the importance of reflective interpretation in converting these challenges into sources of personal and professional growth. Van der Wal et al. (2019) extend this perspective by showing that identity tensions are often rooted in misalignments between personal values and the enacted realities of the

teaching role, producing self-doubt and vulnerability that can only be mitigated when schools provide space for critical dialogue and value alignment.

Despite the predominance of deficit-focused studies, more recent research has begun to foreground the positive features that contribute to the formation of a robust and adaptive professional identity. Mommers et al. (2021) argue that positive identity formation is grounded in meaningful relationships, value alignment, inspiring self-narratives, opportunities for collaboration, and a strong sense of agency. These elements empower ECTs to see themselves as effective, recognised professionals who are capable of navigating the complexities of the role. In line with this, Nickel and Crosby (2022) identify a range of reinforcing factors, including collegial networks, mentoring, reflective practice, professional development, leadership support, and institutional recognition, that sustain motivation, enhance resilience, and contribute to job satisfaction. Their findings point to the importance of environments that enable ECTs to experience both growth and belonging.

Even within subject-specific contexts, similar themes emerge. Ballantyne and Zhukov (2017), focusing on early-career music teachers, found that professional identity was positively influenced by mentoring, collegiality, recognition, and a supportive workplace culture, factors echoed across broader educational settings. Gu (2024) brings these threads together in arguing for a holistic model of identity development that integrates personal agency, relational support, value alignment, emotional recognition, and meaningful opportunities for professional learning.

While the literature increasingly acknowledges the relational and contextual conditions that support the positive development of professional identity, such as mentoring, value alignment, and collegial support (Day and Gu, 2010; Kelchtermans, 2009; Mansfield et al., 2019), less attention has been paid to how teachers themselves make meaning of these experiences over time. Much of the existing work tends to focus on predefined variables or outcomes, rather than exploring teachers' evolving interpretations of their professional journeys in context. This highlights a gap that qualitative, longitudinal approaches such as narrative inquiry are well-positioned to address, offering insight into how identity is shaped through situated reflection, relational interactions, and accumulated lived experience (Clandinin et al., 2009; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). The

present study contributes to this emerging strand of research by examining how ECTs in England construct professional identity over their first three years, attending to how meaning is made within and through the relationships, contexts, and tensions they encounter.

2.10 Positioning the Current Study within the Literature

My study is situated within, and seeks to contribute to, the evolving field of research on ECT professional identity. Much of the current research focuses on identity tensions, emotional dissonance, and the destabilising effects of institutional misalignment, particularly in relation to neoliberal reforms and performative policy environments (Ball, 2003; Nichols et al., 2016; van der Wal et al., 2019). These studies have offered important insights into the challenges of identity construction, but they have also, at times, risked presenting professional identity as something precarious, rather than resilient or generative.

Drawing on a relational, contextual, and situated lens, my study explores how early career secondary school teachers in England construct, negotiate, and affirm their professional identities over the first three years of their careers. A further contribution of this study lies in its methodological distinctiveness. Much of the literature to date has adopted either survey-based or cross-sectional designs, which, while useful in mapping patterns, often fall short in capturing the lived, longitudinal processes through which identity is formed. By employing narrative inquiry longitudinally, this research privileges teachers' own voices, recognises the temporal and evolving nature of identity work, and foregrounds meaning making as central to the construction of the professional self. Narrative inquiry not only provides rich insight into how identity is experienced across time and context but also allows for an exploration of how teachers position themselves in relation to policy, practice, and professional communities (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Sfard and Prusak, 2005). Through attention to temporality, sociality, and place, narrative methods capture the evolving nature of identity work and the ways teachers make sense of their roles within shifting institutional and relational landscapes (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2006). These dimensions enable researchers to explore how teachers' past experiences, current contexts, and imagined futures intersect in the construction of professional identity.

In addition, this study is theoretically grounded in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997), frameworks that are widely referenced in the teacher motivation literature but have received less sustained attention in research specifically focused on teacher professional identity (Vansteenkiste and Ryan, 2013; Klassen et al., 2011). This dual-theoretical lens enables a deeper exploration of how autonomy, competence, relatedness, and perceived self-efficacy interact with contextual and relational interactions to shape identity trajectories. Emerging studies suggest that when these psychological needs are met, teachers are more likely to experience a stable and agentic sense of professional self (Schaap et al., 2021; Beijaard, Koopman and Schellings, 2022; Abramson and Schachter, 2024), yet their explanatory potential in relation to longitudinal identity development remains underexplored. This study seeks to contribute to this gap by integrating self-determination theory and self-efficacy theory within a narrative framework to examine the lived experiences of ECTs over time.

Overall, this study seeks to advance the field by shifting attention towards the constructive and relational aspects of identity development, by privileging teacher voice through narrative methods, and by offering a conceptually grounded, empirically rich understanding of how identity is formed and sustained over time. It aims not only to fill gaps in the literature but also to inform more responsive, identity-attuned approaches to ECT support, policy design, and professional learning. To pursue these aims, the research design must be capable of capturing the nuanced, situated, and evolving nature of identity work.

The following chapter, sets out the study's theoretical foundations, explaining how self-efficacy theory and self-determination theory provide complementary lenses for examining the complexity and fluidity of professional identity. It also establishes how these frameworks shape the study's analytical focus and underpin the methodological choices outlined in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 3 – Theoretical Chapter

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to articulate, situate, and justify the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study, recognising that theoretical frameworks do more than guide data analysis; they shape research question formulation, inform methodological choices, and frame how meaning is constructed from participants' narratives (Anfara and Mertz, 2015; Braun and Clarke, 2022; Crotty, 1998). This research investigates the construction of professional identity through the lived experiences and personal narratives of secondary school early career teachers (ECTs) in England across their first three years of teaching. Professional identity is widely acknowledged as dynamic and evolving, shaped through the interaction of personal values, relationships, contextual experiences, and institutional discourses (Beijaard et al., 2004; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). However, this thesis is concerned not only with what ECTs experience, but with how those experiences become identity-forming over time: how teachers come to experience themselves as legitimate professionals, what enables that identity to stabilise, and what disrupts it.

For that reason, this study adopts two established psychological theories, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Ryan and Deci, 2000) and Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1977; 1997), as its primary theoretical framing. SDT is used to examine how ECTs' motivation and identity development are shaped by the extent to which their working environments support or frustrate the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Self-efficacy theory provides a complementary lens for analysing how ECTs' beliefs about their capability develop through lived experience, feedback, modelling, and emotional labour, and how those beliefs influence persistence, resilience, and professional engagement. Together, these theories offer a mechanism-oriented way to interpret ECTs' narratives across time, making it possible to trace how particular experiences and relationships become identity-affirming, identity-threatening, or identity-repairing.

This theoretical choice is deliberate in relation to the early career phase. Identity formation in the first years of teaching is often characterised by heightened vulnerability, intensified emotional labour, and frequent negotiation between personal commitments

and institutional expectations (Kelchtermans, 2005; Mockler, 2011). ECTs encounter competing demands, including performative accountability pressures and the practical realities of classroom work (Ball, 2003), while simultaneously trying to develop confidence, legitimacy, and professional agency. SDT and self-efficacy theory are particularly well suited to this terrain because they focus attention on how ECTs interpret their context in terms of agency, belonging, competence, and capability, and how these experiences shape motivation and commitment in ways that are central to identity development (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001; Klassen et al., 2009). They also connect directly to issues foregrounded in the wider identity literature, including professional agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), emotional investment and vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 2005), and tensions between personal and policy-driven values (Mockler, 2011), while providing clearer explanatory tools for how these tensions are lived and managed over time.

Adopting SDT and self-efficacy theory does not imply that professional identity can be understood solely through individual psychology. Sociological perspectives have been essential in illuminating how teacher identity is shaped through discourse, power, institutional norms, and policy regimes, particularly in contexts characterised by performativity and accountability (Ball, 2003; Mockler, 2011). This thesis draws on those insights in interpreting how institutional and policy contexts enter teachers' narratives and structure the conditions of their work. However, because the research questions in this study are concerned with the development of professional identity as experienced and narrated across three years, a psychological framing is necessary to examine the within-person processes through which teachers sustain motivation, build confidence, respond to feedback, and persist through challenge. In other words, a sociological lens helps to explain how conditions are produced; SDT and self-efficacy theory help to explain how those conditions are experienced, internalised, and translated into identity trajectories.

This framing is also aligned with the study's longitudinal narrative inquiry design. Following teachers across three years enables analysis of change, continuity, and turning points in identity construction, including how early experiences of autonomy support, recognition, and belonging become consolidated into professional self-understandings,

or how repeated need frustration and setbacks produce identity strain. Using SDT and self-efficacy theory therefore provides a consistent analytical lens for exploring participants' meaning-making across time while remaining attentive to context and relational dynamics.

Understanding professional identity is particularly important in the current policy climate given the ongoing challenges in teacher recruitment and retention in England (McLean and Worth, 2025) and the links between identity, relational engagement, and longer-term commitment (Suarez and McGrath, 2022). Finally, as a teacher with 30 years of experience, I recognise that my interpretations are influenced by my own professional history, values, and assumptions. Theory does not neutralise subjectivity, but it provides a disciplined structure for interpretation, enabling transparency about how analytic claims are developed and supporting reflexive scrutiny of what I notice, prioritise, and infer (Finlay, 2002; Nordberg, 2022).

The chapter now discusses self-determination theory, focusing on how its three core needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, enable a nuanced interrogation of professional identity construction in ECTs.

3.2 Self-Determination Theory for Early Career Teachers

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan and Deci, 2000; 2017) provides a theoretically coherent framework for examining the motivational and relational conditions under which professional identity becomes established or destabilised during the early career phase. As outlined in the previous section, this thesis is concerned not only with describing ECTs' experiences, but with analysing how those experiences are internalised and translated into identity narratives across time and individual contexts. SDT is particularly suited to this task because it offers a structured account of how social environments shape motivation through the satisfaction or frustration of three basic psychological needs: autonomy (the experience of acting with volition), competence (the experience of effectiveness), and relatedness (the experience of belonging and connection).

The central claim of SDT is that sustained motivation, well-being, and personal growth are most likely when these needs are supported within a given context (Ryan and Deci,

2000; Niemiec and Ryan, 2009; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). In the context of early career teaching, these needs are not abstract psychological constructs but are directly implicated in identity formation. Autonomy shapes whether teachers experience themselves as professionals with agency or as implementers of externally imposed directives. Competence shapes whether they come to see themselves as capable practitioners whose efforts produce meaningful outcomes. Relatedness shapes whether they experience belonging and recognition within a professional community. Together, these needs provide a mechanism for understanding how school cultures, mentoring relationships, workload expectations, and policy pressures become identity-affirming or identity-frustrating over time.

Importantly, SDT treats autonomy, competence, and relatedness as needs that are supported or thwarted by social and institutional conditions (Ryan and Deci, 2017), enabling analysis of how accountability pressures, feedback cultures, and restricted discretion shape motivational trajectories without individualising responsibility.

These three requirements for ECTs are not just desirable, but also necessary. The initial years of teaching require managing the interplay of personal goals, school cultures, and broader policy settings. A lack of autonomy, chronic feelings of ineptitude, or professional isolation can all undermine confidence and unsettle identity (Kelchtermans, 2005; Worth and Van den Brande, 2020). When schools foster these needs through supportive mentoring, collaborative cultures, and opportunities for authentic decision-making, teachers are more likely to internalise professional values and develop a strong sense of belonging (Deci and Ryan, 2012; Gu and Day, 2013; Collie and Perry, 2019).

SDT's emphasis on intrinsic motivation and value internalisation is especially pertinent to current concerns about teacher retention, workload, and burnout (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2018; Worth and McLean, 2021). While policy discourse in England continues to stress performance metrics and external accountability measures, SDT distinguishes between controlled and autonomous forms of motivation, highlighting that sustained engagement is more likely when teachers experience autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Taken together, SDT offers more than a general account of motivation; it provides a structured explanation of how professional identity is shaped through the satisfaction or frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within particular institutional contexts. In the narratives of the ECTs in this study, these needs did not operate in isolation but interacted dynamically, influencing how participants interpreted feedback, responded to challenge, and positioned themselves within their schools. However, across the data, autonomy emerged as especially significant during the early career phase, shaping whether teachers experienced themselves as agentic professionals or as constrained implementers of externally defined expectations. The following section therefore examines autonomy in greater depth, considering how its presence or absence influenced the construction of professional identity across the first three years of teaching.

3.3 Autonomy and Its Impact on Professional Identity Formation

Within SDT, autonomy refers to teachers' experience of acting with volition and professional self-endorsement, particularly in contexts where judgement and discretion are under pressure (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Autonomy involves more than just making independent decisions; it is also about feeling empowered to make meaningful choices and act in ways that are consistent with one's values and beliefs (Deci and Ryan, 1987). This dichotomy is especially relevant in education, where teachers frequently labour within externally imposed boundaries but can still feel autonomous provided their professional opinion is recognised and supported (Pearce and Morrison, 2011).

Autonomy is directly related to the type of motivation that drives professional engagement (Deci and Ryan, 1985). SDT claims that when autonomy is supported, individuals are more likely to develop intrinsic motivation, which is motivated by genuine interest, enjoyment, or personal significance. Intrinsic motivation is related to deeper learning, perseverance, and psychological resilience (Deci and Ryan, 2000). In contrast, when teachers are motivated by controlled or extrinsic factors such as rewards, sanctions, or fear of being evaluated, they may meet objectives but are less likely to feel personally committed to their profession, which might impede identity development.

In the teaching profession, autonomy allows educators to take ownership of their work, connecting their behaviours with their personal and professional ideals (Ingersoll, 2003).

This alignment is essential for developing a strong professional identity (Day and Gu, 2010). When teachers have the authority to make pedagogical decisions, adjust content, and shape classroom interactions, they are more likely to internalise the profession's ideals and engage meaningfully in their positions (Coldron and Smith, 1999; Toom, Pyhältö, and Rust, 2015). In contrast, when autonomy is limited by top-down accountability frameworks or a lack of professional trust, intrinsic motivation may suffer, resulting in identity conflict, emotional weariness, and disillusionment (Priestley et al., 2015).

Autonomy has an especially important role in ECTs. It enables people to negotiate the complexity of the profession while testing, improving, and affirming their own professional identities. Suarez and McGrath (2022) argue that autonomy is central to ECTs' sense of professional legitimacy, because it shapes whether teachers experience themselves as authors of practice or as compliant deliverers of prescribed routines.

Research has revealed that teacher autonomy has a significant impact on job satisfaction, views of workload management, and intention to stay in the profession. Worth and van den Brande (2020) discovered a strong link between levels of autonomy and teachers' likelihood of staying in the profession, with only half of those with the lowest levels of autonomy intending to stay in teaching over the next 12 months, compared to more than 85% of those with the highest autonomy (Worth and van den Brande, 2020, p. 14). These findings are consistent with other research that has identified autonomy as a feature of supportive, collaborative educational environments, which are more likely to foster professional identity (Lin and Gao, 2023; Liu et al., 2021; Nguyen and Walkinshaw, 2018).

Autonomy is essential for ECTs to integrate personal values with professional obligations. It not only gives them a sense of ownership over their work, but it also allows them to experiment with different instructional approaches and gain confidence in their professional judgement. According to Gu and Day (2013) and Hordern et al. (2024), the ability to act autonomously enables teachers to regard themselves as capable, self-directed professionals rather than simple policy implementers.

After discussing the significance of autonomy, the next psychological need essential to professional identity construction is competence. While autonomy allows teachers to act in accordance with their principles, competence allows them to feel capable and effective in doing so, which is especially important during the first years of teaching when professional confidence is still building.

3.4 Competence and the Development of a Professional Identity for Early Career Teachers

Self-determination theory defines competence as the need to feel effective and skilled in one's surroundings (Ryan and Deci, 2000). In education, competence encompasses not only subject knowledge and pedagogical skills but also the capacity to exercise professional judgement, respond to diverse learners, collaborate with colleagues, and engage in critical reflection (Eraut, 1994; Hordern, 2014; Guerriero, 2017). Recent research highlights its relational, ethical, and adaptive dimensions, enabling teachers to navigate policy demands while remaining true to professional ideals (Schleicher, 2020).

For ECTs, competence extends beyond technical mastery to include the adaptability required to manage complex classroom situations and the confidence to make contextually appropriate pedagogical decisions. In some professional development frameworks, including the ECF, the emphasis is placed on specified practices and programme requirements. This study treats competence as extending beyond technical mastery to include adaptive judgement, relational work, and contextual decision-making, which are frequently central to identity development over time. In SDT terms, the experience of competence is psychological, but the conditions under which it is built and recognised are relational and organisational. Trust, respect, and supportive relationships provide the conditions in which ECTs test, refine, and affirm their abilities (Le Cornu, 2013). Mentors, colleagues, and students act as 'significant others' whose validation influences teachers' self-esteem and sense of efficacy (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002). Meaningful encounters, what Mommers et al. (2021) term 'moments of contact,' allow ECTs to enact their values and ambitions, reinforcing both competence and identity.

Feedback is particularly significant in this process. When it is authentic, timely, and relevant to classroom practice, it strengthens ECTs' confidence and sense of agency; when generic or perfunctory, it risks undermining growth (Ryan et al., 2019). Yet feedback

alone is insufficient. Broader professional support, emotional, educational, and organisational, creates safe spaces for risk-taking and reflection, which are essential to competence development (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Langdon, 2017). Research shows that the quality of such interactions matters more than frequency, with high-trust relationships and recognition of teachers as evolving professionals linked to stronger growth (Thomas et al., 2019; Bryk and Schneider, 2002). When ECTs feel both competent and connected, they are more likely to remain in the profession (Buchanan et al., 2013).

Competence is also tied to well-being and retention. Positive experiences of classroom practice, lesson planning, and staffroom dialogue help ECTs move from the profession's periphery towards central membership (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Incremental immersion builds confidence and belonging (Zhao, 2022), while exclusionary environments, unsustainable workloads, and poor mentoring can erode competence and lead to isolation or burnout (Kyndt et al., 2014; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010). Research consistently links unmet psychological needs to reduced satisfaction, commitment, and higher attrition (Collie et al., 2016).

External accountability regimes intensify these challenges. High-stakes testing, performance metrics, and rigid curricula restrict professional autonomy and discourage experimentation (Buchanan, 2015; Ball, 2003). Conformity is often prioritised over creativity or authenticity (Connell, 2009), producing identity dissonance when ECTs' ideals clash with externally imposed expectations (Pillen, Beijgaard and den Brok, 2013). Such tensions create emotional strain and disengagement, particularly for ECTs still forming their professional selves (Kelchtermans, 2009; Mockler, 2011). Nevertheless, structural constraints do not wholly determine competence. Collaborative networks, mentoring, and reflective spaces allow teachers to reclaim agency and affirm their capacity even in restrictive contexts (Wilkins, 2011). When these spaces operate as autonomy-supportive communities, they promote growth through shared purpose, dialogue, and self-directed learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

In sum, competence is central to ECTs' professional identity, shaping motivation, job satisfaction, and retention (Day and Gu, 2007). It can be cultivated through feedback, trusted relationships, and supportive professional cultures, but it is also threatened by institutional demands and unsupportive environments. Where teachers engage actively

in professional learning and reflective practice, they are more likely to build a resilient sense of competence and, with it, a sustainable professional identity (Hobson et al., 2009; Avalos, 2011).

3.5 Relatedness and the Creation of a Professional Identity among Early Career Teachers

Relatedness, one of the three basic psychological needs articulated in self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), refers to the innate human desire to feel linked to others, to be cared for, and to care for others. In the teaching profession, the requirement for social connection is central to the development of a strong professional identity (Day et al., 2006; Flores and Day, 2006). Relationships with colleagues, mentors, and students provide the relational trust, affirmation, and shared understanding that enable teachers to navigate professional challenges, maintain motivation, and align their practice with personal and collective values (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Kelchtermans, 2005). Without these relationships, teachers risk feeling isolated, lacking confidence, and having a decreased sense of belonging, all of which can impair professional progress and long-term commitment to the profession (Buchanan et al., 2013). Developing positive relationships with colleagues, mentors, students, and school leaders is especially important for ECTs because it provides not only emotional sustenance but also a critical framework in which their burgeoning professional selves may be acknowledged, challenged, and developed.

Research indicates that when ECTs feel a sense of belonging and inclusion in their professional environment, they are more likely to maintain enthusiasm, confidence, and commitment, even in the demanding and often turbulent policy landscape of national education systems (Le Cornu, 2013). These interactions serve as mirrors and sounding boards, influencing how teachers perceive their function and status in the school community. As teachers engage in discourse, receive validation, and navigate collaborative decision-making, they grow to regard themselves as legitimate, respected members of the profession, which is an important aspect of identity building. In this study, relatedness emerged not only as a source of emotional support but also as a tool for teachers to negotiate the meanings of their professional experiences. Moments of connection enabled participants to verify and confirm their professional values and beliefs, whether through informal chats with colleagues, partnerships with colleagues,

or encounters with students. These interactions were crucial in assisting ECTs in this study to transition from tentative engagement to a stronger, more integrated sense of professional self.

Collegial relationships, which develop within collaborative, trusting professional communities, are one of the most important sources of relatedness for ECTs (Sürmeli et al., 2024). Collegiality offers more than just companionship; it allows teachers to feel a part of a larger professional mission, establishing a strong sense of belonging and identity within the school culture (Goodnough, 2003). Research consistently linked collegial environments to better job satisfaction, motivation, and well-being, with teachers who have high-quality professional relationships reporting more engagement and reduced stress levels (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2011; Day and Gu, 2010). Collegiality, particularly among ECTs, provides rich ground for informal learning, such as peer observations, co-planning, and pedagogical interaction (Hobson and Maxwell, 2020). These collaborative environments not only provide access to practical teaching expertise but also help to shape identity by confirming growing professional values and promoting critical thought. Trusted colleagues often provide a buffer against the emotional demands of teaching. In difficult educational situations, having someone to confide in or work with can dramatically minimise feelings of isolation and exhaustion (Day and Gu, 2010). However, as Shah (2012) argues, the quality of these contacts is more important than the quantity. Superficial or hierarchical collegial connections contribute little to identity or well-being. Schools that emphasise inclusive, dialogic, and non-competitive cultures, rather than performance-driven or status-oriented ones, are more likely to generate the kind of meaningful connectedness that promotes ECT development (Kelchtermans, 2009).

Supportive mentoring is particularly important for improving ECTs' sense of relatedness, which is the sensation of being linked, appreciated, and supported within a professional community (Walker, 2024). Mentoring provides systematic assistance and promotes social integration, assisting new teachers in navigating the often intimidating transition into the field. Experienced mentors help ECTs feel confident and acknowledged in their growing professional identities by providing continuing support and relationship continuity (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011). Beyond emotional comfort, mentoring fulfils the affective needs of teaching by providing support, perspective, and empathy at times of

self-doubt or stress (Chea, 2024). ECTs can increase competence and confidence by providing constructive feedback, imitating excellent behaviours, and sharing practical techniques (Lindqvist et al. 2014). These mentorship relationships help ECTs internalise the teaching community's professional norms, expectations, and values (Wang and Odell, 2002). Mentoring consequently serves as both a relational and pedagogical bridge, promoting not only performance but also a deeper process of professional identity building by sustaining a sense of belonging within the larger educational context.

While positive, supportive interactions help ECTs develop a strong professional identity, a lack of relatedness can seriously harm their feeling of belonging and professional well-being. Teachers who are isolated, excluded, or in unsupportive school environments may struggle to make meaningful professional connections, limiting their potential to form a strong and cohesive teacher persona (Johnson et al., 2012; Shah, 2012). This is especially harmful for ECTs, who frequently rely on informal support and collegial validation to navigate the uncertainties of the early years (Flores and Day, 2006).

A lack of relatedness is frequently associated with perceived restrictions in autonomy and voice. When ECTs believe that their contributions are not valued or that decision-making is hierarchical and top-down, they may suffer both separation from colleagues and a loss of professional agency (Keddie et al., 2023). Schools that prioritise accountability mechanisms above collaborative cultures may unintentionally discourage collegial involvement and professional conversation, heightening feelings of isolation (Buchanan, 2015). In this sense, relatedness is more than just being socially linked; it is also about being professionally recognised and having one's identity validated through participation in meaningful, reciprocal relationships. Relatedness is critical for ECT identity formation since it promotes belonging, motivation, and professional validation (Le Cornu, 2013). Schools that actively promote collaborative environments, relational trust, and teacher voice are more likely to retain ECTs and foster the development of stable and positive professional identities (Lindqvist et al., 2014).

Self-Determination Theory therefore helps to explain how motivational conditions for identity development are shaped through the satisfaction or frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness within particular school contexts. The chapter now turns to self-efficacy theory as a complementary framework for analysing how ECTs develop

beliefs about their capability through experience, feedback, modelling, and emotional labour, and how those beliefs shape persistence and professional engagement.

3.6 Self-Efficacy Theory for Early Career Teachers

While Self-Determination Theory explains how motivation is shaped by the satisfaction or frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, it does not fully account for how teachers come to believe they can enact those capacities in practice. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977; 1997) provides this additional explanatory layer. In the teaching profession, self-efficacy is consistently associated with instructional quality, perseverance in the face of adversity, adaptive coping, and long-term commitment to the role. Bandura (1977, p.3) defines self-efficacy as ‘beliefs in one’s capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments.’ At its core, the theory proposes that individuals are more likely to initiate, sustain, and succeed in challenging tasks when they believe they can influence outcomes. These beliefs shape decisions, effort, emotional responses, and patterns of engagement (Bandura, 1995).

For early career teachers, this is not a peripheral issue but a central component of identity construction. During the first years of teaching, confidence is often fragile and professional self-understanding is still forming. ECTs must continually interpret whether classroom successes and setbacks signal growth or inadequacy. Self-efficacy theory enables analysis of how these interpretations accumulate into a narrative of oneself as capable, struggling, improving, or resilient. In this study, efficacy beliefs are examined not simply as predictors of performance but as identity-relevant judgments through which teachers come to see themselves as legitimate professionals, or conversely, as uncertain and vulnerable practitioners.

Bandura (1997) identifies four principal sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Each of these is directly observable within the lived experiences of ECTs. A successful lesson or behaviour breakthrough may function as a mastery experience; observing a respected colleague may provide vicarious affirmation; developmental feedback from a trusted mentor may act as social persuasion; and sustained stress or emotional strain may shape efficacy through physiological interpretation. These sources are not internally generated traits but are socially mediated and institutionally structured. Opportunities

for mastery, modelling, credible feedback, and emotional regulation are shaped by mentoring practices, departmental cultures, workload, and leadership norms. Self-efficacy therefore operates at the intersection of personal belief and contextual condition.

Self-efficacy differs from broader notions of self-concept in that it focuses on perceived capability rather than objective skill (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). This distinction is particularly important in the early career phase, when actual competence is still developing. It is often the belief that one can improve, rather than the current level of skill, that sustains persistence and engagement. In this thesis, self-efficacy theory provides a framework for analysing the dynamic processes through which ECTs interpret feedback, respond to challenge, and gradually construct a sense of themselves as capable teachers within specific institutional contexts.

3.7 Teacher Self-Effectiveness and Identity Formation

Although Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory serves as the conceptual framework, this study focuses on a more specific interpretation pertinent to the profession: teacher self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998, p. 233) define teacher self-efficacy as a teacher's belief in their 'capability to organise and execute courses of action required to accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context.' This includes confidence in managing behaviour, engaging students in learning, and effectively communicating complex concepts (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2014). Such ideas influence not only what teachers expect of their students, but also what they anticipate of themselves in the classroom and throughout the school environment.

Contemporary educational contexts extend teachers' professional responsibilities beyond classroom instruction to include wider organisational, evaluative, and professional expectations (Ball, 2003; Mockler, 2011). As a result, teachers may assess their efficacy not only in relation to classroom practice but also in relation to institutional expectations and shared professional norms. For ECTs, these multiple reference points shape how performance, feedback, and progress are interpreted while professional identity is still developing. Competence beliefs are therefore formed through interaction with pedagogical demands as well as organisational structures and workplace culture (Kelchtermans, 2009).

Self-efficacy is characterised by its development via effort and perseverance (Bandura, 1997). Teachers who face challenges but persevere and eventually achieve frequently express stronger efficacy views (Day, 2018, p. 62). These experiences are more than just technical accomplishments; they are identity-defining moments. When ECTs overcome problems, they develop not only a repertoire of methods but also a story about themselves as capable and resilient professionals (Gu and Day, 2013). However, self-efficacy does not grow independently. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2021) refer to crucial inputs as 'information sources', mirroring Bandura's (1977) categorisation of four major influences: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. The sections that follow will look at each of these in turn, with a special emphasis on how they shape ECTs' self-perceptions and contribute to the development of their professional identities.

3.8 Mastery Experience: the most powerful influence

Mastery experiences are thought to be the most influential of Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy. Bandura defines them as 'genuine successes created on one's own efforts,' which provide the most reliable proof of whether one can succeed in future tasks (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). These are firsthand experiences of success or failure in accomplishing a task, and they are critical in forming teachers' perceptions about their professional abilities. Mastery experiences for ECTs take place in everyday situations, like as successfully managing behaviour, providing an engaging lesson, or developing a fruitful connection with a student. Gu and Day (2013) discovered that mastery experiences in the classroom increased teachers' resilience and feeling of purpose, whereas Mansfield et al. (2021) emphasised their importance in fostering adaptive competence and problem-solving confidence. Similarly, Collie and Perry (2019) found that embedding mastery experiences in supportive professional environments improved not just competency but also teachers' willingness to take pedagogical risks. According to self-determination theory, mastery experiences are powerful because they satisfy the need for competence while also reinforcing autonomy; teachers see their own decisions and actions as leading to success and relatedness when these successes are recognised by students or colleagues. This interaction strengthens agency, maintains drive, and aids in the development of a confident and cohesive professional persona.

However, failure, especially when unsupported or repeated, can diminish self-efficacy and impede the formation of a positive professional identity (Tait, 2008; Dicke et al., 2015). The early years of teaching are frequently marked by instability, and without procedures to help teachers understand setbacks productively, unpleasant experiences may come to define their self-perceptions (Tait, 2008).

While mastery experiences are seen to be the most powerful source of self-efficacy in general (Bandura, 1997), ECTs may not always have enough of these experiences to draw from in the early phases of development. Instead, they frequently rate their teaching abilities based on vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional cues (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2007). These indirect sources of information are especially useful during times of uncertainty, when teachers are still learning how to interpret the profession's standards and their sense of standing within it. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, are more likely to build their efficacy views on years of experience, drawing on a deeper reservoir of prior accomplishment and established competence (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2007). For new teachers, however, seeing others, particularly those regarded to be effective, can serve as both a model for practice and a mirror through which they might begin to imagine themselves as capable professionals. The next section investigates the influence of vicarious experiences on teacher self-efficacy and professional identity formation.

3.9 Vicarious Experiences: Learning through observation

The second source of self-efficacy is vicarious experiences, which entail learning by observing others. For ECTs, these experiences frequently serve as informal benchmarks for determining if teaching is doable and what an excellent teacher looks like in practice (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Observing experienced colleagues manage classrooms, create rapport with students, and provide useful lessons can instil a sense of potential, especially when the observed teacher demonstrates relevant and attainable behaviours or tactics (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). These role models provide not only technical examples, but also templates for forming a developing teacher identity.

However, vicarious experiences do not always result in favourable outcomes. Watching highly skilled teachers handle the classroom with apparent ease can be demoralising, especially if ECTs think they are falling short in comparison (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy,

2007). Rather than motivating growth, such comparisons can deepen self-doubt and uncertainty, especially if the observed teacher appears to be operating in an unrelated setting or with unstated levels of confidence or support.

Nonetheless, when situated in supportive and dialogic professional cultures, vicarious experiences can provide great learning opportunities. Zhang et al. (2024) contend that positive role models promote self-efficacy not just through demonstration, but also by demonstrating resilience, critical reflection, and problem-solving techniques. Vicarious experiences contribute to professional identity by allowing teachers to see themselves as competent practitioners. The mirroring of not only acts but dispositions, how teachers respond to problems, form relationships, and reflect on their practice, allows ECTs to start incorporating those professional attributes into their developing self-concept (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). This highlights the necessity of providing ECTs with access to skilled, reflective role models; without such exposure, possibilities for identity development may be limited. This social and emotional mirroring is closely related to the next source of self-efficacy: social persuasion, which focuses on how encouragement and feedback from others can confirm or undermine one's belief in their ability to achieve.

3.10 Social Persuasion: The Power of Encouragement

The third source of self-efficacy is social persuasion, which refers to verbal and nonverbal feedback from others about one's performance or potential (Bandura, 1997). Encouragement from mentors, coworkers, or leaders can be a motivating factor for ECTs, especially in times of doubt or difficulties (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Social persuasion allows teachers to see themselves as capable, respected professionals in the eyes of others, and this external validation can have a substantial impact on their evolving professional identity (Kelchtermans, 2005).

However, the impact of social persuasion is modulated by the source's perceived legitimacy and relationship trust. Praise from a respected mentor or critical criticism from a trusted colleague is more valuable than generic or compliance-driven evaluations. For ECTs, whose self-efficacy beliefs are still developing, such feedback can be critical in influencing their confidence to face new obstacles. According to research, credible, focused support can help teachers reframe setbacks as learning opportunities,

thereby maintaining motivation and commitment (Klassen and Tze, 2014; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010). In this study, participants recalled instances where deliberate, precise encouragement from colleagues allowed them to perceive their progress more clearly and take professional risks without fear of being judged. Furthermore, when offered in a trusting connection, such feedback can promote relatedness, one of the basic psychological needs described in self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), strengthening the conditions for long-term professional development.

As a result, collegial support emerges as an important technique for social persuasion. Zhang et al. (2024) contend that ECTs who receive constructive, collaborative feedback have higher self-efficacy beliefs and are more likely to regard themselves as emerging professionals. Many ECTs join the profession with little prior experience providing dialogic, developmental feedback and may lack the confidence to seek it out. As a result, feedback that improves efficacy serves as a relational practice that promotes a sense of inclusion and professional belonging, both of which are essential components of identity building. To address this gap, schools and training providers must create structured, continuing opportunities for ECTs to engage in constructive, two-way feedback exchanges with trustworthy colleagues. However, the ways in which feedback cultures are established and sustained are likely to vary across settings, shaped by local norms, leadership practices, and relational conditions. This allows for diversity in quality and risks sustaining situations in which feedback is viewed as evaluative rather than developmental. Embedding supportive and collaborative feedback techniques should help bridge this gap by increasing self-efficacy and developing professional agency, which is essential for long-term retention.

Furthermore, the institutional framework influences how social persuasion is delivered and perceived. Organisational cultures that value cooperation, prioritise developmental feedback, and cultivate relational trust produce situations in which praise and constructive criticism can significantly boost teacher self-efficacy (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Collie, Shapka, and Perry, 2012). According to research, teachers who work in supportive professional environments grow more in their practice than those who work in rigid, compliance-driven settings, because collaborative cultures encourage risk-taking, reflection, and the incorporation of feedback into professional learning (Kraft and

Papay, 2014). In contrast, in situations controlled by compliance monitoring or hierarchical control, social persuasion is more likely to be regarded as evaluative, limiting its ability to motivate and foster growth (Kelchtermans 2005). This highlights that the experience and function of feedback can differ across school contexts. In this study, feedback is treated as a relational practice whose meaning for ECTs depends on factors such as trust, credibility, and whether interactions are experienced as developmental or evaluative.

According to Wu et al, (2024), teachers with high self-efficacy are more likely to remain resilient in the face of professional problems, as well as demonstrate a stronger commitment to their school and roles. This conclusion is closely related to social persuasion since the legitimacy, tone, and relational quality of feedback within a school can promote or undermine these efficacy beliefs. Where institutional norms encourage supportive, trust-based conversation, social persuasion acts as an empowering force, increasing teachers' sense of agency and belonging; where such norms do not exist, the same feedback mechanisms can have a neutral or even negative impact on professional confidence. A sense of commitment is frequently fostered by school environments in which teachers feel not just supported but also visible, which fosters the development of a secure and confident professional self (Day and Gu, 2010). Leadership is essential here. According to Hatlevik and Hatlevik (2024), leaders who establish open, accepting settings encourage ECTs to take intellectual and emotional risks, share ideas, and engage in professional dialogue, all of which are essential for self-efficacy and identity development. When these requirements are not met, ECTs may experience professional isolation, lower confidence, and a weakened sense of belonging (Johnson et al., 2012; Kelchtermans, 2005). Over time, such conditions can undermine self-efficacy, increase burnout risk, and contribute to greater attrition rates, especially in the early years of teaching (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Worth and Van den Brande, 2020).

When used together, social persuasion demonstrates how identity is co-constructed with others rather than just internally. This dynamic relationship between affirmation, belonging, and self-perception provides a natural link to the ultimate source of self-efficacy: physiological and emotional states, which influence how ECTs interpret and respond to the emotional labour of the profession.

3.11 Emotions and Physiological States: Their Role

The fourth source of self-efficacy is physiological and emotional conditions, which influence how teachers assess their abilities (Bandura, 1997). According to Bandura (1997), individuals use their bodily sensations and emotional responses as interpretive signals to determine whether they can effectively complete a task. Positive emotional states promote a sense of efficacy and agency, whereas negative emotions such as persistent stress, tiredness, or anxiety can undermine confidence and create feelings of inadequacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

This feature of self-efficacy is especially important in early career teaching since emotional volatility and high-stakes performance demands are common during this time. According to research, unresolved negative emotional states can contribute to burnout and attrition (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010; Dicke et al., 2015), whereas positive affect, supported by collegial relationships and manageable workloads, can enhance resilience and strengthen professional identity (Day and Gu, 2010). This is consistent with self-determination theory, as the workplace's emotional climate can either meet or frustrate the demands for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Positive emotional states in supportive surroundings are more than just byproducts of effective practice; they actively strengthen an ECT's belief in their ability to achieve and sense of belonging within the profession. Conversely, in unsupportive environments, negative physiological and emotional states can exacerbate identity misalignment, diminishing both self-efficacy and long-term commitment to teaching.

Emotions can be especially explosive for ECTs, who are frequently navigating challenging educational contexts for the first time (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002). High anxiety over classroom management, workload, or policy compliance might cause self-doubt and reduced efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2007). When these emotional responses are not acknowledged or handled, they can become internalised, influencing not only daily performance but also the teacher's whole sense of self. As a result, emotional regulation is not only a survival mechanism but also an important component of identity formation in the early years of instruction (Zembylas, 2018). This emphasises the importance of school cultures and professional development frameworks actively addressing the emotional dimensions of teaching, ensuring that ECTs have both the

strategies and the relational support they need to maintain self-efficacy and build a resilient professional identity, both of which have been linked to teacher retention and reduced burnout (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2021). Teachers who hold high efficacy beliefs are more likely to see professional problems as opportunities for advancement rather than threats to their competence (Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2014). Participants in this study reported feeling more stable and confident in their professional roles after developing techniques for managing emotional labour, such as drawing strength from positive student interactions. These coping methods enabled them to preserve a feeling of identity continuity even in the face of emotionally difficult circumstances.

In this approach, physiological and emotional conditions shape long-term professional narratives as well as immediate classroom behaviour. For the ECTs in this study, the ability to make sense of and manage emotions is critical to becoming a resilient, introspective, and confident professional.

3.12 Understanding Early Career Teacher Identity via the Integration of Self-Determination and Self-Efficacy Theories

Self-Determination Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory offer distinct but complementary explanatory lenses for understanding the construction of professional identity in early career teachers. While both frameworks foreground human agency and view individuals as active interpreters of their experiences (Sweet et al., 2012; Wong et al., 2024), they operate at different analytical levels. SDT explains how social and institutional conditions shape motivation through the satisfaction or frustration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Self-efficacy theory, by contrast, explains how teachers come to believe they can enact professional practice effectively through mastery, modelling, feedback, and emotional regulation (Bandura, 1997). In combination, SDT clarifies the motivational climate in which identity develops, while SET explains how confidence and capability beliefs are constructed within that climate.

For ECTs, this distinction is critical. A teacher may work in a school that is structurally autonomy-supportive and relationally rich yet still experience fragility in self-belief if mastery experiences are limited or feedback is inconsistent. Conversely, a teacher may experience moments of strong efficacy but struggle to sustain professional identity if autonomy is persistently constrained or belonging is undermined. Identity construction,

therefore, cannot be reduced to motivation alone or confidence alone; it emerges through the interaction between need satisfaction and efficacy development across time. The narratives in this study illustrate this dynamic interplay: participants described how supportive mentoring relationships both enhanced relatedness (SDT) and functioned as credible sources of social persuasion (SET), and how successful classroom experiences simultaneously reinforced competence (SDT) and strengthened efficacy beliefs (SET). Identity development thus appears as a recursive process in which context shapes belief, belief shapes engagement, and engagement reshapes identity.

This integrated framework is particularly valuable within the early career phase, where vulnerability, emotional intensity, and heightened accountability pressures intersect (Ball, 2003; Kelchtermans, 2005). SDT enables analysis of how policy and organisational structures influence teachers' sense of agency and belonging, while SET explains how those conditions are interpreted as either identity-affirming or identity-threatening through efficacy judgments. Together, they provide a mechanism-based account of why similar institutional conditions may produce divergent identity trajectories among ECTs.

Both theories, however, have recognised limitations. SDT offers a persuasive account of psychological need satisfaction but does not fully theorise the structural, historical, and political forces that shape teachers' opportunities for autonomy and recognition (Priestley et al., 2015; Biesta, 2005). Similarly, SET conceptualises efficacy primarily as a belief system and can risk underemphasising how opportunities for mastery, modelling, and feedback are patterned by institutional culture and power relations (Klassen et al., 2011). This study addresses these limitations by situating teachers' efficacy-building experiences and need satisfaction within the broader socio-political landscape of English education. In doing so, it does not treat psychological processes as detached from context, but as embedded within policy regimes, accountability cultures, and relational dynamics.

The integration of SDT and SET therefore enables a multi-layered understanding of early career teacher identity: SDT explains how environments support or frustrate the motivational foundations of professional life; SET explains how teachers interpret experience into capability beliefs; and their interaction explains how identity becomes stabilised, strengthened, or destabilised across time. This dual framework underpins the

narrative analysis that follows, guiding interpretation of how ECTs make sense of their relationships, challenges, and achievements, and how those meanings accumulate into evolving professional identities.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the philosophical foundations, methodological approach, and practical processes, including limitations that shaped my doctoral study. It details how narrative inquiry, underpinned by a constructivist paradigm, was used to explore the lived experiences of early career secondary school teachers and the formation of their professional identities during their first three years in the classroom. The research situates itself within the broader educational context of challenges in teacher recruitment and retention in England, specifically in the eastern region. It responds to the need for deeper insight into how ECTs navigate their roles and construct their identities in a high-accountability, policy-driven system. Specifically, the study investigates how relationships, context, and personal experiences intersect to shape professional identity over time.

My aim: The aim of this study is to critically examine how secondary school early career teachers in England establish and sustain a professional identity within their first three years of teaching, drawing on their lived experiences and personal narratives to illuminate the interplay of contextual, situated, and relational factors.

The central research question guiding the study is:

‘In what ways does contextual, relational and situational factors shape early career teacher professional identity?’

Four secondary research questions were developed to investigate this in greater depth:

RQ1 – What key experiences and events do early career teachers identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity?

RQ2 - What role does building informal and formal networks play in the development of a professional identity for early career teachers?

RQ3 – What challenges do early career teachers confront, and how do they navigate them as part of developing their professional identity?

RQ4 - What strategies are identified as being most effective in facilitating the construction of an effective teacher's professional identity in the first three years?

Professional identity, as conceptualised in this study, is understood as dynamic, relational, and situated within social, cultural, and institutional contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004; Slegers and Kelchtermans, 1999). Given this complexity, narrative inquiry was selected as the methodological framework. It is particularly suited to uncovering how individuals make sense of their lives through the stories they tell and how identity is shaped over time and across different contexts, situations and relationships (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Reissman, 2008). Narrative inquiry allows for an exploration of temporality, place, and sociality, key dimensions for understanding identity formation within teaching.

This chapter outlines and justifies the use of constructivism, qualitative methodology, and narrative inquiry as the research approaches. It sets out the recruitment strategy, ethical considerations, data collection methods, and the procedures used for analysis. To protect participants' confidentiality, all names used throughout this thesis are pseudonyms. Identifying details relating to schools, geographical location, and specific institutional roles have been anonymised or generalised to minimise the risk of deductive disclosure. Participants were informed of these measures during the consent process. These steps were taken in line with BERA (2024) ethical guidance and reflect the relational ethic of care underpinning this study.

The chapter also reflects on the relational, temporal, and situated nature of the research process, positioning it as a co-constructed and ethically engaged endeavour. It concludes by outlining how the methodological choices align with the study's theoretical foundation, self-efficacy theory and self-determination theory, and how these informed the design and interpretation of the research.

4.2 Research Paradigm

Qualitative research is not a neutral or linear process; rather, it involves a series of complex interpretative activities shaped by the researcher's assumptions about reality

(ontology), knowledge (epistemology), and the strategies used to generate meaning (methodology). As Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 52) observe, ‘behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher who speaks from a particular class, gendered, multiculturally situated standpoint.’ Researchers apply their personal social positioning, experiences, and values to the research process, a concept known as positionality (Holmes, 2020). In this study, my ontological position aligns with a relativist view, acknowledging that multiple, subjective realities exist. My epistemological stance is rooted in a constructivist approach, recognising that knowledge is co-constructed through relationships between researchers and participants. These assumptions underlie the use of narrative inquiry, which emphasises that knowledge is relational, situated, and shaped through lived experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Andrews, Squire, and Tamboukou, 2013). This framing was particularly relevant to my study of the ECTs, whose stories of professional identity development were interpreted not as objective truths but as evolving, contextualised accounts shaped by time, place, and relationship dynamics. My positionality (Holmes, 2020) as a former teacher educator and senior leader in professional learning inevitably influenced the way I interpreted participants’ narratives, foregrounding the importance of autonomy, self-efficacy, and professional purpose throughout the research process.

Narrative inquiry positions both the researcher and the participant as co-constructors of meaning, acknowledging that stories are shaped through interaction and context rather than extracted as objective facts. It offers a way of exploring the dynamic and evolving nature of identity, particularly in professions like teaching, where context, relationships, and values deeply influence practice (Sfard and Prusak, 2005; Connelly and Clandinin, 1990). These ideas sit comfortably within a constructivist paradigm, which views reality as multiple and constructed through human experience and social interaction (Crotty, 1998; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Constructivist research does not aim to find generalisable truths but to understand meaning as it is experienced by individuals within specific contexts. Narrative inquiry’s attention to temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin and Caine, 2008) makes it especially suited to this kind of interpretative, context-sensitive exploration.

Thus, there is a tight interweaving of the interpretative nature of qualitative research, the relational emphasis of narrative inquiry, and the ontological and epistemological commitments of constructivism. Together, they support a research approach that foregrounds the lived experiences of ECTs while acknowledging the researcher's own influence on the stories that are told and the meanings that are made.

Given this study's constructivist paradigm, which views reality as multiple, subjective, and shaped by social interaction, it follows that the ontological position underpinning this research emphasises lived experience as a legitimate and valuable source of knowledge. In narrative inquiry, reality is not seen as fixed or externally defined but as continuously constructed through relationships, personal histories, and contextual influences (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). This leads to an ontological stance that recognises identity as fluid, relational, and embedded in experience. The next section outlines this relational ontology in more detail, showing how it supports the narrative inquiry methodology and aligns with the study's focus on ECTs' evolving professional identities.

4.2.1 Ontological stance

The ontological priority of narrative inquiry is to emphasise lived experiences. Rather than simply describing human experience, it creates space for individuals to actively represent and make sense of their realities in their own terms.

'A relational ontology requires that we undertake research with an understanding of relational ethics that calls to us larger questions of who we are in relation to participants, but also who we are in relation to the larger world or worlds that people inhabit. This relational ontology interwoven with a relational ethics calls us to consider mutuality, respect and reciprocity' (Clandinin et al, 2018, p. 20).

A relational ontology requires us to see identity shaped through relationships, not just between researchers and participants but also within broader social and educational landscapes. Professional identity is not an isolated static construct but one that emerges through interactions with colleagues, students, institutional frameworks and personal histories and aspirations (Runcieman, 2018). This emphasis on relationality aligns closely with an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; Gilligan, 2013), which foregrounds

attentiveness, responsiveness and responsibility within human relationships. Within the context of narrative inquiry, a relational ontology and an ethic of care are intertwined, as both require the researcher to approach participants not as passive sources of data but as individuals engaging in meaning-making (Caine et al., 2013). Taking an ethic of care approach means valuing participants' stories as expressions of their lived realities and engaging with them through mutual respect, trust and emotional attentiveness (Josselson, 2007; Caine et al., 2013). This ethical stance is particularly vital when exploring professional identity, as the process of storytelling can surface vulnerabilities, tensions, and deeply personal insights.

Ontologically, this study is grounded in the understanding that experience constitutes knowledge and that meaning is continuously constructed through lived experience (Dewey, 1938; Polkinghorne, 1995). Narrative inquiry, as both a methodological and ontological stance, assumes that knowledge is relational, temporal, and constructed through storytelling (Clandinin, 2019). By deeply engaging with the narratives of the ECTs, this study recognises that their experiences are not merely data to be extracted but 'living', evolving sites of knowledge production (Craig, 2011). This perspective acknowledges that professional identity development is neither linear nor individually determined but emerges through ongoing interactions within social, institutional and historical contexts (Sfard and Prusak, 2005). Consequently, my study's ontological position supports an exploration of how ECTs navigate the complexities of professional identity in diverse and dynamic school environments, where their identities are shaped through relational engagements, power structures, and evolving professional landscapes (Kelchtermans, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, and Verloop, 2004).

Building on this ontological commitment to experience as relational and situated, the study adopts a constructivist epistemological stance. This perspective views knowledge not as objective or fixed but as co-constructed through the interactions between researcher and participant, shaped by context, power relations, and narrative meaning making. Having established a relational and interpretivist ontological position, one that views reality as multiple, subjective, and constructed through experience, it is necessary to consider the corresponding epistemological stance that informs how knowledge is understood and generated within this study.

4.2.2 Epistemological Approach

The epistemological foundation of narrative inquiry aligns with the constructivist paradigm, which posits knowledge as socially constructed through interactions, experiences, and language (Crotty, 1998). Within this framework, narratives are not merely a methodological tool but also frame ontological and epistemological stances, recognising experience as the primary source of knowledge (Dewey, 1938; Bruner, 1991, 2002). Narratives are thus understood as active constructions, shaped by the interplay of personal, social and professional dimensions of identity making (Sfard and Prusak 2005; Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). Rather than viewing knowledge as an objective entity that exists independently of those who experience it, this study acknowledges that knowledge is fluid, co-constructed and context dependent (Bruner, 1991). In line with this, I designed the research as a dialogical and relational process, using semi-structured narrative interviews that enabled participants to share their lived experiences on their own terms while also allowing me, as a researcher, to engage reflexively in the co-construction of meaning.

A central epistemological commitment of narrative inquiry is its emphasis on the co-construction of meaning between researcher and participants (Riessman, 2008; Chase, 2011). In this study, ECTs are not positioned as passive subjects of research; rather, they are treated as active agents in shaping and interpreting their professional identities. This was enacted through a relational interviewing approach, in which I drew on our shared histories from the ITE programme and ongoing dialogue to build trust and allow the participants to guide the conversation. By responding to their cues, using open-ended prompts and offering space for reflection across the three interview phases, the stories we co-constructed were grounded in both the experiences of the ECTs and the relational dynamic between the researcher and the researched. This collaborative approach ensured that the participants' voices, reflections, and meaning-making processes were central to the inquiry, highlighting the relational and dialogical nature of knowledge production (Goodson and Gill, 2011). In practical terms, I demonstrated this by engaging participants in semi-structured interviews where they could shape the direction of the conversation, revisiting themes across three years of data collection. I also incorporated member checking, inviting participants to review their transcripts and clarify or expand

their narratives, further reinforcing their role as co-constructors of knowledge. Furthermore, narrative inquiry acknowledges that the process of storytelling is itself a sense-making activity, wherein teachers engage in retrospective reflection and prospective projection, continuously reshaping their professional identities (Goodson and Gill 2011), as evident in the longitudinal nature of my study.

The temporal nature of professional identity development is another key epistemological consideration. Identity is not a fixed entity but a continuously evolving process, shaped through teachers' interactions with students, colleagues, and institutional structures (Clandinin, 2013; Day et al., 2006). A constructivist epistemology allows for an interpretive and context-sensitive exploration of these complexities, ensuring that identity is understood as both personal and socially negotiated (Gee, 2000). By situating ECTs' narratives within their broader social and institutional landscapes, this study recognises that their identity formation is embedded in power relations, policies, and socio-cultural discourses (Kelchtermans, 2009; Sachs, 2005).

This constructivist position, with its emphasis on knowledge as relational, context-bound, and co-constructed, aligns closely with narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry offers a methodological framework that not only accommodates but actively values the temporality, relationality, and situatedness of teachers' experiences. It provides the tools to capture the interplay between individual meaning-making and the social contexts in which it occurs, enabling an exploration of professional identity that is faithful to its dynamic and situated nature. The following section outlines how narrative inquiry is operationalised in this study, from its theoretical underpinnings to the practical decisions that shaped the research design.

4.3 Methodological framework

Narrative inquiry serves as the methodological framework for this study, chosen for its ability to explore 'biographical particulars' (Chase, 2011, p. 209). The autobiographical nature of narratives allows ECTs to share their stories, starting with personal experiences related to their education and upbringing and progressing to their professional 'stories to live by' (Clandinin and Huber, 2005). These narratives, shaped by the landscapes past and present in which teachers live and work, illuminate the dynamic and evolving nature

of professional identity. Thus, understanding such relational aspects of narrative inquiry is particularly important in this study.

Clandinin and Connelly (1990), seen as the pioneers of narrative inquiry research in education, first used the term 'narrative inquiry' as a methodology in the educational research field in their paper, 'Stories of experience and narrative inquiry'. They posit that humans are storytelling organisms who individually, and socially, lead storied lives (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). Inevitably, teachers have long histories as learners (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990), and these histories are deeply embedded in their teaching practices (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990), which offer the spaces for individual and collective stories to be produced and reproduced. Therefore, taking a narrative inquiry methodology for this research study is appropriate, as it encourages the stories of ECTs to become visible and the decisions and actions that they make in their daily professional practice to be understood in the context of their everyday realities and relationships (Conle, 1997, p. 214). Additionally, in this study, narrative inquiry allowed me to collect data that addresses my research questions regarding how early ECTs value and develop their sense of professional identity.

