



Teaching on the Other Side: how identity affects the capacity for agency of teachers who have crossed the community divide in the Northern Ireland educational system

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4 **Teaching on the Other Side: how identity affects the capacity for**
5 **agency of teachers who have crossed the community divide in the**
6 **Northern Ireland educational system.**
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10 The ethnic separation of the school system in Northern Ireland along Catholic and
11 Protestant community lines limits opportunities for daily cross-community interaction
12 between young people. Recent research has shown that, whilst the deployment pattern
13 of teachers is largely consistent with this divide, a small proportion of teachers had
14 diverted from the community-consistent path and were teaching in a school not
15 associated with their own community background. Narrative interviews with a
16 purposive sample of these cross-over teachers has provided rich insights into their
17 experiences. The research presented here explores the extent to which these cross-over
18 teachers felt able to reveal and engage their ethnic identity in their teaching. A mixed
19 pattern is observed; whilst some had endeavoured to hide or disguise their identity,
20 others had embraced their otherness and were consequently better placed to achieve
21 agency in their practice.
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26 **Keywords:** teacher identity, teacher agency, segregated education, ethnic
27 division, Northern Ireland
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INTRODUCTION

In his poem “The Other Side”, Seamus Heaney described how Catholic/Irish and Protestant/British neighbours in rural Northern Ireland (NI) navigated an uneasy co-existence.

“Should I slip away, I wonder,
or go up and touch his shoulder
and talk about the weather”

In 1968 inter-community tensions around issues of inequality, national identity and the constitutional status of NI ignited a bloody conflict (*The Troubles*) that lasted thirty years and cost thousands of lives before the Belfast Agreement brought an end to the more evident manifestations of violence. However, two decades after the peace agreement, the two communities remain substantially divided and ill-at-ease with one another (Gray et al, 2018). The complex interaction of the social, cultural, historical, political and religious dimensions of the divide have created a situation where community separation is so comprehensive that it has been classified as *ethnic* (e.g. Morrow, 2017; Jarrett, 2017).

The majority of children (93%) attend schools that are systematically organised on either side of the axes that define this divide. Non-denominational grammar schools and state *Controlled* schools work to a pattern of British cultural norms underpinned by Christian (Protestant) faith whilst those schools managed under the auspices of the Catholic church (*Maintained* schools and Catholic voluntary grammar schools) promote Irish cultural and religious identity (Gallagher, 2019). Seven percent of pupils attend Integrated schools which bring together children from both of these ethnic identities (and others) (Ipgrave, 2016).

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4 Prospective primary school teachers have a choice of two University Colleges in NI
5
6 where they can undertake Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at an undergraduate level –
7
8 one of these has traditionally provided teachers for Controlled schools whilst the other
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10 has an explicit Catholic ethos and prepares students for employment in the Maintained
11
12 sector. Additionally, teachers are exempted from protection under the terms of
13
14 comprehensive fair employment legislation.
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19 Ethnic consistency has consequently been a key and enduring feature in the deployment
20
21 patterns of those teachers working in primary schools, although there is recent evidence
22
23 that there has been an increase in cross-community career mobility by teachers in post-
24
25 primary schools (see Table 1 and Table 2). Of those teaching in Maintained primary
26
27 schools less than 2% had attended a Controlled primary school, whereas 17% of those
28
29 teaching in Catholic grammars had. Seven percent of those employed in Controlled
30
31 primaries and 23% in non-denominational grammar schools had attended a Maintained
32
33 primary (Milliken et al, 2020a). This research also identified that 22% of teachers in
34
35 Controlled schools and 33% in Maintained were *culturally encapsulated* – having had
36
37 no practical experience of an education sector outside of their own ethnic identity at any
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39 stage of their education or career.
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46 Menter (2010, 29) observed that “postmodern social theory has focused attention on the
47
48 ‘multiple identities’ that most individuals hold” - in addition to their professional
49
50 identity, teachers will have a number of other personal identities. Francis and le Roux
51
52 (2011) attested that a teacher’s identity will inevitably have been mediated by their race,
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54 ethnicity, religion, gender, age, class, language, sexual orientation, physical ability and
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56 language. They proposed that these multidimensional aspects of a teacher’s identity
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4 would, directly or indirectly, affect everything that s/he does, feels, says and thinks.
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6 Consequently, teachers cannot claim to have a purely professional identity.
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8 Furthermore, Beijaard et al (2004) identified that there may be a potential for
9
10 dissonance and discomfort if a teacher's 'personal' and 'professional' identities are too
11
12 far removed from one another. *Teachers' engagement with the multi-faceted nature of*
13
14 *their identity is inextricably linked with their agency: their capacity "to act on behalf of*
15
16 *what matters to them"* (Alkire 2005, 223).
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20 *Agency emerges in the dialectical interaction of person and practice (Edwards,*
21 *2015, 779).*
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24 A teacher's capacity for agency develops throughout the whole of their career (Izadinia,
25
26 2013). *It is mitigated and mediated by the structure within which they are engaged.*
27
28 Prior to the research being presented here, there had been no academic work undertaken
29
30 to explore the manner in which those who teach across the traditional divide in NI have
31
32 engaged their ethnic identity within their professional context. There is, however,
33
34 literature relating to the experiences of minority and community-atypical teachers in
35
36 other settings. *This has predominantly assumed that minority teachers are in an "ideal*
37
38 *position to provide students with culturally responsive teaching and advance the goals*
39
40 *of critical multiculturalism"* (Gilat et al, 2020, 2).
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45 Perry et al (2009) conducted in-depth interviews with 20 instructors of colour who were
46
47 involved in the teaching of diversity courses at a predominately white college. They
48
49 described how the *peculiar marginality* of these teachers' racial identity had impacted
50
51 upon their experiences which were inextricably, and negatively, connected with their
52
53 outsider status. They documented how attempts to adopt white mores had proved
54
55 unsuccessful and concluded that teachers in minority or marginalised positions should
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4 'teach what you are' as opposed to 'teaching what you are not' (i.e. from white,
5
6 heterosexual, middle- or upper-class perspectives).
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9
10 Jewish teachers are essentially absent from Arab schools in Israel, but a small
11
12 proportion of teachers employed in Jewish schools do come from an Arab community.
13
14 Sion (2014) documented how such teachers attempt to conceal their 'Arabness' or at
15
16 least endeavour to be 'good Arabs' to avoid drawing attention to their otherness.
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18
19
20 Gilat et al (2020) conducted a quantitative study into the experiences of Arab teachers
21
22 employed in Jewish schools in Israel. They noted a paradox; even though Arab teachers
23
24 reported encountering racism and finding emotional difficulty when obliged to engage
25
26 with Jewish or Zionist culture and customs in school, these teachers also reported fewer
27
28 day-to-day difficulties compared with their same-culture colleagues. The researchers
29
30 proposed that this could indicate a *selection bias*, that those teachers willing to cross-
31
32 over may be more optimistic and positive to begin with, or that those who choose the
33
34 atypical career path were already highly accepting of the existing power relations.
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38
39 Racial identity is not easily obscured or disguised, but there are other aspects of an
40
41 individual's identity that can be consciously, or unconsciously, concealed or revealed.
42
43 Wright's (2016) autoethnographic study of his experience of being a gay man and a
44
45 teacher explored the implications of working in a setting where a particular dimension
46
47 of an individual's identity was not readily accepted by those around. He had opted not
48
49 to disclose his sexuality. This denial made him particularly uncomfortable, "I
50
51 swallowed part of myself - I moved from it, apologised for it, and made it easier for
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53 others to silence me. I allowed myself to become an accomplice in the assumptions
54
55 about me" (Wright, 2016, 201). Wright identified three factors that prevented him from
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4 coming-out in school: firstly, he expected professional opposition; secondly, he
5
6 perceived that his sexuality would not be accepted by his colleagues and thirdly, he
7
8 found that it was relatively easy to adapt in order to remain 'closeted'.
9

