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Performers and postulates: the role of evolving socio-historical contexts in shaping new teacher professional identities

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Abstract: In this article we investigate the generative causes of variation in the professional identity of new teachers. Building on previous work that has shown a link between professional identity and socio-political context, we argue that the context experienced in late adolescence and early adulthood is particularly significant in shaping how beginning teachers think of themselves as teachers. This finding suggests that the linear response to neoliberal education reform described in much of the critical literature may be too simple to account for the range of ways teachers interact with the system. There is, therefore, a need for greater diversity in research approaches to work with the complexity of social systems in and around schools. To support this call for methodological diversity, we borrow the *life story model of identity* as a theoretical framework and use a computer-assisted phenomenographic analysis technique to find new ways into the research data.

Keywords: teacher professional identity; life story model of identity; neoliberal reform; computer-assisted qualitative research

Arguments that effective school reform requires an understanding of the complex ways teachers interact with the drivers of change has been present in the school change literature for over a decade (see for example Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Sarason, 1996). These interactions are shaped by the dominant and popular discourses of teacher's work which critical scholars including Connell (2009) and Moore (2004) have shown are shaped by the broader social and political setting, including the persistent government reforms of education over the last 20 years or so across the globe. Such work illuminates the connected evolution of popular discourses, the contexts within which reform takes place, and the identity of teachers, reflecting

Bernstein's (1996) proposal that 'any one educational reform can… be regarded as the outcome of the struggle to produce and institutionalise particular identities'(p. 66).

Teacher professional identity is not an abstract concept. Lingard and Rawolle (2004), for example, have argued from a Bourdieuian perspective that identity is both created by the *field* and acts upon the *field*, and so changes in identity lead to systemic changes in the *field* that are far more long lasting than structural changes imposed from outside. This article explores differing beginning teacher identities and the way in which those identities are formed, and suggests that what is happening is more complex than a uniform response to the current neoliberal socio-political setting. In this way, the article responds to the argument of Rowlands and Rawolle (2013) that 'part of the doxic condition of neoliberalism within the field of education may, indeed, rest on our reluctance to attempt to explain it' (p. 270).

In their formulation of grounded theory in the 1960s, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that qualitative investigation of the social world at that time had drifted towards verification of existing theory with an 'assumption by many sociologists that our "great men" forefathers (Weber, Durkheim, Simmel, Marx, Veblen, Cooley, Mead, Park, etc.) had generated a sufficient number of outstanding theories on enough areas of social life to last for a long while' (p. 10). A significant rationale they gave for the development of grounded theory was to encourage 'able sociologists to generate more and better theory' (p. 12). Rowlands and Rawolle (2013) have identified what might be described as a similar drift in contemporary critical research in education, with much of this work drifting towards the verification of the impact of neoliberalism on education. Seale's (2002) description of contemporary social inquiry suggests this drift is present in broader sociology, noting that

… social research [in the current 'moment'] becomes a very literary rather than a scientific pursuit. At the same time, it is possible to detect a rescue effort from researchers, concerned about the nihilistic tendencies of postmodernism, taking the form of advocacy of ethical and political goals as replacements for truth value (Seale, 2002, p. 101).

The purpose here is not to critique this body of work, but to point to the problems the verification drift creates in the validity and trustworthiness. In their manual on validity and reliability in qualitative research, Kirk and Miller (1986) noted that 'asking the wrong questions is actually the source of most validity errors' (p. 30) and that 'devices to guard against asking the wrong question are critically important to the researcher' (p. 31). They go on to suggest that diversity of method is one such device and following Glaser and Strauss (1967), we would contend that this diversity should include methods that allow the data or even the participants (Johnson, 1997) to assist in generating the 'right' questions.