A narrative helps to give a schematic meaning to temporal events (Bruner, 1991). Individuals construct private and public stories, and these stories are inevitably about the self over time, which can be understood in various ways, 'as a member of the human race, as a participant in a group, and as a configuration relating events and actions' (Polkinghorne, 1991, p. 139). Narratives, then, whether told or written, are a summary of the structure of everyday experience and action as it is used to provide meaning to our lives. The story of a person's own self is central in providing meaning and identity to individuals (Polkinghorne, 1991). As humans, we are in the middle of our own stories, so we become narrators of our self-stories, which gives meaning to the critical events that have been part of our existence (Polkinghorne, 1991). Over the course of the three-year study, the ECTS would still be in the middle of their own story-making, and this study aimed to capture their self-stories and critical events to ascertain how it affected the ECTs' perception of their professional identity. It is the essential link between narrative and reality, which, as human beings, we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves to meet the needs of the situations we encounter (Bruner, 2002, p.64), that the study

found so important in understanding teachers' professional identity. Smidt (2017) posits it is this ability to organise and communicate experience through narratives that makes human beings unique. As part of the research process, I encouraged the ECTs to reveal to me their 'stories to live by' (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 141). By sharing stories about their teaching experiences, teachers construct their professional identity by defining the 'shoulds, dos, and don'ts' of their practice. Through storytelling, they articulate their values, reflect on their experiences, and engage in sense-making processes that shape their professional self-concept (Sfard and Prusak 2005; Conle, 1997). Additionally, storytelling serves as a mechanism for professional development, allowing teachers to challenge norms, negotiate change, and reaffirm their sense of agency within their educational communities (Beijaard et al., 2004; Wenger, 1990).

Relationships are not only central to the participants' experiences of professional identity development but also to the research process (Dempsey et al., 2021; Clandinin et al., 2018). As a former teacher education course leader for the participants, I have an established professional relationship with them, which has deepened over the course of the study. To demonstrate this relationship, during this research study, I have crocheted a baby blanket for Susie, as she became pregnant and had a baby girl in January 2022, during the period of this research study. Tanya was struggling with long COVID and was having to make plans about a staged return to teaching, and after we had met in February 2022, I sent her an email in March 2022, just to check how she was doing with her return to work, and she replied with 'Thank you for checking in – how kind' (Tanya). These examples highlight how much I value the relationship I have developed with the research participants and reflect my commitment to a relational approach to methodology (Clandinin, 2016). This emphasis on relationality is not incidental but central to narrative inquiry, which is grounded in the belief that knowledge is co-constructed through sustained, ethical relationships between researcher and participants (Sfard and Prusak, Caine et al, 2013). The quality of these relationships influences not just the data generated but the depth of understanding that becomes possible. In this study, trust, reciprocity, and care were essential to creating the conditions in which participants could share the often vulnerable and evolving aspects of their professional identity. These relationships enabled a level of trust and openness that was crucial to the capturing of

the 'secret' stories of teachers, which are shaped by the tensions between their classroom and out-of-classroom experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996). Furthermore, an intriguing aspect of this study is that the lived stories of teachers are typically considered 'secret ones' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996, p. 25). When teachers are outside their classrooms and with colleagues, they often share cover stories that portray them as experts, aligning with the narrative of the school, which may differ from or resemble their 'secret' stories (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996; Goodson, 2013). I hope the ECTs felt they could share some of these 'secret stories' with me because of our bond. The potential conflict between in-classroom and out-of-classroom environments can create dilemmas in teachers' personal and professional lives (Craig, 2011). However, telling stories about oneself is not easy, as we are inclined to tell stories that we think others want us to be like (Bruner, 2002), and I was interested to see if these 'secret' stories emerge during the three-year study. For example, James highlights the tension between how his colleagues describe him as a 'PE lad who has got his shorts on in the winter and whistle around his neck' and his own assertion, 'That's not who I am at all' (James, Interview 2). James is actively negotiating his professional identity and rejecting a stereotypical view imposed by his colleagues. James perceives a misalignment between his self-perception and how others perceive him. This 'secret story' from James reflects his struggle to assert a legitimate professional identity that aligns with his self-concept rather than one imposed by others. As it is the features of narrative inquiry that 'allow wondering, tentativeness and alternative views' (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2012, p. 22; Conle, 2000), which excites me about this methodology.

Narrative inquiry is a powerful methodological approach that allows researchers to explore lived experiences through stories that participants reveal (Kelchtermans, 1993). However, as with any qualitative approach, narrative inquiry presents some challenges that must be acknowledged and addressed to ensure the rigour and trustworthiness of this research. Subjectivity is a primary criticism of the data collection and interpretation processes in narrative inquiry (Reissman, 2008); as the researcher plays an active role in shaping the narrative, there is a risk of imposing my own biases onto participants' stories. To address this, I used member checking, where the participants reviewed their transcribed narratives to ensure accurate representation of their experiences (Birt et al.,

2016). This is detailed later in this chapter under Ethical and Relational Considerations. Furthermore, personal narratives, while rich in depth, may not provide broad applicability across different educational contexts, and I have ensured transferability (Lincoln and Guba, 1994) by providing thick descriptions of the context to enable readers and future researchers to determine how findings may apply to their own settings. Narratives are shaped by the temporal and social context (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007) in which they are told, which means that interpretations may change over time as participants recall and reconstruct their experiences. However, over the three years of this study, I conducted one interview each year for each participant, and this longitudinal approach helped to capture any shifts in participants' professional identity (Kelchtermans, 2009). In line with the methodological principles of narrative inquiry, these choices were reflected in the design of the study, which prioritised temporality, relational engagement, and context using semi-structured narrative interviews conducted across three years.

4.4 Research Design

The next section details the practical steps taken to implement the methodology, including participant recruitment, data collection methods and ethical considerations, ensuring alignment with the study's overarching aim: to explore the professional identity formation of ECTs.

4.4.1 Method – Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews have long been recognised as a valuable method for generating rich, in-depth qualitative data that captures participants' experiences, perspectives, and social realities (Kvale, 1996; Patton, 1980). Unlike structured interviews, their flexible format allows researchers to explore emerging ideas while still maintaining consistency across participants (Fontana and Frey, 1994). This balance enables the researcher to probe deeper into participants' beliefs, values, and meaning-making processes without overly constraining the conversation (Barriball and While, 1994). Semi-structured interviews informed by a narrative inquiry approach are particularly effective for uncovering nuanced insights into professional lives, as they invite detailed narratives and encourage participants to reflect on their lived experiences (Kelchtermans and Ballet, 2002). The approach opens a dialogic space where

participants can articulate their own understandings of professional and social situations, while also enabling researchers to notice shifts, tensions, and contradictions within those accounts.

By allowing participants some control over the direction of the interview, this method supports agency and promotes a relational dynamic between interviewer and interviewee (Hendrikx, 2019; Patton, 1980). The conversational tone can also foster trust, which is vital when exploring emotionally or professionally sensitive topics (Brinkmann and Vale, 2005). Importantly, semi-structured interviews offer room for mutual reflection, which Angelides (2001) refers to as a shared sense-making process, which not only deepens understanding but also supports the trustworthiness of the data. In this study, this format created a space for ECTs to tell their stories in their own way, enabling moments of insight and vulnerability that may not have emerged through more rigid or one-off data collection methods.

The flexibility of semi-structured interviews made them the most appropriate method for this study. While biographical interviews as the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Chamberlayne et al., 2000; Wengraf, 2001,) are also qualitative, they differ in focus, depth and interpretive frameworks (Edwards and Holland, 2013). BNIM typically involves asking a single open-ended question designed to elicit an uninterrupted narrative from the participant to explore a specific aspect of their biography or experience (Edwards and Holland, 2013). However, in this study, I sought to explore a range of perspectives faced by ECTs, including their relationships with colleagues and students, professional tensions and self-efficacy. I therefore decided that BNIM lacked the necessary flexibility to address these multiple dimensions effectively.

Without semi-structured questions and asking a number of them, I was concerned that I would not obtain the rich, thick data required across these various topics. Furthermore, given that this was a longitudinal study, BNIM was less likely to capture the changes over time in responses to a range of themes. While BNIM might have enabled me to identify shifts in perspective annually, it would not have provided a comparative view across multiple areas of professional identity.

However, I did include elements relevant to a BNIM approach, particularly in Years 2 and 3, where I used the open-ended prompts such as ‘Tell me about...’ to allow participants to respond freely and reflectively. This is evident from Table 2 below. This approach encouraged wide-ranging answers and aligned with the narrative inquiry methodology underpinning this study. Additionally, as an ‘insider-outsider’ researcher (Mercer, 2007), I felt confident using open-ended questioning, given my familiarity with the ECTs’ context, terminology and challenges. The semi-structured interviews also supported my focus on social, cultural and institutional contexts, which are central to narrative inquiry (Goodson and Gill, 2011). Had I relied solely on BNIM, the responses might have been presented as a linear sequence of events rather than complex, evolving narratives embedded in professional practice.

Another method that I could have chosen was the free association narrative interview method (FANI) as outlined by Holloway and Jefferson (2008). The free association narrative method (FANM), Holloway and Jefferson (2008) inform, is designed to access unconscious elements of participants’ experiences and the emotional dimensions of their narratives. It involves encouraging participants to speak freely, with minimal intervention from the researcher, following a single prompt. While this method is valuable for exploring deeply subjective and emotive aspects of human experience, I felt that it would not enable me to explore the specific themes relevant to professional identity, such as interactions with colleagues, students and parents, and ECTs. FANM emphasises uncovering unconscious dynamics and psychological processes (Holloway and Jefferson, 2008), and although it can reveal rich, in-depth data, it might not always highlight participants’ conscious reflections on their professional lives and practices. While the free association narrative method offers a valuable approach for certain types of research, its emphasis on uncovering unconscious processes and its less structured format were less suited to the objectives and relational dynamics of this study. The semi-structured interview method, by providing a framework for exploring the complexity of professional identity within the relational and contextual realities of ECTs, was a more appropriate choice (Keltchtermans and Ballet, 2002). Semi-structured interviews enabled me to ask the same questions to each of the research participants, and the nature of the open-ended questions, which usually started with ‘tell me about’, as

encouraged for narrative inquiry interviews, led to a breadth of answers from the participants (Roulston, 2018). These types of questions are good interview questions, as they yield descriptive data as well as stories (Wiley, 2009, p. 99).

Semi-structured interviews enabled me to develop a sense of connectedness and coherence across the stories that were shared with me (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The flexible format allowed me to revisit earlier topics, using prompts such as ‘Let’s unpick that a bit’ or ‘This was the question we said we’d return to,’ which supported deeper reflection and allowed themes to unfold more naturally. These strategies encouraged participants to develop more coherent narratives and created space for new insights to emerge. Importantly, the longitudinal nature of the study, conducting interviews over three years, made it possible to trace shifts in participants’ perspectives, decisions, and identity development over time. This temporal dimension enriched the data by capturing not only what participants experienced but also how their understandings and responses evolved across different stages of their early career (Clandinin and Huber, 2002; Saldana, 2003). Furthermore, the chosen method enabled me to interact with the participants relationally and demonstrate to them a ‘caring for, curiosity, interest, passion and change’ approach pertinent to narrative inquiry (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2012, p.26). It is the flexibility of using semi-structured interviews (Horton et al., 2004), which enabled me to ask follow-up questions, provide spaces for participants’ narratives, and ask questions to demonstrate my curiosity to shape reciprocal relationships between me and the participants that were essential to this study. One example of a question from me to Mandy in Interview 3 was, ‘Just because I am curious, does the two-office thing still operate at your school in your department?’ This question demonstrates to Mandy that I knew not only the geographical layout of her school but also the potential tensions that having two offices for one department created. This helped build reciprocal relationships and trust between us as she answered, ‘You know, opposite the Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) office, there was a really tiny classroom, and we’re all in there.’ (Interview 3). Here, Mandy demonstrates her reciprocity, acknowledging that I am familiar with the school and would know where the MFL office is. Using semi-structured interviews allowed for the development of reciprocity between myself and the participants by offering the flexibility to ask follow-up questions and

enabling participants to express themselves in their own terms (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson and Kangasniemi, 2016).

The interview questions were shaped by the key concepts underpinning self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), both of which are central to understanding ECTs' professional identity. Self-efficacy theory emphasises the role of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional regulation in shaping teachers' beliefs about their capability (Klassen et al., 2013; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2007). These concepts informed prompts designed to explore participants' perceptions of their competence, their responses to challenges, and the impact of feedback and support on their confidence.

Similarly, self-determination theory's focus on the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Collie et al., 2012) guided the framing of questions about decision-making, professional agency, and collegial relationships. For example, I included prompts inviting participants to describe situations where they felt able to make professional choices, moments where their expertise was recognised or undermined, and experiences of connection or isolation with colleagues. This theoretical framing ensured that discussions addressed not only the practical aspects of teaching but also the underlying psychological drivers that support or hinder professional growth.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives into the semi-structured format, I was able to adapt questions in response to participants' narratives, returning to themes of efficacy, autonomy, and relational support as they naturally emerged. This approach aligns with research showing that professional identity is shaped by the interplay between perceived competence, agency, and connectedness within a given context (Gu and Day, 2007; Kelchtermans, 2009). Over three years, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled me to trace how these dimensions shifted over time, capturing the evolving interplay between personal beliefs, social relationships, and institutional demands. This ensured that the interviews did not simply record events but illuminated how teachers' identities were negotiated through their ongoing sense of self-efficacy and fulfilment of their psychological needs. These theories shaped the topics explored, but I did not follow

a rigid script. Instead, I adapted the structure to each participant, allowing the conversation to flow naturally and responsively. This flexible, dialogic approach helped to build trust and foster a sense of care, enabling participants to share openly across our three-year relationship (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik, 2021).

This is an example from Interview 2 with Tanya and me.

Me – ‘So, tell me about the values which are important to you as a teacher now?’

Tanya – ‘Do you mean from the people around me?’

Me – ‘You as a person’

Tanya – ‘What do I value?’

Me – ‘What do you, as a teacher, value?’

Tanya – ‘Me being kind? What is it that I want to be? What values do I want to have? I think consistency is important....’

I start by asking Tanya the planned interview question but, then as we engaged in a conversation, I know that Tanya values her interactions with people, even if she introduces some self-deprecating humour by saying, ‘me being kind?’ There are more examples of the follow-up questions I asked in Table 2, underneath.

Another example is from my interview with Audrey in the third year, as my question was not a planned one, but I was genuinely interested in her answers, which are not shown here in their complete narrative form but as extracts.

Me – ‘In comparison to everything else you’ve done, why do you think teaching ticks those boxes for you?’

Audrey – ‘Because there’s a challenge every day. You just never know what you’re walking into in that morning...’

Me – ‘It’s just I said to you, so why does it tick all the boxes?’

Audrey – ‘It’s just got variety every day, really, and I like being sociable and also the fact that I don’t have to be sociable with adults all the time either...’

This is another example of where the flexibility of the interviews enabled me to probe further, and Audrey reveals what is potentially a 'secret story' that she doesn't have to be sociable with adults, as she says.

'I don't think I could hack an office where I was forced to have the same conversation with the same group of adults, as I can say it is easier to have the same conversation with the same students every day.' (Audrey, Interview 3)

This insight not only illustrates the personal and relational nuances that emerged through the interviews but also highlights how each participant's comfort zones and preferences shaped the tone and depth of our exchanges. Table 2 demonstrates how I interacted with the participants, some more formally than others. However, at some point with all the participants cited, I don't ask the planned second question; my relational interest in each of them becomes apparent. It is this flexibility provided by the semi-structured interview method which enables me to take this approach with the research participants.

Table 2 - A summary of the first question asked across a sample of the participants across Years, 1-3 with my initial response.

Name of Participant and year of interview	Original question	Participant answer to the question	My follow-up questions/comments
Sally Year 1	So, can you tell me who inspired you to become a teacher?	So, both of my parents were heavily involved in education.	So, you have sort of touched on this, but can you tell me your reasons for becoming a teacher?
Sally Year 2	So, explain to me your current context, and what role do you have in teaching?	Okay, so I am currently the second in performing arts in a secondary school.	Tell me, has that role changed your views about teaching in any way?
Sally Year 3	So, tell me what has happened to you in your professional career over the past year?	So, we've gone to weekly lessons, which is having a massive impact on our students' progression. It obviously was a trial. But in music, it's been amazing.	Do you think it will help with your recruitment of students to Key Stage 4 or Key Stage 5 in music?
Audrey Year 1	So, can you tell me what or who	My sister. She knew right from the word go that she wanted to be a primary	Three years full-time at university. You must have enjoyed that?

	inspired you to become a teacher?	school teacher. So, I did night school for my A Levels and then three years at uni.	
Audrey Year 2	So, explain to me your current context and what is your role in teaching?	I work at a local school, and it has lots of Pupil Premium kids; there's lots of deprivation there.	Have you got involved in some of the oracy projects that are running across the school and the national programmes?
Audrey Year 3	So, tell me what has happened to you in your professional career over the past year?	And it's just nice; I like this year. I haven't had a day where I haven't enjoyed it.	You're amazing with that. If we could bottle your positivity and commitment to teaching, it would be completely amazing.
Isaac Year 1	So can you tell me what or who inspired you to become a teacher?	It was the head of chemistry at a local school. He said to me, 'When are you going to do teacher training?'	Why do you think he said that to you?
Isaac Year 2	So explain to me your current context, and what role do you have in teaching?	I am a science teacher at the name of a local school, and I teach from Year 7 to 11.	How long have you been a teacher?
Isaac Year 3	So, tell me what has happened to you in your professional career over the past year?	I am now second in science at school. So, there's been an interesting shift as a new headteacher has come in, and there's been significant changes and a lot of turmoil for staff.	So, new headteacher, when did the old headteacher leave?

The model of semi-structured interview was sufficiently structured to allow me to address the themes from my research questions of professional identity, but equally it

provided the participants with the opportunity to develop and elaborate on key concepts too, such as the impact of their context, their positive attitude to teaching, and their involvement in their school community (Galetta and Cross, 2013). Using narrative inquiry as my methodology enabled the participants and me to engage in a more robust discussion, revealing their ‘stories to live by’ (Clandinin et al., 2009, p. 141). To facilitate these in-depth, narrative exchanges, I adopted both in-person and online interview formats, each offering distinct advantages in supporting the relational and flexible nature of narrative inquiry.

4.4.2 Online interviews and in-person interviews

The online interviews were scheduled at times and dates convenient for each participant, which is a key advantage of virtual interviewing methods. This flexibility helped eliminate the need for physical travel and reduced time-related pressures for both the participants and me. These logistical benefits are well-documented in the literature, with researchers noting that virtual interviews can enhance participation by minimising disruption to daily routines (Archibald et al., 2019; Lo Iacono, Symonds and Brown, 2016).

In one instance, an online interview helped to mitigate health-related risks, while in another, it supported a participant with caring responsibilities; she was able to take part while caring for her young daughter. Such accommodations demonstrate how virtual methods can facilitate reciprocal relationships by broadening access to research participation, particularly for individuals balancing work, health, or caregiving demands (Howlett, 2021).

The virtual interviews were scheduled at times that suited the participants, typically after school or at the weekend, which supported their availability and reduced disruption to their professional and personal responsibilities. Notably, we did not encounter any significant technical difficulties during these sessions, which helped maintain the flow and quality of the conversations (Archibald et al., 2019). While some scholars note that online interviews can feel more abrupt or ‘sudden’ due to a lack of informal interaction and reduced opportunity for small talk (Archibald et al, 2019), I did not find this to be the case in my study. In fact, the average duration of the virtual interviews was like the in-person ones, which was approximately two hours. Most participants appeared relaxed and willing to share detailed reflections. There was only one instance where the interview

was notably brief, but this was not due to the format; rather, it reflected the participant's communication style, as she tended to give concise answers and did not elaborate unless prompted. This experience highlights the importance of recognising individual variation in storytelling and engagement, regardless of the medium used.

Despite my existing rapport with my participants, we still engaged with the pre-interview phase where I repeated the purpose of the interview and shared the ethics statement, as well as catching up with their news about promotions, health, engagement to be married and, in Susie's case, meeting her 13-month-old daughter. However, much of that pre-interview phase was not recorded, though the sharing of the ethics statement with the participants was. This pre-interview is an important stage, as it helped the participants to know that I was present and interested in their lives, not just focusing on my research outcomes (Corbin and Morse, 2003). However, I did find the abrupt nature of the end of the interviews when the 'leave the meeting' button is clicked (Engward et al., 2022) rather odd in contrast to the interviews in the coffee shop. As with the ones from the coffee shop, we were able to continue with our informal conversations whilst we left the coffee shop, and I could check that all was well after the interview. I attempted to mitigate that issue with one participant who was online and who had long COVID, as I checked in with her at a later date to find out how she was coping with her transition back to school, which took place after our interview.

Another example is that one of our online interviews was interrupted as the research participant was still in the isolation period for COVID, and the participant's parents called around to drop off groceries. This created a ten-minute pause in our interaction, which added to the complexity of creating a rapport during an online interview. Despite this interruption, due to our ongoing relationship, it was possible to bring the research participant back into the focus of the interview, as the participant clearly valued my 'emotional attentiveness and engagement and degree of reciprocity in the conversation' despite it being online (Riessman, 2008, p.24). I discuss this further in the Ethics section 4.7, demonstrating how I was able to mitigate some of the issues that arise with online interviews by using humour and building on our existing rapport to create an informal atmosphere. Having established the practical and relational conditions under which the interviews took place, I now turn to the nature of the questions asked, which were

carefully designed to align with the study's theoretical framework and to elicit rich, reflective narratives from participants.

4.4.3 Types of Questions

In narrative inquiry, the construction of interview questions plays a crucial role in inviting participants to share rich, storied accounts of their experiences. Rather than seeking factual responses, narrative questions are designed to elicit meaning making, allowing participants to reflect on the events, relationships, and contexts that shape their professional identities (Reissman 2008; Chase, 2011). According to the definition provided by Connelly and Clandinin, my research study is a 'telling inquiry' as it was an interview study rather than a 'living one' since I was not working alongside the ECTs in their classrooms (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 484).

However, as I already had an existing rapport with my participants, due to my role as their ITE leader, we were immediately able to engage with the pre-interview phase without introductions (see some examples shared in Table 2 above). Although the content of the questions evolved over the course of the three interview encounters, the open-ended nature to encourage a storytelling response did not, and I avoided 'why' questions from the onset (Holloway and Jefferson, 2017, p. 10). Using narrative inquiry as my methodology, I wanted to avoid interrupting the natural flow of their stories or putting pressure on the participants to justify their actions (Scheffelaar et al., 2021). Most of the questions started with 'Can you tell me...' as a way of encouraging participants to share with me their stories, which is appropriate for my methodology, as it helps to elicit stories from the participants (Roulston, 2018). By asking these types of questions, I was aiming to demonstrate that as a researcher, I was interested in hearing the ECTs' stories (Rapley, 2007). The interview questions I created included questions about the dimensions of narrative research, the temporal, social and spatial dimensions (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998).

I created ten questions for two of the three research encounters, and for the third interview, I wrote thirteen questions due to my increased knowledge from reading previous data sets and the specific information I wanted to elicit from participants about their self-efficacy. After the first encounter, I decided to share the questions with the participants in advance of our second interview. I told them the questions a day before

the interview and asked them not to prepare. My rationale for this was that I realised that the complexity of what I wanted to elicit from the questions had grown from Year 1 to Year 2, so I wanted to give time for the participants to reflect on the questions in advance, and it also added a transparency to the process by enabling them to understand more about what they had consented to (Haukås and Tishakov, 2024). One of the ECTs commented that she had been contemplating a specific question on the way to our meeting. The question was, "So what did you think about school as a student?" and Audrey started her answer with, "I was thinking about this question in the car." (Interview 2). Additionally, only Audrey specifically mentioned that she had been contemplating the questions beforehand; therefore, I did not send the questions in advance for Year 3. This decision does not seem to have affected the research participants' engagement with the questions, as they were already familiar with the themes and ideas of my research at this stage. However, Haukås and Tishakov (2024) posit that my view on making this decision could have been strengthened if I had emailed the participants after Year 2 and asked them how they felt about being able to see the questions in advance. Although I did not implement this approach in my research, upon reflection, I recognise its potential value for future studies. Furthermore, I was mindful of the participants' workload and time commitment in this longitudinal study. Since there appeared to be no impact on the quality of responses, I determined that introducing additional tasks was unnecessary. To honour their contribution while maintaining sensitivity to their workload, I chose to represent their autobiographical details and motivation to become teachers through pen portraits, an approach that offered a meaningful yet unobtrusive way to foreground their voices.

4.4.4 Use of Pen Portraits

In line with narrative inquiry traditions, I have included pen portraits (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013) at the beginning of each findings chapter, using them as an analytical technique to condense and depict qualitative data from participants while incorporating themes or patterns. This approach allows for descriptive accounts and rich stories (Blundell and Oakley, 2024, p. 45). The individual participant pen portraits are intended to offer a broad representation of their story before extracts are used for analysis in the subsequent chapter. This method enabled me to consolidate data from across the three-

year study into focused, narrative-rich summaries that go beyond fragmented quotations.

I followed the four-stage analytic process described by Sheard and Marsh (2019), defining focus, structuring, populating content, and interpreting it to some extent, which was my attempt to ensure methodological rigour and transparency. Given the limited existing guidelines on pen portrait construction, I also reflected on methodological challenges noted by Blundell and Oakley (2024), acknowledging the interpretive role I played in selecting and shaping these profiles.

In this study, the pen portraits also serve a structural role: they are placed at the start of each discussion chapter to introduce participants' contexts in relation to the research questions. By situating lived experiences alongside the analytical focus of each chapter, they act as a bridge between individual narratives and thematic analysis, helping to ground theoretical discussion in the realities of participants' professional journeys.

Because pen portraits necessarily involve the selective inclusion and interpretation of participants' stories, they carry inherent ethical responsibilities. Decisions about what to include, how to frame it, and how to preserve participants' voices without distortion are inseparable from broader concerns around confidentiality, informed consent, and respectful representation. Ethical considerations, such as ensuring participant confidentiality, informed consent, and the respectful representation of their lived experiences, are also central to maintaining the trustworthiness of the research and are discussed in the following section.

4.5 Participants and Recruitment Strategy

My recruitment of research participants for this research study was from within the trainee cohort of Suffolk and Norfolk Secondary SCITT 2019-2020. As I was the course leader for this ITE programme, I was able to use purposive sampling, as I had access to a sample of trainee teachers (Raj and Thapa, 2015) who were all about to start their careers as ECTs. There were approximately seventy trainee teachers in this cohort, and a recruitment letter detailing the study, alongside the Participant Information Sheet and the consent letter, was sent out to them, inviting them to be a participant in the three-year

research study (see Appendix 1, 2 and 3). Within the context of this cohort, I attempted randomised participant selection, as I did not know who was going to respond to the recruitment request (Stratton, 2024). By doing this, I was attempting to ensure that the sample who did engage with the research process was as representative as I could make it in terms of subject specialism, training route, gender and placement context. The inclusion criteria were that the participants had to be in the first year of their career from September 2020, enabling me to follow them over three years in line with the agreed fieldwork schedule for this longitudinal study as outlined in the Participant Information Form (see Appendix 2). The recruitment letter and the accompanying information were all approved by the University of Suffolk's Ethics Board and are included in the Appendices (see Appendix 3 and 4).

I received nine replies: seven females and two males. All of the participants had gained teaching roles in secondary schools across Suffolk and Norfolk. The schools ranged from a state-independently funded school to schools with a high number of Pupil Premium students. The range of schools included those in coastal regions, urban areas, and slightly more rural locations. One participant switched schools in Year 2, so two of them ended up at the same school. One participant changed schools at the end of her first year and went back to her placement school, where she had been a trainee teacher. One other participant had a baby during the three years of this study, so she was not involved in the second year of the interviews, as she was on maternity leave. Another ECT had long COVID, which meant that she took six weeks off during the spring term of the second year of the study. During the three years of the study, seven of the nine participants received promotions or extra responsibilities. At the time of the third interview in February 2023, none of the ECTs had left teaching.

Participants were invited to choose whether they preferred to be interviewed in person or online, allowing them to select a setting in which they felt most comfortable. This flexibility was consistent with the relational and participant-centred principles of narrative inquiry, helping to foster trust and support the co-construction of rich, reflective stories. The participants based in Norfolk chose to be interviewed online due to ease of access, and I met face-to-face with the ones who lived in Suffolk. This flexibility is

increasingly recognised in qualitative research as a way to enhance participant convenience and reduce barriers to engagement without compromising the depth or quality of data (Archibald et al., 2019; Deakin and Wakefield, 2014). Alice, Audrey, Catherine, Mandy and Sally, who were based in Suffolk, opted for face-to-face interviews, which were held in coffee shops local to them. In both settings, creating a comfortable and participant-led environment supported the relational ethos of narrative inquiry and helped facilitate open, reflective storytelling (Clandinin, 2016). The interviews I conducted are defined as acquaintance interviews, which are semi-structured interviews where the researcher is an insider and has a prior connection with the interviewee (Garton and Copland, 2010, p. 56). Meeting in a coffee shop meant that the research participants had minimal professional or personal distractions, so they could be fully present and engage with the process (Pierre, 2008). This neutral, informal setting supported deeper engagement with the research process by removing immediate professional demands (Pierre, 2008). However, the opportunity to develop such relational depth also required a substantial time commitment from participants over the course of the study.

4.6 Time Commitment

The longitudinal nature of this study involved a significant time commitment for participants: three semi-structured narrative interviews over a three-year time period. I was acutely aware of the potential burden this might place on the ECTs (BERA, 2018), particularly given the documented pressures they face around workload and time management (IES and BMG Research, May 2025). Although interviews were arranged outside of school hours to avoid interfering with professional responsibilities, I recognised that this inevitably encroached on their personal time. To mitigate this, I outlined the anticipated time commitment clearly in the recruitment letter (Appendix 1), ensuring that participants could make an informed decision about their involvement from the outset.

Participants were also given full autonomy over the scheduling, format, and location of each interview, which helped to maintain a sense of agency and respect for their availability. This flexibility supported the ethical foundations of the research and contributed to building trust and sustained engagement over time. The time commitment

also demanded sustained engagement from me as the sole researcher and interviewer. My familiarity with the participants developed across the three years, which allowed for continuity, deeper rapport, and richer storytelling.

There were, of course, challenges. Two interviews, one in the first year and one in the second, were not recorded due to technical failure. In response, I wrote detailed field notes immediately after each session to capture the narratives as accurately as possible. I chose to disclose these issues to the participants during the third-year interviews so as not to compromise their engagement with the study midway.

The longitudinal design also allowed me to adapt and refine my questions year on year. This development reflected not only my growing understanding of the literature on professional identity and self-efficacy but also my evolving insights into the participants' experiences. The flexibility to modify the questions in response to emerging themes was a strength of this time-extended design, allowing for a more responsive and context-sensitive approach to the inquiry (Hollstein, 2021).

I found it exciting and fulfilling to meet with the ECTs and listen to their stories; however, the time required for transcription and data analysis for both them and me can make the interview process feel draining (Tracy, 2010). Even during the actual interview, the underlying tension of my need to gather data from the interviews whilst maintaining a neutral but positive interactional approach for a long period of time (Rapley, 2010) made the interview encounter complex and tiring. Rodger-Shaw et al. (2021) posit this as 'emotional labour', as controlling emotions during the interview demands significant effort and planning to limit the researchers' verbal, facial and physical reactions. However, I did find that during the days of half-term, when I met with two of the participants in one day or on two consecutive days, I was tired and emotionally drained, as at the time of the research, I was working full-time in a senior leadership role. These moments of emotional fatigue underscored the relational and intensive nature of qualitative data collection, reinforcing the value and demands of using semi-structured interviews as a method for accessing rich, nuanced narratives.

4.7 Ethical Stance and Relational Ethics

In this study, my ethical stance was shaped by a qualitative, social constructivist, and narrative inquiry approach, which requires researchers to be prepared for the ‘complexity and unpredictability of the research encounter’ (Mills and Ratcliffe, 2012, p. 155). Narrative inquiry is a relational endeavour (Josselson, 2007) and therefore demands an ethical framework that prioritises attentiveness, mutual respect, and relational responsibility (Ellis, 2007). This is consistent with feminist methodological principles that aim to empower participants by centring their voices and lived experiences (Steinberg, 2015) and aligns closely with an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984, 2013; Tronto, 1998), which recognises that caring is both a universal human activity and a moral imperative within just societies.

Applied to this research, the ethic of care meant fostering trust, reciprocity, and emotional safety in all stages of the study, enabling ECTs to share candid, sometimes vulnerable accounts of their professional identity. This approach safeguarded participants’ well-being while enhancing the authenticity and richness of the narratives collected (Riessman, 2008; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). It also required attentiveness to the emotional and professional risks participants took in disclosing their experiences, ensuring their stories were interpreted and represented faithfully, without distortion or deficit framing (Ellis, 2007). As Caine et al. (2013) caution, relational research involves an inherent asymmetry between researcher and participant, demanding integrity, humility, and responsiveness in all interactions.

Given my previous role as ITE course leader, I was mindful of potential power dynamics. To mitigate this, I consciously adopted what Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman (2016) term ‘performed approachability’ and embraced the notion of the ‘acceptable incompetent’, positioning participants as the experts of their own experiences. For example, in my initial invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix 1), I stated:

‘I hope to build an open and trusting professional relationship with you, which will be based on mutual respect, as in this instance, you are the expert, and I wish to hear your stories and experiences.’

This framing signalled a genuine willingness to learn from participants rather than evaluate them. In narrative inquiry, trust and rapport are not simply methodological

considerations but ethical imperatives (Josselson, 2007). Throughout the research process, from recruitment to data interpretation, I aimed to create a space in which participants felt safe, heard, and valued, and where knowledge was co-constructed rather than extracted (Noddings, 1984; Riessman, 2008). This commitment to relational ethics ensured that participants retained agency over their contributions, with opportunities to clarify, amend, or withdraw material at any stage, thereby reinforcing the trustworthiness and ethical integrity of the study.

4.7.1 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

Positionality ‘refers to the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study, the community, the organisation one is aligned to, or the participant group’ (Coghlan and Brydon-Miller, 2014, p. 627). I am deeply embedded in the educational community to which the ECTs in this study belong, having worked in education for over twenty-five years. For nine of those years, I served as course leader for a large secondary ITE programme across Suffolk and Norfolk, working directly with approximately 600 trainee teachers and the participants were trainee teachers of this programme. This history positioned me in a dual role: both as a former authority figure in their professional formation and as a fellow educator who shares their cultural and institutional reference points. This embeddedness brought both advantages and challenges. On the one hand, my insider status provided immediate access, rapport, and a deep understanding of the professional context. As Berger (2015) and Pillow (2003) note, subjectivity is not a limitation to be eliminated but a lens that shapes every stage of the research process. I therefore engaged in ongoing reflexivity, critically examining how my experiences, values, and power relations influenced the co-construction and interpretation of data (Bourke, 2014).

On the other hand, occupying an insider position also risked assumptions of shared knowledge, the potential to overlook implicit practices, and the danger of over-identification with participants. There was a need to remain alert to moments where my professional familiarity could obscure alternative perspectives or silence contradictions (Mercer, 2007). To counterbalance this, I actively sought to surface, rather than smooth over, tensions in the narratives, and to remain open to accounts that diverged from my

expectations or professional standpoint (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). This required a continual negotiation between closeness and distance, ensuring that my interpretations respected participants' voices while recognising the interpretive influence of my own positioning.

Reflexivity in this study was not treated as a one-off statement of positionality but as a sustained practice throughout the research process. I kept reflective notes (see Fig 3) to document emerging assumptions, emotional responses, and interpretive decisions, which created an audit trail of my thinking and made visible the evolution of my interpretations (Finlay, 2002). I also revisited interview transcripts multiple times, asking how my questions or silences may have shaped the stories produced.

For example, in one interview, Mandy described how, in a large school, students were divided into two bands, A and B, based on whether they were considered ready to take Spanish as a language option:

'So, that means you get the A band and the B band. The A band is brilliant; everyone loves teaching students in this group. The B band is carnage because you end up with groups of low ability, and they have been stuck together' (Mandy, Interview 3).

From my own professional experience, I hold a different perspective on banding, particularly for English teaching, where a clear lower-ability grouping can undermine teacher autonomy and sense of competence. However, I recognised the importance of allowing Mandy's perspective to unfold without reframing it through my own values. I invited her to elaborate on her adaptation strategies, which resulted in a richer account that reflected her lived reality rather than my interpretation. This reflexive stance allowed me to acknowledge my own subjectivity while resisting the imposition of my professional standpoint on participants' narratives. I recognised that my positionality is not static but shifts across time, space, and interaction (Savvides et al., 2014). During the three years of fieldwork, I moved from being their ITE course leader to a researcher, an evolution made more pronounced when I left my ITE role entirely. This transition altered power dynamics, reducing the potential for participants to see me primarily through an institutional lens. My approach drew on humility, openness, and 'researcher vulnerability'

(Rose, 2021), inviting participants to shape the research process, valuing their authority in storytelling, and making transparent my interpretive role.

My positionality is also shaped by the privileges and subjectivities I carry as a white, middle-class woman with long professional experience in education. These social locations inevitably influenced my access to the research field, the ways participants responded to me, and my interpretations of their narratives (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; England, 1994). My racial identity and professional seniority may have aligned me with dominant institutional discourses, potentially discouraging critique, while my gender and shared professional background may have encouraged perceptions of empathy and care. Following Bourke's (2014) and Berger's (2015) guidance, I interrogated these dynamics throughout, questioning whether I was privileging certain voices, overlooking structural inequities, or interpreting experiences through the filter of my own career.

As Mercer (2007) suggests, insider research exists on a continuum, with shifting boundaries depending on the situation (Merton, 1972; Deutsch, 1981). At times, I was an 'intimate insider researcher', known to participants from their training year; at other times, my role as an academic researcher positioned me more as an outsider. This dual positioning enabled me to detect implicit references, emotional nuances, and institutional language that might elude a non-member, while also stepping back to question taken-for-granted norms. For example, when Tanya expresses her frustration at having to create every resource for all her lessons or when James explains that workload can be 'quite exhausting and addictive' (Interview 1), as there is always another thing to check off the ongoing to-do list. I probed gently to explore whether these reflected personal coping strategies or broader occupational expectations.

Within the framework of narrative inquiry, positionality is integral to the relational and co-constructed nature of the research (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). My presence and interactions inevitably shaped the stories told, and my reflexive engagement with privilege, subjectivity, and insider/outsider shifts was essential to ensuring that participants' voices remained central and authentically represented. This required recognising the inherent power asymmetries in the research relationship and

remaining accountable for how my interpretations both illuminated and framed participants' professional identities. Recognising my positionality within this research process also necessitates a consideration of power dynamics. The relational nature of narrative inquiry means that the co-construction of stories is shaped not only by my identity and experiences but also by the interplay of power within the interview setting. This dual positionality also brought with it an acute awareness of the power dynamics embedded in the research relationship, particularly given my prior role in participants' professional formation and the inherent asymmetries between researcher and participant in narrative inquiry.

4.7.2 Power Dynamics and Rapport-Building Strategies

In qualitative research, and particularly in narrative inquiry, the relationship between researcher and researched is never neutral. This dynamic is shaped by a range of social, professional, and epistemic factors, including authority, expertise, and the asymmetry of voice within the research process (Berger, 2015; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). While narrative inquiry emphasises relational engagement and the co-construction of meaning, it still involves an inherent power imbalance: the researcher sets the agenda, frames the questions, and ultimately decides how the participant's story is represented and interpreted (Josselson, 2007). When the researcher possesses prior professional authority, as I did as the ITE course leader for the participants, these dynamics become particularly prominent. Reflexively acknowledging this positionality was crucial. I was aware that participants may have initially viewed me through a hierarchical lens, potentially influencing what they chose to share and how they framed their experiences. Such influence risks shaping the data in ways that reflect the researcher's expectations, values, or interpretations rather than participants' authentic accounts (Berger, 2015; Pillow, 2003). This not only compromises the trustworthiness of the research but can also reinforce the very power imbalances qualitative inquiry often seeks to disrupt (Lincoln, Lynham and Guba, 2011). As Kvale (2006) warns, interviews are sites of 'asymmetrical power relations', where the interviewer's role in framing questions, steering the conversation, or signalling approval can subtly constrain what is voiced and how it is expressed. In the context of narrative inquiry, this can be particularly

problematic, as stories are co-constructed in the moment and thus susceptible to the researcher's implicit cues and interpretive authority (Riessman, 2008).

To mitigate these risks, I actively worked to redistribute power within the research relationship, adopting a stance of humility, reinforcing participants' roles as experts of their own narratives, and fostering a sense of mutual respect and trust (Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Bourke, 2014). Yet, as England (1994) reminds us, power cannot be fully equalised in research; it must instead be recognised, negotiated, and made transparent throughout the process. This meant being mindful of moments where my insider knowledge could inadvertently lead or constrain a narrative and resisting the urge to validate or challenge accounts in ways that might subtly redirect the participant's meaning-making.

One example of this occurred during an interview in Year 3, when Isaac explained that, up until this point in his career, all his lesson plans and resources had been provided for him by the academy trust. I considered that this situation undermined his autonomy, expertise as a subject specialist, and competence as a professional teacher. My instinct, shaped by my own professional history, was to question whether he felt that this situation had undermined his sense of professionalism in any way. Instead, I chose to remain with their framing, asking open-ended prompts such as, 'Tell me about the steps you are going to take now that you, as a department, need to plan your own lessons and create resources?' This enabled him to articulate their interpretation and experiences without my value judgement shaping his response. In doing so, I was able to hear a more nuanced account, where Isaac acknowledged his anxieties about the lack of guidance from senior leadership, as he was aware that it could lead to 'crazy, absolute chaos' (Interview 3). This reinforced for me the importance of reflexive restraint, not to avoid engaging critically, but to ensure that critical engagement was led by the participant's priorities rather than my own.

One of my first actions to acknowledge and begin navigating this power dynamic at the start of the research process was in the initial recruitment letter sent to the 2019–2020 secondary trainee cohort. In this letter, I explicitly framed participants as the experts and positioned myself as a learner seeking to understand their stories, to decentre my previous role as course leader and establish a more collaborative, care-informed research relationship from the outset.

‘You also need to be aware that my role for this study is as a postgraduate researcher and not as the course leader for the secondary Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT programme. I hope to build an open and trusting professional relationship with you for the duration of this research process, so you feel able to share with me your thoughts and views about your current context at the time of the interview. It is important that you feel that you can be open with me, even if your comments are critical about the teacher training you received last year (Letter to Research Participants, February 2021 in Appendix 1).’

By taking these steps, I adhered to best practices as outlined in the *BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (2024). The participants’ sustained engagement over three years suggests they valued their involvement and perceived our research interactions as reciprocal and respectful. Providing them with explicit opportunities to withdraw at any stage, reinforcing their autonomy and control, granted them meaningful agency within the research process (Hoffman, 2007). These efforts were particularly important given the complex and layered nature of power within qualitative interviews. Power dynamics are influenced by multiple factors, including socioeconomic status, educational background, professional experience, gender, and ethnic identity (Anyan, 2013). Moreover, power is multifaceted, operating simultaneously on relational, structural, and discursive levels (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach, 2009). While ethical procedures help to protect participants’ rights in formal terms, addressing power in practice requires continuous reflexivity and sensitivity as to how these dynamics play out moment by moment during the research encounter.

Relationally, power is embedded in the interaction between interviewer and participant, shaped by perceived authority, expertise, or status. Structurally, it reflects broader inequalities, such as differences in age, race, gender, or institutional affiliation. Discursively, power is enacted through language, who gets to speak, how questions are framed, and how narratives are interpreted and disseminated (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2005). These overlapping dimensions mean that even when rapport is established, the researcher retains considerable influence over the framing, pacing, and eventual use of participants’ stories. Recognising this complexity is essential for ensuring that participants’ voices are not only heard but also respected and represented with care and

integrity. While interviewers may intentionally adopt a less dominant or more facilitative role (Hoffman, 2007), power imbalances remain embedded in the structure of most interviews. In semi-structured formats, the researcher typically sets the agenda and frames the questions according to their research aims (Anyan, 2013). Attempts to reduce dominance, such as using open-ended prompts, active listening, and allowing participants to shape the direction of the conversation, can help redistribute authority and support collaborative meaning making. However, as Anyan (2013) and Galletta (2013) note, the interview context is always a negotiated space, with participants exercising agency over what they choose to disclose, how they present themselves, and how they shape their narratives. This dynamic interplay of control, interpretation, and resistance means that interviews are never neutral; they are relational acts that must be approached reflexively and ethically.

To mitigate power imbalances in this study, I implemented several strategies. I employed iterative member checking of the transcripts so that the participants felt their narratives were represented accurately (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I was transparent about my dual-insider positioning and the interpretive role I would play, both in the recruitment materials (Appendix 1, 2 and 3) and during the interviews, so the participants understood that their perspectives would shape, not simply feed into, my analysis. I used anonymised composite examples of their narratives to protect confidentiality while retaining the integrity of their accounts. The most significant strategy was the establishment of rapport through our prior professional relationship. While most research examines rapport as it develops within the research setting, Garton and Copland (2010) highlight that pre-existing relationships can also play a formative role in shaping interview dynamics. These strategies did not remove the inherent power asymmetry; indeed, as England (1994) reminds us, such symmetry is rarely achievable in research, but they acted as deliberate, reflexive practices to acknowledge, negotiate, and partially redistribute narrative authority. In doing so, I sought to create conditions in which participants' voices were not only heard but represented with care, respect, and fidelity to the complexities of their lived experiences. Extracts from interviews with Isaac, Susie and Tanya illustrate how humour, shared personal experiences, and empathy helped to bridge the power gap and create a comfortable interview environment despite that these were conducted online.

For example, this is an extract of the interview with Issac in Year 2; all of Issac's interviews were conducted online.

Isaac – 'My dog is ringing; my dog has doorbells to ring, and I can hear it ringing.'

Me – 'And that means he needs to go out. I'm not surprised you've trained your dog.'

Isaac – 'So we trained him with bells first, and now we have replaced them with a doorbell, and if you are somewhere else in the house, you can hear it.'

Me – 'And then does he have a bell to ring when he wants to come back in?'

Isaac – 'He has got one outside to let him back in as well. Oh, he'll close the door by himself.'

Me – This conversation just gets more and more mad.

Humour is evident in this extract, which Kaaristo (2022) suggests can help to overcome imbalances in power relations within research settings. Used sensitively, humour can humanise the researcher, reduce social distance, and create a more relaxed atmosphere that encourages openness and reciprocity. It can act as a relational leveller, signalling that the interaction is not solely evaluative or formal but one where mutual trust and rapport are possible (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). In this study, humour helped disrupt hierarchical dynamics established by my former role as ITE course leader, positioning the interaction as a shared conversation rather than a formal interview. By laughing with participants, I was able to signal warmth, attentiveness, and a willingness to be emotionally present, key elements in a relational, care-focused research encounter.

Another example is the interview with Susie in Year 3, and we conducted the interview online with Emma, her daughter, at 13 months being part of it.

Me – 'Hello, you. Yes, you are so cute, Emma, aren't you? Her little face. She is so smiley, isn't she?'

Susie – 'Yeah, she loves attention.'

Me – 'Hello, you are beautiful. You're lovely, aren't you?'

Susie – ‘She will be happy now; she has a toy car she sits in.’

Me – ‘Yes, you can tell she is making happy noises.’

In this extract, I am engaging with Susie and her daughter and acknowledging Emma’s presence, which helped deepen the relationship that Susie and I have. By responding warmly and personally, I stepped outside the formal boundaries of an interview to connect on a human level. This interaction blurred the researcher–participant hierarchy, helping to position us as two women in conversation rather than solely as interviewer and interviewee. Acknowledging Susie’s role as a mother alongside her professional identity helped create an atmosphere of mutual respect and authenticity, reinforcing the relational foundation of the interview. This approach reduced the potential for power asymmetry to dominate, allowing Susie to share her experiences comfortably and with trust.

A final example is the Year 3 interview with Tanya, which began with an unrecorded discussion about her ongoing health challenges with long COVID. When the recording started, our conversation reflected a mutual recognition of the impact of illness on our professional lives:

Me – ‘I am on antibiotics again; it’s the tiredness thing, and I completely empathise with the tiredness. I completely get it, and you know what, it’s like you go into performance mode, don’t you?’

Tanya – ‘I think there’s a level of adrenaline attached to that. Yes, it is performing very much performing. It’s a five-period day, and you know by the time I’m walking to the car, I’m like weaving all over the place. I just crash, and I am sure it must be adrenaline.’

Me – ‘I totally agree – it’s complete performance mode, and I am just done at the end of the day too.’

This exchange demonstrates how self-disclosure, here, my openness about my own health experiences, functioned as a relational strategy to reduce the asymmetry of the interviewer–interviewee relationship. As Hoffman (2007) argues, carefully considered self-disclosure can enhance rapport by signalling shared vulnerability, humanising the

researcher, and positioning participants as equals in the exchange. In this case, acknowledging Tanya's personal circumstances and reciprocating with my own experiences disrupted the formal hierarchy of the interview and fostered an environment where she could speak candidly.

These examples illustrate that mitigating power imbalances in narrative inquiry requires more than procedural safeguards; it demands an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1998) enacted through attentiveness, responsiveness, and relational reciprocity. While power could not be eliminated (England, 1994), deliberate use of transparency, rapport, self-disclosure, relatedness and active listening, alongside an ethic of care, helped redistribute narrative authority, enabling participants' voices to emerge in ways that were both authentic to their lived realities and protected in interpretation. For some participants, particularly those who lacked opportunities to discuss their challenges with senior leaders, this attentive listening provided a rare space to articulate frustrations and reflections to someone who understood their context.

While some qualitative approaches emphasise researcher neutrality (Subedi, 2023; Holstein and Gubrium, 2003), the shared history and relational depth in this study meant that a strictly neutral stance, even if methodologically possible, would have felt disingenuous and potentially alienating. Instead, I adopted a responsive approach, where self-disclosure and emotional reciprocity were used reflexively to support trust-building and participant agency. Decisions about how much of myself to share, and when, were not straightforward. As Hoffman (2007) notes, such choices require sensitivity to the moment and an awareness of the possible influence on the participant's responses. To navigate these decisions, I wrote field notes capturing my interpretation of their views and how I perceived the emotional tone of the exchange. These reflexive notes assisted in analysing instances of emotional uncertainty, such as occasions when interaction with research participants required attentive listening. This process ensured that self-disclosure and attentive listening were not incidental but deliberate methodological tools to negotiate power and co-create an environment where participants' voices could be expressed freely and authentically.

Alongside rapport-building, I also adopted the stance of the 'acceptable incompetent' (Mayorga-Gallo and Hordge-Freeman, 2016), a strategic posture in which researchers,

particularly those with insider status, present themselves as fallible and human to reduce hierarchical distance. At the start of Mandy's Interview 3, I joked about my upcoming thesis deadline:

'I will be in touch because whenever I get the transcriptions done, which is quite close, because I am meant to submit next September, don't say it' (Mandy, Interview 3).

This humour and self-deprecation subtly undermined the notion that I held complete control or expertise, reframing the interaction as more reciprocal and authentic.

A third strategy was to avoid questions that could be perceived as evaluative of participants' ITE experience, given my prior role as their course leader. As Mercer (2007) notes, insider research carries ethical complexity: pre-existing relationships can both enable openness and constrain it. By consciously avoiding potentially evaluative questions, I aligned with Gair's (2011) call for reflexivity in insider research, ensuring that participants could speak without fear of judgement or obligation. As my positional relationship evolved, culminating in my departure from the ITE leadership role, the implicit hierarchy began to dissolve. Tanya's unsolicited praise for the SCITT programme in Year 3 illustrates this shift:

'I am so grateful that I found the SCITT that I did with the people that I did... I do feel that it gave me the best set-up or tools and start that I could have possibly received' (Tanya, Interview 3).

Her emphasis that this was 'not because it's you' signals a move from guarded deference to open reflection. Literature on insider-outsider role shifts (Mercer, 2007; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009) supports this, noting that as institutional authority recedes, participants often feel freer to share both critical and affirming perspectives without fear of repercussion.

While power imbalances were present at the outset of the study due to my prior role as ITE course leader, these dynamics evolved noticeably by Year 3. Insider-outsider positioning is not static but exists along a shifting continuum shaped by time, role, and relational proximity (Mercer, 2007; Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). By the third year,

participants were more professionally established, several had assumed additional responsibilities, and I had stepped away from my formal leadership role. This reduced the immediacy of institutional authority and repositioned interviews as conversations between professionals at different stages rather than between trainer and novice.

However, as England (1994) cautions, power in qualitative research is never fully dissolved. Although the relational dynamic became less hierarchical, I retained structural authority as the researcher who framed questions, selected extracts, and interpreted narratives (Kvale, 2006; Riessman, 2008). The Year 3 interviews therefore required continued reflexive attentiveness to ensure that increased familiarity did not lead to assumed consensus or uncritical acceptance of shared professional norms. The longitudinal design illustrates that power imbalance in narrative inquiry is fluid rather than fixed, but it remains embedded within the interpretive responsibilities of the researcher.

These examples demonstrate that power in qualitative research is neither fixed nor one-directional but shifts over time in response to relational, structural, and discursive factors (England, 1994; Kvale, 2006). In this study, strategies such as reframing my role, using humour and self-disclosure, embracing ‘acceptable incompetence’, attentive listening, and consciously managing role boundaries all served to redistribute narrative authority. Anchored in relational ethics (Ellis, 2007) and an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1998), these strategies enabled participants’ stories to be voiced on their own terms and safeguarded in interpretation. As my positionality evolved and the formal power, I once held diminished, interviews became increasingly open, underscoring the centrality of trust, transparency, and reciprocity in sustaining ethical research relationships across a longitudinal study.

With these power-sensitive strategies in place, the next crucial consideration was how I approached informed consent, not as a one-off formality, but as an ongoing, relational process embedded in trust and clarity throughout the study.

