Introduction

Despite the apparent homogeneity of a national curriculum, standardized assessment regimes and statutory professional standards for teachers, every classroom is different, because every teacher is unique. It is widely recognized (for example Korthagen and Vasalos 2005; Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Stenberg 2010) that an individual’s personal experiences shape their values and attitudes, which in turn influence how they see themselves as teachers and what kind of teacher they are. In any staffroom you will meet men and women from different social and cultural backgrounds, each with a different emotional makeup and with different personal and professional aspirations. Olien (2008: 24) has called these ‘embedded understandings’ that ‘shape how teachers interpret, evaluate and continuously collaborate in the construction of their own early development’. In so doing, they are developing what we call teacher identity. While notions about how teacher identity is shaped and developed, and even the term itself, are complex and multi-dimensional (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009), the model in Figure 3.1 may be useful in helping you to understand what might influence your teacher identity. From it we can see that we are influenced by both personal and professional experiences. Thus ‘teacher identity’ can be defined as the relationship
between our personal self and our professional self. Stenberg (2010: 334) refers to these two aspects as:

- self identity: who am I?
- professional identity: who am I as a teacher?

Because our experiences continue throughout life, the potential to modify both our personal and our professional identity is ever present. Each teaching experience, from your first teaching practice to your induction year and into your early professional development (EPD), each interaction with learners, tutors, mentors and peers, has the potential to shape your teacher identity. This potential will be realized only if you see your teacher identity as dynamic and not fixed. You need to be able to reflect on who you are and why. In Chapter 5 you will explore and reflect on the relationship between the professional contexts in which you work and your attitudes, values and beliefs, and how these interact to shape your professional attributes as a teacher. Whether you are just thinking about applying for a teacher training course, in training or in the early years of your career, this chapter has two main purposes:

- to support you in understanding some of the possible influences on your teacher identity;
- to encourage you to interrogate your beliefs and assumptions and to be more critically responsive to a range of contexts; to respond in a dynamic way to professional experiences and develop your teacher identity appropriately.

The role of reflection in exploring and shaping teacher identity provides ‘valued ways for people to probe their teaching existence so that they understand their position within their practice’ (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009:183). The ideas you have about teaching at the start may be turned upside down as you gain experience in different contexts, but reflection on your professional self in relation to your personal self will enhance and enrich your teacher identity.

**Influences on teacher identity**

The personal self that beginning teachers bring to their early training is drawn from a wide range of influences, some of which might never have been consciously examined but just subconsciously absorbed. These influences form what Weber and Mitchell call ‘a cast of fictionalised characters . . . that takes on larger than life proportions’ (1995: 14). The following aspects of the model in Figure 3.1 are considered:

- metaphors for teaching;
- cultural influences;
- experiences of being a learner;
- initial hopes for and future aspirations of a teaching career;
- teacher education experiences.

The case studies exploring the development of teachers’ early identity will provide some illuminatory examples which, along with the reflective tasks provided, will help you to understand and develop your own identity as a teacher.

**Metaphors for teaching**

*It makes a great deal of difference to our practice . . . if we think of teaching as gardening, coaching or cooking. It makes a difference if we think of children as clay to mold or as players on a team or as travelers on a journey.*

(Weber and Mitchell 1995: 20)
The metaphors identified in the above quotation capture significantly different views of teaching, and subsequently learning. The degree to which you find yourself drawn to one view rather than another could reveal important clues about the values, attitudes and beliefs that you bring to the profession. For instance, the view that pupils are clay to be moulded implies learners who are passive. In this view, teaching is perceived as something that is 'done to' the learners. The teacher, only, holds the vision of the learning outcomes, although the 'clay' might behave in unpredictable ways! If, however, you are drawn more to the idea of a learner as a fellow traveller on a journey, then teaching and learning may appear to be a more shared, exploratory process in which the learner as well as the teacher can share in leading the way.