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11
12 The situation facing the teacher who departs from the ethnically consistent career path
13
14 in NI has some similar elements. Educational segregation and the legacy of the conflict
15
16 means that some professional opposition to the outsider may be expected, it is also
17
18 possible that a teacher from 'the other side' may not be accepted by the wider school
19
20 community. In addition, given that the staff team in any school is likely to share the
21
22 same ethnic identity as the pupils, a teacher's identity may simply be assumed. Whilst
23
24 many other ethnically divided societies are characterised by self-evident signs
25
26 (language, skin colour), tell-tale reference points that would instantly reveal the cross-
27
28 over teacher as an outsider are largely absent in the NI context. The cross-over teacher
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30 in NI may therefore adapt relatively easily to hide their ethnic identity.
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36 This research project set out to explore whether the ethnic identity of teachers who had
37
38 crossed between the traditional sectors of education in NI was open or hidden and how
39
40 this may affect their potential capacity to achieve agency in their professional practice.

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42 The research took place within a larger mixed-method project that also quantified the
43
44 incidence of community cross-over among teachers in NI (Milliken et al, 2020a) and
45
46 explored the factors that may influence such a career choice (Milliken et al, 2020b).
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50 51 **RESEARCH METHOD**

52
53 Emirbayer and Mische (1998) identified a *chordal triad of agency* whereby an
54
55 individual's conception of their agency is informed by the past (iterational), oriented
56
57 toward the future (projective) and acted out and understood in the present (practical-
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4 evaluative). They considered that the actor requires the capacity to contextualize past
5
6 habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment and that consequently
7
8 “all three dimensions resonate as separate but not always harmonious tones” (Emirbayer
9
10 & Mische, 1998, 972). Biesta et al (2015; 627) further refined this work and drafted a
11
12 model which illustrated how reflections on professional and life histories, and future
13
14 projections contributed to a practical evaluation of current cultural, structural and
15
16 material elements. Taken together these provide a framework for the achievement of
17
18 agency.
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23
24 Beijaard et al (2004, 113) observed that since “personal identities are negotiated at the
25
26 intersection of the personal and the social” the potential for the achievement of agency
27
28 by the professional self is therefore inseparable from a person’s identity, which is in
29
30 turn determined through their life story. In order to access teachers’ narratives around
31
32 self-identified critical incidents, a schedule was developed for a semi-structured,
33
34 narrative style interview. This was constructed in line with Biesta et al’s (2015)
35
36 chronologically aligned chordal triad (see Appendix 1).
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41 Thirty interviews were conducted with teachers who had been identified as having taken
42
43 employment in a mainstream school in NI that was not consistent with their ethnic
44
45 identity (e.g. Protestant teacher in a Maintained school, Catholic teacher in a Controlled
46
47 school or a teacher from either community employed in an Integrated school). Data
48
49 sufficiency was ensured by selecting a proportion of interviewees in line with a
50
51 purposive sample matrix which incorporated the different school sectors and
52
53 dimensions of cross-over (Table 3).
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4 Informed consent was provided by all participating teachers and the data was handled
5
6 and stored in line with established ethical protocols. The data gathered was analysed in
7
8 line with the Braun et al (2019) guidelines on their six-step recursive process of
9
10 thematic analysis: familiarisation with data, generating initial codes, searching for
11
12 themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.
13
14 This data was then reviewed at two interpretative levels: Descriptive Analysis (a literal
15
16 description of events) and Conceptual Analysis (reflection and the identification of
17
18 deeper meaning). Ultimately, these processes develop clusters of meaning or ‘Themes’.
19
20 The rich description of the data-set that is facilitated through thematic analysis means
21
22 that the method is well suited to the analysis of data generated in a narrative-style
23
24 inquiry (e.g. Hajisoteriou, et al, 2015).
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30 Themes were developed through the application of deductive analysis of the data
31
32 gathered and arranged within an inductive framework based a priori on Emirbayer and
33
34 Mische’s (1998), and Biesta et al’s (2015) chordal triad of agency (See Figure 1, Figure
35
36 2 and Figure 3).
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40 It should be noted that all of the interviewees were volunteers. It is possible those
41
42 teachers who felt most passionately about the subject – and those who had the most
43
44 extreme experiences – were most willing to come forward.
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48 Although efforts were made to ensure a balance across the range of possible cross-over
49
50 permutations interviewees were not evenly distributed across all sectors. For example,
51
52 Protestant teachers employed in Maintained primaries proved difficult to locate whilst
53
54 almost all teachers employed in Integrated schools fitted the criteria to be classified as
55
56 having crossed-over. The experiences of the former could potentially be considered as
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4 being of greater value to the task of addressing the research questions than the latter; all
5
6 were, however, afforded equal weight in analysis.
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9 10 **FINDINGS**

11 The outsider teacher's capacity for agency relies on their capacity to engage their
12 identity; this capacity is likely be mitigated by context - specifically, the prevailing
13 hegemony within a school (Liggett, 2012). For the teacher who crosses the traditional
14 community divide in the NI education system, this is of particular significance. The
15 cross-over teacher must be at ease with the 'otherness' of their community-ethnic
16 identity. Their capacity to achieve agency is affected by how the teacher understands
17 the way in which their identity has been formed (the iterational dimension), and the
18 extent to which the feel able to engage it in current and future practice (practical-
19 evaluative and projective dimensions).
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34 *Open or hidden identity*