4.7.3 Consent as an Ongoing Process

The measures taken to mitigate power imbalances in the research process were essential in fostering an ethical research environment. Obtaining informed consent from the nine

newly qualified teachers was paramount to this study (see Appendix 3). Given the longitudinal nature of this research, obtaining consent was not a one-time procedural requirement but an ongoing, relational process that necessitated transparency and continuous reaffirmation of participants' willingness to engage (Cohen et al., 2018). Framing consent in this way upheld ethical standards and functioned as a strategy to diminish power dynamics, reinforcing participants' autonomy, validating their agency throughout the study, and positioning them as active collaborators rather than passive subjects. This section outlines the specific steps taken to ensure that participants were fully informed about the study's aims, nature and procedures, as well as the reassurance provided regarding confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2018).

Informed consent promotes respect for the participants' autonomous decision-making but can only be obtained if the participant is accurately informed about the research and can make a voluntary decision about participation (Kyngas et al, 2020). As outlined earlier in this chapter, a letter was sent to the cohort of 2019-2020 Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT Secondary trainees (see Appendix 1), which outlined the key ethical principles about the selection of the participants. In the recruitment letter and in the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix 1, 2 and 3), it highlighted that they had the right to withdraw, without any repercussions, at any time as in accordance with *BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2024)*. However, as part of their agreement, they were prepared to let me include any anonymised data that had been recorded up to that point. For example, if they withdrew in Year 2, I was able to use their data for Year 1.

In the recruitment letter and accompanying Participation Information Form (Appendix 1 and Appendix 2) I outlined what was involved in the study, what would happen to the data that they shared. I would keep the anonymised data on password-protected drives up to ten years to enable me to publish articles after the submission and assessment of my thesis. In the previously listed documents, I also committed to ensuring the anonymity of each of the research participants by using pseudonyms for their names; each of the participants agreed to the pseudonyms that were used for them. I have also ensured that I make no specific geographic references to schools that they work in, I do not specify whether they teach in Suffolk or Norfolk, and I only describe their schools as being in the eastern region.

All participants have reviewed their data transcripts and pen portraits, offering suggestions for necessary amendments or clarifications (see Table 3 below). In this study, member checking was used in a way that aligned with the relational and care-informed principles underpinning the research. Participants were invited to review their interview transcripts and pen portraits and were given the opportunity to clarify, amend, or remove material before it was incorporated into the analysis. This process was not framed as a test of analytical accuracy, but as a means of ensuring respectful and faithful representation of their lived experiences.

Within a narrative inquiry design, participants' stories often involve professional vulnerability and personal reflection. Returning transcripts acknowledged that these accounts remained their stories, not simply data to be interpreted. Providing space for correction or withdrawal reflected attentiveness and responsibility, core components of an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984; Tronto, 1998). It also reinforced participants' agency in the research process, particularly given my prior professional role in their training.

While the thematic interpretation remained my responsibility as researcher, member checking ensured that participants were comfortable with how their words were recorded and portrayed (Goldblatt et al, 2011). Participant feedback was therefore used as an ethical safeguard to support relational trust and minimise the risk of misrepresentation rather than as a mechanism for transferring interpretive authority. This approach reflects the position that, within reflexive thematic analysis, meaning-making and interpretation remain the responsibility of the researcher, as participants' agreement with interpretations does not necessarily constitute analytic validity (Braun and Clarke, 2022). These strategies support the concept that throughout this three-year study, consent was both formally documented and evolved into a more informal and flexible practice. This approach is driven by the perspective that research is fundamentally an inter-relational and context-dependent process (Klykken, 2021). Ethics often encounter situational and multidimensional issues, so no regulations or frameworks can cover all potential situations that might arise when undertaking fieldwork, and any attempt to do so may not leave room for authentic discussion (Kyngas et al., 2020).

Table 3 - Overview of some of the email responses to the request for the participants to review their transcripts and pen portraits.

Audrey	Yes, absolutely fine to ahead with these, they bring back some memories.
Mandy	Happy with the transcripts. In terms of the pen portrait, it might be worth mentioning that as from September 2023, I was made whole school Literacy Lead.
Isaac	All of that looks good to me, let me know if you need anything else.
James	I have checked the transcripts, and all appear to be anonymous to me.
Alice	I have read through everything, and it seems good to me.

The implemented ethical measures enhanced participant trust in the research process, leading to more genuine and transparent narratives. By involving participants in the verification of their own data and offering them control over how their narratives were constructed, contributions were represented, the study fostered a sense of ownership and collaboration (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This participatory approach aligns with relational ethics (Ellis, 2007), where trust is built through reciprocity, openness, and respect for the participant’s voice. When participants feel confident that their perspectives will be handled accurately and sensitively, they are more likely to share nuanced, candid accounts, resulting in richer and more authentic data (Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden, 2001). In this way, ethical practice was not only a procedural safeguard but also a methodological strength, directly enhancing the depth, integrity, and trustworthiness of the narratives collected over the course of the study.

Privacy and confidentiality were treated as related but distinct ethical commitments. Privacy refers to participants’ control over what aspects of their experiences are shared, whereas confidentiality concerns the safeguarding of identifiable information once disclosed (BERA, 2024; Wiles et al., 2008). In line with this distinction, participants retained ongoing control over the information they chose to share. At each interview stage they were reminded that they could decline questions, withhold sensitive material or request the removal of extracts during transcription interview.

Protecting confidentiality required attention beyond the consistent use of pseudonyms. In qualitative research involving relatively small and professionally interconnected samples, individuals may still be identifiable through contextual clues rather than explicit naming (Kaiser 2009). This risk was heightened in this study due to the relatively bounded regional education community and the longitudinal nature of the research. To mitigate this, school characteristics were generalised, geographic markers were removed, and contextual details were selectively modified where necessary, without altering analytic meaning. This approach sought to balance narrative integrity with protection from identification.

Longitudinal research introduces additional ethical considerations. Identity continuity across time can increase traceability, particularly where career progression, role changes, or distinctive experiences are described. Tolich (2004) highlights the risk of 'internal confidentiality' breaches, where participants may recognise one another through narrative detail even when anonymised. Accordingly, cumulative detail across interview rounds was reviewed carefully to ensure that participants could not be indirectly identified through the aggregation of information.

The dissemination of findings was addressed explicitly during the consent process. Participants were informed that anonymised data would be included in the doctoral thesis and may be presented at academic conferences or in peer-reviewed publications. In all dissemination contexts, pseudonyms were retained and identifying features removed. Quotations were selected to preserve analytic integrity while minimising identifiable information. As Wiles et al. (2008) note, ethical responsibility extends beyond initial consent to the management of representation over time. Decisions regarding quotation length, contextual framing, and narrative sequencing were therefore made with ongoing consideration of how participants might experience public representation of their professional lives.

An ethic of care underpinned these decisions. Narrative inquiry involves rendering participants' lived experiences into academic text; ethical practice therefore required continuous reflexive attention rather than procedural compliance alone. Protecting participants involved not only anonymising data but also safeguarding dignity, relational

trust, and future professional standing. Ethical responsibility was thus embedded throughout data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

4.8. Ensuring Rigour and Trustworthiness

Ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research is crucial for validating its credibility and rigour (Ahmed, 2024). In this study, which employs narrative inquiry and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) to explore the professional identity formation of ECTs, trustworthiness was addressed through the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Each of these criteria was carefully considered and integrated into the research design and analysis process.

4.8.1 Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, Confirmability

Credibility, concerned with the internal coherence and plausibility of the account, was strengthened through multiple strategies. While the primary purpose of conducting three semi-structured interviews with each participant over a three-year period was to explore the evolving nature of professional identity, this longitudinal design also enhanced trustworthiness. Prolonged engagement enabled the development of rapport, facilitated observation of developmental trajectories, and supported deeper insight into participants' narratives, thereby increasing the authenticity and credibility of the data (Shenton, 2004). The iterative nature of data collection allowed earlier interpretations to be revisited, refined, and, where necessary, revised in light of subsequent interviews.

Transferability in this study is conceptual rather than statistical (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Through sustained engagement across three years, the research provides rich, thick description of early career teachers' identity development (Geertz, 1973), enabling readers to assess the relevance and resonance of the findings within comparable educational contexts. While the sample is necessarily bounded, the depth and temporal layering of the narrative data support analytical generalisation to theory rather than population (Yin, 2014).

The study's contribution extends beyond its regional setting through its theoretical integration of Self-Determination Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory as complementary explanatory frameworks for professional identity formation. By tracing how autonomy, competence, and relatedness interact with the development of efficacy beliefs across

time, the research identifies relational and contextual mechanisms of fluid identity construction in early career teacher identity. Such explanation-building aligns with qualitative approaches that prioritise theoretical insight and process-oriented understanding over numerical representativeness (Maxwell, 2013). The longitudinal narrative design further strengthens this contribution. Narrative inquiry conceptualises identity as temporally constructed and continuously reinterpreted (Riessman, 2008); by following participants across three years, the study captures identity as process rather than static outcome. Transferability in this thesis therefore rests on contextual resonance, theoretical applicability, and methodological contribution.

Dependability, which concerns the stability and consistency of the research process (Ahmed, 2024), was addressed through a detailed and transparent account of research design, data collection, and analysis. Each stage of reflexive thematic analysis was documented, including transcription, coding, theme generation, and iterative refinement. Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases of RTA provided a structured yet flexible framework that supported methodological transparency. Negative case analysis was undertaken across interview rounds, with systematic searching for disconfirming or deviant instances. Codes, theme boundaries, and, where appropriate, the scope of claims were revised until the account accommodated both confirming and challenging evidence (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Confirmability was supported through reflexive practice and evidential grounding. The inclusion of direct participant quotations in the findings chapter foregrounds participants' voices and reduces the risk of over-interpretation (Ahmed, 2024). Transparency in the coding process, including examples of how codes were grouped into themes (see Table 4), further strengthens the auditability of analytic decisions. Throughout the study, I recorded analytical reflections, acknowledged how my positionality and professional history shaped interpretation, and worked within an ethic of care that recognised my relational responsibilities to participants. Where disconfirming patterns persisted, they are reported as boundary conditions rather than absorbed into dominant themes. For example, mentoring often had limited impact

across participants, except in Sally's case, where mentoring clearly supported identity and efficacy development; similarly, sustained negative references to workload were primarily concentrated in Tanya's narrative. These boundary conditions specify the contexts in which claims are most likely to hold and strengthen the study's conceptual clarity.

4.8.2 Rigour and Beneficence

Ensuring rigour was also fundamental to maintaining trustworthiness. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria, credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability, I combined prolonged engagement with member checking and triangulation through multiple interviews to ensure transparency in decision-making and interpretation. These strategies ensured that the findings were firmly grounded in participants lived realities rather than shaped by the researcher's assumptions.

The principle of beneficence, the ethical obligation to maximise benefits and minimise harm (Beauchamp and Childress, 2013), was embedded throughout the research design. Beyond procedural safeguards such as confidentiality and secure data storage, beneficence informed my relational approach: creating supportive interview spaces, avoiding lines of questioning that could cause discomfort, and ensuring participants retained agency over their contributions. In qualitative research, beneficence is closely tied to relational ethics (Ellis, 2007), as benefits can extend beyond the individual to the wider professional community when findings are used to inform practice and policy. In this study, beneficence was evident in participants' feedback that the interviews provided a valued opportunity for reflection, professional affirmation, and the articulation of challenges rarely voiced in their institutional contexts. By integrating ethical practice, rigour, and beneficence, trustworthiness in this study was not treated as a checklist of procedures, but as an ongoing, relational, and reflexive process. This approach enhanced both the quality and integrity of the research, resulting in narratives that were richer, more authentic, and grounded in mutual trust between researcher and participants.

This ethics section has demonstrated how care, reflexivity, and relational responsibility were embedded throughout the study, not only through adherence to formal ethical procedures, but in the everyday practices of consent, positionality, power negotiation,

and attentiveness to participants' emotional well-being. These choices were not only protective; they also improved data quality by encouraging fuller, more candid narratives. With these ethical foundations in place, the next section outlines the data analysis process, detailing how participants' narratives were interpreted through a reflexive thematic approach that remained consistent with the study's ethical and relational commitments.

4.9 Data Analysis

The data generated from the interviews and research questions, which signpost the reader, lend themselves to being answered through a reflexive thematic analysis (RTA,) which is a qualitative analytical method for identifying, analysing and interpreting patterns of meaning with data (Braun and Clarke, 2022). RTA is rooted in a reflexive, interpretive process in which the researcher plays an active role in generating themes rather than discovering them as fixed entities. It assumes that meaning is co-constructed between researcher and data, shaped by the researcher's theoretical position, values, and reflexive engagement throughout the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis is particularly suited to qualitative research exploring complex topics such as professional identity formation in ECTs. As Braun and Clarke (2022) explain, RTA allows researchers to identify not only explicit content but also hidden meanings, uncovering the underlying assumptions and power dynamics that shape participants' narratives. RTA was chosen as it provides a robust yet flexible framework to analyse the personal narratives of ECTs, exploring how professional identities are shaped over time. It supports a data-driven approach while allowing theoretical frameworks such as self-efficacy and self-determination theory to inform the interpretation of themes were appropriate.

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is a flexible and rigorous approach to analysing qualitative data that prioritises the researcher's active role in the process of meaning-making (Finlay, 2021). Unlike more formulaic methods, RTA emphasises the interpretative nature of thematic analysis, where the researcher's reflexivity and subjectivity are viewed as central to the analytical process (Finlay, 2021). This approach allows researchers to explore patterns of meaning (themes) within qualitative data whilst

also acknowledging the contextual and relational dynamics of the research process. For instance, in my study, the long-term relationships I developed with participants over three years meant that their narratives were shaped not only by their evolving professional contexts but also by the trust and familiarity established through repeated interviews. This continuity influenced how I interpreted shifts in meaning and identity across time, with my own position as researcher-teacher becoming part of the interpretive lens. Braun and Clarke (2022, 2012) stress that RTA is not a passive process of coding but is a thoughtful, reflective engagement with the data that requires the researcher to consider their positionality, theoretical lens and the broader context of the research. In my study, this reflexive process involved writing field notes to note down my emerging thoughts, regularly questioning how my prior professional relationship with the participants might be shaping the themes I was identifying. As Finlay (2021) posits, it is an approach that requires ‘craft, graft and artistry’ (Finlay, 2021, p. 107) because it involves creative intuition but also painstaking and attentive systematic working through iterative versions over time (Finlay, 2021).

The process of RTA involves six recursive and nonlinear phases: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2022). These phases are not rigid steps but rather guidelines that emphasise the need for flexibility and iterative refinement throughout the analytic process.

After the recording of each interview, I saved the audio files in a password-protected cloud platform as outlined in my ethical consent forms. I used artificial intelligence Otter.ai, which is a speech-to-text transcription app that uses artificial intelligence to convert spoken words into text. There was no specific reason for choosing this software other than that some colleagues had suggested that it had a good replication rate between speech and text. Although I found it easy to use and was generally accurate, I had to use the paid version for the amount of data which I needed transcribed. The first time I listened to the interviews, I gained an overview of what was discussed and found out issues such as Audrey’s interview did not record in Year 1, and Catherine’s interview did not record in Year 2, even though I used the same audio recorder for all the interviews, whether they were face-to-face or online. I wrote up what I could remember from their

interviews to try and capture as much of their stories as possible, so at least there was some continuity between the years. The second time I reviewed the recordings, I started to make notes on the data, and as data was produced, they were coded, and emerging themes were used to inform the next stage, elaborated further on. I reviewed the transcripts very slowly at this stage, as I was correcting any errors as for example, the software had transcribed NQT as 'new event' and other similar mistakes were spotted which needed to be rectified. At the same in the software, I started to write short notes next to the transcripts to give me an idea of some of the codes. I did this for all twenty-seven transcripts. See Figure 1

Figure 1 – Example of the comments I put into the software to start tracking emerging codes.

AI Chat Outline **Comments**

show more

6:19 1

Kate Sida-Nicholls · 14/08/2023
Making a difference to students.

Reply...

have so many. I never go home thinking that was a rubbish day.

8:09 1

Kate Sida-Nicholls · 14/08/2023
Always has good days.

Reply...

Kids just getting on with it. Kids laughing Yeah, I've been teachers come past and like, or have a really good ...

Show more

8:37 1

Kate Sida-Nicholls · 14/08/2023
Kids learning and laughing.

Reply...

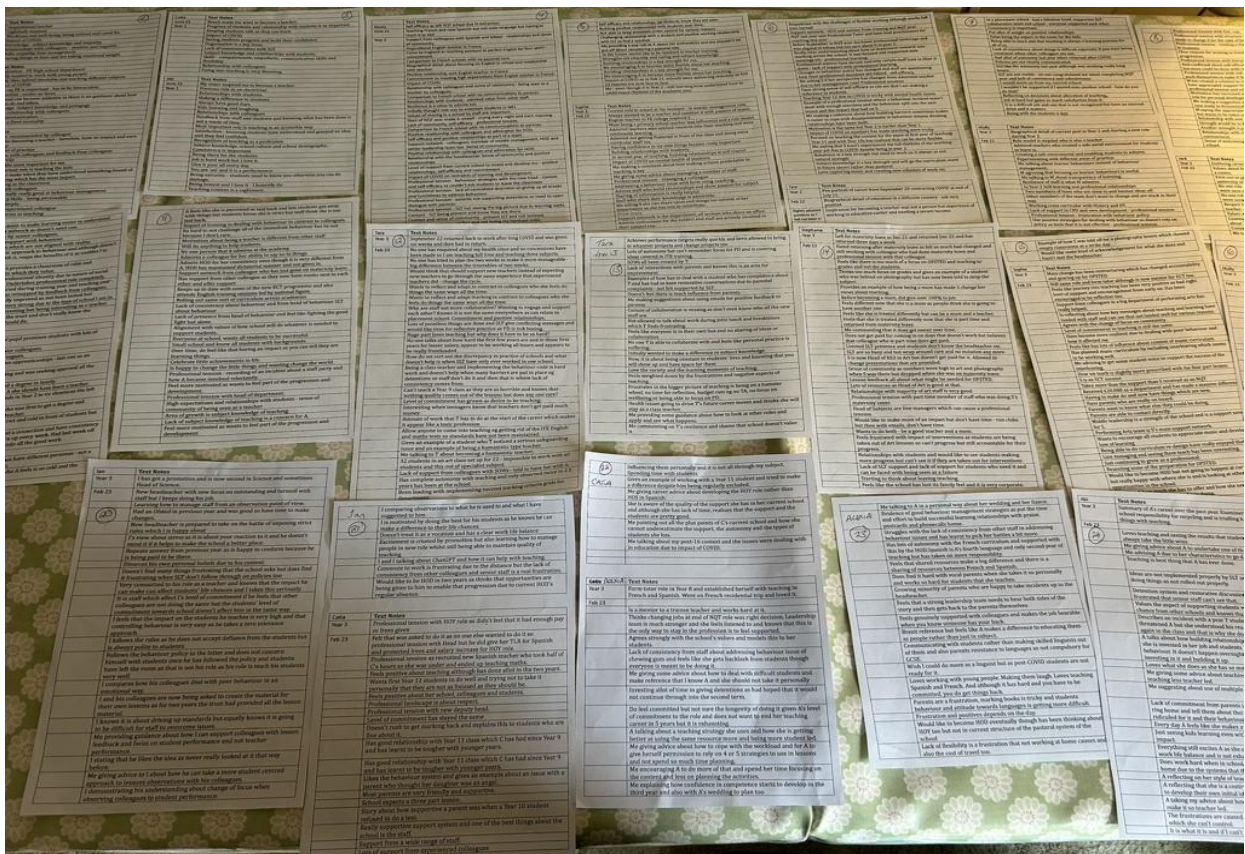
And so that's probably a good day just knowing that all the staff respect me as well.

9:28 1

Kate Sida-Nicholls · 14/08/2023
Relationships with colleagues.

I then downloaded these comments into Word and printed them out for all twenty-seven transcripts so I could start coding by hand. See Figure 2 for an example of the comments which were printed out. At this stage, the task seemed quite overwhelming, but I bought a range of highlighter pens and started to colour similar comments and turn them into codes, eg relationships with students, relationships with colleagues, interactions with parents, which essentially is phase two of RTA. However, as can be seen from this extract, I also included comments as 'kids learning and laughing', which lacked context and didn't make it into a theme at the next stage. This task essentially took most of my summer holiday in August 2023, but it was worth it to get a detailed idea of the data and what codes were emerging.

Figure 2 -Photo of the printout of notes from the software for all of the transcripts – these notes were colour-coded and then turned into codes.



A summary of the codes can be seen in the table below. Although the codes don't demonstrate progression from one to the other, they are essentially the codes for each year.

Table 4- Overview of the codes from the notes as shown in Figure 2.

Interview 1 – Codes	Interview 2 – Codes	Interview 3 – Codes
Inspire future generations	Importance of subject knowledge	Working as a mentor, trainee teachers or coaching colleagues.
Being proud of student progress.	Building commitment from students.	Too much of a focus on outcomes and not progress of students.
Positive relationships with colleagues	Positive relationships with colleagues.	Collaboration with colleagues
Positive behaviour of students is important.	Building positive relationships with students over time.	Building positive relationships with students over time.
Skills of compassion, communication, flexibility and consistency.	Would like career development	Would like career development
Workload can be addictive as no guidelines of what to do.	Sharing of professional tensions.	Sharing of professional tensions

Clear patterns were emerging regarding positive relationships with students and working with colleagues, so following phase 3 of RTA, I started to develop these codes into themes. Multiple codes should share a similar underlying concept, and it is up to the researcher to actively construe the relationship among the different codes and determine how this relationship may inform the narrative of a given theme (Finlay, 2021). At this stage, I then started to refer to the notes I had written after putting notes into the software to see if any of the ideas were linking together, which could become themes as outlined in Phase 4 of RTA.

Figure 3 – My reflections after listening to the transcripts for Year 1 and making notes in the software.

- The importance of positive relationships with the students appears to be key in what the teachers are developing and what they value and two of them mention the light bulb moment with students and other explain that seeing the students make progress is what makes them happy and this adds to the level of commitment that the teachers have which is a key part of self-efficacy although I didn't ask about self-efficacy in Year 1 questions.
- They also flag up the emotions involved in teaching and how you have to learn to leave things at the door.
- Workload is mentioned regularly and that it can become addictive as there is no guidance about how much to do and when. One teacher says that she would not have gone into teaching if she had known as there is an insane workload.
- Most of them had an inspirational teacher and one of them was inspired by their sister who became a teacher and one of them was inspired by BREXIT as this is what drove her to teach languages to help students develop a wider knowledge of other languages and cultures.
- Relationships with colleagues is mentioned by six of the teachers' -mentioned relationships with colleagues although not always positive and that has taken some adjustment.
- Lack of communication with SLT and lack of positivity from SLT is referred to at this early stage by the teachers.

Based on these reflections, moving into Phase 4 of RTA, two themes were easy to identify, which were the relationships with colleagues and students. However, within those themes, when undertaking the analysis, the sub-theme is positive relationships and negative relationships with students and colleagues. Part of the development of these themes was to make sure that there was enough meaningful data for the theme and that it was not too wide-ranging (Finlay, 2021). For example, although workload was a code in Year 1, it did not avoid contractions in academic work turning into a theme, as there was not enough data as it was not mentioned in any significant way (by more than half of the participants) for the next two years. The same was noted with 'subject knowledge' as it

was mentioned by two of the participants quite regularly, who ended up teaching in the same school in their third year. However, I didn't want to ignore these, so I put them under 'Context' as it did appear that there was a discrepancy about workload or clear links between these codes, depending on the types of schools that the ECTs taught at.

Defining the themes and sub-themes in Phase 5 of RTA required me to ensure that each theme captured a distinct and meaningful pattern in the data that was not better represented by another theme, thereby maintaining conceptual clarity and avoiding overlap (Finlay, 2021). At this point, I put extracts of data in a spreadsheet under initial themes see Figure 4 and although this gave me access relatively quickly to minute details of the data, the names of the tabs on the spreadsheet did not end up being themes, as there was not enough data under each of the tabs to justify a theme. These initial themes are essentially descriptors; they are not creative, whilst also communicating an important aspect of the theme (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Figure 4 – Overview of initial themes to the spreadsheet



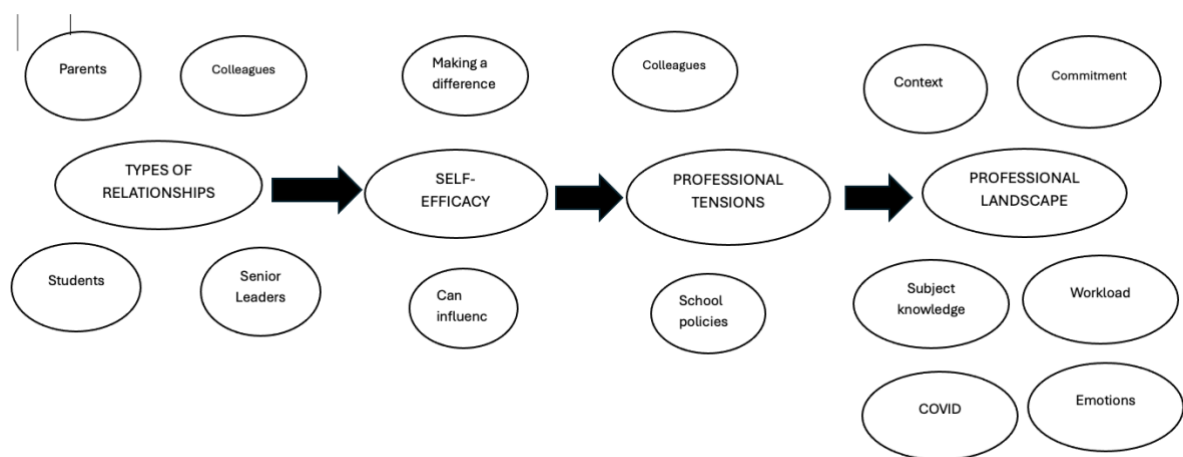
As part of phase 5, it was at this point that I had to review the codes and the initial themes and make sure that the names of the themes were concise, memorable and informative (Finlay, 2021, p. 1408). The themes I created in Table 5.

Table 5 – Concise Informative Themes

Themes	
Types of relationships	Professional tensions
Self-efficacy	Professional landscape

This is a thematic map demonstrating how the initial themes and the final themes were collated. See Figure 5 below.

Figure 5 – Final themes with links to initial themes



These final themes indicate how the initial themes supported by the coding were moved into the final theme headings. In the sixth and final phase of RTA, it is posited by Braun and Clarke (2022) that I establish the order of the themes in which they will be reported. The order of the themes is determined by my research questions, and I have included two to exemplify the point. RQ1- What key experiences and events do early career teachers identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity? RQ2 – What role does building informal and formal networks play in the development of a professional identity of early career teachers?

A significant limitation of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is the time-intensive nature of the process, particularly when working with a large volume of qualitative data. This was evident in my study, where I analysed 27 interviews, each lasting approximately two

hours. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2019), RTA requires deep, iterative engagement with the data, which can be especially demanding in longitudinal or large-scale projects. Similarly, Nowell et al. (2017) highlight that ensuring rigour and trustworthiness in thematic analysis involves prolonged immersion and detailed coding, which is inherently time-consuming. Verifying the accuracy of transcripts and coding took approximately four hours per transcript, amounting to an intensive workload alongside my full-time job. Furthermore, the interpretative phase, described as ‘the slow wheel of interpretation’ (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 272), required deliberate reflection to move beyond basic data description. This involved mapping connections between codes and generating themes that captured the complexity of the data across all interviews.

Although undertaking the analysis during the summer of 2023 allowed for consistency in theme development, it felt overwhelming and required sustained focus over an extended period. On reflection, coding the data incrementally after each interview round in June 2021, February 2022, and February 2023 might have lessened the workload. However, this approach could have shaped subsequent interview questions, as preliminary themes might have influenced the areas I chose to explore in later interviews. Recognising that I bring subjectivity to my research, I returned to the data repeatedly to ensure that the themes I developed were grounded in participants’ repeated expressions and reflective of their meanings, rather than being overly shaped by my own interpretations.

Rather than beginning with a predetermined coding frame, I initially worked inductively from the data before revisiting the research questions and theoretical concepts to refine and interrogate the emerging patterns. This recursive approach, moving between codes, theoretical lenses (self-efficacy and self-determination), and the research questions, helped to maintain analytic integrity and ensured that themes reflected shared meanings across the data set rather than isolated or idiosyncratic accounts (Braun and Clarke, 2022). There were some interesting codes which emerged, which were COVID and also the impact of having a baby as an ECT. However, having a baby only applied to Susie and issues about COVID were not only mentioned by two or three of the participants so although these would have been interesting codes which could have developed into

topical and engaging themes I have not identified them due to the lack of consistent data and they were not the aims of my research (Rogers-Shaw et al, 2021).

In keeping with the reflexive nature of RTA, I interpreted the data through the dual lenses of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), both of which shaped how I understood participants' experiences across the three years. For example, instances where participants expressed increased confidence about their impact on students' learning were analysed as indicators of mastery experiences, a key source of self-efficacy. Similarly, when participants spoke about feeling restricted by school policies or tensions with colleagues, these moments were interpreted as threats to their sense of autonomy and relatedness, both central to self-determination theory. These theoretical concepts were instrumental in assisting me to make sense of how professional identity was negotiated in relation to institutional constraints, mentoring relationships, and personal values, which were key themes emerging from the data.

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was an appropriate method of data analysis for this research because it aligns with the study's narrative inquiry approach and its focus on the evolving professional identity of ECTs. Given that the research explores personal experiences and meaning-making, RTA provides the flexibility to capture the complexity and depth of participants' stories while allowing for an iterative, interpretative engagement with the data. This approach supports a constructivist understanding of identity formation, recognising that meaning is co-constructed through interactions and reflections. This reflexive, interpretative stance also shapes how I articulate the study's limits: rather than claiming statistical generalisability, I specify the boundary conditions under which the analysis holds and offer the findings for analytical and theoretical transfer.

4.10 Limitations of this Study

This study aimed to understand processes of professional identity construction rather than to estimate prevalence or causal effects. The small, purposive sample and the specific school and regional contexts limit claims of generalisability. In line with qualitative standards, the findings are offered for transferability: readers are provided

with thick description and an explicit account of context so they can judge the fit to their settings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Geertz, 1973).

The three-year window captured early formation, not later consolidation, of identity. Identity trajectories may develop differently beyond the early career phase; longer-term longitudinal work would be valuable. School-level policy enactment and leadership changes during the fieldwork period may also have shaped experiences in ways that are not representative elsewhere (Maxwell, 2013).

Data were generated through repeated narrative interviews rather than classroom observation or artefact analysis. This reliance on self-reported accounts can be affected by recall and social desirability. I mitigated this through iterative interviewing over three rounds, an audit trail of decisions, and negative case analysis to seek and account for disconfirming evidence (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles, Huberman and Saldaña, 2014; Creswell and Poth, 2018).

To support dependability and confirmability, I document the analytic pathway from codes to themes, provide examples of theme development, and report boundary conditions where patterns did not converge. For example, workload and COVID were codes where patterns did not emerge. These boundaries specify where the claims are most likely to hold and where caution is warranted (Yin, 2014). Taken together, these limitations do not undermine the central contribution. They delimit scope and support reasoned transfer of insights to settings with similar conditions.

4.11 Concluding Comments for this Chapter

This methodology chapter has outlined the philosophical, theoretical, and practical foundations of this study, demonstrating the coherence between its constructivist paradigm, narrative inquiry approach, and the methods of data collection and analysis. The decision to employ narrative inquiry was rooted in the need to capture the lived experiences of ECTs as they construct and negotiate their professional identities within relational, temporal, and institutional contexts. Semi-structured interviews provided the flexibility to explore participants' evolving perspectives while fostering trust and rapport, essential to eliciting authentic narratives. Reflexive thematic analysis was chosen as the analytical approach to allow for an in-depth, iterative engagement with the data, enabling

the identification of key themes that directly address the research questions. Ethical considerations, including relational ethics and researcher positionality, were central to ensuring the integrity of the study, mitigating power imbalances, and upholding the voices of participants. Taken together, these methodological choices support the overarching aim of this research: to deepen understanding of how ECTs establish and develop their professional identities in the first three years of their careers. By aligning the research design with the complexity of professional identity formation, this study ensures that its findings, discussed next, will offer meaningful contributions to both academic discourse and educational practice, providing valuable insights into the challenges and strategies that shape the early career teacher experience.

Each findings chapter begins with a brief pen portrait of the participants whose narrative forms the focus of the chapter. The portraits provide a concise overview of the participant's reasons for becoming a teacher, their teaching context and key moments in their early career journey. The positioning of the pen portraits as the start of each of the four findings chapters helps to preserve the integrity of their narrative and allows for a more situated and relational understanding of the identity-building experiences which are explored in each chapter.

Having outlined the methodological approach and the rationale for using narrative inquiry, the next chapter turns to the first research question, examining which experiences of key experiences and events early career teachers identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity.

Chapter 5 - What key experiences and events do early career teachers identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity? (RQ1)

This chapter begins with pen portraits of four participants, Catherine, Sally, Susie and Alice. These portraits are particularly included to help illustrate how pivotal experiences, whether personal, relational or contextual shaped their professional identities in distinctive ways. Each portrait captures not only individual trajectories into teaching but also the moments that proved transformative in their early careers. Taken together, these narratives highlight the interplay of personal motivation, school culture and professional opportunity, providing a foundation for the analysis that follows.

Catherine – Pen Portrait

Catherine holds a subject leader role, having introduced the teaching of a new language in her school, alongside a pastoral position during the three years of this study. She teaches at what she describes as a ‘very nice school’ (Interview 1).

Her decision to become a teacher was sparked by a specific political and social moment, Brexit. She explains:

‘I didn’t really think about teaching, but then Brexit came along. I just want to inspire the next generation and make them aware of their preconceptions and assumptions about people like me. They’re looking at me; I sound English, but I’m not English. And I have got a whole new background; it’s a whole new part of me, a whole culture that they don’t know about. I mean, especially in England, I think people are very closed off to certain cultures and certain experiences. So, it’s nice to be able to share that with them’ (Interview 1).

This account reveals a pivotal experience where a national political event triggered a values-driven commitment to education, rooted in cultural representation and social purpose.

Catherine describes a positive day as ‘where I feel like my students have had fun and learnt something’ (Interview 1). This pleasure in seeing students develop is still important for Catherine in the third year of this study, as she says, ‘What excites me is seeing students learn something and remember something for the next lesson’ (Interview 3). She values the importance of building relationships with students, and she says there are ‘so

many kids I have a connection with; they know that I care, and they can come and talk to me if they need to' (Interview 1).

Catherine describes her school as a 'good' one with 'a lot of good colleagues, and the kids are normally pretty decent' (Interview 3). She explains that she feels that she can go to any member of staff for support, as everyone is helpful, and for Catherine, the biggest positive about her school is actually the staff, as they are 'really, really great' (Interview 3).

She recalls that while her initial motivation was shaped by her desire to broaden students' worldviews, her early classroom experiences also highlighted practical barriers, such as limited parental support for languages.

'I can now see the barriers: if parents do not support language development, the children will naturally listen to their parents more than to us. There is nothing more important than when you see kids who are doing so well, and they pick it up, and they're excited about it. It just makes you quite proud to be able to be there and teach them and actually see them grow through it and see them progress; it's just nice to see' (Interview 1).

Catherine recognises that she is at a career crossroads. She is drawn to the pastoral side of her role, valuing the deeper connections it allows with students, yet is aware of the emotional toll:

'I like the pastoral side of it, where I get to speak to the kids and really sort of get to know them. However, I don't know if I can do that for a very long time, as it's something that just takes a lot out of you. I think that a head of department role seems to be more technical, as you have to get stuff done. You've got to sign students up for GCSEs or whatever, but it seems less stressful in an emotional way. I do worry how much it's going to take out of me to carry on doing the pastoral side. Knowing the students' safeguarding side and knowing their backgrounds and their stories and hearing stuff that they have to go through, I have struggled to find that kind of detachment' (Interview 3).

Catherine's story illustrates how pivotal experiences, whether rooted in personal values or shaped by the demands of the role, can act as defining moments in the construction of professional identity. Her decision to enter teaching in response to Brexit reflects the influence of broader socio-political events on career motivation, while her pastoral responsibilities demonstrate how role-based experiences can simultaneously deepen professional purpose and challenge emotional resilience. These experiences connect directly to the themes explored in this chapter, where identity is continually negotiated through a combination of personal convictions, contextual realities, and the relational work of teaching.

Sally- Pen Portrait

Sally teaches music at a large comprehensive school and was promoted to second in the performing arts department at the end of her first year, taking on responsibility for managing peripatetic provision and line-managing two colleagues. Her decision to enter teaching was rooted in her parents being involved in education,

‘From really early on, I was around teachers a lot... I knew that teachers are like real human people; they had a side to them beyond the classroom, so that definitely played an influence. It didn't seem like an alien thing at all; it actually seemed like normal’ (Interview 2).

Her mother and a former teacher served as role models, shaping her early perceptions of what it meant to be an educator. A joint honours degree in music and education deepened her understanding of the psychological and social aspects of teaching, and after two years in university outreach work, she decided it was time to apply her theoretical knowledge in practice:

‘Music was the thing I wanted to do... something I cared about so much, and I'd really enjoy getting that kind of passion across to the students’ (Interview 2).

Sally's professional identity is grounded in this combination of subject passion and a commitment to young people's growth. She sees teaching as valuable and rewarding work, aligning with her self-perception as someone able to make a positive impact:

‘I enjoy giving a lot of time and thought to how I can help young people progress and enjoy music in particular but learning in general’ (Interview 1).

In leadership, she has navigated the complexities of a part-time department, recognising the relational challenges of flexible working patterns and the need to adapt communication and management approaches. By her third year, her subject enthusiasm remained strong, alongside a desire to shape curriculum at a departmental level:

‘It’s nice that I have been able to develop those skills within a really supportive department... they just kind of welcome all my suggestions’ (Interview 3).

From a self-determination theory perspective, Sally’s journey reflects strong relatedness through early immersion in education, competence developed via subject mastery and leadership experience, and autonomy in setting career goals that align with her values. Her early promotion provided mastery experiences that strengthened self-efficacy, while the supportive departmental culture reinforced her confidence and authenticity as a leader-in-development. Her narrative shows how professional identity in the early career stage is not only shaped by formal advancement but by the alignment of role, subject passion, and supportive relationships that sustain motivation and purpose.

Susie – Pen Portrait

Susie is an art teacher at a small coastal school. She was on maternity leave from December 2021 to December 2022 and was interviewed in the first and third years of this study. Upon returning three days a week, she took on the role of head of KS3 Art, although, as she notes, ‘I don’t get paid for it’ (Interview 3).

Educated abroad, Susie was inspired by an art teacher who supported her during a difficult home life:

‘He was the only teacher who actually spoke to me normally, and because I liked art so much. He frequently helped me, organised trips, and led art clubs and similar activities. He would just help you get a better grade’ (Interview 1).

This early experience shaped her motivation to become a teacher:

‘A stable job, and I’d be doing something that I love as well, and I wanted to get the kids to get the grades. My sister is at my old school now, and she has the same

problems, and I want to be the teacher who helps students rather than just write them off' (Interview 1).

Susie explains that she is happy for her Year 9 and GCSE students to stay with her at break and lunchtime, as 'I can help them further, and then they will have less work to do at home, and then their grades will get better' (Interview 1). For Susie, satisfaction in her role is when a student asks if they can take a photograph of what they have done in the lesson, so if I get that in a lesson, then I am happy' (Interview 1), as she knows that the student is proud of their work and the effort, they have put in. Towards the end of her first year in teaching, Susie says about her teaching role, 'I am enjoying it' (Interview 1).

Susie found the return to teaching difficult after her maternity leave, as she felt that she 'wasn't getting recognised for anything I was doing.' She struggled with

'The kids that I'm trying to really help are getting pulled out of lessons because of interventions; they are always pulled out of art and photography because it is deemed as, like, the lesser subject in the school. Students are getting pulled out of lessons, and we are still expected to get the grade. For English, maths and science, they have five lessons a week, and we have one, and they remove students, and then SLT say to us, 'Why haven't you got the grades?' (Interview 3).

These experiences have caused her to question her future in teaching:

'I don't see it being positive, as I love my job, but yes, it has changed a lot; there's no love there. As before, it was very friendly, but it doesn't feel like a family type of thing' (Interview 3).

Susie's professional identity is rooted in the value she places on relational care and creative learning, but her return from leave marked a pivotal point where systemic devaluation of the arts and rigid policy practices undermined her autonomy, recognition, and self-efficacy. This tension between her enduring passion for art education and the constraints of her school's priorities makes her narrative highly relevant to RQ1, as it highlights how key moments, both affirming and disillusioning, can shape identity trajectories in the early years of teaching.

Alice – Pen Portrait

Alice taught modern foreign languages in two schools during the three years of this research, moving after her first year, a decision she describes as ‘the right one for me’ (Interview 3). A native French speaker who also speaks Spanish and German, Alice originally planned to teach English in France but relocated to England to perfect my English, ‘to be the best teacher that I could be for my future students’ (Interview 2).

Her trajectory into teaching was strongly shaped by her English teacher in France, whose demanding yet inspiring approach made her ‘work so hard because I wanted to follow him’ (Interview 2). This teacher has been a continuing mentor, guiding her from pupil to qualified teacher, reinforcing Alice’s belief in the value of long-term, trust-based professional relationships.

Although deeply committed to her subject, Alice sees her role as extended beyond language teaching:

‘I do feel that I make more of a difference in terms of educating my students as people... I do feel that my role is more through the idea of communicating of trying to do your best, rather than making skilled linguists out of them’ (Interview 2).

This values-based approach reflects an identity grounded in communication, care, and human connection, supported by a strong sense of relatedness and autonomy.

However, in her first school, where she had to teach German, she wasn’t confident at all, and there was not a culture of sharing lessons, so she explains, ‘I was planning every night until 9-10 pm, over two languages. It was just madness’ (Interview 2). She explains that the impact this had on her as

‘I was worrying myself sick and crying every night and crying in the car in the morning before going in and really kicking myself to get out of the car’ (Interview 2).

She describes her first school as having a culture of ‘isolation rooms, mobile patrol and use of walkie-talkies’, (Interview 2) and she explains that it was ‘made with the best intentions; it was lovely, but it wasn’t the right time, as the students needed more structure’ (Interview 2). In addition, due to the layout of the rooms in the department,

Alice felt ‘stuck with my classes’. I couldn’t send them outside because they would disturb the class next door, so I was stuck with them literally in my class (Interview 2). In Alice’s view, ‘it meant that throughout the year, behaviour became increasingly worse, and what I found was there was no accountability, so all the onus was on the teachers’ (Interview 2). As a result, ‘I was ending up giving all my lunchtimes for detentions and sometimes even having to skip lunch because it was detention after detention, and I couldn’t keep it up.’ (Interview 2). Alice noted the impact that this kind of environment had on staff at her first school, as she describes there being a ‘fracture between a distrusted senior leadership team and the teaching team, which explained the mass exodus of colleagues who left when I left’ (Interview 2).

This culture contrasts with Alice’s second school, which she describes as having a strong leadership team, and she feels supported and listened to. She also explains that in her school, she has a lot of influence over the curriculum for French, which is ‘nice to be trusted with this kind of thing’ (Interview 3). She also provides examples of how resources are shared, printing is done for each other, and registers are taken if she is not there, and she reflects

‘It’s just lovely to feel that we’re not alone and it helps make the job more bearable, day to day, knowing that somebody has got your back’ (Interview 3).

Alice’s experiences in two contrasting schools had a profound impact on her self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Her first school was characterised by isolation, inconsistent behaviour management, and strained staff–leadership relations, leading to burnout and a ‘mass exodus’ of colleagues (Interview 2). By contrast, her current school fosters collegiality and visible, supportive leadership, conditions she sees as essential to teacher retention and professional growth. Looking ahead, Alice aspires to become a subject leader for French, motivated by the opportunity to design an inspiring curriculum and manage a small department. This ambition reflects her increasing confidence in her pedagogical expertise and leadership potential. Alice’s story is relevant to this chapter because it illustrates how pivotal professional relationships, contrasting school cultures, and career aspirations interact to shape an early career teacher’s identity. Her journey shows how positive mentoring, supportive contexts, and autonomy in practice can

strengthen self-efficacy, while unsupportive environments can act as turning points that redirect career trajectories.

5.1 Introduction

Pivotal experiences are the building blocks and turning points of professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004). Identity is not only psychological but also relational and context-sensitive, negotiated across settings and time (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Coldron and Smith, 1999). Often described as ‘key moments’ or ‘critical incidents’, they are central to sense-making, influence teachers’ emotional engagement and agency, shape personal narratives and professional continuity, and are deeply embedded in social and educational contexts (Pillen et al., 2013). Pivotal experiences provide the core material teachers draw upon as they interpret and reinterpret what it means to be a teacher (Gu, 2023). These moments, whether positive or negative, are subject to deep reflection, enabling teachers to shape their beliefs, values, and self-perceptions (Beijaard, Koopman, and Schellings, 2022).

The work of identity formation for the ECTs in this study takes place within broader institutional and policy contexts that frame expectations for support and development. In England, frameworks such as the ECF and ITTECF outline structured approaches to early career progression. While this study does not evaluate these frameworks directly, the narratives in this chapter illustrate how school cultures, interpersonal relationships, and personal circumstances intersect within these wider contexts to influence emerging professional identities.

This chapter addresses the key experiences and events which ECTs identify as pivotal in shaping their professional identity. For many ECTs, initial school experiences, powerful moments during teacher education, or challenging situations in early teaching become reference points for self-understanding and future actions. This ongoing meaning-making reinforces both the continuity and the change within professional identity, helping teachers to answer the essential questions: ‘Who am I as a teacher?’ and ‘What kind of teacher do I want to be?’ (Chen et al., 2023). These questions are worked out through agency in context, where personal resources meet structural conditions (Priestley, Biesta and Robinson, 2016; Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998).

5.2 Importance of subject expertise within the context of a school (*contextual domain*)

For secondary teachers, the subject they teach is a primary source of professional identity (Beijaard, 1995). Identity often blends subject, didactical and pedagogical dimensions, which shift with experience and context (Beijaard, Meijer and Verloop, 2004). Relationships with colleagues who teach the same subject are especially important, as these conditions can reinforce the teacher's identity and provide validation or support (Beijaard, 1995). Across participants, there was a clear sense that deep engagement with subject content not only builds credibility with students but also allows teachers to adapt lessons responsively and locate personal meaning in their work:

'Subject knowledge is really important' (Susie, Interview 1).

'I think definitely you need excellent subject knowledge in your area' (Mandy, Interview 1).

'I suppose teaching and teaching PE in particular, I hold particular, you know, I want to make sure that is definitely immaculate' (James, Interview 1).

'My subject knowledge is so much more rounded and extensive, and I can follow down little rabbit holes or bring something into it, to make it come alive at the drop of a hat' (Tanya, Interview 1).

Alice's account offers a parallel example. As her confidence has grown, she explains:

'I've learnt a lot more Spanish, but also in my French, I've learnt how to make it more relatable, get away from the textbook and build in the cultural aspects and pique the students' interest' (Alice, Interview 2).

Subject expertise develops socially in departments and communities of practice; school culture shapes how far that expertise can grow (Flores and Day, 2006). These moments, in which teachers draw on and expand their subject expertise, meet the needs of efficacy for instruction and classroom management which matters most for early confidence (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2014). For ECTs, such experiences are pivotal in shaping professional identity, embedding the confidence and independence that can sustain them through future challenges.

Recognition by colleagues is part of teachers' 'professional self-understanding' and buffers vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 2005, 2019). James' experience (Pen Portrait, Chapter 6) highlights the protective role of professional respect. Despite limited facilities, he notes,

'Most of the school is supportive of my subject; it doesn't really get undermined. On the whole, most people either value PE or are respectful enough not to undermine it in a professional capacity' (James, Interview 2).

Collegial recognition strengthens his relatedness and safeguards his self-efficacy, showing how peer validation can offset structural limitations.

When subjects are symbolically downgraded, teachers' identity and agency contract (Hargreaves, 2012). Susie's account illustrates the damage caused when a subject is undervalued. As an art teacher, she describes students being routinely withdrawn from her lessons for core subject interventions such as English, maths and science.

'Because of interventions, students are always pulled out of art and photography. Just because they are seen and deemed as the lesser subject in the school. Students are getting pulled out of lessons, and we're still expected to get the grades' (Interview 3).

This marginalisation erodes her competence and autonomy, diminishing her belief in her ability to effect change, particularly with more vulnerable learners. Her frustration reflects broader debates in the literature about how subject hierarchies within schools interact with national development frameworks. While current policy emphasises subject knowledge and expertise, participants' narratives suggest that the lived experience of disciplinary recognition varies considerably across contexts.

Similarly, Isaac reports little opportunity to extend his subject knowledge:

'My subject knowledge hasn't really got any better since my training year. I don't get tested where I work; they're not really asking anything particularly extensive' (Interview 2).

The absence of challenge prevents mastery experiences, weakens competence, and risks a narrowing of identity to the routine delivery of content rather than the development

of expertise. These accounts underline a tension in current national frameworks. While ECF and ITTECF emphasise subject knowledge, they often treat it as a static competency rather than evolving with context and collegial work. These frameworks risk overlooking the disciplinary nuances and relational conditions that allow expertise to flourish. A more responsive approach would protect time for collaborative planning, peer observation, and mentor flexibility, recognising the centrality of disciplinary identity to teaching.

Subject knowledge, however, is not enacted in isolation. Relationships with colleagues, mentors, and students develop, validate, and sustain this expertise. Audrey (Pen Portrait, Chapter 7) reflects,

‘The first year I spent building relationships and now this year, all my growth has actually been looking at students’ books and adapting my teaching and seeing something that didn’t work last time and changing it’ (Interview 2).

Tanya values ‘being that expert in the room for the kids’ (Interview 2), while Alice points to the impact of departmental collaboration.

‘We are creating a bank of resources, and I feel that this is a massive help for me in Spanish, because I can then look at the lesson beforehand and look up words that I don’t know and make it my own as well’ (Interview 3).

These examples show that the competence underpinning self-efficacy and self-determination is both internally driven and socially constructed. Supportive departmental cultures foster recognition, trust, and the shared development of expertise, key ingredients in shaping a sustainable professional identity.

Finally, subject expertise is closely linked to the values teachers bring to their work. Brooks (2016) describes these values as a ‘professional compass’ (p. 2), helping teachers navigate practice, policy reform, and school contexts. Such ‘professional compasses’ link to pedagogical tact, the in-the-moment judgement that can’t be reduced to checklists (van Manen, 1995). Subject identity is therefore not only about knowledge but also about the moral and ethical dimensions of teaching, influencing how teachers define what matters and how they enact their roles (Brooks, 2016). A strong disciplinary identity underpins autonomy, the ability to act purposefully, make professional

judgements, and adapt to changing educational landscapes (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009).

Yet subject expertise alone was not enough to sustain identity. For participants, being seen as a 'good teacher' by colleagues, leaders, and students, and the quality of the relationships underpinning that recognition, was just as important in reinforcing competence and belonging. The next section explores this relational validation.

5.3 Being seen as a good teacher: how relationships shape competence and identity *(relational domain)*

The narratives consistently emphasised the significance of receiving recognition from others, colleagues, students, and school leaders as capable and effective. This recognition was embedded in everyday interactions and pivotal moments, like a colleague seeking advice, a student expressing appreciation, or senior leaders offering feedback. Such moments acted as affirmations, reinforcing participants' emerging sense of competence and shaping their developing professional identities. As Kelchtermans (2005) observes, teachers' self-understanding is constructed dialogically, shaped by how they are perceived and treated in their professional environment. Identity is co-authored through interactions with students, colleagues and leaders (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). For ECTs, this validation often served as a turning point, stabilising identities during a period marked by uncertainty and change. Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) similarly emphasise that identity is socially negotiated and forged through the interactions teachers have across different contexts.

Mandy reflected on the impact of leadership recognition.

'I get quite a lot of nice feedback from my learning walks and when you are putting the effort into that planning, for someone to come in and say "I really liked how you gave feedback on that idea," it makes you feel noticed for the hard work you're putting in; it's being appreciated' (Mandy, Interview 3).

Such recognition strengthens teachers' sense of competence and moderates workload strain (Day and Gu, 2010). Audrey offers a similar example, recalling how colleagues appreciated the resources she had developed:

‘Let’s scrap that other unit and make your unit longer, because the kids really enjoyed looking at it’ (Audrey, Interview 3).

In both cases, recognition affirmed their subject expertise and pedagogical contribution, reinforcing their sense of professional worth.

Classroom emotions are shaped by students as well as teachers, creating ‘emotional geographies’ that influence identity (Hargreaves, 2001, 2012). Feedback from students emerged as an equally powerful source of affirmation, shaping participants’ perceptions of their competence. Students, as O’Connor (2008) notes, actively shape the emotional and relational climate of the classroom, influencing how teachers experience their work. When students show curiosity, express enjoyment, or voice appreciation, it creates a relational feedback loop that confirms teachers are making a difference, strengthening both competence and self-efficacy.

Tanya’s experience illustrates this shift powerfully. Initially unsure about working with teenagers, she recalled:

‘It was the thing that I queried the most. Do I really? Am I really going to want to spend that much time with teenagers? It was the one that was the unknown for me’ (Tanya, Interview 1).

Over time, she found meaning in precisely these relationships:

‘Those interactions are where you can see that you’re leaving little droplets in these children’s lives that help boost their confidence or just make a difference’ (Tanya, Interview 2).

These practices build relational resilience in the induction phase (Le Cornu, 2013). By her third year, Tanya’s definition of effectiveness has shifted:

‘I think what I’ve realised is that sometimes it’s just about being constant in their lives as well. You know, it’s that, for a lot of them, it’s just knowing that you’re, you’re there and you’ll hold space with them and that you’ll show up’ (Tanya, Interview 3).

Competence is experienced not just in planned lessons or observed outcomes, but in the relational trust built through everyday interactions with students. These bonds affirm a teacher's purpose and effectiveness in deeply human ways, suggesting that the emotional and interpersonal landscape of teaching is inseparable from professional growth and identity formation.

Authentic, value-consistent work is a known antidote to performativity pressures (Day and Kington, 2008). Audrey's narrative similarly centres on relational consistency and authenticity. She recalled a student's reaction to her acknowledging Eid:

'She said to me, "Miss, you are the only teacher who has acknowledged it and asked me about it. And yeah, it's just knowing I am making a difference' (Audrey, Interview 1).