Metaphors, or images of teaching, can be useful in categorizing and realizing how we see ourselves as teachers at different points in time, although the images we apply to our role are likely to change as our 'teacher identity' changes in response to circumstances, and as we mature professionally and reflect upon how we are teaching and why we teach in this way. Studies by Cooper and Olsen (1996) and Reynolds (1996) described in Day et al. (2006: 607), identify the 'multiple selves' of teachers which are ... continually reconstructed through the historical, cultural, sociological and psychological influences which all shape the meaning of being a teacher'. Cooper and Olsen also refer to the tensions that teachers experience between how they conceive of teaching (drawing on their previous childhood histories and memories) and the contexts in which they find themselves while learning to be teachers. This process they describe as 'creating their world while also being shaped by it' (Day et al. 2006: 607). In this sense, the metaphor may be a useful tool for describing your concept of being a teacher at any given point.

Reflective task 3.1 Using metaphors to define teacher identity

This task may be easier to do in pairs or small groups.

1. What metaphor captures your current view of what a teacher is?
2. If you already have experience, were your ideas and metaphors different at the outset? How have they changed, and why?

Cultural influences

Cultural influences will include your family background and life experiences, including how you were educated, an aspect dealt with separately in this chapter.

This theme is explored further in Chapter 5.

Experiences of being a learner

The reflective journals written by our trainee teachers reveal similar findings to those of wider research on teacher identity, for example, wanting to become a...
teacher is influenced by experiences of being in school and being engaged in community activities (Walkington 2005: 57). Earlier, Calderhead 1991, in Eraut, 1994: 71 found that teachers ‘rely heavily on the images of practice that are acquired from past and current experiences in schools’. Furthermore, he claimed that these images can be accepted without reflection: ‘taken and implemented uncritically’. Thus in its broadest sense, our teacher identity is how we define what education is for, based on our own experience of it; if you felt inspired by enthusiastic teachers, you may set out from a position of ‘love of subject’; if your learning was very formal, you may consider the ‘transmission of knowledge’ as the way forward. Consider the contrasting examples below, extracted from trainee teachers’ initial reflections on their teacher identity. Each reveals something of the attitudes and beliefs of the author.

"Jane: "

'My role is to make sure that the naughty ones don’t disrupt other pupils.'

'My job is to teach them the facts.'

'Children need to understand the penal code and what is expected of them.'

Claire: "

'I want to find creative and exciting ways of actively engaging pupils in their own learning.'

'I want them to enjoy school and to share my passion for learning.'

'I think it is my role to encourage independent thought and exploration.'

Jane brought to her training her own educational experience in a context where pupils sat in rows and they were all well behaved. She explained later that the prospect of badly behaved pupils terrified her; thus her statements are heavily bound up in notions of ‘control’, suggesting instrumentalist, behaviourist views of learning that are rooted in the idea that children are empty vessels to be filled and need to be ‘taught’, with an emphasis on punishment for transgressions, into socially acceptable ways of behaving. Unless she questions her initial conceptions and is helped to develop them, Jane is likely to remain fixed in what Leavy et al. (2002) call a self-referential approach with the focus remaining on herself as teacher rather than on students as learners. Without guided reflection, she is therefore unlikely to move towards constructivist and social constructivist approaches where students become active participants and collaborators in their own learning with the teacher as the guide providing challenge and support. These approaches are implied in Claire’s conception of her role (see above). She is focused on the learners as agents of their own learning.

Initial hopes for teaching

Perhaps through some of the influences identified above, teachers at the start of their training often have very clear ideas about what kind of teacher they want to be. As they progress through training, experiencing different teaching environments, and move into their first school as a qualified teacher, their teacher identity adaptively changes. This is sometimes a painful experience, but can be much less traumatic if you understand that it is a normal process in your development as a teacher; each new environment will enrich and (re)shape or (re)form your teacher identity.

The following three extracts are taken from the personal statements of beginning teachers’ application forms, outlining their personal philosophies of teaching:

"I want to be the kind of teacher whom children will not be afraid to approach, the kind that they can ask questions of, where they know that if they don’t ‘get it’ the first time, or the second, or the third, they can still ask me and I will still be explaining patiently."

(Annet, primary employment-based route)

I want to open my pupils’ eyes to the mysteries of science. I want them to see that there is a kind of wonder in the world but that everything can have a logical explanation.

(Abdul, one-year secondary science PGCE)
I want to inspire pupils and instill a self-belief in them to aid them in achieving the best they possibly can.

(Chalerm, secondary drama employment-based route)

These candidates have started to demonstrate the qualities that they value: qualities of trustworthiness, patience, self-efficacy, approachability, enthusiasm and inspirational guidance. Possibly because of anxieties about how to ‘control’ pupil behaviour, beginning teachers often express a desire to be popular with pupils:

At the start of my first placement, I thought it was really important that pupils liked me.