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36 Ethnic identity in NI is not always immediately evident – English is generally spoken as
37 a first language by both communities and there are no distinguishing racial
38 characteristics by which Catholics and Protestants can be identified. There are however
39 at least fifty ways of 'telling' ethnic identity in NI including recognised 'linguistic'
40 clues such as the use of the aspirated or unaspirated 'h' or the convention of referring to
41 NI's second city by either its official (British) title Londonderry or its abbreviated/Irish
42 name 'Derry/Doiré (Ferguson & McKeown, 2016). With cautious and informed use of
43 language, therefore, the aware, cross-over teacher who wishes to remain hidden may be
44 in a position to make a choice as to whether or not they wish to expose their 'otherness'.
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4 Family names and first names can provide a widely understood *tell* – those whose name
5 has an Irish origin are perceived as being Catholic whilst those who bear a name with
6 British roots are assumed to be Protestants (Trew, 2004). Generations of inter-marriage
7 and other historical factors mean that, if only a surname is known, this may be a
8 potentially misleading clue to identity. Accuracy increases when both first and
9 surnames are available. Since teachers are generally only known by their students as
10 Mr. X or Miss/Mrs/Ms. Y it may be possible for some teachers with ethnically
11 unspecific or ambiguous surnames to hide in plain sight (should they wish to do so) as
12 in the example below of a teacher with a Catholic identity who is teaching in a
13 Controlled school.
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26
27 I have an Irish first-name. My surname wouldn't give anything away, but my
28 Christian name would.
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30 For others their surname alone raised questions relating to their identity.
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33 There were a couple of other Catholic teachers in the school however their
34 surnames were not as Irish-sounding as mine. I did not think that my name
35 would be such an issue and 'out' me. There was an initial cautiousness from
36 staff... but from the first day I was in, children wanted to know if I was a *fenian*¹
37 or not.
38
39
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41 With the advent of the digitally connected classroom and the use of ICT for teaching,
42 the ability of a teacher to be able to disguise their ethnic identity has receded. For one
43 Catholic teacher employed in a non-denominational grammar school this involuntary
44 exposure had brought his identity into his teaching.
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50 I hadn't consciously thought I am going to hide things about me, but we started
51 using Google Classroom and on Google Classroom your first and last name
52
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55
56 ¹ Originally an ancient tribe within Ireland the name 'fenian' was adopted in the nineteenth
57 century by Irish republican organisations. Today it is used by Protestant/Unionist/Loyalists
58 as a colloquial, pejorative term for a Catholic or Irish Nationalist.
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4 appears, you can't do anything about it... I did worry for a moment that my first
5 name was being displayed because it's Irish. I think because of that I have just
6 been completely open with where I came from.
7
8

9 In light of the subtle complexities of ethnic identification, some teachers had been
10 incorrectly assumed by their pupils to have had the same identity as themselves.
11
12

13 I remember that one of them said to me at one time – because [K.] was my
14 maiden name – “Miss, are you anything to Mick [K.] who has the car place up
15 there?” And I said “No”. And one said, “Wise up! Mick [K.] is a Protestant, he
16 wouldn't be any relation of hers!”
17
18

19 Whilst another teacher was made aware of the potential of hostility towards her identity.
20
21

22 They were 13-14-15 year olds and, hearing them talk, the worst crime that their
23 peers could commit was to *go out with a taig*² – I wondered how many of them
24 realised that I was a *taig*.
25
26

27 In one reported instance, the involuntary exposure of a Protestant teacher's ethnic
28 identity came as something of an uncomfortable surprise to an ethnically consistent
29 colleague.
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34 I had a season ticket for [a soccer team with a fanbase strongly associated with
35 Protestant-Loyalism]. I will never forget the day it dropped out in the staffroom
36 one of the older member gentlemen of the staff went, he went “Oh! Oh!”
37 {DISCOMFORT}, it may as well have been my Nazi card, you know, he
38 panicked, “And you go to...?” {SOUNDING SHOCKED} – and so I had to
39 explain to him, and he calmed himself down, he was nearly in the roof you
40 know. But that's just the experiences you get as time goes on. He had never
41 seen anything like that!
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45 Unconscious use of language can also expose the political perspective generally
46 espoused within the cross-over teacher's ethnic group.
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48

49 I remember one of my first lessons where I just off the top said, “If you think
50 about IRA³ *terrorists*” and that just came out... I just said it because obviously it
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55
56 ² Similar to ‘fenian’, ‘taig’ is a derogatory term for a Catholic or Irish Nationalist.

57 ³ IRA (Irish Republican Army) is a paramilitary organisation that sought to end British rule in
58 NI through violence.
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4 was just something that was there. One of the girls pulled me up so I presented it
5 as a deliberate mistake, so it was okay. But it was a real learning.
6

7
8 Unsurprisingly perhaps some cross-over teachers had actively sought to exercise
9
10 caution in their use of language to ensure that their community identity remained
11
12 opaque.
13

14
15 There are some silly wee things – you don't say 'aitch' [unaspirated 'H'] – but
16 they wouldn't know beyond that – the senior boys would probably know. I
17 don't have my grandfather's sash on the wall.
18

19
20 For some teachers there did seem to be a progressive, incremental opening-up of
21
22 identity – which, for some, was still only partially complete.
23

24
25 I was very wary with teachers and staff – it's taken me a good 10 years to relax
26 and go, "It doesn't matter". When I was first appointed full-time [the principal]
27 actually brought me in and asked me outright, "Are you Catholic or are you
28 Protestant?" and me thinking, "You can't really ask me that!" but she did. I had
29 no problem saying to her, but it did make me feel uneasy – she did say to me at
30 that time, "You have one other member of staff that is Protestant." I childishly
31 went to him and went, "You – eh – me -eh-yeah-eh". But we played it cool...
32
33

34
35 Once their 'other' identity is known some teachers felt that they needed to tread a very
36
37 cautious line with colleagues.
38

39
40 I'm very guarded in any kind of political conversation. I think now that people
41 know that I probably don't feel the same politically as they might think. 'Cos
42 they feel very safe to say things and I'm sitting thinking, "I disagree with that
43 but I don't want them to think that I'm rocking the boat or that I'm always trying
44 to pick a fight" so I just keep tight lipped.
45

46
47 Revealing ethnic identity was seen as a less problematic issue in Integrated schools
48
49 where the composition of the staff room was more mixed.
50