This moment underscores the relational dimensions of competence, which are recognised not just for instructional skill but also for care and attentiveness. Audrey consciously resists performative models of teaching that prioritise measurable outputs over relational depth (Ball, 2003; Mockler, 2020), framing her practice as authentic and human:

'When you look at them both, there's not much difference between who I am as a teacher and who I portray myself to be in front of kids and who I am out of the classroom, so I think it is about being authentic' (Interview 2).

By her third year, she viewed relational investment as her most powerful behavioural tool:

'You can give as many detentions as you want. But unless the kids see that you're invested and you want to be there, you will never have them, and that's why I have them, because they see the passion they see that I show up every day, they see that I give the same energy every day. I don't come in a mood. I don't come in like that. Whatever is going on I start you know it's the same. It's the same me and you know, I tell them about my life and you always have giggles about like my four year old has had a tantrum about and you know, they know that I'm obsessed with sort of Pokemon and they know that like you know I always do a little checkup on the school's football like tonight today before I go in tomorrow. 'Unlucky for your team,

' and they just feel that I care, that's the biggest behavioural tool you can have. The kids don't feel that you care, they know, they don't want they are to gonna give you the respect either, and I don't take it for granted.... Because likely, it's not just about talking to them, because they're going to see that as fake but you can't just go all of a sudden you're on at them and then the next minute you go, oh, so what, you know what sort of, you know, talking about something to get that connection, because that they're gonna see that through is not authentic either.. I definitely have a different approach to behaviour than most of them in school. It's a lot harder. I think it's harder being mean, I think it's harder to stand out in the classroom, shout and yell at the kids' (Interview 3).

Audrey's story shows that teacher competence is not simply about instructional technique or policy-aligned standards but about relational integrity, being emotionally available, consistent, and human in the classroom. Her approach challenges narrow, performative interpretations of professional identity and reframes competence as something co-constructed with students, rooted in trust, care, and everyday presence. Her narrative sits alongside ongoing scholarly debates about whether structured professional development frameworks sufficiently capture the relational and emotional dimensions of teaching. These questions are present within discussions of the ECF and ITTECF, although this study does not seek to adjudicate their design.

Taken together, these narratives demonstrate that competence for ECTs is deeply relational, co-constructed through trust, recognition, and authentic interaction. Both self-determination theory and self-efficacy theory illuminate how these experiences sustain motivation and identity: competence is strengthened when teachers feel effective in ways that matter to them, and when that effectiveness is affirmed by others. Current policy frameworks, with their focus on measurable, observable behaviours, risk narrowing this understanding, undervaluing the professional judgement and 'pedagogical tact' (van Manen, 1995) that emerge from the lived, relational complexity of the classroom. Supporting sustainable professional identity requires recognising these relational dimensions as central to what it means to be a good teacher. When recognition and trust are present, identity moves from defensive to generative (Flores and Day, 2006; Day and Gu, 2010).

While recognition within everyday classroom and collegial interactions was vital, professional identity was also shaped by moments when teachers were invited to take on formal leadership roles. For some, these opportunities strengthened their confidence and sense of influence; for others, they created tensions between personal values and institutional expectations. The following section explores how promotion and leadership shaped, and at times tested, early career professional identity.

5.4 Promotion, Leadership and the Shaping of Professional Identity (*contextual and relational domains*)

Leadership pathways are often framed around generic competencies and managerial responsibilities, which may conflict with teachers' intrinsic motivations or subject-based commitments (Gunter, 2001; Fitzgerald, 2009). For some, moving into leadership enables a broader sense of contribution and influence, aligning with their values and enhancing their identity as change-makers (Day and Gu, 2010). However, for others, promotion can create a sense of dissonance, particularly when it distances them from classroom practice or subject specialism (Kelchtermans, 2005). This tension reflects a wider concern in educational policy and practice: the assumption that leadership is the natural or preferred route for career progression, rather than one of several valid professional trajectories (Wilkins, 2011). Crucially, how schools frame and support promotion, whether as a top-down managerial step or as a meaningful extension of a teacher's existing professional identity, can either strengthen or destabilise their sense of authenticity and purpose in the role. Some of the research participants were promoted during the three-year study; they were Catherine, Sally, James and Isaac. These experiences affected their professional identity in various ways.

5.4.1 Catherine's Experience

Catherine was promoted to a pastoral role as head of the year during her second year of teaching. Initially, she declined, citing the absence of protected non-contact time, leaving her vulnerable to being used for class cover, and the fact that 'the money was really quite rubbish' (Interview 3). When a colleague who had taken the role fell seriously ill, Catherine was asked to step in temporarily. When it became clear this colleague would not return, she was approached again but refused, explaining, 'I couldn't see that much had changed since the last time, so I said no' (Interview 3).

The school advertised internally, but no one applied, describing it as ‘actually a really hard role’ (Interview 3). On the last day of the autumn term, the headteacher again asked her to take it on:

‘You’re asking me on the last day of term, at the last possible moment, to do it because no one else is... it literally feels like I am the last resort... ‘It’s really disrespectful’ (Interview 3).

Catherine told the head she would think about it over the break. Ultimately, Catherine accepted the offer, not out of professional aspiration but for financial reasons:

‘I’m trying to get a house... maybe I should do it and try and get a bit more money to save up for a deposit. So, that’s the only reason I did it’ (Interview 3).

By the summer term, she admitted the role was ‘hard’ but noted that her stance had prompted changes: a salary increase for all heads of year and protected free periods to carry out pastoral work. This showed her that leadership could be leveraged to improve structural conditions: ‘They realised they actually could do something about it.’ (Interview 3). When she accepted for financial reasons, this created an identity tension, what Day and Kington (2008) term ‘identity dissonance’, between personal circumstances and professional ideals. Agency is enacted with and against structures; even early-career teachers can shape conditions (Biesta and Tedder, 2007; Priestley et al., 2016). Yet, the resulting structural improvements show that even ECTs can influence workplace conditions when they assert their needs, aligning with Biesta and Tedder’s (2007) view of agency as enacted within both enabling and constraining contexts. However, her observation that ‘everyone else struggles as well’ highlights how broader institutional norms shape this agency. Where promotion is opaque, teachers may internalise systemic problems as personal failings (Kelchtermans, 2005). Catherine’s story reveals both the potential and the cost of early promotion: it can accelerate professional growth, but only when supported by fairness, clarity, and respect.

5.4.2 James’s Experience (Pen Portrait, Chapter 6)

At the start of his second year, James was promoted to PE subject co-ordinator for what he describes as ‘a small PE department’ (Interview 2). As the only PE specialist, he consciously avoided becoming ‘self-righteous by thinking that my view is always the best

one', recognising that 'the answer isn't always in my school, but it's somewhere' (Interview 2). Without a departmental community for dialogue, James relied on self-regulation and sought professional input beyond his immediate setting, a stance that reflects a developing identity valuing openness and collaboration (Kennedy, 2007). In the absence of subject peers, identity is sustained by external professional networks and leadership trust (Coppe et al., 2024; Day and Gu, 2010).

Coldron and Smith's (1999) perspective, which posits that identity shapes both internally and through one's position within institutional and social structures, aligns with this context. For James, the absence of subject-specific peers reinforced a more outward-looking, relational stance, where learning from others became essential to sustaining growth.

James explains:

'It's made me realise that although it is a small responsibility, I want more when I'm ready... I can't stay still... I would love to do some form of mentoring in my third year... I just don't want to be in the same role... with no extra challenges, as I would struggle with that' (Interview 2).

By his third year, he was 'leading one of our coaching groups' and felt he was 'starting to take a bit more of a middle leadership position... and I'm looking for it' (Interview 3). His headteacher's affirmation, 'I want you here; I want you as a big part of our team,' reinforced his motivation: 'I'm not settling as I am continuing to be challenged and there is support' (Interview 3). James's experience shows how a supportive and developmental school context can nurture a secure, positive professional identity in the early years. Recognition, challenge, and alignment between his aspirations and institutional trust strengthened his sense of belonging and professional worth (Day and Gu, 2010). This reduced the risk of identity dissonance by keeping personal values and institutional expectations in harmony.

As Coppe et al. (2024) suggest, professional identity flourishes when recognition and trust are sustained. James's narrative illustrates how ECTs, when supported by an enabling culture, can develop leadership aspirations without losing authenticity. His

motivation to 'not stay still' reflects a self-authored identity that is both aspirational and grounded in the relationships and opportunities his school provides.

5.4.3 Sally's Experience

Sally was promoted to second in a performing arts department at the end of her first year, taking on responsibility for managing peripatetic provision and line-managing two colleagues (Interview 2). She describes her head of department as part of her support network, yet acknowledges 'tricky' aspects of the role:

'I see that everyone's got personal values and reasons for teaching or ways in which they work. The differences in that can be tricky to manage... You can't expect everyone to view everything the same as you' (Interview 2).

Her department comprised six women, all working part-time between two and four days a week. This, she explains, can be 'quite a tricky thing to balance', particularly when colleagues miss key discussions:

'For someone to say something and you don't have a clue what they are talking about because it happened the day before when you weren't in, must be really challenging... It's made me understand how challenging flexible working can be' (Interview 2).

By the end of her third year, Sally reflected:

'I would really like to move towards a head of department position, but the role has got to be the right one... There were some points where I was kind of thinking whether I had done the right thing going for second in the department so early... But in reality, I'm really happy with what my role is... I don't really know what might happen, so I am happy with where I am' (Interview 3).

Sally's experience demonstrates how professional identity is shaped not only by formal leadership responsibilities but by the relational and structural conditions in which they are carried out. Flexible working, while beneficial for work-life balance, can disrupt continuity, shared planning, and collective identity (Putnam et al., 2013). Managing these conditions requires what Noddings (1984) calls an ethic of care: attentiveness, empathy, and adaptability. Her tempered ambition reflects what Eteläpelto et al. (2013) describe

as situated agency: shaping her trajectory through reflection and adaptation within a changing institutional landscape. Flexible work can fragment collective sense-making unless leaders curate routines for continuity (Putnam et al., 2013). Rather than following a rigid career ladder, she is negotiating leadership in a way that maintains authenticity. Sally's narrative challenges narrow, linear notions of career progression. It emphasises the value of leadership pathways that accommodate flexible working and foster inclusive, relationally sensitive models of early career leadership, particularly in feminised professions like teaching, where part-time roles are common but often overlooked in leadership design (DfE, 2023).

5.4.4. Isaac's Experience (Pen Portrait, Chapter 7)

At the end of his second year, Isaac was promoted to second in the department and, due to his head of science being on long-term sick leave, often acted as head of department.

'Three of us interviewed, and it was me against two very experienced teachers, and they decided to go with me, which was really, really amazing... So, I am now Head of Science some of the time; most of the time, it varies. So, that has been an interesting shift' (Interview 3).

He attributed a wider culture shift to a new headteacher 'determined to push the school toward outstanding' (Interview 3). His approach to the role was pragmatic:

'I seem to keep doing whatever I am asked to do, and everyone leaves me alone... I've been quite happy. It has been really strange to start observing other colleagues... to officially write it down in the correct way, I find it quite difficult... but otherwise, mostly fine, I guess' (Interview 3).

Isaac's trajectory contrasts with participants like James or Sally, whose leadership development was actively scaffolded. His leadership identity appears to be forming reactively, shaped more by institutional need than by personal aspiration or strategic planning. This reflects what Sachs (2005) terms a managerial identity, emerging when institutional demands override professional agency. Identity built mainly through task compliance can feel brittle without structured learning for the role (Kelchtermans, 2019). His uncertainty around judging others' teaching reflects the absence of targeted training

or mentorship, limiting opportunities for mastery experiences that build lasting efficacy. Viewed through the lens of agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Emirbayer and Mische, 1998), Isaac's story suggests practical agency, adapting to immediate demands, but without the reflective anchoring needed to consolidate his professional identity over time. Unlike Catherine, who resisted promotion under unfavourable conditions, Isaac does not actively negotiate the terms of his job, which may limit his ability to align leadership responsibilities with his values and long-term goals.

Taken together, these narratives challenge the policy assumption that leadership is the natural or inevitable route for career progression (Wilkins, 2011). While promotion can be identity-building when it is scaffolded, transparent, and aligned with personal values, it can equally be identity-distorting when it is rushed, under-resourced, or framed primarily as a managerial necessity. The experiences of Catherine and Sally highlight the importance of autonomy and values alignment; James's trajectory demonstrates the benefits of competence-building and relational trust; and Isaac's case underscores the risks when these conditions are absent.

For schools and systems, this suggests that leadership should be positioned as one of several credible professional pathways rather than the default marker of success. Promotion processes should make criteria and time allocations explicit, with non-contact time protected for new leaders to carry out their responsibilities effectively. ECTs stepping into leadership roles benefit from structured mentoring, training in key leadership tasks such as observation and feedback, and opportunities to connect with peer networks beyond their own institution. Such provisions not only generate mastery experiences that strengthen self-efficacy but also reinforce the three psychological needs outlined by self-determination theory. Allowing for paced progression that respects disciplinary identities, and personal circumstances can help sustain motivation and build a professional identity that is both confident and authentic.

These varied experiences of promotion show that formal leadership roles are only one pathway through which recognition and identity can grow. Equally powerful shifts arose from personal life events and transitions that sat outside formal career structures but had profound effects on how participants understood themselves as teachers. The next

section examines how these personal pivotal experiences, from maternity leave to moving schools, reshaped professional identity.

5.5 Personal Pivotal Experiences Affecting the Development of a Professional Identity

(personal domain)

While institutional structures and workplace relationships often shape professional identity, personal life events and circumstances can have an equally powerful influence. Personal transitions often prompt identity negotiation rather than linear growth (Alsup, 2006; Pillen et al., 2013). These events, occurring outside formal teaching contexts, can reframe priorities, challenge established self-perceptions, and shift career trajectories. From a self-determination theory perspective (Deci and Ryan, 1985), significant life transitions can affect autonomy, relatedness, and psychological well-being, influencing how teachers engage with professional demands. Similarly, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) may be reinforced or undermined depending on whether these transitions enhance or diminish confidence in professional competence.

In this section, I examine how participants' experiences, such as maternity leave and changing schools, reshaped their professional identities during the early years of their careers. These narratives reveal that when personal transitions are handled without adequate relational support, institutional recognition, or flexibility, they can create moments of identity dissonance that undermine motivation and commitment.

5.5.1 Navigating Motherhood and Professional Identity: The Impact of Maternity Leave

Susie was the only research participant to take maternity leave during the duration of this study, stepping away from December 2021 to December 2022 and returning part-time. Her experience illustrates how personal transitions can intersect with institutional culture to reshape professional identity, sometimes in disorientating ways.

Before her leave, Susie's professional identity appeared to be rooted in relational satisfaction and pedagogical impact.

'In Art it's quite easy to know when a student is happy because they ask you if they can take a photo of their work, and if I get that in a lesson, then I am happy' (Susie, Interview 1).

She spoke of feeling ‘100%’ committed and energised by her students’ pride and progress. However, on her return, she found a school environment which she felt was increasingly defined by Ofsted-driven performativity. She perceived that the senior leadership team was being,

‘So obsessed with Ofsted that I feel like we’re very business now and not teaching, and that’s not really why I became a teacher’ (Susie, Interview 3).

Susie felt difficulties begin to emerge before her leave. She recalled a lack of engagement from her headteacher, who delayed her risk assessment until her final week and, in her mind, treated the process perfunctorily: ‘He didn’t really pay much attention to me being pregnant’ (Interview 3). This lack of acknowledgement signalled a withdrawal of relational recognition, what Kelchtermans (2005) calls ‘vulnerable commitment’, where the emotional investment in one’s role leaves identity particularly exposed to organisational neglect. Return-to-work identity depends on relational validation and role clarity, not policy text alone (Ladge and Greenberg, 2015; Cross et al., 2024). Intensified performativity climates heighten this vulnerability (Ball, 2003; Mockler, 2020).

Susie’s perception was that her return was marked by further challenges. The teacher covering her role often positioned herself as the authority, telling Susie, ‘That’s not how we do that anymore.’ This left Susie feeling displaced in her classroom, undermining her professional ownership and relatedness. In addition, unclear boundaries in their part-time, job-share arrangement created logistical and relational strain. Late or missing handovers left her unprepared:

‘However, it got to Sunday night; it was only my second or third week, and she still hadn’t sent me a handover. It was like 8 pm, and she still didn’t send it, and then it got to 10 pm, and she sent it then, and it was way too late. When I got to school, I had no idea what I was teaching for the week, and I didn’t have time to prepare’ (Susie, Interview 3).

Such experiences not only reduced her capacity to plan effectively but also eroded her perceived competence and sense of control, key drivers of both self-efficacy and motivation.

These challenges expose a persistent gap between policy and practice. National guidance (NEOST, 2023; NEU, 2025) sets out clear maternity entitlements, but as Susie's case shows, formal policies are insufficient without relationally attuned leadership, proactive reintegration planning, and visible recognition of returning teachers' professional contributions. The ECF and ITTECF primarily frame early career development through structured content and sequenced progression. Participants' experiences of significant personal transitions highlight how identity development may also involve relational and emotional dimensions that extend beyond formal frameworks.

Susie's reflections capture the emotional toll of this oversight:

'I absolutely love being a mum, but I should still be recognised that I'm still working hard' (Susie, Interview 3).

Her narrative underlines that returning to teaching after maternity leave is not simply a logistical adjustment; it is an identity negotiation. When schools fail to actively validate teachers in this phase, they risk long-term disengagement. As Cross et al. (2024) and Ladge and Greenberg (2015) argue, reintegration that ignores the relational and emotional dimensions of professional identity leaves teachers vulnerable to feeling fragmented and undervalued, precisely the conditions most likely to weaken retention in the early career stage.

Just as personal events such as maternity leave can significantly reshape a teacher's professional identity, so too can the decision to move schools. For some ECTs, school moves are strategic and empowering; for others, they result from contextual misalignment or personal strain. In both cases, moving school represents a moment of identity negotiation, an opportunity to re-establish oneself professionally, but also a disruption to established relationships, routines, and a sense of belonging. Next, I explore the experiences of Mandy and Alice, both of whom moved schools during this study. Their narratives highlight how mobility, while often framed in policy as professional development or career progression, is also deeply personal, shaped by emotional responses to context, evolving values, and the search for professional fit.

5.5.2 Moving Schools as a Search for Belonging and Professional Alignment

During my time leading an SCITT programme, I often advised trainees that if their school environment conflicted with their values or identity, it was both legitimate and professionally responsible to change schools rather than leave the profession entirely. This was grounded in research showing that when ECTs experience a clash between their emerging professional identity and their school's ethos, leadership culture, or collegial climate, identity formation can become strained, fragmented, or stalled (Alsup, 2006; Pillen et al., 2013; Nickel and Crosby, 2022). Mandy's and Alice's decisions to move schools illustrate how such changes can enable identity repair, renewed motivation, and professional realignment.

5.5.2.i Mandy: Seeking Professional Growth (Pen Portrait, Chapter 8)

By her second year, Mandy felt increasingly disconnected from her first school's culture, despite having two trusted colleagues who provided a strong personal support network.

‘We bounce ideas off each other; when something is wrong, we openly talk to each other about it’ (Mandy, Interview 2).

While these relationships supported her well-being, she deliberately distanced herself from other departmental colleagues whom she perceived as resistant to change. This selective engagement, what Cohen et al. (2011) term ‘network intentionality’, helped her preserve her own professional values but also reinforced a sense of isolation. Seeking fit is a form of situated agency, aligning values with context (Eteläpelto et al., 2013).

Her frustrations deepened over the lack of meaningful professional development:

‘There is no desire to progress in a positive sense and to work on something, say through training and CPD (continual professional development). There is no value given to what has been achieved already, and it's not motivating. I'm sort of trying to find my own CPD, which is brilliant. But again, it almost feels like, why do I bother? As no one else is spending the time on it’ (Mandy, Interview 2).

Her eventual decision to move schools reflects an act of agency and self-preservation, a strategic attempt to realign her values, aspirations, and identity with a more enabling environment. In this way, Mandy's story illustrates the value of contextual fit, relational belonging, and meaningful opportunities for growth in shaping the evolving professional

identity of ECTs. This aligns with wider literature showing that identity is not developed in isolation but within specific institutional and interpersonal ecologies (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2005). When school cultures are characterised by limited collaboration, weak induction structures, or hierarchical leadership, ECTs often report reduced efficacy and increased attrition (Hobson and Maxwell, 2020; Crafton and Kaiser, 2011). Where trust and recognition are present, identity work becomes restorative (Coldron and Smith, 1999; Lasky, 2005). Mandy's move thus illustrates both the fragility and malleability of early career identity and how changes in setting can create space for professional restoration and redefinition.

5.5.2.ii Alice: From Crisis to Stability

Alice's first year was marked by disillusionment and emotional exhaustion, driven by persistent behavioural challenges and her self-consciousness as a non-native English speaker.

'I really wasn't confident when I started teaching either and that again, links back to me not being a native speaker, because if I am going to have a conversation with a child, I need to think it through before because I don't want to seem like an idiot, if I lose a word or stutter or something like that' (Alice, Interview 2).

These concerns reflect what Hong (2010) identifies as a key risk factor for ECT burnout: low self-confidence, particularly in relation to behaviour management. The emotional consequences were significant. Alice recalled,

'I was worrying myself sick and crying every night and crying in the car in the morning before going in and really kicking myself to get out of the car' (Alice, Interview 2).

Her experience illustrated how emotional exhaustion, when combined with high job demands and limited support, can lead ECTs to question their place in the profession (Hong, 2010). She admitted, 'I thought I would have resigned by Christmas' (Alice, Interview 3), a turning point which might have come to pass had it not been for the second COVID lockdown. She reflected that the lockdown provided

‘The respite that I needed. I needed that time at home to regroup’ (Alice, Interview 2).

This unexpected break gave her time to develop her pedagogical skills and begin restoring her confidence. ‘I feel a lot more confident now’ (Alice, Interview 3), she later shared. Alice was able to secure a new role at her teacher training placement school, a setting where she felt professionally known and valued. She noted, ‘I am perfectly happy to go to work’ (Interview 2), and by her third year, stated:

‘I am in the right job. I think making the change of schools after my first year was the right decision for me. I feel supported and listened to, and that’s what we need – that support from the leadership team and colleagues. That’s what we need to last in this job’ (Alice, Interview 3).

Her account illustrates the intertwined emotional and intellectual demands of early career teaching. Effective practice required more than technical competence; it demanded emotional resilience, adaptive thinking, and a strong sense of purpose. As Day and Gu (2010) argue, teachers draw on both emotional and intellectual resources to sustain commitment, particularly in challenging contexts. Re-placement into a known setting offers vicarious stability and new mastery opportunities, rebuilding teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2014). Alice’s story shows how planning, assessment, and classroom management are compounded by the emotional labour (Day, 2018) of behaviour management, navigating expectations, and negotiating professional confidence.

Both Mandy’s and Alice’s narratives highlight the non-linear and context-dependent nature of early career professional identity development. While national frameworks such as the ECF and ITTECF outline structured and sequenced approaches to early career progression (DfE, 2024, p.7–8), participants’ experiences illustrate how identity formation is also shaped by relational climates, leadership cultures, and opportunities for authentic growth within specific school contexts. Mandy’s experience of stagnation in a culture resistant to development, and Alice’s identity disruption within unsupportive leadership structures, demonstrate how professional identity is negotiated through situated experiences that extend beyond formal programme design.

Rather than presenting early career development as inherently stable or predictable, these cases suggest that identity work is contingent upon relational trust, alignment of values, and access to meaningful professional agency. Informal networks frequently operated as emotional and professional anchors, providing context-sensitive support that participants experienced as critical to sustaining motivation and belonging. Formal mentoring and structured provision could enable growth where school cultures were inclusive and responsive, yet their impact varied considerably depending on how they were enacted locally.

Taken together, these narratives reinforce the argument that professional identity is constructed through dynamic interactions between individual values, relational recognition, and contextual conditions. Building and sustaining supportive relational webs appeared central to meeting core psychological needs for competence and relatedness, strengthening self-efficacy and fostering a durable sense of professional belonging.

5.6 Concluding Comments for this Chapter

Identity in the early years emerges at the intersection of context, relationships, and personal transitions, and is co-authored through recognition and trust (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2019; Flores and Day, 2006). Pivotal experiences ranged from the affirmation of subject expertise and the validation of being recognised as a ‘good teacher’ to the opportunities and tensions associated with promotion, maternity leave, and school moves. Across these domains, the conditions that most strongly supported professional identity were those that met the three psychological needs identified within self-determination theory, autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and that enabled the mastery experiences central to self-efficacy.

Participants’ narratives suggest that professional growth is closely tied to opportunities for contextual agency, pedagogical judgement, and relational recognition (Priestley et al., 2016; van Manen, 1995). Where such conditions were limited, teachers described experiences of identity dissonance, stalled development, or a narrowing of their professional role. These findings reinforce the argument that identity formation cannot

be reduced to engagement with formal development structures alone. Rather, identity is constructed through dynamic interactions between institutional expectations, relational climates, and personal trajectories.

The chapter therefore highlights the importance of relationally attuned, context-sensitive support in sustaining early career teachers' professional identities over time. The next chapter explores these informal relationships in greater depth, examining how emotional connection, care, and authenticity, particularly in relationships with students and trusted colleagues, contribute to identity formation within the broader environments in which teachers work.

Chapter 6- What Role Does Building Informal and Formal Networks Play in the Development of a Professional Identity for Early Career Teachers? (RQ2)

James – Pen Portrait

James's story is placed in this chapter because it illustrates how both formal and informal support networks, particularly trust-based relationships with senior leaders, colleagues, and parents, can shape the development of an early career teacher's professional identity. His experiences highlight how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are built not only through formal structures but also through everyday relational interactions, which are central to the focus on relationships in this chapter.

James teaches PE at what he describes as a 'small school,' a 'hybrid mainstream independent school' for students with EHCPs and 'a focus towards social and emotional needs' (Interview 2). He values being able to 'see the actual kids changing' because the school is small enough to notice progress. As PE lead, he says, 'I am delivering a PE provision that I've almost self-moulded for the kids in our school' (Interview 2).

As an only child, James was often the first to make friends. 'I'd be the first one to make friends in the play park or whatever' (Interview 2). Sport was central to his life, and he was 'always the captain of sports teams,' rewarded 'for being kind to people and encouraging them' (Interview 2). His values in sport, 'involvement, participation and enjoyment,' (Interview 2) underpin his teaching philosophy.

James was the first in his family to attend university, studying PE after leaving school for sixth form and initially working. 'I don't know why I didn't go to university initially... if I had gone straight away, then I wouldn't have been ready. I enjoyed uni, and I made loads of friends and played sports and stuff' (Interview 2). He recalls no single role-model teacher, but remembers those who 'probably just made a difference as they probably treated me like a human' (Interview 2).

A graduate scheme in sports management left him missing the direct contact with young people he had enjoyed in coaching and summer camps. Initially put off teaching by the competition for places, he gained confidence after a year in industry: 'Why can't it be me? And that's why I ended up with SCITT' (Interview 2).

His philosophy of PE is inclusive and critical of narrow 'games-teacher' thinking: 'Including everyone is a kindness rather than a duty, and I think that is shameful... You cannot give children the chance to succeed and then spite them for not being good at it' (Interview 2).

By his third year, he reflects: 'When I first qualified, I was a PE man. I was banging the drum. I was super passionate... my passion hasn't stopped for PE, I just think it's maybe split, and it's got different embers now' (Interview 3). He values his school's differences, saying, 'I never would have been afforded the opportunities, like working with trainee teachers for a PGCE programme, if I were in a mainstream PE department... I've got an area of expertise where I think the rest of the world is actually not very strong... I like the idea of learning' (Interview 3).

Informal support from his deputy head has been pivotal. 'She's really good at just striking the balance of being your friend but being your senior leader, and she's so good at wearing those hats at different times.' They share a maths room,' leading to regular conversations that have brought on my OFSTED folder in leaps and bounds.' He values her mix of challenge and care, recalling, 'When I was poorly lately, she messaged me to get better soon and said there's a Terry's chocolate orange for you when you get back' (Interview 3).

James's role now also involves more regular contact with parents. At the start of his career, 'I didn't really have an interaction with parents,' but by his third year, he was 'reaping the benefits' of making positive calls home. 'Because our curriculum is so adapted, I can say loads of positive things to parents... I like the idea of breaking down some of the barriers, especially with parents who might have had negative experiences with authority.'

James's narrative links directly to the themes of this chapter. His professional growth has been shaped by the informal trust and challenge offered by a senior leader, the autonomy to design an inclusive curriculum, and the competence built through leadership and positive parent engagement. These experiences demonstrate how professional identity in the early career stage can be strengthened through supportive relationships that go beyond formal mentoring to meet deeper psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter examines how ECTs build professional identity through the support they experience within school. It considers formal mentoring, day-to-day informal support from colleagues and leaders, and relationships with students and parents, and connects these experiences to wider questions of early career retention in England.

Identity is not constructed in isolation. It is negotiated through interaction, recognition, and daily work in specific settings (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2005, 2019; Coldron and Smith, 1999). Participants' accounts suggest that some of the most consequential learning occurred informally, in the flow of teaching, reflection, and conversation (Eraut, 2007; Flores and Day, 2006). I begin with mentoring as a formal support mechanism, before turning to informal collegial support and to the emotionally charged relationships with students and parents that could either steady or unsettle an early professional self.

6.2. Mentoring as Formal Support for Early Career Teachers

The development of professional identity is a complex process shaped by teachers' beliefs, values, and experiences alongside the demands and cultures of their schools (van der Wal et al., 2019). Mentoring is widely presented in the literature as a key support for early career teachers, originally framed as a response to isolation and attrition (Hobson et al., 2009) and more recently emphasised within national approaches to early career development. Within these discussions, mentoring is positioned as central to professional learning and retention, with an emphasis on structured training and regular support.

The rationale is clear: with around a quarter of teachers leaving within three years (House of Commons Education Committee, 2024), mentoring is intended to provide consistent guidance, reduce 'reality shock' (Lavigne, 2014), and build self-efficacy (Bullough, 2005; Ovenden-Hope, 2022). The ITTECF presents mentoring as the mechanism for translating pedagogical knowledge into practice, while government investment, around £130 million, has aimed to protect mentor time and develop training programmes (DfE, 2024). In principle, this represents a significant shift from ad hoc arrangements towards a more coherent system of support. The next section explores how mentoring was experienced

by the participants in this study, and the extent to which it enabled or constrained their developing sense of professional identity.

6.2.1 Role of Mentoring

Official expectations for mentors remain broadly defined: they must hold Qualified Teacher Status and have ‘the necessary skills and knowledge’ (DfE, 2021, p. 27). Statutory guidance adds that they should meet regularly with ECTs, provide targeted feedback, broker additional support, and take action if difficulties arise (DfE, 2025). Observations of practice are also required to ensure alignment with the Teachers’ Standards (DfE, 2011).

Research has long highlighted the benefits of high-quality mentoring for mentees, mentors, and schools. For new teachers, it supports classroom confidence, pedagogical competence, well-being, and identity development, while reducing isolation (Ingersoll and Strong, 2011; Maready, Cheng and Bunch, 2021). Mentors themselves can gain status, leadership skills, and opportunities for reflection, and at the institutional level, mentoring has been linked to more collaborative professional cultures (Hobson et al., 2009). In short, effective mentoring can act as a ‘make or break’ factor in shaping how ECTs perceive their place in the profession (Teacher Development Trust, 2024).

However, the literature suggests that the quality and function of mentoring varies considerably across settings, particularly where mentors experience workload pressure and limited time for sustained developmental dialogue (Hobson, 2021). Even where structured expectations exist, participants’ accounts and wider research indicate that the enacted experience of mentoring can drift towards procedural completion rather than relational support.

6.2.2. Mentoring Models and Workload

Evaluations of early roll-out and delivery have reported mixed experiences for mentors and ECTs, including concerns about workload, relevance and perceived prescriptiveness (e.g., Gatsby Foundation, 2022; Teacher Development Trust, 2024). Some reports have also suggested limited evidence of measurable improvement in retention among early cohorts (Education Endowment Foundation, 2024). Taken together, this literature points to variability in how formal mentoring is experienced and enacted in practice.

Sally's experience as a mentor now highlights this shift,

'It's quite a lot. It definitely takes more time than compared to when I was a newly qualified teacher' (Sally, Interview 3).

Her comment reflects the extra burden associated with current frameworks, despite policy commitments to release time. Other participants emphasise how formal mentoring did not always provide meaningful support, Isaac for example, suggested it was primarily remedial:

'I've not had any real complaints of anything that is going wrong with what I'm doing, so I've not felt the need to access the formal support network' (Isaac, Interview 2).

His comment echoes concern about mentoring being framed as a deficit model (Scherer, 1999), intervening only when problems arise than proactively supporting growth.

James also reflected on the importance of the mentor-mentee match

'As my current line manager is the deputy head and I get on really well with her, I probably wish she was my mentor last year, as if I'm honest, that would have been amazing' (James, Interview 2).

His experience illustrates how mentoring often hinges on relational quality, which can be overlooked when mentors are appointed based on availability or seniority (Butler et al, 2010). Together, these accounts show how mentoring can drift from its intended purpose. When it becomes bureaucratic, under-resourced, or poorly matched, its capacity to build identity and confidence is diminished.

Mentoring has significant potential to help ECTs navigate the uncertainties of their induction years, alleviating the 'reality shock' of teaching and supporting long-term retention. Participant experiences confirm this gap: while Sally, Isaac, and James highlight the importance of mentoring, they also reveal how it is inconsistently enacted in practice.

Participants' narratives suggest that mentoring is most likely to support identity development where it is characterised by relational trust, developmental dialogue, and

context-sensitive support, including mentors who are prepared and enabled to adapt to individual needs (Curtis et al., 2024; Luong et al., 2025). Where these conditions are absent, mentoring may be experienced as primarily procedural rather than identity-affirming. In the next section of this chapter, I examine the importance of informal support that was highlighted by the participants in this study, which is in direct contrast to the lack of comments they made about mentoring.

6.3 Benefits of Informal Support to Early Career Teachers

Early career teachers enter not only a new profession but also a specific local school context. Much of what they learn about “how things work here” is picked up informally through day-to-day conversations, quick checks with trusted colleagues, and working alongside others (Eraut, 2007; Colognesi et al., 2020). Informal learning is typically learner-led and embedded in practice, which makes it responsive and timely (Billett, 2002; Marsick and Watkins, 2001).

In this study, participants referred to informal support as valuable, though the depth of detail varied across the dataset. The sections that follow therefore present two illustrative narratives that show how informal support can contribute to identity construction through relational trust, situated feedback, and shared sense-making.

Eraut (2007) distinguishes implicit, reactive, and deliberate informal learning and argues that ‘helpful others’ frequently matter more for development than formally assigned mentors. His account links closely to Bandura’s self-efficacy: confidence grows through successful experiences and credible encouragement; it weakens when challenge is high but support is thin (Bandura, 1997; Eraut, 2004). Informal support also maps onto SDT. It routinely meets needs for relatedness through trustworthy relationships, competence through feedback and shared expertise, and autonomy because the teacher chooses when and how to seek help. When those needs are met, motivation and persistence improve.

Informal support here is taken to mean every day, non-mandated professional exchange: quick problem-solving with a colleague, reading and sharing resources, and corridor coaching that builds confidence and belonging (Mansfield and Gu, 2019; Colognesi et al., 2020). Such interactions help ECTs interpret the ‘professional knowledge landscapes’

of their schools and shape the ‘stories to live by’ that form their professional identities (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995; Clandinin et al., 2009).

6.3.1 An Illustrative Example of Informal Support from a Colleague in Senior Leadership

James’ account provides an illustrative example of informal support from a senior leader. Working in close proximity to a deputy head created regular opportunities for on-the-spot problem solving and reflective challenge. He describes her ability to ‘strike the balance of being your friend but being your senior leader’ (James, Interview 3), suggesting a relationship characterised by warmth alongside professional stretch.

In SDT terms, this relationship appears to support relatedness and competence without undermining autonomy. In self-efficacy terms, James’ description indicates the value of credible encouragement and structured challenge in building confidence over time (Bandura, 1997). They share a ‘maths room’ (James, Interview 3) which creates natural proximity for on-the-spot coaching and problem solving. Alongside the day-to-day guidance, she also challenges him:

‘Those serious conversations with me, I feel like she challenges me, she asks the right questions of me, and she has brought on my OFSTED folder in leaps and bounds’ (James, Interview 3).

Trust is reinforced by simple human gestures:

‘When I was poorly lately, she messaged me to get better soon and said there’s a Terry’s chocolate orange for you when you get back” (James, Interview 3).

While this is one account, it illustrates how informal leadership support can operate as a relational resource for early career identity work when enacted through trust and responsiveness.

6.3.2 An Illustrative Example of Informal Support from Colleagues

Audrey’s narrative offers an illustrative example of informal collegial support operating as a day-to-day protective factor. She describes a close relationship with a colleague who provides mutual emotional and practical support, including brief ‘offload’ conversations and check-ins during the day (Audrey, Interview 2). Physical proximity being ‘next door’

made support accessible and normalised. Audrey, who works in a school which she describes as challenging due to its context of ‘lots of Pupil Premium kids and lots of deprivation (Interview 2), describes a tight school based network that sustains her:

“I've got a lovely little network. So, there's another colleague in English and we're like, really close friends. We see each other out of school” (Audrey, Interview 3).

She explains the everyday, mutual nature of the support:

“Really great little support network to sort of go next door and sort of, you know, offload each day and sort of break or lunchtime and sort of pop their heads around the door. It was a sort of mutual thing as well. Sometimes I feel like, oh God, am I sort of, you know, bothering her all the time? But she does, like, sort of, I stay in my room, she will then sort of come in and check how I am. And you know, it's really sort of supportive” (Audrey, Interview 2).

Physical proximity matters. Being in the room next door lowers the threshold for asking, observing, and trying things out, which accelerates learning in context (Richter et al., 2011; Auletto, 2021). These quick exchanges are not trivial. They build psychological safety, which supports SDT’s relatedness, and they produce repeated small wins that feed self-efficacy. Audrey’s resulting confidence is visible across the study:

‘Everything. It is exciting because I have still got, I still see such a big future, I still see so many things I can do as well’ (Audrey, Interview 3).

This level of optimism about her teaching career is a consistent theme across the three years of this study, with earlier comments like ‘I love it, I honestly do’ (Interview 1) and ‘I definitely feel motivated’ (Interview 2). Audrey remains positive about teaching and her school,

‘Even where the school is and the dramas we have, I love it” (Interview 3) and “I’ve gone into teaching and it’s just amazing” (Interview 3), valuing the “community aspect’ (Interview 3).

Her optimism is not naïve. It is anchored in a collegial environment where she can test ideas, get credible feedback, and be known as a whole person. These micro-interactions can be understood as context-embedded learning (Eraut, 2007) that builds psychological

safety and supports SDT needs for relatedness and competence. Over time, Audrey's account suggests that this kind of collegial support contributed to optimism and persistence, visible in her repeated expressions of motivation and commitment across interviews (Audrey, Interviews 1–3). Again, while this is not a universal pattern evidenced across all participants, it illustrates how informal networks can scaffold identity through repeated, situated reinforcement.

Taken together, these two cases illustrate how informal support can contribute to identity construction by enabling situated problem solving, reducing isolation, and providing credible encouragement. Interpreted through self-efficacy, such support can strengthen confidence through small mastery experiences and verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1997). Interpreted through SDT, it can meet needs for relatedness and competence and allow teachers to exercise autonomy in how and when they seek help. The next section shifts from colleague networks to relationships with students, which were discussed more consistently across participants and appeared central to teachers' sense of purpose and efficacy.

6.4 Fostering Ongoing Positive Relationships with Students and the Impact of Negative Relationships with Students

Teachers' sense of impact is central to professional identity. When they feel they are making a meaningful difference to students' learning and wellbeing, motivation and commitment rise (Day and Gu, 2007; Skaalvik and Skaalvik, 2010; Farquharson et al., 2023). This feeling maps directly onto self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) and is sustained in climates that are emotionally supportive and collegial. Policy and guidance documents often reference behaviour and relationships as important, but the enacted support available to ECTs varies across schools and contexts (McLean et al., 2024). In this study, positive student relationships consistently acted as a key source of efficacy and identity stability; when relationships fractured, confidence and belonging were more difficult to sustain.

6.4.1 Importance of developing positive student relationships

Relationship-building is not an optional extra. It's the everyday work through which classroom culture and identity are formed. Participants' narratives capture this clearly:

‘Teaching is the bit that’s nice and I will do everything else so I can spend 55 minutes in the classroom delivering content that my students are going to understand’ (Isaac, Interview 1).

‘It is those interactions where you can see that you’re leaving little droplets of knowledge in children’s lives to help boost their confidence or to just make a difference to them’ (Tanya, Interview 1).

‘Nothing is as important when you see the kids doing so well, and they pick something up and they’re so excited about it. Just makes you quite proud to be there and teach and actually see them grow,’ (Catherine, Interview 1).

‘I love working with young people, on a day-to-day basis, I love making them laugh, as by cracking a small joke, that is how positive relationships get built’ (Alice, Interview 3).

The understanding of the need for trust and emotional presence is evident. Audrey’s comment, ‘The kids I work with, they need connection, they need to know that you’re going to turn up’ (Audrey, Interview 2), illustrates the relatedness need in SDT; feeling connected sustains motivation. Tanya adds the competence dimension: ‘It is actually being present in the class and helping the children to see they can do it, that they can achieve something, actually I think it is the most important thing I can do’ (Tanya, Interview 1). These interactions create the small mastery moments and credible encouragements that grow self-efficacy.

Positive emotions aren’t peripheral: they are part of how teachers understand who they are and what they can do. When classrooms feel relationally safe, ECTs experience repeated success cues (verbal persuasion, emotional arousal, vicarious experience), strengthening both efficacy and identity. Where early career development is framed predominantly in technical terms, the relational processes through which identity is sustained can be easier to underplay in practice. Participants’ narratives suggest, however, that these relational experiences were often what kept them grounded and willing to persist.

6.4.2 Early Career Teachers' Perspective on the Importance of Building Positive Relationships with Students

Audrey's narrative (see Pen Portrait Chapter 7) shows how identity is built through felt impact:

'I think it's just knowing that I am making a difference. Didn't realise as thought it was just one of those cliché things that everyone says, oh you, know you will make a difference. But when you go into that school, and you see those kids change for you' (Audrey, Interview 1).

By her second year, she named the mechanism, which is trust.

'Those kids in that school need to have that familiarity, they need to have that relationship with you, for them to trust you to get something out of them' (Audrey, Interview 2).

Authenticity is her strategy:

'I don't see much difference between who I am as a teacher and how I portray myself to be in front of the kids, to the person I am outside of the classroom, and yeah, I think it is about being authentic' (Audrey, Interview 2).

Consistency is the signal that the students read:

'Unless the kids see that you're invested and you want to be there, you will never have them. They see the passion that I show up every day, they see that I give the same energy every day' (Audrey, Interview 3).

Audrey is demonstrating SDT's competence, and relatedness which together sustain intrinsic motivation. In self-efficacy terms, she's accumulating mastery experiences and believable encouragement which buffers against external pressure.

Tanya (Pen Portrait, Chapter 8) names the emotional labour involved in sustaining that presence

'It is actually being present in the class and helping the children to see they can do it, that they can achieve something, actually I think it is the most important thing I can do' (Tanya, Interview 1).

Her safeguarding account shows identity in action:

‘I had a little boy in my class who I noticed had ligature marks on his neck, and that was period four, and it turns out that his father had attempted to strangle him. And so obviously, between period four and five, I reported it. There was a school-wide message that went out the next day, saying it was unbelievable that we’d got to period four before somebody had noticed, and they were really obvious. But I think that’s part of who I am, those relationships and noticing kids and being able to talk to them, having that dialogue or showing that interest in them’ (Tanya, Year 3).

This is professional empathy (O’Connor, 2008), attentiveness, swift action and care, reflecting a careful awareness of the emotional and physical well-being of students, underpinned by a strong sense of moral responsibility and relational awareness. It reflects high competence (judgement, responsiveness) and deep relatedness, and confirms to Tanya who she is as a teacher. These are precisely the experiences that build durable efficacy beliefs and a coherent, values-anchored identity.

However, not all interactions with students are positive, and the next section explores the challenges and negative relationships a specific teacher in this study encountered, which affected her professional identity.

6.4.3 When Relationships are Strained: Identity Costs and Recovery

Emotions are a significant and ongoing part of becoming a teacher (Day et al., 2006), and they are socially constructed through interactions with students, colleagues, and senior leaders. As Hong (2010) notes, emotional engagement is not peripheral but ‘a vital and integral part of being a teacher’ (p. 1540). The emotional dimensions of teaching are not always foregrounded within formal professional learning structures, which can leave ECTs navigating the identity costs of sustained relational strain with limited space for reflection and recovery. When ECTs enter classrooms with values rooted in care, purpose, and connection but are met with resistance or disengagement from students, the dissonance between their ideals and lived experience can generate what Beijaard et al. (2022) call professional identity tensions, internal struggles between the situation-as-is and the situation-as-preferred (van der Wal et al., 2019, p. 60). These tensions are not

abstract; they are deeply felt and often expressed through strong emotions such as frustration, guilt, or helplessness.

Alice's experience during her first year of teaching (see Pen Portrait in Chapter 5) illustrates the emotional and professional toll of negative student behaviour and its impact on teacher identity. Despite working within a supportive departmental team, Alice faced frequent behavioural challenges 'behaviour was becoming really, really problematic' (Interview 2), which created what Pillen et al. (2013) term professional identity tensions, internal struggles between the realities of the classroom and her aspirations as a teacher. Her description of a 'horrible, horrible class' and being 'stuck' in a room where she couldn't remove disruptive students reflects a strong sense of powerlessness and emotional strain. These conditions significantly undermined her teacher self-efficacy, particularly in the domain of behaviour management, one of the key domains in Bandura's (1977) model of self-efficacy. When teachers feel unable to assert control over their classroom environment, this can trigger avoidance behaviours, emotional withdrawal, and, in Alice's case, considerations of leaving the profession entirely.

Alice's narrative also illustrates the consequences of emotional dissonance, where the expectations of the teaching role conflict with the emotional realities of daily practice (Chang, 2009; Hochschild, 1983). She describes crying in the car before work and 'worrying herself sick,' which indicates the emotional burnout that can result from sustained negative student interactions, particularly when compounded by a lack of collaborative planning or peer support. In Alice's department, she notes it was 'not common practice to share lessons,' leaving her isolated, overburdened, and under-resourced, factors known to intensify professional vulnerability (Kelchtermans, 1996).

The temporary shift to online teaching during the COVID-19 lockdown provided unexpected relief. Alice describes this period as 'the respite I needed,' as disengaged students simply didn't attend, removing a major stressor from her daily experience. This aligns with research from Spilt et al. (2011), who argue that poor student-teacher relationships are a major predictor of teacher burnout, especially in early career stages. While online learning exacerbated educational inequalities (National Literacy Trust,

2022), for Alice, it temporarily removed the emotional triggers undermining her confidence and provided space to recover.

While the transition itself did not immediately restore her confidence, the new environment actively supported her development as she feels the school is ‘investing in me’ (Interview 2). Her head of department and senior leaders offered emotional and practical support, including sitting in on lessons until she regained her footing. The senior leadership team said to her, ‘Actually, it’s not about how you teach, it’s about this class, ‘It’s just them’ (Interview 2). This targeted scaffolding enabled Alice to rebuild her self-efficacy over time, particularly through verbal persuasion and mastery experiences, two of Bandura’s (2000) four sources of efficacy beliefs. The feedback she received, ‘I know you can’t give 200% each time and that’s fine with me,’ reflects a recognition of her effort and capacity, not just performance, which is crucial for restoring professional agency. Alice’s journey shows both the cost of relational breakdown for identity and the path back: credible support, time and a culture that protects teacher dignity while problems are solved. Audrey and Tanya show how authenticity, consistency, and care translate directly into purpose and resilience. Alice shows what happens when that fabric tears, and how responsive, relational support can repair it. If schools want ECTs to stay, they should treat relationship-building as a core developmental strand, not background noise. That means protecting quick feedback loops with trusted adults, making space for reflective conversation about the emotional work of teaching, and ensuring leaders can step in early with humane, confidence-preserving support. Technical competence matters, but without relational trust and opportunities for emotionally intelligent practice, identity wobbles and retention suffers.

While relationships with colleagues and students form the core of ECTs’ day-to-day professional experience, interactions with parents introduce another layer of complexity. As the next section explores, these relationships can significantly influence teacher confidence, identity formation, and longer-term commitment to the profession.

6.5 Relationships with Parents and Early Career Teacher Identity

Parent–teacher relationships sit at the core of practice and, for ECTs, are identity-shaping because they involve high emotional stakes and public judgements of competence (Uitto et al., 2021). Two lenses clarify why they matter. Self-determination theory explains that

positive engagement can satisfy relatedness, autonomy, and competence, while strained engagement frustrates them (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Self-efficacy theory shows the mechanism: successful exchanges provide mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and credible verbal persuasion that strengthen beliefs about managing parent interactions; hostile or opaque exchanges erode those beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

Standard 8 of the Teachers' Standards requires teachers to communicate effectively with parents about achievement and wellbeing (DfE, 2011). The ECF/ITTECF locates this within Professional Behaviours and points to proactive communication and the use of parents' evenings (DfE, 2019, p. 24). This is narrow when set against evidence that broader parental engagement improves learning (EEF, 2021; Goodall et al., 2013) and that parents' evenings can be episodic and teacher-dominated (Hargreaves, 2001). The frameworks state what to do, but not how to handle the emotional and relational complexity that makes contact productive for teachers and families.

6.5.1 Positive Engagement as Identity-Building: Mandy and James (see Pen Portrait Chapter 8 and Pen Portrait Chapter 6)

Participants show how purposeful contact strengthens identity. Mandy adopts a relationship-first stance:

'I have really tried to forge positive relationships with parents,' as 'I think it makes my relationships with the kids better as well' (Interview 3). Mandy explains that if there is a negative reason to contact parents, 'I make sure to phone them, rather than email, as chances are they have a lot of questions or concerns, and I would rather let them air that out' (Interview 3).

Her approach goes beyond parents' evenings and satisfies SDT needs: autonomy in choosing methods that fit her values, competence as behaviour improves, and relatedness through frequent, human contact.

James, working in a SEND context, moves along a parallel path from underestimating the role of parents to 'reaping the benefits' (Interview 3) once he initiates regular, positive contact. Due to James's context of working in a SEND school, he is aware of the power of his phone calls, as he is aware that some of his students would be failing,

‘In previous settings students would be failing in other environments, but because our curriculum is so adapted, I can say loads of positive things to parents as the students are not put into a box’ (Interview 3).

This aligns with *SEND Futures* (DfE, 2024) findings that parents in special schools often feel better supported because staff understand their child’s needs (Crowley et al, 2024). As subject lead for PE, James now feels confident speaking with parents, aware that some had negative experiences of authority. He prioritises a ‘friendly voice and being supportive’, (Interview 3), empathy and authenticity, echoing guidance for working with families facing adversity (Taggart et al, 2020). At the same time, he sets boundaries,

‘Most interactions go through the office...if parents do have my email, they ‘understand it is for questions during the working day, I try to reply in a 48-hour window’ (James, Interview 3).

This is emotional labour in the Hochschild sense: presenting professionalism while regulating feeling (Hochschild, 1983). It protects energy and reduces burnout risk (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Mandy invests continuously; James uses structure. Both routes build relatedness and competence while sustaining motivation. Their practice highlights the importance of sustainable, relational approaches to parent communication and the ways ECTs develop workable routines and boundaries over time.

6.5.2 When Parent Engagement Threatens Identity: Catherine and Alice (see Pen Portraits in Chapter 5)

Parent interactions can also destabilise identity when key needs are frustrated. Catherine, a pastoral middle leader, comments:

‘I think the issue facing education is too much parent interaction. The parents have just got too much influence, and it is difficult to deal with parents’ (Catherine, Interview 3).

Catherine recalls an incident with a student she teaches, who has been diagnosed with ADHD and constantly asks to go to the toilet, even though there are breaks between all the lessons. Catherine explains how she kept ignoring the requests of the student and

said to her, “You’re interrupting my lesson, and I’m trying to teach”. The student then said, “My mum says it is a human right,” and she walked off and went to the toilet. Catherine spoke to the mum and explained to her that it was not right, as there is no medical issue, and just because this student is bored, she can’t leave the room and go for a walk, as Catherine says, ‘that’s just not how it works’ (Interview 3). Catherine’s attempt to explain expectations to the parent felt like a public challenge to her professional judgement. Autonomy is constrained, competence questioned, and relatedness is fragile, emotions that link with anxiety and frustration (Hargreaves, 2012). Teachers may then avoid or tightly stage-manage contact (Hargreaves, 2012).

Alice also reports identity pressure:

‘I do find it challenging that the parents are so vocal about everything purely because I take it so personally, and I do work so hard for those children, when I get this kind of backlash, I don’t like it at all’ (Interview 3).

This is a classic recognition conflict: who she is and wants to be versus how parents position her (Mommers et al., 2021). She notes she now hears ‘more from parents from a negative point of view than for a positive view’ (Interview 3), partly because the time constraints reduced her Friday positive phonecalls to parents. Those calls were moments of contact that helped define the teacher she wanted to be with parents (Mommers et al., 2021). Leadership that listens and, where appropriate, fronts difficult conversations buffers these effects and supports identity work (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2011; Flores, 2004; Kelchtermans, 2019).

6.5.3 Disengagement and Structural Barriers: Isaac and Audrey (see Pen Portraits in Chapter 7)

Isaac’s experiences reflect the complexities and variability of parental engagement, highlighting the diverse nature of ECTs’ relationships with parents. It is evident that Isaac has more of a variable relationship with his students’ parents as he explains his interactions as:

‘I phone home and it’s either a pointless activity that I do to check off my list of what I have done to try and support x students, and I’ve gone well, I have phoned

home, and this parent says I don't care, your problem, blah, blah, whatever. So, half the time, that's the result, or I get told not to phone home because the parents are known to scream at staff or whatever. So that's fine. The other half, I have had quite a lot of positive responses. Once I have explained what the issue with the behaviour is, the parents are usually on side. Because they've now met me at least once at a parents' evening or maybe twice. And they don't think that I am some kind of monster that screams at children. I'm just very realistic. So, whenever I phoned home to talk to them, usually it's a resigned position of I know, I've tried everything, there's nothing I can do, which is fine because then I know. But then a quarter of the time, it's been positive, and they've said 'Oh no, if they don't behave for you their phone will get taken from them' or 'they will be grounded for a week'. 'Can you please phone again at the end of the week to let me know how they've got on,' which I've done for a couple of students, but it wasn't really sustainable' (Isaac, Interview 3).

