

# Online Professional Identity Development in University Teachers:

How do specific concepts or practices  
utilised by university teachers influence  
their professional identity when teaching  
online?

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## **Abstract**

Online learning has emerged in recent decades from the practice of enthusiasts and innovators and is now part of the offer of most universities. As a result, often alien and uncomfortable teaching concepts and practices have faced, and at times have been imposed on, teachers. The unique circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic in March 2020 brought this into sharp focus. Many teachers in universities in the UK were required to shift rapidly to online education. These included those already opting to teach online, indicating a level of comfort with that practice. It also brought those who did not want to make the change into focus, many of whom needed help to 'find themselves' online. The challenges to the professional identity of both sets of teachers were not well understood at the time and consequently could not be well supported.

The research was conducted in a single university in Northwest England during the 2020/2021 academic year. An interpretative approach was adopted, guided by the principles of constructivist grounded theory. Recorded interviews captured the experiences of twelve teachers in two distinct phases over one year. Themes were generated relating both to how interviewees present and perceive their professional identity online, as well as the limitations of doing so in an online space. Analysis of shifts in professional identity during the move from face-to-face to online teaching environments generated a new understanding of this transition.

Analysis of the themes revealed challenges to professional identity as teachers moved through a stage of liminality during the transition from a traditional face-to-face environment to operating remotely online. Understanding issues of change to subjectivity, otherness, context, and social interaction generated are

central to addressing these challenges. Four simple but troublesome questions face university teachers as they establish online professional identity.

- 'Who am I?', how do I present myself as a teacher?
- 'Who is there?', who is watching me when I teach?
- 'Who are we?', what shared identity do my students and I have as a group?
- 'Who is that?', how do I relate to my image online?

The generation and use of a reflective toolkit is described and further avenues for research in this field are highlighted. The toolkit is intended for utilisation particularly by academic developers or teachers themselves to support moving to online teaching and the development of professional identity in this space.

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

Blended and online education has in recent decades emerged from the practice of enthusiasts and innovators to become an increasingly valuable offering for universities. Morris et al. (2020) suggest this is in response to ‘two co-existing, yet increasingly conflicting rationales. These are, as is discussed chapter 2, widening access and increased marketisation. Both rationales are enabled through the increased accessibility and scalability that digital resources and platforms offer. This is highlighted from the outset of this thesis as I argue these rationales present not only a complex, multifaceted tension for universities.

They also present new complexities and challenges to the professional identity of teachers in higher education as online education becomes an increasingly common requirement of them (Coker, 2018). As I will argue throughout this thesis, this results in teachers facing roles, practices, and environments which, although alien and often uncomfortable, are increasingly imposed on them.

The story of this enquiry begins in March 2020 when academics in universities in the UK, concurrent with teachers across all educational levels around the globe, experienced a shift in teaching practice in response to the coronavirus pandemic. This shift, which had been almost inconceivable a matter of weeks before, triggered a widespread and significant move to online education during the remainder of 2020 and beyond. This, in turn, provided a rich opportunity to explore the capacity of university teachers to adapt to online education. Prior to the changes and challenges presented by the pandemic, time constraints, poor technical skills, inadequate infrastructure, and an absence of institutional strategies and support created barriers to online education for teachers, impeding development of practice and research in this area (O’Doherty et al., 2018).

The 'pandemic big bang', as described by Toto and Limone (2021) has resulted in a significant period of experimentation and innovation with blended and online education, during which teachers have been forced to 'describe, explain, and predict their actions'. As Carusi et al. (2020) highlight, the rapid adjustment of teaching and assessment from face-to-face to online formats at this time was unprecedented, yet appeared to set a precedent for what is possible, with some resistance from academics who feared this indicated a new normal in the near future. This period, I argue, created conditions in which it was possible to explore the experiences of transition from face-to-face to online teaching not only of those willing to make the transition but also of those previously resistant to this change. The rapid, essential changes triggered by the pandemic provided unique insights into the experiences and responses of both groups of university teachers and, crucially, how those in academic staff development roles such as my own might better provide support.

### **1.1 Purpose of the Thesis**

The enquiry I present in this thesis is concerned with the lived experiences of university teachers in one higher education institution during the forced transition from face to face to online teaching. The primary purpose of this research is to inform the development of approaches to supporting university teachers through similar transitions in teaching environments. It is this which prompts my research question.

*How do specific concepts or practices utilised by university teachers influence their professional identity when teaching online?*

The question is approached by addressing three objectives. The first is to explore, theoretically, the similarities and differences in university teacher professional identity in face-to-face and online environments. The second is to develop an understanding of an appropriate research design for exploring similar transitions in teaching environments and the impact this has on teachers' professional identity. The third is to develop a contribution to knowledge of this area to aid academic development for university teachers engaging with online education, recognising the importance of, and supporting the development of professional identity.

## **1.2 Structure of the Thesis**

This first, introductory chapter of this thesis is focused on scene setting, positioning the enquiry in the context of my own professional role and development. I discuss my own learning journey and drive for engaging with this study, and the Educational Doctorate more broadly. In the second chapter I articulate the challenge I perceive in the higher education sector through a review of existing literature. I explore the notion of professional identity in higher education teachers and consider the potential impact on this of teaching in an online environment. I then consider the experience of transition and the impact of this on identity, illuminating where in the literature there is discussion of teachers transitioning from face to face to online teaching environments. It is in this chapter that I begin to approach the first of my three objectives. That is, by drawing on established theories of identity formation and more recent thinking on online and digital identity, to propose a working definition of online professional identity for university teachers.



Through Chapter 3, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 I respond to my second objective, presenting the research design I have developed to explore transition in teaching environments and the impact this has on teacher professional identity. In Chapter 3 I discuss how I have positioned identity, and its relation to self-concept and environment. In this, I draw upon theories of self-concept, identity development, and subjectivity, building on discussion of liminality introduced in Chapter 2, to present a theoretic underpinning to my research design. In Chapter 4 I discuss my methodology, constructivist grounded theory. I explore this approach and argue its appropriateness to my study. In Chapter 5 I describe my application of the data gathering and analysis methods used in this study.

Chapter 6 presents my findings. This is structured around my journey through data gathering and analysis. I summarise my journey through coding, categorising, and sampling by which I arrived at four prominent areas of theory grounded in my data. In Chapter 7 I discuss this theory and, through application of the perspective of identity I offer in Chapter 3, critique and develop this theory as four critical points for reflection on teacher professional identity as they develop practice, knowledge and experience as online teachers.

Chapter 8 then goes on to address my third objective, presenting my contribution to knowledge of university teachers engaging with online education which might aid or guide academic development. I present theory discussed and developed in Chapter 7 as a framework of reflective lenses. These are designed to guide university teachers to develop a better understanding of their online professional identity, either independently or through support and development provided by those in roles such as academic developers. 8.4

offers conclusions regarding my overall enquiry. I offer final reflections on my enquiry, suggesting potential improvements or changes. I also reflect upon the contribution provided by this research and highlight opportunities for further enquiry stemming from this thesis.

### **1.3 My Learning Journey**

My journey to the final focus of this thesis was driven by circumstance which I explain in more detail in the following sections. At this point however it is useful to clarify more generally my drive to engage with a professional doctorate. To do this, I draw on three questions that Fulton et al. (2013) suggest may be encountered during the viva to organise and articulate my reasons. I have found these useful in grounding my activities and remaining motivated throughout this study.

#### **1.3.01 Why Study a Professional Doctorate?**

A professional doctorate is an alternative to the more traditional PhD route to undertaking doctoral study where 'some or all of the research is undertaken within a work context and where the candidate is an advanced practitioner' (Boud et al., 2018). Reasons practitioners have given for engaging with a professional doctorate vary but, as Creaton (2021) suggests, studies show a shift in these reasons over the past two decades from personal satisfaction and career progression to a desire to address specific work-based problems and influence organisations. This shift aligns with the characteristics statement for professional doctorates as set by the QAA (Quality Assurance Agency) which states 'successful completion of the degree normally leads to professional and/or organisational change that is often direct rather than achieved through

the implementation of subsequent research findings' (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, 2020).

In my case, my undertaking of the Professional Doctorate was partially driven by, as Creaton (2021) describes personal satisfaction and career development. This has been successful. Through the completion of the study and the thesis, I have demonstrated to myself a capacity for study I previously considered beyond my ability; something of which I am immensely proud. It has also enabled me to progress my career as in the final stages of authoring my thesis and linked to my development and study during the Educational Doctorate, I was appointed to a senior role in my team. It should however be acknowledged that both accomplishments are grounded in my desire and ability, enabled by my study, to address a specific work-based problem.

My job title is Academic Developer. In this role I have, for several years, focused on supporting university teachers to engage with blended and online teaching and learning. This has given me a perspective on the experience of teachers practicing in online spaces which has enabled me to problematise those experiences. In observing and discussing online teaching I have become aware of troublesome shifts in professional identity in this environment and the impact these have on teaching quality and student experience. My desire to address how university teachers develop professional identity online is driven by an authentic desire to address this challenge I perceive in my role.

### 1.3.02 Was the Professional Doctorate what you expected?

The role of the academic developer is focused on supporting the improvement of curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment as well as scholarly activity in

and around this practice in Higher Education (Bath and Smith, 2004). The performance of academic developers has two broad purposes: development of institutional academic practice and of individual academic practice (Lea, 2015). The knowledge and expertise of academic developers exists in the pedagogic common ground between academic disciplines. They engage with complex and varying academic environments, finding shared knowledge and practices across disciplines to study and distribute. They also provide development to academics on the institutionally accepted standards of practice and conceptual underpinnings, and support them to cope with often rapidly changing practices and organisation (Blackwell and Blackmore, 2003; Land, 2004). In doing so, they are both facilitators and regulators of academic practice as they are regularly tasked with interpreting abstract sectoral and government initiatives and challenges, translating these into institutional strategy, and subsequently invoking their application in academic practice. It is at this intersection between institutional agendas and the norms and practices of various academic groups that I operate, both as an academic developer and a postgraduate researcher.

Lee and Boud (2003), discussing academic identity in higher education professionals such as myself, suggest the predominant emphasis of academic development on teaching has resulted in a neglect for research, impacting both the focus of academic development and the research output from this field. While I partially agree with this sentiment, I feel their suggestion that doing a research degree 'often on a part-time basis with many home and work pressures' is somehow insufficient is now outdated. I have found the part-time nature of a professional doctorate to be enabling.

A major concern on commencing the programme was that I would be both challenged by finding time around work to study and would not spend enough time to focus and engage with the study. On the contrary, and a key aspect of the professional doctorate, was that the practice focus of research on my professional role embedded study in my everyday role. My study is authentic to me as an individual and my professional role and ability as a researcher have strengthened in parallel through this experience.

### 1.3.03 How has the Professional Doctorate changed you?

My role encompasses my own complex, and at times tense, professional identity formed around practices of teaching theory and practice of online, remote teaching and work-based learning. It includes research both scholarly in nature and aimed, for example, at the design of institutional policy and strategy. The role also extends to administrative responsibilities ranging from management of colleagues and projects to quality assurance and evaluation of the University's portfolio.

During the first phase of the Educational Doctorate, my assignment focus was led by the needs I perceived within my university. These related predominantly to student employability and vocational education, and my EdD study directly influenced my priorities and practice in the workplace. For example, a paper I prepared regarding work-based learning during this phase formed a basis for a university policy and set of guidelines in this area. Similarly, an initial research proposal for this thesis was focused on supporting individuals with non-academic backgrounds to develop teacher identity. While of significant interest to me, this was developed in discussion with my line manager, and directly supported a strategic priority at the time, which was, to improve academic

development for experienced industry professionals joining the University as teachers. While the focus of the study presented in this thesis pivoted towards understanding transition to online learning, this was also driven by institutional necessity. It reflected a significant contemporary professional challenge for me, supporting teachers to transition to online education, and my early research enabled me to make a significant contribution to how my organisation responded to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Studying the professional doctorate has enabled me to recognise myself not only as a practitioner, but also as a researcher. This has disrupted and reframed my understanding of my role. Within my role specifically, I am focused on online, remote, and work-related pedagogic practices, working closely with academics, primarily new in their role and often from non-academic backgrounds. I work with them to develop their teaching and learning related practice, inducting new colleagues into established institutional practices, modes of working and academic identities. I am however aware this form of institutional orientation does, to an extent, perpetuate the challenges I wish to explore through suggestions of unfamiliar practices and ways of being. This enquiry has forced me to refocus, recognising my own role in creation of the challenges to which I wish to respond. My engagement with a professional doctorate is therefore not only focused on better understanding academics practicing remotely and online, but of academic developers and their role in managing but also creating an increasingly disrupted institutional space.

#### **1.4 Responding to the Unexpected**

As mentioned above, in the initial proposal for this enquiry the focus was on shifts in professional identity for those starting out as new lecturers after

significant careers outside of the Higher Education sector. That is, exploring how those with well-established professional identities transition to an academic identity, and how they might be better supported by those in academic development roles. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the University in which this enquiry is situated presented a significant challenge for my research in that the initial intended focus was no longer viable. My research focus had to shift.

The Covid-19 global pandemic also presented an opportunity for my work in that, it created a set of unique conditions where the idea of transition between professional environments could still be explored using the same research design. While my firm belief was that the pandemic should not become the focus of this thesis, I was able to reorientate my research to explore how moving academic activities online, including teaching, research and projects influences and impacts how academics view themselves, or how they believe they are viewed by others.

My enquiry relates to transition which can happen at any time, and under many circumstances, in a higher education career. By exploring this in the context of the pandemic lockdowns, it was possible to bring to the surface the experiences of those being forced to move their teaching online, rather than doing this through choice. This presented a research environment where experiences would be more critical and potentially negative and allowed for exploration of approaches which helped or supported those resistant to engaging with online teaching.

I have been highly aware of the context in which this transition has taken place for my research interviewees, and the emotional and well-being impact they

have also experienced. I experienced this intensely myself. The pandemic, and more specifically the first UK lockdown, occurred a matter of days before the birth of my second child. It also occurred as my first child was transitioning from nursery to primary school. These were turbulent but pivotal times for my family. Further to this, the nature of my role in the University I work in meant I was very much at the forefront of responding to the clamour to move online. Increased workload at the time contributed to me suspending studies on my doctorate for nine months. Having resumed study, my own and my family's contraction of coronavirus and the significant ongoing health impact from this were central to the decision to a further suspension of study. I do not layout my own coronavirus story for personal cathartic means. Rather, I present it as something that I feel was central to my journey through my research and writing of this thesis. Reflecting on the experience, while as I have stated my firm belief was that the pandemic would not be the focus of this study, the trauma of living through these times inevitably impacted the design and implementation of this research and has informed and shaped this thesis.



## **Chapter 2. Review of Literature and Related Work**

This chapter is focused on establishing, through exploration of existing literature and related work, the landscape of theory, opinion, and experience which my enquiry builds upon. In line with the focus of a professional doctorate suggested by Fulton et al. (2013), this will cover literature relating to practice, professional issues, relevant policy, and academic research to set a baseline of knowledge and illuminate key issues, problems, and gaps. Through this review I will address three objectives aligned with my research question, 'how do specific concepts or practices utilised by university teachers influence their online professional identity?'. These objectives are to:

- offer a definition of professional identity in university teachers.
- map out key influences impacting or limiting university teachers online professional identity.
- describe the transition phase between university teacher roles, environments, and practices and how this impacts professional identity.

The chapter is thus structured in three sections. In the first section I discuss established concepts and knowledge of professional identity in university teachers. I do so first through exploration of relevant literature relating to the broader notion of professional identity. I then focus this on university teachers, considering enquiry into professional identity in the higher education environment.

In the second section I map the current context of online education in which university teachers form academic identity. By considering academic literature, media commentary, government policy and private sector initiatives I will present a landscape of influences, pressures, and tensions university teachers

experience while teaching in the online space. The purpose of this section is to highlight areas where university teachers may experience “limitations of what is acceptable, whether embraced or resisted”, a term drawn from Lumby’s (2009) definition of identity which I will introduce in the first section of this chapter and return to in Chapter 3, underpinning my critical discussion of identity.

The third section considers transition between professional roles, environments, and practices. Literature discussing experiences of transition, phases of liminality, and the impact of this on identity are explored to present a notion of how professional identity dissolution and reformation occurs. The chapter concludes with discussion of the limited literature available which acknowledges a transition in professional identity for teachers as they engage with online education.

Through this review and discussion, I will present a gap I perceive in both the literature and as a result, I argue, in the practice of academic developers such as myself. That is, understanding of the impact of transition on online practices, environments, and roles on the professional identity of university teachers. It is this gap which the enquiry which follows this chapter addresses through response to the question ‘how do specific concepts or practices utilised by university teachers influence their professional identity online?’

## **2.1 Professional Identity in University Teachers**

In this first section I begin to address my first objective in this chapter by exploring existing ideas and perspectives relating to professional, academic and teacher identity. I explore literature discussing professional identity and the university environment, illuminating key notions of what it means to be a university teacher around which those in this role form professional identity.

This informs the following sections of this chapter where I consider how the online educational environment may influence, disrupt or alter these notions of being a university teacher.

(i) Professional Identity

The chapter following this literature review discusses the notion of identity and its development in detail. At this point I draw on a definition of identity I will refer to throughout this thesis to underpin and align my discussion of professional identity.

*'We might understand identity to be the creation of a self-concept, in part self- and in part socially constructed, always in response to the limitations of what is acceptable, whether embraced or resisted.'*

(Lumby, 2009)

Drawing on this working definition, at this point I suggest identity is the image one presents of themselves in a particular context in response to what they perceive to be personally or socially acceptable within that context. Based on this I open this discussion by positioning professional identity as the self-image an individual presents in their context as a professional, in response to the personal and social acceptances of their profession.