The opportunity to explore the generative principles of new teacher identity arose through the identification of apparent age-related differences among a cohort of beginning teachers through adopting a novel methodology in a study outlined later in this article. In this study we observed distinct differences between beginning teachers entering teaching as their first career aged in their twenties when compared to those entering teaching as a second career aged in their thirties or older. This finding was inconsistent with earlier critical work on changing discourses of the 'good teacher' and teacher identity that had tended to suggest a synchronous change of discourse connected to the changing socio-political context (Connell, 2009; Moore, Edwards, Halpin, & George, 2002). Our analysis of this finding is influenced by Maton's

(2008) critique that work in education too often focuses on distinguishing the empirical features of practice, rather than their underlying generative principles. Our ambition is to move beyond naming further emergent discourses and identities and to examine the generative principles causing them to surface. We do this with an awareness of calls for critical scholarship in education to explore different scales of investigation and different modes of inquiry (Kincheloe, 2007), and to engage in 'scholarship which sheds light on previously under-developed or unexplored features of practice' while avoiding the 'repetitious, prescriptive, and aspirational tone of much work in the area' (Eacott, 2013, p. 185). We are also influenced here by Bourdieu's methodological polytheism (Wacquant, 1998) and the suggestion that social researchers need to start with the problem rather than the method (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

The critical arguments outlined above have lead to the experiment in this article to explore both the socio-political influences on new teacher professional identity in Australia, and the use of 'borrowed' theory and method as a diversifying device to 'guard against asking the wrong questions' (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Consistent with the idea of methodological polytheism, the article begins with a description of the empirical data that illustrates the problem. This is followed by two sections exploring the use of two different methods used to develop our critical understanding of the problem. The first considers the use of a computer-assisted technique for text analysis; the second investigates the generative principles of new teacher identity revealed by this analysis in the light of McAdams' (2001) *life story model of identity*.

Finding the question in the data

The data upon which this article is based comes from a post-course survey of recent graduates of an Australian graduate initial teacher education program. The survey was conducted with the approval of the institution's ethics committee and 39 of the 110 (35%) participants in the course responded to the survey. In addition to demographic information and questions regarding the experience of particular features of the program, the survey asked participants to explain how they thought each of nine focus questions that had been used extensively in the pre-service program were relevant to teaching practice. This approach elicited not simply the respondent's answer to the question, but also a meta-analysis of the questions.

The nine focus questions were developed from an initial 'manifesto' written by one of the authors of this paper early in planning a revision of the initial teacher education program (Roberts & Leonard, 2012). Though it was intended to frame the planning of the program, the 'manifesto' was written as if addressing the new students. It contained some firm positions on the nature of teaching, for example:

> This course is built on the basis that we teach children not subjects. In saying that, we recognise that everyone who meets the entry requirements of a graduate program is a recognised expert in their discipline, having achieved a previous degree in the field and often considerable professional experience. Our job is to help you begin to make the transition from subject expert to accomplished professional educator. This is a difficult and often challenging period of transformation for many students…

> Teaching is a profession not a trade. While moves to standardise quality teaching and codify such practice are common, and indeed useful, we advocate that as a profession it is the meta-competencies that connect these standards into what we do in a classroom that matters most. As a profession teaching is built upon a solid core of professional knowledge, as well as a lot of practical experience, trial and error, observation and a little bit of intuition.

Early in the planning of the program, however, the teaching team chose not to present a manifesto but instead to frame a set of provocative questions that would deliberately challenge the students to examine their assumptions about the nature of teaching. The questions that emerged were labelled 'provocations' within the program and were explicitly approached in every lecture. They were:

- What kind of teacher do I want to be?

- Will I be allowed to be the teacher I want to be?

- To whom am I accountable?

- Am I ready to teach?

- Is teaching a profession or a trade?

- What will students want and need from me?

- Should we teach students or subjects?

- To what extent is teaching an intellectual pursuit?

- How will I control my students?

This way of engaging with students was in itself a critical process that laid the foundations for the production of the data upon which this analysis is based.

Throughout the course the provocations were used as the basis for the major assessment pieces in which students were asked to address one of the provocations with reference to both their reading across the breadth of the program and their observations from school-based experience. This assessment was modelled on the *pedagogical reasoning* process (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Shulman, 2002) and proved popular with the students participating in the course with high levels of satisfaction reported in the university's regular student satisfaction surveys. The extent to which the 'provocations' actually provoked changes in thinking, however, is less clear. In their participation in the course, many students demonstrated a strong

engagement with the diversity of 'big ideas' in education that were opened by the provocations. In the post-course survey however, the respondents' meta-analysis of the questions were comparatively uniform and narrow.