His school serves a disadvantaged coastal community with well documented structural challenges (Ovenden-Hope and Passy, 2019). However, Isaac's description also indicates some of the expectations of emotional work from parents who act like customers, reflecting the trend of neoliberal governing of education (Lundqvist et al, 2024) when they asked him to ring at the end of each week to inform parents of their child's behaviour, and as he says, it wasn't sustainable. Isaac manages identity risk through consistent use of the behaviour policy and clear escalation routes:

'Weirdly enough, we don't have any student or parental complaints about the department, as the vast majority of us just follow the school's behaviour policy. So, any time we've had parental issues, and it's been forwarded to us, it's usually because we have followed the school's behaviour policy, so we refer it to the head of behaviour because that's our policy' (Isaac, Interview 3).

This protects autonomy and competency, and he reports feeling, 'Quite happy to stay' (Interview 3).

Audrey faces a different barrier due to little meaningful contact. She describes parents who begin calls with "What have they done now?" even when she rings with good news

and some even ridicule their child for positive behaviour (Interview 3). This reflects a sociocultural distance between school and community as she is teaching with a bureaucratic system that expects a feminine caring ethic (Hargreaves, 2012, p. 1069). However, the system makes it clear that there has to be a professional distance between Audrey and her students so she is expected to control her feelings with parents which could be a cause of her frustration.

Taken together, these narratives show that parental engagement is not a peripheral administrative task but a complex relational practice through which ECTs come to see themselves, and to be seen by others, as competent professionals. Where schools provide supported opportunities to develop this practice, through modelling, coaching, shared routines and leadership backing, self-efficacy tends to strengthen and identity stabilises. Where contact is adversarial or unsupported, identity wobbles and emotional labour increases. Making this work visible, supported and learnable appears to help ECTs meet core psychological needs, strengthen beliefs about capability, and sustain a resilient, self-authored professional identity.

6.6 Concluding Comments for this Chapter

Across formal and informal networks, professional identity in this study developed through recognition, trust and situated sense-making (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Flores and Day, 2006; Day and Gu, 2010). Mentoring was presented in the literature as a key formal support mechanism, yet participants' accounts suggested that its enacted value depended on time, relational fit and the extent to which dialogue was developmental rather than procedural.

Informal support was discussed as valuable, although detailed examples were concentrated within two of the narratives. The cases of James and Audrey illustrate how informal leadership and collegial relationships can provide timely feedback, emotional containment and context-sensitive guidance, supporting competence, relatedness and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Deci and Ryan, 2000).

Relationships with students were more consistently foregrounded across participants and appeared central to purpose, efficacy and staying power. Where teachers

experienced relational safety, authenticity and consistent support, identity stabilised; where relationships frayed, identity costs increased, though recovery was possible through humane leadership and scaffolded support. Relationships with parents added another layer of emotional and public scrutiny, sometimes affirming professional standing but also generating identity strain where contact was adversarial or unsupported.

Overall, the chapter highlights that identity construction is sustained through context-sensitive support and relational trust across multiple domains. The next chapter turns to the challenges that marked turning points in participants' journeys and how they navigated them.

Chapter 7 – What Challenges do Early Career Teachers Confront and how do they Navigate them as part of developing their Professional Identity? (RQ3)

These two pen portraits open this chapter because they demonstrate, in different ways, how ECTs meet concrete challenges and actively work out who they are as professionals. Audrey's story foregrounds tensions between institutional policy demands and pedagogical judgement, and how she navigates them through relationships, collaboration, and adaptive curriculum work. Isaac's story highlights a contrasting route: embracing consistency, using clear systems, and seeking measurable impact while stepping into leadership. Read together through self-efficacy (how credible successes and feedback build confidence) and self-determination theory (how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported or thwarted), they illustrate two viable responses to the same problem: making sense of pressure, context, and workload while constructing a stable professional identity. They are placed here to ground the chapter's analysis in lived practice before moving to cross-case themes.

Audrey – Pen Portrait

Audrey is an English teacher in a state school in a local town with a high proportion of Pupil Premium students. She came to teaching 'later in life, after my first child, returning to night school to complete A Levels while on maternity leave. She had left school at 16, going to college to complete apprenticeships in business administration/ IT and as an electrician. Reflecting on her early career, she recalls,

'When I was an electrician, I worked so hard, it was like more of a physical job than a mental job. I was coming home really tired and exhausted, and coming home to a little child, I just didn't want to do it anymore. But I liked the whole learning aspect of it. I love learning the trade from the electricians, and I love all the training and stuff behind it' (Interview 1).

Audrey describes growing up without higher education role models:

'In my household, no one had gone to university. No one had a degree, and it was like one of those things I didn't want one either. I looked down on it; I was like, you

don't need a degree to get on in life. So yeah, I sort of resisted it, and it wasn't an avenue to explore. So, I didn't have any role models in that sense, but my first role model was my younger sister, who was the first person to go to uni' (Interview 2).

Her sister whom she calls a 'trailblazer in our family' (Interview 2) became the first in her family to secure a teaching job, influencing Audrey's eventual move into the profession. Her pathways reflect adaptability, self-motivation and a desire for intellectual growth.

In her first year of teaching, Audrey said,

'I can't imagine doing anything else now. I feel like, especially in the school I am in now, I know I'm making a difference. And I can see I am making a difference. And I can see it just in the way they come into my classroom, and we just have a chat, and I know about their lives. I think it's just knowing I am making a difference. I just thought it was one of those cliché things that everyone says, but when you go in there and you see those kids change for you. I never go home thinking that was a rubbish day' (Interview 1).

These early experiences show a professional identity rooted in relationships and emotional investment, with her sense of self-efficacy growing alongside her impact on students.

Audrey speaks with optimism about her career trajectory:

'Everything excites me, as you don't know what is going to happen. I still see such a big future; I still see so many things I can do as well. And what excites me is the fact that I don't feel that nothing is over yet or has come to an end; I think that is what is exciting. I've still got so many opportunities, and I know that this is only the start, and I have a bigger career ahead of me. However, I am biding my time not because of where I am in the school but because of where I am in my life. I am happy building up that experience and knowing that I could go home at half past three, put my kids to bed, and know that I haven't got any work to do. That, for me, is what excites me the most, as I'm not going home exhausted; I don't feel like I

hate my job, and that's why it is exciting. The fact that I enjoy it, and I've still got so much more' (Interview 3).

She emphasises the importance of balance between work and family life, valuing a supportive school environment that sustains her enthusiasm. Her perspective on personal responsibility has shifted:

'I remember saying last year that I can't leave because my students need me, and I've come to terms with the fact that the students will be fine without me, so I have sort of adapted. Nothing has really changed for me; I don't get the 'pat on the back,' and I don't get the recognition, but I don't need it now. I know I am doing a smashing job' (Interview 3).

This reflects a maturing professional identity characterised by self-assurance, intrinsic motivation, and confidence grounded in experience rather than external validation. She no longer looks for praise or formal recognition, instead taking quiet pride in knowing she is doing her job well. It is a self-assurance grounded in experience rather than external validation. Audrey's experiences highlight several of the central themes explored of this chapter. She confronts challenges in the form of top-down curriculum directives, inconsistent school policy implementation, and a lack of collective accountability among colleagues. These pressures threaten the autonomy and relational trust that underpin her professional fulfilment. However, Audrey overcomes them by asserting her pedagogical judgement, adapting content to meet her students' needs, and engaging in collaborative curriculum development that values teacher expertise over compliance. In doing so, she demonstrates the resilience and agency central to the construction of a sustainable professional identity, illustrating how ECTs can navigate and resist structural constraints while remaining grounded in their values.

Isaac - Pen Portrait

Isaac works in a coastal school with a high number of Pupil Premium students, and in the third year of this study, he becomes the second in the science department, which is a middle leader role. Isaac was inspired to become a teacher by a head of science at a

local school where he was working as a technician in the science department. Isaac recalls that he said

‘When are you going to do your teacher training? And I was like, what do you mean? He said you would be very, very good at it, so why haven’t you done it? Then I was like, I guess I will look into it, and that is how I ended up here. It was that kind of really short conversation’ (Interview 1).

Isaac defines three key reasons for becoming a teacher.

‘So, number one, I was bored with being a teacher. I’d reached the top of my pay scale, and I’d done everything. So, it was fun as a job. I enjoyed the job, but there was nothing interesting about it anymore. Two, I wanted to have a bigger impact on, like, the school as a whole because, as support staff, you have a small impact. Third was money because it pays better. I was very fortunate, as I was paid a lot of money for being a technician, but it’s never a job you can do for your whole career. So, I was like, I wanted to stay working in schools because if you have the right school, it’s a nice place to work because it’s not profit-driven’ (Interview 1).

Reflecting on his own education, Isaac admits:

‘I was a school refuser. I had about 40% attendance in school. It seemed pointless to me, as I was beyond the curriculum at the time, and the teachers didn’t have time to cater to anyone who was achieving higher. So basically, I was given a worksheet, and I can do that at home, so I might as well stay at home. My mother quickly realised that she couldn’t physically force me to go to school, and my grades weren’t an issue, so she just sort of allowed it’ (Interview 2).

Despite this, he acknowledges that:

‘There were a couple of teachers I felt were influential. They tended to be the older generation of teachers who did not pander to anyone or anything’ (Interview 2).

After his GCSEs and A Levels, Isaac did a pharmaceutical degree, and he admits mainly because 'I just didn't want a job. I liked chemistry, so I thought I might as well keep studying, and it seemed like a better idea at the time' (Interview 2).

Following his degree, he spent five years working in the gambling industry, a role he left after his partner insisted, he find a job that would enable them to get a mortgage. At that point, he admits: 'I didn't want to be a teacher because of my own school experience, which was horrendous.' (interview 2). However, he also reflects that:

'The stress of teaching is nothing compared to the stress of the role I had in the gambling industry. So, that's really helped; in terms of whatever the kids say to me, it doesn't really affect me in any way, which is quite nice' (Interview 2).

Isaac's professional identity is shaped by this pragmatic entry into teaching, but it is steadily strengthened through affirmation, contextual understanding, and increasing responsibility. Initially motivated by a mix of extrinsic (career progression, pay) and intrinsic (impact, intellectual stimulation) factors, Isaac's story reflects a developing sense of autonomy, he chooses teaching not out of idealism, but because of its alignment with his values and preferred working environment.

For Isaac, consistency is what he values the most, as he explains.

'I am universally consistent with whatever I do, and I apply the application of the behaviour policy very, very consistently. That value becomes my overriding value of how I teach. One that was in place, my enjoyment and passion for the subject has begun to rebuild quite quickly because students are not necessarily interested, but they are engaged' (Interview 2).

He adds, 'Now they've become more interested, because I can make it more interesting and I'm just spending all my focus on making them engaged' (Interview 2). In his third year, consistency remains his guiding principle:

‘My deep-down personal belief is that consistency, above all things, is the most important part of a school, as even a bad policy enacted consistently is better than a good policy enacted inconsistently’ (Interview 3).

For Isaac, the reliability of systems matters more than whether every policy is perfect. Even a flawed approach, he argues, is preferable to constant change because it provides clear expectations for both students and staff. This reflects his preference for stability and structure, which he sees as essential for learning and professional effectiveness. He explains his sense of commitment:

‘I do have a certain level of commitment because the difference between me doing my job properly and not doing my job properly is that some students will either get into college or not get into college, which has a very big impact on their future potential. So professionally I do a good job because I know I’m having an impact, and I am committed there, and personally I am committed because trying now to find something equivalent to teaching is quite difficult in this environment’ (Interview 3).

Isaac measures his work by its tangible impact, helping students secure places at college and improve their life chances. This sense of purpose fuels his professional pride and personal motivation, particularly in a job market where few roles offer the same level of meaning.

Discussing his new role, he says:

‘The excitement for me is obviously learning things from a managerial perspective. That’s exciting. So, I’m head of health and safety for the scientists; this is exciting to me, as that’s something new to be doing. The excitement is possibly learning new things and managing to do them whilst still teaching to a reasonable standard. At the end of last year, my teaching standards went down because I was just trying to do other things while I was teaching. So, trying to fit all the things I need to do efficiently into a day for me is reasonably exciting while trying to keep my lesson as good as possible’ (Interview 3).

When reflecting on his future career, he says

‘I would imagine I might be head of department within two years. I think that’s a reasonable career progression in the five years I would have been teaching. As I say to most people, I just do what I’m told, and everyone seems to leave me alone to get on with it, so I will continue basically doing that, as that seems to serve me quite well, especially at this school, at least’ (Interview 3).

Taking on new managerial responsibilities has brought Isaac a fresh source of excitement. He enjoys the challenge of developing skills in areas such as health and safety leadership, while balancing these with his teaching duties. However, he acknowledges that the extra workload can affect the quality of his lessons, and he is focused on finding ways to manage his time, so both aspects of his role are delivered to a high standard. Isaac’s experiences demonstrate that for some ECTs, overcoming professional challenges is about finding alignment between personal values and the operational systems of the school. His commitment to consistency and his focus on real-world student outcomes has enabled him to build confidence and authority in the classroom, while his willingness to take on new leadership responsibilities reflects a maturing professional identity.

7.1 Introduction

ECTs in England begin their careers within school environments shaped by long-standing accountability pressures and institutional routines, including inspection expectations and data practices (Ball, 2003, 2017; Perryman, 2006; Worth and Van den Brande, 2020). While national frameworks and guidance form part of the wider landscape of early career development, this study does not evaluate the direct impact of specific policy reforms. Instead, this chapter examines how participants navigated day-to-day expectations within their schools, particularly around behaviour, curriculum routines, and collegial cultures, and how these experiences interacted with the construction of professional identity over time.

Identity is negotiated rather than received, and is shaped through interaction, recognition, and situated sense-making (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Coldron and

Smith, 1999). The chapter is organised into three strands: (1) exercising professional judgement within institutional routines; (2) negotiating relational and emotional tensions; and (3) sustaining identity through collaboration and micropolitical agency.

7.1.2 Theoretical Framework and Key Arguments

The analysis in this chapter is grounded in the view that professional identity develops through ongoing negotiation between personal values, relational recognition, and contextual conditions (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2019). Self-determination theory helps explain why certain environments feel identity-affirming or identity-threatening: when autonomy, competence, and relatedness are supported, motivation and wellbeing are more likely to be sustained; when these needs are frustrated, teachers may experience dissonance, withdrawal, or narrowing of role (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Self-efficacy theory adds a mechanism for understanding these trajectories: confidence develops through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and credible encouragement, and can be undermined when teachers experience persistent failure, mixed messages, or limited support (Bandura, 1997).

Within these lenses, the chapter examines how participants made sense of institutional expectations and how they exercised professional agency in context. Their accounts show forms of adaptation, selective enactment, and collaboration that supported identity continuity, alongside moments where inconsistency, low trust, or constrained agency created identity strain. The focus here is therefore on ECTs' situated identity work, rather than on assessing the quality of policy frameworks.

7.2 Navigating challenges: Asserting Identity in a Culture of Compliance

Participants' narratives illustrate that early career teaching involved ongoing negotiation of institutional expectations, particularly around behaviour routines, curriculum pacing, and "how things are done" in specific school settings. Rather than simply adopting practices wholesale, ECTs described making judgements about when to follow routines closely, when to adapt them, and how to sustain their values in the midst of everyday pressures. Interpreted through SDT and self-efficacy, these choices can be understood as efforts to protect autonomy, build competence through workable successes, and maintain relatedness through authentic relationships, all of which supported the construction of sustainable professional identities.

Audrey provides a clear example. She resists pressure from national educationalist within her trust who is 'pushing for all of the schools in England to do the same thing' in her subject, which is English (Audrey, Interview 3). She says,

'He wants us to teach the stories from the Bible in Year 8, but they are so dry and dull' (Audrey, Interview 3).

Instead, she prioritises texts like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Noughts and Crosses* explaining that it is 'just awesome to see their enjoyment out of it as well,' and if we end up doing stories from the Bible, they will see 'my enthusiasm and my love of it go' (Audrey, Interview 3). Audrey's account illustrates Deci and Ryan's (2000) principle of autonomy: professional fulfilment depends on aligning choices with values and student's needs.

'I think the only reason I love what I do now is because I have so much freedom in the way I teach and the influence I can have' (Audrey, Interview 3).

It also resonates with Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) argument that efficacy is strengthened when teachers believe they can act effectively in their contexts. Audrey further recalls slowing down her teaching of a gothic unit to ensure that her students grasped basic sentence writing before advancing to the next stage:

'And it's like I have learnt control, like having the confidence to say I am not doing that learning objective just because it says we are doing it in lesson 10' (Audrey, Interview 3).

This reflects what Tickle (2011) calls reflexive capability, the ability to organise one's practice in response to students rather than imposed scripts, and Hordern et al.'s (2024) framing of teaching as a negotiated relation between teacher, students, and content. Her example illustrates the importance she placed on contextual expertise and professional judgement when planning for her students' needs

In contrast, Isaac's early experiences illustrate how externally defined curricula and rigid structures can shape the professional identity of ECTs by fostering dependency and compliance, rather than autonomy or critical engagement. He explains that

‘The school was focusing on compliance, so getting all the teachers to do the same thing and getting the kids to follow all the rules’ (Isaac, Interview 3).

Here, proficiency was equated with following scripts, aligning with Priestley et al.'s (2016) notion of teachers as curriculum deliverers. When leadership later relaxed these controls, Isaac describes uncertainty:

‘What has come after that has been a bit of a mess, as staff are thinking, are they letting the reins off, and are they going to let teachers do whatever they want and risk chaos? People will start thinking again because colleagues haven’t been thinking, myself included, because I was told how to do it, and so that’s currently in a bit of limbo...’ (Isaac, Interview 3).

This reveals the de-skilling effects of prolonged prescription: teachers lose the habit of planning, designing curricula, and exercising professional judgement. Highly prescriptive or tightly controlled environments can make it harder for teachers to rebuild confidence once routines shift, particularly where opportunities for supported mastery and dialogue are limited. Professional confidence does not automatically re-emerge when controls are lifted; it requires opportunities for mastery, supportive leadership, and a culture that values teacher knowledge (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Kelchtermans, 2019).

7.3 Negotiating challenges: Identity Work in a Landscape of Tensions

While ECTs are expected to transition smoothly into professional roles, their actual experiences are far more complex. It is not the presence of challenges alone that shapes their early professional lives, but the ways in which they negotiate those challenges. In this context, negotiation refers to the relational, emotional, and intellectual labour teachers undertake as they reconcile policy expectations, school cultures, and their own values and beliefs. As related by the participants of my study, this is where identity work becomes most visible, not as a fixed endpoint but as an ongoing process of becoming, shaped by each decision to conform, adapt, or resist (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011).

This negotiation is rarely straightforward. Many participants in this study described feeling tension between their professional beliefs and the implementation of school policies, particularly when those policies were enacted inconsistently across departments, classrooms, or leadership levels. These inconsistencies not only cause frustration but also disrupt teachers' sense of fairness, coherence, and relational trust. As Ball (2003) and Mockler (2011) note, such tensions often emerge in performative cultures where the stated values of care and collaboration are undermined by the realities of managerialism and surveillance. Within these spaces, ECTs must actively position themselves, deciding what kind of teacher they want to be and how far they are willing to align with the expectations imposed upon them.

From a theoretical perspective, these negotiations are sites of psychological and professional significance. Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) emphasises the importance of clear, consistent modelling and feedback in developing professional confidence. When teachers are exposed to contradictions and mixed messages, they may struggle to develop the kind of stable efficacy beliefs that support resilience. Meanwhile, self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) suggests that the continual denial of autonomy and the erosion of relational support impede not only motivation but the development of a coherent sense of self. In this section, I explore how ECTs experience these disjunctions and how they negotiate their implications, not only for their day-to-day practice but also for their evolving professional identity.

A common theme amongst the ECTs in this study was the lack of consistency in implementing a policy. Mandy provides the example of her first school, (Pen Portrait, Chapter 8), where she explains that as the students were 'fresh out of COVID' (March 2021), returning after a long absence from school due to the pandemic, the school said,

'We are going to crack down hard on everything. No jeans, no leggings; if you see a phone, then take it on sight, and it goes into a safe box until the end of the day.'
(Mandy Interview 2).

She then goes on to say that further details were given as

‘It was a very specific behaviour policy that you must follow, but these students can’t follow it due to various reasons. So, make sure that if they’re in, those students must be treated in a specific way, but everyone else must follow this behaviour policy. (Mandy, Interview 2).

It is at this point that Mandy’s frustration begins to emerge as she says

‘How does that benefit anybody? So, as time has progressed, if I see a phone, I don’t take it on sight because, unfortunately, I am sympathetic that something might be going on with that student. I tell them to put it away straight away, but I’m not going to confiscate it because they could have a family member at home seriously ill, and they want to check in with their mum. So, I’d rather they put it away and it stay safe with them than put it into a safe and them be upset about it. The behaviour policy genuinely sounds awful, but I’ve changed it as I have my own behaviour management techniques, and I don’t have to follow the policy because there is no need for it’ (Mandy, Interview 2).

Mandy’s example illustrates how teachers often navigate tensions by reinterpreting rather than simply enacting policy. Her decision not to confiscate a phone reflects a professional judgement rooted in empathy and contextual awareness, prioritising the wellbeing of students over rigid adherence to rules. In doing so, she demonstrates what Buchanan (2015) terms professional agency: the capacity to reshape practice in line with values and situational demands. This is not passive resistance but an active reframing of expectations, where institutional policy is adapted through the lens of lived classroom realities. Such choices highlight the role of teachers as moral and relational agents (Biesta, 2015), negotiating between compliance and care to sustain both their authority and their sense of professional integrity.

Mandy shares another example,

‘The school follows very rigid structures of how they want form time done. They want reading on a Monday, PHSE on Wednesday and Thursday, assembly on Tuesday, and math on Friday, but I just feel that it is too rigid, and it doesn’t have

to be done like this. I just feel like for my class, it just doesn't work for them. And by Friday, they're burnt out, and they have had enough on Friday, and they don't want to sit there and do loads of numeracy. When we do the math on Monday instead, they say they are aiming for their best score. But then on Friday, we do reading; we might hear some modelled reading and play a bit of reading bingo, which actually gets them enthusiastic about reading. And then it's kind of the right balance, as on a Monday, they come and they're getting their brains engaged for the week, and then on Friday, they're winding down' (Mandy, Interview 2).

Mandy's account shows policy enactment in practice rather than simple compliance (Ball et al., 2012; Braun et al., 2011). Faced with a templated form-time schedule, she reads the local conditions, class energy, weekly rhythms, and what students can productively attend to, and reorders activities. Moving numeracy to Monday and reserving reading for Friday is an example of reflexive capability (Tickle, 2011): she reorganises means and ends so the timetable serves learning, not the reverse. This is also an instance of practical wisdom or phronesis (Biesta, 2015), where purposes (readiness to learn, maintaining momentum) are weighed against procedures. Her tweaks are small, but they constitute teacher agency (Priestley et al., 2016; Eteläpelto et al., 2013): a situated, value-informed adjustment that aligns curricular intent with students' temporal routines. Read through van Manen's (1995) idea of pedagogical tact, Mandy demonstrates the tactful timing that makes policy workable for real students. In short, she is not rejecting policy; she is recrafting it, using professional judgement to balance institutional routines with the lived tempo of her class and, in doing so, articulating an identity grounded in care, attentiveness and context.

Audrey is equally frustrated, but for her the issue is not rigidity but incoherence: policies are introduced with initial enthusiasm yet quickly abandoned, leaving teachers to navigate the gap between official directives and everyday realities. This lack of follow-through undermines both trust and the sense that policies are connected to genuine pedagogical purpose.

'I don't disagree with anything, but I do think things could be done more. So, they'll, like, you know, implement something. They'll do like one little assembly

on it, and then that's it, and it just doesn't get implemented as they don't get the buy-in from the teachers. I am well up for it, as if you can explain why, then I will do it, but there are so many sorts of old-school teachers who can't really be bothered, and then they don't buy in. So, then their ideas just fall flat. So, there is an eye roll every time one is rolled out, and we are all going to do it this time, but I'm like, we are probably not; I probably will, but no one else will' (Audrey, Interview 3).

Her willingness to engage with behaviour policies when they are meaningful and well-explained reflects her desire to align institutional expectations with her own professional values. However, when her efforts are undermined by inconsistent implementation and a lack of collective responsibility from colleagues, she experiences not only disillusionment but also a disruption to her identity as a competent and credible practitioner. This illustrates how professional identity is relationally constructed: it depends not only on individual commitment but also on the extent to which colleagues and leaders create a coherent and supportive environment (Kelchtermans, 2009; Day and Gu, 2010). In this sense, Audrey's narrative underscores the importance of context in shaping identity, as inconsistent enactment and weak collaborative practices erode both her self-efficacy and her sense of belonging within the professional community (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). She recalls,

'I'm there at the door; is the person next door there? She is actually sitting at a desk with her laptop. I am just like, have the balls to implement it properly. But following through is a major bugbear that I've got, really. And the detention system, I don't really like it either, this idea of having a restorative chat with someone who was in a lesson that wasn't even your lesson. So, if you, as a member of staff, go to the loo and you can catch a student in the toilet, then you put them down for a detention. However, you are then emailed and asked, Can you come down and have a chat with that student? And there is nothing about the fact that I found them in the toilet, bunking a lesson that wasn't even mine. I don't get it. Why? Why do I have to go and do that? So, I think you know, and the kids are doubtless at the same point with these restorative conversations, as it is the same

teacher doing it every week, the same student, the restorative chat; it's just rubbish. Yeah, it doesn't work saying, I won't do it again, and they do it again the next week. It's not working, and I don't understand why the head of behaviour, who is running it, can't see that it's not working' (Audrey, Interview 3).

Her sense of investment is not matched by those around her, and this lack of professional coherence challenges her motivation and trust in the system. Over time, this disconnect can weaken teachers' sense of belonging and erode their trust in both colleagues and the wider profession. Audrey's reflections also speak to what Kelchtermans (2009) calls professional vulnerability, where a teacher's self-understanding is destabilised by a sense of disconnection between their moral purpose and the institutional demands placed upon them. The continual failure of the school's behaviour systems to achieve their intended impact and Audrey's awareness of this contribute to her questioning of the system's legitimacy. In this way, the negotiation of challenge is not just about managing frustration, but about trying to maintain professional integrity in the face of structural contradictions.

Isaac shares similar concerns; for him, the issue is trust. When leadership fails to model expectations, it signals a lack of shared accountability. His disengagement is a pragmatic response to a perceived performativity. He explains,

'Anything I find frustrating would be any policy that you enact that you're not willing to back up, which has been the case for a couple of them. For example, from the previous headteacher, we're going to crack down on this. And then 10 minutes later, I see several members of SLT not enforcing the rule they've just announced, at which point I let go, as that is frustrating because you just told me something, and now, you're not doing it. So, then my response is, well, if you're not going to do it, I won't do it, and then I've moved on' (Isaac Interview 3).

Isaac's response highlights the central role of relationships, particularly with leadership, in shaping his professional stance. His frustration lies not just in the policy itself, but in the relational breakdown: a breach of trust between what is said and what is done. Context plays a vital role here. Isaac's school environment appears to be one where

performative leadership is present, directives are issued for the sake of appearance, but without follow-through. This aligns with Ball's (2003) concept of performativity, where surface-level compliance is often prioritised over meaningful engagement. Such contexts matter because identity is not formed in isolation but is embedded in the organisational cultures, values, and practices that teachers inhabit (Kelchtermans, 2009; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). When school leadership promotes directives without substance, it creates a climate of mistrust that undermines teachers' relatedness and erodes their sense of professional agency (Deci and Ryan, 2000; Day and Gu, 2010). For ECTs like Isaac, this environment destabilises the construction of a coherent professional identity, particularly when leadership's actions contradict the values being promoted, producing tension between personal commitments and institutional expectations (Braun et al., 2011).

Tanya's narrative (Pen Portrait Chapter 8) picks up on this same theme of negotiating inconsistency, but where Isaac responds by stepping back from policy enactment, Tanya's response is marked by quiet compliance, emotional withdrawal, and a growing sense of professional isolation, all shaped by her specific relational and contextual experiences.

'There is a huge push about uniforms again, cracking down on uniforms, but then not all the teachers are. You know, nose rings, girls come in with nose rings, and they say to you, some teachers don't say anything or other teachers do this, and sometimes I think where we put our energy is wrong. I'm probably someone that turns a blind eye on some things, and maybe I ought to do more, but again, I think if it was really consistent and everybody was doing it across the board, then it would be a lot easier, and it also means that you don't get challenged by the kids if you've got that consistency' (Tanya, Interview 2).

Tanya's account illustrates the tension between policy, practice, and professional identity. On the one hand, uniform policies reflect broader institutional priorities and the performative emphasis on visible compliance. Yet, as Tanya observes, inconsistent enactment across staff undermines not only the policy's effectiveness but also her own professional authority in the classroom.

Tanya goes on to say,

‘It’s the lack of cohesiveness with the behaviour or the consistency of behaviour policies and policies in general. The whole school sometimes just feels a bit like too many disjointed people are just trying to send emails out and over each other, and I am just kind of left to go, What? So, I kind of stay in my little corner’ (Interview 2).

Tanya’s experiences affect her professional identity, as the perceived lack of consistency means that she ‘stays in my little corner,’ and she admits that ‘I don’t really get out and see much,’ and she states, ‘The longer I am there, that will grow and become more normal’ (Tanya, Interview 2). Her words suggest a movement from active resistance to passive withdrawal, where speaking out is replaced by silence and retreat. This echoes Kelchtermans’ (2009) concept of ‘professional vulnerability’, where teachers respond to dissonance between personal values and institutional practices by protecting themselves through disengagement. Silence can function as a coping strategy, yet it also signals a loss of agency and a narrowing of professional identity (Sachs, 2001). For ECTs, such withdrawal is particularly significant because professional identity is relationally constructed through interaction and participation in collegial networks (Wenger, 1990; Day and Gu, 2010). When these opportunities are abandoned in favour of self-protection, identity formation risks becoming more individualised and fragile. Over time, what begins as tactical withdrawal can normalise professional isolation, reducing teachers’ sense of belonging and increasing the likelihood of alienation or attrition (Ingersoll, 2001; Hong, 2012).

She continues with the theme of the lack of consistency in her third year, as she says,

‘We do have a behaviour code. I don’t have a problem with the behaviour code. So, to speak, sometimes I can think, do I really want to fight with that kid about, you know, that his shirt is untucked? Or do I want him to actually learn something? Or I have daily fights with students about coats being on. Anyways, I know they’re always trying to push the boundaries as they are teenagers and want to feel that they can get away with their nails or something. Toilet, I know we can’t allow every

kid to go to the toilet because then we would have a class that could get disruptive and yada, yada. But when they're still sitting there, you know, telling you that you are infringing their human rights, you know, and other teachers let them go. And it's the lack of consistency that I find the most frustrating. And they've made it so hard, as it takes 20 minutes to log an incident onto the school system, and if you create the detentions, then you actually have to do the detentions. So, if you actually followed every single behaviour incident with a detention you would spend every break and every lunch or every after school in detention and so people don't do it, they don't bother and then you get inconsistency and kids thinking, 'oh well, I can get away with this' and push the boundaries even more' (Tanya, Interview 3).

In contrast to many of the other ECTs in this study, Isaac expresses strong support for his school's behaviour policy. He explains.

'I like the behaviour policy at our school because it makes my life very clear and obvious about what I have to do. There is very little in terms of negotiables as to what should be done with x and y, and I know who to pass it onto, so I like the way they've enacted the policy because of how it makes my job much easier' (Isaac, Interview 3).

This sense of clarity and structure appears to be central to Isaac's early professional identity.

'I tell them you have to listen to this in silence. While I do this, if you interrupt me, I start again. And I've done it for 30 minutes straight, where I'm just repeating and kicked out five, six of the class because they couldn't be silent. And it's like really, really draining because it's so monotonous and it's not interesting, but I have gotten to the point where behaviour is the most important thing for me by far' (Isaac, Interview 1).

Tanya's account highlights the frustrations teachers face when behaviour policies are inconsistently enacted and overly bureaucratic. Her dilemma whether to enforce

uniform rules rigidly or prioritise learning, illustrates the everyday decisions teachers make about where to invest their energy. The policy's design, requiring lengthy administrative follow-up for minor incidents, effectively disincentivises enforcement and fosters inconsistency across staff. This aligns with research showing that when systems are impractical or fragmented, they undermine professional trust and create what Kelchtermans (2009) describes as professional vulnerability, a sense of diminished security in one's role and practices. Rather than supporting staff, the policy structure positions teachers in conflict with both students and colleagues, eroding relational trust. Day and Gu (2010) note that identity and motivation are sustained when policies are coherent and enacted collectively; Tanya's experience reflects the opposite, where fragmentation and workload pressures drive frustration and disengagement. While self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000) helps explain how such conditions frustrate autonomy, competence, and relatedness, her account also resonates with Ball's (2003) critique of performativity, where compliance structures replace meaningful professional judgement.

Tanya's reflections also echo Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) work on efficacy: she retains confidence in her classroom priorities but is continually undermined by systemic incoherence, which makes consistency impossible. The result is an identity shaped by compromise and disillusionment rather than growth. Her story underlines that professional identity is sustained not only through individual resilience but through a supportive organisational culture where rules are coherent, follow-through is possible, and teachers feel their judgement is both enabled and trusted.

Isaac presents a contrasting perspective, expressing strong support for his school's behaviour policy. He values its clarity and consistency, which he feels removes ambiguity from his role and simplifies decision making. By the second year, this commitment becomes embedded in his teaching philosophy:

'I apply the behaviour policy very, very consistently. So that value became my overriding value of how I teach, basically. And once that was in place, my enjoyment and passion for the subject began to rebuild quite quickly, because they're not necessarily interested, but they are engaged. They're engaged

because they have no choice but to engage; if they are not engaged, they have to leave. So, now they're engaged; I make it more interesting, and I have spent all of my focus making them engaged because now they've realised that they have no choice' (Isaac, Interview 2).

This reflects what Braun et al. (2011) describe as policy enactment as sense-making, where teachers interpret and work with policies in ways that provide stability in uncertain contexts. For Isaac, consistency across staff translates into a more predictable environment, enabling him to establish order in his classroom. His experience highlights how, when policies are applied coherently, they can act as a scaffold for ECTs, supporting professional confidence and reducing the cognitive and emotional load often associated with behaviour management (Worth and Van den Brande, 2020). In this sense, Isaac's account demonstrates how institutional structures can provide the kind of security that Kelchtermans (2009) associates with reducing professional vulnerability. At the same time, his heavy reliance on behavioural compliance raises questions about how identity is shaped when technical control becomes the dominant marker of success. Biesta (2015) cautions against reducing teaching to matters of efficiency and control, warning that the ethical and relational dimensions of practice risk being overshadowed. Isaac himself acknowledges the monotony of enforcing silence and issuing repeated sanctions, suggesting that while the system secures order, it does so at the cost of creativity and relational engagement.

Over time, Isaac reports that once behaviour management became routine, he could begin to reconnect with subject passion and pedagogical enjoyment. This trajectory suggests that while structured systems can provide an initial anchor for ECTs, long-term professional growth depends on rebalancing control with opportunities for autonomy, relational connection, and pedagogical experimentation (Priestley et al., 2016; Hordern et al., 2024). His story illustrates both the protective function and the potential limitations of highly standardised policies: they can create the conditions for identity development, but risk narrowing its scope if not coupled with opportunities for teachers to reassert judgement and creativity.

The experiences of Mandy, Audrey, Tanya, and Isaac highlight how ECTs actively negotiate school policy within the contextual realities of their settings, relationships, and lived experiences, a process that plays a critical role in shaping their professional identities. This negotiation reflects Ball et al.'s (2012) conception of policy enactment as something teachers do rather than simply receive, interpreting and applying policy in ways that are filtered through school culture, personal values, and institutional pressures. For Mandy, this means drawing on her knowledge of students and enacting her professional autonomy to modify policy in compassionate, student-centred ways. Her response aligns with self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), where autonomy and relatedness are essential to motivation and well-being in practice.

Taken together, these narratives show that ECTs are not passive recipients of school policy but active navigators, responding to challenges through relational, contextual, and identity-driven decisions. At the same time, their accounts reveal the constant tension between external policy demands and their own values and professional identities. For Audrey and Tanya, inconsistent enactment and performative priorities conflicted with their commitment to fairness, collaboration, and meaningful teaching, leading to frustration, withdrawal, or disillusionment. For Isaac, alignment between policy and practice provided greater space for his values to be enacted, strengthening his sense of competence and agency. Their ability to negotiate these tensions depends on the level of autonomy, support, and consistency they encounter, reaffirming that professional identity is not only shaped by what teachers do, but by the conditions in which they are expected to do it.

While this section has explored how ECTs negotiate policy challenges that often constrain their autonomy and identity, another significant challenge emerged in the form of limited collaboration and inconsistent collegial support. For many participants, the absence of meaningful professional relationships within their schools was just as destabilising as prescriptive policy demands. Despite longstanding recognition in the research literature that collaboration enhances teacher learning, wellbeing, and retention (Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018; Day and Gu, 2010), and despite growing

concerns about teacher attrition, neither the ECF nor ITTECF meaningfully foregrounds the relational and contextual dimensions of ECTs' development.

7.4 Collaboration, Resistance, and the Shaping of Professional Identity

Collaboration and collegiality are widely recognised as essential components of teacher professional development, with the potential to enhance self-efficacy, instructional quality, and a sense of professional belonging (Duyar et al., 2013; Hargreaves and O'Connor, 2018). Policy frameworks such as the OECD (2020) and the DfE (2023) promote collaboration as a lever for retention and workload reduction. Yet within the neoliberal climate that has shaped English education since the late 1980s, collaboration has often been reframed as a performative exercise tied to accountability rather than authentic professional growth (Ball, 2003; Connell, 2009). When collaborative structures become managerial tools, they risk eroding trust and increasing workload, undermining teacher wellbeing (Day and Gu, 2010).

Despite this, participants often sought to reclaim collaboration as spaces of solidarity and professional affirmation. Their experiences reflect Kelchtermans' (2006) view of collegiality as both an emotional buffer and a political practice: teachers turn to trusted colleagues not only for resources but also for shared meaning-making, trust, and mutual care. Authentic collaboration therefore functions as a site of professional agency (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), where teachers can contest narrow, compliance-driven framings and co-construct their identities. The experiences of participants such as Sally, Audrey, Tanya, Mandy, and Alice illustrate how these dynamics play out in practice.

For Sally (Pen Portrait, Chapter 5) and Audrey (Pen Portrait, Chapter 7) collaboration and collegiality appear to be embedded in their school contexts, supporting a more positive and affirming professional experience. Sally, for example, values the shared pedagogical practices in her school: 'I think it's better that we've got things that we're doing collectively' (Sally, Interview 3). Although she acknowledges a potential drawback, 'what's hard is if people aren't doing it, then it's not going to work,' (Interview 3), the sense of professional coherence in her department seems to outweigh the frustration of occasional inconsistency. What appears significant in Sally's case is the presence of a

shared instructional vision, which promotes alignment and collective responsibility while still allowing room for individual contributions.

This is further evidenced in her reflections on curriculum development,

'I think I actually have a lot of influence. We've redesigned our curriculum, and I have tried to kind of suggest that we interleave (intertwine) the units, and it's worked really well. There are only three of us who teach music, and it's just us, which is nice because of the rotations of the classes; we don't have anyone outside of us to teach music, and it does seem like everyone's on board, which is really good' (Sally, Interview 3).

Sally's account highlights how collaboration can strengthen identity when it is grounded in professional trust and shared responsibility. Her sense of ownership in curriculum design and confidence in shaping departmental practices illustrates how autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan, 2000) can be supported in collegial environments. At the same time, her reflections on the limits of collaboration, "what's hard is if people aren't doing it, then it's not going to work" (Interview 3), point to the fragility of these arrangements. Collaboration depends not only on structures but also on the consistency and reciprocity of colleagues, echoing Little's (1990) distinction between genuine collegiality and surface-level cooperation.

Her experience also resonates with Kelchtermans' (2006, 2009) work on vulnerability in teaching: the sense of professional security she derives from a coherent departmental culture contrasts with the exposure teachers feel when collaboration is absent or undermined. From a broader perspective, Sally's positive account reflects Biesta's (2015) argument that professionalism is sustained not only through technical competence but through relational practices that affirm teachers as moral and autonomous agents. Thus, while SDT helps explain the psychological satisfaction Sally experiences, her story also demonstrates how supportive school cultures, coherent collective practices, and recognition of teacher agency work together to reinforce identity. Collaboration here is more than the exchange of resources, it is an affirmation of belonging, trust, and professional worth.

Audrey's narrative echoes many of these themes. She too, highlights the value of consistency combined with the freedom to make pedagogical choices. In her department, collaboration is situated in ongoing conversations about what works and what doesn't,

'We always have a chat when the Year 11s leave and say, Right, let's scrap that. And let's run with what you created. So, like I did, a crime and punishment unit, and there was another unit after that, and everyone was like, Let's scrap that other unit and make your unit longer because the kids just really enjoyed looking at crime and punishment and stuff like that' (Audrey, Interview 3).

Audrey's reflections also highlight the power of collaboration when it is authentic and rooted in professional trust. Her account of colleagues collectively deciding to scrap one unit and extend another demonstrates what Little (1990) calls genuine collegiality, where teachers exercise shared judgement rather than follow external directives. This sense of co-construction strengthens Audrey's professional agency, allowing her to enact her values within a supportive community of practice (Wenger, 1990).

From the perspective of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), Audrey's autonomy is sustained through the freedom to shape pedagogy, her competence is affirmed by colleagues recognising and adopting her curriculum innovations, and her relatedness is deepened through ongoing professional dialogue. Yet, her experience also points to something beyond SDT: the political and ethical dimensions of collaboration. By privileging teacher expertise over standardisation, Audrey and her colleagues resist what Ball (2003) terms the technification of teaching, asserting the profession's relational and moral character. Kelchtermans' (2009) notion of professional vulnerability is useful here too. The trust placed in Audrey to lead change shields her from the sense of exposure and isolation that often comes with prescriptive policy contexts. Instead, collegial recognition strengthens her identity and sustains her motivation. Biesta (2015) reminds us that education is always a matter of values, and Audrey's account demonstrates how collaboration can be a space where values are enacted and reaffirmed, not just techniques shared. In this sense, her story shows that collaboration is not simply instrumental but constitutive of identity. It enables her to position herself

as a knowledgeable, trusted professional within a collective, thereby reinforcing both her agency and her sense of belonging.

In contrast, Tanya's account illustrates the difficulties of working in a context where collegiality feels absent or superficial. Her frustration at not even having access to a staff list becomes emblematic of what Kelchtermans (2006) describes as the erosion of the relational conditions needed for professional growth. Without opportunities for authentic engagement, she retreats into what she calls her 'little corner, a strategy of self-preservation that mirrors Sachs' (2001) notion of teachers adopting a more defensive identity stance when professional cultures feel fragmented. Her example of not having access to a staff list becomes a powerful indicator of this:

'There are people that I have no idea who they are, which bugs me, but it is really important to me as I want to know who I'm greeting in the staff room or across the parking lot or whatever' (Tanya, Interview 2).

From the perspective of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), Tanya's sense of relatedness is clearly undermined by the lack of collegial trust and connection, while her autonomy is constrained by policies that rely on compliance rather than dialogue. Yet her reflections also resonate with Lortie's (1975) idea of individualism in teaching, where isolation is normalised and professional learning becomes a solitary rather than shared endeavour. This culture limits the vicarious experiences and feedback that self-efficacy theory identifies as critical for building professional confidence (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). Tanya also questions the absence of collaborative spirit among her colleagues, particularly when she is visibly 'struggling'. In her third year, she reflects,

'Why aren't they more collaborative? Why aren't they wanting to help? You know, when somebody can see they is struggling?'

She attempts to rationalise it,

'So, the only thing I can think of about why they wouldn't want to be more sharing and cooperative is that they are like, I am out of here at 4 o'clock on the dot' (Tanya, Interview 3).

Tanya's disappointment is sharpened by her sense that colleagues are unwilling to support one another, even when she is visibly struggling. Her rationalisation that staff simply 'clock off at 4,' echoes Hargreaves' (1994) concept of contrived collegiality, where collaboration is restricted to formalised, transactional exchanges rather than genuine mutual support. In such an environment, professional identity becomes shaped less through shared dialogue and more through withdrawal, silence, and a narrowing of professional horizons.

Her story is significant because it shows that identity is not only shaped by what teachers choose to do, but also by what they feel forced to stop doing. Tanya's retreat into isolation reflects both a loss of agency and an attempt to protect her professional integrity. As Biesta (2015) argues, teaching is fundamentally about values, and when these values cannot be enacted collectively, teachers like Tanya face a deep dissonance between what they believe education should be and the culture in which they work.

Mandy's reflections (see Pen Portrait, Chapter 8) add another layer to how collaboration, or its absence, shapes professional identity. Her frustration with what she calls a 'silo mentality' illustrates how competitive or guarded school cultures can stifle opportunities for mutual learning. Hargreaves (1994) describes this as contrived collegiality, where sharing is limited or withheld, often leaving ECTs isolated and overburdened. For Mandy, the lack of access to colleagues' resources not only increased her workload but also undermined opportunities for vicarious learning, a key pathway for strengthening self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). Reflecting on her first school, she expresses frustration with what she describes as a 'silo mentality',

'I don't understand the silo mentality that we have in teaching. And you know what annoys me is that you could look at that experienced teachers' scheme of work, which would help you, and you could put some of your really creative ideas and pop them in there as well. You know, if it's a new book, you would get the benefit of the subject knowledge and not have to do all the research in detail on *The Tempest* or something like that if you haven't studied it before. Just honestly, I just don't get it. It annoys the hell out of me, and you know, in any new role, that is

going to be one of my big keywords. I am going to be like, Collaboration? We're all professionals. Why don't we all share ideas?' (Mandy, Interview 1).

This absence of trust based collaboration also conflicts with her personal values. This disconnection is compounded by her interactions with the literacy coordinator in her first school. Mandy recalls a moment that left her feeling dismissed,

'It wasn't a positive discussion; it was, oh, I didn't realise that. And what do you read? It wasn't a collaborative; let's discuss where the strengths are it was, I am the literacy coordinator, so I don't know why I am talking to you' (Mandy, Interview 2).

When Mandy expresses an interest in attending a literacy webinar, her initiative is shut down again.

'Why are you doing that? You're not the literacy coordinator, so I don't see why you feel you need to go to that webinar. And I say, well, it's for my own professional development, really; I just thought it might be valuable about implementing vocabulary. And again, I felt like it was another rejection, and I was trying to encroach on her role' (Mandy, Interview 2).

From a self-determination theory perspective (Deci and Ryan, 2000), relatedness is denied when colleagues gatekeep resources, and autonomy is constrained when her initiative, for instance, attending a literacy webinar, is dismissed.

Kelchtermans' (2009) concept of micropolitical literacy helps explain Mandy's later strategy: rather than abandoning collaboration altogether, she cultivates a small, trusted network where ideas and resources can be shared more safely. She describes having a 'small little network' with whom she shares materials, noting that she sometimes edits departmental resources before sharing them with her group as 'I didn't want to offend them' (Interview 3). In this way, she demonstrates what Eteläpelto et al. (2013) call professional agency, finding ways to sustain her values in an environment that does not always support them. By her third year, Mandy reframes collaboration on her own terms, selectively sharing and adapting departmental materials while maintaining her creative

independence. This adaptive approach reflects not only growing self-efficacy in her classroom practice but also an emerging professional identity that balances agency with pragmatism. As Mockler (2011) suggests, such everyday acts of quiet resistance are integral to identity formation, allowing teachers to hold on to their values even in restrictive contexts.

Alice's early experiences (see Pen Portrait, Chapter 5) highlight the risks of working in contexts where collaboration is limited or absent. In her first school, collaboration was rare:

‘It wasn't common practice to share lessons. I was planning every night until 9-10pm across two languages. It was just madness’ (Alice, Interview 2).

This lack of collegial exchange reflects Lortie's (1975) ‘individualism’ in teaching, where professional isolation is normalised. Without opportunities for vicarious learning or feedback, her self-efficacy was undermined, particularly in teaching less familiar content. Alice's move to a new school marked a significant shift in both context and identity. She describes a culture where collaboration is not only encouraged but underpinned by mutual trust and reciprocity:

‘We are creating a bank of resources, and I feel that this is a massive help for me with Spanish. Because I can then look at the lesson before, and I can look up words that I don't know and make it my own as well. I don't teach it exactly as I put my own spin on it. Equally, I then take the lead for French and send out resources, and because we all do it that way, I don't feel like I give out everything, and I don't get anything in return. I feel it's nice to be trusted with these kinds of things. I have carte blanche on what I do in my lesson. We do want to make sure we teach the same thing because they all have the same test at the end of half term, but how we teach it is up to us. I don't feel that somebody is breathing down my neck constantly’ (Alice, Interview 3).

This context afforded Alice both the freedom to adapt materials to her style and the recognition of her expertise as a French lead. From a self-determination theory perspective (Deci and Ryan, 2000), these conditions satisfied autonomy, competence,

and relatedness, reinforcing her motivation. More broadly, Wenger's (1990) concept of communities of practice helps explain how her identity was reshaped through active participation in a shared professional project. Alice's story also demonstrates resistance in quieter forms. By seeking out and embedding herself in a collegial environment, she countered the isolation that constrained her earlier development. In this sense, her professional identity was not only constructed in response to external structures but also through her own choices about the environments in which she could thrive. This reflects Biesta's (2015) view that teacher identity is inseparable from values and purpose: Alice actively sought a setting that allowed her to enact both.

Taken together, these narratives show how collaboration can either sustain or constrain ECTs' professional identity. Where collegiality is grounded in trust and reciprocity, as in Sally's and Audrey's schools, teachers experience what Little (1990) terms genuine collegiality, spaces that meet needs for relatedness, affirm competence, and reinforce self-efficacy through shared practice and recognition. In contrast, Tanya's and Mandy's accounts reveal the risks of isolation, gatekeeping, and contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994), which erode belonging and require teachers to develop micropolitical strategies to protect their values (Kelchtermans, 2009). Alice's journey illustrates that teachers can resist such isolation by actively seeking communities of practice (Wenger, 1990) where autonomy and trust are preserved.

Across these cases, collaboration emerges not simply as an organisational arrangement but as a lived and negotiated process. It shapes identity through solidarity and shared expertise, but also through absence, resistance, and the choices teachers make in response to their professional contexts. Authentic collaboration allows ECTs to position themselves as competent, valued professionals, while its absence can narrow identity and undermine motivation. In this sense, collaboration is best understood as both a resource for professional growth and a site of identity politics (Mockler, 2011), where ECTs continually negotiate who they can be within the cultures of their schools.

7.5 Concluding Comments for this Chapter

This chapter has shown how early career teachers constructed professional identities through three interrelated processes: asserting professional judgement within institutional routines, negotiating relational and organisational tensions, and sustaining identity through collaboration and micropolitical agency.

First, participants described navigating school-based expectations around behaviour, curriculum pacing, and everyday routines. In some contexts, clearly enacted structures provided stability and early confidence; in others, inconsistency or rigidity generated frustration and required adaptation. Across cases, ECTs were not passive recipients of institutional expectations. They exercised professional judgement in context, reshaping routines in ways that aligned with their values and students' needs. Identity was strengthened where autonomy and coherent enactment were present; it was strained where trust and consistency were weak.

Second, identity work was evident in the negotiation of relational and emotional tensions. Participants described the psychological labour involved in reconciling personal beliefs with organisational practices, particularly when expectations were inconsistently applied. Such tensions did not automatically undermine identity; rather, they became sites of meaning-making. Through adaptation, selective compliance, or withdrawal, ECTs sought to protect their sense of competence, relatedness, and professional integrity.

Third, collaboration functioned as both a resource and a fault line in identity formation. In contexts characterised by trust, reciprocity, and shared purpose, collegial relationships affirmed competence and belonging, reinforcing self-efficacy and sustaining motivation. Where collaboration was limited, guarded, or transactional, participants described isolation and the need to develop small, trusted networks or quiet forms of resistance. These micropolitical strategies were not acts of rebellion but efforts to maintain professional coherence within complex organisational cultures.

Taken together, the findings reinforce the argument that professional identity is constructed relationally and contextually. It develops not simply through exposure to

formal structures, but through the everyday negotiation of institutional routines, relational climates, and opportunities for professional agency. Identity was most secure where environments enabled coherent expectations, relational trust, and space for professional judgement. Where these conditions were fragile, identity required greater emotional labour to sustain.

The next chapter builds on these insights by examining the strategies that most effectively supported ECTs in constructing resilient professional identities over time, with particular attention to relationships, context, and agency.

Chapter 8 - What strategies are identified as being the most effective in facilitating the construction of an effective teacher professional identity in the first three years?

To introduce this chapter, I have included the pen portraits of Mandy and Tanya because their experiences highlight two central themes of what makes support for ECTs effective. Mandy's narrative highlights the importance of role models, recognition and collaborative cultures that create space for growth. Tanya's narrative shows how consistency, relational trust and responsive support become particularly significant when personal capacity is tested by health and structural pressures. Together, their accounts illustrate that professional identity is constructed through the interaction of personal values and the relational and organisational conditions in which teachers work.

Mandy Pen Portrait

Mandy taught in two schools during this research, moving at the start of the summer term in her second year. Her decision to become a teacher was inspired by two English teachers who sparked her love of the subject:

'It was my middle school English teacher; there was just something that he did that just sparked that love of English for me. From that point onwards, I just thought I'd love to be a teacher. When I went to high school, my English teacher inspired me from Year 9 through to Year 13; she just inspired that love for the subject' (Interview 1).