Professional identity is, fundamentally, our 'sense of being professional' (Trede et al., 2012). Ibarra (1999), drawing on the work of Schein (1978), describes professional identity as a 'relatively stable and enduring constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences'. This description provides a useful starting point as it offers a basic mapping of the notions and influences

around which we develop our professional identity. However, in her discussion Ibarra (1999) positions professional identity as something to be found or defined, describing it as a personal process of forming one's own professional constellation by experimenting with temporary self-image in a professional context. I argue this suggestion is limiting when exploring how professionals adapt to varying environments. While it may be desirable to find stability and endurance in one's professional identity, this constellation is both personal and social, and subject to the influence or limitations of dynamic professional contexts. It is, as Trede et al. (2012) propose, a 'dynamic and continuous negotiation and renegotiation' with our profession. Rather than stable and enduring, professional identity is perhaps better described as a constantly evolving way of being within a professional constellation of notions and influences.

Viewing professional identity as an evolving way of being also aligns with the proposition from Paterson et al. (2002) that professional identity is how an individual forms a self-image in a professional context which 'permits feelings of personal adequacy and satisfaction'. This suggests a process of adapting rather than defining one's professional identity. This chimes with McNeil et al. (2013) who position professional identity as how members of a profession, often with different personal identities and characteristics, collectively differentiate themselves from other professionals, and emphasise the status, duties, and self-image of a profession. Wackerhausen (2009), exploring this idea of membership of a profession, suggests professional identity is how an individual identifies in the context of their profession, adopting a 'way of speaking, a way of questioning, a way of understanding and explaining, a way of seeing and valuing'.

Based on this idea of professional identity as an evolving way of being professional, and of being a member of, a profession, I suggest the attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences posited by Ibarra (1999) as forming our professional constellation are both personally and socially defined. That is, our constellation is unique to us as individuals, but with many elements formed through a shared constellation through which we identify with others in our profession. This aligns with Lumby's (2009) definition of identity introduced at the beginning of this chapter as 'the creation of a self-concept, in part self- and in part socially constructed'.

Drawing on Schellings et al. (2021) to develop this position, professional identity can be viewed as both a product and process. It is a product as it is our individual representation of our professional self-concept, captured in the moment of being. It is a process as it is under continuous, changing influence of our profession and our professional context. Clarke et al. (2013) capture this notion of professional identity being both product and process, describing it as personal but complex and unstable, shaped by contextual factors. As Wenger (1998) describes, professional identity is as much the 'lived experience of participation' in a professional community as it is an internal sense of being professional. He argues there is a profound connection between identity and practice, that 'practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in context'. This is echoed by Beijaard et al. (2004) who suggest professional identity is formed within social practice, and as such is simultaneously a reflection of self-image and recognition within a social context. As Eraut (2000) posits, knowledge acquisition of who we are as professionals is dependent upon the context in which it occurs and the relations between individuals in this process. This suggests the professional constellation of notions and influences

in which one is constantly evolving their way of being is itself constantly shifting and evolving in response to the dynamic professional landscape of influences around them. In the context of this study, for teachers this dynamic professional landscape is the university, both physical and online.

#### (ii) Academic Identity

In the context of the university environment, professional identity of university teachers holds much in common with a growing area of interest, academic identity. This term is used to describe an identity in practice which encompasses teaching along with other aspects of higher education practice (Churchman, 2006). I position university teacher professional identity as, for many, a significant dimension of their academic identity. This is useful when developing towards a discussion of university teacher professional identity. It provides a broad perspective within the university context of the constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences Ibarra (1999) describe, and the professional practices and notions of professional membership in which these are formed.

The broad range of descriptions and definitions of academic identity illuminate the extent to which it is both difficult to define and in constant flux because of external influences. Adopting a similar position to Ibarra (1999), Locke (2012) suggests academic identity is formed around a homogeneous group of roles and values. However, as with the broader notion of professional identity, this position has been increasingly challenged as it is reframed as a fluid, changing construct which is difficult to grasp (Clegg, 2008; Billot, 2010; King et al., 2014; Billot and King, 2015, 2017). As Churchman (2006) notes, there is no sole academic identity, but instead there exists a complex multiplicity of accounts

and understandings of being part of academe. Clegg (2008) broadens this view, describing academic identity as part of the 'lived complexity of a person's project'. Based on this, it can be argued that while individuals conceptualise themselves as having an identity as an academic, this multiple and shifting term exists alongside other aspects of how people understand their personhood and ways of being in the world. This aligns with the suggestion by Dashper and Fletcher (2019) that for many, being academic is more than just a job, it is a way of life.

These and other similar descriptions suggest that being an academic is an ongoing process of construction and deconstruction as identity is negotiated in various roles (Fitzmaurice, 2013). Variables influencing this negotiation include conditions of contract; the focus on teaching and research, or the balance of the two; and the range of disciplines and fields engaged (Locke, 2012). These roles can be viewed in the context of institutional positions and policy frameworks, but also values, norms, and academic conventions (van Winkel et al., 2018).

Winter (2009) suggests there was 'scant attention' to academic identity in higher education literature prior to the mid-2000's. They suggest the emergence of interest in the topic since this time appears to have been stoked by broader developments in higher education around managerialism and marketisation which have presented challenge to the values, norms, and conventions of being academic. While, as Macfarlane (2016) comments, there has been a tendency in literature discussing these challenges to focus on the 'declining conditions of the academy', discussion illuminates key elements of the constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, and motives forming academic

identity. For example, Harris (2005) highlights academic freedom, autonomy, and purpose as key notions of academic identity. Winter (2009) identifies collegial governance and institutional autonomy as important academic values to be protected. Henkel (2007) discusses rights to self-governance and freedom of inquiry as crucial to academic autonomy. Dashper and Fletcher (2019) provide a concise list of 'academic freedom, collegiality, truth seeking, autonomy, peer review, critical self-evaluation and professional judgement' as key to academic identity. These are significant notions forming the personal and shared professional constellation in which teachers form and evolve their way of being in the university context. They are also notions which are themselves subject to change, shifting and evolving constantly in response to the higher education landscape.

### (iii) University Teacher Professional Identity

As Churchman (2006) observes, teaching is a key role of higher education practitioners with the professional identity for many higher education teachers situated within their broader academic identity. Teacher professional identity is, however, a distinct field of interest as not all academics teach, and not all higher education teachers identify as academics.

Coldron and Smith (1999) suggest the formation of a teacher's professional identity is often 'a matter of being seen as a teacher' by themselves and others, 'acquiring and then redefining an identity that is socially legitimated'. Canrinus et al. (2011) echo this, describing teachers' professional identity as how they see themselves 'based on their interpretations of their continuing interaction with their context', interaction which is apparent in job satisfaction, occupational commitment, self-efficacy, and motivation. It is a construct through which a



teacher defines themselves to themselves and to others, situated in the political and environmental context of their teaching and the career stage of the teacher (Lasky, 2005).

It can be argued that it is the political and environmental context and influences teachers interact with which makes teacher professional identity distinctly complex. Aligning with the wider notion of professional identity developed earlier in this chapter, teacher identity is a dynamic notion of self with many internal and external influences (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009). Where this is complex is in their relationship with knowledge. Teacher professional identity is an 'ongoing process whereby a teacher seeks to integrate a range of diverse knowledge and experience into a coherent image of self' (Clarke et al., 2017). Much of the legitimacy of the teacher is their diverse knowledge and experience, as well as the attributes, beliefs, and values this informs. Beijaard et al. (2004) position the knowledge, beliefs, and values of teachers as well as their working norms as belonging 'in the landscape' of the profession. They emphasise the importance of what 'surrounds a person' in terms of the expectations of others, and what external factors an individual allows to impact them.

#### (iv) A Definition of University Teacher Professional Identity

In conclusion to this section, I return to the objective I set out to address in the introduction to this chapter. I offer a definition of professional identity in university teachers to underpin the development of a more specific definition within the context of online education. For the purposes of this study, at this point I define university teacher professional identity as a constantly evolving way of being, and of being seen as, a teacher within a constellation of

attributes, beliefs, values, and motives, integrating a range of diverse knowledge and experience into a coherent image of self.

It is through this professional identity a university teacher feels seen by themselves and others as legitimate in the university context. Notions of academic freedom, collegiality, truth seeking, autonomy, peer review, critical self-evaluation and professional judgement highlighted by Dashper and Fletcher (2019) capture a concise mapping of the professional constellation of teachers in the university context. In the second section of this chapter, I explore how the online education environment may conflict with these notions, challenging university teacher legitimacy and disrupting their professional identity.

## **2.2 Online Education**

In considering the higher education landscape in the context of online education in this section, I ask the question of existing literature, what influences or impacts the 'constellation' of a university teachers' professional identity when they are engaged in online education? In doing so I consider how this 'constellation' differs or conflicts with the established, face to face notions of university teacher professional identity discussed in the previous section. To do this I focus the broad discussion of online education and educational technology available in the literature on the academic values and beliefs suggested by Dashper and Fletcher (2019) as well as the challenge Coldron and Smith (1999) highlight of being 'seen' as a legitimate teacher.

### **(i) What is Online Education?**

As Ally (2008) highlighted at the time, online education, or online learning, is a term which has been difficult to define since its emergence. This is due to its

interchangeable use with terms such as eLearning, distributed learning, virtual learning, web-based learning, and distance learning. Ally (2008) suggests the terms to which he refers imply education at a distance, in contrast to education in traditional settings. Sangrà et al. (2012) acknowledge this but posit that while discourse around the adoption of technologies for education may result in online learning being seen as a 'natural evolution' and 'new generation' of distance education, recent developments in online education are not limited to this. Attempting to move on from definitions of online education which suggest a progression of distance learning presents challenges. For example, it is widely argued a significant benefit of online education is the flexibility of time and place to learn it enables (Ruey, 2010). As Toufaily et al. (2018) highlight, 'convenience and flexibility' are key reasons students decide to study online. This focus in the literature on benefits to students, rather than pedagogic potential, embeds the notion of online learning's value being its capacity for education delivered outside of perceived constraints of the university campus. I suggest that this has the potential to generate a perception not only that online learning represents learning at a distance, but that teachers are also situated outside of the traditional university settings.

In recent years, online technology has become ubiquitous in the university environment. This has created conditions where descriptions of online education such as from Swerdloff (2016) are more appropriate, describing online education as 'facilitating learning in and out of the traditional classroom setting'. As Kumar Basak et al. (2018) highlight, rather than viewing online learning in contrast to traditional learning, increasingly we can view it as complimentary. For example, terms such as 'blended' and 'hybrid' are increasingly used to describe online learning activities. Blended learning is

described by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) as a 'fusion of face-to-face and online learning', while hybrid learning is described by the University of Edinburgh's Institute for Academic Development (2021) as comparative, concurrent learning facilitated in face to face and online learning environments. Similarly, 'virtual' is a term often used to describe the online educational space and is increasingly embedded in university culture. These terms are not without similar challenges to those facing the broader lexicon surrounding online learning. Dziuban et al. (2018) highlight that while these terms are becoming commonplace in current teaching, they are also broad and ambiguous. They are extensively used interchangeably and are subject to institutional context (Smith and Hill, 2019; Saichaie, 2020).

With such a range of terminology used interchangeably and with little consensus on definitions, it is important within a study to clearly define what is meant by 'online education' (Batdi et al., 2021). Singh and Thurman (2019) offer a useful starting point, a definition based on an extensive review of online education literature over the past three decades. They define online education as being education 'delivered in an online environment through the use of the internet' which is not dependent on students located in the same physical or virtual location, but where learning is enhanced through interactivity in synchronous or asynchronous environments'.

Based on the above, I define online education as discrete synchronous or asynchronous teaching and learning experiences and activities delivered and interacted with in an online environment. While the students broader learning experience may be partially dependent on a physical learning space, online learning implies a distinct session or series of sessions where teaching content

is delivered online, and the instructors develop teaching modules that enable learning and interactivity in the online environment.

#### (ii) Shifts in Roles for Online Teachers

As online education has become an increasingly common aspect of a university teacher's role, it is argued by Coker (2018) that research has tended to focus on understanding the student learning experience. Less attention has been paid to the role of the university teacher. While much has been explored regarding the practice of online teachers and the impact of this practice on students, little literature is offered relating to the professional identity of the teacher in this space. This is problematic in that, as El-Soussi (2022) argues, many experienced teachers find themselves as novices when they move to teach online, significantly impacting their self-confidence and self-concept.

Anderson and Rivera-Vargas (2020) suggest the role of the online teacher has progressed significantly from facilitating early models of distance learning focused on independent study and instructivist pedagogies to creating and sustaining asynchronous learning communities. Earlier definitions such as that offered by Carliner (2004) present online learning as being 'learning and other supportive resources that are available through a computer'. Such definitions put forward at the time, imply a learning relationship between the student and the resources presented to them on the computer, where 'the computer prompts the learner for more information, and presents appropriate materials based on this' (Carliner, 2004).

In more recent discussion of online learning, a shift is evident towards more social and constructivist modes of teaching. For example, Ruey (2010) suggests development and increased availability of the internet and associated

technologies allow for 'collaborative, interactive, constructivist online learning'. Similarly, in a review of online learning practice, Janse van Rensburg (2018) highlights the importance of student participation and collaboration with a key role of the teacher being to facilitate safe, connected spaces for students to interact with the teacher and other students. This shift in the role of the teacher and in the focus of online education was predicted by, for example, Hiltz and Turoff (2005) who anticipated a shift to online and hybrid courses using digital technologies to support constructivist, collaborative, student-centred pedagogy.

The literature highlights that in parallel with these changes, there has been increased recognition of the need for support for academic staff moving into online learning roles, by way of both training and support. As Kane and Dahlvig (2022) highlight, considerable time is required by university teachers to transition material and teaching methods into the online space. In addition, there is a need to engage with wider issues of institutional understanding and support of online programmes as being points of concern for teachers. They link this with teacher concerns over quality of learning outcomes for students which align with their value as a teacher. Interestingly, many participants in the study by Kane and Dahlvig (2022) viewed online education as a viable mode of delivery with potential to deliver quality learning outcomes. Their concerns were that the management and administration of their university did not fully understand or did not communicate the value of online education, resulting in a view of it as being used to drive the efficiency of teachers rather than quality of outcomes for students.

Paradoxically, where universities have introduced support, this has been highlighted as a potential troublesome shift for the teachers. The role of

learning or educational technologist<sup>1</sup> is one example of a support role which, while beneficial, has the potential to become problematic. Albeit an emergent role for several decades, it was not until the mid-2000s that the roles of learning technologists and their value to universities became prominent in line with the development of 'Web 2.0' technologies<sup>2</sup> (Shurville et al., 2009). Around this time a range of literature highlighting the emergence of this role developed. In this the presence of learning technologists was viewed as a positive development (Nieveen, 2007; Czerniewicz, 2008; Armellini and Aiyegbayo, 2010; Kidd and Keengwe, 2010).

This development can be viewed as problematic in that the increased involvement of technologists in designing learning can have an impact on the identity of the university teacher. Where, for example, this is perceived as a reduction in their control over the subject content and its quality this can cause tensions as ownership and responsibility for study are contested. These tensions can have a particularly powerful impact on the traditional notions of academic freedom, autonomy, and purpose which authors such as Harris (2005) have identified as central signifiers of academic identity. Hanson (2009) views the introduction of learning technologists as reducing the role of the academic to 'knowledge worker', as intellectual capital is packaged as 'eLearning', and academic control is relinquished to the technologist who has

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<sup>1</sup> Learning technologists are people who are actively involved in managing, researching, supporting or enabling learning with the use of learning technology.

<sup>2</sup> Web 2.0 is a term emerging between 1999 and 2004 used to describe the introduction of functionality enabling participatory and social activity, and the shift in the role of the internet user from content consumer to content producer.

power over the content, fundamentally detaching the academic from the presentation of their knowledge.

A further significant challenge to teacher identity presented by educational technology has been visible at the macro level where universities have engaged with educational technology companies. Although accelerated by the onset of the pandemic, this engagement was already firmly in place by 2020. Hassan (2017) highlights it as part of a cultural shift in which marketisation and globalisation compelled universities to engage with digital technologies. In terms of teaching and learning, Morris et al. (2020) suggest 'two co-existing, yet increasingly conflicting' external pressures driving development of online education provision by universities. The first of these drivers is allowing mass access to education, 'pushing the priorities towards the public'. Morris et al. (2020) characterise this through the rise of the Open Education Resource movement and the investment by many universities in Massive Open Online Course's, or MOOCs. The second driver suggested aligns with the position of Hassan set out above. This is 'marketisation, which they describe as 'drawing the sector closer to the interest of the free market'.

As Selwyn et al. (2020) highlight, this allows for a great deal of soft power to be held by many educational technology, or 'ed-tech' companies over higher education. It is in relation to the impact of this on the autonomy and freedom of university teachers that the rapid rise of ed-tech which is of particular significance to the focus of this thesis. Eraut (2000) describes the notion of 'distributed cognition', where the experience of working with computer software is heavily dependent on those who designed the software. Based on this, it can be argued that in the higher education context, much of the image and



presentation of universities, university teachers, their curriculum and learning activities is set by their virtual learning environment and virtual classroom provider. This came into sharp focus during the pandemic and can be viewed as having had a significant impact on how online teachers might view themselves.

The impact of ed-tech companies can also be seen in the gathering and processing of user data by digital technologies, and its influence on the experience of being both student and teacher. Selwyn (2015) highlights the use of educational technologies for data collection and tracking to prompt learner interventions and guide academic practices. As Land (2006) argues, the technology which underpins online education renders academic practice more visible and calculable, implicating these technologies in a move towards academic performativity, resulting in a need for academics to find new identities and roles. Hope (2010) describes this activity as coercive, suggesting the use of educational technology such as learner analytics, internet tracking and plagiarism detection software can be seen as more exercising control through surveillance than advancing students learning. Skerritt (2020), commenting on secondary education, addresses this area through the lens of teacher coercion and control, driving the business-like accountability and evaluation Land (2006) alludes to.