Borrowing method: a computer assisted technique

Standard approaches to the analysis of data such as the data in the surveys reported here include grounded approaches to coding through manual inspection, and critical discourse analysis. The limitation of such approaches is that the codes chosen will inevitably be grounded not only in the survey responses, but also in the assumptions of the researcher including assumptions about the importance of neoliberalism or emancipatory research paradigms. Given that the interviews were developed from a manifesto written by one of the authors this limitation was particularly relevant to this study. The gravity of pedagogical intention is almost irresistible and, in hindsight, clearly affected some early manual coding we did with this data. For example, in early coding we saw uniform views from participants on accountability to student/school/parent as evidence that they had missed the point made in the course about the effects of new forms of governance of teachers and schools through performativity mechanisms (Ball, 2003; Power, 1994). However we did not notice the variation in the explanation given for the positions held. That is, our analysis privileged the relatively uniform positions held by the whole cohort, but missed the differences between the different generations within the cohort.

The difference may have emerged as we worked further with the data, but in standard manual coding we did not see the participants' age as an important feature in the data due to the attention naturally given to the intended outcomes of the program. Recognising this limitation, and encouraged by some indications of age related differences in the analysis of the statistical component of the survey, we turned to a

technique of computer-assisted phenomenography using the *Leximancer* software. This technique showed participant age as an important feature very quickly. In this case it showed us that while neither age group had taken on board the intended learning outcomes, each group had 'not learned' in a different way.

It would be naïve to suggest that any technique eliminates researcher bias, and we do not argue that this computer-assisted technique is more trustworthy or valid than other techniques such as a manual discourse analysis. A central argument to this paper, however, is that adding the use of *Leximancer* to the diversity of methods used has improved the validity of the study by creating greater opportunities to find the 'right' questions (Kirk & Miller, 1986), and that it has served as way of letting data lead the generation of these questions. As we describe below, the questions asked were still ours, but by automating the analysis we were able to ask many more questions of the data and so reduce the influence of our prior theoretical positions on question choice. In this way we recognise that the approach is influenced by a genuine mixed method lineage in that indicative statistical trends encouraged further and novel approaches to this qualitative data. Compared to many 'mixed methods' studies that approach each elements sequentially, in this approach the elements were genuinely in conversation (Denzin, 2010) going into the analysis.

The software uses a *corpus linguistic* approach to textual analysis and identifies concepts used within text, mapping those concepts and relationships between them. The software makes no assumptions that one concept is more or less significant than any other, leaving the task of interpretation to the human researcher. Enhancing trustworthiness, each author independently reviewed the computer-assisted analysis and arrived at complimentary interpretations consistent with the statistical analysis (Roberts & Leonard, 2012). Using this technique we were able to very

quickly ask questions such as 'did men and women respond to the questions differently?', 'did people with different parental education levels respond to the questions differently?' and did people of different ages respond to the questions differently?' The answers were no, a little and significantly. The significant time required to approach such questions manually has meant that until recently it has generally only been possible to ask them when using multi-variant statistical techniques rather than qualitative techniques. It is useful to recall, though, that even in the quantitative environment this type of analysis only became routine in the social sciences in the 1970s with the development of off-the-shelf software for the purpose (Abbott, 2006). The development of software that allows for this sort of analysis of text may be as revolutionary for various forms of textual analysis as the equivalent software was for statistical analysis in the late twentieth century. In facilitating the rapid analysis of large volumes of data it allows fundamentally different questions to be asked.

Leximancer has been shown to have high face validity in that its analysis is stable and reproducible when working repeatedly with the same texts (Smith & Humphreys, 2006, pp. 265-270). Comparisons of how *Leximancer* analysis compares to manual analytical method remain limited largely because examples of validated human-coded inductive rather than deductive analyses are rare (Smith & Humphreys, 2006, p. 274). When used to assist rather than replace human analysis, however, the technique has been found to have high functional validity and has been used for a range of studies such as tracking changing themes and concepts over time in an academic journal (Cretchley, Rooney, & Gallois, 2010), identifying communication patterns between medical staff in a complex hospital environment (Hewett, Watson, Gallois, Ward, & Leggett, 2009), and examining the focus of mentor-teacher feedback

in pre-service professional experience placements (Leonard, 2013). In a comparison of a phenomenographic study using manual coding, and automatic coding using *Leximancer,* Penn-Edwards (2010) found the automatic analysis to be more efficacious in that the researcher 'was able to deal with large amounts of data without [coding] bias, identify a broader span of syntactic properties, increase reliability, and facilitate reproducibility' (p. 253).