(Rebecca, one-year English PGCE, end of training year)

This kind of sentiment highlights aspects of beginning teacher identity concerned with being a successful teacher who is not disliked or held in fear. These feelings are not untypical and have been recognized by Furlong and Maynard, (1995), as characteristic feelings of ‘early idealism’ as beginning teachers adapt and adopt strategies to ensure ‘personal survival’.

Although they often have high aspirations regarding their role, beginning teachers can see teaching in simplistic terms:

I can’t believe my naivity now. Before I started this course I really thought that teaching was just about standing up in front of a group of children and sharing my knowledge. I thought that if I just explained everything clearly enough they would learn what I wanted them to learn.

(Terry, secondary English, employment-based route, end of training year)

An almost universal theme articulated by beginning teachers is their wish ‘to make a difference’ as was expressed by David writing in his initial reflections. However, what he begins to realize is how complex this notion is:

...since I wrote the pre-course chapter of this journal, my thoughts and knowledge have evolved, and I have also come to realize that to become a good teacher the challenges ahead are going to be a lot harder than I originally thought. Since I started working within my school, I have come to realize that notwithstanding the guidance in university sessions, teaching methods and approaches are a lot harder to apply in practice. This has led me to conclude that the nature of teaching is varied, challenging, and every action that I will undertake will have an effect on my pupils. These actions must be individual to the circumstances in which they are undertaken.

(David, one-year primary PGCE, end of first placement)

Through reflection, David is already showing evidence that he is revisiting his early assumptions and is beginning to consider the complexity of what he will need to master if he is to be effective.

### Reflective task 3.3a  Who do you think you are currently?

Do you, or did you, like the beginning teachers above, have an over-simplified view of the role of the teacher, or perhaps an inflated view of the difference you could make? Is concern about behaviour casting a shadow over your hopes and expectations about being a teacher? Select from Table 3.1 the column that best suits your situation and consider the questions. They are intended to help you to reflect on your teacher identity.

| Table 3.1 Reflecting on your teacher identity
<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you are beginning your teacher training</td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What attracts you to be a teacher? What skills and personal attributes do you think you will bring? Think back to how you perceived yourself as a teacher before you began to teach. How different are your current perceptions, and why? Compare and contrast what you thought would be your greatest challenges with the challenges you are actually facing. What have been your greatest achievements to date? In what ways has becoming qualified changed how you perceive yourself as a teacher? Why do you think this is? What challenges do you currently face? In what ways are these the same as and different from the challenges of teacher training? What have been your greatest achievements since qualifying? What are your aspirations as a teacher now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What do you expect the greatest challenges to be? What do you think you will find easiest?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What sort of teacher do you want to be and why? What sort of teacher are you becoming? How does this compare with your initial expectations? How would you describe the teacher you are aspiring to be at the moment?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Future aspirations for teaching

Although at times it will feel as if your vision for the future will barely extend beyond how you will plan next week’s lessons, teachers do begin to develop a sense of their future career aspirations surprisingly early, as the following trainees illustrate:

“... I can’t see myself as a head of department; there is so much administration. I gave up an office job to be more ‘hands-on’ and don’t want to be back dealing with endless paperwork. I wouldn’t mind having some departmental responsibility though, like being in charge of the sixth form, or developing an ICT strategy.”

(Sarah, one-year PGCE MF, at end of training)

I have discovered that I have a real interest in pupils with learning difficulties and would welcome opportunities for professional development in special needs education.

(James, three-year primary BEd, writing in his career entry and development profile)

“My love of Spanish, that I thought was so strong at university, has been overtaken by a passion for teaching in challenging schools; I am discovering that it isn’t really about how much Spanish they learn. What matters is how well I can enhance their self-esteem, teach them to respect me and each other, and develop independent learning skills, and ultimately have a fulfilling life.”

(Sophie, one-year PGCE MFL, part way through final teaching practice)

I can’t believe what an interesting life my mentor has. As an AST he is so busy, but he loves everything he does, and he knows so much about teaching and learning! I would love to think I could do what he does in a few years’ time.