### (iii) Criticism of Related Literature

An example of challenge to the values of university teachers can be found in the literature surrounding the proposed and promoted practice of online teachers. Located in the wider academic identity of university teachers' professional identity are key values and attributes of scholarly activity, criticality,

and peer review. Publication in the field of online education and educational technology is suggested by several authors to be lacking in these values. A decade ago Selwyn (2011), a key voice in the field, called for a more 'purposefully pessimistic' approach to the adoption of technology in education due to his observation of a failure in this field to engage with critical perspectives. However, as I will argue below, this is still evident and creates a problematic field of practice, enquiry, and scholarly activity for university teachers to engage with. This is because in engaging with literature to inform their emergent teacher identity they are faced with a subtle move towards acceptance of enthusiasts, rather than critical self-reflection and evaluation of practice.

An example of this relates to the literature surrounding blended learning. Blended learning is an increasingly popular term in higher education, and as a result one with a broad and complex range of interpretations. As defined earlier in this chapter, drawing on Garrison and Vaughan (2008), it is a 'fusion of face-to-face and online learning', blending face-to-face, real-time learning and the use of online teaching practices. It is, I would suggest from my experience as an academic developer, the mode of teaching where there has been most interaction with online education practice by university teachers.

There is a plethora of models and styles of blended learning, with generalisations becoming problematic as digital technologies become increasingly ubiquitous in the educational environment. Howard (2020) observes that much of the literature surrounding blended learning concentrates on the student experience, engagement, and empowerment. This reflects the notion of many blended and online approaches, such as the flipped classroom,

emphasising student-centred learning and a shift in role for the teacher to that of a facilitator of learning (Jones-Bonofiglio et al., 2018; Engelbertink et al., 2021).

While the notion of student-centred learning is pedagogically sound, it is often the positioning of blended learning, or a new model of this, as the key enabler for this which is problematic. Hazelkorn and Locke (2021) use the stimulus of the pandemic to call for an 'urgent need to move beyond' what they describe as existing 'dead' models of blended learning to the model they favour, 'hybrid' learning, which they describe as a 'superior' form of study which 'can offer new forms of learning'. Similarly Sellnow-Richmond et al. (2020) claim a similar position of superiority, stating 'the time is ripe to position ourselves as leaders determining best practices for achieving desired learning outcomes in courses delivered in hybrid and online formats'. The absolutist language of the authors in these examples does not take the 'purposefully pessimistic' position Selwyn (2011) called for a decade before. It pressurises teachers to adopt educational technology and engage with modes of teaching without professional judgement or critical reflection. Rather, it echoes the observation by Selwyn (2011) of those promoting practice taking an often evangelical stance towards technology, suggesting an inherent potential for positive change, with those presenting negative analysis often branded 'luddites' and 'technophobes'. For university teachers exploring online teaching for the first time this is not just unhelpful, but I would suggest off-putting. If we consider the importance to university teacher professional identity of being seen as a socially legitimate teacher, but in exploring how to do so teachers encounter perspectives which are in direct conflict with their professional values, this becomes a barrier and point for resistance.

In conclusion to this section, I ask the question what message the literature provides those new to teaching online? The field of online education is relatively new, emerging during recent decades in line with the technologies it utilises. As a result, the literature is still in conflict and as a result may be a confusing source of values and experiences of those already teaching online.

### **2.3 Transition & Liminality**

In the concluding section of this chapter, I address my third objective. I describe the transition phase between university teacher roles, environments, and practices and how this impacts professional identity. By doing so I will position the definition of teacher professional identity in the transition to the online teaching environment. I will, through use of existing literature, suggest where this transition may become problematic and propose how this may be addressed.

#### **(i) A Constellation of Challenge and Limitation**

Returning to Ibarra (1999), as I have proposed earlier in this chapter, while it may be desirable to find stability and endurance in ones 'constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences', this constellation is subject to the influence or limitations of dynamic professional contexts. I have offered an overview of where I perceived these influences or limitations occurring for university teachers in the context of online education. Slay and Smith (2011) highlight contemporary careers are characterized by 'shifting boundaries' in occupational, organizational, national, and global work arrangements. As these boundaries shift, and one's working context shifts, their professional identity 'constellation' is subject to both challenge and change. In this research, the shift which occurs as the boundaries of their teaching role

and practice change from the physical teaching environment to the online teaching environment.

Hanson (2009) provides a case study highlighting the shift in power when teaching online, citing Conceição (2006) assertion that when teaching online academics must 'reconsider the meaning of being an expert', breaching the academic 'cocoon'. They describe this displacement of identity, their narrative of themselves and their achievements, as a 'jolt to their 'trajectory of self'. This challenge or displacement can arise from several areas including face-to-face instruction, situated by the cultural spaces in which university teachers' act. The cultural values and beliefs of professional communities and the informing epistemologies are enacted through the interactions between participants as they engage in, and through, online spaces (Coker, 2018).

As Saltmarsh and Sutherland-Smith (2010) suggest, the practice of teaching represents an integral dimension of a teachers personal and professional self which changes during an online mode of delivery, and the pedagogic practices and relationships this entails, present a challenge to how teachers conceptualise, experience, and produce themselves professionally. O' Shea et al. (2015) posit this creates deeper issues regarding 'teacher beliefs, values and practices which may become disrupted' when teaching online, suggesting many of the challenges stem from comparisons made between online modes and face-to-face classes.

#### (ii) Liminality, Troublesome Knowledge & Identity

For the purpose of this discussion, I position the experience of shifting boundaries from face to face to online teaching within what Ybema et al. (2011) describe as liminality. That is, an experience of being on the threshold of two

different identity positions, but where one is neither one identity or another and where one's internal sense of self is disrupted meaning one must reconstruct their understanding of self (Ybema et al., 2011). During this phase of liminality individuals may experience awkward, unexpected, and powerful transformation (Felten, 2016). Framing the transition of an individual as a liminal state is useful when, as Wood et al. (2016) suggest, we look to move beyond the narrative of transition to that of analysis of the state of the 'in between'. To be liminal is to 'work on one's identity, as this very experience throws an individual's "sense of self or place" within their social environment into disarray' (Brown et al., 2022). Viewing the shift in professional identity as a phase of liminality creates a space which recognises this disruption and disarray.

The idea of liminality is central to the notion of threshold concepts, suggested by Meyer and Land (2003). Threshold concepts impact how we think about or experience phenomena in cognitive, affective, psychomotor, social, ethical, and moral domains (Timmermans and Meyer, 2019). That is, they have a powerful influence on a learner's subsequent learning with potentially transformative impact on understanding (Entwistle, 2008). Liminality is described in the literature around threshold concepts as a state of being in-between, described as a 'stuck place' where 'uncomfortable shifts in identity' are experienced (Meyer et al., 2010). In this state, Land (2011) suggests we encounter 'troublesome knowledge', knowledge which is 'conceptually difficult, alien, inert, tacit or ritual', but which provokes the liminal phase of transition, prompting new understanding and relinquishing of prior conceptions. In terms of university teachers transitioning to online education, the outline of influences on professional identity present in the context of online education I have offered earlier in this chapter may well be conceptualised as 'troublesome'.

Little research has been conducted into the threshold concepts experienced by online university teachers (Northcote et al., 2020). In the limited research available, Kilgour et al. (2018) do identify 12 threshold concepts in categories relating to preparation and learning design, online presence, and interaction. The categorisation and wording of these threshold concepts suggests a focus on the actions and activity of the teacher, for example 'online presence requires interactive elements'. Northcote et al. (2020) draw together threshold concepts suggested in the limited prior literature available, categorised under use of technology, humanisation, and pedagogical thresholds. These threshold concepts use wording which takes a broader perspective on the learning experience of the student, for example 'teaching can be seen as a public act'. Northcote et al. (2020) also suggest a further set of threshold concepts relating to teaching, learning, organisation, and communication, with concepts themselves indicating a focus on course management, for example 'expectations of students and teachers should be clear'. The categories the threshold concepts in these studies are clustered under shows differing perspectives on the role of the teacher in the online environment. What is common across the literature available is those fundamental aspects of the role and experience of the teacher changes.

Irvine and Carmichael (2009) suggest threshold concepts have a dual use. Primarily they are used to conceptualise a form of portal from periphery-to-core knowledge of a discipline. They also offer a distinctive way of 'participating' in a discipline, stimulating reflection ('what is it we do?') and encouraging a self-conscious consideration of disciplinary distinctiveness ('how might others see us?'). Considering online education as a new, troublesome discipline for university teachers, it is the second of these uses which is of

particular interest in this study. Reflection by a teacher on what they do and how they are seen is central to the move of the individual from a space of the pre-transition construct of university teacher professional identity, to a space occupied by their construct of university teacher identity in a new professional space. Supporting teachers through this transition through prompting dissolution, questioning, and reformation of professional identity is a critical role of academic developers such as myself.

### (iii) Supporting Teacher Transition Through Reflection

Critical reflection forms a key component of academic development. The development of university teachers as reflective practitioners is widely acknowledged as a core practice beneficial to academic staff (Nerantzi and Chatzidamianos, 2018). It can be viewed as a way of 'infusing personal beliefs and values into a professional identity', moving a teachers' practice beyond the judgments, interpretations, assumptions, and expectations they form, unchecked, in the moment of teaching, to something aligned more broadly with their values, beliefs and the norms of their profession (Larrivee, 2000).

Moon (2013) argues reflection is a form of mental processing where a teacher can take complex or ill-structured ideas or notions, for which there is not an obvious solution, and make sense of this based on knowledge and understanding that they already possess. In academic development reflection is applied to the development of new and experienced teachers, supporting them to make sense of themselves as teachers within the context of their own school, discipline and professional background. Several theoretic models or frameworks guiding reflection exist and are commonly used in academic development. For example, the framework of 'What? So What? Now What?'



popularised by Borton (1970) provides a simple but effective approach to reflection, guiding teachers to identify meaningful experiences, analyse the significance of these, and plan future action as a result. Gibbs (1988) reflective cycle models a more in-depth reflection on teacher experience, with more focus on a staged process of critical analysis of an experience or incident. Gibbs cycle, in my experience, is useful particularly during initial professional development of university teachers as it offers a clearly structured process for moving beyond the basic description of a situation or incident. The cycle prompts a teacher to create a balanced evaluation of an experience and based on this plan required change or development of practice.

Gibbs (1988) and Borton (1970) propose cyclical, process focused frameworks for reflection which serve as useful prompts to acknowledge stages of an individual's own analysis of an experience to enter more critical reflection. Complementary reflective frameworks which place emphasis on varying perspectives of a situation are also used in university teacher development, for example Brookfield's (1995) four critical lenses. Using Brookfield's (1995) framework a teacher can move on to a deeper critical reflection on an incident surfaced through a cycle such as Gibbs (1988). Brookfield (1995) prompts the teacher to consider their reflective analysis from four perspectives, or through four 'lenses'.

- Autobiographical, informed by one's own opinions, experience, and history.
- Students, considering their experiences, opinions, and feelings.
- Colleagues, considering their observations, experience, and advice.

- Theoretic, considering findings in existing theory, literature and experience disseminated by others.

By applying frameworks such as these to reflection teachers are guided through a more focused critical reflection on their practice, but also their identity. It not only allows critique of what they do, but how they are seen, by themselves and in the eyes of others, creating a sense of cohesion and legitimacy as a teacher.

(iv) Troublesome Knowledge in Online University Teacher Development Recognition of the shift in identity for teachers moving to online education, and the need to support these transitions, has been recognised for some time in a limited number of previous studies. For example, Mcshane (2006) addresses teacher identity transformation when teaching online, highlighting the fundamental shifts in the values and practices on academics and the impact this has on their professional identity. The transition from face to face to online learning is however still an area of fledgling interest in the literature, with a current spike in interest resulting from the impact on Higher Education of the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, El-Soussi (2022) explores the instability in academic professional identity caused by the move to online teaching during the pandemic. A study by Cain et al. (2022) presents a clear theme emergent of academics teaching online asking the question 'who am I as a teacher?' More research is needed to offer a better understanding of how the move from face-to-face to online teaching has impacted teachers' professional identity. My justification and drive to engage with this area of enquiry aligns with the argument of El-Soussi (2022) that beyond providing technical and pedagogic training for lecturers teaching online, there is a need for universities to provide

appropriate support to teachers in professional identity development due to its significant impact on their pedagogic choices, self-confidence, and performance.

Kilgour et al. (2018) position the threshold concepts for online teaching they propose as informing professional development for novice online teachers to guide them through the 'stuckness' of the liminal phase in their transformation to an online teacher. This aligns with the notion of threshold concepts guiding periphery-to-core knowledge of a discipline. It is, however, Irvine and Carmichael's (2009) idea of threshold concepts presenting distinctive ways of 'participating' and stimulating reflection on 'what is it we do?' and 'how might others see us?' which is useful when considering transition in professional identity.

While the identification of threshold concepts is not the intention of this enquiry, the notion of threshold concepts becomes particularly useful due to the effect of threshold concepts described by Land and Meyer (2006) on transformation of identity and shifts in personal values, feelings, or attitude. During the liminal phase of transformation resulting from threshold concepts learners are said to go through "an uncomfortable shift in identity" and "a sense of loss" (Meyer et al., 2010). The notion of 'liminality' has the potential to provide strong analytical purchase for understanding the more intricate dimensions of social actors' identity work in transient and unsettled organisational contexts (Ybema et al., 2011).

## **2.4 Chapter Conclusion**

In conclusion, in this chapter I have explored literature and related work that informs and reflects the landscape of theory, opinion, and experience which my

enquiry builds upon. Through this review I have addressed three objectives aligned with my research question, 'how do specific concepts or practices utilised by university teachers influence their online professional identity?'. I have offered a definition of professional identity in university teachers which underpins my discussion in this chapter and informs critique in the next. That is, a constantly evolving way of being, and of being seen as, a teacher within a constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, and motives, integrating a range of diverse knowledge and experience into a coherent image of self. I suggest it is through this professional identity a university teacher feels seen by themselves and others as legitimate in the university context. With this definition in mind, I have explored key influences impacting or limiting university teachers and have considered how this may affect their professional identity. Finally, I have discussed existing notions of the transition phase between university teacher roles, environments, and practices and how this impacts professional identity. I have focused the notion of transition I have adopted in this research on a phase of liminality, a 'stuckness' encountered during experiences of change in our identity. I suggest this might be address by stimulating reflection and encouraging a self-conscious consideration of a teacher's distinctiveness as a professional.

Through this review and discussion, I have also presented a gap I perceive in the literature regarding the impact of transition to online practices, environments, and roles on the professional identity of university teachers. Research in this area is sparse and fledgling, but I suggest is key to academic development in the current context of higher education. It is this gap which the enquiry which follows this chapter addresses through response to the question

'how do specific concepts or practices utilised by university teachers influence their professional identity online?'

### **Chapter 3. Theoretical Discussion of Identity**

So far, I have, through my introductory remarks and literature review, set out to establish the context of this enquiry. I have discussed my motives as an individual for engaging with this research, and the environment and time in which the enquiry has taken place. I have illuminated key issues, problems, and challenges to my field of enquiry and the gap in knowledge I have set out to address. In this chapter I begin to explain my research process.

The nuances of the components and presentation of a clearly articulated research process have many variations. I draw on the work of Crotty (1998) to structure my research design. Crotty's suggestion is of four elements of a research process that need to be understood, then articulated and justified before embarking on a research journey. These are the methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology. Licqurish and Seibold (2011) offer the following concise definitions of the four elements.

- 'Methods' are the procedures used to gather and analyse data.
- 'Methodology' is the overall strategy or research process.
- 'Theoretical perspective' is the philosophical stance informing the methodology.
- 'Epistemology' is the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective.

Crotty (1998) advises caution when presenting a research design, observing many are 'thrown together in grab-bag style' with these key elements treated as comparable, interchangeable terms. While not presented as a definitive construction of the social research process, rather a suggested framework,

Crotty's' breakdown is useful when articulating and justifying one's approach to research clearly, both for the author and reader. He remarks:

*'Research students and fledgling researchers - and, yes, even more seasoned campaigners-often express bewilderment at the array of methodologies and methods laid out before their gaze. These methodologies and methods are not usually laid out in a highly organised fashion and may appear more as a maze than as pathways to orderly research. There is much talk of their philosophical underpinnings, but how the methodologies and methods relate to more theoretical elements is often left unclear.'* (Crotty, 1998)

This chapter is focused on defining my theoretical and epistemological position relating to identity, and how this has influenced my research design and analytic process. My theoretic position takes significant influence from Lacanianism which, as I will discuss later in this chapter, suggests we do not develop a stable, self-determined identity, but rather engage with a perpetually shifting process of identification within a world we are subjected to. This position acknowledges the differing and shifting contexts of participants in this enquiry and focuses on their attempts to define themselves as teachers in their unique circumstances.

To underpin my development of this position, and alignment with my methodology and the literature review, in the first and second sections of this chapter I present a discussion of the notions of identity, self, and self-concept critically explored in the development of my theoretical perspective. Developing my positioning of these notions, in the third section I discuss interpretive,

'processual' symbolic interactionism and how this theoretic position has influenced my enquiry by orientating my analytic gaze towards behavioural patterns and independent actions of participants in their own context, as described by Carter and Fuller (2016). Framing this, in the fourth section I discuss my exploration of constructivist and postmodern notions of identity. I critically evaluate both the merits and challenges of adopting these epistemological positions in relation to enquiry into identity, highlighting how they have influenced my developing understanding of identity but also where I perceive their limitations.

In the fifth section I argue my adoption of a Lacanian theoretic view of identity as more suitable to my enquiry than the constructivist or postmodern. I introduce key concepts orientating how I have theoretically conceptualised identity in this enquiry and discuss how this has influenced my epistemological position in relation to my research design. In the sixth section of the chapter, I realign my notion of identity with my enquiry. I explore my integration of Lacanianism within my theoretic and epistemological position, explore the strengths and challenges of doing so in this enquiry, draw parallels with key findings of my literature review in chapter 2, and begin to align this with my methodology which I articulate in chapter 4.