The Leximancer output

The *Leximancer* concept map shows the way in which different concepts are used together within the text. Those used more frequently are grouped together while those placed more distantly are used together less frequently or not at all. The concept map in Figure 1 represents the concepts that emerged in the post-course survey and, when all the responses were considered together, the way in which the concepts were used in relation to each other. The software provides a second level of information by suggesting 'themes' for closely related concepts, which are shown by the circles within the map. The size of the circles provides an indication of the frequency with which the concepts within the theme are used together. A further function of the software is a capacity to 'locate' different sections of text as tags within the concept map of the whole text. In our analysis of the text, we categorised the responses based on various data such as gender, age, parental educational attainment, and teaching-subject area. The most significant variation found within all these categories was age, with that variation shown by the tags in Figure 1 which locate the responses of two of the age brackets used (20–29 and 30–39) within the map of concepts. The texts used did include a small number of responses (n = 6) from participants over the age of 40, but these responses have not met the threshold to be tagged in the concept map.

In analysing responses to a set of questions it is clear that the questions posed will drive particular language usage. For example the software suggested the name of the theme with the 20–29 file at the centre could be 'wants'. It seems highly likely that this word has been used extensively because it was used in three of the nine questions, for example 'What kind of teacher do I *want* to be?' The interesting thing then is not that the respondents are using the word 'want', but what concepts they are using it in association with. In contrast, the software suggested the name 'motivation' for the theme closest to the 30–39 file. This word was not used within the questions and nor did the questions seem obviously to lead to the use of the term. As an example, respondents were not asked 'why do you want to be a teacher?' The concept appears to have emerged more spontaneously from the respondents' own thinking on the topic. Differences such as these demonstrate why the technique should be thought of as 'computer-assisted' rather than 'computerised' analysis. *Leximancer* provides a lot of information about the text being examined, but it is not able to make sense of that information.

Figure 1 goes near here

The concept map in Figure 1 is unusual in its polar distribution of concepts. This polarity makes the visual representation a little crowded but the distribution pattern is informative so we have included it in the article in the form produced by the software. (To clarify, the overlapping concepts in the bottom right are 'grad' and 'preconceptions' and they overlap the tag 'File_30_39'.) The polarity of distribution suggests that there were a set of concepts discussed essentially by the 20–29 year age group and a set of concepts discussed by the 30–39 year age group. The middle of the

figure shows that there were a set of ideas discussed by both groups but more importantly it shows the unique way that each group arrived at those ideas. For example, a 30–39 respondent takes a path through 'motivation' and 'philosophy' to discuss 'curriculum,' while a 20–29 respondent gets to 'curriculum' via student 'wants'.

As noted above, the text analysed here also included files for respondents aged 40–49 and 49+. These groups were very small (n = 4 and n = 2 respectively) and their responses did not cluster strongly enough for the software to position them in the map. Notably the statistical output (not reproduced here) shows that the concept 'understanding' was used only by the over age 40 respondents. With such small numbers, this may simply be idiosyncratic, but the position of this concept away from all of the other concepts suggests that there may be a third age-related divergence. With the data at hand, though, there is a clear and striking age-related differentiation in the responses of the 20–29 and 30–39 groups.

Borrowing theory: the *life story model of identity*

The questions generated by this use of *Leximancer* are phenomenographical (Marton, 1986) in nature. That is they ask about the variation of experience of phenomena. In this case it has led to the key researchable question of 'why do students of different ages explain professional teaching practice differently following engagement in the same course'? This is different from a question such as 'how does popular neoliberal discourse effect the identity of new teachers? The different question may be complementary, or may be asking something entirely unrelated, but it clearly generates a different way to interrogate the data. While the question is data-derived, the approach we have taken to investigating the research question is not grounded theory. If anything, it can be understood as a grounded theory approach applied in

reverse. Where a grounded approach identifies something going on that needs to be named, the computer-assisted approach has provided the names but the researcher needs to identify what was going on to produce them. In this explanatory task we make use of McAdams' (2001) *life story model of identity* framework and a closer manual examination of the text.

An obvious way to explain different responses from each age group is to call on differing levels of maturity, or differing life experience. People beginning their teaching career later in their adult life, for example, are more distant from their own schooling experience and may be able to imagine different relationships with children, a possibility reinforced by the greater chance that they have had children of their own. Given the idiosyncratic lives that people lead, however, globalising an imprecise term like 'maturity' provided only a weak explanation for apparent generational effects. This easy explanation also obscured the questions of generative principles such as 'what are the life experiences that lead to different dispositions?' and 'how are these effects likely to change the way a teacher approaches her or his professional tasks?'