51
52 One of the staff and her husband are big into the Orange⁴ – she talks about the
53 Twelfth and parading and whatever they get up to there. I have another member
54

55
56 ⁴ 'The Orange Order' – a Protestant fraternal order founded in recognition of the victory of King
57 William III (of Orange) over the Catholic King James II in the Williamite-Jacobite war
58 (1688-1691) which it celebrates with annual parades on 12th July AKA the Twelfth.
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4 who is GAA⁵-mad and she is all about her football and whatever is going on...
5 there's no sense of whispering behind the hand.
6

7
8 Some teachers (particularly those who have grown up during the conflict) felt
9
10 uncomfortable revealing their community identity – two teachers whose fathers had
11
12 served as police officers during the Troubles spoke of having grown up in a culture of
13
14 secrecy in respect of their fathers' occupation.
15

16
17
18 The evidence indicates that those cross-over teachers who had not had their identity
19
20 involuntarily exposed were able to choose to whom and when they revealed their ethnic
21
22 origins; to trusted colleagues only, to teaching colleagues generally within the school, to
23
24 colleagues and some trusted pupils (usually senior) or to everyone in the school.
25

26 27 28 *Teachers engaging their ethnic identity* 29

30
31 Schools can be very traditional and conservative institutions – with long histories and a
32
33 unique place within a local community. The culture and practices of a school may
34
35 consequently be very resilient and resistant to change. There were suspicions that it
36
37 would be counterproductive were the outsider-teacher to attempt to change too much
38
39 too soon.
40

41
42 You bide your time. You don't go in and change it right away. You need to
43
44 find out why they do things in the way that they do.
45

46
47 One teacher spoke of something of a Damascene moment when he reached a realisation
48
49 that he needed to reveal and use his ethnic identity in his teaching.
50

51
52 I remember one wee incident was one of the students who mustn't have known
53
54 my background, I remember they got some coaching in for them and the guy had
55

56
57 ⁵ GAA – Gaelic Athletic Association is an Ireland-wide organisation which was established to
58
59 promote traditional Irish sports and cultural activities, it is perceived by many northern
60 Protestants as having an anti-British, Irish Nationalist agenda.

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4 an Ulster [rugby]⁶ thing on, and she was, “What are *they* coming over here for?”
5 – and it was early days and I remember thinking it's quite sort of narrow-
6 minded.... So that actually accelerated my decision to be quite overt in class.
7
8

9 He went on to explain how he actively used his British-Protestant identity to enable him
10 to act as a devil’s advocate in a Catholic school located in an urban area renowned for
11 its association with Irish republicanism.
12
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15
16 There are times, especially over the Irish language at the moment, where I
17 deliberately banter and I say, “Seriously? There’s old women you know over in
18 Health Service and they are not able to get a bed, they are sitting on a chair for
19 days on end and you are saying you want an Irish language act?” Just getting
20 the thing going... I’m provoking thought, I’m trying to get higher thinking,
21 trying to get you outside maybe some of the views that you have, and you think
22 you are quite wide with your views but the more I put in, gets you just to think
23 wider.
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27 A Catholic teacher in a non-denominational grammar had created an opportunity for her
28 students to gain an insight into the Irish language – an initiative which the school
29 accommodated but was unwilling to support financially in the longer term.
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33
34 I got an Irish speaking guy in to do a workshop in our English department... He
35 was brilliant, but we would have to pay for that now and there is no money.
36
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38 Given the close connections between ethnicity and cultural activities, sport also
39 provided opportunities for cross-over teachers to engage their otherness as a tool for
40 teaching.
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44
45 I teach about the GAA and I show how the GAA has grown as an organisation
46 to the modern day and I would show them a GAA match on YouTube – just to
47 show them how the organisation has grown. They wouldn’t have seen that and
48 probably and wouldn’t expect that of another history teacher in the school.
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56 ⁶ The sport of rugby is played predominantly in non-denominational grammar schools in NI – it
57 is therefore often associated with the Protestant middle-class, although this perception may
58 be slowly changing.
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4 One teacher had introduced hockey to a Maintained post-primary school. Her
5
6 engagement even went so far as to coach Gaelic football to pupils at the local
7
8 Controlled school as part of an inter-school programme.
9

10
11 I would be a hockey player – and the kids go, “But hockey is a Protestant sport.”
12 “Hockey isn’t a Protestant sport – if you look there are as many schools in the
13 Republic⁷ that play.” And they just accept that... And I said, “Well really you
14 should be introducing sports from other cultural backgrounds and we could join
15 up with [neighbouring school] and play hockey and we could teach them
16 Gaelic.” And we’ve done that. The irony of the Protestant teacher in the
17 Catholic school teaching the pupils in the Protestant school how to play Gaelic!
18 {LAUGHTER} How twisted is that?
19
20
21

22 History was also identified by cross-over teachers as a subject well-suited to the agency
23 afforded by virtue of their other identity to explore contentious issues. One history
24 teacher spoke of her capacity to teach students about the Troubles from her own,
25 personal perspective.
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32 I would talk about my experiences growing up... A lot of pupils here actually
33 have very little understanding of Northern Ireland. I mean at a very simplistic
34 level, when you are starting off looking at The Troubles you really have to start
35 off saying what is a Nationalist? What is a Unionist? [They] don’t watch the
36 news.
37
38

39 English was also identified as a subject that allowed the cross-over teacher to engage
40 with issues of their own and their pupils’ identities:
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43

44 I was teaching ‘The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn’ and quite a wee bit came
45 through about Calvinism and I was explaining - because that’s where
46 Presbyterianism traces back to - and we were talking about pre-destination and
47 they were horrified at this idea. And I was explaining that I wouldn’t
48 necessarily go with all of that and they of course were saying that they wouldn’t
49 necessarily go with all of what their church teaches either.
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58 ⁷ Ireland was divided in 1922 when the Irish Free State (later to become the Republic of Ireland)
59 broke away from British rule while NI remained within the United Kingdom.
60

The poetry of Seamus Heaney was seen as providing explicit opportunities for pupils to explore issues related to division and identity in the NI context.

Seamus Heaney at A level - I have usually *come out* at some stage and said that - you know? - told them. And that has been quite interesting and particularly with the previous syllabus we were doing there's a poem of his called 'The Other Side' – you know it? – there is that brilliant sort of little portrait that he gives of the Protestant mind in it and we would talk a wee bit about it.

Two teachers made separate reference to the impact upon them and their students of one particular novel, 'Bog Child' by Siobhan Dowd. The story deals with the 1981 Republican hunger strike⁸ and a young boy growing up at that time. His brother is a hunger striker nearing the end of his life. The whole political situation is in turmoil.