### **3.1 Locating Identity in my Enquiry**

In my discussion of professional identity in Chapter 2, I have positioned identity as a complex and crucial dimension underpinning this enquiry. As one may expect for a concept so inextricably linked to us as individuals, the mapping and unpacking of this concept is something widely discussed and debated, for example, by psychologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and neurologists.



Even within the broadly sociological area in which I locate my own research we find a 'dazzling variety and diversity in terminology and foci' (Bamberg et al., 2011). Notwithstanding the acceptance that the concept of identity is addressed and contested across a large, complex body of literature, Lumby (2009) offers a working definition which makes for a useful starting point.

*We might understand identity to be the creation of a self-concept, in part self- and in part socially constructed, always in response to the limitations of what is acceptable, whether embraced or resisted, as 'an interlocking personal and social project under particular discursive conditions of possibility.'*

(Lumby, 2009)

To position my research, I will briefly unpack this definition to identify key elements of use in the following discussion. Lumby suggests identity is a creation of self-concept. That is, 'the concept the individual has of himself as a physical, social, and spiritual or moral being' (Gecas, 1982). Identity might therefore be viewed as how we understand ourselves in relation to those domains. However, Lumby's definition suggests this is more complex as one's self-concept is both individually and socially constructed. Moreover, both constructs are responses to external limitations explored in the previous chapter such as, in the case of this study, the professional roles, responsibilities, practice and environment within which university teachers exist. This suggests a tension, as whether we embrace or resist those limitations of what is personally or socially acceptable, they remain present and influence how we develop self-concept. Therefore, to an extent, our identity is beyond our control. It is an ongoing negotiation with perceived limitations to development of

a self-concept. To explore this in more detail, in the following section I begin by discussing self-concept and its relation to identity, before going on to consider how we develop identity in context. Based on this, I then discuss the problematic nature of context when looking at identity in dynamic situations.

### **3.2 Self and Self-Concept**

I begin this discussion by addressing the terms 'self' and 'self-concept' as they are notions forming a key mapping in which identity is nested (Owens et al., 2010). As Baumeister (1997) highlights, 'people use the word 'self', especially with its many prefixes and suffixes, dozens of times each day, and yet it is difficult to pause and say what is meant by 'self''. A key theorist in this area, Mead (1972), suggests self is something not initially within us but which develops in us based on processes of social experience and activity. Mead asserts that self is a phenomenon of the human mind born out of reflexive action (Owens et al., 2010). Oyserman et al. (2012) suggest 'self' is how we refer to a 'warm sense or warm feeling that something is 'about me' or 'about us''. They suggest this awareness is a construct of three key aspects; being an actor with the ability to think, being aware of this thinking and being able to take oneself as an object to think about. This awareness of self is encapsulated in Descartes famous assertion 'cogito, ergo sum', or 'I think, therefore I am'.

Self-concept is our internal organisation of these thoughts of self. It differs from identity in that it is contained in the person's own mind, whereas identity is external, negotiated with societal and contextual influences (Baumeister, 1997). Identity focuses on the meanings comprising the self as an object, gives structure and context to self-concept, and anchors the self to social systems (Gecas, 1982). Consciously and unconsciously, identities are constructed to

ensure that the response we elicit from others validates our self-concept (Stets and Harrod, 2004).

Self-concept is described by Stets and Burke (2005) as the content and structure of the sum of our thoughts, feelings, and imaginations as to who we are, developed over time as we point out who we are to ourselves and to others. It is a theory that a person holds about themselves as an experiencing, functioning being in interaction with the world, capturing and organising their reflexive, social, and symbolic evaluation of their internal structure of various identities and attributes in this context (Gecas, 1982). Markus and Wurf (1987) link self-concept with how we regulate our behaviours in varying situations, highlighting it as active, multidimensional, and multifaceted. They discuss the problematic nature of this for theorists, highlighting that while discussion has moved on from viewing self-concept as an 'apparently singular, static, lump-like entity', there was still at their time of writing a tendency to focus on rigid, structural approaches to understanding this.

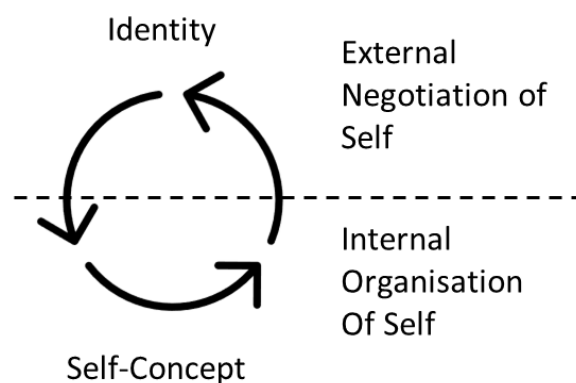


Figure 1 - Schema of relationship between Identity and Self-Concept

The relationship between identity and self-concept is important in my research. It is at this intersection where I perceive university teachers attempt to make sense of themselves in relation to the unfamiliar concepts and practices they

encounter in the online educational environment. Figure 1 - Schema of relationship between Identity and Self-Concept offers the beginning of an analytic schema to guide analysis of this relationship in this enquiry. I will return to and develop this throughout this chapter to locate my enquiry within the theoretic mapping I will explore and unpack.

### **3.3 Identity & Symbolic Interactionism**

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century several theories of how we develop our identity have been proposed. Theorists have linked personality development and role confusion with identity (Erikson, 1968), suggested identity development occurs through our exploration and commitment to ideologies and occupations (Marcia, 1966), and have explored the connection between our identity and social capital (Côté, 1996). These concepts of how we construct identity tend to focus on the individual operating within a social environment and developing to address this, rather than in response to or influenced by it. While these theories do not dismiss the importance of the social realm in identity development, my own desire to explore the notion of identity as essentially a negotiation between context and self-concept requires more focus on this interplay than they offer. This aligns more with social identity theory in which Tajfel and Turner (1979), key theorists in this field, define identity as a person's sense of who they are based on their group membership. Sluss and Ashforth (2007) also highlight the individual's or group's perception of its association with another individual or group as key to construction of identity.

Stryker and Burke (2000) suggest the emergence of two different, but strongly related and complimentary strands of identity theory. One of these focuses on the link between identity and social structures while the other focuses on the

process of self-verification. They highlight three distinct uses of the term 'identity' which straddle the theoretic strands they suggest. These refer to:

- The culture of people, for example ethnic, religious, or national identities.
- Individual identification with a collective or social category.
- Parts of a self 'composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies'.

(Stryker and Burke, 2000)

Stryker and Burke (2000) suggest the two strands of identity theory they discuss are theoretically linked to symbolic interactionism. Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective in sociology that addresses the way society is created and maintained through face-to-face, repeated, meaningful interactions among individuals (Carter and Fuller, 2016). For Gecas (1982) symbolic interactionism plays a vital role in addressing how we interpret the relationship between our self-concept and the world around us through our identity. There is a coherence here as symbolic interactionism is said to have its roots in the work of Mead (1972) regarding the varying theories of self-concept and identity I have mentioned above (Stryker and Burke, 2000). There is also an alignment with my methodology as symbolic interactionism is key to constructivist grounded theory. I return to the methodological merits of symbolic interactionism in the following chapter.

Returning to the definition offered by Lumby (2009), in terms of our 'interlocking personal and social project' identity can be argued to be a product of symbolic interactionism as we participate within groups or communities. Wenger (1998) refers to this as our 'identity in practice'. Wenger's argument focuses on our

identity having a direct relationship with our practice and the community with which this practice is shared. This is important to consider within my enquiry as Wenger argues that, developing the notion of symbolic interactionism outlined above, when considering identity in social spaces it is important not to think of the identity of an individual or the community they exist within as a dichotomy. While both the individual and the community can be considered to have identities, he suggests these should not be considered as separate units of analysis as there is a process of mutual constitution between the two and it is this interplay which matters, not our ability to classify the two. In my own enquiry this is important as it is this interplay and how this informs the identity of teachers as they move to online practices which are in focus.

This links to the idea of identity being a process of negotiation between the individuals developing self-concept and the environment they find themselves in. Wenger's (1998) position is further useful as it highlights that we not only develop identity based on what is around us, but also what is not around us, through participation and non-participation. This suggests a side to an individual's existing professional identity which is developed based on their unfamiliarity with the context within which they will identify. That is, we form an understanding of who we are by that which we can engage with or negotiate, but we also form an understanding of who we are *not*, based on what is unfamiliar or that which we do not engage with. This is a further important aspect of my own study as my focus is on the formation of teachers' self-concept as they move from a context they are familiar with to one which they are not.

As Wenger suggests, the involvement of others in how we develop our identity and understand ourselves can be viewed as critical. Within these groups we also define, again returning to Lumby (2009) ‘the limitations of what is acceptable, whether embraced or resisted’.

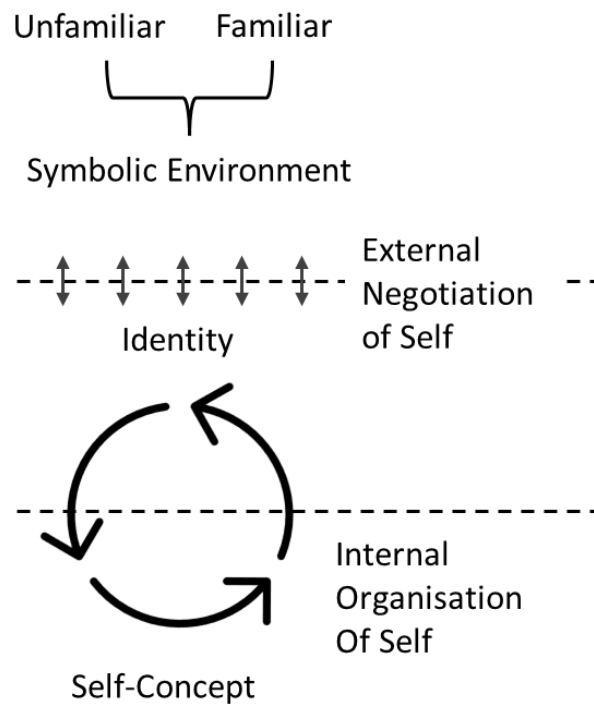


Figure 2 Relationship between Self-Concept, Identity and Symbolic Environment

In my developing schema of identity formation, I begin to depict the social space our identity negotiates with in Figure 2 Relationship between Self-Concept, Identity and Symbolic Environment. Here I visualise the relationship between our identity and social environment through social interaction, the focus of symbolic interactionism. The schema shows our identity being our point of interaction with our dynamic social context and environment. What begins to become apparent is the need to acknowledge that identity as well as the social context is dynamic. Based on this, at this point in the discussion I recognise our identity is, as Markus and Wurf (1987) argue, active,

multidimensional, and multifaceted rather than singular and static. It is important this fluidity is acknowledged in the theoretic perspective of identity adopted in this study. My research design must acknowledge, with reference to my literature review, the constantly evolving way of being within a professional constellation of notions and influences, and our attempts to integrate a range of diverse knowledge and experience as we strive to form a coherent image of self.

### **3.4 Identity Construction and Postmodernism**

So far in this discussion I have positioned identity through the lens of symbolic interactionism, as a singular self-image formed in a fluid context, with attempts at identity formation a process of making sense of ones position in, and relationship with, the world around us. This perspective, I suggest, aligns with the constructivist epistemology. That is, a position from which our world view is considered a subjective construction, dependant on the perspective, context and interpretation of the observer, and where individuals may perceive and interpret the same objective world differently (Ültanır, 2011). This is useful in my exploration of my theoretic position as it aligns with my suggestion of identity being a negotiation between our self-concept and our context. It also supports the notion of an individual constructing identity to both reflect their perception of the world and their desire for validation of self-concept.

I argue this is, however, restrictive in the context of this enquiry as it suggests our identity is a singular construct developed in response to multiple, dynamic contexts. This suggests an element of control over identity by the individual which, as I ask my participants to explore their experiences in unfamiliar contexts, may overlook the influence of what is out with their control or which



they do not experience. My earlier suggestion of identity being a 'negotiation' is intended to allow for something more malleable and responsive to an overall environment, formed of that which is both within and out of our control, and for that which we do not experience or are unfamiliar with. While I perceive the adoption of a constructivist theory of identity in this enquiry would allow me to explore identity in those teaching online, my focus here is rather how the negotiation participants engage with shifts and changes in response to the online learning environment they encounter. It is therefore important to acknowledge in my theoretic and epistemological stance the fluidity and changeability of identity as well as the environment in which it is formed, looking to theorists such as Gee (2000) who describe identity as not just the 'kind of person' we are, but the 'kinds of people'.

*“When any human being acts and interacts in a given context, others recognize that person as acting and interacting as a certain "kind of person" or even as several different "kinds" at once... The "kind of person" one is recognized as "being" at a given time and place, can change from moment to moment in the interaction, can change from context to context, and, of course, can be ambiguous or unstable.” (Gee, 2000)*

Bauman (1996) argues that when we view identity as singular, it becomes susceptible to disruption when subject to radical shifts caused by reconstruction and redefinition. This disruption manifests in the instability, ambiguity and changeability of context described by Gee (2000) and is problematic when we view our identity as a singular construction to form continuity and confidence through ones meaning for others. As Schachter (2005) posits, 'if life is in

constant flux, and the social context is constantly changing, then an identity formed at one moment may no longer be relevant the next'. This aligns with my own response in the earlier literature review to Ibarra (1999) regarding the influence or limitations of dynamic professional contexts with shifting boundaries we are subject to.

Barrow, Grant and Xu (2020) comment, our focus when developing identity is not the establishment of something stable and durable. Rather we must accept it as a slippery, assumed, ongoing project of the self, a consideration of how 'to go on in each other's presence' and 'keep options open'. Bauman (1996) describes identity formation as a process of 'recycling' rather than 'creation', a position he suggests we can view as postmodern. That is, a view of the world as fundamentally incoherent and discontinuous, and one that challenges the 'conventionally accepted notion of universal truths and norms' (Mease, 2016). As Harcourt (2007) suggests, adoption of this position concentrates our focus on 'the moment when we impose meaning in a space that is no longer characterized by shared social agreement'. In the context of this enquiry this is useful as participants engage with new and unfamiliar teaching spaces in online environments.

If we adopt a postmodern view of the context in which the individual exists, two characteristics of the postmodern context are relevant. The characteristic of continuous and rapid social change and the characteristic of the postmodern individual being embedded in multiple contexts with multiple affiliations to different, sometimes contradictory, social groups (Schachter, 2005). Both of these characteristics align with my developing notion of identity in this chapter. I approach this research with a belief aligning to postmodernism that as teachers

transition into new contexts, understanding of professional identity loses its shared agreement. However, I approach this position with caution. The view of reality suggested by postmodernism is of an entirely social construct with multiple contexts (Redman-MacLaren and Mills, 2015). In this enquiry my desire is to focus, in part, on how individuals respond to their own fluid, shifting professional context.

In my research design this creates a tension. My assertion in chapter two is that professional identity is the self-image an individual presents in their context as a professional, in response to the personal and social acceptances of their profession. This suggests an identity that is attainable and aligns with aspects of both constructivism and postmodernism. I perceive reality of this enquiry is more complex. While constructivism can offer a critical perspective of how individuals construct identity, and post-modernism prompts the exploration of the multiple identities and the spaces in which we construct these, I argue that the notion of an identity emergent in my enquiry is not an attainable construct. Rather it is something ambiguous and in constant flux, a process rather than a construction.

While I believe, as Stets and Harrod (2004) suggest, identity is formed to elicit validation of our self-concept by others, I argue this is subject to a perpetual negotiation between our self-concept and the world we perceive around us, rather than it being how we present ourselves in response to that world. That is, as Lumby (2009) describes, subject to 'limitations of what is acceptable'. Figure 3 – Schema of Identification with Dynamic Symbolic Environment visualises this perpetual negotiation and its relationship with self-concept. This reflects the notion discussed in Chapter 2 of our professional identity being a 'dynamic and

continuous negotiation and renegotiation with our profession' (Trede et al., 2012), a process under and in response to continuous and changing influences (Schellings et al., 2021).

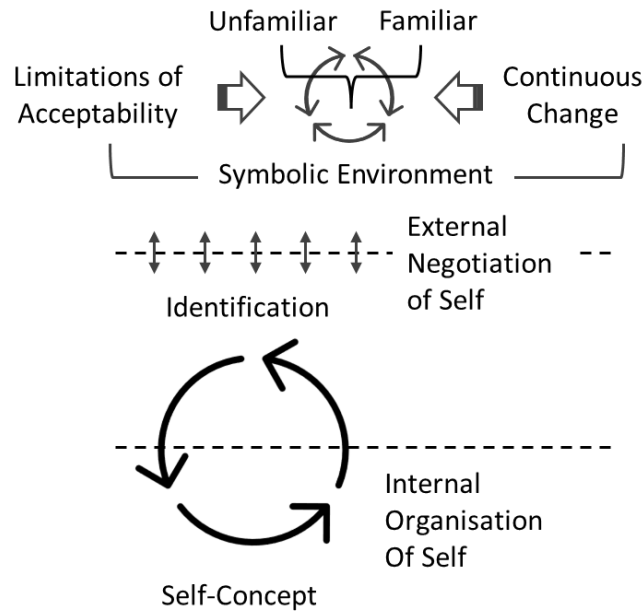


Figure 3 – Schema of Identification with Dynamic Symbolic Environment

This position is driven by a desire to explore how individuals respond to and develop a self-concept in new, messy environments. Influenced by the postmodern view, I argue that for participants in this enquiry existing theories of teacher professional identity may no longer maintain a shared social agreement. This brings attention to those concepts or practices utilised by university teachers to find sustainability of self rather than stability when teaching online. This sustaining of self widens the focus of this enquiry from identity to the act of identification in order to critically explore how participants respond to new and unfamiliar online teaching spaces. It is for this reason I found myself drawn to Lacanianism to explore my theoretic positioning of identity in this enquiry.