(Raj, one-year science PGCE, end of training)

Teacher education experiences

This whole book is about how reflection on your and others’ experiences in training and beyond shapes the teacher you are and will become. In Case Study 3.3 we use a simple illustration of how one trainee, through reflection on teaching styles, shifted her view of what ‘good’ teaching is:

Case Study 3.3  Geraldine: reflecting on the meaning of ‘good’ teaching

When she was asked at interview about her ‘best’ teacher, Geraldine described her as a ‘wonderful’ advanced level teacher who ‘seemed to know everything about everything ... she was a font of knowledge to us and we just lapped up every word’. She described how they took detailed notes and were able to reproduce these in their examinations. As a beginning teacher who had already had some teaching experience in a challenging context, when asked whether she had reproduced those approaches in her own practice, she immediately said: ‘Oh no – I couldn’t use those approaches with those children. They needed lots of different activities, lots of small, structured steps, lots of opportunities to think for themselves.’ In the middle of explaining this, she suddenly stopped and referred back to her own experience as an advanced level student saying: ‘Actually, now I think about it like that, more interactive teaching would have been good for me, too. All I learned was how to regurgitate what we’d been told. That’s probably why I struggled in my first year at university.’

Reflective task 3.3b  What are your future aspirations?

As your initial training ends, you will be encouraged to think about what you hope to achieve during your induction year; how you will meet and maintain the core professional standards and what opportunities for development you would like the school to provide. These same issues are also part of your continuing professional development.

1. Consider the statements above, and speculate about what kind of teacher each person is. What style do you think they might adopt in the classroom? To what extent are you thinking about your future teacher identity in terms like these? If you are, what are your current thoughts, and what does this tell you about your professional self?

2. If you have the opportunity, compare and contrast your responses with those of your peers. Discuss the extent to which context has shaped the varying responses.

Reflective task 3.4  How has your teacher education influenced your teacher identity?

This task is enriched by group discussion where possible.

1. Look back to your application for teacher training and/or early written reflections on your role. What has changed in your thinking, following at least one school-based experience?

2. Try to articulate these changes in professional language.
New contexts and your teacher identity

Every new context in which you find yourself (new school, new class, new experiences with individual pupils and colleagues) will shape your teacher identity and determine the sort of teacher you wish to become. However, that is not to say that you are a hapless victim in this process! Through reflection, you will be able to use these experiences to your advantage, just so long as:

- you continue to reflect on the kind of teacher you want to be;
- you are critically reflective about your professional experiences and recognize how you can use them to shape your professional self.

Beijaard et al. (2004) explored the extent to which teacher identity is context dependent. They investigated whether teachers saw 'identity' as developmental rather than static and unchanging. In reviewing and summarizing over twenty studies that focused on teachers' professional identities, they found that although the concept of identity has different meanings in the literature, what they have in common is the idea that 'identity is not a fixed attribute of a person, but a relational phenomenon' (Beijaard 2004: 108). That is to say, different contexts enable us to develop different skills, and this in turn helps us to develop a 'fluid' teacher identity. Many of the teachers interviewed in the studies saw their professional identity as an 'ongoing process ... a process of interpreting oneself as a certain

![Fluid and static teacher identities](image)

**Static teacher identity is likely when teachers:**
- see education as 'fixed'
- stick with one way of doing something because it works, or
- do what they have always done despite the evidence that what they do is not working in a changing context
- lack self-awareness
- resist any change
- are unable or unwilling to question their own practice.

**Fossilized practice**

**Fluid teacher identity is likely when teachers:**
- see education as dynamic and changing in response to changes in society
- adapt what they do in response to changing needs and contexts
- seek new ways of engaging and motivating learners
- understand own responses to events and contexts
- reflect critically in order to evaluate their practice.

**Dynamic practice**

**Figure 3.2** Fluid and static teacher identities

kind of person and being recognized as such in a given context' (Gee 2001, in Beijaard et al. 2004: 108). Thus our identity remains static only when we fail to learn from our experiences. Figure 3.2 demonstrates the difference between 'fluid' and 'static' teacher identities. Learning from experience requires reflection on our experiences. In their review of the literature on teacher identity, Beauchamp and Thomas (2009:183) have also concluded that reflection is a 'powerful way for students and practising teachers to delve deeply into their teaching identities'.