I was designing a scheme of lessons for the kids and I thought "Why not flip this on its head? For homework... let's look at it from the British perspective – to come up with a song that promotes their ideals – why the British soldiers are there, what their perspective is." [A week later] everyone had it done but there was this one wee girl – was sitting at the table, almost shaking, tears coming out of her eyes... She was crying because she was caught between a rock and a hard place. Forbidden from doing the homework by daddy – having no homework for the teacher... this girl's dad had been heavily involved in the provisional IRA movement.

Whilst in this instance opposition to the lesson had been from a Republican perspective, another teacher, teaching the same book in an Integrated school, had faced Unionist objections. On this occasion the legitimacy of exploring controversial issues in school was specifically supported by the school leadership.

['Bog Child'] was introduced and there was a lot of controversy because it mentions the Hunger Strike... it ended up going to the local newspaper, local politicians got involved as well but at the end of the day the Principal was very, very supportive with the English Department, said, "We are an Integrated school, and we approach things and we look at things, you know, differently."

⁸ A campaign by Irish republican prisoners to be treated as political prisoners rather than criminals – during the hunger strike ten prisoners starved themselves to death.

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4 Not all teachers had received such firm support in the face of external criticism. One of
5
6 the teachers interviewed, a RE teacher in a Controlled post-primary school, had been
7
8 subjected to personal attack when she attempted to extend the syllabus taught in her
9
10 school.
11

12
13 I was taking the Year 8s out around the town to visit the Methodist church, [two]
14 Presbyterian, the Church of Ireland and the Catholic church. Letters went out.
15 Permission slips came back. No problem at all... it was relayed to me [later]
16 with advice from another member of staff to tell me to be very careful with what
17 I'm doing teaching RE in a Protestant town, in a Protestant school... because the
18 parents aren't very happy about you taking those children to a Catholic church.
19
20

21
22 Eventually opposition from pupils and parents receded, only to re-emerge.
23

24
25 Everything was quite easy until... we went to the Mosque! {AUDIBLE
26 INTAKE OF BREATH} We went to the mosque but unbeknownst to me – they
27 all came back with their reply slips – half the class didn't want to go. I was soon
28 to find out why. The parents all took to Facebook – identified me by name –
29 identified me by where I live – my position within the school – “She's a fenian!”
30 – the language was unbelievable.
31
32

33
34 A couple of years earlier a sectarian social media campaign had culminated in the
35 resignation of a Catholic history teacher from a school in an urban loyalist area
36 (Graham, 2014). Another Catholic teacher who was familiar with the teacher and the
37 school had a perspective that was noticeably different to the dominant narrative.
38
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41
42 I would absolutely stand by the fact it was a small cohort of people who didn't
43 know what they were talking about. She had pupils from her... class[es] in her
44 corner, boys saying, “This is the best teacher I've ever had.” “She doesn't sway
45 me in any way.” “I am happy with my culture and I love who I am and where
46 I'm from,” and, “I don't feel she pushed anything on us”... There were
47 extremely supportive families, extremely supportive members of staff and pupils
48 which I think is the most important thing who came out and were vocal in their
49 support for her.
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54 The above examples relate primarily to cross-over teachers in post-primary settings.
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56 The primary curriculum also includes sensitive subject areas; Religion and The World
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4 Around Us include components that touch on a teacher's identity and have potential for
5
6 controversy. The need to retain impartiality and not be drawn into exposing personal
7
8 biases was considered to be particularly important in the teaching of Religion in an
9
10 Integrated primary school.
11

12
13 You will be asked... "What do you believe?"... You might well be able to admit
14 that you were Protestant but to say, "Well I don't believe this and that," was
15 something you shouldn't be doing because that would influence the children.
16 You present all the options. You don't say, "This one's better!"
17
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19
20 There were suggestions that cross-over teachers may, inadvertently, display cultural
21
22 naivety as in the example of a Protestant teacher employed in a Catholic primary who
23
24 made birthday cards for Queen Elizabeth's jubilee with an infant class – a decision
25
26 which she identified as being a "spontaneous response to a child-led initiative" – only to
27
28 be informed by the principal that the children would on no account be allowed to take
29
30 their work home to show their parents.
31

32
33 [The principal] said, "We are very in for the GAA and that sort of thing as a
34 school and some parents would be shocked" – no not even shocked "would be
35 *horrified* to think that you were teaching your children to wish the Queen happy
36 birthday". It wasn't a planned thing and I maybe should have second guessed it
37 but to me what is happening in the *world around us* is what is happening in the
38 World Around Us... it didn't matter that this person was the Queen of England –
39 when it's somebody's birthday you send them a card!
40
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44 The evidence indicates that whilst some teachers – particularly those in Integrated
45
46 schools – considered the use of their ethnic identity in their teaching to be an important
47
48 dimension of their practice, many cross-over teachers had made a conscious choice to
49
50 selectively reveal their identity in their teaching and to colleagues. Some teachers had,
51
52 however, gone to considerable lengths to conceal their community background as
53
54 completely as possible. For others the exposure of their identity, had been involuntary,
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56 and often motivated by sectarianism. There were very few illustrations of Catholic-to-
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4 Protestant or Protestant-to-Catholic teachers being wholly comfortable with revealing
5
6 their otherness to the whole school community.
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10 **Discussion**