### **3.5 Lacanianism, Identification, and the Other**

Lacanianism is a theoretic perspective grounded in the work of 20<sup>th</sup> century French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Developing from Freud's work on the unconscious, Lacanianism explores personal questioning of self and society, with a particular focus on language and its limits (Parker and Vanheule, 2014). In this enquiry, this position is useful due to its model of the human agent in focus; in psychoanalysis the patient, in this study the participant. Lacanianism aligns with the postmodernist view I have explored above as it recognises the subject's multiplicity in the world (Elliott and Spezzano, 2019). However, rather than positioning identity as an individual and social human construct, a notion I have highlighted as problematic in the constructivist and postmodern positions already explored, Lacanianism offers a position which sits at the intersection between structuralism and post-structuralism. That is, Lacanianism views the world as a structure of language, culture, laws, and social conventions which we are subjected to, and problematises this by arguing this structure is not closed or stable (Günday and Kaçar, 2019).

Returning to Lumby's (2009) description of identity as always in response to the 'limitations of what is acceptable, whether embraced or resisted', there is a coherence with Lacanianism which can be explored. The linking of identity with the creation of a self-concept, in part self- and in part socially constructed, offer by Lumby (2009) is more problematic and complex in relation to Lacanianism, but offers a useful area to develop a more critical exploration of the notions of self-concept and identity in this study.

Lumby's (2009) description of identity being an interlocking project of the self is a useful starting point for this development as it echoes Lacan's (1966)

depiction of the 'mirror stage'. The mirror stage is one of the most well-known concepts in Lacanianism. It describes the moment when an infant first sees its own reflection and identifies with the image they see, idealising their mirror image as they first begin to acquire a sense of self (Malin, 2011). In Lacanianism, this is not a self-determining or free version of the self, but a 'model for the entirety' of a self through which one can identify with a united interpretation or 'fixed bundle' of fragmented parts (Chiesa, 2007a; Vanheule and Verhaeghe, 2009; Johnston, 2016). Lacan (1966) describes this as an 'identification', a transformation an individual experiences when they assume an image.

In Lacanian theory identification is a core concept. It refers to the process by which we form a sense of self by relating to the images, language and culture which surround us (Verhaeghe, 2019). So far in this chapter I have critiqued the notion of identity being a singular construct, positioning it instead as a negotiation through which we seek to validate ourselves with the dynamic reality around us, a process of identification. Adopting Lacanian theory in this enquiry allows me to explore this further as Lacan distinguishes between three types of identification. Our primary point of identification is our Imaginary other (indicated by a lowercase or little 'o'), our unified image of self. Our secondary point of identification is our Symbolic Other (indicated by a capital or big 'O'), the realm of language and culture that surrounds us. Finally, our third point of identification is the Real, an emptiness beyond language (Vanheule, 2011). It is these three types of identification and their interplay which I argue are particularly useful in analysis of professional identity in participants of this enquiry.

It is argued that ego takes shape through identification, as an individual recognises their self-image in the world (Brown, 2008; Lacan, 1966; Vanheule, 2011). Ego, in Lacanianism, is the sense of who and what a person is, what they view as 'part and parcel' of themselves (Fink, 1999). Returning to my earlier discussion of the self I liken ego to self-concept, or more accurately conscious self-concept. This is useful as, developing my emergent schema guiding my analysis of identity in participants of this study, it recognises and gives structure to a conscious and unconscious self-concept. I liken the unconscious self-concept to what is referred to in Lacanianism as the subject.

In relation to the ego, in Lacanianism a further distinction is made between the "ideal-ego" and the "ego-ideal". The 'ideal-ego' is formed through primary identification with the Imaginary 'other', the construct of what a successful version of oneself would look like (Vanheule and Verhaeghe, 2005). The imaginary 'other' does not indicate unreality but refers to the image with which one compares themselves, an 'idealized image the subject constructs around itself' (Vanheule and Verhaeghe, 2005; Malin, 2011). The converse of the ideal-ego is the 'ego-ideal'. The ego-ideal is formed through secondary identification with the symbolic 'Other', the predetermined structure of discourse, language, culture, laws and social conventions surrounding us and in which we exist (Driver, 2009; Žižek, 2009). It is how we might view ourselves as perfect, a point we strive towards but never achieve (Evans, 1996).

We strive towards the ego-ideal through identification with the symbolic Other, often theoretically likened to identification with a 'father figure'; that is, secondary to the maternal figure of the imaginary other (Evans, 1996). This links with Lacan's work on the Oedipus complex which, to oversimplify for the

purpose of this discussion, is our addressing of the question of who we are in relation to the symbolic Other (Homer, 2004). This question is useful when developing a more critical perspective from which to analyse professional identity as it positions symbolic identification as secondary to imaginary identification. That is, our imaginary other, the representation of ourselves which we view as complete in our 'mirror' is our primary point of identification through which we form conscious self-concept, or ego. We locate this within the realm of our symbolic Other, asking how we fit into this symbolic system (Evans, 1996).

If the conscious ego asks the question of how we fit into the symbolic order, the unconscious subject asks how the symbolic order subsumes us. As Homer (2004) suggests, Lacan's position is that we can never fully grasp or identify with the symbolic order in its totality, but that totality has a structuring force upon us as subjects. It extends beyond that which we consciously engage with, into the 'language of the Other' where Lacan locates the unconscious subject (Homer, 2004). As Vidon (2019) explains, for Lacan, we do not exist outside of language. We are 'an effect of a continuing chain of signifiers – a narrative – that never reaches a final stage' (Parker and Vanheule, 2014). Who we are is constituted by being subjected to the symbolic system that governs our existence. We are 'locked within what Lacan calls a circuit of discourse', born into a language with which we are forced to assimilate to articulate our desire and to interpret the desires of others (Homer, 2004).

Lacan suggests that in order to identify with the Symbolic Other, to assimilate the 'father figure' of language and culture which precedes us and surrounds us, we must give up aspects of our maternal, imaginary identification and the self



which constitutes this (Lacan, 1973). As a result, unlike the constructivist conceptualisation of a 'self' which is autonomous, undivided, sovereign unto itself, for Lacan we, as the subject, are necessarily split to enter the Symbolic Order (Hook, 2006). This is what Lacan calls the "split subject", suggesting a fracturing between the primary and secondary points of identification and positioning the subject as nothing but the split between the two (Riedberger, 1997). The split subject is thus always in conflict and tension with itself and with the Other.

The result is a sense of self that is not stable, requiring adaptation to a distorted rather than objective reality (Muller, 1982). This tension in the subject, split between our symbolic Other and our imaginary other, is referred to in Lacanianism as alienation. That is, the subject is split, not a unified and coherent entity, but divided and contradictory, alienated from both the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. Verhaeghe (2019) describes alienation as 'the bad version of identification' or the 'opposite of authenticity'. This can be described with brevity in relation to the creation of ego during the mirror stage. During the mirror stage identification is with the Imaginary other, the unified image of self, what may be perceived as an authentic self. However, this occurs after the child has been given a name by others, after those around the child have already started to talk about them, assimilating them into the language and discourse of the symbolic Other (Chiesa, 2007). As a result, there is a language they are born into which they are already subjected by. Alienation is where they become detached from that language, where the language of the Imaginary other and the Symbolic Other divide across the split subject, as language is 'progressively written and overwritten with signifiers' (Fink, 1995).

When looking at the range of contextual influences on how participants in my enquiry identify as teachers online, I suggest the concepts of the ego, split-subject, and the imaginary and symbolic 'others', and their interplay provide a useful analytic tool through which to guide exploration of those influences. One further register, which is often presented alongside the Imaginary and Symbolic to create a tripart series of orders, is the Real. The Real is a particularly challenging concept to describe with brevity as it is essentially nothing, an emptiness of 'all that is beyond words, description, and consideration of any type' (Malin, 2011). If we consider the imaginary and symbolic orders to form our reality, the Real is the limit to, and that which is beyond our reality and which resists symbolization. It is that which we cannot conceive in the Symbolic order that surrounds us, and as a result is in a constant tension with the Symbolic order as, once symbolized, the Real ceases to exist (Homer, 2004).

In Lacanianism the Real is intricately linked with trauma, where we find ourselves unable to comprehend an experience as we have never put it into words or verbalised our understanding of the event, reaching the limit of our symbolic Other (Fink, 1999). In these situations, counselling sets out to help us comprehend and symbolize a traumatic experience, in doing so moving it from our Real into our symbolic order to comprehend this (Homer, 2004).

Experiences explored in this enquiry are not those we might commonly consider "traumatic". As Wright (2020) suggests the word 'trauma' has become a 'cultural lightning rod', with its use often shifting meaning away from the experience of an individual to the gravity of that experience. Rather than searching for experiences of such gravity, the Lacanian meaning of the term drawn upon for the purpose of this enquiry focuses on the relationship of an individual with the Real and how experiences disrupt the Symbolic Order, the

repetition of life which we recognise, creating a void in an individual's Symbolic Other. Lacan suggests we focus on the uniqueness of the experience and its role in our broader cycle of the Symbolic Order, the 'automatism of repetition', rather than the 'traumatic' effect of the experience itself (Lacan, 1962).

*She: This Real of Lacan's which cannot be said but about which one must speak—isn't it what Freud simply called "trauma"?*

*I: Lacan's Real is always traumatic; it is a hole in discourse; Lacan said "trou-matique" [literally "hole-matic"]; in English one could perhaps say "no whole without a hole"? I would be inclined to translate Lacan's "pas-tout"—one of his categories—by (w)hole.*

(Lacan, 1974)

The concept of the Real is a useful one as it allows us to envisage a space where new and unexpected events previously resided prior to being signified. The suggestion is that these events which we often describe as traumatic exist and form part of a broader order beyond the Symbolic, we just cannot understand or describe them yet.

Returning to my emergent schema for analysis of identity in this enquiry, 'Figure 4 - Lacanian Model of Identification' offers a development of 'Figure 3 – Schema of Identification with Dynamic Symbolic Environment' applying the Lacanian concepts I have discussed in this section. This development presents a more in-depth representation of the relationship between our self-concept and the reality we perceive around us, highlighting distinct points of identification as

well as the tensions between these points and our conscious and unconscious self-concept.

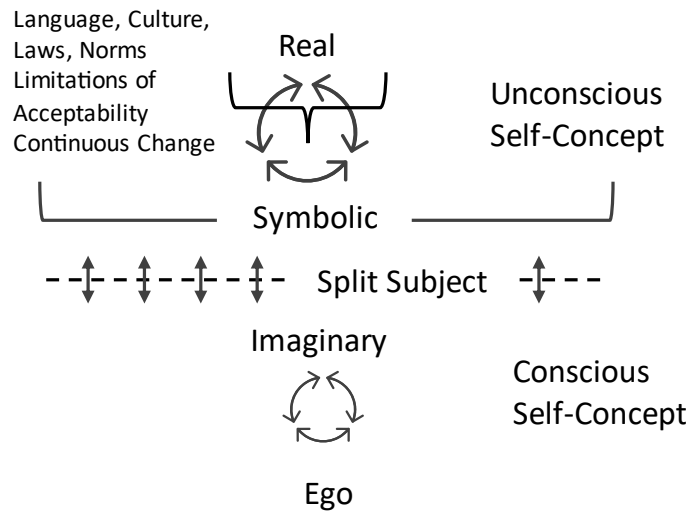


Figure 4 - Lacanian Model of Identification

### 3.6 A Lacanian Lens on Teacher Professional Identity

In the opening section of this chapter, I made the distinction between self-concept being our internal organisation of self, and identity being our external presentation of self. In doing so, I positioned identity as a negotiation between self-concept and the social and societal structures which surround us. Through my critique of this position, I have arrived at the Lacanian argument that there is no fixed identity but a cycle of identification, subjection, and alienation.

Returning to the purpose of this chapter, in this final section I will offer a definition of identity. Based on my critique so far in this chapter, I will establish the theoretical and philosophical position I will apply in my analysis of theory relating to teacher professional identity emergent in this study.

Developing from Lumby's (2009) working definition I have referenced regularly throughout this chapter, I align my theoretic view of identity with their suggestion of 'an interlocking personal and social project under particular

discursive conditions of possibility'. Where my theoretic view splits from Lumby's definition relates to their positioning of identity as being part self and part socially constructed, in response to the limitations of what is acceptable, whether embraced or resisted, suggesting individuals have agency in the construction of their identity. Rather, I view identity construction and our ability to embrace or resist external pressures on this as an illusion. Instead, we experience a continuous process of identification between our ego and subject and our perception of the reality around us, which I structure around the Lacanian orders of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. This positions identity as an ambiguous, slippery notion of self which is beyond our control. For "professional identity", an unavoidable term in discussion of participants' professional selves in this study, I suggest the focus of discussion is the desired, but unattainable validation of self-concept in the teacher's professional environment.

When looking to approach an enquiry into teacher professional identity and transition between teaching environments, such as the move from physical to online teaching, adoption of a Lacanian perspective on professional identity is analytically useful. The notion of the split-subject focuses exploration on how they have shifted between the recognised structure of their teaching, giving up prior language and understanding of the symbolic environment they occupy, and entering new spaces where differing orders exist. It also positions how participants perceive themselves as a teacher rooted in the language and culture of their profession.

It is this desire in teachers to find meaning for themselves online, and thus creating self-concept, which is the focus of this thesis, and therefore forms a

key dimension of the notion of how individuals identify in the online environment. That is, while I have approached this enquiry looking to explore how teachers find stability through the creation of a professional identity, my critique of the notion of identity itself and its suitability to this enquiry has shifted my focus. Rather, to reflect the dynamic and unpredictable nature of the online higher education environment I perceive, in this study my focus is to look at professional identification.

It is my argument that how a teacher perceives themselves professionally is based on identification with an image of a teacher, located within a symbolic system of teaching they are both consciously and unconsciously subjected to. For example, the culture and norms of teaching mean they will identify as a teacher in a 'classroom'. What that classroom is and means is informed by the symbolic order of their professional environments, their constellation of social norms, and the limitations of what is acceptable. The question which arises in this enquiry is, what happens to the teacher's self-concept when the notion of the classroom is completely disrupted by moving to an online or "virtual" classroom? How does the teacher make sense of themselves in this new environment, how do they identify, and what concession do they make in the negotiation with the new symbolic order? It is questions like these I have developed this analytic framework to address.

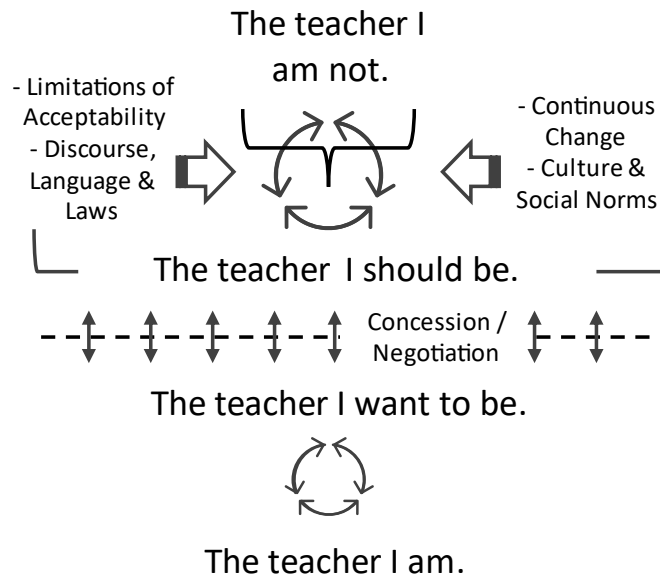


Figure 5 - Analytic Schema of Teacher Professional Identification

I present the schema above as my analytic model of teacher professional identity which is applied to theory generated within this enquiry. This framework, as I discuss in the following chapter, does not present a hypothesis relating to teacher professional identity my enquiry sets out to prove or disprove. Rather it presents a mapping of identity developed during this chapter to connect emergent theory, to explore commonality across that theory and enter a deeper critical discussion. Within this framework I suggest four conceptualisations of teacher professional identity which reflect the sources of identification, subjection, and alienation I have drawn from my discussion of Lacanianism.

- 'The teacher I am' refers to the ego, the conscious self-concept.
- The 'teacher I want to be' is the primary point of identification, the imaginary other of the teacher, their idealised and familiar version of themselves.

- The ‘teacher I should be’ is the version of a teacher located in the Symbolic order who the teacher is subjected to through the language, culture and laws of the professional teaching environment.
- The ‘teacher I am not’ does not suggest preference or agency, but rather the teacher which does not exist in their symbolic system, their Real teacher formed of language, culture, laws and environment which they have not encountered.

This mapping and these categories are an important aspect to how I explore professional identity in this study. I argue that, as teachers transition from familiar face to face to unfamiliar online teaching environments, they experience shifts in how they perceive both themselves and the context they find themselves in. This transition is not a single experience. As teachers evolve and develop as professionals, their professional identity continuously shifts as they pursue an identity I suggest is a desire that cannot be attained. This positions professional identity as a fallacy.

For the purpose of this enquiry however, the notion of a “professional identity” is still a useful one. It provides a focal point in the professional context when defining the point at which participants link their self-concept with the reality they perceive around them. “Professional identity” is a recognised term which, while participants have varying notions of what this means, does enable narration of their experiences and for theory to emerge from data unimpeded.

I propose the following definition of teacher professional identity developed through the discussion and critique in this chapter.

*Teacher professional identity is our attempt to validate our self-concept through identification as a teacher within our*



*professional environment. It is an illusory notion which exists momentarily, consciously and unconsciously, as we continually negotiate the teacher we are with the teacher we want to be, the teacher we should be, and the teacher we are not. It is our ongoing attempt at self-validation in a professional reality beyond our control.*

My use of the term 'teacher professional identity' from this point onwards within this thesis is done so with reference to this definition. It is however acknowledged that use of this and similar terms by participants will likely vary from this in definition. Its use, alongside my schema developed during this chapter, is to provide a single analytic lens through which to view discussion of identity, sensitising my approach to the construction of grounded theory. I return to this approach and discuss in more detail in the following chapter.