To move out of our default thinking space we sought to once again 'borrow': in this case a theoretical framework not widely applied in the critical education space and subsequently arrived at McAdams' (2001) *life story model of identity*. This choice is again influenced by Bourdieu and his eclectic engagement with areas of study and methods not traditionally used in the field under investigation. 'Borrowing' a theoretical framework and a method not widely used in critical education has allowed us to focus on the key themes rather than be constrained by orthodoxies of academic fields (Wacquant, 1989), and serves as a further device to increase the validity of the study through asking the right questions (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

McAdams' model argues that the socio-historical context encountered early in life, and particularly in key developmental periods, continues to play a significant role in identity formation throughout life. The model rests on the understanding that people in modern societies provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalised and evolving narratives of the self. As such, *identity* is not simply the self; rather, it is the 'integrative configuration of the self-in-the-adult-world' that 'provides life with some semblance of psychosocial unity and purpose' (p. 102). Identity allows us to 'locate the self within an ongoing life story that, simultaneously, is strongly oriented towards future goals' (p. 107).

The use of McAdams' model can bring together previous studies in the teacher identity/discourse space. The orientation of identity towards future goals seen in this model, for example, is consistent with the findings of Connell (2009) who through an examination of such things as text books used within teacher education has shown that dominant discourses on the 'good teacher' have evolved alongside the socio-political context in Australia. Within this model the need for teachers and schooling to support nation building evident in the early twentieth century gave way to the humanist movements of the mid-twentieth century and the neoliberal public policy agenda of the late twentieth century. The work of Moore et al (Moore et al., 2002) is similar in its demonstration that teachers in England had moved from discussions of professional identity around concepts of 'traditional' and 'progressive' to a focus on 'pragmatism', 'eclecticism', and 'what works' as the broader political discourse beyond schools and education changed in the late twentieth century. Related work in the Canadian context, on the other hand, reflects a psychological need for unity. Clandinin and colleagues (Clandinin, Downey, & Huber, 2009) have

written of the negative impact for teachers unable to compose lives that work in the 'shifting landscapes' in which they find themselves.

McAdams' model can also be used to extend this previous work. The previous studies cited all suggest a synchronous change: that teachers, perhaps not uniformly but when taken as a group, negotiate new identities and develop new strategies to survive within changing contexts; or fail to negotiate new identities and leave. Such findings are consistent with the theories of social constructionists that emphasise the interplay between individual agency and social or cultural patterns in shaping individual and collective identities (Abbott, 2005; Bourdieu, 1977). The *life story model of identity* extends this by considering the diachronic or life-long affects of living in socio-political contexts. The model highlights the importance of both the experiences of childhood and also the developmental period Arnett (2000) has labelled *emerging adulthood*. Studies of parent–child conversations, McAdams (2001) argues, show that 'children are collecting and processing experiences of all kinds that will eventually make their way or have some important influence on the integrative life stories they later construct to make sense of their lives' (p. 106). In highlighting the possibly greater and more persistent importance of the experiences of the early years of adulthood, McAdams points to work of Arnett (2000) and to Erickson's (1963) developmental stage model to argue that it is in this period of changing social relationships and expectations that we first start to genuinely construct an identity in the sense of the self-in-the-adult-world. He also adopts the arguments of Habermas and Bluck (2000) that we do not have all the necessary cognitive tools to do this 'identity work' until later adolescence.

While emerging from the field of personality psychology, McAdams' model has been applied to cultural studies including Houkamau's (2010) study of varying

indigenous identities among different generations of Maori women in New Zealand. In this study Houkamau draws the links between the identities expressed by the participants in her study through interviews with the evolving macro-societal factors in New Zealand including political, economic and social changes. In doing this she found that Maori women born before 1950 were typically raised within Maori communities and drew their identity from communal economics and traditional spiritual beliefs; Maori women born after 1960 were typically raised in multi-cultural urban communities and struggled to develop a positive Maori identity; while Maori women born after the 1970s held strong political views and drew on affirmative ideologies of Maori rights. In all three generations the way they made sense of themselves in the contemporary world depended significantly on their experiences earlier in life. While not drawing explicitly on McAdams model, Schulz (1998) used a similar technique to arrive at similar findings in regards to Navajo women in the USA.