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12 The development of a professional identity is an extremely context-dependent process
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14 that cannot be understood without taking into account the environment within which it
15
16 takes place and the role of an individual in making sense of this environment (Ruohotie-
17
18 Lyhty and Moate, 2016). For cross-over teachers to be able to engage their identity in
19
20 their school (and thereby **have the potential to** achieve agency) the alignment of two
21
22 components is needed: the environment must be (or be perceived to be) receptive or at
23
24 the very least not openly hostile *and* the teacher must be personally comfortable in
25
26 revealing their identity to pupils and colleagues. **This, in turn, is predicated on the**
27
28 **teacher having engaged with how their personal history has informed the development**
29
30 **of their identity, their practice and their vision of the future – the chordal triad.**
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36 Where a cross-over teacher perceived that the school environment could be potentially
37
38 hostile to their ethnic identity, they were seen to have endeavoured to hide that
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40 dimension of their identity from their pupils or, in the most extreme examples, from
41
42 both pupils and other staff members. In such cases, teachers carefully and consciously
43
44 tried to adapt to fit within the prevailing culture; such a strategy is fraught with
45
46 difficulties. It inevitably involves a degree of subterfuge and deception. The
47
48 ‘disguised’ teacher may be anxious about their otherness being found out – they must
49
50 maintain a consistent mask. Deception has the potential to backfire and word-of-mouth
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52 quickly spreads.
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4 It was also seen that a cross-over teacher may, out of habit or convention, attempt to
5 obscure their identity, or, alternatively, to believe, probably naïvely, that it is unknown.
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8 Such an approach is only possible where the teacher's *other* identity is not seen as a
9 threat within the school – this was seen to be the case where the teacher was well-
10 established in the school and when they teach a subject with comparatively limited
11 potential for engaging with controversial issues (e.g. Mathematics). Interestingly, the
12 cross-over teachers in Gilat et al's (2020) study were predominantly teachers of
13 mathematics.
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23 In marked contrast, some cross-over teachers were seen to have actively brought their
24 ethnicity into both their teaching in the classroom and their interactions with colleagues
25 – for these teachers their outsider status had become a defining aspect of their identity
26 within the school. Support from leaders within the school was identified as having been
27 instrumental where the teacher reported that this approach as having proved effective.
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36 It has however also been observed that there can be significant problems where an
37 ethnically *other* teacher attempts to act in a manner that challenges the established
38 practices and attitudes. This was seen at its most extreme in school communities that
39 were inexperienced, unwilling and/or unprepared to engage with alternative
40 perspectives. In all such instances the situation was seen to have deteriorated into
41 sectarian bullying.
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50 A small number of teachers who had returned to NI following a period teaching
51 elsewhere took up a cross-over position in the assumption that society had progressed
52 beyond historical sectarianism. Those who had entered an Integrated school found a
53 culture within which the various dimensions of their identity were accepted or
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4 accommodated. However, two teachers who had stepped across the ethnic divide in
5
6 education had experienced a less welcoming situation. Their identity tested the culture
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8 of their host in ways for which it was not prepared, and they found themselves exposed
9
10 in a hostile school environment. Neither received effective support from either the
11
12 school leadership or sectoral management. The sectarian attitudes displayed by pupils,
13
14 parents and other staff members went unchallenged and, as such, were effectively
15
16 reinforced. Both have since left their posts and are seeking employment in community
17
18 consistent schools.
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23 From these examples it is proposed that **the potential** capacity of the cross-over teacher
24
25 to achieve agency is affected by both their own willingness to engage their identity and
26
27 the culture of the school in which they are employed i.e. whether their otherness is
28
29 supported or not. Cross-over teachers were characterised in line with the different
30
31 approaches that they had adopted within these four possible permutations: the Ostrich,
32
33 the Peacock, the Chameleon and the Hedgehog (Figure 4).
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38 The apocryphal story of the Ostrich that sticks his head in the sand in the face of a
39
40 perceived threat provides an illustration of the cross-over teacher who attempts to
41
42 disguise, or distance themselves from, their ethnic identity, even though it may be
43
44 widely known within the school. The Ostrich does not **only not** use their ethnic identity
45
46 in any aspect of their teaching **but does not see it as having relevance to their role. Their**
47
48 **professional persona is incomplete, they are consequently unable to achieve agency and**
49
50 **there is no impact from their otherness on the school culture.**
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55 The Chameleon is a cross-over teacher who adopts the culture of the host community so
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57 effectively that they assimilate completely, and their otherness effectively disappears.
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4 The chameleon teacher is accepted as ‘one of us’; their ethnic identity is assumed by all
5
6 (bar perhaps a small number of individuals) to be consistent with that of the school.
7
8 They can however work as an *insider* to create change from within, **though their**
9
10 **potential capacity to achieve agency is compromised by their lack of practical-**
11 **evaluative engagement with their identity.** Their position is vulnerable and maintaining
12
13 the pretence may prove difficult in the **future.**

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18 The Peacock flamboyantly displays their identity and, where the school authorities
19
20 accept and accommodate this display, they are able to engage their ethnic identity in
21
22 their teaching – thereby opening opportunities for pupils to encounter and engage with
23
24 issues that might otherwise remain unexplored. In order to be able to achieve agency,
25
26 the peacock needs to have critically reflected on their own identity *and* to feel confident
27
28 in using it in their **current practice.** Such displays may be unsettling to more
29
30 conservatively-minded colleagues and the wider school community – the support of
31
32 school management is therefore crucial. Where that support has been assumed by the
33
34 teacher but has failed to materialise, the cross-over teacher becomes exposed and has to
35
36 fall back on their own defences. The peacock can become a hedgehog.

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43 **The archetypal hedgehog is wary in the present and ultrasensitive to the potential of**
44
45 **future threats. The hedgehog teacher has engaged their ethnicity – its otherness is**
46
47 **known to everyone else in the school. They see hostility everywhere and readily retreat**
48
49 **into a prickly, defensive carapace. This becomes the dominant feature of their identity**
50
51 **to the detriment of everything else. Clearly this is not conducive to helping them to**
52
53 **achieve agency.**

Conclusion

The experiences outlined by the thirty cross-over teachers interviewed within this project were hugely varied. Examples have however been seen where an innovative, collegial cross-over teacher has critically reflected on their identity and has as a consequence been able to engage their agency in their interactions within the school. This is only possible where that engagement is accepted by the school community, and particularly the school leadership.

The breadth of experiences detailed illustrate that, in the best-case scenario, the agentic cross-over teacher may have capacity to make a significant difference. At the same time, there is potential for the cross-over teacher to experience hostility and bullying. The challenge is to develop policy and practice that can maximise the potential to have more of the former and minimise the frequency of the latter. The cross-over teacher can bring not only new perspectives to the pupils that they teach but also to the interactions in the staffroom and, potentially, also the boardroom. Cross-over teachers **that are enabled to engage their identity and achieve agency** may have capacity to act as catalysts, as the grit that grows to create the pearl of real change in a separated and divisive school system.