### **3.7 Chapter Conclusion**

As discussed in Chapter 2, I suggest that during the transformation individuals experience when transitioning between professional spaces, teacher professional identity is challenged. In the case of this enquiry that transition is from physical to online teaching spaces, during which time teachers are faced with counter-intuitive, alien, or incoherent practices and concepts, described as troublesome (Perkins, 1999). In this chapter I have positioned these troublesome concepts or practices more specifically as a challenge to the self-concept and legitimacy professional teachers hold. I have entered a critical discussion regarding the notion of teacher professional identity, and through this critique have offered a definition and analytic schema which I adopt and apply in the critique and discussion of theory emergent in this study.

In summary, in this chapter I have reviewed a range of different theories of identity, self, and self-concept from various perspectives. In doing so I have highlighted the importance of social experience and interaction in shaping our sense of self. I have also challenged the notion of identity as a stable self-image, positioning it instead as a dynamic process of identification.

I have then discussed the constructivist and postmodern views of identity and their implications for the enquiry. I argue that constructivism offers a useful perspective on how individuals construct their identity through their interpretation of reality, but that it has limitations relating to the fluidity of identity. I suggest that postmodernism offers a useful challenge to the constructivist notion of a coherent and singular identity, highlighting the role of context in identity formation, but that its proposal of a multiplicity of realities and attainable identities is unhelpful in this study.

In response to this critique, I introduce Lacanianism as theory more suited to this study as it views the self as a fictional and split construct that results from identification with, and alienation from, the symbolic order that forms our reality. I have presented key concepts of Lacanianism, such as the mirror stage, the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the split subject, arguing they offer a useful critical lens as they acknowledge the complexity and ambiguity of self resulting from troublesome concepts and practices I suggest participants in my study experience during change and transition in teaching environment. Based on this critique, I offer a definition of teacher professional identity as an illusory and ongoing attempt to validate one's self-concept through identification as a teacher within the professional environment. I also propose a schema for analysing teacher professional identity using Lacanian concepts.

It should be acknowledged that through critical discussion in this chapter it became apparent that the theoretic stance I take in relation to identity is itself a critique of the epistemological position of my methodology, constructivist grounded theory. While my argument is that there is alignment in these positions, with my Lacanian perspective of identity offering a route to a more critical discussion of theory constructed in this study, it is important my implementation of these approaches is clear. It is discussion of my methodology, and clarification of the relationship in my research design between my definition of identity and my research methodology, which are the focus of Chapter 4.

## **Chapter 4. Methodology**

In Chapter 2 I presented my review of literature and prior work relating to professional identity in university teachers. Drawing on this work I argued that the transition from face to face to online teaching, and the changes in practice and role this entails, is disruptive for teacher professional identity. In Chapter 3 I discussed my theoretic perspective of identity. That is, identity is our attempt to validate our self-concept through identification as a teacher within our professional environment, but which is an illusory notion which exists momentarily, consciously and unconsciously, as we continually negotiate the teacher we are within a professional reality beyond our control. These chapters together position identity transition between face to face and online learning as a disruption to the reality with which we identify as a teacher, introducing new, alien teaching contexts and often troublesome practices and experiences.

This chapter is focused on presenting and arguing my position in favour of constructivist grounded theory as the most appropriate research method for this enquiry. I begin by offering a discussion of the broader family of research methods developed based on the original grounded theory proposal by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Next, I argue my reason for the adoption of constructivist grounded theory, highlighting its distinction from other schools of thought around grounded theory and arguing its appropriateness for my enquiry.

Following my proposal of constructivist grounded theory as my research methodology, I have argued and positioned my use of my Lacanian critique of identity developed in Chapter 3 as a lens to critique the emergent theory, and as a sensitizing concept to guide the initial direction of the research. I conclude the chapter by clarifying my intent for application of the Lacanian theoretic perspective of teacher professional identity within a constructivist grounded

theory research methodology to ensure a rigorous and reflexive application of the research design.

#### **4.1 Grounded Theory**

The term 'grounded theory' is used in two ways. Primarily, and the use on which this chapter is focused, is to describe a series of flexible research methods through which interpretive understanding of data is created. The second use is to describe the output of these research methods; theory which is 'grounded' in the data. That is, theory which offers an abstracted construct based on a pattern in the data collected, rather than theory which has been hypothesised in advance which data collected is used to prove or disprove. It is the grounded theory emergent from this study which the chapters following this will present and discuss.

Grounded theory was adopted in this enquiry as a pragmatic method to generate theoretical constructs from qualitative data analysis as proposed by Corbin and Strauss (2008). This approach is useful for explanation of a process, or how and why people experience and respond to events, challenges, and problematic situations (Somekh et al., 2011).

In this enquiry it is the process of transition between teaching environments and the experiences and responses of individuals to this transition which I have set out to interrogate. My adoption of grounded theory was guided by a desire to understand how the novel or difficult concepts the online environment presents to teachers impact their professional identity. My initial consideration of grounded theory as a suitable research method was based on my observation that the transition in question is unique and emergent as a challenge to many teachers. While, as discussed in my literature review, adoption of online

education by enthusiasts cannot be considered as new, significant numbers of those less enthusiastic about teaching online being asked to make the transition is a more recent phenomenon. The transition itself may be familiar to many, but it is the transition in the context of my studied world that I argue is new and of interest. Adopting a research method utilising grounded theory creates the potential for theory to be generated that offers an abstract understanding of the core concerns in this new context, characterised by Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) as the defining purpose of grounded theory. Because theory generated using this research method is “grounded” in the data, it is sensitive to the context of the research and the complexities of the setting, potentially providing a better explanation of the phenomena than pre-existing theory (Creswell, J, 2008). Gasson and Waters (2013), employing grounded theory to explore learning behaviours in students online, comment that often hypothesis-based studies into online behaviours are limited by a specific scenario and perspective. Grounded theory, they suggest, facilitates the construction of theory through the interpretive analysis of multiple perspectives, reflecting a broader social reality. While an option available to me would have been to create a hypothesis for this study based on my own experiences, and many observations, of transitioning between face to face and online teaching, I have been acutely aware throughout this study of my position as an experienced online educator. I have developed confidence and expertise in this area of teaching practice which make the context of my own transition between face to face and online teaching environments, and the impact this has on my professional identity as a teacher, vastly different from interviewees in this study.

While I believe grounded theory to have been the best methodological approach for my enquiry, it is of value to also consider that grounded theory is not without its direct critics. It is argued, for example, that theory constructed using grounded theory is open, particularly in less experienced and / or rigorous researchers, to influence by the authoritative position of the researcher (Charmaz, 2014). Hutchison, Johnston and Breckon (2010) highlight certain characteristics which they suggest are common to all grounded theory methods and which it is important researchers can evidence to respond to this criticism and ensure rigour.

1. Data collection and analysis are iterative and concurrent.
2. Sampling decisions are a function of the research question and aimed at theory generation.
3. Analytical codes and categories are created from, and are representative of, the data.
4. A range of techniques are used to advance theory development during each step of data collection and analysis.
5. Systematic comparisons are made at every stage of the analysis identifying variations in the patterns found in the data.
6. There is evidence of theoretical density and saturation which results in the presentation of a theory from which hypotheses can be generated.

Following critical stages such as these ensure a systematic and rigorous activity, giving grounded theory much credibility as an interpretive research method (Gehrels, 2017). While as is suggested by Hutchison et al. (2010), many grounded theory studies fail to recognise a number of these common

characteristics, their illumination served as a useful checklist of key activity to be engaged, evidenced, and discussed in my enquiry, justifying my approach, and demonstrating rigor in my research activity. Within this enquiry using these points to check my method has also illuminated valuable stages where I could foster my own reflexivity throughout the iterative phases of development.

Adopting a grounded theory method, and in particular the constructivist approach that I will discuss shortly, allows for reflexivity while making what the researcher learns transparent by showing how the research has been conducted thoroughly and systematically (Charmaz and Thornberg, 2021).

As stated above, grounded theory was judged by me to be the most suitable to my research design due to its focus on generation of theory over proof of a hypothesis. This was primarily led by the observation that little is known or published regarding the experience of transition between face to face and online teaching environments. While grounded theory has been contrasted with the generation and testing of hypotheses it is important to acknowledge that it is not the only research method which would have provided me with the analytic tools to explore this situation. Alternatives such as descriptive phenomenology would have allowed for focus on the lived experiences of individual interviewees, articulating the meaning of these (Christensen et al., 2017). This method could potentially have been used to evidence phenomena beyond existing understanding with deeper more meaningful and productive insights than grounded theory due to its less interpretive approach to analysis. Similarly, an ethnographic approach could have been used to widen the focus of the analytic approach through more immersive data gathering and treatment of the group as a community (Walford, 2009). However, Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) describe how grounded theory originators Glaser and Strauss argue



against the separation of data gathering and analysis as in these approaches, favouring simultaneous data collection and analysis being used to steadily focus on developing concepts grounded in the data. This enquiry was carried out in a complex and messy environment, largely because of the conditions and challenges resulting from the global pandemic. In the unique circumstances of the time and their influence on interviewees, I considered that the ability to focus on developing concepts was more workable within the constraints of this thesis over the unravelling of lived experiences of individuals or a community.

A further field which was also of initial interest covered methods taking an interventionist approach, such as action research. Adopting such an approach would have allowed for me to use my insider position in the world I have explored to identify not a hypothesis, but a real problem and to address this by way of 'research in action' rather than 'research about action' (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007). Indeed, a criticism levelled by a colleague when discussing my research method was that, as an academic developer, I should focus on intervening or bringing about change, focusing my research in, rather than on, my professional world to better align with my practice. My argument against this is more personal than one of method. This enquiry has been primarily about developing understanding of my own practice, albeit as a key to helping to change the practice of others. My career has been based entirely around intervening, challenging, and supporting the development of practice by others. I was firmly of the view that authoring a thesis based around this would put me in danger of simply documenting my day-to-day activities. This thesis has been an opportunity to fundamentally re-evaluate and evolve my understanding of not just my practice, but my role, context, and ideology. To do this, stripping back my understanding of my role to the bare minimum of theory grounded in

data emerging from the context of my practice has been an enlightening exercise. It has also enabled me to explore this without the preconceptions I have developed as a professional which I consider to be a healthy professional development.

## **4.2 Constructivist Grounded Theory**

According to Chamberlain-Salaun et al. (2013), since its introduction, three distinct versions of grounded theory have developed:

- i. Classic grounded theory, associated with Barney Glaser;
- ii. Evolved grounded theory, associated with Anselm Strauss, Juliette Corbin, and Adele Clarke;
- iii. Constructivist grounded theory, associated with Kathy Charmaz.

Classic Glaserian grounded theory places importance on discovery and emergence of theory, with the researcher being led by what is 'happening in the data' (Lehane, 2019). In its early development, the theoretic position of its originators Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss was positivistic, adopting an ontology that there is a 'truth' which is discoverable through data, retrospective of a 'real' reality (Mills et al., 2006). In later work Glaser pursued this classic grounded theory while Strauss, working with Juliette Corbin, shifted their ontological position to be more aligned with pragmatism and symbolic interactionism. This development has been criticised for being ambiguous and claiming a position of symbolic interactionism while, some suggest, vacillating between positivism and constructivism (Rieger, 2019). This transition reflects much in sociological research in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with 'Straussian' or 'Evolved' grounded theory changing focus from a singular, discoverable reality to reality which is socially interpreted, and from the

discovery of objective structures to subjective meanings (Carter and Fuller, 2016). This is considered by many scholars as moving grounded theory towards constructivism.

Charmaz (2008) makes a distinction between objectivist grounded theory, with its roots in positivist research, as aiming to answer 'why' questions, while constructivist grounded theory approaches are focused on 'what' and 'how'. Adopting a constructivist grounded theory approach in this study has provided a method through which I can explore the 'what' and 'how' of teachers professional identity in uncertain situations, through the interpretive analysis of multiple perspectives which reflect a social reality. Charmaz (2017) presents constructivist grounded theory as a contemporary revision adopting earlier grounded theory strategies but being distinct from these due to researchers' clear adoption of a relativist epistemology and the acknowledgment of researcher and interviewees' multiple standpoints, roles, and realities. They also encourage the adoption of a reflexive stance toward their background, values, actions, situations, relationships with research interviewees, and representations of them and the situating of research in the historical, social, and situational conditions of its production. These distinctions reshape the interaction between researcher and interviewees in the research process, bringing the narrative of interviewees into the foreground of research, allowing the researcher to construct theory from these narratives. This places the researcher in the position of the author of a collective story (Mills et al., 2006). As I will return to in the following sections of this chapter, this is a useful position and perspective on the research process regarding my adoption of Lacanianism in the theoretic perspective.

In this section, and with reference to my literature review, I have set out to argue that exploration and illumination of teacher professional identity in the online space, and the concepts and practices used to construct this identity should not extend from a hypothesis drawn from existing theory of teacher professional identity. While online teaching is not a new concept, for many teachers confronted with this task during the pandemic it presented new practice, roles, and environments. As I have argued in my literature review, transferring from face-to-face teaching to these new practices, roles and environment stimulates a shift in teacher professional identity.

My work centres around how individual interviewees in my enquiry experienced and interacted with transition between face to face and online contexts of their teaching. This focus on individual experiences underpins my argument to adopt the narrative approach offered by this method. This provides the opportunity to construct theory grounded in the data focused on meaning making by participants of the university teaching space, both face to face and online, which is not confined to existing understanding. My aim is to make a truly original contribution to understanding how colleagues reform identity as they experience disruption, transition and liminality in their working contexts, practices, and self-perception.

### **4.3 Symbolic Interactionism**

My employment of constructivist grounded theory to explore spaces no longer bearing shared social agreement is in part led by constructivist grounded theory's' common alignment with symbolic interactionism (Charmaz, 1983). While, as I have discussed in chapter 3, symbolic interactionism does not underpin my theoretical perspective of identity in this enquiry, its consideration

within my research design and approach to data collection is useful due to its focus on human behaviour and an approach to enquiry into human conduct and group behaviour (Goulding, 2011). Symbolic interactionism in this enquiry primarily informs how theory will be constructed with interviewees, and to a lesser extent how emergent theory will be understood in relation to teacher professional identity, as defined in chapter 3.

As a methodology, there are two main variants to this tradition; the Chicago School where the focus is on interpretivist, processual interactionism, and the Iowa School where it rests on positivist, structural interactionism. Processual interactionism favours qualitative methods to analyse the processes actors use to create and recreate experiences, while structural interactionism takes a quantitative approach to focus on analysis of interaction and social behaviour in the context of their relation to preceding and projected acts and events (Carter and Fuller, 2016).

The use of the Chicago School's tradition of processual symbolic interactionism orientates more towards interpreting behavioural patterns and independent actions in their own context (Carter and Fuller, 2016). The original work of Blumer (1986) emphasises the meaning making process we experience as individuals as we negotiate the relationship between our self-concept and our context. This is useful in this enquiry as it provides us a lens through which to view the actions and behaviours through which this meaning making and connection occurs. Handberg et al. (2015), drawing on the work of Blumer (1986), suggest symbolic interactionism builds on three simple assumptions making it particularly useful for exploring and understanding human beings through their interaction:

1. People strive and act toward what represents meaning, attaching meaning to objects interpreted through symbols and during interaction.
2. Meaning arises out of social interaction, presuming individuals act based on a shared understanding of meaning in their environment.
3. Meaning is being dealt with and modified through interpretive processes with freedom of choice in human behaviour, but with this choice in some way being defined by society and cultural norms.

Symbolic interactionism provides a methodology through which we can study the context in which we create our self-concept. Following my definition of teacher professional identity in the previous chapter, symbolic interactionism would help to explore the reality in which we find the teacher we are, the teacher we want to be, the teacher we should be, and the teacher we are not. This forms a central tenet of my research method, aligning with my Lacanian positioning of professional identity as an ongoing process of identification in the professional context. When we adopt the perspective of symbolic interactionism, we begin to see the importance of others in how we define ourselves, which in this enquiry I suggest are both other people and our “Other” in the Lacanian sense.

#### **4.4 Lacanianism, Constructivist Grounded Theory & Sensitizing Concepts**

Constructivist grounded theory and symbolic interactionism have many commonalities with Lacanianism making them useful tools to align in my research design. They also present distinct differences and contradictions that are crucial to acknowledge and discuss to justify their application. It is the acknowledgement and discussion of these commonalities and contradictions in

order to argue their use within this enquiry which is the focus of this section of this chapter. As a starting point I offer the following two statements which position my intent for these two aspects of my research design.

1. Constructivist grounded theory is my overarching research methodology. It guides and structures my research methods and activity and positions the generation of theory grounded in the data collected as epistemologically constructivist.
2. Lacanianism is the lens through which I critique emergent theory. It underpins a mapping of teacher professional identity, established in chapter 3, from which theory generated from data analysis can be located, connected, discussed and further developed.

These positions, as I will come on to discuss, adopt Lacanianism as a theoretic signposting for the development of grounded theory, positioning those Lacanian ideas discussed in chapter 3 as what Bowen (2006) describes as 'sensitizing concepts'. As Bryant (2020) discusses, it is important to remember that "an open mind is not the same as an empty head". That is, while grounded theory methodologies caution against development of predetermined ideas or hypotheses, those inevitable preconceived concepts which may influence theory should be suspended so they do not 'get in the way' of the development of new theory, rather than rigidly ignored (Glaser, 2012).