One strength of this approach when applied to professional identity is if we accept that the 'identity work' we undertake is a goal oriented and social practice (McAdams, 2001), then we find that what is 'tellable' changes as the context evolves. Work that allows for psychological unity to be maintained must be framed in ways that also make sense in the current context. In the examination of the interplay of identity and evolving context we learn not just about the holder of the identity but the way in which that identity is formed by the evolving context so that each age-related cohort present unique insights into particular social and educational challenges.

Thinking through the lens of the *life story model of identity* changed our key phenomenographic question to 'Does the *life story model of identity* provide a way to explain why students of different ages explain professional teaching practice

differently following engagement in the same course'? If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, then we must be able to connect the phenomenographic differences in the text with the experiences each cohort will have had in the period of their respective emergent adulthoods.

Finding generative principles

In regards to the professional role of teachers in Australia, where this study was conducted, we do see macro-societal changes that parallel the emergent adulthood of the cohorts in this study. The effects of the education reform that Ball (2012) has referred to in the English context as *second liberalism;* that Apple (2009), perhaps noting a more complex American setting, has termed *conservative modernisation*; and that Sahlberg (2011) has more humorously labelled the Global Education Reform Movement (he suggests that the strength of the Finnish education system is its ability to remain 99.9% GERM free) have been covered extensively in the critical education literature. In Australia the major elements of this reform agenda such as teacher registration, census testing of basic skills and the publication of the results, greater 'choice' within public schooling, and the acceleration of the privatisation of schooling were introduced in most parts of the country in the early years of the 2000s (Campbell, Proctor, & Sherington, 2009; Connell, 2013). That is, the reforms were part and parcel of the school experiences of participants in their twenties during this teacher education program conducted in 2011, but came after the school experiences of the participants aged over 30. This is particularly significant given the power of the 'apprenticeship of observation' (Darling-Hammond, 2006) on informing new teachers professional practice.

In identifying the early 2000s as the time when school reform in Australia really gathered steam, we recognise that this broad suite of reforms was 'in play' in

the higher and vocational education sectors a decade or so earlier. In this earlier period, however, the school sector remained largely untouched both in terms of structural interventions and the nature of political interest. This can be seen, for example, in the no fewer than 64 government reports into teacher education between 1990 and 2005 (Commonwealth of Australia, n.d.). In the early 1990s the focus was largely on recruitment and the experience and curriculum of initial teacher education programs, while later in that decade an interest in raising the public status of teachers emerges. It is only after 2000 that the titles of many reports start to use terms like 'quality' and 'standards' in relation to teachers themselves. Implicit in this is a shift in understanding from 'teachers are to be attracted and nurtured' to 'teachers are to be measured'.

Returning to Leximancer

To identify links between this macro-societal change and the experiences reported by the two student groups we returned to the *Leximancer* output. This output includes the concept map reproduced in Figure 1 and a collation of the text blocks that generated each concept on the map. The text blocks are too extensive to reproduce in full in this article but the following section provides the reader with a feel for the comments that generated the key concepts seen in Figure 1.

Inspecting the concept map in Figure 1, it can be seen that participants from both cohorts identified very similar concepts such as curriculum, children, and their affective responses to beginning a new career. It can also be seen that each cohort arrived these concepts via different discursive or logic paths. A key driver of the difference seen in the concept map appears to be the way in which the participants position themselves within the educational landscape. In particular, through drilling

into the text blocks generating the 'connecting' concepts on the map, we found that the 30–39 year age group positioned themselves as central to the educational endeavour and showed a consistent concern for their own motivations and philosophy. In contrast, the younger group positioned themselves in a de-centred way, in the orbits of both the needs of the children and of public policy. The following responses to the question about what type of teacher the participants wanted to be are typical of this difference. Firstly from a 30–39 year old:

> For me this question relates to my teaching philosophy, what is important, what is my motivation for teaching, what goals, values, beliefs am I bring [sic] that will influence the way I teach. I want to be a good teacher who develops a relationship with the students. I want the students to get the best education that I can offer to them.

And then from a 20-29 year old:

> Heaps of stuff. I think this is a good provocation because it makes sure I think about the students needs, not just my desires and my impressions of a good teacher – if I have to change my style to suit their needs, then thats [sic] what I'm going to do.