A conversation with her stepfather, himself a teacher, encouraged her to pursue English at university:

'A long time ago, I wanted to do beauty and hair. I sat down with my stepdad, who's been a teacher, and we had a discussion about my actual passion, and then I suddenly realised that English was my favourite subject, as I love it. My stepdad helped raise me since I was 10, and I saw different things, and that university was an option. I could achieve things that I didn't think I could before, so he's been a massive influence' (Interview 2).

Mandy's motivation for teaching stems from wanting to recreate for others the 'light bulb' moments she experienced as a student:

'I've never been good at math or science, but when that spark for English started, I started to get better at it, and I improved. I just thought, I want to make others feel like this. And I want others to have that wow moment, like the light bulb, that is brilliant. I want to do this all the time. I will read more books, and I want to write stories, and I want to talk about what other authors are doing. It just really stemmed from that idea that I want others to know how brilliant it is' (Interview 1).

The move to her second school was positive with a stronger focus on teaching and learning 'It has definitely changed moving schools, but I think it's for the better.' (Interview 3) as 'I felt that teaching had a much bigger focus' (Interview 2).

She now aspires to mentoring and coaching roles:

'I would like to think that I will be mentoring trainees and ECTs because that is a really achievable goal for me. I would also like to think that there will be some kind of teaching and learning responsibility in place as part of the whole school restructuring. They have talked about having coaches in departments, and again, I feel like I'm building up enough experience that I would be able to do that job well' (Interview 3).

However, she acknowledges the challenge of being taken seriously early in her career,

'It's difficult for someone who is still very new to teaching and very baby-faced. People don't tend to take me seriously, so it's quite important to me to show I am capable' (Interview 2).

This links to her frustration, explored in the chapter, at not being able to contribute meaningfully to departmental discussions. Her experience reflects the wider challenge for ECTs establishing professional credibility in environments where expertise is often equated with years of service rather than the quality of insight or practice.

Mandy is intentional about developing her practice, motivated by admiration for a progressive lead practitioner in English at her first school:

‘I am pushing so hard to develop myself as a practitioner in very specific avenues. So, although I love the subject, I love English; it’s my passion, my definite goal is to go more behind the scenes and train teachers and make sure that we have quality first teaching’ (Interview 3).

Mandy’s journey reflects several key themes explored in this chapter: the importance of professional role models in shaping early career aspirations; the way collegial trust and validation strengthen self-efficacy; and the role of collaborative, non-hierarchical relationships in sustaining motivation. Her admiration for a progressive lead practitioner illustrates the powerful influence of modelling on identity construction, while her frustration at not being taken seriously highlights the barriers that ECTs can face in gaining professional credibility. These experiences speak to the chapter’s wider argument that identity development is both relational and situational, shaped by the quality of professional networks and the opportunities teachers have to demonstrate, refine, and be recognised for their expertise.

Tanya’s Pen Portrait

Tanya was educated and lived abroad, initially training to become a social worker before moving to the UK. After working in various roles, including as a primary school teaching assistant, she trained as a design and technology teacher and now works in a rural secondary school. She is a design and technology teacher at a rural secondary school. During this study, Tanya experienced long COVID from late 2021 to early 2022, taking six weeks to recover. When she returned in February 2022, she was offered a few concessions, and by September, she was expected to resume her full teaching and form tutor duties. As a single mother of two children, these demands added to the pressures she faced.

Tanya recalls that her decision to become a teacher was influenced by her enjoyment of dialogue and connection in education. While initially she considered working with younger children, she found her passion in secondary teaching.

‘Realised I didn’t want to be working with the little kids. But I loved that kind of discussion and dialogue, and the connection from education. It was something I kept toying with, and then I got to a point in my life where I felt really unfulfilled, so that’s when I started looking at teaching, as, ‘if I can inspire a young person to go out in the world and do great things, how amazing would that be?’ (Interview 1).

She was inspired in part by a ‘standout teacher’ who took the time to believe in her when others did not. This early experience reinforced her commitment to building strong, supportive relationships with her own students.

‘A standout teacher that a lot of the other students disliked, but because he had so much time for me and thought so much of me, I just thought the world of him, and I will never ever forget him. He taught me the importance that one person can play in just believing in a kid and saying, “You know what, you have got this,” and I wouldn’t say he inspired me to become a teacher, but he’s still certainly with me as a teacher’ (Interview 1).

This relationship was important to Tanya, as she explains, ‘I had a tough home life, and I didn’t feel that I could relate to a lot of people at school. I was really insecure, and I had self-esteem issues (Interview 2). Consistency is a core value for Tanya. She believes students need to know who you are and what you stand for, and she works hard to create positive, stable relationships.

‘Consistency is important, as I think it is important for the kids to know who you are, and I’ve noticed that some of the troublemakers play up for other people, but sometimes they just need to know that you are going to be consistent. I think I probably put a lot of weight on creating those positive relationships with students’ (Interview 2).

In her third year, she reflected on how much she loved teaching, more than she had expected, but acknowledged that health concerns might one day force her to leave.

‘There’s a part, a huge part of me that loves it, that actually loves it way more than I ever expected to. I feel really passionate about it, and it still feels really

connected. However, I think I might have to give it up for my health, and when I think that I get really upset as I don't want to' (Interview 3).

Her view of making a difference has evolved. Initially focused on subject knowledge and creativity in product design, she has come to see her role as being 'a constant' in students' lives, providing a steady, reliable presence. She recognises that such constancy can have a profound impact, even when teachers are unaware of the difference they make.

'When I started, it was more about the subject, and I was thinking that if I give the students a more creative approach to things and have a questioning mindset, problem-solving, and that kind of revolves around more product design. But I think what I have realised is that sometimes it's about being a constant in their lives as well. You know, it's just knowing that you're there and you'll hold space with them and that you'll show up, and it's really interesting, as with some of the hardest kids, that's all they need to know. You can't be somebody for everyone, and I'm not trying to be, but sometimes you won't even know that you were something to someone, and I think that thing that has actually surprised me' (Interview 3).

Looking ahead, Tanya's future career decisions are likely to be health-driven. While she has no ambitions to climb the leadership ladder, she would consider becoming a head of year if she had the energy or perhaps moving to a different school or working part-time.

'Much of my career now is health-driven. So, it is harder to predict, and I don't think I am a ladder climber, and I don't think I will go beyond just a class teacher. If I were younger, I probably would have liked to be a head of the year. If I had the energy to take on more, I would, and I guess, maybe trying to find a better school would be my goal, or trying to stay, maybe go part-time, if I can, but it's unfortunately going to be health-driven' (Interview 3).

Tanya's experiences also resonate strongly with the themes of this chapter. Her emphasis on consistency, relational trust, and being a 'constant' in students' lives reflects the central role of relationships in sustaining both teacher motivation and

professional identity. At the same time, her accounts of isolation, frustration, and health-related challenges highlight how the absence of collaborative support or responsive leadership can erode self-efficacy and threaten long-term retention. Tanya's story underscores the chapter's core argument that identity formation in the early years is deeply dependent on the interplay between personal values, relational contexts, and the structural conditions in which teachers work.

8.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies the strategies participants described as most effective in supporting the construction of a sustainable professional identity across the first three years of teaching. Three strategies were most prominent across the narratives: the enabling or constraining influence of school context, the importance of situatedness within professional knowledge landscapes, and the stabilising role of relationships. These strategies are not discrete; they work together to shape whether early career teachers experience autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000) and whether self-efficacy is strengthened through feedback, modelling and mastery experiences (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2007).

8.2 The Role of Context in Early Career Teacher Identity

Context is not a passive backdrop to professional identity formation but an active force that can either support or inhibit the development of a confident and sustainable professional self (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Day et al., 2006). For ECTs, context entails school culture, leadership style, departmental norms, and policy enactment combine to create the conditions in which autonomy, relatedness, and competence can flourish or be constrained (Kaplan, 2021; Fackler et al., 2021). Supportive contexts provide the job resources, such as collegial collaboration, leadership trust, and consistent expectations, that De Neve et al. (2015) identify as critical for professional growth.

The narratives in this study illustrate how contextual factors shape identity work in nuanced ways. Where school structures enabled open communication and collective problem-solving, participants described feeling valued and empowered. Where leadership was inconsistent or expectations were unclear, participants described adapting their practice pragmatically, sometimes prioritising manageability over their

preferred approaches (Flores and Day, 2006). These findings align with international research showing that professional identity is strengthened when teachers have space to act in alignment with their values, adapt to their students' needs, and access sustained, relational support (Abramson and Schachter, 2024; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Context functions as both the structural and emotional landscape of teaching. It influences opportunities for mastery experiences (Zee and Koomen, 2016; Klassen and Tze, 2014), relational trust, and professional autonomy.

James' narrative (Pen Portrait, Chapter 6) reveals the importance of context when he explains that being at his school 'it's like a family' (Interview 2) as it is a small school, so 'you don't really get lost in translation, so there is an open-door policy which is nice' (Interview 2). In this context, an open-door policy signifies more than just physical accessibility; it reflects a culture in which staff at all levels are approachable, communication flows freely, and support can be sought without formal barriers. For ECTs, such conditions support both relatedness and competence (Reeve, 2006; Kaplan, 2021). Similarly, Audrey described a 'really good support network' (Interview 2), with daily opportunities to 'offload' to peers. These informal exchanges provided the emotional buffer that stabilised her developing professional self. Together, these accounts echo Abramson and Schachter's (2024) argument that early career identity is shaped in contexts where contributions are recognised, and professional judgement is trusted. In these examples, autonomy is not about working in isolation but about exercising professional judgement within a supportive network. Relational trust combined with professional space strengthens motivation and enhances long-term identity sustainability (Fackler et al., 2021; Day and Gu, 2010).

One of the most influential contextual levers identified in this study was mentoring. When embedded in a supportive culture, it offered more than procedural guidance, it provided relational trust, affirmation, and the professional space for new teachers to flourish. Where absent or reduced to compliance, however, ECTs often substituted peer networks as sources of identity affirmation, a finding consistent with international studies of mentoring variability (Fransson, 2020; Squires, 2019).

8.2.1 Mentoring as a Contextual Strategy for Professional Identity Construction

When strategically embedded within school structures, mentoring can be a powerful contextual lever for supporting ECTs identity development (Dreer-Goethe, 2025; Hobson, 2021). Its value lies not only in the provision of structured guidance but also in how it fosters psychological safety, affirms developing identities, and enables professional growth through recognition, feedback, and relational trust (Day et al., 2006; Reeve, 2006). From a self-determination theory perspective, effective mentoring can satisfy ECTs' needs for relatedness and competence, needs strongly linked to sustained motivation and identity coherence (Kaplan, 2021; Fackler et al., 2021).

In this study, Sally, (Pen Portrait, Chapter 5) described her mentor as part of her 'support network' (Interview 2). Such relationships strengthen self-efficacy through encouragement, feedback, and shared problem-solving (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2007; Klassen and Tze, 2014). Yet the limited references to mentoring across participants suggest its enactment varies widely across schools, a finding consistent with international research (Fransson, 2020; Hobson, 2021).

Where formal mentoring was absent or tokenistic, informal peer networks often took its place. Collegial ties offered identity-affirming spaces to test ideas, admit doubt, and receive validation, conditions that bolster both self-efficacy and resilience (De Neve et al., 2015; Zee and Koomen, 2016). Mandy, James, Catherine, Audrey, and Alice all emphasised the value of trusted colleagues in helping them feel competent and recognised (see Chapter 6.3.2).

8.2.2 Leadership as a Contextual Influence in Professional Identity Formation

Leadership plays a decisive role in shaping the emotional and structural climate of schools (Leithwood et al., 2008; Grissom et al., 2021). It affects whether ECTs feel trusted, recognised, and safe to take professional risks, conditions central to identity formation (Day et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2015). Leadership is therefore not only about setting direction but about creating relational climates where autonomy, competence, and relatedness can be experienced in practice (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Bryk and Schneider, 2002).

Across the narratives in this study, leadership emerged not only as a structural feature of school life but as a highly relational and emotionally charged influence on teacher identity. Where leadership was visible, emotionally intelligent, and supportive, participants described a sense of psychological safety, trust, and affirmation. James, for example, characterised the deputy head at his school as ‘fantastic, I would consider her a friend’ (Interview 3). Alice reflects positively on the shift between her first and second schools (Pen Portrait, Chapter 5), emphasising the increased visibility and relational engagement of senior leadership, ‘I’d say senior leadership is much more visible, much more approachable as well’ (Interview 2). Alice goes on to say that the headteacher at her second school,

‘Puts in your pigeonhole a little card. You’re doing so well. I really like that and that’s what I like moving to my current school and having those kinds of touches from the headteacher’ (Interview 2).

This account illustrates how this symbolic gesture of appreciation had a powerful effect on Alice’s sense of belonging and professional worth. Such practices align closely with what Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) refer to as relational leadership, leadership that builds trust, listens actively, and responds with emotional intelligence. These examples illustrate relational leadership (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2015), where visible presence and trust-building affirm teachers’ professional worth and strengthen self-efficacy (Day et al., 2016).

In contrast, Susie (see Pen Portrait, Chapter 5) expressed frustration at leaders’ lack of visibility.

‘I can understand that he’s doing all the paperwork and stuff, but no kids have actually met him. He’s not in the corridors, or when he is in school, he’s in his office and doesn’t come out. So, the kids have noticed, and they’re like acting out quite a bit. So, on Wednesday, for example, there is no senior leadership team member in the school, it’s really tricky as the behaviour is so bad’ (Interview 3).

According to Susie, this lack of presence not only diminished support for staff but also destabilised student behaviour, creating additional pressures on classroom management and eroding self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2017). The absence of visible, engaged leadership signalled to both staff and students that relational connection was not prioritised, undermining trust and weakening the shared sense of purpose that is critical to identity formation (Kelchtermans, 2009). For ECTs, this gap in relational leadership can accelerate feelings of professional isolation and vulnerability, shifting their focus from pedagogical growth to basic classroom survival, conditions that limit opportunities to develop a confident and sustainable professional identity.

Catherine's account (Pen Portrait, Chapter 5) of a senior leader who imposed punitive policies without consultation and publicly undermined staff reflected a breakdown of professional trust. Catherine describes the new member of the senior leadership team as 'an absolute nightmare' (Interview 3), as he locked all the toilets during lesson time so students couldn't go to the toilet during lessons. The caretaker refused to lock them, so Catherine says, 'he got the key off the caretaker and did it himself' (Interview 3), and he also 'doesn't speak very nicely to staff in front of the kids', and she explains, 'we are all struggling with him at the minute' (Interview 3). Catherine's account highlights how authoritarian or inconsiderate leadership practices can erode professional trust, disrupt collegial morale, and damage the relational fabric of a school. Leadership that lacks emotional intelligence and mutual respect undermines the collaborative and supportive environments that are essential for teachers' identity development and wellbeing (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). If such a leader were also assigned as a formal mentor to an ECT, the impact could be particularly detrimental; mentoring might become a mechanism of surveillance or compliance rather than genuine professional growth. Instead of fostering confidence, autonomy, and reflective practice, the relationship could heighten anxiety, reduce openness, and limit opportunities for authentic learning, thereby constraining the ECT's ability to develop a secure and positive professional identity.

When leaders act without consultation, model poor interpersonal behaviour, or fail to treat staff with dignity, they contribute to a culture of disempowerment and disconnection, which ultimately weakens both individual and collective efficacy

(Leithwood et al., 2008). Isaac (Pen Portrait, Chapter 7) also believes that members of the senior leadership team weaken what Bandura (2000) terms collective efficacy, the shared belief in staff capacity to achieve goals.

‘We’re going to crack down on this. Then ten minutes later, I see several members of the senior leadership team not enforcing the rule, they have just announced, at which point I find that very frustrating and my response is Well, if you are not going to do it, then I won’t do it’ (Interview 3).

These accounts demonstrate how disengaged or inconsistent leadership can destabilise professional identity, pushing ECTs toward survival rather than growth. Conversely, relationally intelligent leadership fosters psychological safety, belonging, and a sense of shared endeavour (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Day et al., 2016). Leadership, therefore, is not simply a structural feature of school context; it is a relational practice that provides the scaffolding for ECTs to develop confidence, resilience, and professional agency. The next section examines how such collaborative cultures function as a powerful contextual resource for ECTs.

8.3 Collaborative Culture at a School Level Context

Collaboration is frequently presented in policy as a solution to workload and retention challenges (DfE, 2023; OECD, 2020). Yet within neoliberal policy climates, it is often instrumentalised as a mechanism of accountability rather than as a genuine professional resource (Ball, 2003; Mockler, 2011). When collaboration is reduced to performative routines or managerial monitoring, its potential to build trust and resilience is undermined (Apple, 2001; Day and Gu, 2010). The narratives in this study illustrate the contrasting realities of collaborative practice. Sally (see Pen Portrait, Chapter 5) describes a department where collaboration is embedded, reciprocal and creative:

‘We’ve redesigned our curriculum... there are only three of us who teach music, and it does seem like everyone’s on board, which is really good’ (Interview 3).

Her experience reflects what Little (1990) termed ‘genuine collegiality,’ where collaboration is rooted in shared professional judgement rather than imposed

conformity. Such contexts support self-determination needs by providing autonomy in pedagogy, competence through curriculum influence, and relatedness via shared responsibility (Ryan and Deci, 2000). They also provide the mastery experiences and peer modelling that strengthen self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Klassen and Tze, 2014).

Susie was the recipient of collaboration from colleagues which she recognises when she recalls

‘They timetabled me to teach A Level Photography when I first started, knowing that I had never done photography in my life. The photography teacher always had time for me, and she would get resources printed for me and show me how to do an edit, step by step, so I could do it at home. It was out of her own time, but she was doing it’ (Interview 3).

Alice also benefited from collaboration with colleagues, in her second school, as she explains that she is not a Spanish specialist, unlike her two colleagues as she is a French specialist.

‘Which means I prepare the French lessons, send them over, and they prepare the Spanish lessons and send them over. Minimal preparation for me’ (Interview 2).

Alice says that she hadn’t seen this level of collaboration in her training schools or in her first school as an ECT, she says

‘Why make our lives more complicated when we can make it easier? Those values of sharing, I hadn’t seen them as an ECT. I was planning every night until 9-10 pm over two languages. It was just madness’ (Interview 2).

These examples show that collaboration is both a practical and identity-forming process (Flores and Day, 2006). This reflects Eteläpelto et al.’s (2013) framing of professional agency as collective, negotiated, and embedded in everyday decisions. In such spaces, identity is co-constructed through dialogue, experimentation, and mutual recognition. In this sense, collaboration can act as a protective factor against burnout and attrition (Fantilli and McDougall, 2009).

However, when collaboration is absent from the school environment, it can cause considerable anxiety for ECTs. Across all three years of this study, Tanya consistently described the emotional strain of working without meaningful collegial support.

‘I think it’s an incredibly toxic profession in so many ways, I think there’s so little understanding of all the extra work, you know, actually what goes on in the classroom is half of the work that goes into it’ (Interview 1)

‘There’s something about the culture that is missing, you know, the real collaboration and consistency’ (Interview 2).

‘Why aren’t they more collaborative? Why aren’t they wanting to help? When can they see somebody is struggling?’ (Interview 3)

Tanya’s reflections are striking in their consistency. Her repeated references to isolation and frustration reveal how a lack of collaboration compounds the pressures of the role, undermining both morale and self-efficacy. Her reflections are striking in their consistency; she repeatedly returns to feelings of isolation and frustration. Unlike others in the study who found strength and reassurance through collaborative cultures, Tanya articulates a sense of being let down by a system that fails to recognise the complexity of the role and the importance of shared support. This persistent disconnection not only weakened her professional confidence but also eroded her sense of belonging, key conditions for identity development and emotional resilience. From a self-determination theory perspective, her unmet needs for relatedness and competence left her identity formation shaped more by survival and self-doubt than by growth and fulfilment.

Taken together, these accounts show that collaboration is not uniformly available and its impact depends on whether it is grounded in trust, reciprocity and practical usefulness. Where collaborative practices were embedded and sustained, participants described stronger belonging, reduced isolation and greater confidence. Where collaboration was absent or uneven, teachers described increased workload, uncertainty and a greater reliance on small informal networks. In this study, collaborative culture functioned as a

contextual resource that could either stabilise identity through shared practice and recognition, or weaken it through isolation and fragmentation.

8.4 Situatedness: Positioning within a Professional Knowledge Landscape

Situatedness refers to how teachers locate themselves within their school communities and professional landscapes (Coldron and Smith, 1999). Teacher identity is not fixed but fluid, shifting in response to particular goals, relationships, and circumstances (Flores and Day, 2000; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). For ECTs, this process is especially pronounced, as their identities are heavily shaped by colleagues, students, and the wider school environment.

Positioning is inherently relational: teachers negotiate their sense of self through daily interactions with colleagues, leaders, parents, and students (Coldron and Smith, 1999; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). These exchanges require constant reinterpretation of professional role and identity in response to changing classroom dynamics, institutional expectations, and cultural norms (Flores and Day, 2006). In this study, participants' accounts reveal how strongly their identities were influenced by these everyday relationships.

Audrey – 'It's probably a good day just knowing that all the staff respect me as well' (Interview 1).

Alice – 'It's lovely to have your team as your support network' (Interview 2).

Issac – 'Towards the end of my first year, I got lots of praise and good reports from heads of whatever and teachers, so I became more motivated as I was doing the right thing, and I knew what I was doing was good teaching' (Interview 2).

Catherine – 'I feel like I've got a good school, a lot of good colleagues and the kids are normally pretty decent' (Interview 3).

These reflections highlight the central role of situatedness in identity formation. Audrey's sense of fulfilment stems from mutual respect, while Alice emphasises the security of departmental support. Isaac illustrates how recognition from peers and senior staff

reinforced his motivation and self-belief, and Catherine links her professional stability to positive relationships with both colleagues and students.

Such accounts underscore how affirmation from professional networks strengthens self-efficacy through verbal persuasion, modelling, and collective validation (Zee and Koomen, 2016; Klassen and Tze, 2014). For ECTs, these experiences are not peripheral but integral to identity development, offering both emotional stability and professional confidence. In this way, the findings echo Coldron and Smith's (1999) view that teacher identity is relationally situated, continually co-constructed within the professional knowledge landscape.

Yet situatedness also extends beyond immediate relationships. Teachers must navigate professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995), where multiple, sometimes competing, discourses of "what counts" as good teaching circulate. For ECTs, this involves negotiating between official policy frameworks, institutional norms, and the lived practices of colleagues and students. Their identities are enacted not only in classrooms but across staffrooms, departmental meetings, CPD sessions, and wider educational discourses. In these spaces, teachers encounter different professional stories, some affirming, some constraining, that they must interpret, adopt, or resist.

In this way, situatedness is both enabling and demanding: it provides access to support, recognition, and belonging, but also requires ECTs to position themselves within complex and sometimes contradictory professional terrains. Coldron and Smith's (1999) view that identity is relationally situated is therefore echoed here, but the findings also highlight that situatedness is shaped by the professional knowledge landscapes through which ECTs move, landscapes that require continual navigation, enactment, and negotiation.

8.5 Strategic Compliance and Value Tensions

Even in collegial environments, ECTs often engage in 'strategic compliance', adopting school norms and prescribed practices to align with institutional expectations, even when these conflict with personal values (Flores and Day, 2006; Pillen et al., 2013).

Isaac portrays this 'strategic compliance' when he says

'I conform because that's what I have been asked to do. And I do conform completely to what I've been asked to do because they are paying me money to be a teacher. My view is that if I didn't agree and found it morally objectionable, I would leave the school. So, I sort of divorce my own personal beliefs from what I do' (Interview 3).

Sally provides some other examples of strategic compliance when she says

'In terms of how we teach, that is slightly more prescribed, and it was odd as we were properly told to teach a 'do now' (starter), main body and a plenary and like, minutes of how long it should take for each' (Interview 3).

She goes on to provide another example regarding teaching and learning,

'There have been a couple of things that haven't landed well. It's all with good intentions but not done particularly well. So, with cold calling, for example, we had a presentation about it with a practical demonstration. The students had the same presentation in assemblies, and some staff felt that the students were being taught how to teach. We had a few students going to some teachers, telling them that they couldn't ask for hands up, which was really difficult as it was like I am going to tell you how to do your job, which I don't think landed particularly well for people' (Interview 3).

These examples highlight how ECTs may engage in strategic compliance to navigate institutional expectations, even when such practices conflict with their personal values or professional judgement. From a self-determination theory perspective, such compliance can erode the psychological need for autonomy, reducing intrinsic motivation and limiting opportunities for identity coherence (Kaplan, 2021; Reeve, 2006).

These examples show how teachers sometimes adopt workable approaches that allow them to function within local expectations while preserving a sense of professional integrity. This sets the scene for the next section, which explores how these landscapes

create tensions between institutional expectations and personal values, often leading to forms of strategic compliance.

8.6 Negotiating Professional Knowledge Landscapes

These moments of strategic compliance reveal the complexity of how ECTs position themselves within their school contexts, negotiating personal values alongside institutional expectations. This negotiation takes place within what Clandinin and Connelly (1995) describe as ‘professional knowledge landscapes’, the layered, shifting spaces in which teachers live out their identities. These landscapes are shaped by both the formal structures of policy and leadership and the informal, lived experiences of practice, making them central to understanding the situated nature of teacher identity (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Understanding identity in this way means recognising that teachers’ knowledge is not simply transmitted but constructed through interactions with context, history, and the stories that shape professional life (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009).

The experiences of Isaac and Sally illustrate how such landscapes can be difficult to navigate. External pressures intersect with internal narratives, creating tensions between what teachers know from experience and what policy prescribes. Teachers adapt, but this adaptation is not passive (Reeve, 2006). Rather, ECTs negotiate contexts in ways that reflect and reshape their emerging identities, often seeking to meet the psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness central to self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000). Audrey provides a clear example of this negotiation:

‘I now have the confidence to talk to my Head of Department and say I am not going to follow this. I am not going to read a page of *A Christmas Carol* and digest it all in one page. I’m going to do a cold read and read it all, and then we are going to work our way back through, and because I have been teaching for a couple of years now, she says, ‘You know what is best with your class, so go on and try it’ (Interview 3).

Her decision to resist a prescribed approach, and the endorsement she receives from her head of department, strengthens both her sense of competence and her relational trust. In turn, this reinforces her self-efficacy and agency, equipping her to make future pedagogical judgements (Zee and Koomen, 2016; Kaplan, 2021). In this study, participants exercised autonomy in subtle yet significant ways, adapting whole-school strategies to their students' needs, aligning decisions with personal pedagogical values, and maintaining ownership of their classroom practice. These acts preserved authenticity within structures that sometimes felt rigid. When autonomy was supported, it enhanced motivation, engagement, and identity coherence (Collie et al., 2012; Fackler et al., 2021). For example, Alice describing her head of department creating a 'team spirit' (Interview 2) or James explaining how he feels that he has 'self-moulded' a PE provision (Interview 3). Conversely, where rigid policy, performative accountability, or silenced teacher voice restricted agency, ECTs in this study reported compliance at the expense of self-efficacy and long-term commitment (Hobson, 2021). Tanya describing how the lack of collaboration and consistency from her colleagues has affected her passion which had made teaching 'enjoyable' (Interview 2). While Isaac explains that he aligns with the values of the school 'because they pay me to work' (Interview 2).

ECTs' professional identities were constructed within and in response to the layered contexts of their work, shaped through daily interactions with colleagues, students, and institutional norms, reflecting the relational and situated nature of teaching (Coldron and Smith, 1999; Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). Where tensions arose between institutional expectations and personal beliefs, teachers engaged in strategic compliance or negotiated autonomy to protect their sense of authenticity (Flores and Day, 2006). Viewed through Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) professional knowledge landscapes, these experiences illustrate how ECTs navigate between formal structures and lived experience, drawing on personal practical knowledge to shape their roles.

However, for such navigation to be meaningful, situatedness needs to be explicitly recognised within professional landscapes and policy. This would mean valuing the relational knowledge ECTs build through colleagues and students, acknowledging how local contexts shape practice, and allowing flexibility for teachers to adapt national

frameworks to the realities of their classrooms. Policies such as the ITTECF, which frame early career development as linear and standardised, risk overlooking these dimensions. By contrast, recognising the fluidity of identity and the importance of context-sensitive practice could support ECTs' agency, enabling them to integrate institutional demands with personal and professional values. In this sense, meaningful recognition of situatedness is not an optional add-on but central to the development of resilient, coherent teacher identities.

This section shows that professional identity is not simply moulded by policy or leadership but actively shaped through daily acts of negotiation. While situatedness frames the broader professional landscape, relationships provide the immediate terrain where belonging, confidence, and resilience are forged. The next section turns to the quality and consistency of these relationships and their influence on sustaining professional identity in the early years.

8.7 Relationships: Foundations and Ongoing Professional Identity Resources

Professional identity is deeply relational (Kelchtermans, 2005; Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). It is constructed through ongoing interactions with colleagues, students, and institutional structures (Akkerman and Meijer, 2011). While individual agency and school context matter, relationships often provide the most immediate and enduring sense of belonging, recognition, and emotional stability (Day et al., 2006). From a self-determination perspective, strong connections meet the core need for relatedness, which sustains motivation and wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2000; De Neve et al., 2015). From a self-efficacy standpoint, relationships provide modelling, encouragement, and affirmation, key sources of confidence (Bandura, 1997; Zee and Koomen, 2016). Consistent, trust-based relationships therefore act as identity resources, enabling teachers to test ideas, take risks, and sustain motivation in challenging contexts. Relational trust and belonging emerged as central to participants' identity formation, shaping their competence, motivation, and self-worth. Kaplan's (2021) work on need-supportive induction highlights how emotionally engaged colleagues and leaders bolster ECTs' confidence and commitment. Relationships thus serve not only as personal

supports but also as professional resources for identity work (De Neve et al., 2015; Haw et al., 2024).

Alice's experience illustrates how emotionally intelligent leadership fosters both autonomy and competence:

'What I like from the head of department is her capacity to create a team spirit. It's a small team. There are only three of us, but she takes an interest in developing us as well and not moulding us into how she wants us to be in the team. She asks, "Where do you see yourself going? What do you want to do? What do you want to improve?" She'll put everything into place for that' (Alice, Interview 2).

Alice's reflection reveals the power of emotionally intelligent leadership to foster not only belonging but professional growth. Her head of department is described as someone who nurtures individuality rather than conformity, signalling a culture of trust and mutual respect. This approach supports autonomy and relatedness, two of the core psychological needs identified in self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000), while also contributing to Alice's developing self-efficacy through goal setting and recognition of her aspirations (Bandura, 1997). The team spirit described here is not just about cohesion; it serves as an incubator for identity development through personalised support and shared professional purpose.

Audrey's narrative centres on alignment, not just with people, but with values.

'That's one of the things that drew me to that school, was that I sort of felt I could make an impact there. And that the school, does try its hardest to build these kids up. I think that's the thing I admire, I sort of aligned myself with, they will do whatever to absolutely go over and above to protect these kids and make sure that they stay in school no matter what' (Audrey, Interview 2).

Audrey's professional identity is reinforced by a sense of moral congruence between her own beliefs and those enacted by the school. This alignment contributes to a strong sense of belonging and emotional investment, which are central to motivation and identity affirmation. Her use of 'I admire' and 'I aligned myself with' reflects how values-

based relational belonging supports sustained engagement and a sense of purpose, echoing Coldron and Smith's (1999) view that identity is achieved through meaningful positioning within professional and moral landscapes.

Catherine's account illustrates the strength of lateral support networks.

'I have some really nice people like my senior leader is really good, and all the other heads of year, if I need anything they're always there. They're really supportive. And my form tutors are really good as well. So I have got a really good team' (Interview 3)

Catherine's sense of belonging is built through multiple relational layers, senior leaders, peers, and form tutors, suggesting that relational trust does not depend on a single figure but emerges from a culture of shared responsibility and care. These relational structures provide emotional containment and affirm her place within the school. This consistency across professional interactions helps reinforce Catherine's sense of competence and relational security, both of which are vital to her ongoing identity development (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

James' language conveys a strong sense of recognition, not just from others, but internally.

'I do feel like I'm making a difference. Sometimes I feel like that difference is massive, and sometimes, I think it's not much at all. But yeah, on the whole, I think I do make a difference, and if you took me away, I think there would be a gap. And that's not like my head is big, I think I would be missed as I make a difference, like in the sense that we all move small stones' (James, Interview 3).

His confidence in his impact suggests that relational belonging has translated into professional affirmation. The metaphor of 'we all move small stones' signals a collective ethic, but also an internalised belief in his value. This interplay of recognition, contribution, and relational anchoring reinforces self-efficacy and supports a positive, sustainable professional identity (Bandura, 1997). By seeing his work as part of a shared endeavour while recognising his unique value, James achieves what Kelchtermans

(2005) calls ‘emotional investment in the profession,’ where identity is grounded in connection, continuity, and purpose. Such a perspective not only sustains motivation but also buffers against the inevitable challenges of teaching, enabling him to maintain commitment over time and adapt without losing his sense of self.

Across the narratives, relationships functioned as ongoing identity resources. Trust-based connections with colleagues and leaders provided reassurance, feedback and encouragement, supporting efficacy and sustaining motivation. Where relationships affirmed professional worth and allowed teachers to be seen as developing practitioners rather than simply performers of competence, identity felt more stable and coherent over time.

8.7.1 When Relationships are Absent or Fractured

Strong professional relationships can anchor ECTs; their absence can trigger emotional disconnection, diminished motivation, and identity fragmentation. In this study, relational breakdowns or institutional silencing left participants frustrated, disillusioned, and less confident. Such experiences align with Zee and Koomen’s (2016) findings that low trust and inadequate support reduce self-efficacy and increase burnout risk. A lack of relational coherence erodes the job resources, collegial collaboration and leadership trust, shown by De Neve et al. (2015) to underpin professional learning. Kaplan (2021) and Collie et al. (2012) note that unmet needs for relatedness weaken motivation. Klassen and Tze’s (2014) meta-analysis further show how inconsistent feedback diminishes competence and professional agency. Relational absences, therefore, represent structural and cultural conditions that destabilise identity formation and long-term commitment.

Susie reflects on her small school’s environment once she returns from maternity leave, as there is a new headteacher and a very clear focus on OFSTED preparation.

‘I love my job and everything like that. But it’s changed a lot, and the staff are very negative about it because they’re all saying the same thing, it’s just corporate, there is nothing to it, the kids feel like there is no love there, like ages ago, it was very friendly. And now it’s right, everyone has to stand outside the door and make

sure that you do this because then it will start the lesson well, yeah, fair enough and stuff, but it doesn't feel like a family type of thing' (Susie, Interview 3).

Her account reflects what Kelchtermans (2005) describes as the erosion of the 'culture of care,' replacing warmth and relational depth with performative routines. This shift can also be read through a neoliberal lens: the prioritisation of accountability measures and external inspection frameworks reframes schooling in terms of compliance, efficiency, and measurable outcomes (Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2006). In Susie's description, the requirement to stand outside doors and monitor routines is less about pedagogy or relationships and more about demonstrating visible conformity to inspection-ready practices. Neoliberal logics of performativity reshape not only organisational priorities but also the affective climate of schools, reducing space for relational trust and professional autonomy. For ECTs, entering a culture defined by corporate-style practices risks undermining the very relational resources that sustain professional identity, replacing belonging with surveillance and care with control.

Mandy's frustration emerged not from overt conflict, but from the inability to contribute meaningfully within a large department:

'Being in such a big department, getting pushback about things that are going to be good for the department. So, when we moved to do library lessons, there was a kickback from teachers by saying that, as the behaviour wasn't right, they didn't feel they could deliver it. And yet I take three groups in there, and they know the exact expectations and know exactly what we are going to do when we get in. I tried to make the point in a department meeting, and five people jumped over me and said I hate doing library lessons and I didn't actually manage to get my point across. It's frustrating when I know things are working, but I can't get that point across. I wanted to make a suggestion, but so and so has been teaching for 10 years and they don't want to listen to me' (Mandy, Interview 3).

Mandy's frustration centres on her inability to contribute meaningfully to departmental dialogue. This illustrates Coldron and Smith's (1999) argument that identity is relationally achieved. Exclusion from the social construction of practice can impede identity

development, regardless of individual competence. Mandy's confidence in her teaching is insufficient without peer validation, leading to reduced efficacy and agency.

Isaac's account centres on organisational inconsistency:

'The only big frustration I have is lack of consistency, which is throughout my day, I didn't think it was that important when I started training. And every year, I carry on teaching, I go, nothing else matters. Just be consistent with what you do. And lack of consistency across staff, across the school, is my greatest source of frustration in that I don't know what to do, or if I can be bothered to keep caring, if you're not going to be consistent with if you say phones are now banned from the school premises, which they've said multiple times. If you see someone with a phone confiscate it, they don't hand it over, report it, and it will be confiscated. And then 10 minutes later, I'll see a student with their phone out, a colleague challenges them, gets told to f*** and then not report it all. Nothing happens, or the consequences their phone is removed from them for 30 minutes. Or I've seen members of senior leadership walk past students with their phones and not challenge them. That to me it's very frustrating. Basically. That's the only part' (Isaac, Interview 3).

Isaac's narrative reveals the emotional exhaustion that emerges from organisational inconsistency. His experience reflects not just a personal frustration, but a breakdown in collective efficacy, the belief that the school community can work together to create change (Bandura, 2000). When senior leadership fails to uphold or model shared standards, the emotional labour required to enforce them falls unevenly on individuals, leading to disengagement. While these narratives reflect the disorienting effects of fractured relationships, some participants also described moments of resistance, adaptation, and quiet persistence, demonstrating that even in the absence of supportive relational cultures, identity work continues in subtle, strategic ways.

8.7.2 Relationships as Sustained Resources

As ECTs progress through the formative stages of their careers, relationships remain central, not only for early affirmation but for sustaining identity over time. These

connections act as ongoing identity resources, offering professional grounding, emotional steadiness, and reflective space through which teachers continually interpret and re-interpret their role. The narratives in this study challenge static models of identity (Coldron and Smith, 1999), showing instead that professional identity evolves through shifting relational dynamics. Whether through mentoring, departmental trust, or informal peer networks, these ties help teachers navigate change, renew motivation, and reaffirm their professional self. Sustained collegial and leadership support operate as job resources (De Neve et al., 2015) that foster adaptability and resilience, particularly when trust and psychological safety are present (Zee and Koomen, 2016). From a motivational perspective, relatedness-supportive relationships maintain autonomous motivation (Kaplan, 2021), while trusted feedback, modelling, and collaborative problem-solving strengthen self-efficacy (Klassen and Tze, 2014).

Alice's experience demonstrates how meaningful relationships with senior colleagues provided emotional reassurance, instructional support and space for confidence to grow.

'My head of department talked to the headteacher, and they have said that we're going to have a member of the senior leadership team sit with you to see what you do and what can be done to help. And then they said, it's actually not how you teach, it's this class, it's just them. So, they sat with the class for a couple of weeks, until I was more confident to deal with them on my own and little by little, in twos and threes, now I have the majority of the class on board' (Interview 2).

Here, reassurance and collaborative presence enhance competence, relatedness, and self-efficacy, reframing leadership as developmental rather than evaluative.

James' describes his deputy head:

'She is really good at just striking the balance of being your friend but being your senior leader, and she's so good at wearing those different hats at different times. You know, when I was poorly lately, she was messaging me to get better soon, as

there is a Terry's chocolate orange waiting for you when you get back' (Interview 3).

This relational leadership (Tschannen-Moran and Gareis, 2015) builds psychological safety, affirming identity through trust and care.

Audrey's relationship with her colleague is grounded in an informal, everyday connection, with a tangible impact on her wellbeing.

'Then there is my colleague and she's a union rep so no one like the head and senior leadership like her as she has got her union hat on but she is next door to my classroom now and it's a great little support network to sort of go next door and you know offload each day and break or lunchtime and pop my head around her door, it's a mutual thing. Sometimes I feel like I am bothering her all the time, but if I stay in my room, she will come in and check how I am, so its sort of supportive and engaging as well' (Interview 2).

Such everyday scaffolding reflects the protective role of peer relationships in sustaining identity (Zee and Koomen, 2016).

Mandy's admiration for the lead practitioner at her school reflects what Kelchtermans (2009) describes as relational modelling, the process by which teachers shape their own practice and identity through meaningful interactions with respected colleagues. These relationships do more than share resources; they create space for reflection, inspiration and ongoing identity collaboration.

'The lead practitioner is very close to me, and I value her approach to planning and teaching and learning, and I like instilling the things that she's recently included in her lessons. We share quite a lot of resources with one another, and it's amazing to see how different things she would do to how I would do things, so I am learning about a different approach. I'm still learning, and I'm really enjoying that. After 13 years of being an English teacher, she is progressive herself' (Interview 2).

Such modelling provides both inspiration and validation, illustrating what Bandura (1997) identifies as the powerful influence of respected colleagues on developing confidence and competence. Her comment, 'I'm still learning,' underscores that professional identity is not static, but continually reshaped through engagement with colleagues who offer guidance, fresh perspectives, and shared values (Kelchtermans, 2009; Zee and Koomen, 2016). These sustained relational interactions promote autonomy by encouraging reflective practice and agency in pedagogical decision-making, while also meeting core psychological needs for relatedness and professional affirmation (Ryan and Deci, 2000; Kaplan, 2021). In doing so, they act as ongoing 'job resources' (De Neve et al., 2015) that sustain motivation, adaptability, and identity coherence over time.

Taken together, these narratives illustrate that meaningful professional relationships are not limited to the induction period but remain active, evolving resources throughout identity development. Whether through modelling, encouragement, informal support, or emotionally intelligent leadership, they provide spaces in which ECTs can grow, reflect, and reaffirm their evolving sense of self. Relationships operate not only as emotional buffers but as strategic conditions shaping motivation, self-efficacy, and the capacity to navigate the complexity of teaching. When such relationships are consistent and responsive, they help meet the core needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000), strengthening professional resilience and sustaining commitment. However, while the centrality of relationships is clear in supporting ECT identity development, the current policy environment, particularly the ECF and ITTECF, does not fully recognise or prioritise these relational foundations, instead framing support in ways that risk narrowing identity formation to prescribed behaviours and standardised routines.

8.8 Concluding Comments for this Chapter

This chapter has identified three interrelated strategies that participants described as most effective in supporting the construction of a sustainable professional identity across the first three years of teaching: enabling contexts, situated professional positioning, and relationships characterised by trust and recognition. Across the narratives, identity was strongest where school environments provided coherence,

supportive leadership, and workable opportunities for collaboration. These conditions supported autonomy, competence and relatedness (Ryan and Deci, 2000) and created the kinds of mastery experiences, modelling and encouragement that strengthen self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Participants' experiences also show that identity development was uneven rather than linear. Teachers responded to shifts in school culture, changes in role and responsibility, and personal pressures by adapting their practice and recalibrating what it meant to be a "good teacher" in context. Situatedness mattered because feeling respected, trusted and able to contribute within a professional community enabled teachers to develop confidence and a sense of professional legitimacy.

Relationships emerged as the most immediate and durable identity resource. Supportive leaders and colleagues provided psychological safety, practical guidance and affirmation, while strained or absent relationships were associated with isolation, reduced confidence and greater emotional labour. Taken together, the findings underline that identity is constructed through the interaction between personal values and the conditions of practice. Strategies that strengthen professional identity therefore need to be understood as relational and contextual, not simply individual.

The concluding chapter now draws these findings together to address how relationships, situatedness and context operate across the three-year period as a set of identity-sustaining conditions, and what this suggests for supporting early career teachers to remain, grow and flourish in the profession.

Chapter 9- Conclusion

This final chapter synthesises the findings of the study and articulates its theoretical, practical and policy implications. Across three years of longitudinal narrative inquiry, the research has shown that early career teacher professional identity is not a fixed attribute nor a simple reflection of competence. Rather, it is an evolving structure of meaning, constructed through the interaction of psychological need satisfaction, efficacy-building experiences and relational engagement within specific school contexts.

By integrating self-determination theory and self-efficacy theory, this thesis advances a conceptualisation of professional identity as psychologically mediated, relationally negotiated and contextually situated. Identity coherence strengthens when teachers experience autonomy in decision-making, competence through supported mastery and relatedness within collegial cultures. It becomes fragile when these conditions are inconsistent or contradictory.

Current policy frameworks, including the ITTECF, form one important structural context within which this negotiation unfolds. The purpose of this chapter is therefore not to rehearse critique, but to clarify how the theoretical model developed in this study can inform early career support, mentoring design and future research on teacher retention. In doing so, it moves from analysis towards application while keeping the conceptual contribution at the centre.

9.1 Retention and the policy landscape

Teacher retention remains a persistent challenge in England. Recent OECD data indicate that approximately 10% of teachers leave the profession annually (OECD, 2025), with attrition disproportionately concentrated in the early years of teaching. While retention is often discussed in relation to workload, pay or accountability pressures, this study has demonstrated that professional identity stability is a central and frequently under-examined dimension of the problem.

Successive policy reforms have sought to strengthen early career provision, including the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (2019) and the Early Career Framework (2019), now combined into the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF, 2024). The ITTECF establishes a national entitlement to a structured curriculum,

mentoring and developmental support. From September 2025 it becomes statutory, signalling a significant policy commitment to consistency and evidence-informed practice.

The findings of this study suggest that such structural coherence is necessary but not sufficient. While the ITTECF provides clarity around instructional routines and professional standards, it does not explicitly conceptualise how professional identity is formed, stabilised or sustained. Identity development is therefore positioned implicitly within technical competence rather than treated as a developmental process in its own right.

This distinction matters. As the preceding chapters have shown, early career teachers do not construct professional identity solely through exposure to prescribed strategies. Identity coherence emerges through the interaction of psychological need satisfaction, efficacy-building mastery experiences and relational recognition within specific school contexts. Where these conditions are aligned, teachers experience growing confidence and professional legitimacy. Where they are fragmented or contradictory, identity becomes fragile, even when technical competence is developing.

The ITTECF can therefore be understood as one significant structural context within which identity formation occurs. Its emphasis on consistency, sequencing and evidence-informed practice provides a framework within which teachers operate. However, the narratives presented in this study suggest that identity-sustaining conditions such as relational depth in mentoring, coherent enactment at school level and structured preparation for emotionally complex work are not always foregrounded explicitly within that framework.

Rather than positioning policy as the source of retention challenges, the findings invite a refinement of emphasis. If early career support is to address attrition effectively, it may benefit from making explicit the psychological and relational conditions that underpin identity stability. The theoretical model developed in this thesis provides a lens through which such refinements can be conceptualised.

In this way, the policy landscape is not treated as oppositional but as a site of enactment. It forms part of the structural environment within which teachers negotiate autonomy,

competence and relatedness. Understanding how those negotiations unfold offers a more comprehensive account of retention than structural reform alone.

9.2 Identity Negotiation within Structural Contexts

The following section illustrates how these negotiations were experienced and enacted by participants across differing school contexts. Rather than responding uniformly to policy expectations, participants interpreted, internalised or adapted to their environments in ways that shaped the stability of their developing professional selves.

Isaac increasingly aligned himself with the performative culture of his school, positioning himself as a technical implementer. While this alignment produced measurable outcomes, it reduced his perceived autonomy and created tensions between institutional expectations and personal values. His identity remained contingent upon external validation rather than internally integrated meaning.

Tanya, by contrast, responded to contextual tensions through withdrawal and silence. Although this strategy preserved her values in the short term, over time it weakened her sense of belonging and contributed to her departure from teaching in August 2025. Her narrative illustrates how diminished relatedness and constrained autonomy can destabilise identity coherence.

Mandy, Audrey and Susie adopted what Handsfield et al. (2010) describe as ‘double agent’ strategies, outwardly complying with school routines while privately sustaining relational and ethical commitments. In these cases, identity coherence was preserved because teachers retained space to align practice with values, even within structural constraint.

Alice, James and Sally experienced fewer overt tensions, yet their accounts confirm that technical competence alone was insufficient for identity stability. Emotional resilience, adaptive judgement and collegial engagement were central to sustaining efficacy and belonging.

Across these narratives, a consistent pattern emerges. Professional identity was strengthened when teachers experienced relational recognition, contextual coherence

and opportunities for cumulative mastery. It became fragile when autonomy, competence or relatedness were compromised. These adaptive responses therefore provide empirical grounding for the theoretical model developed in this chapter: identity is negotiated, psychologically mediated and shaped through situated relational practice rather than secured through technical compliance alone.

9.3 Mentoring as a Relational Mediator of Professional Identity

Mentoring occupies a central position within early career frameworks, intended to support professional growth and integration into school culture. In this study, however, the impact of formal mentoring varied considerably. Only Sally described sustained positive influence from structured mentoring provision, while for others, mentoring played a limited or peripheral role in their developing professional identity.

These findings do not suggest that mentoring lacks value. Rather, they indicate that the identity-sustaining potential of mentoring depends upon relational quality. Where mentoring was experienced primarily as procedural or evaluative, its developmental impact was constrained. This aligns with Hobson's (2021) critique of 'judgementoring', in which assessment and support are intertwined in ways that can limit psychological safety.

Research on dialogic and future-focused mentoring models (Larsen et al., 2025) emphasises relational reciprocity, recognition of prior experience and collaborative meaning-making. Such approaches resonate strongly with the findings of this study. Participants described growth where they felt heard, recognised and treated as developing professionals rather than as implementers of predefined strategies.

Within the conceptual framework advanced in this thesis, mentoring functions as a key relational site in which autonomy, competence and relatedness can either be strengthened or constrained. Its impact is therefore not procedural but psychological and relational. Mentoring that foregrounds dialogue, trust and contextual understanding contributes to cumulative mastery and efficacy formation. Where relational depth is limited, its influence on identity coherence correspondingly diminishes.

9.4 Parental Engagement as an Arena of Identity Formation

Parental engagement emerged in this study as a significant yet under-theorised domain of early career development. Participants described highly variable experiences of interacting with parents, often with limited structured preparation or shared routines within their schools.

For several ECTs, conversations with parents directly challenged their sense of competence and professional legitimacy. Catherine described feeling ill-prepared for difficult interactions. Isaac and Audrey experienced inconsistent expectations across their schools, requiring individual interpretation of appropriate practice. In contrast, where collegial cultures provided informal guidance and modelling, as described by James and Alice, parental engagement contributed positively to relatedness and efficacy.

These accounts suggest that parental engagement is not simply an operational task but a relational space in which professional identity is negotiated. As Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) argue, identity is shaped through social interaction and recognition. Interactions with parents therefore influence whether ECTs experience themselves as capable and legitimate professionals.

Within the theoretical framework developed in this thesis, parental engagement represents a domain in which competence, autonomy and relatedness are tested and strengthened. Where emotional labour is acknowledged, scaffolded and supported, efficacy is reinforced. Where it is implicit or inconsistent, uncertainty can undermine confidence.

Together, mentoring and parental engagement illustrate how relational arenas mediate identity formation. They demonstrate that identity coherence depends not solely on instructional competence but on psychologically mediated experiences of recognition, belonging and supported mastery. These patterns are synthesised in the following section.

9.5 Synthesis and Contribution

This study conceptualises early career teacher professional identity as a psychologically mediated, relationally negotiated and contextually situated process that unfolds cumulatively over time. Rather than treating identity as a stable trait or a reflection of

policy compliance, the findings demonstrate that identity coherence emerges through the interaction of autonomy, competence, relatedness and efficacy within lived school contexts.

The central theoretical contribution of this thesis lies in the integration of self-determination theory (Ryan and Deci, 2000) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) as a unified framework for understanding professional identity formation. Self-determination theory provides a lens for examining the motivational conditions under which teachers experience autonomy, competence and relatedness. Self-efficacy theory explains how teachers interpret mastery experiences, feedback, emotional arousal and social persuasion to form judgements about their professional capability. When combined, these frameworks illuminate how identity is both motivationally structured and efficacy-mediated.

Across the three-year longitudinal narrative data, identity stability was strengthened where three interrelated conditions were present:

Relational recognition – sustained collegial trust, dialogic mentoring and meaningful professional acknowledgement.

Situated coherence – alignment between school routines, policy expectations and lived classroom practice.

Cumulative mastery – authentic experiences of success that reinforced efficacy beliefs over time.

Where these conditions were fragmented or contradictory, identity became fragile. Teachers adapted through compliance, resistance or withdrawal, but these strategies varied in their long-term sustainability. Identity was therefore shown to be neither purely individual nor purely structural. It is constructed through the ongoing negotiation between personal values and institutional contexts, mediated by psychological need satisfaction and efficacy beliefs.

The longitudinal narrative methodology strengthens this conceptual contribution. By following teachers across three years, the study captures identity as iterative rather than episodic. Moments of affirmation, tension, contradiction and recognition accumulate.

These accumulations shape whether teachers experience coherence or dissonance in their professional self-understanding. This temporal dimension is often absent in cross-sectional research and offers a more dynamic account of early career development.

The contribution of this thesis is therefore threefold.

First, it provides a theoretically integrated model of professional identity formation that connects motivation, efficacy and relational context.

Second, it demonstrates empirically how identity stability or fragility emerges through cumulative relational and mastery experiences.

Third, it establishes narrative inquiry as a powerful methodological approach for examining identity as lived, emotional and evolving practice rather than abstract competence.

Professional identity in the early career phase is best understood as an emergent structure of meaning, sustained when teachers experience autonomy in decision-making, competence through supported mastery and relatedness within collegial cultures. When these psychological and relational conditions are intentionally designed into early career support, identity coherence strengthens. When they are incidental or inconsistent, identity becomes vulnerable to erosion.

This conceptual framing extends beyond the specific policy context examined in this study. It offers a framework through which teacher development can be analysed across phases, school types and national systems. By repositioning identity as a psychologically and relationally mediated process, this thesis provides a lens for future research and programme design that moves beyond compliance models towards identity-sustaining systems of professional learning.

9.6 Implications for Policy and Practice

The theoretical model developed in this study suggests that early career support is most effective when it intentionally strengthens autonomy, competence, relatedness and efficacy over time. The implications that follow are therefore framed as design principles derived from the findings rather than prescriptive reforms.

First, early career frameworks may benefit from making professional identity development an explicit objective alongside instructional competence. When programmes are sequenced to provide structured mastery experiences, supported rehearsal prior to first attempts and guided reflection afterwards, teachers are more able to integrate values, context and pedagogical decision-making. Such design features directly support competence and efficacy formation.

Second, mentoring appears most identity-sustaining when relational trust is foregrounded. The findings indicate that developmental, dialogic mentoring, characterised by listening, joint problem-solving and strengths-based feedback, strengthens both autonomy and relatedness. Where possible, reducing tensions between support and formal assessment may protect the psychological safety necessary for growth. Monitoring the quality of the mentor–ECT relationship alongside technical progress recognises that relational depth is a condition for professional learning.