I argue that this approach, which I have adopted in my research design, allows for the emergence of substantive theory, which is grounded in the data collected, not led by predetermined hypotheses, but for that theory to be critically explored and discussed through the lens of Lacanian concepts. This approach illuminates the alignment of emergent theory discovered using

grounded theory methods with Lacanian concepts and structures. This approach is suggested by Vanheule et al. (2003), to be beneficial as from experience within their own enquiry, it can connect emergent theory of how individuals perceived experiences with how they make sense of those experiences. This is particularly relevant within my own study as I aim to generate and develop theory regarding how participants perceive themselves in new and unfamiliar teaching environments. Driver (2017) also adopts data analysis approaches which align to grounded theory, performing qualitative coding prior to applying a Lacanian framework to explore this, similar to the approach I apply in this enquiry. Vanheule (2002) offers a different perspective which is also useful to consider, highlighting the benefit to Lacanian interpretation of data of the disciplined, iterative reflection, emphasised in qualitative research approaches linked to grounded theory. This point is useful as it aids positioning of both reflection and Lacanian interpretation of data in my research design.

While I perceive many benefits to aligning constructivist grounded theory and symbolic interactionism with Lacanianism in my research design, as I have acknowledged above there are also contradictions. It is important to discuss and clarify my position in relation to these contradictions and avoid confusion between, or conflation of, theoretic approaches. The three areas where I perceive these contradictions as potentially impacting on the application of my research design are:

- Data collection – Lacanianism positions participants as subjects without agency, while constructivist grounded theory positions participants as meaning makers and narrators of their own story.



- Data analysis – Lacanian theory is abstract, focusing on the underlying structures and logics that govern experience and behaviour while constructivist grounded theory is more concrete, emphasizing the empirical details and variations that emerge from the data.
- Theory development – Lacanianism takes a deductive approach to theory, testing data against existing theory, while constructivist grounded theory adopts inductive reasoning aimed at discovery of theory.

In traversing from a constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection, to a Lacanian critique and discussion of emergent theory, it is critical to acknowledge and clarify my positioning in relation to each of these points.

Addressing each of these areas of contradiction requires a disciplined adherence to an overarching rule that, in this enquiry, theory emergent in my data is primary to the Lacanian concepts which I will use to explain, discuss and critique that theory.

In relation to data collection, my research design assumes the epistemic values of constructivist grounded theory. As a research method, constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the subjective and co-constructed nature of data collected and the active role of the researcher in the collection and interpretation of that data. It recognizes interviewees as not simply subjects, but 'knowing beings' whose knowledge is key to the interpretation of their behaviour or actions (Magoon, 1977). As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, Charmaz (2017) suggests constructivist grounded theory acknowledges the multiple standpoints, roles, and realities of participants, bringing the narrative of interviewees into the foreground of research. This enables the researcher to construct theory from these narratives, placing the researcher in the position of

the author of a collective story (Mills et al., 2006). This is useful as I look to align the construction of grounded theory with my adoption of Lacanianism to guide critique and discussion of theory being developed. There is a synergy between the two theoretically as both imply that the self is not a stable or coherent entity, but dynamic and relational. Nonetheless, while constructivist grounded theory implies that the self is a social product, Lacanian theory proposes the self as a fictional construct that results from identification with and alienation from the Other. I therefore position my analytic schema of identity developed in chapter 3 as a useful mapping, sensitizing the dynamic and relational dimensions of identification and self-concept within the data, but without illuminating specific data or defining emergent theory.

Following on from data collection into analysis, my research design continues the development of theory using the methods and methodology of constructivist grounded theory. Lacanianism is theoretically abstract, focusing on the underlying structures and logics that control behaviours or actions. This is useful in the discussion and sense-making of emergent theory but should, as described by Glaser (2012), be suspended during the development of analysis of data so as it does not 'get in the way' of the position of participants as the knowing being.

Applying constructivist grounded theory methodology at the point of interaction with the data ensures theory is emergent from the data, generated inductively. Lacanianism can then be applied deductively to the constructed theory in order to explain and explore in more critical depth. In this study grounded theory, constructed through the analysis of data, can be explained through the lens of

Lacanianism to connect theory through the common ground of the schema of identity developed around Lacanian concepts in chapter 3.

While I approach my application of this research design with care and clarity, as I have indicated above there are similarities in Lacanianism and Constructivist Grounded Theory which, I argue, make these complementary theoretical approaches and useful to adopt in this enquiry. Both approaches are interpretivist, placing focus on the meanings and perspectives of participants involved in the research. The close association of constructivist grounded theory with symbolic interactionism further emphasises this position. While symbolic interactionism does emphasise human agency, while as I have discussed Lacanian theory espouses subjection, both emphasise the role of symbols and language in shaping human reality, positioning reality as a product of symbolic practices. This makes Lacanianism a useful critical lens through which to view theory emergent from constructivist grounded theory as it places emphasis on the reality in which the research participant finds themselves, over their action within it. It allows for the participant to narrate and construct their experiences, but for discussion of this to move beyond their agency within this narrative to look at the broader reality in which their experience is located.

Leaning on Lacanian theory in this way can aid interpretation and description of theory emergent in this study. The development of an initial schema of professional identity around Lacanian concepts also provides an initial direction for the study prior to entering into data collection or analysis. In grounded theory, this approach is referred to as sensitising. Sensitising concepts are a common approach across sociological research and useful across a range of variations of constructivist grounded theory (Zaidi, 2022). According to Blumer

(1954), sensitising concepts equip “the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look.” Those discussing the proposition of sensitising concepts by Blumer (1954) highlight the importance of making the distinction between a ‘definitive concept’ and a ‘sensitising concept’. A definitive concept refers precisely to commonality in a class of object or article through clear attributes, while sensitising concepts lack such specificity instead providing a general guidance (Liu, 2004). Definitive concepts prescribe what to see, making them inappropriate to a grounded theory enquiry. Sensitising concepts simply suggest where to look and can offer useful guidance in initial stages of constructivist grounded theory data analysis. They are general ideas that provide an initial direction for research without imposing a predefined framework or hypothesis on the data. In this study, I suggest my definition of teacher professional identity and development schema in chapter 3 offer a set of sensitising concepts. The definition and schema do not form a hypothesis I have set out to prove. Rather, they provide general direction at the outset of collection and analysis of data, before being set aside during theory generation. They are returned to once substantive theory has been allowed to emerge from the data, enabling a more critical discussion of this theory.

#### **4.5 Chapter Conclusion**

In my previous chapter I set out my theoretical perspective of teacher professional identity. In this chapter I have established my methodology. I have presented and argued for constructivist grounded theory as the most appropriate research method for this enquiry into professional identity in

university teachers. In summary I have presented grounded theory as a flexible research methodology and suite of methods which aims to generate theory from the interpretive analysis of data, rather than testing a predefined hypothesis. I have argued this is useful in enquiries such as my own, exploring the processes and experiences of people in a specific context. I have then explored the divergent and difference of constructivist grounded theory from classic grounded theory, with its relativist position acknowledging the multiple realities and standpoints of the researcher and the participants as well as the co-constructed meaning and narrative nature of data.

Following my proposal of constructivist grounded theory as my research methodology, I have argued and positioned my use of my Lacanian critique of identity developed in Chapter 3 as a lens to critique the emergent theory, and as a sensitizing concept to guide the initial direction of the research. I have acknowledged this results in some contradictions and difficulties resulting from different assumptions about human agency and reality in constructivist grounded theory and Lacanianism. I address these challenges through clear definition of my intent for these two theoretic positions, and by following the common characteristics of grounded theory methods to ensure a rigorous and reflexive application of the research design.

In the following chapter I present the final dimension from Crotty's (1998) four elements of a research process, my methods, or the procedures used to gather and analyse data. It provides a descriptive account of the journey I have taken through my enquiries phase of data collection and analysis. However, as I have discussed in this chapter and will explain in the following chapter, constructivist grounded theory is not engaged with in a linear, successive way. It is an

iterative journey through overlapping phases of data collection, analysis, and comparison to a point of developing categories of data which represent theory, saturated to the point of reality emerging from the data.

## **Chapter 5. Methods**

In Chapter 4 I have presented my overall research process, my methodology. Returning to Crotty's (1998) suggested four elements of a research process, in this chapter I address the procedures I have used to gather and analyse data in this enquiry, my methods. I present and discuss key approaches adopted through careful consideration of the options and of alternative methods which may have also been appropriate but which I have considered less suitable. I also discuss challenges to my approach and mitigation of these and the impact this had on my research. Chapter 6 then goes on to present the data collected and analysed.

### **5.1 Summary of Research Activities**

The practical application of the research methodology presented in the previous chapter involved two phases of qualitative interviewing, initially narrative followed by semi-structured. These were conducted over a six-month period. Table 1 provides an overview of the journey of data collection and analysis, highlighting the activities and practices engaged with as distinct phases and illustrating how they informed each other.

However, while a table of this type provides a helpful overview, its constraints result in an apparently linear process being illustrated and it has to be stressed that the detail of data collection, analysis and theory building in constructivist grounded theory is not linear. Activities in the phases illustrated overlap and are revisited to drive constant comparison (Charmaz, 2014). In line with the grounded theory constant comparison method, data collection was conducted in parallel with, and increasingly informed by, data analysis. Constant comparison is a method I will return to in the later sections of this chapter. To

summarise at this point, Hallberg (2006) describes this as a simultaneous process of data collection and analysis to explore variations, similarities and differences across data collected.

Date Range	Activity	Purpose / Output
Feb 21 – Mar 21	Narrative Interviewing	Capture of narrative interview transcripts.
Feb 21 – June 21	Initial Coding / Focused Coding	Development of focused codes. Development of phase two interview questions.
Jun 21 – July 21	Semi-Structured Interviewing	Capture of semi-structure interview transcripts.
Jun 21 – Oct 21	Focused Coding Theoretic Sampling	Development of focused code. Identification of emergent theory. Saturation

*Table 1 - Phases of Data Collection and Analysis*

## **5.2 Interviewees – Choice, Recruitment & Context**

The general context in which interviewees operate was a considerable influence on my research, both in its conception and design. This was significant in that it formed part of the histories described by respondents in characterising the University in their discussions of identity. The following thumbnail sketch of my study provides a brief description of the background and context to my enquiry and its interviewees. The sketch should not be allowed to distract from my constructivist epistemology that focuses on the richness of individual experience.



The research took place in a University in the Northwest of England with a student population of approximately 21,000 and around 800 academics working across four distinct schools: Health, Business, Science and Arts. A plate-glass University, originally a technical institute which opened in 1896, the institution in which the enquiry has been conducted has a commitment to widening participation and supporting local, first in family students to access higher education. In recent years policies, strategy, and structures to drive engagement with local community and industry through models of higher vocational and work-based learning have become increasingly prominent. Increased use of online and blended learning has formed a piecemeal but strategic dimension of this and has increasingly been imposed on teaching staff rather than adopted by them through choice.

Twelve interviewees, all full-time academic teachers in the University, were approached after consultation with school management for approval and requests for volunteers made through several institutional online forums and social groups. Volunteers were contacted initially via email, with the outline of the research method provided along with a summary of the research focus. The full email can be found in Appendix 1. A key extract of this email is as follows.

One point I would highlight in the attached document. This research forms part of my thesis for the Doctor of Education programme at Manchester Metropolitan University. The research is not being carried out in my capacity as an Academic Developer at the University of XXXX. On this basis, all data gathered during these interviews will not be visible to colleagues

at the University of XXXX other than in the form of the final thesis where all data will be anonymised.

It was important to me, both for personal and ethical reasons, that my role in this research was clearly positioned as a research student at Manchester Metropolitan University, rather than an employee of the University in which the study was to take place. The professional focus of the Educational Doctorate programme meant there was significant overlap between my enquiry and my everyday role, and it was important this was both clear, and mitigated in terms of the impact it may have on interviewees.

This was evident in one response to my request to participate in the enquiry. Those who were approached were very forthcoming and happy to be interviewed. However, one individual, who had indicated interest in the study, declined to participate after clarification of the research focus and method. The reason given was that in my capacity as an academic developer there was potential for them to discuss uncomfortable experiences involving myself or my close colleagues, particularly relating to the then recent shift to online learning because of the first coronavirus pandemic lockdown. I responded to thank them for considering the enquiry and for providing the explanation of their reasoning which highlighted for me early in the enquiry a tension between my own professional role and the field of enquiry. It also flagged up the potential for recent negative experiences of the pandemic lockdown to influence responses from interviewees.

I consciously chose to approach people with diverse levels of experience and who could be expected to have varying commitment to teaching, research, or managing. On the one hand, the range of interviewees included those with 20+

years' experience of teaching and significant research output who had held senior management roles in the past. On the other, it encompassed those very new to university teaching such as those in technical demonstrator roles or graduate teaching roles (that in the University in which this study took place both roles teach on accredited programmes). I also endeavoured to achieve balance across the University's disciplines and areas of practice. Overall, these choices were informed by a desire to talk to diverse individuals, not by any concern with representativeness.

The interviewees recruited and their backgrounds are presented in Table 2 - Interviewee Profiles), below. To humanise interviewees, I have given each a pseudonym.

Interviewee No & Pseudonym	Discipline, as identified during first interview.
1. Drew	Management
2. Alex	Criminology
3. Jessie	Literature
4. Lesley	Performance Arts
5. Taylor	Health
6. Jamie	Law
7. Frankie	Business
8. Elliot	Creative Technologies
9. Campbell	Architecture
10. Riley	Sociology
11. Aiden	Strategy
12. Andie	Fine Art

*Table 2 - Interviewee Profiles*

Discipline areas are generalised based on how interviewees self-identified during their first interview, rather than their department or school. This approach was adopted to avoid identification of colleagues through the nuances of institutional organisation of the disciplines. It also helped to avoid confusion that may have resulted from ongoing institutional restructure during my enquiry. The value of taking this approach was illustrated in discussions with interviewees relating to their discipline areas which highlighted the complexity of professional identity for teaching staff.

### **5.3 Research Ethics & Data Confidentiality**

The School of Education, Manchester Metropolitan University, provided ethical approval for this research, with no approval from external bodies or third parties required. After the study had been granted approval from the ethical review boards, initial recruitment of interviewees commenced immediately.

At this point, the unique circumstances regarding the coronavirus pandemic came into play. An originally proposed research focus on transitions from professional identity outside of the higher education sector to academic identity became unfeasible. The circumstances of the pandemic necessitated a change in research focus. However, while the research focus changed, the research process, interviewee profile, and the focus of analysis did not change from those approved. In short, the questions being asked of the data would change. However, the methodology and methods used to gather data, and the group from which interviewees were sought, did not.

Interviewees who had agreed to partake in the originally proposed study were informed of the change and asked if they wished to continue. Four interviewees

did continue. Other interviewees at the time did not, primarily due to professional commitments during the pandemic impacting their availability.

Prior to the first interview interviewees were provided with an information study sheet (via email, see Appendix 1). One purpose of this was to ensure interviewees were given sufficient time to familiarise themselves with and reflect upon the study prior to taking part and signing the consent form, At the beginning of each interview session, I also offered a printed version and ensured they had read the sheet and were comfortable with the interview taking place, highlighting the opportunity for questions or queries to be answered. Also at this point, their anticipated risks, confidentiality, and their rights as interviewees were discussed. I reminded them that they had the option to withdraw from the study or end the interview at any time.

Throughout the study, interviewees were given a unique identification code so that they could not be identified from any documents (e.g. Transcriptions). This was used through the documentation of the enquiry, with the only source of identification linking the interviewee to their identifying code being their signed consent form.

As discussed above, interviews were digitally recorded. All the information obtained from the interviewees and the interview documents were always kept confidential. After each interview, the digital video recording files and the observation field notes were stored on a secure University of Salford cloud server, where they remained for the duration of the enquiry. This drive is password protected, securely encrypted by Microsoft and only accessible by me unless in extreme situations where, in my absence, a senior manager would be able to approve an ICT specialist from the University of Salford's data

security team to access. This is in line with the University of Salford ICT Acceptable Use Policy<sup>3</sup>. An explanation of the data collection and its management process was provided to the interviewees, stating that the recordings would be destroyed one year after completion of the study, which will be in January of 2024.

Ensuring research ethics and data confidentiality were robust and transparent at all times was important to me. While in the study I positioned myself as the researcher and distanced myself from my role in the university the study has taken place in, it was important to remember the interviewees were colleagues, some of whom I worked with regularly. In order to illicit meaningful, authentic accounts of their experience's interviewees had to be confident throughout the study there would be no opportunity, unintended or otherwise, for their colleagues or managers to view the data shared. For this reason, I regularly reminded interviewees during interviews of the ethical commitment I had, but also that as a colleague I was adamant the interview would remain a safe space.

#### **5.4 Phase One Data Collection - Narrative Interviewing**

For the first phase of data collection unstructured, narrative interviews were conducted with each interviewee through February and March 2021. These involved asking open-ended questions (see section 5.7.01) to discover how they perceive the topic of interest (Given, 2008). The focus on narrative in this form of unstructured interview was to generate a story by providing an opportunity for the interviewee to narrate their experience (Allen, 2017). When

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<sup>3</sup> ICT Acceptable Use Policy - Version Number 4.3 Effective from 18 July 2018

studying people, observing their experiences, and trying to understand their lives, narratives come closer to representing the context and integrity of those lives than pre-set questions as they prioritise the storyteller's perspective over the agenda of the interviewer (Anderson and Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Each interview lasted 30 to 60 minutes and was conducted in Microsoft Teams. However, additional time was spent building rapport with the interviewees prior to the interview taking place and allowing time where required to discuss the research and the requirements and rights of the interviewee. This time was also spent elucidating roles during the interview, as to engage with a narrative interview the commonly conceptualised roles of interviewer and interviewee must shift to narrator and listener (Allen, 2017). This shift in role compliments the wider interpretivist research approach of constructivist grounded theory. Engaging this approach at the outset can be argued to take a constructivist view of interviewing to an extreme, placing interviewees in a role as purely meaning makers rather than sources of existing answers and information (Warren, 2001).