The differences here are subtle. Both of these new teachers are concerned with being a good teacher and having a good relationship with their students, but the older one seeks to do this through understanding the diverse influences on themselves as a teacher, while the younger student understands the students to be the major influence of relevance. That is, there is a tendency of both age cohorts to reflect the dominant socio-political ideas of their *emerging adulthood* with the older group reaching this developmental phase in a period where teachers were to be nurtured was prevalent, while the younger group reached this developmental phase in a period when public

discourse had moved on to the 'quality' of the teacher being positioned firmly in relation to student needs.

A key element of recent school reform has been the use of market mechanisms to 'improve' school performance. Putting aside the efficacy of this approach, this is the discourse that has dominated public discussion of schooling for most of the school experience of the 20–29 cohort. This makes understandable the view held by this cohort, that it is the role of teachers to respond to 'market' forces in the form of students, parents and possibly government. New teachers in the over 30 age group, however, have been largely removed from these reforms and draw upon their experience of schooling and working with teachers in a period before these reforms were implemented. It is likely then that these beginning teachers over 30 may yet encounter these reforms with a 'terror' similar to that which Ball (2003) suggested was the experience for teachers in England through the similar reforms there a decade ago. Younger people entering teaching on the other hand may simply have incorporated these reforms into their identity, their *habitus*.

Reflecting the shift in socio-political discourse is a difference in teacher identity: teacher-as-leader for the older group and teacher-as-responder for the younger group. Once again this difference is subtle, but it is evident in many of the student responses including the following examples of students discussing 'controlling' students. The first student, from the 20–29 age group, rejects the notion:

> I won't. I really don't think I can or should. I'm not supposed to have 'control over them.' I'll give them choices, and do my best to help them make those choices wisely, and let them figure out how to live with the consequences of those choices.

In contrast, this response from the 30–39 year old group imagines a greater role for the teacher in shaping behaviour. Where the first response positioned the teacher as 'counsellor', this response positions the teacher as 'moral leader':

> Having ways to engage students in the classroom so they can learn effectively, having strategies to manage classroom behaviours which are useful and respectful, creating a classroom culture so students know what is expected of them and of the teacher, and that they help create so they feel ownership and responsibility.

A similar difference is evident in the following excerpts when two more participants discuss what students want and need from their teachers. Typical of the 20–29 year group, this participant focuses on a positive and affirming relationship:

> A lot of different things! All students are different and all have different wants and needs! I'd say that some of the most important things that all students want (though may show this differently) and need to know that their teacher knows them, cares about them, has high expectations of them and is interested in them.

In the 30–39 year age group student relationships are also important, but the sense of leadership is again present. While in the previous response the purpose of the good relationship was for the affective 'good' of the student, here the relationship is more consciously future focussed. In the first the student is to be responded to, here the student is to be led:

> What kind of role model they want and need, compassion, interest, enthusiasm for learning, care for them as individuals, ability to adapt lessons so they can maximise learning, have alternative teaching strategies to make concepts and knowledge clear, making things relevant and interesting, help them to succeed and prepare them for the future.

Clearly the over 30 group is drawing on a different set of ideas to the under 30 age group. The older group reflect the position that the classical liberal or academic model is the legitimate model of education and that immersion in the traditional academic disciplines has intrinsic value (Gale & Densmore, 2000). They also reflect the discourse that Moore (2004) refers to as the *charismatic teacher* so prominent in Hollywood treatments of teachers' work. That this group of new teachers find these identities 'tellable' is informative. It suggests that teachers have more socially acceptable identities available outside the schooling 'ecology' than within it. In turn, this suggests something about the pattern of effects that global education reforms have had in the social spaces in and around schooling. In particular it suggests that the effects are more complex than the simple triumph of neoliberalism in the public sphere cascading into all parts of public life (Connell, 2013; Down, 2009).