Third, the study highlights parental engagement as a significant yet often implicit domain of early career development. Explicit preparation for proactive communication, boundary-setting and emotionally complex interactions may enhance teachers' sense of competence and legitimacy. Rehearsed simulations, structured feedback and coherent school-level routines can reduce improvisation and uncertainty. Recognising the emotional labour involved in this work supports both relatedness and long-term efficacy.

Fourth, identity stability is strengthened when policy intention and school-level enactment are coherent. Programmes may therefore incorporate structured opportunities for contextualisation, enabling ECTs to analyse how formal expectations are lived within their specific school environment. Guided reflection on “how we do it here” supports autonomy and reduces ambiguity.

Fifth, the emotional demands of early career teaching warrant explicit recognition. Including opportunities for emotional regulation strategies, structured debrief following high-intensity experiences and access to peer support may protect efficacy over time. Naming this dimension of professional work legitimises its impact on identity development.

Sixth, collaboration emerges in this study as a protective factor. Concrete routines such as co-planning, co-teaching, peer coaching and participation in communities of practice embed relatedness within everyday professional life rather than positioning it as incidental. Such routines contribute to cumulative mastery and shared professional meaning-making.

Finally, the role of research evidence may be most productive when framed as guidance for professional judgement rather than procedural script. Collecting developmental indicators such as self-efficacy, sense of belonging and relational trust can support programme refinement while keeping identity formation visible as an outcome of early career provision.

Taken together, these implications suggest that retention is strengthened when early career systems are designed not only for consistency of content but for coherence of experience. The model advanced in this thesis indicates that identity coherence develops when relational recognition, contextual alignment and cumulative mastery reinforce one another over time. Policy frameworks, including the ITTECF, provide an important structural context within which these processes unfold. The findings here offer a theoretically grounded lens through which such frameworks may be interpreted, enacted and refined.

9.7 Final Reflection

This thesis has demonstrated that improving retention requires attention not only to structural reform but to the conditions under which professional identity is formed and sustained. Early career teachers remain in the profession when their sense of capability, belonging and professional judgement is strengthened within the realities of school life. These conditions are built through high-quality relationships, coherent contexts and cumulative mastery experiences over time.

The analysis advances three interrelated claims.

First, professional identity is constructed in relational and situated practice rather than in abstract statements of competence.

Second, self-efficacy develops when teachers experience authentic success, are trusted to exercise judgement and participate in collegial routines that make professional learning manageable and meaningful.

Third, inconsistency between policy intention and school-level enactment can destabilise identity by generating uncertainty about expectations and professional legitimacy.

These claims help explain why structural reforms alone may not fully address early career attrition. Retention is not simply a matter of technical preparation; it is shaped by whether teachers come to see themselves as capable, valued and contextually effective professionals.

The implications that follow from this analysis are disciplined rather than radical. Mentoring may be most effective when developmental dialogue is prioritised and relational trust is protected. Early career programmes may benefit from explicit preparation for emotionally complex aspects of teaching, including parental engagement and high-stakes interactions. Schools may strengthen identity coherence by ensuring visible alignment between policy, routine and lived practice. Programme design may be enhanced when mastery experiences and collaboration are prioritised alongside coverage of content.

Narrative inquiry has been central to reaching these conclusions. By tracing teachers' stories across three years, the study makes visible the cumulative and often hidden processes through which identity stabilises or fragments. It shows that early career teachers are not passive recipients of policy but active interpreters who negotiate values, context and expectations over time.

The conceptual model developed in this thesis positions professional identity as psychologically mediated, relationally negotiated and contextually situated. This framing offers a lens through which future research, programme design and policy refinement can be examined. When early career systems are designed with explicitly attention to the

psychological and relational conditions identified in this study, identity stabilisation becomes more likely.

Ultimately, the contribution of this study lies in reframing retention as an identity-based phenomenon. Supporting early career teachers therefore requires not only clarity of standards but intentional design of the relational and psychological conditions in which professional identity can flourish. This perspective does not replace existing frameworks; it deepens understanding of how they are experienced and enacted in practice.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Letter to Early Career Teacher

Dear Research Participant

Thank you for reading the information sheet about this research study and this letter will provide you with more specific details. As you know there is a national retention issue with early career teachers and by your involvement with this study, I am hoping that your contributions will help to provide a wider perspective on the reasons for the low retention rate of early career teachers. I hope you feel able to join this research study as your stories of your experiences as an early career teacher will be invaluable to this research.

I am conducting this research for my PhD with the University of Suffolk, and it is a longitudinal study over three years. The aim of this research is to track the development of your professional identity through your first three years of teaching. It would involve interviews of 1-2 hours in length with me at the following points:

- 1) Summer Term 2021- I would hope to be able to see you for a face-to-face interview
- 2) Spring Term 2022 – Face-to-face interview
- 3) Spring Term 2023 – Face-to-face interview

I will be taking some notes during the interview as well as recording the interviews so I can transcribe it, and I will summarise my findings and share with them with you before they are included in the research study. You can check that the summary is a true reflection of what you said and that you feel confident about the anonymity too. I will not include any material in the study which I think would affect your anonymity as I have a duty of care to you as a research participant.

If you decide to take part in this research at this first stage, your willingness to continue to take part in the research will be confirmed at each point that I contact you to arrange the interview at a suitably convenient time. You will be able to withdraw from the research at any time without any repercussion for you. All I would ask is that after I have conducted the first interview and you have agreed the data, but if you withdraw for

interview 2, 3, I am able to use your anonymised information and the same would be for your withdrawal and any other subsequent interviews. After each interview, I will check that you are happy for me to analyse the data you have provided and once the analysis is completed, it will be sent to you for final confirmation and if you wish for any information to be removed from the analysis of the data then I will happily do so. If you change schools during the three years then I would like to still be able to interview you and if you leave the profession, I would like to be able to interview you at the agreed stages as well. However, your permission to do this would be sought at each stage.

You also need to be aware that my role for this study is as a post graduate researcher and not as the course leader for the secondary Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT programme. I hope to build an open and trusting professional relationship with you which will be based on mutual respect as in this instance you are the 'expert' as I wish to hear your stories and experiences. Therefore, it is important that you feel that you can be open with me even if your comments are critical about the teacher training you received last year.

If you wish to take part in this research study then please complete the attached Participant Consent Form and email back to me at k.sida-nicholls@uos.ac.uk by the end of March 2020. I will then be in touch with you again to sort out the finer details of the first interview which will take place in the spring term of your first year as an early career teacher.

Thank you again for your time and I wish you well as you are doing a great job being a newly qualified teacher in these really tricky times in school.

Best wishes

Kate

You are invited to take part in a study on the professional identity of early career teachers in secondary schools

The aim of this research is a critical exploration of the experiences of newly qualified and early career teachers. Being part of this research study will allow you to share your stories about your experiences of being an early career teacher and how these experiences are shaping your professional identity.

Participation in this study will involve three one to two hour interviews with the Researcher across three years. These interviews might initially be online but then hopefully they will be face-to-face and will take place in your employing school.

- **1 interview in summer term 2021**
- **1 interview in spring term 2022**
- **1 interview in spring 2023**

Your rights as a participant in this study are:

- *You can withdraw at any stage from the study with no consequences.*
- *If you do not wish to answer a specific question within the interview, then there is no requirement to do so.*
- *The material you share as part of the interview process will be included in the study anonymously.*

Participation in this research:

If you wish to participate in this research, then please read the Research Participant Letter and complete the Consent of the Research Participant

This research has been approved by the University of Suffolk Research Ethics Committee.

If you have any concerns about the Ethics of this research, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Ethics Panel, Professor Emma Bond e.bond@uos.ac.uk (01473 338564) or the Research Development Manager, Andreea Tocca a.tocca@uos.ac.uk (01473 338656).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>You will be able to review the summary of the material before it is included in the study. If you feel any of the material will disclose your identity, then it will not be included in the study.</i> • <i>Your consent will be gained at each stage of the study. You will be asked before each interview if you wish to continue to participate and you will be asked at the end of the interview if you are happy for the material to be transcribed and used in the study for final approval by you.</i> 	<p>form confirming involvement.</p> <p>before your</p>	<p>If you wish to find out any further information about this study having read the attached Research Participant Letter, before making a final decision about being part of the study, please do not hesitate to contact me on k.sida-nicholls@uos.ac.uk</p>
---	--	--

Storage of the data from the interviews:

The original material from your interview will be stored in password protected files on OneDrive until submission of the research in 2025. Anonymised but not raw data from the interviews will be stored on password protected OneDrive indefinitely in order to allow the Researcher to write and publish further articles about the research.

Dear Research Participant

Thank you for reading the information sheet about this research study and this letter will provide you with more specific details. As you know there is a national retention issue with early career teachers and by your involvement with this study, I am hoping that your contributions will help to provide a wider perspective on the reasons for the low retention rate of early career teachers. I hope you feel able to join this research study as your stories of your experiences as an early career teacher will be invaluable to this research.

I am conducting this research for my PhD with the University of Suffolk and it is a longitudinal study over three years. The aim of this research is to track the development of your professional identity through your first three years of teaching. It would involve interviews of 1-2 hours in length with me at the following points:

- Summer term 2021 – this interview would be online or face-to-face so outside of the school day
- Spring Term 2022- I would hope to be able to see you for a face-to-face interview or can remain online (will be your choice)
- Spring Term 2023 – Face-to-face interview or online interview

I will be taking some notes during the interview as well as recording the interviews so I can transcribe it and I will summarise my findings and share with them with you before they are included in the research study. You can check that the summary is a true reflection of what you said and that you feel confident about the anonymity too. I will not include any material in the study which I think would affect your anonymity as I have a duty of care to you as a research participant.

If you decide to take part in this research at this first stage, your willingness to continue to take part in the research will be confirmed at each point that I contact you to arrange the interview at a suitably convenient time. You will be able to withdraw from the research at any time without any repercussion for you. All I would ask is that after I have conducted the first interview and you have agreed the data but you withdraw for interview 2 or 3 that I am able to use your anonymised information and the same would be for your withdrawal and any other subsequent interviews. After each interview, I will check that you are happy for me to analyse the data you have provided and once the analysis is completed, it will be sent to you for final confirmation and if you wish for any information to be removed from the analysis of the data then I will happily do so. If you change schools during the three years then I would like to still be able to interview you and if

you leave the profession, I would like to be able to interview you at the agreed stages as well. However, your permission to do this would be sought at each stage.

You also need to be aware that my role for this study is as a post graduate researcher and not as the course leader for the secondary Suffolk and Norfolk SCITT programme. I hope to build an open and trusting professional relationship with you which will be based on mutual respect as in this instance you are the 'expert' as I wish to hear your stories and experiences. Therefore, it is important that you feel that you can be open with me even if your comments are critical about the teacher training you received last year.

If you wish to take part in this research study then please complete the attached Participant Consent Form and email back to me at k.sida-nicholls@uos.ac.uk by the end of March 2021. I will then be in touch with you again to sort out the finer details of the first interview which will take place in the summer term.

Thank you again for your time and I wish you well as you are doing a great job being a newly qualified teacher in these really tricky times in school.

Best wishes Kate

Appendix 3 - Informed Consent Form for Research Participants – Early Career Teachers

Study Title: Professional Identity of Early Career Teachers	
Research Lead: Kate Sida-Nicholls	
Academic Supervisor (for Student Led Research): Dr Sarah Richards and Dr, Clare Gartland	
I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet and letter (delete as applicable) dated <i>[insert date]</i> explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw within 2 weeks of the interview taking place, without giving any reason and without there being any consequences.	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand that my responses will be anonymised and any personal or identifying information removed from published materials	<input type="checkbox"/>
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.	<input type="checkbox"/>

I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.

I understand that the data I provide will be used solely for the purposes of the research study outlined and will not be used for any other purpose. I also understand how long my data will be stored for.

I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

This research has been approved by the University of Suffolk Research Ethics Committee.

Should you have any concerns about the Ethics of this research, please feel free to contact the Chair of the Ethics Panel, Professor Emma Bond e.bond@uos.ac.uk (01473 338564) or the Research Development Manager, Andreea Tocca a.tocca@uos.ac.uk (01473 338656).

The Key Principles of Ethical Research are:

- The emotional well-being, physical wellbeing, rights, dignity and personal values of research participants should be secured.
- Research participants and contributors should be fully informed regarding the purpose, methods and end use of the research. They should be clear on what their participation involves and any risks that are associated with the process.
- Research participants must participate in a voluntary way, free from coercion. Participants should be informed of the time period during which they can withdraw their data from the study.
- Research must be independent and any conflicts of interest or partiality must be declared.
-

Sunday, January 10, 2021



Online Application Form for Ethical Approval for Research Staff and Students

Online Application Form for Ethical Approval for Research Staff and Students

Appendix 4 – Online Application Form for Ethical Approval for Research Staff and Students

Normally information provided by the participants would be anonymous or the identity protected (however anonymity may be broken in circumstance where people may be at risk).

Applications (completed application form with supporting documentation as attachments) must be submitted online to the University Research Ethics Committee in advance of the intended start date for data collection. ***If research is undertaken without approval it could lead to disciplinary action.***

Name Kate Sida-Nicholls

Researcher Information

Kate Sida-Nicholls

Project lead / Principal Investigator Name

Staff or Student

Student

School/Research Institute/Centre School of Social Sciences and Humanities

Staff / Student ID S199910

Email k.sida-nicholls@uos.ac.uk

I am undertaking this as a

Name of Supervisors
Dr Sarah Richards and Dr Clare Gartland

I have read the guidelines for submitting an application for ethical approval

Project Information

Project title Is the professional identity of early career teachers supported within secondary schools?

Data collection start date (note: must Monday, May 10, 2021 be prospective)

Expected project completion date: Friday, June 30, 2023

Project summary – please avoid using jargon and clearly explain your project so that it is understandable to a non-academic audience and include your intended methodological approach (maximum 250 words):

This study is a critical exploration of the experiences of newly qualified teachers in the first three years of their teaching career. It is a qualitative and longitudinal study involving eight to sixteen newly qualified teachers as their career develops over three years. At the heart of this inquiry is a desire to support early career teachers to reflect on their emerging professional development and explore reasons they may or may not have for remaining or leaving the profession.

I am the secondary course leader of Suffolk and Norfolk Secondary SCITT (ITT provider) and the research participants will be volunteers from the cohort of 2019-2020 trainee teachers. Therefore, the research participants will be in the first year of their career.

I intend to use a narrative inquiry methodological approach to the research, using narrative interviews as my method of collecting data. The interviews will take place

three times during the three years of this study, Summer Term 2021, Spring Term 2022, Spring Term 2023. The timeline of the interviews is important as data published by the government states that the three year retention rate of newly qualified teachers is poor.

Does your research entail collaboration with other Researchers/Organisations?

No

Will all collaborators be given appropriate recognition in any outputs?

No

If No – please give brief details why not.

I am not working with any other researchers or organisations.

Please briefly state your research ethics training to date.

Attended the PGR face-to-face session last year on ethics

Completed PGR online unit on Postgraduate Research Ethics

Deliver M Level assignment sessions to trainee teachers involving ethics

Have completed MA in Education

Member of BERA and kept up to date concerning ethics by reading their materials

Please state your research experience to date.

Completed MA in Education

Deliver M Level assignment sessions to trainee teachers about the key concepts of research

Summary of main issues (if applicable)

Please summarise the main ethical, legal, or management risk or issues arising from your study and state how you will address/mitigate for them. Please indicate each as (high, medium, low risk) :

	Risk/Issue	Action to mitigate Issue	High, medium, low
Issue 1	The research ethics frame is supported through the use of a feminist ethic of care which promotes nurturance, reciprocity and relational interactions with participants. This is especially significant over a longitudinal methodology.	Applying feminist ethic of care when working with research participants.	Low
Issue 2	Anonymity of participants.	To help assist this principle I will ask at the end of each interview if the participant is happy for their data to be analysed. After each transcription is complete it will be shared with the research participant to check that they are happy with its content and that they feel the content does not affect their anonymity. Any data that they are concerned about will not be used.	Low

	Risk/Issue	Action to mitigate Issue	High, medium, low
Issue 3	3) My previous relationship as course leader for the SCITT ITT programme which the research participants completed in 2019-2020	To help mitigate this power relationship the location of the interviews will take place in an informal setting such as a coffee shop or will take place online. The initial information letter and information to participate in the research will not be sent by me but by another colleague, making it easier for people to decline participation. I will also use a different email from my work email address to correspond with all participants throughout the duration of the research. At every opportunity I will inform the research participants that for this research, they are the experts as I am interested in their lives, knowledge , opinions and our topics of discussions will not be about my professional role in any way.	Medium
Issue 4			
Issue 5			
Issue 6			
Issue 7			
Issue 8			
Issue 9			
Issue 10			

Are there any potential risks for the researchers themselves?

No

Research Participants

Briefly outline how participants will be identified, selected and recruited:

The research participants will be newly qualified teachers from the 19-20 trainee teacher cohort of the SCITT programme. The research participants will be sent a letter and an information guide about the research from a colleague of mine. They will be invited to volunteer for the research. Depending on numbers, if it is possible to make a selection of participants then in order to gain information from the widest range of participants that selection will be made on age, gender and location of their employing school. However, the principle of inclusion is paramount here.

Have you involved members of your potential participant group in the design of your study? (for example patients or service users)

No

	Other (description)	Please state number of participants	Please state how long each participant will be involved in the study
Children and young people (under 18 years old)			
Adults (over 18 years old and competent to give consent)	Trainee Teachers	6-16	1 interview once a year for three years
Parent / Carers			
Participants with a disability			
Participants with a declared mental health issue			
Personal relationships with the researcher			
People from non-English speaking backgrounds			
Adults or youth offenders detained at Her Majesty's convenience			
Other - please describe:			

Will you inform participants of the findings?

Yes

If no, please give rationale

A summary of the findings will be made available upon request.

Will you involve other people in the research design; study materials; management or dissemination of your research? (For example, an advisory group; service users; other experts in the field; other professionals; young people. No

Will you record informed consent in writing?

Yes

Data

Will you be using somebody else to transcribe or analyse the raw data?

No

[Click here to ask the ICO GDPR Compliance guidance](#)

Who will have access to participants' personal data during the study?

Only

Do you intend to keep raw data after the completion of the study?

No

Yes

Do you intend to publish your findings and present at a future conference?

If yes, please provide further information (if available at this stage)?

I would like to use the anonymised data for future conferences and publications. All raw and then anonymised data will be stored on a password protected cloud.

I have read and understand the guidelines on GDPR

Yes

[Click here to ask the ICO GDPR Compliance guidance](#)

I have successfully completed the GDPR course

Yes

Conflict of interest

Do you or any other investigator/collaborator have any direct personal involvement (e.g. financial, employment etc.) in the organisations sponsoring or funding the research that may give rise

**to a possible
conflict of interest?**

No

Checklist of Documents for Ethical Application

Please provide all the relevant supporting documentation (Project Proposal, Participant Information Form, Participant Consent Form, Employer Permission letter, Invitation Letters, Interview schedule, questionnaires, etc.) related to your application to Ethics.

The following documents are required in order for the University Research Ethics Committee to consider an application for ethical approval – please tick box and upload supporting document as appropriate.

Informed Consent(s) forms for participants



Informed Consent Form for School Mentors. d



Informed Consent Form for Early Career Tea c...

Interview Schedules (if applicable)



Interview Timeline KSN.doc x

Yes


Research Proposal (if applicable)

 Research Proposal Kate Sida-Nicholls.doc x

Information

 Letter to Research Participant - Mentor.doc x

 Letter to Research Participant.doc x

 Participant Information Form Kate Sida-Nic h...

Sheets for participants

Please confirm your application has been reviewed by your PhD Supervisors

Declaration

Applicant Declaration

By submitting this form with my University of Suffolk e-mail account registered I confirm that I will undertake this project as detailed above.

I understand that I must abide by the terms of this approval and that I may not substantially amend the project without further approval.

TICK BOX BELOW TO AGREE

Agree

Yes

Appendix 5- Acknowledgement of AI and Digital Tools

In the preparation of this thesis, I made use of several digital tools to support, but not replace, my own academic work. These tools included:

- Otter.ai – used to transcribe recorded interviews with participants. All transcripts were reviewed and corrected manually to ensure accuracy and confidentiality.
- Anara – used to organise and manage references, generate reference lists in Harvard format, and check for consistency in citations.
- ChatGPT (OpenAI) – used to assist with rewording for clarity, improving fluency, identifying repetition, suggesting structural changes, and providing examples of concise linking sentences.

The use of these tools was limited to supporting transcription, organisation, and the refinement of language and structure. All intellectual content, analysis, and interpretation are my own. I retained full responsibility for verifying the accuracy of tool-generated outputs, integrating them into the thesis, and ensuring compliance with academic integrity requirements.

Reference List

Abramson, L., Schachter, E. (2024) 'Beginning Teachers Navigating Identity Development Transitions: Identity Motives and Commitment to Teaching', *Education Sciences*, 14(11). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111170>.

Acker, S. (1994) *Gendered education: Sociological reflections on women, teaching and feminism*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Adeoye-Olatunde, A., Olenik, N. (2021) 'Research and Scholarly Methods: Semi-structured Interviews', *Department of Pharmacy Practice Faculty Publications*, Paper 6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/jac5.1441>.

Aelterman, A., Engels, N., Van Petegem, K., Verhaeghe, J. P. (2007) 'The well-being of teachers in Flanders: The importance of a supportive school culture,' *Educational Studies*, 33(3), pp. 285-297. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690701423085>.

Ahmed, S. (2024) 'The pillars of trustworthiness in qualitative research,' *Journal of Medicine, Surgery and Public Health*, 2. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.glmedi.2024.100051>.

Akkerman, S.F., Meijer, P.C. (2011) 'A dialogical approach to conceptualizing teacher identity', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(2), pp.308–319. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.08.013>.

Aldridge, J., Fraser, B. (2016) 'Teachers' views of their school climate and its relationship with teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction', *Learning Environments Research*, 19(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-015-9198-x>.

Allen, R., Bibby, D., Sims, S. (2018) *The teacher labour market in England: Shortages, subject specialisms and implications for policy*. London: Education Policy Institute.

Allen, R., Sims, S. (2018) *The Teacher Gap*. Oxon: Routledge.

Allen, B, Ford, I., Hallahan, G., Hannay, T. (2024) Teacher Recruitment and Retention in 2024 Gatsby <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/2024-06-13-teacher-tapp-final-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-in-2024.pdf> (Accessed 3rd January 2025).

Alsop, J. (2006) *Teacher Identity Discourses: Negotiating Personal and Professional Spaces*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc Publishers.

Andrews, M., Squire, C., Tamboukou, M. (2013) *Doing Narrative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd: Available at <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402271>.

Anfara, V.A., Mertz, N.T. (Eds) (2006) *Theoretical frameworks for qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Angelides, P. (2001) 'Using critical incidents to understand school cultures,' *Improving Schools*, 4(1), pp. 24-33. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/136548020100400105>.

Anyan, F. (2013) 'The Influence of Power Shifts in Data Collection and Analysis Stages: A Focus on Qualitative Research Interview,' *The Qualitative Report*, 18(18), pp. 1-9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1525>.

Apple, M.W. (2001) *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality*. New York: Routledge Falmer.

Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., Lawless, M. (2019) 'Using Zoom Videoconferencing for Qualitative Data Collection: Perceptions and Experiences of Researchers and Participants,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596>.

Au, W. (2011) 'Teaching under the new Taylorism: high-stakes testing and the standardization of the 21st century curriculum,' *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 43(1), pp. 25–45. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2010.521261>.

Auletto, A. (2021) 'Making sense of early-career teacher support, satisfaction, and commitment,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 102(103321). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103321>.

Avalos, B. (2011) 'Teacher Professional Development in Teaching and Teacher Education over Ten Years,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27, pp. 10-20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.08.007>.

Ayling, P., Wallace, D. (2025) 'We are not concerned about good grades': elite Nigerian parents' consumption of high-quality education as a form of distinction,' *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 34 (1), pp. 115-134. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620214.2024.2346074>.

Back, L. (2007) *The Art of Listening*. Oxford: Berg.

Ball, S. J., Bowe, R., Gewirtz, S. (1995) 'Circuits of Schooling: A Sociological Exploration of Parental Choice of School in Social Class Contexts,' *The Sociological Review*, 43(1), pp. 52-78. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1995.tb02478.x>.

Ball, S. J. (2000) 'Performativities and fabrications in the education economy: Towards the performative state,' *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 27(2), pp. 1–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03219719>.

Ball, S.J. (2003) 'The Teacher's Soul and the Terrors of Performativity', *Journal of Education Policy*, 18(2), pp.215–228. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043065>.

Ball, S. J. (2017) *The Education Debate*. University of Bristol: Policy Press.

Ball, S., Maguire, M., Braun, A. (2012) *How Schools Do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*. Oxon: Taylor and Francis.

Ball, S.J, Maguire, M, Braun, A., Hoskins, K. (2011) 'Policy actors: doing policy work in schools', *Discourse studies in the cultural politics of education*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 625 - 639. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2011.601565>.

Ballantyne, J., Zhukov, K. (2017) 'A good news story: Early-career music teachers' accounts of their 'flourishing' professional identities', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 68, pp.241–251. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.08.009>.

Bandura, A. (1977) *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. (1977) 'Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change', *Psychological Review*, 84(2), pp. 191–215. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191>.

Bandura, A. (1986) *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Bandura, A. (1995) *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bandura, A. (1997) *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman.

Bandura, A. (2000) 'Cultivate self-efficacy for personal and organizational effectiveness', In Locke, E.A. (ed.) *Handbook of principles of organizational behavior*. Oxford: Blackwell. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405164047.ch9>.

Bandura, A., (2000) 'Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy,' *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 9(3), pp.75–78. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.00064>.

Barriball, K.L., While A. (1994) 'Collecting data using a semi-structured interview: a discussion paper,' *J Adv Nurs* 19(2) pp. 328-35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2648.1994.tb01088.x>

Beauchamp, C., Thomas, L. (2009) 'Understanding Teacher Identity: An Overview of Issues in the Literature and Implications for Teacher Education', *Cambridge Journal of*

Education, 39(2), pp.175–189. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640902902252>.

Beauchamp, C., Thomas, L. (2011), 'New Teachers' Identity Shifts at the Boundary of Teacher Education and Initial Practice', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 50(1), pp.6–13. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2011.04.003>.

Beauchamp, T.L., Childress, J.F. (2013) *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*. 7th edn. New York: Oxford University Press.

Becher, A. (2024) 'Holding our ground in the face of public mistrust: the future of professionalism in teaching and teacher education,' *Journal of Teacher Education* Vol 75:5. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224871241268552>.

Beijaard, D. (1995) 'Teachers' Prior Experiences and Actual Perceptions of Professional Identity', *Teachers and Teaching*, 1(2), pp. 281–294. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354060950010209>.

Beijaard, D., Verloop, N., Vermunt, J. (2000) 'Teachers' Perceptions of Professional identity: an Exploratory Study from a Personal Knowledge Perspective', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16(7), pp.749–764. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(00\)00023-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(00)00023-8).

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P., Verloop, N (2004) 'Reconsidering Research on Teachers' Professional Identity', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, pp.107–128. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2003.07.001>.

Beijaard, D., Koopman, M., Schellings, G. (2023) 'Reframing Teacher Professional Identity and Learning', In I. Menter (ed) *The Palgrave Handbook of Teacher Education Research*. Switzerland: Springer Nature.

BERA (2024) *BERA Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research*. 5th edition. Available at: <https://www.bera.ac.uk/publication/ethical-guidelines-for-educational-research-fifth-edition-2024>. (Accessed 23rd April 2024).

Berger, R. (2015) 'Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research', *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), pp. 219–234. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>.

Biesta, G. (2005) 'Against learning. Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning', *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 25(1), pp. 54–66. Available at <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1891-5949-2005-01-06>.

Biesta, G., Tedder, M. (2007) 'Agency and learning in the Lifecourse: Towards an ecological perspective', *Studies in the Education of Adults*, 39(2), pp. 132–149. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02660830.2007.11661545> .

Biesta, G., Priestley, M., Robinson, S. (2015) 'The role of beliefs in teacher agency', *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), pp. 624–640. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044325>.

Billett, S. (2002) 'Towards a Workplace Pedagogy: Guidance, Participation and Engagement,' *Adult Education Quarterly* 53: pp. 27–43. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/074171302237202>.

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C. and Walter, F. (2016) 'Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation?', *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>.

Blundell, P., Oakley, L. (2024) 'Missing people and fragmented stories: painting holistic pictures through Single Pen Portrait Analysis (SPPA)', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 21(1), pp. 44-70. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2023.2285066>.

Boronski, T., Hassan, N. (2015) *Sociology of Education*. London:SAGE publications.

Bosen, R. (2023) Germany's schools are running out of teachers. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-schools-are-running-out-of-teachers/a-64541184> (Accessed 4th June 2023).

Bourke, B. (2014) 'Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process, ' *The Qualitative Report*, 19 (33), pp. 1-9. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1026>.

Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77–101. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

Braun, A., Maguire, M., Ball, S.J. (2010) 'Policy enactments in the UK secondary school: examining policy, practice and school positioning', *Journal of Educational Policy*, vol. 25, no. 4, pp. 547 - 560. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680931003698544>.

Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2012) 'Thematic analysis', in H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, K. J. Sher (Eds), *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol. 2. Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological*, pp. 57–71. Washington DC: American Psychological Association.

Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2019) 'Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis', *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), pp. 589–597. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>.

Braun, V., Clarke, V. (2022) *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. London: SAGE Publications.

Bray-Clark, N., Bates, R. (2003) 'Self-Efficacy Beliefs and Teacher Effectiveness: Implications for Professional Development,' *The Professional Educator*, 26, pp. 13-22. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ842387.pdf>.

Brear, M. (2018) 'Process and Outcomes of a Recursive, Dialogic Member Checking Approach: A Project Ethnography,' *Qualitative Health Research*, Vol 29, Issue 7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732318812448>

Brenner, C.A. (2022) 'Self-regulated learning, self-determination theory and teacher candidates' development of competency-based teaching practices,' *Smart Learn. Environ.* 9, (3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40561-021-00184-5>.

Brinkmann, S., Kvale, S. (2005) 'Confronting the Ethics of Qualitative Research', *Journal of Constructivist Psychology*, 18(2), pp. 157–181. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720530590914789>.

Brooks, C. (2016) *Teacher Subject Identity in Professional Practice: Teaching with a professional compass*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Brown, P., Lauder, H. and Ashton, D. (2011) *The global auction: The broken promises of education, jobs and incomes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bruner, J. (1991) 'The Narrative Construction of Reality', *Critical Inquiry*, 18(1), pp. 1–21. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343711?origin=JSTOR-pdf> (Accessed 14th March 2023).

Bruner, J. (2002) *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Bryk, A.S., Schneider, B. (2002) *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Buchanan, J., Prescott, A., Schuck, S., Aubusson, P., Burke, P., Louviere, J. (2013) 'Teacher retention and attrition: Views of early career teachers', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(3), pp. 112–129. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n3.9>.

Buchanan, J. (2015) 'Metaphors as two-edged swords: The positive and negative faces of teacher attrition', *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 40 (10). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2015v40n10.3>.

Buchanan, R. (2015) 'Teacher identity and agency in an era of accountability', *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), pp. 700–719. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1044329>.

Bullough, R. V. (1997) 'Practicing theory and theorizing practice in teacher education,' In J. Loughran, T. Russell (Eds), *Purpose, passion and pedagogy in teacher education*, pp.13-31 London, England: Falmer Press.

Bullough, R.V, Jr. (2005) 'Being and becoming a mentor: school based teacher educators and teacher educator identity,' *Teaching and Teacher Education* 21, pp.41-35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2004.12.002>.

Bullough, R. V., Jr. (2019) 'Empathy, teaching dispositions, social justice and teacher education,' *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 25(5), pp. 507–522. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1602518>.

Burns, E. (2014) *How does a short history of professions help us think about professionalisation today?* Conference Paper. Available at: <file:///Users/user2/Downloads/EdgarBurns14thAustraliaStudiesConfinChina11-14July2014.pdf> (Accessed 15th April 2023).

Butler, B.M., et al. (2010) '*Challenging the construction of student teaching supervision: the possibilities of collaborative action research*,' Symposium conducted at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Denver, CO.

Caine, V., Estefan, A., Clandinin, D. J. (2013) 'A return to methodological commitment: Reflections on narrative inquiry', *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 57(6), pp. 574–586. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2013.798833>.

Canrinus, E., Helms-Lorenz, M, Beijaard, D., Buitink, J., Hofman, (2012) 'Self efficacy, job satisfaction, motivation and commitment: exploring the relationships between indicators of teachers' professional identity,' *European Journal of Psychology Education*, 27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10212-011-0069-2>.

Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J., Wengraf, T. (2000) *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples*. Oxon: Routledge.

Chang, M.-L. (2009) 'An appraisal perspective of teacher burnout: Examining the emotional work of teachers,' *Educational Psychology Review*, 21(3), pp. 193–218. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-009-9106-y>.

Chase, S. E. (2011) 'Narrative inquiry: Still a field in the making', in N. K. Denzin, Y. S. Lincoln (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th ed), pp. 421–434). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Chea, C. (2024) 'Mentorship's function in creating professional identity: findings from Cambodian teaching practicums', *Cogent Education*, 11(1). Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186x.2024.2419710>.

Clandinin, J., Connelly, M. (1990) *Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry*. Available at: <https://scholarpractitionerexus.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Connelly-Clandinin.pdf> (Accessed 18th June 2023).

Clandinin, D. J., Connelly, F. M. (1995) *Teachers' professional knowledge landscapes* (Vol. 15). New York: Teachers College Press.

Clandinin, J., Connelly, M. (1996) 'Teachers' Professional Knowledge Landscapes: Teacher Stories,' *Stories of Teachers, School Stories*. Stories of School: American Educational Association.

Clandinin, D.J., Pushor, D., Orr, A.M. (2007) 'Navigating Sites for Narrative Inquiry', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), pp.21–35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487106296218>.

Clandinin, D. J., Downey, C. A., Huber, J. (2009) 'Attending to changing landscapes: Shaping the interwoven identities of teachers and teacher educators,' *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(2), pp. 141–154. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13598660902806316>.

Clandinin, D. J., Connelly, F. M. (2000) *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Clandinin, D. J. (2013) *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry*. Left Coast Press.

Clandinin, D. J. (2016) *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry*. Oxon: Routledge.

Clandinin, D. J., Rosiek, J. (2007) 'Mapping a landscape of narrative inquiry', in D.J. Clandinin (ed) *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*, pp. 35–75. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Clandinin, D. J., Pushor, D., Orr, A. M. (2007) 'Navigating Sites for Narrative Inquiry,' *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), pp. 21–35. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487106296218>.

Clandinin, D.J. and Husu, J. (2017) *The SAGE handbook of research on teacher education*. London: Sage.

Clark, A. (2022) *Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child Time for Slow Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education*. Oxon: Routledge.

Clark, D. (2022) *Teacher retention rate in England 2010-2022*. Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1358244/teacher-retention-uk/#:~:text=An%20estimated%2088.7%20percent%20of,after%20receiving%20their%20teaching%20qualification> (Accessed 6th October 2024).

Clark, A. (2022) *Slow Knowledge and the Unhurried Child Time for Slow Pedagogies in Early Childhood Education*. London: Routledge

Clarke, M. (2013) 'Terror/enjoyment: Performativity, resistance and the teacher's psyche.' *London Review of Education* 11 (3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14748460.2013.840983>.

Clarke, M., Killeavy, M. and Moloney, A. (2013) 'The genesis of mentors' professional and personal knowledge about teaching: perspectives from the Republic of Ireland', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(3), pp. 364–375. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2012.755513>.

Clarke, M., Phelan, A. (2015) 'The power of negative thinking in and for teacher education,' *Power and Education*, 7(3), pp. 257-271. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743815607025>.

Coghlan, D., Brydon-Miller, M. (2014) *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Action Research*. London:SAGE.

Cohen, A., K. Klein, A. J. Daly, K. Finnigan (2011) '*Out with the Old, in with the New: When are Leader Successions Successful, New Directions in Leadership Annual Meeting.*' The Wharton School of Business. University of Pennsylvania.

Cohen, L.; Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018) *Research Methodologies in Education*. 8th edition. Oxon: Routledge.

Coldron, J., Smith, R. (1999) 'Active location in teachers' construction of their professional identities,' *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 31(6), pp. 711–726. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/002202799182954>.

Collie, R.J., Shapka, J.D., Perry, N.E. (2012) 'School climate and social–emotional learning: Predicting teacher stress, job satisfaction, and teaching efficacy', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 104(4), pp. 1189–1204. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029356>.

Collie, R.J., Martin, A.J. (2017) 'Teachers' psychological needs, motivation, and well-being: A large-scale validation study', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 68, pp. 53–62.

Available at: https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2016_CollieShapkaPerryMartin_JEP.pdf.

Collie, R.J. and Perry, N.E. (2019) 'Cultivating teacher thriving through social-emotional competence and self-determination theory', *Theory Into Practice*, 58(2), pp. 119–130. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00342-2>.

Colognesi, S., Van Nieuwenhoven, C., Beusaert, S. (2020) 'Supporting newly qualified teachers professional development and perseverance in secondary education; on the role of informal learning,' *European Journal of Education* Vol 43 No 2. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2019.1681963>.

Conle, C. (1997) 'Image of Change in Narrative Inquiry,' *Teachers and Teaching Theory and Practice* 3:2, pp. 205-219

Conle, C. (2000) 'Narrative Inquiry: Research tool and medium for professional development', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 23(1), pp. 49–63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/713667262>.

Connell, R. (2009) 'Good Teachers on Dangerous Ground: Towards a New View of Teacher Quality and Professionalism', *Critical Studies in Education*, 50(3), pp.213–229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17508480902998421>.

Connelly, F.M., Clandinin, D.J. (1999) *Shaping a professional identity: Stories of educational practice*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Coppe, T., Parmentier, M., Keltchtermans, G., Raemdonck, I., Marz, V., Colognesi, S. (2024) 'Beyond traditional narratives about teacher professional development: A critical perspective on teachers' working life', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 139. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104436>.

Corbin, J., Morse, J. M. (2003) 'The Unstructured Interactive Interview: Issues of Reciprocity and Risks when Dealing with Sensitive Topics,' *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9(3), pp. 335-354. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403009003001>.

Cordingley, P., Crisp, B., Johns, P., Perry, T., Campbell, C., Bell, M. and Bradbury, M. (2019) 'Constructing Teachers' Professional Identities'. Available at: http://www.curee.co.uk/files/publication/%5Bsite-timestamp%5D/2019_EI_Research_Constructing_Teachers_Professional_Identities_final.pdf (Accessed 22 May 2025).

Crafton, L., Kaiser, E. (2011) 'The language of collaboration: Dialogue and identity in teacher professional development', *Improving Schools*, 14(2), pp. 104–116. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480211410437>.

Craig, C.J. (2011) *Narrative inquiries of school reform: Storied lives, storied landscapes, storied metaphors*. North Carolina: Information Age Publishing Inc

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. (2018) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. 4th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Cross, C., Darcy, C., Garavan, T. (2024) 'Work re-entry following maternity leave for first-time mothers: An event, social identity and intersectional theories informed identity work framework', *Gender, Work & Organization*, pp. 1–20. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13162>

Crotty, M. (1998) *Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process*. London: SAGE Publications.

Davies, B. (1996) *Gender Theories in Education*. London: Macmillan Co. Ltd.

Davies, B., Bansel, P. (2007) 'Neoliberalism and education,' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 20(3), pp. 247–259. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281751>.

Day, C. (2002) 'School Reform and Transitions in Teacher Professionalism and Identity', *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37(8), pp.677–692. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355\(03\)00065-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355(03)00065-X).

Day, C. (2005) 'The Challenge to Be the Best: Research and the Teacher,' In: Day, C (ed) *Connecting Policy and Practice*. Oxon: Routledge.

Day, C., Elliot, B., Kington, A. (2005) 'Reform, standards and teacher identity: Challenges of sustaining commitment', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(5), pp.563–577. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.03.001>.

Day, C. (2005) 'The Challenge To Be the Best: Research and the Teacher' in Day. C *Connecting Policy and Practice*, Oxon:Routledge.

Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., Sammons, P. (2006) 'The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities', *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), pp. 601–616. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920600775316>.

Day, C., Gu, Q. (2007) 'Variations in the environment for teachers' professional learning and development: Sustaining commitment and effectiveness across a career', *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(4), pp. 423-443. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980701450746>.

Day, C., P. Sammons, G. Stobart, A. Kington, and Q. Gu. (2007) *Teachers Matter: Connecting Work, Lives, and Effectiveness*. New York: Open University Press.

Day, C., Kington, A. (2008) 'Identity, well-being and effectiveness: the emotional contexts of teaching', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 16(1), pp. 7–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681360701877743>

Day, C. (2008) 'Committed for life? Variations in Teachers' Work, Lives and Effectiveness,' *Journal of Educational Change*, 9(3), pp.243–260. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-007-9054-6>.

Day, C., Kington, A. (2008) 'Identity, well-being and effectiveness: The emotional contexts of teaching', *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 16(1), pp. 7–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681360701877743>.

Day, C., Smethem, L. (2009) 'The effects of reform: Have teachers really lost their sense of professionalism?' *J Educ Change* 10, pp. 141–157. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-009-9110-5>.

Day, C. and Gu, Q. (2010) *The New Lives of Teachers*. Oxon: Routledge.

Day, C., Kington, A., Stobart, G., Sammons, P. (2013) 'The personal and professional selves of teachers: Stable and unstable identities', *British Educational Research Journal*, 32(4), pp. 601–616. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920600775316>.

Day, C. (2018) 'Professional Identity Matters: Agency, Emotions, and Resilience' In P.A. Schutz, J.Hong, D.C. Francis (Eds) *Research on Teacher Identity*, pp.61–70. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3_6

Day, C. (2018) *Teachers' worlds and work: Understanding complexity, building quality*. Oxon: Routledge.

Deakin, H., & Wakefield, K. (2013) 'Skype interviewing: reflections of two PhD researchers,' *Qualitative Research*, 14(5), pp. 603-616. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879411348812>.

Deci, E.L., Ryan, R.M. (1985) *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Springer.

Deci, E.L., Ryan, R.M. (2000) 'The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior', *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), pp. 227–268. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327965PLI1104_01.

Dempsey, H., Mansfield, C., MacCallum, J (2021) 'Early Career Casual Teachers: The role of relationships with colleagues in negotiating a teacher identity and developing resilience' in C. F. Mansfield (Eds) *Cultivating Teacher Resilience*. Princeton: Springer.

De Neve, D., Devos, G., Tuytens, M. (2015) 'The Importance of Job Resources and Self-Efficacy for Beginning Teachers' Professional Learning in Differentiated Instruction,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 47, pp. 30-41. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.12.003>.

Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y. (2018) (Eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 5th edition. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Department for Education (2011) *Teachers' Standards Guidance for School leaders, School Staff and Governing Bodies*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/61b73d6c8fa8f50384489c9a/Teachers_Standards_Dec_2021.pdf (Accessed 25 May 2025).

Department for Education (2019) *Early Career Framework*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-career-framework> (Accessed 30 April 2025).

Department for Education (2019) *Teacher recruitment and retention strategy*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-strategy> (Accessed 17th December 2024)

Department for Education, (2021) *Year 1 The importance of subject and curriculum knowledge – Spring Week 1 – ECT Evidence*. Available at: <https://support-for-early-career-teachers.education.gov.uk/education-development-trust/year-1-the-importance-of-subject-and-curriculum-knowledge/spring-week-1-ect-evidence/> (Accessed 30 Apr 2025).

Department for Education (2021) *Induction for early career teachers (England)*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/6629237f3b0122a378a7e6ef/Induction_for_early_career_teachers_England_statutory_guidance_.pdf (Accessed 17th Dec 2024).

Department of Education (Jan 2023) *Flexible Working in schools; exploring the costs and benefits*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/63d0088dd3bf7f3c44bcd69b/Flexible_working_in_schools_-_exploring_the_costs_and_benefits_-_research_report.pdf (Accessed 28th July, 2025).

Department of Education (June 2023) *School workforce in England 2022*. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england> (Accessed 11 June 2023)

Department for Education (2024) *Flexible Working in Schools*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/flexible-working-in-schools/flexible-working-in-schools--2> (Accessed 2nd May 2025).

Department for Education (DfE) (2024) *Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) Implementation Guidance*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/661d24ac08c3be25cfbd3e61/Initial_Teacher_Training_and_Early_Career_Framework.pdf (Accessed 30 April 2025).

Department of Education (2024) *Evaluation of the national rollout of the early career framework induction programmes*. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65dfa86ff1cab36b60fc475f/DfE_ECF_Report_Year2.pdf (Accessed 17th December 2024).

Department of Education (March 2024) *Statutory policies for schools and academy trusts*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/governance-in-maintained-schools/statutory-policies-for-maintained-schools> (Accessed 9th March 2025).

Department for Education (2024) *School workforce in England: Reporting year 2023*. GOV.UK, 5 Jun. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2023> (Accessed 13th Sep 2025).

Department for Education (2025) *School workforce in England: Reporting year 2024*. GOV.UK, 5 June. Available at: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-workforce-in-england/2024> (Accessed 13th Sep 2025).

Deutsch, C. P. (1981) 'The behavioral scientist: Insider and outsider,' *Journal of Social Issues*, 37(2), pp. 172–191. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1981.tb02631>.

Dewey, J. (1938) *Experience and Education*. New York: Macmillan Company.

Dicke, T., Elling, J., Schmeck, A., Leutner, D. (2015) 'Reducing reality shock: The effects of classroom management skills training on beginning teachers', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 48, pp. 1–12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.01.013>.

Dreer-Goethe, B., (2025) 'The impact of mentor support and high-quality connections on student teachers' psychological safety and engagement during practicum,' *Frontiers in Education* 10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1499749>.

Drudy, S. (2008) 'Gender balance/gender bias: the teaching profession and the impact of feminisation', *Gender and Education*, 20(4), pp. 309–323. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250802190156>.

Duyar, I., Gumas, S., Sukru B. (2013) 'Multilevel analysis of teacher work attitudes. The influence of principal leadership and teacher collaboration,' *International Journal of Educational Management* Vol 27 No 7. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-09-2012-0107>.

Dwyer, S. C., Buckle, J. L. (2009) 'The Space Between: On Being an Insider-Outsider in Qualitative Research,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1), pp. 54-63. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690900800105>.

Education Committee (May 2024) *Teacher recruitment, training and retention Second Report of Session 2023-24*. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmeduc/119/report.html> (Accessed 11th August 2025).

Education Endowment Foundation (2021) *Effective Professional Development*. Available at: <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/eef-guidance-reports/effective-professional-development/EEF-Effective-Professional-Development-Guidance-Report.pdf>. (Accessed 18th October 2024).

Education Endowment Foundation (2023) *Teaching and Learning Toolkit*. Education Endowment Foundation. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit> (Accessed 13 Jun 2025).

Education Endowment Foundation (2023) *Teacher quality, recruitment and retention, Rapid Evidence Assessment*. Education Endowment Foundation. <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/production/documents/Teacher-quality-recruitment-and-retention-lit-review-Final.pdf?v=1735753167> (Accessed 1st January 2025).

Education Endowment Foundation (2024) *Early Career Framework early roll-out: Evaluation report*. London: EEF. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/early-career-framework-early-roll-out> (Accessed 6 Aug. 2025).

Education Endowment Foundation (2025) *Parental Engagement*. Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit/parental-engagement> (Accessed 17th March 2025).

Education Support (June 2023) *1970s working conditions in the 2020s: Modernising the professional lives of teachers for the 21st Century*. <https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/media/bn2bk5a3/1970s-working-conditions-in-the-2020s.pdf> (Accessed 11 June 2023).

Edwards, E., Holland, J. (2013) *What is qualitative interviewing?* New York: Bloomsbury Academic.

Ellis, C. (2007) 'Telling Secrets, Revealing Lives: Relational Ethics with Intimate Others,' *Qualitative Inquiry*, 13, (1) pp. 3-29. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406294947>.

Emirbayer, M., Mische, A. (1998) 'What is agency?' *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(4), pp. 962–1023. Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1086/231294>.

England, K. V. L. (1994) 'Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research,' *The Professional Geographer*, 46(1), pp. 80–89. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0033-0124.1994.00080.x>.

Engward, H., Goldspink, S., Iancu, M., Kersey, T., Wood, A. (2022) 'Togetherness in Separation: Practical Considerations for Doing Remote Qualitative Interviews Ethically,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211073212>.

Eraut, M. (1994) *Developing professional knowledge and competence*. London: Falmer Press.

Eteläpelto, A., Vähäsantanen, K., Hökkä, P., Paloniemi, S. (2013) 'What is agency? Conceptualizing professional agency at work', *Educational Research Review*, 10, pp. 45–65. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2013.05.001>.

Evans, L. (2008) 'Professionalism, professionalism and the development of education professionals,' *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 56(1), pp. 20–38. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8527.2007.00392.x>.

Evetts, J. (2009) 'New Professionalism and New Public Management: Changes, Continuities and Consequences,' *Comparative Sociology*, 8(2), pp. 247-266. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156913309X421655>.

Fackler, S., Sammons, P., Malmberg, L. (2021) 'A comparative analysis of predictors of teacher self-efficacy in student engagement, instruction and classroom management in Nordic, Anglo-Saxon and East and South-East Asian countries' *BERA Review of Education* (9) 1, pp.203-239. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3242>.

Fantilli, R., McDougall, D. (2009) A study of novice teachers: Challenges and supports in the first year, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 25, Issue 6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.02.021>.

Farquharson, C et al. (2023) 'Teacher recruitment, training and retention: submission to the Education Select Committee,' London: Education Select Committee. Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/teacher-recruitment-training-and-retention-submission-education-select-committee> (Accessed: 3 January 2025).

Finlay, L. (2002) 'Negotiating the swamp: The opportunity and challenge of reflexivity in research practice', *Qualitative Research*, 2(2), pp.209-230. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/146879410200200205>.

Finlay L. (2002) 'Outing' the Researcher: The Provenance, Process, and Practice of Reflexivity,' *Qualitative Health Research*, 12(4), pp. 531-545. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/104973202129120052>.

Finlay, L. (2021) 'Thematic Analysis: The 'Good', the 'Bad' and the 'Ugly', *European Journal for Qualitative Research in Psychotherapy*, Vol 11. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24377/EJQRP.article3062..>

Fitzgerald, T. (2009) 'The continuing politics of mistrust: Performance management and the erosion of professional work', *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 41(2), pp. 139–152. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620802210871>.

Flores, M.A. and Day, C. (2006) 'Contexts Which Shape and Reshape New Teachers' identities: a multi-perspective Study,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(2), pp.219–232. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.09.002>.

Florian, L., Black-Hawkins, K. (2010) 'Exploring inclusive pedagogy,' *British Educational Research Journal*, 37(5), pp. 813–828. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2010.501096>

Ford, I., Allen, B., Wespieser, K. (2022) 'Early Career Framework: One Year On. Teacher Tapp/Gatsby Foundation,' Available at: <https://teachertapp.co.uk/> (Accessed 25th May 2025).

Foster, D. (2019) *Teacher recruitment and retention in England*. House of Commons Library Briefing Paper, No. 7222. London: House of Commons Library. Available at: <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/32904/1/CBP-7222.pdf>.

Fransson, G. (2020) 'Mentoring Policies' In *The Wiley International Handbook of Mentoring: Paradigms, Practices, Programs and Possibilities*' (Eds) Irby, B., Boswell, J., Searby, L., Kochan, F., Garza, R., Abdelrahman, N. New Jersey:Wiley.

Freidson, E. (2001) *Professionalism: The Third Logic*. Cambridge:Polity

French, J. (2022) *Early Career Framework: One Year on* | Gatsby Education. Available at: <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/updates/early-career-framework-one-year-on/> (Accessed 25 May 2025).

French, J (2024) *Teacher Recruitment and Retention* Gatsby Foundation <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/education/latest/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-2024-an-exploration-of-recruitment-changes-in-disadvantaged-schools> (Accessed 4th December 2024).

Gair, S. (2011) 'Feeling Their Stories: Contemplating Empathy, Insider/Outsider Positionings, and Enriching Qualitative Research,' *Qualitative Health Research*, 22(1), pp. 134-143. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732311420580>.

Galletta, A. (2013) *Mastering the semi-structured interview and beyond: From research design to analysis and publication*. New York: New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9780814732939.001.0001>.

Garton, S., Copland, F. (2010) 'I like this interview; I get cakes and cats!': the effect of prior relationships on interview talk,' *Qualitative Research*, 10(5), pp. 533-551. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794110375231>.

Gatsby Foundation (2022) *Early Career Framework: One Year On* <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/reports/pdf/2022-10-early-career-framework-tt-gatsby-final.pdf> (Accessed 17th December 2024).

Gee, J. P. (2000) 'Chapter 3: Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research in Education,' *Review of Research in Education*, 25(1), pp. 99-125. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X025001099>.

General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) (2021) *The Professional Standards for Teachers*. Available at <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/knowledge-base/articles/a-guide-to-the-professional-standards> (Accessed 11th August 2025).

Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gibb, N. (2015) *The Purpose of Education*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-purpose-of-education> (Accessed 3 Jan. 2020).

Gilligan, C. (2013) 'The ethic of care,' *Monographs of the Víctor Grífols i Lucas Foundation No. 30*, Fundació Víctor Grífols i Lucas.

Glaser, B., Strauss, A. (1999) *Discovery of Grounded Theory Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York: Routledge.

Goldblatt, H., Karnieli-Miller, O., Neumann, M. (2011) 'Sharing qualitative research findings with participants: Study experiences of methodological and ethical dilemmas,' *Patient Education and Counseling*, Volume 82, Issue 3. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pec.2010.12.016>

Goodall, J. (2012) 'Parental engagement to support children's learning: a six point model,' *School Leadership & Management*, 33(2), pp. 133–150. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2012.724668>.

Goodson, I., Hargreaves, A. (Eds) (1996) *Teachers' Professional Lives*. London: Falmer Press.

Goodson, I.F., Gill, S. (2011) *Narrative Pedagogy: Life History and Learning – Connects personal narratives to professional learning*. Switzerland: Peter Lang Publishing Inc.

Goodson, I. (2012) *Developing Narrative Theory: Life Histories and Personal Representation*. Oxon: Routledge.