Interrogating your beliefs and assumptions

You will have started your teacher training with a more or less clear idea about what teaching is like and what sort of teacher you want to be. The reflective scaffolds in Figures 3.3 and 3.4 may help you to interrogate your current

**Tracking a teacher for a day**

Check whether your teacher training programme requires you to undertake something similar. If so, it is advisable to follow the brief they provide.

1. **Seek out Information.** Find out about the current legislation in respect of teachers' roles. What are teachers expected to do contractually?
2. **Experience the classroom.** With the support of your mentor or other contact in school, identify a teacher whom you can track for a day, from their arrival in school until leaving at the end of the day. Write down what they do with approximate times alongside.
3. **Take in the bigger picture.** Arrange to spend 10 minutes with this teacher to discuss what they do in addition to what you have observed and to establish to what extent this day is typical.

**Reflection**

Make notes on, and/or discuss in groups, the following:
- What surprised, or even shocked, you about this experience?
- How does what you have learned compare with your initial conceptions of the teacher role?
- What modifications to your own teacher identity (for example, how you define what sort of a teacher you want to be) will you now make?

**Figure 3.3** Interrogating your assumptions about the teacher role
beliefs and assumptions in order to ensure that your teacher identity remains fluid.

Summary

Your teacher identity is derived from a number of influences:

- the life experiences that have shaped your personal values, attitudes and beliefs, for example your personal ideology about the purposes of education, how you view the concept of 'quality' or 'multiculturalism';

• your developing pedagogic, curriculum and subject knowledge as experienced during your teacher training;
• your interaction with school contexts during and beyond your initial training;
• your developing reflective practice.

As you shape and reshape your teacher identity, you will need to internalize and demonstrate what is meant by 'an effective teacher' and, desirably, 'an outstanding teacher'.

Conclusion

The Greek philosopher, Socrates, highlighted the importance of having 'intellectual humility', that is, a sensitivity to what you know and what you do not know. This means being aware of your biases, prejudices, self-deceptive tendencies and the limitations of your viewpoint (Elder 2010).

This is a crucial aspect of forming professional identity and, whatever stage of your professional development you are at, you might wish to consider the following questions (adapted from Elder 2010):

• What do I really know about myself as a beginning teacher?
• To what extent do my prejudices or biases influence my thinking?
• To what extent have I been indoctrinated into beliefs that may be false?
• How do beliefs that I have accepted uncritically keep me from seeing things as they are?
• Do I behave in accordance with what I say I believe, or do I tend to say one thing and do another?
• Am I willing to change my position when the evidence leads to a more reasonable position?
• To what extent do I uncritically accept what I am told by my government, the media, my peers?
• Do I think through issues on my own, or do I merely accept the views of others?

Teachers who are applying this critically reflective gaze will be able to articulate the changes in their thinking and practice over time. In twenty years' time, their experiences will have shaped their identity; they will not be the teacher with one year's experience repeated twenty times!
Key learning points

In order to develop a fluid teacher identity that provides a 'best fit' between your personal self and your professional self, you will need constantly to reflect upon:

- the role of the teacher in society;
- why you want to teach and what kind of a teacher you want to be;
- the extent to which your practice reflects the expectations and definitions of the professional role as expressed in the professional standards (TDA 2008);
- the ways in which your personal and professional values (and associated actions) underpin your professional identity and your professional decision making.

CHAPTER

How consciously reflective are you?

Lesley Cartwright

It is not enough to have a good mind. The main thing is to use it well.

Rene Descartes

Introduction

This chapter is designed to help you to make reflection a conscious activity. Three different but related approaches to reflection are described. You should be able to recognize, select and apply these different strategies at different points in your development in order to become empowered as professional learners with a belief in your ability to succeed in what sometimes feels like very challenging tasks; in other words, to develop what we call self-efficacy.

Reflection can arise at different times and in varied locations. It can be a formal process, for example:

• a reflective journal or diary;
• a piece of academic writing for an assignment;
• a written lesson evaluation;
• written reviews of progress prior to mentor meetings.

It can also be an informal process, for example:

• a discussion with a peer;
• engagement in training activities in university, school or other setting;
• how you think and feel in given situations (reflection-in-action);
• how you think and feel after the event (reflection-on-action);

There are two principles that underpin reflection in this chapter. The first is that meaningful reflection is a balance between the rational (logical thought) and