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For Peer Review Only

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For Peer Review Only

Table 1. Non-Catholic Teachers in Catholic Schools

Source	Catholic Primary	Catholic Post-Primary	Catholic Grammar
1977 (Darby et al)	< 1%	2%	1%
2004 (Equality Commission)	2%	2%	1%
2020 (Milliken et al)	2%	8%	17%

Table 2. Catholic Teachers in non-denominational Schools

	Non-denominational Primary	Non-denominational Post-Primary	Non-denominational Grammar
1977 (Darby et al)	< 1%	2%	1%
2004 (Equality Commission)	5%	5%	1%
2020 (Milliken et al)	7%	17%	23%

Figure 1: Themes and Coding - Iterational

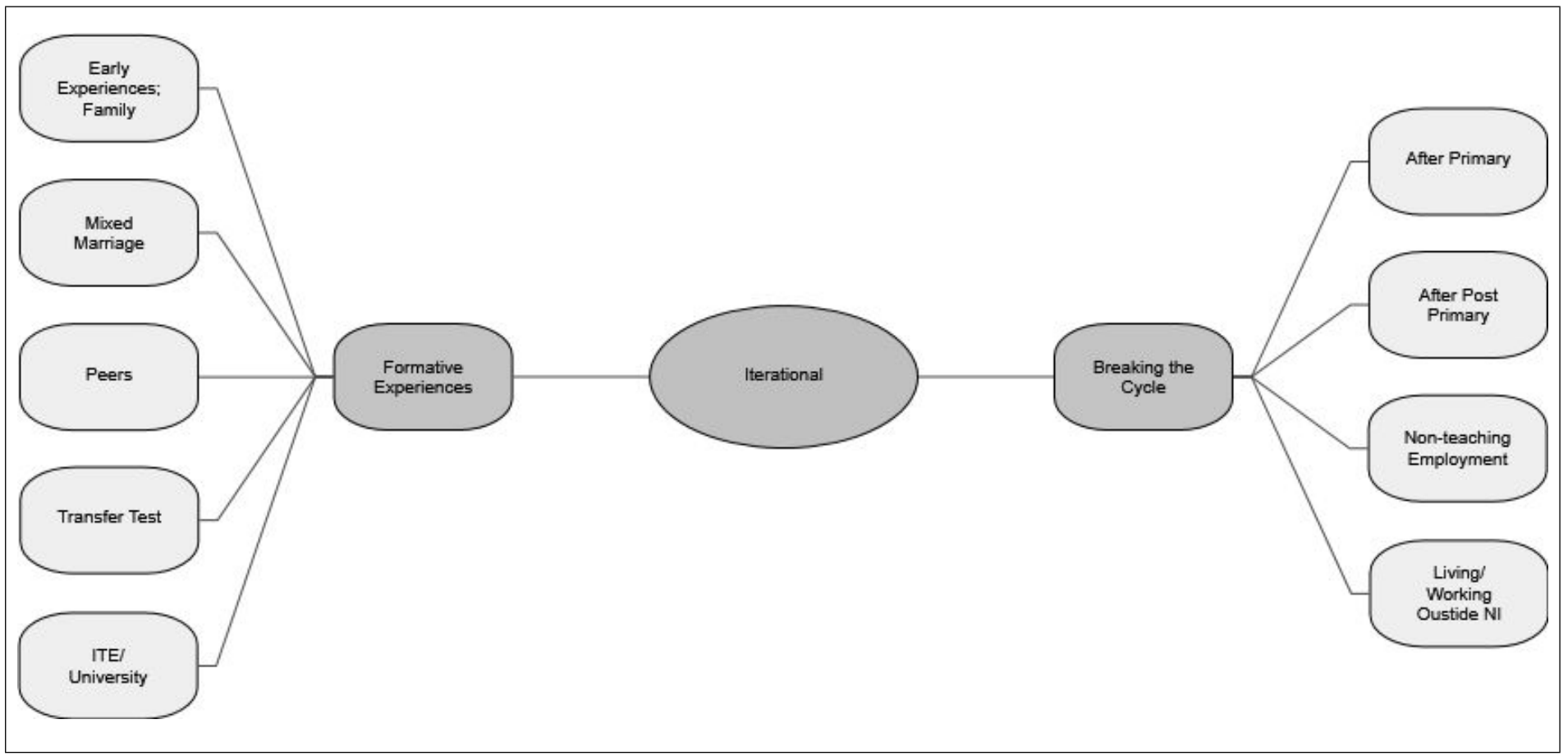
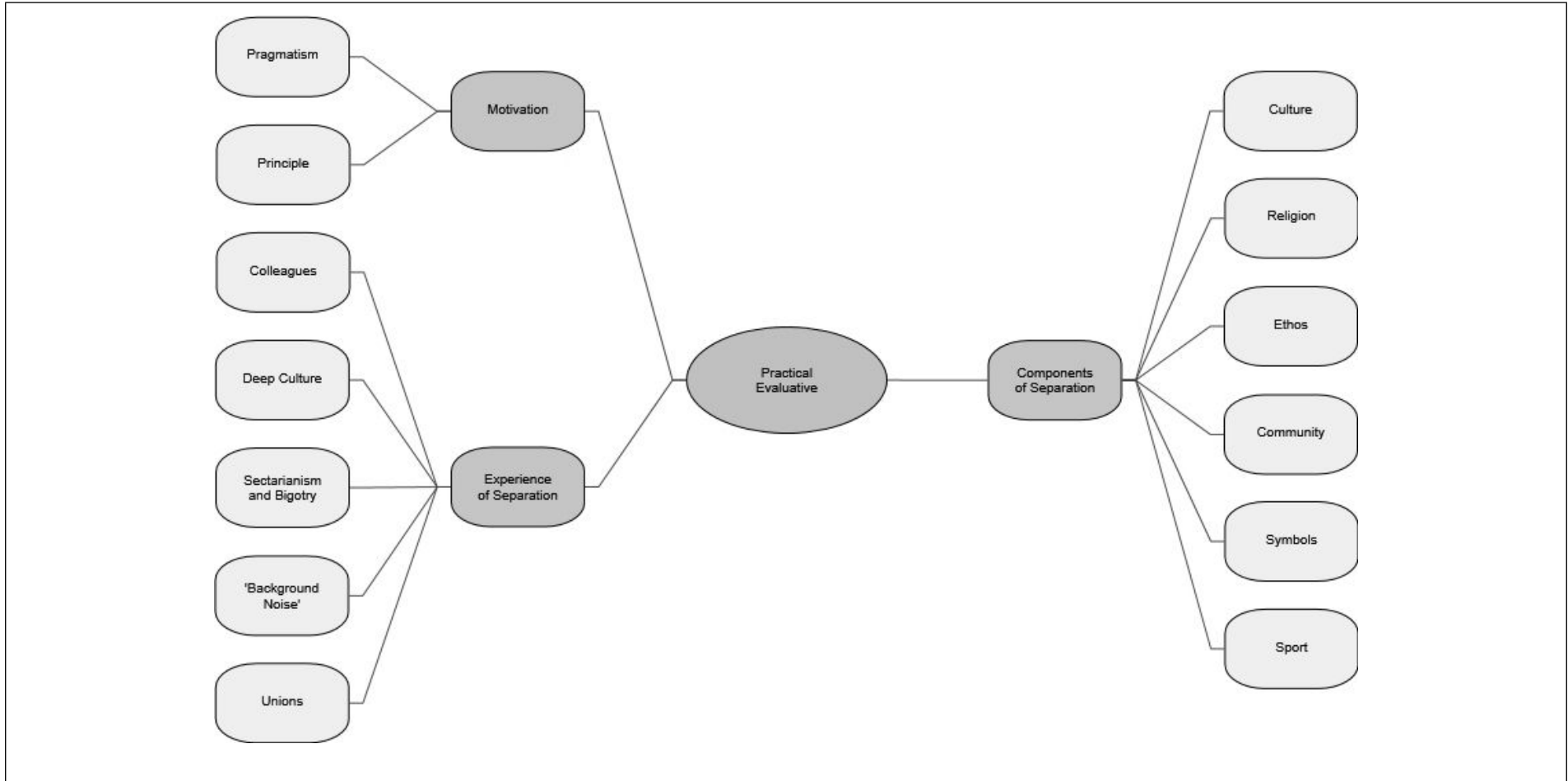
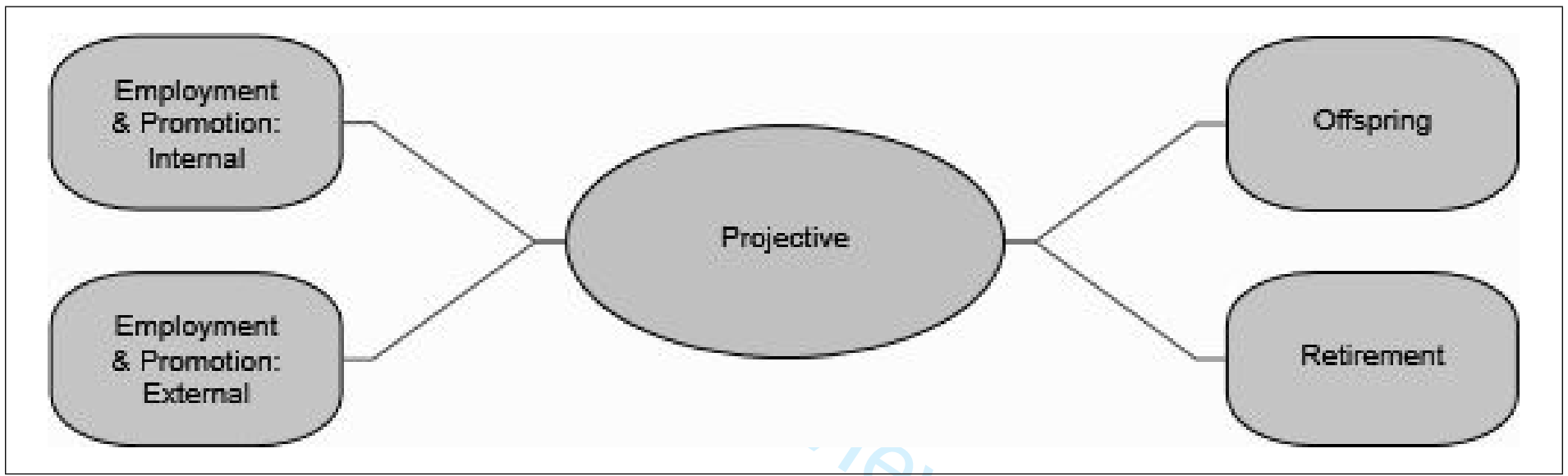