Gray, S. (2017) 'Teacher as Technician: semi-professionalism after the 1988 Education Reform Act and its effect on conceptions of pupil identity,' *Policy Futures in Education* Volume 5, No 2. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2007.5.2.194>.

Greany, T., Higham, R. (2018) *Hierarchy, markets and networks: Analysing the 'self-improving school-led system' agenda in England and the implications for schools*. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.

Grek, S. (2009) 'Governing by numbers: the PISA 'effect' in Europe,' *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(1), pp. 23–37. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930802412669>.

Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., Lindsay, C. A. (2021) *How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research*. Wallace Foundation. Available at: <https://wallacefoundation.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/How-Principals-Affect-Students-and-Schools.pdf> (Accessed 9th April 2025).

Groenewald, E., Arnold, L. (2024) 'Teacher Professional Identity: Agentic Actions of a Novice Teacher in a Challenging School Context,' *Teachers and Teaching*, 31(3), pp.1–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2024.2308890>.

GTCS (2021) *A Guide to the Professional Standards*. Available at: <https://www.gtcs.org.uk/knowledge-base/articles/a-guide-to-the-professional-standards> (Accessed 11 Aug. 2025).

Gu, Q., Day, C. (2013) 'Challenges to teacher resilience: Conditions count', *British Educational Research Journal*, 39(1), pp. 22–44. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411926.2011.623152>.

Gu, Q. (2023) 'Anchoring Teacher Professional Learning and Development in Context: How Schools Enable Teachers to Thrive' In: Menter, I. (ed) *The Palgrave Handbook of Teacher Education Research*. Switzerland: Springer Nature.

Guba, E. G., Lincoln, Y. S. (1994) 'Competing paradigms in qualitative research,' In N. K. Denzin Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. New York: SAGE.

Guerriero, S. (ed.) (2017) '*Pedagogical knowledge and the changing nature of the teaching profession*,' Paris: OECD Publishing. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/pedagogical-knowledge-and-the-changing-nature-of-the-teaching-profession_9789264270695-en.html (Accessed 24th June 2024).

Gunn, T., McRae, P. (2021) 'Better understanding the professional and personal factors that influence beginning teacher retention in one Canadian province,' *International Journal of Educational Research* (2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2021.100073>

Gunter, H.M. (2001) *Leaders and leadership in education*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.

Gunter, H. M. (2016) *An intellectual history of school leadership practice and research*. London: Bloomsbury.

Hairon, S., Loh, S.H., Lim. S.P. (2020) 'Structured mentoring: principles for effective mentoring,' *Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 19 (2), pp. 105–123. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10671-019-09251-8>.

Hall, D., McGinity, R. (2015) 'Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Identity in Neoliberal Times: Resistance, Compliance and Reform,' *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 23, pp.88. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v23.2092>.

Handsfield, L.J., Crumpler, T.P., Dean, T.R. (2010) 'Tactical Negotiations and Creative Adaptations: the Discursive Production of Literacy Curriculum and Teacher Identities across Space-Times,' *Reading Research Quarterly*, 45(4), pp.405–431. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1598/rrq.45.4.3>.

Hanna, F., Oostdam, R., Severiens, S.E., Zijlstra, B.J.H. (2022) 'The Development of the Relationship between Professional Identity Tensions and Teacher Identity: A Quantitative Longitudinal Study among Dutch Primary Student Teachers,' *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 75, pp.101199. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2022.101199>.

Hargreaves, A. (1992) 'Time and teachers' work: An analysis of the intensification thesis,' *Teachers College Record*, 94(1), pp. 87-108. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819209400110>.

Hargreaves, A. (2000) 'Four Ages of Professionalism and Professional Learning,' *Teachers and Teaching*, 6:2, pp. 151-182. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/713698714>.

Hargreaves, A. (2001) 'The emotional geographies of teachers' relations with colleagues,' *International Journal of Educational Research*, 35, pp. 503–527. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355\(02\)00006-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0883-0355(02)00006-X).

Hargreaves, A. (2003) *Teaching in the knowledge society: Education in the age of insecurity*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Hargreaves, A., O'Connor, M. T. (2018) *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all*. Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press.

Hargreaves, L., Flutter, J. (2013) 'The Status of Teachers and the Teaching Profession. A desk-study for Education International.' Cambridge: University of Cambridge. Available at https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/research/programmes/teacherstatus/Summaryreport_25Jan07_print_ready_version.pdf (Accessed 22nd September 2025).

Hargreaves, A. (2019) 'Teacher collaboration: 30 years of research on its nature, forms, limitations and effects,' *Journal of Educational Change*, 20(1), pp. 1-23. Available at:

Hatlevik, I., Hatlevik, O. (2024) 'Variations in sources of job satisfaction and teacher efficacy between rookie and experienced teachers,' *Teachers and Teaching*, pp.1-20. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2024.2400170>.

Haukås, Å., Tishakov, T. (2024) 'Sharing interview questions in advance: Methodological considerations in applied linguistics research,' *European Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(1), pp. 54–68. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1515/eujal-2023-0045>.

Hendrikx, W. (2019) 'What We Should Do Vs What We do: Teachers' Professional Identity in a Context of Managerial Reform,' *Educational Studies*, 46(5), pp.1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2019.1620694>.

Hobson, A., Ashby, P., Malderez, A., Tomlinson, P. (2009) 'Mentoring beginning teachers: What we know and what we don't,' *Teaching and Teacher Education* 25. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2008.09.001>.

Hobson, A., Malderez, A. (2013) *Judgementoring and other threats to realizing the potential of school-based mentoring in teacher education*, *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 2(2), pp. 89–108. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-03-2013-0019>.

Hobson, A.J., Maxwell, B. (2017) 'Supporting and hindering the well-being of early career teachers: A comprehensive review of literature,' *British Educational literature Journal*, pp.168-191. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3261>.

Hobson, A.J., Maxwell, B. (2020) 'Mentoring substructures and superstructures: an extension and reconceptualisation of the architecture for teacher mentoring', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 46(2), pp. 184–206. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1724653>.

Hobson, A. J. (2021) 'Bringing mentoring onsite: Averting judgementoring and enhancing the professional learning, development, and well-being of teachers,' In E. H. Reames, L. J. Searby (Eds), *The art and science of mentoring: A Festschrift in honor of Dr. Frances Kochan* (pp. 49–74). North Carolina: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Hochschild, A. (2012) *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. California:University of California Press.

Hoffmann, E. A. (2007) 'Open-Ended Interviews, Power, and Emotional Labor,' *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 36(3), pp. 318-346. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241606293134>.

Holloway, W., Jefferson, T. (2008) 'The free association narrative interview method,' In: Given, Lisa M. ed. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. Sevenoaks, California:SAGE.

Holloway, W., Jefferson, T. (2017) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: A Psychosocial Approach*. Sevenoaks, California: SAGE.

Holloway, J., Parcerisa, L. (2024) 'Teacher collaboration: how conditions of accountability shape teachers' autonomy, responsibilities, and relationships', *Teachers and Teaching*, 31(1), pp. 1–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2024.2436028>.

Hollstein, B. (2021) 'Promises and pitfalls of qualitative longitudinal research,' *Longitudinal and Life Course Studies*, 12(1), pp. 7-17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/175795920X16040851984946>.

Holmes, A.G.D. (2020) 'Researcher Positionality – A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research – A New Researcher Guide,' *Shanlax International Journal*

of *Education*, Vol 8, No 4, pp.1-10. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>.

Holstein, J., Gubrium, J. (2003) 'Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns,' In Holstein, J. Gubrium, J. (Eds) *Inside Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984492.n1>

Hong, J.Y. (2010) 'Pre-service and Beginning Teachers' Professional Identity and Its Relation to Dropping out of the Profession,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(8), pp.1530–1543. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.06.003>.

Hong, J. Y. (2012) 'Why do some beginning teachers leave the school, and others stay? Understanding teacher resilience through psychological lenses,' *Teachers and Teaching*, 18(4), pp. 417–440. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2012.696044>.

Hong, J., Day, C., Greene, B. (2017) 'The Construction of Early Career Teachers' identities: Coping or managing?' *Teacher Development*, 22(2), pp.249–266. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2017.1403367>.

Hong, J., Cross Francis, D., Schutz, P.A. (2018) 'Research on Teacher Identity: Common Themes, Implications, and Future Directions', In P.A. Schutz, J. Hong, D. Cross Francis (Eds) *Research on Teacher Identity: Mapping Challenges and Innovations*. Singapore: Springer International Publishing.

Hong, J.Y., Greene, B.A., Lowery, J. (2018) 'Multiple dimensions of teacher identity development from pre-service to early years of teaching: A longitudinal study', *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(5), pp. 568–582. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2017.1251111>

Hood, C. (1991) A Public Management for All Seasons? *Journal of Public Administration*, 69 (1). Available at <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.1991.tb00779.x>.

Hordern, J. (2014) 'How is vocational knowledge recontextualised?', *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 66(1), pp. 22–38. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2013.867525>.

Hordern, J. (2024) 'Teacher professionalism, expertise and the jurisdictional struggle', *Education Inquiry*, pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2024.2308945>.

Hordern, J., Brooks, C. (2023) 'The Core Content Framework and the 'new Science' of Educational Research,' *Oxford Review of Education*, 49(6), pp.1–19. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2023.2182768>.

Hordern, J., Brooks, C. (2025) 'The ITTECF and educational research: the next version of a flawed vision?' *London Review of Education*, 23 (1), 6. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14324/LRE.23.1.06>.

Hordern, J., Evans, K., Kelly, P., Pratt, N. (2024) 'An Expert System on Flimsy Foundations: Teaching Expertise and the Early Career Framework,' *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 72(5), pp.607–625. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2024.2376133>.

Horton, J., Macve., Struyven, G. (2004) 'Qualitative Research: Experiences in Using Semi-Structured Interview,' *The Real Life Guide to Accounting Research*, pp.339-357. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008043972-3/50022-0>.

House of Commons Education Committee (2023–24) *Teacher recruitment, training and retention*. London: House of Commons. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmeduc/119/report.html>.

Howlett, M. (2021) 'Looking at the 'field' through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic,' *Qualitative Research*, 22(3), pp. 387-402. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120985691>.

Hoyle, E. (2001) 'Teaching: Prestige, Status and Esteem,' *Educational Management & Administration*, 29(2), pp. 139-152. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263211X010292001>.

Ingersoll, R. M. (2001) 'Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: An organizational analysis,' *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(3), pp. 499–534. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312038003499>.

Ingersoll, R.M., Strong, M. (2011) 'The impact of induction and mentoring programs for beginning teachers: A critical review of the research', *Review of Educational Research*, 81(2), pp. 201–233. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654311403323>.

Institute for Employment Studies and BMG Research (2025) *Evaluation of the national roll-out of the early career framework induction programmes*. Government Social Research. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/682f2072c054883884bff423/Evaluation_of_the_ECF_-_summary_report.pdf (Accessed 21st June 2025).

Jansen in de Wal, J., den Brok, P., Hooijer, J., Martens, R., van den Beemt, A. (2014) 'Teachers' engagement in professional learning: Exploring motivational profiles', *Learning and Individual Differences*, 36, pp. 27–36. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2014.08.001>.

Johnson, S. (2023) 'Who is here to help?' Exploring informal teacher mentorship: a call for study,' *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education* Vol 18 Issue 1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.15760/nwjte.2023.18.1.1>.

Johnson, S.M., Kraft, M.A., Papay, J.P. (2012) 'How context matters in high-need schools: The effects of teachers' working conditions on their professional satisfaction and their students' achievement', *Teachers College Record*, 114(10), pp. 1–39. Available at: <https://scholar.harvard.edu/mkraft/publications/how-context-matters-high-need-schools-effects-teachers%E2%80%99-working-conditions-their> (Accessed 20th September 2024).

Johnson-Bailey, J. (1999) 'The Ties that Bind and the Shackles that Separate: Race, Gender, Class and Color in a Research Process,' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 12 (6) pp.659-70. Available at: ISSN-0951-8398.

Jones, C, Banerjee, P., Jackson, L. (2025) *The positioning of parental engagement within England's current educational policy landscape*, BERA Journal. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4175>.

Josselson, R. (2007) 'The Ethical Attitude in Narrative Research: Principles and Practicalities,' In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452226552.n21>.

Kaaristo, M. (2022) 'Everyday power dynamics and hierarchies in qualitative research: The role of humour in the field,' *Qualitative Research*, 22(5), pp. 743-760. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941221096597>.

Kaiser, K. (2011) 'Protecting Respondent Confidentiality in Qualitative Research,' *Qualitative Health Research*, 19(11):1632-1641. Available at: [10.1177/1049732309350879](https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309350879)

Kallio, H., Pietilä, A., Johnson, M., Kangasniemi, M. (2016) 'Systematic methodological review: developing a framework for a qualitative semi-structured interview guide,' *JAN Leading Global Nursing Research*, 72 (12). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.13031>

Kant, I. (1900) '*Kant on Education (über Pädagogik)*,' *Online Library of Liberty*. Available at: <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/davids-kant-on-education-uber-padagogik>. (Accessed 3rd November 2019).

Kaplan, H. (2021) 'Promoting Optimal Induction to Beginning Teachers Using Self-Determination Theory,' *SAGE Open*, 11(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211015680>.

Karim, S. (2023) 'Power-informed practice in social work,' *Journal of Social Work*, 23(6), pp. 1062-1079. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14680173231180307>.

Karnieli-Miller, O., Strier R., Pessach L. (2009) 'Power relations in qualitative research,' *Qual Health Res*, pp. 279-89. Available at: <https://doi:10.1177/1049732308329306>.

Karousiou, C., C. Hajisoteriou, P. Angelides (2019), "Teachers' professional identity in super-diverse school settings: Teachers as agents of intercultural education", *Teachers and Teaching*, Vol. 2 (2). Available at: <https://doi:10.1080/13540602.2018.1544121>.

Keddie, A., McDonald, K., Blackmore, J., Gobby, B. (2023) 'Teacher professional autonomy in an unusual government school: issues of relationality and context', *Oxford Review of Education*, 50(3), pp. 434-449. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2023.2236941>.

Kelchtermans, G. (1993) 'Getting the story, understanding the lives: From career stories to teachers' professional development,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(5-6), pp. 443–456. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X\(93\)90029-G](https://doi.org/10.1016/0742-051X(93)90029-G).

Kelchtermans, G. (1996) 'Teacher vulnerability: understanding its moral and political roots,' *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 15:2, pp. 257-272. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875332>.

Kelchtermans, G. (2005) Teachers' Emotions in Educational Reforms: Self-understanding, Vulnerable Commitment and Micropolitical Literacy, *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), pp.995–1006. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.009>.

Kelchtermans, G. (2006) 'Teacher collaboration and collegiality as workplace conditions,' *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik* 52 2, S. pp. 220-237. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:4454>.

Kelchtermans, G. (2009) 'Who I am in how I teach is the message: self-understanding, vulnerability and reflection', *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(2), pp. 257–272. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600902875332>.

Kelchtermans, G. (2017) 'Should I stay, or should I go? Unpacking teacher attrition/retention as an educational issue,' *Teachers and Teaching* Volume 23, Issue 8. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2017.1379793>.

Keltcherman, G. (2019) 'Early Career Teachers and their Need for Support: Thinking Again' in A. Sullivan et al, (Eds) *Attracting and Keeping the Best Teachers Professional Learning and Development in Schools and Higher Education*. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Kelchtermans, G., Ballet, K. (2002) 'The micropolitics of teacher induction: A narrative-biographical study on teacher socialisation', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 18(1), pp. 105–120. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(01\)00053-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00053-1).

Kennedy, A. (2007) 'Continuing professional development (CPD) policy and the discourse of teacher professionalism in Scotland', *Research Papers in Education*, 22(1), pp. 95–111. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02671520601152128>.

Klassen, R. M., Tze, V. M. C., Betts, S. M., Gordon, K. A. (2009) 'Teacher efficacy research 1998–2009: Signs of progress or unfulfilled promise?' *Educational Psychology Review*, 23, pp. 21–43. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-010-9141-8>.

Klassen, R. M., Tze, V. M. C., Betts, S. M., Gordon, K. A. (2011) 'Teacher efficacy research 1998–2009: Signs of progress or unfulfilled promise?' *Educational Psychology Review*, 23(1), pp. 21–43. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-010-9141-8>.

Klassen, R.M., Tze, V.M.C. (2014) 'Teachers' self-efficacy, personality, and teaching effectiveness: A meta-analysis', *Educational Research Review*, 12, pp. 59–76. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2014.06.001>.

Klykken, F. H. (2021) 'Implementing continuous consent in qualitative research,' *Qualitative Research*, 22(5), pp. 795-810. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211014366>.

Kraft, M.A., Papay, J.P. (2014) 'Can professional environments in schools promote teacher development? Explaining heterogeneity in returns to teaching experience,' *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 36(4), pp. 476–500. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373713519496>.

Kvale, S. (1996) *Interview Views: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications

Kvale, S. (2006) 'Dominance Through Interviews and Dialogues,' *Qualitative Inquiry*, 12(3), pp. 480-500. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800406286235>.

Kyndt, E., Donche, V., Gijbels, D., Van Petegem, P. (2014) 'Workplace learning within teacher education: the role of job characteristics and goal orientation,' *Educational Studies*, 40(5), pp. 515–532. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2014.936829>.

Kyngas, H. (2020) 'Qualitative Research and Content Analysis,' In: H. Kyngas, K. Mikkonen, M. Kaariainen (Eds.), *The Application of Content Analysis in Nursing Science Research*. Princeton, NJ:Springer. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30199-6_1

Ladge, J., Greenberg, D. (2015) 'Becoming a Working Mother: Managing Identity and Efficacy Uncertainties During Resocialization,' *Human Resource Management* Volume 54 Issue 6, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21651>.

Lambert, K., Gray, C. (2019) 'Performing 'teacher': exploring early career teachers' becomings, work identities and the [mis-]use of the professional standards in competitive educational assemblages,' *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 28(4), pp. 501–523. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2019.1663247>.

Lamote, C., Engels, N. (2010) 'The development of student teachers' professional identity,' *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 33(1), pp. 3–18. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619760903457735>.

Langdon, F. J. (2017) 'Learning to mentor: unravelling routine practice to develop adaptive mentoring expertise,' *Teacher Development*, 21(4), pp. 528–546. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2016.1267036>.

Larsen, E., Jensen-Clayton, C., Curtis, E., Loughland, T., Nguyen, H. (2025) 'Re-imagining teacher mentoring for the future,' *Professional Development in Education*, 51:4, pp. 683–697. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2023.2178480>.

Lasky, S. (2005) 'A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(8), pp. 899–916. Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003>.

Lave, J., Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lavigne, A.L. (2014) 'Beginning Teachers Who Stay: Beliefs about Students,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 39, pp.31–43. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2013.12.002>.

Le Cornu, R. (2013) 'Building early career teacher resilience: The role of relationships,' *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(4), pp. 1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2013v38n4.4>.

Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008) 'Seven strong claims about successful school leadership,' *School Leadership and Management*, 28(1), pp. 27–42. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632430701800060>.

Li, B., Li, Z., Fu, M. (2022) 'Understanding beginning teachers' professional identity changes through job demands-resources theory,' *Acta Psychologica*, Volume 230, Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103760>.

Li, S. (2023) 'The effect of teacher self-efficacy, resilience, and emotional regulation on teacher burnout: a mediation model,' *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1185079>.

Lieblich, A., Tuval-Mashiach, R. Zilber, T. (1998) *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis and Interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Lim, W. M. (2024) 'What Is Qualitative Research? An Overview and Guidelines,' *Australasian Marketing Journal*, 33(2), pp. 199-229. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14413582241264619>.

Lin, Q., Gao, X. (2023) 'Exploring predictors of teacher autonomy: A three-level worldwide study,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 135. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104338>.

Lincoln, Y.S., Guba, E.G. (1985) *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Lincoln, Y., Lynham, S., Guba, E. (2011) 'Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradictions, and Emerging Confluences,' In: Denzin, N., Lincoln, Y., (Eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Lindqvist, P.; Nordänger, U.K., Carlsson, R. (2014) 'Teacher attrition: The first five years in Sweden,' *Educational Review*, 66(2), pp.164–183. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.02.005>.

Little, J. W. (1990) 'The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teachers' professional relations,' *Teachers College Record*, 91(4), pp. 509-536. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819009100403>.

Liu, S.; Keeley, J.; Sui, Y., Sang, L. (2021), 'Impact of distributed leadership on teacher job satisfaction in China: the mediating roles of teacher autonomy and teacher collaboration,' *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, Volume 71. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2021.101099>.

Lo, L. (2011) 'Issues in teacher professionalism and performativity', In Day, C, (ed) *The Routledge International Handbook of Teacher and School Development*. Oxon: Routledge.

Lo Iacono, V., Symonds, P., Brown, D. H. K. (2016) 'Skype as a Tool for Qualitative Research Interviews,' *Sociological Research Online*, 21(2), pp. 103-117. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.3952>.

Lodge, R.C. (2014) *Plato's Theory of Education*. Oxon: Routledge.

Longmuir, F. (2023) *Australia's teacher shortage is a generational crisis in the making. How can we turn things around?* Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-01-30/pandemic-exposed-australia-teacher-shortage-students-schools/101886452> (Accessed 4th June 2023).

Lortie, D., (1975) *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Loveless, B. (2023) *Are Teachers in Demand in Canada?* Available at: <https://www.educationcorner.com/are-teachers-in-demand-in-canada/> (Accessed 4th June 2023).

Lyons, D., Scull, J. (2023) 'Critiquing narrative inquiry's epistemological pillars within a large-scale study into the teaching of phonics', *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 47(2), pp. 114–125. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2023.2196066>.

Mansfield, C., Gu, Q. (2019) 'I'm finally getting that help that I needed' Early career teacher induction and professional learning,' *The Australian Educational Researcher*, Vol 46, pp. 639-659. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00338-y>.

Mansfield, C., Broadley, T., Weatherby-Fell, N. (2021) 'Building resilience in teacher education: An evidence-informed framework', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 99, pp. 103283. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.11.016>.

Maready, B., Cheng, Q., Bunch, D. (2021) 'Exploring Mentoring Practices Contributing to New Teacher Retention: An Analysis of the Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study', *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 19 (2), pp.88-99. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.24384/rgm9-sa56>.

Marsick, V. J., K. E. Watkins (2001) 'Informal and Incidental Learning,' *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education* 89: pp. 25–34. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/ace.5>.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013) *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Mayer, D., Mills, M. (2021) 'Professionalism and Teacher Education in Australia and England,' *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(1), pp.1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2020.1832987>.

Mayorga-Gallo, S., Hordge-Freeman, E. (2016) 'Between marginality and privilege: gaining access and navigating the field in multiethnic settings,' *Qualitative Research*, 17(4), pp. 377-394. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794116672915>.

McCarthy, M., Riddle, S., Hickey, A. (2025) 'The Teacher as Double Agent: Performative Compliance, Allegiance and Survival in the Contemporary Classroom,' *Teachers and Teaching*, pp.1–15. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2025.2478150>.

McLean, D., Worth, J. (2025) *The Teacher Labour Market in England*. Available at: file:///Users/user2/Downloads/teacher_labor_market_in_england_annual_report_2025.pdf (accessed March 18, 2025). National Foundation for Educational Research.

McLean, D., Worth, J., Smith, A (2024) *Teacher Labour Market in England NFER* file:///Users/user2/Downloads/teacher_labour_market_in_england_annual_report_2024.pdf (Accessed 3rd January 2025).

Mercer, J. (2007) 'The challenges of insider research in educational institutions: Wielding a double-edged sword and resolving delicate dilemmas,' *Oxford Review of Education*, 33(1), pp. 1–17. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054980601094651>.

Merton, R. (1972) 'Insiders and outsiders: a chapter in the sociology of knowledge,' *American Journal of Sociology* 78 (July) pp. 9-47. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1086/225294>.

Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M., Saldaña, J. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Mockler, N. (2011) 'Beyond "what works": Understanding teacher identity as a practical and political tool,' *Teachers and Teaching*, 17(5), pp. 517–528. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2011.602059>.

Mockler, N. (2020) 'Teacher professional learning under audit: reconfiguring practice in an age of standards,' *Professional Development in Education*, 48(1), pp.166-180. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1720779>.

Mockler, N. (2020) 'Navigating professional identity as a teacher of history' in *Historical Thinking for History teachers: a New Approach to Engaging Students and Developing Historical Consciousness*, In (eds) Parkes, R. Oxon: Routledge.

Mommers, J., Schellings, G., Beijaard, D. (2021) 'Professional Identity Assignments to Support Beginning Teachers,' *Growth into the Profession,* *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*, 10(2). Available at: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1642215>.

Morrison, C. M. (2013) 'Teacher Identity in the Early Career Phase: Trajectories that Explain and Influence Development,' *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 38(4). Available at: <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol38/iss4/6>.

Murtagh, L., Dawes, L., Rushton, Ball-Smith, C. (2024) 'Early career teacher mentoring in England: a case study of compliance and mediation,' *Professional Development in Education*, pp. 1–14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2023.2291357>.

Nadelson, L., Booher, L., Turley, M. (2020) 'Leaders in the Classroom: Using Teaching as a Context for Measuring Leader Identity,' *Front Educ* (5). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.525630>.

National Audit Office (2016) *Training new teachers*. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Training-new-teachers.pdf> (Accessed 17th October 2023).

National Audit Office (2025) *Teacher workforce: secondary and further education*. Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/teacher-workforce-secondary-and-further-education/> (Accessed 13th May 2025).

National Education Union (2025) *Pregnancy risk assessments: Best practice guidance for workplace representatives and members*. London: NEU. Available at: <https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/BPW%20-%20Pregnancy%20risk%20assessments.pdf> (Accessed: 28 July 2025).

NEOST (2023) *Conditions of service for schoolteachers in England and Wales (The Burgundy Book)*. London: National Employers' Organisation for School Teachers and National Education Union. Available at: <https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-06/Burgundy%20Book%202023.pdf> (Accessed: 28 July 2025).

NFER (December 2023) 'Evaluating the impact of the early roll-out of the EC using a quasi-experimental matched comparison group design.' Available at: <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/projects-and-evaluation/projects/early-career-framework-early-roll-out> (Accessed 19th December 2024).

Nguyen, X., Walkinshaw, I. (2018) 'Autonomy in teaching practice: Insights from Vietnamese English Language teachers trained in inner circle nations,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 69, pp. 21–32. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.08.015>.

Nichols, S.L., Schutz, P.A., Rodgers, K., Bilica, K. (2016) 'Early Career Teachers' Emotion and Emerging Teacher Identities,' *Teachers and Teaching*, 23(4), pp.1–16. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2016.1211099>.

Nickel, J., Crosby, S. (2022) 'Professional identity values and tensions for early career teachers,' *Teaching Education* Vol 33 No 3. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2021.1895107>.

Nickel, J., Crosby, S. (2023) 'Professional identity values and tensions for early career teachers,' *Teaching Education*, Vol 33 No 3, pp. 317-331. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2021.1895107>.

Niemiec, C. P., Ryan, R. M. (2009) 'Autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom: Applying self-determination theory to educational practice,' *Theory and Research in Education*, 7(2), pp. 133-144. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477878509104318>.

Noddings, N. (1984) *Caring: A feminine approach to ethics and moral education*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nolin, J. (2008) *In search of a new theory of profession*, University of Boras. Available at: file:///Users/user2/Downloads/In_search_of_a_new_theory_of_professions.pdf.

(Accessed 12th July 2023).

Noordegraaf, M. (2015) 'Hybrid professionalism and beyond: (New) Forms of public professionalism in changing organizational and societal contexts,' *Journal of Professions and Organization*, (2) 2, pp. 187–206. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jpo/jov002>.

Nordberg, D. (2022) "The Lens of Theory: Seeing Better or Different?," *International Journal of Organisation Theory and Behaviour*, Vol. 26, pp. 152-162. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOTB-09-2022-0177>.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., Moules, N. J. (2017) 'Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria,' *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>.

OCED (2020) Professional collaborations as a key support for teachers working in challenging environments. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2020/09/professional-collaboration-as-a-key->

[support-for-teachers-working-in-challenging-environments_310402b3.html](#) (Accessed 12th March 2025).

OECD (2021) *Education at a Glance*. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2021_bcc79d57-en (Accessed 15th June 2025).

OECD (2021), "What proportion of teachers leave the teaching profession?", in *Education at a Glance 2021: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1787/bcc79d57-en> (Accessed 4th June 2023).

OCED (2025) *Education at a Glance*. OCED Indicators, OCED Publishing, Paris. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2025/09/education-at-a-glance-2025_c58fc9ae.html (Accessed 15th September 2025).

O'Connor, K.E. (2008) 'You choose to care': Teachers, emotions and professional identity', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), pp. 117–126. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.11.008>.

Olsen, B. (2016) *Teaching for Success*. New York: Routledge.

Olssen, M., and Peters, M. A. (2005) 'Neoliberalism, higher education and the knowledge economy: from the free market to knowledge capitalism,' *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(3), pp. 313–345. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/026809305001087>.

Orb, A., Eisenhauer, L., Wynaden, D. (2001) 'Ethics in qualitative research', *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 33(1), pp. 93–96. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x>.

Ovenden-Hope, T., (2022) 'Introduction,' In Ovenden-Hope T (ed) *The Early Career Framework: Origins, Outcomes and Opportunities*. Woodbridge: John Catt.

Ovenden-Hope, T., Kirkpatrick, H. (2024) 'The Early Career Framework: Why Context Matters for Teacher Professional Development,' *Education Sciences*, 14(11). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14111261>.

Ovenden-Hope, T., Kirkpatrick, H. (2025) *Early Career Teacher Entitlement Great Expectations*. London: Hachette Learning.

Ozga, J., Lawn, M. (1988) 'Schoolwork: interpreting the labour process of teaching', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 9(3). Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1392796>.

Ozga, J. (2009) 'Governing education through data in England: from regulation to self-evaluation,' *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(2), pp. 149–162. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930902733121>.

Papatraianou, L., Le Cornu, R. (2014) 'Problematising the role of personal and professional relationships in early career teacher resilience,' *Australian Journal of Education*, Volume 39 Issue 1. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2014v39n1.7>.

Parliament. House of Commons (2023) *Teacher Recruitment and retention in England*, (HC 23 0722) London: House of Commons <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-7222/CBP-7222.pdf> (Accessed 6th October 2024).

Parsons, T. (1954) *Essays in sociological theory*. 2nd ed. New York: Free Press

Perna, M. (2022) *Flexibility or Else: Teacher Retention in the Brave New World of Education*. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcperna/2022/07/12/flexibility-or-else-teacher-retention-in-the-brave-new-world-of-education> (Accessed 4th June 2023).

Perryman, J. (2006) 'Panoptic performativity and school inspection regimes,' *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(2), pp. 147–161. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500500138>.

Peters, R.S. (1973) *The Philosophy of Education*. London: Oxford University Press.

Pi Y., Ma M., Hu A., Wang T. (2024) 'The relationship between professional identity and professional development among special education teachers: a moderated mediation model,' *BMC Psychology*, 12. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-02075-z>.

Pierre, E. A. (2008) 'Decentering Voice in Qualitative Inquiry,' *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 1(3), pp. 319–336. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1525/irqr.2008.1.3.319>.

Pillen, M., Beijaard, D., den Brok, P. (2013) 'Professional Identity Tensions of Beginning Teachers,' *Teachers and Teaching*, 19(6), pp.660–678. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2013.827455>.

Pillow, W. (2003) 'Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research,' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16(2), pp. 175–196. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839032000060635>.

Pinnegar, S., Daynes, J.G. (2012) 'Locating narrative inquiry historically: Thematics in the turn to narrative', in Clandinin, D.J. (ed.) *Handbook of narrative inquiry: Mapping a methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1991) 'Narrative and self-concept,' *Journal of Narrative & Life History*, 1(2-3), pp. 135–153. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.1.2-3.04nar>.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995) 'Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), pp. 5–23. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/0951839950080103>.

Priestley, M., Biesta, G., Robinson. S., (2016) 'Performativity and Teacher Agency' *Teacher Agency: An Ecological Approach*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.

Putnam, Linda L., Myers, K., Gailliard, B. (2013) 'Examining the tensions in workplace flexibility and exploring options for new directions', *Human Relations* 67(4), pp.413-440. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713495704>.

Rai, N., Thapa, B. (2015) 'A Study on Purposive Sampling Method in Research' Kathmandu School of Law, Kathmandu, 5. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/28087388/A_STUDY_ON_PURPOSIVE_SAMPLING_METHOD_IN_RESEARCH (Accessed on 12th February 2023).

Rapley, T. (2007) *Doing Conversational, Discourse and Document Analysis*. London:SAGE.

Reeves, J. (2018) 'Teacher Identity Work in Neoliberal Schooling Spaces,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 72, pp.98–106. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.03.002>.

Riessman, C. K. (2008) *Narrative methods for the human sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Richardson, P.W., Watt, H.M.G. (2018) 'Teacher professional identity and career motivation: A lifespan perspective', In Schutz, P.A., Hong, J.Y., Francis, D.C. (Eds) *Research on teacher identity: Mapping challenges and innovations*. Cham: Springer, pp. 37–48. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-93836-3_4.

Richter, D., Kunter, M., Klusmann, U., Lüdtke, O., Baumert, J. (2011) 'Professional development across the teaching career: Teachers' uptake of formal and informal learning opportunities,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(1), pp. 116–126. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.07.008>.

Robertson, J. (1996) 'The radical social solution,' *Progressive Review* (3)2, pp.118-120. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0041.1996.tb00126.x>.

Rodgers, C., Scott, K. (2008) 'The development of the personal self and professional identity in learning to teach' In (eds) M. Cochran-Smith, S. Feiman-Nemser, D. J. McIntyre, K Demers, *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education, Enduring Questions in Changing Contexts*. Abingdon: Routledge

Rogers-Shaw, C., Choi, J., Carr-Chellman, D. (2021) 'Understanding and Managing the Emotional Labor of Qualitative Research,' *Qualitative Social Research*, 22(3). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-22.3.3652>.

Rose, G. (2021) *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*. 5th ed. London: SAGE.

Roulston, K. (2018) 'Tips for formulating interview guides for semi-structured qualitative interviews' <https://qualpage.com/2018/02/15/tips-for-formulating-interview-guides-for-semi-structured-qualitative-interviews-part-2/comment-page-1/#:~:text=Attributes%20of%20a%20population,what%20you%20hope%20to%20find>) (Accessed 13th February 2025).

Runcieman, A (2018) *The Identity of the Professional Interpreter. How Professional Identities are constructed in the classroom*. New York: Springer.

Ryan, R.M., Deci, E.L. (2000) 'Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being,' *American Psychologist*, 55(1), pp. 68-78. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68>.

Ryan, R. M., Deci, E. L. (2006) 'Self-regulation and the problem of human autonomy: Does psychology need choice, self-determination, and will?' *Journal of Personality*, 74(6), pp. 1557–1586. Available at: <https://doi.org.10.1111/j.1467-6494.2006.00420.x>.

Ryan, R., William, Ryan, Domenico, E, Deci, E. (2019) 'The Nature and Conditions of Human Autonomy and Flourishing: Self-Determination Theory and Basic Psychological Needs' In Ryan, R. (editor) *The Oxford Handbook of Human Motivation*, Oxford: Oxford Library of Psychology.

Sabbe, E., Aelterman, A. (2007) 'Gender in teaching: A literature review,' *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 13(5), pp. 521–538. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600701561729>.

Sachs, J. (2001) 'Teacher Professional Identity: Competing Discourses, Competing Outcomes,' *Journal of Education Policy*, 16(2), pp.149–161. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930116819>.

Sachs, J. (2005) 'Teacher education and the development of professional identity: Learning to be a teacher', In P. Denicolo and M. Kompf (Eds), *Connecting Policy and Practice: Challenges for Teaching and Learning in Schools and Universities*. Oxon: Routledge.

Sachs, J. (2010) 'Teacher professional identity: Competing discourses, competing outcomes,' *Journal of Education Policy*, 20(2), pp. 153–169. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930116819>.

Sachs, J. (2016) 'Teacher professionalism: Why Are We Still Talking about it?' *Teachers and Teaching*, 22(4), pp.413–425. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1082732>.

Sachs, J., Mockler, N. (2012) 'Performance cultures of teaching. Threat or opportunity? In Day, C. (ed) *The Routledge International Handbook of Teacher and School Development*. London: Routledge.

Saldaña, J. (2003) *Longitudinal qualitative research: Analyzing change through time*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

Salhberg, P. (2011) 'Paradoxes of educational improvement: The Finnish experience' *Scottish Educational Review*, 43 (1), pp. 3-23. Available at <https://pasisahlberg.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Paradoxes-of-improvement-SER-2011.pdf> (Accessed 20th October 2023).

Sahlberg, P. (2015) *Finnish Lessons 2.0: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

Savvides, N., Al-Youssef, J., Colin, M., Garrido, C. (2014) 'Journeys into Inner/Outer Space: Reflections on the Methodological Challenges of Negotiating Insider/Outsider Status in International Educational Research,' *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 9(4), pp. 412-425. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2304/rcie.2014.9.4.412>.

Schaap, H., van der Want, A.C., Oolbekkink-Marchand, H.W., Meijer, P.C. (2021) 'Changes over time in the professional identity tensions of Dutch early-career teachers,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 100, pp. 103283. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103283>.

Schaefer, L., Clandinin, D Jean. (2011) 'Stories of Sustaining: A Narrative Inquiry Into the Experiences of Two Beginning Teachers,' *LEARNing Landscapes*, 4, pp. 275-295. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.36510/learnland.v4i2.400>

Scheffelaar A, Janssen M, Luijckx K. (2021) 'The Story as a Quality Instrument: Developing an Instrument for Quality Improvement Based on Narratives of Older Adults Receiving

Long-Term Care,' *Int J Environ Res Public Health*, 18(5). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052773>.

Schellings, G., Beijaard, D. (2023) 'Beginning teachers' Professional Identity Work and Its Support' in: R. Tierney, F. Rizvi and K. Erkican, (Eds), *International Encyclopaedia of Education*. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-818630-5.04085-9>.

Schellings, G., Koopman, M., Beijaard, D., Mommers, J. (2023) 'Constructing configurations to capture the complexity and uniqueness of beginning teachers' professional identity,' *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 46(3), pp. 372–396. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2021.1905793>.

Scheopner Torres, A. (2020) 'Emotions, identity, and commitment among early leavers in the United States of America', *Teachers and Teaching*, 26(7-8), pp. 508–521. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.1889494>.

Scherer, M. (1999) (ed) 'What do new teachers need?' In *A Better Beginning: Supporting and Mentoring New Teachers*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Available at: https://lib.zu.edu.pk/ebookdata/Medical%20Education/A%20Better%20Beginning_%20Supporting%20and%20Mentoring%20New%20Teachers-Association%20for%20Supervision%20&%20Curriculum%20Development%20Marge%20Scherer.pdf (Accessed 26th July 2025).

Schunk, D., DiBenedetto, M. (2021), 'Self-efficacy and Human Motivation' in A.J. Elliot (Ed): *Advances in Motivation Science*. Massachusetts: Elsevier Academic Press.

Sfard, A., Prusak, A. (2005) 'Telling Identities: In Search of an Analytic Tool for Investigating Learning as a Culturally Shaped Activity,' *Educational Researcher*, 34(4), pp. 14-22. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X034004014>.

Shah, M. (2012) 'The importance and advantages of teacher collegiality in schools - a literature review.' *Social and Behavioural Science*, 46, pp. 1242–1246. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.282>.

Sheard, L., Marsh, C. (2019) 'How to analyse longitudinal data from multiple sources in qualitative health research: the pen portrait analytic technique,' *BMC Med Res Methodol*. 19(1) p. 69. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0810-0>.

Shenton, A. K. (2004) 'Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects,' *Education for Information*, 22(2), pp. 63-75. Available at <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>.

Shulman, L. S. (1986) 'Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching,' *Educational Researcher*, 15(2), pp. 4-14. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X015002>

Skaalvik, E.M., Skaalvik, S. (2010) 'Teacher self-efficacy and teacher burnout: A study of relations', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(4), pp. 1059–1069. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.11.001>.

Skaalvik, E.M., Skaalvik, S. (2011) 'Teacher job satisfaction and motivation to leave the teaching profession: Relationships with school setting, feeling of belonging, and emotional tiredness,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27(6), pp. 1029-1038. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.04.001>.

Skaalvik, E.M., Skaalvik, S. (2014) 'Teacher self-efficacy and perceived autonomy: relationships with teacher engagement, job happiness, and emotional weariness,' *Psychological Reports*, 114, pp. 68–77. Available at <https://doi.org/10.2466/14.02.PR0.114k14w0>.

Skaalvik, E.M., Skaalvik, S. (2018) 'Job Demands and Job Resources as Predictors of Teacher Motivation and Well-being,' *Social Psychology of Education*, 21(5), pp.1251–1275. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-018-9464-8>.

Skaalvik, E.M., Skaalvik, S. (2021) 'Teacher burnout: Relations between dimensions of burnout, perceived school context, job satisfaction and motivation for teaching,' A longitudinal study. *Teachers and Teaching*, Vol 26, (7-8). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2021.1913404>.

Skelton, C. (2002) 'The 'feminisation of schooling' or 're-masculinising' primary education?', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 12:1, pp. 77-96. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210200200084>

Skinner, B., Leavey, G., Rothi D. (2018) 'Managerialism and teacher professional identity: impact on well-being among teachers in the UK,' *Educational Review*, Volume 73. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1556205>.

Slegers, P., Kelchtermans, G. (1999) 'Inleiding op het themanummer: professionele identiteit van leraren [Professional identity of teachers]', *Pedagogisch Tijdschrift*, 24, pp. 369–374.

Smidt, S. (2017) *Narratives of learning through international professional experience*. London: Routledge.

Squires, V. (2019) 'The well-being of the early career teacher: a review of the literature on the pivotal role of mentoring,' *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in*

Education. Emerald Publishing Limited. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-02-2019-0025>.

Steadman, S. (2024) 'Who is it that can tell me who I am?' In V. Ellis (ed) *Teacher Education in Crisis: The State, the Market and the Universities in England*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Steinberg, S. (2015) 'Proposing a multiplicity of meanings: Research bricolage and cultural pedagogy,' In: Tobin K, Steinberg, S. (Eds) *Doing Educational Research*, 2nd edition. Rotterdam, Boston, Taipei: Sense Publishers.

Stratton, S. J. (2024) 'Purposeful sampling: Advantages and pitfalls', *Prehospital and Disaster Medicine*, 39(2). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049023X24000281>.

Strain, M., Simkins, T. (2008) 'Continuity, Change and Educational Reform – Questioning the Legacy of the Education Reform Act 1988,' *Educational Management Administration and Leadership BELMAS Vol 36 (2)*, SAGE: London.

Strong, M. (2009) *Effective Teacher Induction and Mentoring: Assessing the Evidence*. New York: Teachers College Press

Suarez, V., McGrath, J. (2022) *OECD Education Working Paper No. 267: How to Develop and Support Teacher Professional Identity in Times of Change*. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2022/02/teacher-professional-identity_1843d4f3/b19f5af7-en.pdf (Accessed 15th March 2025).

Subedi, K. (2023) 'Teacher Identity and Hierarchy: Narrative Inquiry of Primary Teachers in Nepal's Public Schools,' *KMC Research Journal* 5. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3126/kmcj.v5i1.52447>.

Summerfield, P. (1987) 'Women workers in the Second World War: Production and patriarchy in conflict'. Available at: https://api.pageplace.de/preview/DT0400.9781136247279_A23816461/preview-9781136247279_A23816461.pdf (Accessed 20th November 2024).

Sürmeli, ÞÁ; Ragnarsdóttir, G.; Gestsdóttir, S. M. (2024) 'Leading the dance. The role of teacher collaboration and collegiality in unexpected interruptions,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Volume 139. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2023.104453>.

Sweet, S., Fortier, M., Strachan, S. (2012) 'Testing and Integrating Self-Determination Theory and Self-Efficacy Theory in a Physical Activity Context,' *Canadian Psychology*, 53(4), pp. 319-327. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030280>.

Tait, M. (2008) 'Resilience as a contributor to novice teacher success, commitment, and retention', *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(4), pp. 57–75. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479174> (Accessed 15th May 2024).

Takahashi, S. (2011) 'Co-constructing efficacy: A 'community of practice' perspective on teachers' effectiveness beliefs,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 27. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.12.002>.

Tang, S.Y.F., Lo, E.S.C., Yeh, F.-Y., Cheng, M.M.H. (2025) 'Early Career Teachers' Motivation to Become a teacher, Teacher buoyancy, and Teacher Engagement,' *Teacher Development*, pp.1–19. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2025.2495876>.

Tate, N. (2015) *What Is Education for? The View of the Great Thinkers and Their Relevance Today*. Woodbridge: John C

Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand (2017) 'Our code, our standards : Teaching Council of Aotearoa New Zealand,' Available at: (<https://teachingcouncil.nz/professional-practice/our-code-our-standards/>) (Accessed 11 Aug. 2025).

Teacher Development Trust (2024) *An Exploratory Study of the Early Career Framework* <https://www.gatsby.org.uk/uploads/education/2024-03-06-ecf-review-exploratory-study-report-finalpdf.pdf> (Accessed 19th December 2024).

Thom, D. (1992) *Nice girls and rude girls: Women workers in World War I*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Thomas, L., Beauchamp, C., (2011) 'Understanding new teachers' professional identities through metaphor,' *Teaching and Teacher Education* Vol 27 (4). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.12.007>.

Thomas, L., Tuytens, M., Moolenaar, N., Devos, G., Kelchtermans, G., Vanderlinde, R. (2019) 'Teachers' first year in the profession: the power of high-quality support,' *Teachers and Teaching*, 25(2), pp.160–188. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1562440>.

Tickle, L. (2011) 'Professional Qualities and Teacher Induction', *Journal of In-Service Education*, 27(1), pp. 51–64. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674580100200146>.

Tolich, M. (2004) 'Internal Confidentiality: When Confidentiality Assurances Fail Relational Informants,' *Qualitative Sociology* 27, 101–106 <https://doi.org/10.1023/B:QUAS.0000015546.20441.4a>

Towers, E., Gewirtz, S., Maguire, M., Neumann, E. (2022) 'A profession in crisis? Teacher's response to England's high-stakes accountability reforms in secondary education, (117). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2022.103778>.

Tracy, S.J. (2010) 'Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(10), pp. 837–851. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>.

Tronto, J.C. (1998) 'An ethic of care,' *Generations*, 22(3) pp. 15-20. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/12785337/> (Accessed on: 25th August 2025).

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A.W., Hoy, W.K. (1998) 'Teacher efficacy: Its meaning and measure', *Review of Educational Research*, 68(2), pp. 202–248. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543068002202>.

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A. W. (2001) 'Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(7), 783-805. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X\(01\)00036-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0742-051X(01)00036-1).

Tschannen-Moran, M., Hoy, A.W. (2007) 'The differential antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs of novice and experienced teachers', *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(6), pp. 944–956. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2006.05.003>.

Tschannen-Moran, M., Gareis, C. R. (2015) 'Principals, trust, and cultivating vibrant schools,' In Hoy, W. K., & DiPaola, M. (Eds.), *Analyzing school contexts: Influences of principals and teachers in the service of students*. North Carolina:Information Age Publishing.

Turvey, K. (2024) England's Essentialist Teacher Education Policy Frameworks as Double Texts, In: V. Ellis, (ed), *Teacher Education in Crisis: The State, the Market and the Universities in England*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

UK Parliament (2023) *Teacher recruitment, training and retention - Education Committee*. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmeduc/119/report.html> (Accessed 11 Aug. 2025).

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2016) *The world needs almost 69 million new teachers to reach the 2030 Education goals*. Paris: UNESCO. <https://uis.unesco.org/en/files/fs39-world-needs-almost-69-million-new-teachers-reach-2030-education-goals-2016-en-pdf> (Accessed 4th June 2023),

van Manen, M. (1995) 'On the Epistemology of Reflective Practice,' *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 1:1, 33-50. Available at: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1354060950010104>.

van der Wal, M.M., Oolbekkink-Marchand, H.W., Schaap, H., Meijer, P.C. (2019) 'Impact of Early Career Teachers' Professional Identity Tensions,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 80, pp.59–70. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.01.001>.

Van De Walle, S., Six, F. (2013) 'Trust and Distrust as Distinct Concepts: Why Studying Distrust in Institutions is Important,' *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis: Research and Practice*, 16(2), pp. 158–174. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876988.2013.785146>.

Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T. and Kyndt, E. (2017) 'Teacher communities as a context for professional development: A systematic review,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, pp. 47–59. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.10.001>.

Vansteenkiste, M., Ryan, R. M. (2013) 'On psychological growth and vulnerability: Basic psychological need satisfaction and need frustration as a unifying principle,' *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, 23(3), pp. 263–280. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032359>.

Vansteenkiste, M., Ryan, R. M., Soenens, B. (2020) 'Basic psychological need theory: Advancements, critical themes, and future directions,' *Motivation and Emotion*, 44(1), pp. 1–31. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11031-019-09818-1>.

Walker, M., Straw, S., Worth, J., Grayson, H. (2018) *Early career CPD: exploratory research* Department of Education. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5f590f93e90e07146161d47a/Early_career_CPD-exploratory_research.pdf (Accessed 1st January 2025).

Walker, M. (2024) 'The Early Career Framework: Key Findings for Policymakers and School Leaders from the Early Roll Out Evaluation'. Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/blogs/the-early-career-framework-key-findings-for-policymakers-and-school-leaders-from-the-early-roll-out-evaluation/> (Accessed March 19, 2025).

Wang, J., Odell, S. J. (2002) 'Mentored learning for standards-based reform: A critical evaluation,' *Educational Research*, Volume 72(3), pp. 481-546. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543072003481>.

Welsh Government (2017) *Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership*. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/19bc948b-8a3f-41e0-944a->

[7bf2cadf7d18/professional-standards-for-teaching-and-leadership-interactive-pdf-for-pc.pdf](#) (Accessed on 20th July 2025).

Wenger, E. (1990) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wengraf, T. (2001) *Qualitative Research Interviewing: Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA, London, and New Delhi: SAGE.

Whitty, G. (2006) 'Teacher professionalism in a new era,' *Education Review*, 19(2), pp. 28–30. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674580000200121>.

Whitty, G. (2008) 'Twenty years of progress? English education policy 1988 to the present,' *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 36(2), pp. 165–184. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143207087771>.

Whitty, G (2008) 'Changing modes of teacher professionalism: traditional, managerial, collaborative and democratic.' In: Cunningham, B, (ed). *Exploring professionalism*. London: Institute of Education.

Wiles, R., Crow, G., Heath, S., Charles, V. (2008) 'The management of confidentiality and anonymity in social research,' *International Journal of Social Research Methodology: Theory & Practice*, 11(5), 417–428. <https://doi.org/10.1080/136455707016222>

Wilkins, C. (2011) 'Professionalism and the post-performative teacher: New teachers reflect on autonomy and accountability in the English school system', *Professional Development in Education*, 37(3), pp. 389–409. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2010.514204>.

Witz, A. (1992) *Professions and Patriarchy*. London: Routledge.

Wong, C.Y.E., Liu, W.C. (2024) 'Development of teacher professional identity: views from Self-Determination Theory', *European Journal of Teacher Education*, pp. 1–19. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1080/02619768.2024.2371981>.

Worth, J., Lynch, S., Hillary, J. (2018) *Teacher supply, retention and mobility in England*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-supply-retention-and-mobility-in-london/> (2nd Feb, 2019).

Worth, J., Van den Brande, J. (2020) *Teacher Labour Market in England: Annual Report 2020*. Slough: NFER. Available at: <https://www.nfer.a20c.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2020/> (Accessed 20th June 2020).

Worth, J., Van den Brande, J. (2020) *Teacher autonomy: How does it relate to job satisfaction and retention?* Slough: NFER. Available at:

<https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-autonomy-how-does-it-relate-to-job-satisfaction-and-retention/> (Accessed 5th February 2022).

Worth, J. (2021) *Teacher labour market in England: Annual report 2021*. Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER). Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-2021/> (Accessed 26th October, 2021).

Worth, J. and Faulkner-Ellis, H. (2022) *Teacher Labour Market in England: Annual Report 2022*. Slough: NFER. Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/teacher-labour-market-in-england-annual-report-2022/> (Accessed 8th June 2022).

Worth, J. (2023) *ITT reforms haven't been catastrophic – but fears remain*. Slough: NFER. Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/blogs/itt-reforms-haven-t-been-catastrophic-but-fears-remain/> (Accessed 5th December 2023).

Worth, J. (2023) *Addressing the post-pandemic teacher recruitment and retention challenges in England*. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Addressing-the-post-pandemic-teacher-recruitment-and-retention-challenges-in-England-Jack-Worth.pdf> (Accessed 6th October 2024).

Worth, J. (2024) *Teacher recruitment and retention crisis shows no signs of abating, new report reveals*. Available at: <https://www.nfer.ac.uk/press-releases/teacher-recruitment-and-retention-crisis-shows-no-signs-of-abating-new-report-reveals/#:~:text=NFER's%20new%20Teacher%20Labour%20Market,workload%20pressures%20since%20the%20pandemic> (Accessed 6th October 2024).

Wu, J., Ghayas, S., Aziz, A., Adil A., Niazi, S. (2024) 'Relationship between teachers' professional identity and career satisfaction among college instructors: role of career calling,' *Front. Psychol.* 15. Available at <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1348217>.

Yin, R.K. (2014) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 5th edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zee, M., Koomen, H.M.Y. (2016) 'Teacher self-efficacy and its effects on classroom processes, student academic adjustment, and teacher well-being: A synthesis of 40 years of research,' *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), pp. 981–1015. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626801>.

Zembylas, M. (2018) 'Rethinking the Demands for 'preferred' Teacher Professional identities: Ethical and Political Implications,' *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 76, pp.78–85. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.08.011>.

Zhang, X., Admiraal, W., & Saab, N. (2024) Factors affecting teachers' self-efficacy in primary education.' *Teachers and Teaching: Theory in Practice*. Available at: <https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1080/13540602.2024.2389384>.

Zhao, H., X. Zhang (2017), 'The influence of field teaching practice on pre-service teachers' professional identity: A mixed methods study', *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol. 8, p. 1264. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01264>.

Zhao, Q. (2022) 'On the Role of Teachers' Professional Identity and Well-Being in Their Professional Development,' *Front. Psychology* 13. Available at <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.913708>.