The reforms to school education in Australia have not been purely *neoliberal* in the Regan–Thatcher sense. Following more closely the Blair–Clinton approach, they have been implemented with very real reference to a form of social-democratic values expressed in the Australian vernacular as a 'fair go' for all and informed by the 'third way' political philosophy of Giddens (1998). Given this, Lingard's (2010) description of the reforms as a 'hybrid mix' of neoliberal and social-democratic aspirations is more accurate. In this hybrid mix, neoliberal apparatus such as market mechanisms are used to drive school reform, but free market fundamentalism has not ruled supreme and the headline policy claims are of 'every school getting the funding it needs to do a great job' and 'giving more support to students who need it most' (Australian Labor Party, n.d.; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, 2013). In fulfilling these policy claims Australia has followed international examples in adopting not just market mechanisms, but also in making significant

public investment in areas such as schools infrastructure and ongoing teacher professional learning (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008). Fullan (2006) has observed that in England and the USA this investment has encouraged the growth of teacher professional communities and networks in which educators assist each other to improve.

We contend that it is this 'third way' policy discourse that allows the over 30 teacher identity to remain 'tellable' and in such contrast to the 20–29 age group. This older group, immersed in the public discourse but not in the world of schools for the last decade, is able to construct an identity consistent with the social-democratic aspirations of public discourse, and to apparently remain untouched by the 'terrors' of performativity (Ball, 2003) suggested in the academic critique of neoliberalism and its effects on teachers (Clandinin et al., 2009; Connell, 2009; Down, 2009; Moore, 2004; Moore et al., 2002).

In contrast, the 20–29 year group more frequently understood their role in terms of service to both students and public policy. We contend that the generative principle in play here is the more constant connection of this group to school life during the recent period of school reforms in Australia. That is, this group has been exposed to more than the public discourse about this reform, but has lived the reality of it in school and has internalised the effects the reforms have had on their own teachers.

We have named these differing dispositions 'performers' and 'postulates'. We use the term 'performers' as the 20–29 group understand their role as performing a set of actions defined by someone else. The choice of 'postulates' on the other hand, recognises that the 30–39 group understand their role as leading students to certain curriculum knowledge and also certain modes of behaviour that they as teachers have

had a role in determining is 'good' through an analysis of their own motivations and philosophies.

Conclusion

In this article we have theorised some generative principles of professional identity among new teachers in a way that takes into account both the current and formative contexts of the teachers concerned. The theory deployed relies on a psychological need for identity 'work' to be both goal oriented and to provide congruence with the past. In evaluating the case of a particular group of students, we have seen that these twin needs can play out in complex and unpredictable ways. Such unpredictability makes both the reform of complex social systems such as those found in education, and also the analysis of that reform, most challenging. In this article, for example, we have seen the emergence of professional identities that are probably not what the reforming policy makers are hoping for, but neither are they completely consistent with some of the concerns raised in the critical literature. This can be seen with teachers later in their careers too. For all the warnings of 'terror' (Ball, 2003) and a 'struggle to compose lives' (Clandinin et al., 2009), others such as Day and Smethem (2009) have pointed to examples in England of where 'under the wise leadership of head teachers, teachers and schools in England are not all incapacitated by the standards agendas of government' (p. 151).

The examination of the links between teacher practice and socio-political context, then, needs to allow for a greater complexity than, say, a direct link between neoliberal elements of policy discourse and reduced professionalism. Similarly arguments that education is forming itself in response to economic greed (Wrigley, Lingard, & Thomson, 2012), or that schooling has become too focussed on vocational outcomes (te Riele, 2011), require a greater account of how teachers as the principal

agents within the system allow it to happen, or resist it happening. Failure to do so, means descriptions such as 'neoliberal' simply become 'kitsch' signifiers that fail to explain (Samier, 2012).

The approaches used in this article have also highlighted the evolving nature of the socio-political values that do influence education. Often, such clarity is lacking as researchers are caught up in the habitus of the times, especially when working in performative university environments themselves where critiques of present policy can readily fall into a form of ideologically informed opposition. While not dismissing this, and recognising that we may well be influenced similarly, the approach used here has allowed us to look beyond our own habitus to examine the causes, processes, and subtleties of changing attitudes and professional identities. In doing so we were able to examine the way in which attitudes and identities have been constructed through a different lens and so broaden the understanding of the impact of professional identity at the intersection of societal, policy and educational change.

Importantly, the approach used here reminds us that the present environment is changeable and not permanent. This gives professionals experiencing the dissonance between their constructed lives and present conditions hope that there is way out of the 'terror'. At the same time it offers policy reformers the opportunity to avoid future backlash. The opportunity will only be realised through the development of feedback mechanisms that are responses to the unpredictable changes that occur within complex systems such as the divergent age-related identities found in this study.

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