Figure 2: Themes and Coding – Practical/Evaluative



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Figure 3: Themes and Coding - Projective


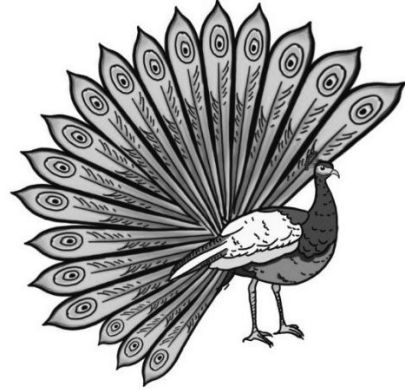
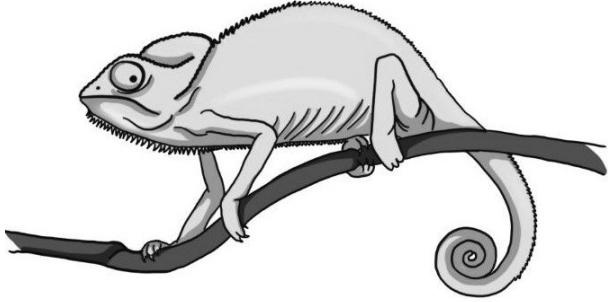



Review Only

Table 3. Purposive sample matrix

PRIMARY	Teaching in Maintained PS	Teaching in Controlled PS	Teaching in Integrated PS
Catholic Teacher		3	3
Protestant Teacher	3		3
SECONDARY	Teaching in Maintained PPS	Teaching in Controlled PPS	Teaching in Integrated PPS
Catholic Teacher		3	3
Protestant Teacher	3		3
GRAMMAR	Teaching in Catholic GS		Teaching in Non-Denominational GS
Catholic Teacher			3
Protestant Teacher	3		

Figure 4. Cross-over Teachers: Identity-Agency Matrixⁱⁱ

	Identity Hidden	Identity Open
Otherness Supported		
Otherness contested		

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APPENDIX 1 - Interview Schedule

Iterational

- a. Tell me about your own experience of education on your way to becoming a teacher
 - i. Primary
 - ii. Post primary
 - iii. Higher
 - iv. Post grad
 - v. Other
- b. Do you recall any particular incident in your life that influenced your choice of career?
- c. What experience have you had of community relations or contact with the other community - either through school or outside?
- d. What was your family's attitude to the 'other side'?
 - i. How did that affect/influence you?

Practical-Evaluative

- a. **Material:** Tell me about the school you are working in and the pupils you teach
- b. **Cultural:** In what ways does the school you are currently teaching in differ from the schools you attended as a pupil?
- c. **Structural:**

Do others in the staff team know that you are Catholic/Protestant?
 How have they reacted – how do you think they might react if they knew?
 Do your pupils know that you are Catholic/Protestant?
 How have they reacted – how do you think they might react if they knew?

Projective

- a. Where do you see yourself professionally 2 years from now?
- b. Where do you see yourself professionally 10 years from now?

ⁱ The origins of a protracted political impasse that led to a three-year suspension of the NI Assembly from January 2017 until January 2020 could be traced, at least in part, to a disagreement between the two blocs with regard to the introduction of an Irish Language Act – supported by Republicans and opposed by Unionists.

ⁱⁱ Images courtesy of Cheirol Lai