### **5.5 Phase Two Data Collection – Semi-Structured Interviews**

Phase two of data collection employed semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews follow a schedule such as a list of specific questions to be asked to ensure continuity and consistency between interviews. The interview schedule in phase two posed questions to interviewees based on phase one data analysis (see section 5.7.02). Grounded theory varies slightly from other methodologies as the schedule can be updated and revised after each interview to include more topics which have arisen because of analysis of the previous interview (Dawson, 2009). It is this process, in conjunction with the

constant comparison method, which is a key feature of grounded theory analysis, which allows for the study to progress from initial coding, through focused coding and category building, and into a phase of theoretic sampling. It is from theoretic sampling that we can illuminate theory grounded in the data collected.

Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. As in phase one, meetings were conducted in Microsoft Teams, recorded, and transcribed verbatim to facilitate subsequent data analysis. Each interview was conducted by myself as the sole interviewer. During interviews I also probed for further information, elaboration, or clarification of responses.

## 5.6 Interviewing

### 5.6.01 Interviewing for Data Collection

Interviews, in general, are a foundational means of collecting data when using qualitative research methods. Regardless of whether the interview method is open, structured, or semi-structured, the use of an inductive method in data gathering is designed to draw from the interviewee constructs embedded in their thinking and rationale for decision making (Given, 2008). Qualitative interviewing is based in conversation (Kvale, 1996). That said, as Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) argue, one of the challenges of conducting interviews is that they are often carried out under the naïve assumption that the researcher wants to achieve understanding through dialogue and discussion. Rather, qualitative interviews afford researchers opportunities to explore, in an in-depth manner, matters that are unique to the experiences of the interviewees, allowing insights into how different phenomena of interest are experienced and



perceived (McGrath et al., 2019). This approach takes a constructionist view of interviews and interviewees, considering them as meaning makers rather than sources of existing answers and information, aiming to understand the meaning of their experiences, themes, and lived worlds (Warren, 2001).

The two phases of interviews forming this enquiry were conducted with the same group of interviewees, with contingency for expansion of the interviewee group beyond the final phase if required to allow theoretical saturation. As indicated above, interviews were conducted online using the researcher and interviewees University provided video conferencing system, Microsoft Teams.

The first phase of interviews followed a narrative format, focused on the interviewees understanding of their academic identity and liminal phase of transition to online and remote working, but allowing interviewees to define the parameters of what they interpreted this as and as a result discussed. The second followed a semi-structured format informed by analysis from phase one. A common set of questions was used to probe each interviewee on key themes emerging across the data from the first set of interviews, while the interview format still allowed for interviewees to explore with the researcher specifics from their own experiences.

My approach to interviewing during this enquiry was deliberately open and free flowing. This stems from my desire to explore the conceptions interviewees have formed themselves of how they approached transition to online teaching, setting aside preconceptions of our understanding of what University teacher identity is and how it is formed. However, as McGrath et al. (2019) highlight, interviews should not be conceived as informal chats with interviewees: instead, they are data-collection instruments which can be used to penetrate

research questions. My desire to be open has therefore required conscious balance with a clear view of the purpose of the interview as a mode of data collection. This consciousness manifests in my approach to the interviews. Amongst other considerations when preparing to interview, McGrath et al. (2019) prompted me to consider power dimensions of the interview situation, build rapport with interviewees and, crucially, to talk less and listen more. I was deliberate in my conduct and use of body language throughout, with minimal use of speech, to encourage interviewees to be open and talkative, feeling comfortable to openly share their experiences, conceptions, and opinions.

As described by Allen (2017) and Warren (2001), positioning the interviewee as meaning maker places particular emphasis on the use of rapport and silence during the interview (McGrath et al., 2019). It became apparent from the outset that this approach would drastically limit my control over the interview. This was also challenging for interviewees, many of whom commented on the challenge and, in some cases, slight discomfort they felt in being asked to speak at length about themselves and of their successes and failures in their career. This was expected, but at times had the potential to derail the interview. In anticipation of this, I took the opportunity prior to the interview commencing to address any pre-existing power dynamics and to build a flowing rapport in preparation for remaining silent for most of the subsequent interview. For example, in my first interview the interviewee repeatedly asked if they were saying “what I was looking for” and appeared increasingly uncomfortable. To address this, in all subsequent interviews I began with a disclaimer that while I would remain silent, they should rest assured what they were saying was of interest and that as part of my approach to the interview, I would not be responding. I also had to ensure that during the interview I would be able to control my own facial

expression and body language, remaining focused and reacting appropriately and encouragingly to the interviewee's responses.

#### 5.6.02 Interviewing Using Microsoft Teams

Interviews were conducted using the online video conferencing platform Microsoft Teams. This is the institutionally provided platform for virtual meetings at the University meaning all interviewees had access and were familiar with this at the time of data collection. Interviewing online using this platform presented both benefits and challenges compared to the face-to-face interview environment. It also illuminated parallels between the online teaching experiences interviewees shared, and my own experience of conducting research online, giving points for reflection not only on how I was conducting interviews, but how this experience could, or should, shape my research.

Key benefits of interviewing online revolved around flexibility and convenience. The lack of a requirement to travel to a physical interview resulted in interviews being arranged with less time commitment required. As colleagues were working remotely, all joined from home and some were flexible with time outside the working day, suggesting meeting during evenings or weekends. This was also beneficial for me as the interviewer, allowing me to arrange an interview schedule around home and work commitments more easily. What did also arise from this approach to interviewing, within the context of the enquiry, was that interviewees found themselves being interviewed in a space which formed their home, office, and teaching space – all being their home desk. This can be viewed as having made descriptions of their experiences particularly authentic with many discussing their environment, or objects within that environment, and showing me them within the interview. Some interviews were

also interrupted by an occurrence in the home, similar in many ways to the experience of teaching they shared. This blurring of the lines between homelife and professional role, and their home identity and professional identity is a key thread I will share in the data which follows.

Challenges experienced were minimal, but echoed findings of de Villiers et al. (2021) related to building rapport, using body language and being able to 'read the room' with participants via video conference. To mitigate these challenges a longer initial rapport building time suggested by Archibald et al. (2019) was adopted. The fact that all interviewees were engaging in this form of communication daily at the point of the enquiry anyway was useful as interviewees were familiar with the approach. However, having not met all interviewees in person, in some interviews it was initially challenging to open dialogue. Similarly, not being able to observe so easily or clearly when an interviewee was, for example, tiring, and the abrupt nature of ending a Teams meeting, made finishing interviews difficult. For example, one interviewee asked to end an interview abruptly without explanation causing me concern that they were upset because of the interview. In a subsequent dialogue via email, they explained they had simply been tired and there was nothing to be concerned about.

### 5.6.03 Recording and Transcribing

In the previous section, points relating to convenience and flexibility were noted as benefits relating to the use of Microsoft Teams. A further practical benefit was the ability to capture video and audio recordings of the sessions and to be able to use automated closed-captioning tools to capture draft transcriptions.

My experience is that transcribing can be a laborious, painful process.

However, there is an argument for manual transcription as it forms a connection with the data which is lost when using full transcription services (Davidson, 2009). Furthermore, it can form a core, reflexive aspect of the data analysis process (Bird, 2005). When using transcription services, aside from the significant cost of using such a service to transcribe multiple interviews, it can be argued that we relinquish control over the representation captured in the transcription, ignoring the complexities of the original data, and endangering the credibility of our eventual findings (Tilley and Powick, 2002).

In this enquiry, the draft transcription offered by Microsoft Teams presented an option which avoided relinquishing control to transcription services while also avoiding the surrender of many hours to manual transcribing. The automated, draft transcription was not free of potential inaccuracies. This was addressed by checking in depth the transcriptions produced, comparing them to the recordings and making any necessary corrections. This solution offered a balance of relief from full manual transcription meaning analysis could commence more promptly, but with the checking process providing the benefits of insight and reflexivity which Tilley and Powick (2002), Bird (2005), and Davidson (2009) suggest are lost when using transcription services.

#### 5.6.04 Memos and Journal Keeping

The keeping of informal analytic notes, referred to as memos is key to grounded theory methodology. These are a crucial method of analysis in grounded theory as they capture the thoughts, comparisons and connections made by the researcher from an early phase of analysis. They document reflexive questioning, coding, and ideation, and illuminate standpoints and

assumptions of the researcher emerging from engaging with the data during the journey of analysis. They are a pivotal intermediate step in the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2014).

Memos should be informal and free flowing, and as such there are few set methods to this practice. Authors such as Charmaz (2014) suggest grounded theory researchers do 'what works for them'. The important thing is to get things written down and captured with other data, be that paper based or using computer software. My approach was to be disciplined in the activity, but not through a structured format or method of memo taking. During interviews, I kept memos throughout, capturing these within the same file as the transcription of each interview. Complimenting this I also kept a reflective journal. This captured reflective, analytical, and methodological considerations occurring to me immediately after the interview. In my journal, after each interview I reflected upon the data shared by the interviewee, considering my interpretation of the data prior to analysis including stand out points in the moment, and capturing early analytic connections. I reflected upon dilemmas, challenges, or refinements in my approach to data gathering, noting actions to revisit previous data and changes in my approach to inform my future sessions.

A further, and significantly productive approach, to memo taking also utilised digital technologies. After interviewing, I found it particularly useful to listen to the audio via headphones while walking. After an interview I would purposefully walk, outside and away from my desk and computer screen, for 60 to 90 minutes. During this time, I would listen to the recording of the interview, and again using voice dictation features I would be able to take significant memos

and notes regarding the interview. This provided another way of immersing myself in the data, but within a different situation and frame of mind.

## **5.7 Questions**

### **5.7.01 Phase 1 Questions**

How a question, or questions, in a narrative interview are designed and asked is of vital importance. It forms the beginning of a dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee. Charmaz (2014) highlights the need for grounded theorists to balance their desire for analytic exploration with hearing the interviewees story in its fullness. Discussing the experiences of Scheibelhofer (cited in Charmaz (2014)), they prescribe caution, advising against assumption of how interviewees may describe themselves, their actions, and situation. As the focus of each interview was on the interviewee's narrative, prepared questions were kept to a minimum and probing questioning deliberately restricted to allow interviewees to share their experience uninfluenced by my own comments, while anticipating that there would be opportunities to probe further in subsequent interviews.

Each interview was led by a script. This is provided in Appendix 4. The interview commenced with three brief questions. The first two questions enquired about the duration of the interviewee's academic career and their discipline area. These were intended to gather key information about the interviewee, but also as suggested by Patton (2002), to approach questions which were factual and unchallenging to open discussion. The third question asked them to briefly discuss what they understood by the term 'academic identity', but with the caveat shared that there is no correct answer. This

question was intended to further open discussion, allowing the interviewee to explore the term in their own words, and emphasising their position as meaning maker.

Following this introduction, the interview included two further questions which formed the core of the interview. These were both designed to frame the general area of discussion sought from the interview while leaving the narration of the response to the interviewee. The structure of the questions, including a preceding statement, drew from the suggested structure of a narrative interview question by Scheibelhofer (2008) (cited in Charmaz, 2014).

The first core question was focused on provoking a narrative regarding the interviewees academic background and how they arrived in their current role, exploring their professional identity and what is of key importance to them as an academic teacher. The first question tended to elicit an answer between 20 and 30 minutes in length. Narratives ranged from very traditional academic stories of undergraduate and post-graduate study followed by research positions and eventually teaching, to recent appointments in academic teaching posts following careers outside of higher education. For some their narrative began when they started to teach, for others they tracked their academic story back to childhood. All ended their account of their teaching career at the point of teaching online in the context of the pandemic lockdown, which led into the second question which aimed to focus the narrative on the period of change and experience of liminality the enquiry has set out to explore, that being the move from face to face to online teaching. The question referred to 'academic practice' to avoid a narrow focus on only teaching at this early stage of the enquiry, with the term explained in the first section of the question.



This question was designed to allow interviewees to discuss their experience of the transition to online teaching in their own terms. The question deliberately aimed to open discussion around not just the transition because of the pandemic lockdowns, but this was central to all narratives shared. Many had, however, experience of online and remote working prior to the pandemic and did offer accounts of this.

#### 5.7.02 Phase 2 Questions

Typically, qualitative interview questions are open ended and general, lending support to a non-invasive stance by the researcher (Creswell, J, 2008). It is important though that questions are carefully designed to guide discussion and ensure clarity in what is being asked on the part of both the researcher and the interviewee. Patton (2002) suggests there are six types of questions it is possible to ask in qualitative interviews, in the past, present, and future tenses. By distinguishing between types, we force ourselves to be clear what is being asked. The six types are:

1. Experience and behaviour, where we explore observable experiences, actions, and behaviours.
2. Opinion and values, where we explore what people think to understand cognitive and interpretive processes.
3. Feelings, where we explore emotional responses to experiences and thoughts.
4. Knowledge, where we explore the factual information the participant possesses.
5. Sensory, where we explore participants experience of stimuli and environment, such as sight, smell, or touch.

6. Background / demographic, where we explore the participants worldview and identity.

Using Patton's (2002) suggested question types is useful when looking to design and word questions as how a question is worded and asked will affect the response of the interviewee. As a minimum, Patton (2002) suggests interview questions must be open-ended allowing interviewees to choose their own terms when answering. They should also avoid any jargon or terms which might be unfamiliar. Questions should also be neutral, avoiding wording that might appear evocative or judgmental and likely to influence answers.

Following the advice of Patton, the second phase interviews were semi-structured around a schedule of broad, open-ended questions designed to investigate in more detail common themes emerging from the first phase narrative interviews. Semi-structured interviewing allows the researcher to ask the same questions in each interview, meaning specific information can be compared with information gained in other interviews, while also remaining flexible so that other valuable information can still arise (Dawson, 2009). This allows central themes to be addressed by interviewees in their own subjective ways (Ryan et al., 2009). The sequence in which an interview is conducted, and which questions are posed, is also an important consideration.

Interview questions employed in this research and the key points in their design are presented in Appendix 5. For each question, a series of follow-up questions is also shown. These were used either to probe the interviewees response to a question, or to prompt further discussion. For the opening questions, a 'knowledge' question was used to allow the interviewee to share information about their teaching and to set context regarding those experiences we would

go on to explore. Questions then moved on to explore the emergent codes relating to agency and performance in more detail. This was also intended to open discussion into interviewees' experience of teaching including their feelings and emotional engagement with the teaching they had described in response to the previous question.

Having opened discussion to interviewee experiences, feelings, and emotional response to points of agency and performance, question 4 was deliberately intended to explore interviewee self-worth. It focused on detachment from learning materials, and the opinions and values interviewees held relating to a scenario indicated in several phase one interviews. When asking this question in interviews, the follow up was developed to more extreme hypothetical examples.

To provide an opportunity to explore points arising in the above from a more emotive and sensory question eight explored the loss of the physical campus to interviewees. The sensory theme in questioning was developed in question nine by prompting interviewees to reflect experiences immediately following some of the challenges they had shared through the interview.

The interview concluded with a background question to allow interviewees to explore their worldview considering our discussion, creating the opportunity to provide any other information they felt relevant to the discussion as well as any overarching opinions and values they wanted to share.

## **5.8 Methods for Data Analysis**

The following sections describe my methods for data analysis. Application of these developed through both phases. The point at which these methods were introduced is indicated in each section.

### **5.8.01 Initial Coding**

Interviewing generates descriptions, recounting or depicting events and these can be rich in data and description, but crucially description is not theory.

Theory takes description to a higher level of abstraction by integrating themes through statements of proposed relationships (Corbin and Holt, 2011). The process of developing theory in this way in constructivist grounded theory begins with analysing data through initial coding.

The use of coding throughout qualitative analysis is a technique to attach conceptual labels to chunks of data to form relationships between those chunks (Urquhart, 2013). It can be tempting to conflate coding with the longhand and descriptive analytic process of creating and assigning categories and illuminating or generating theory (Dey, 1993). However, it is key to remember that coding in grounded theory 'distils events and meanings without losing their essential properties' and is a critical stage of the analytic process which must occur prior to theory building (Charmaz, 2001).

The general purpose of initial coding is to move from a descriptive account of the transcript, to an analytical one. It is useful to begin with quite descriptive coding to 'break open the data' (Urquhart, 2013). At this stage of coding the researcher must immerse themselves in the data, engaging in line-by-line analysis and coding, writing memos throughout to capture early conceptual and theoretical ideas (Walker and Myrick, 2006). It is important, however, to remain

open to exploring whatever theoretical possibilities we can discern from the data. This means sticking closely to the data, avoiding applying categories or theories at this stage. As recommended by Charmaz (2014), to do this, coding was applied using language which reflected analytically on action or intention within the segment of data, rather than merely offering a description, but without extrapolating as a broader topic or theme. For example, at this stage codes such as 'becoming disconnected with students', 'agreeing social norms online' and 'flexibility for students' were used to reflect action within the text, but later grouped into a category of 'interaction'.

The purpose of coding during this first phase of data analysis in my enquiry was not to reach the stage of theoretical sampling, but to begin to get to know the interviewees, their stories, and the beginnings of the themes running through their narratives. The aim was to develop categories, but also frequent questions of the interviewees which could be returned to and explored. This is not to say this data would not be subject to the later stages of the analytic process. The focus of this stage of coding deliberately did not progress to theorising prior to the next phase of data collection to avoid crystallising categories too early in the analytic process.

Throughout the analytic process, the qualitative data analysis software package NVivo v12 was used to analyse transcripts, manage memos, and journal entries, and facilitate the varying iterative stages of coding and theory building. As Maher et al. (2018) reflect, software packages such as NVivo provide excellent data management and retrieval facilities that support analysis and write-up, although they do not fully scaffold the analytic process. As has been suggested by researchers such as Bryant and Charmaz (2007), I was mindful

to ensure the software application was not the central focus for developing the grounded theory. As is highlighted by Rosenbaum et al. (2016), a reliance on software packages such as NVivo for purposes other than maintaining easier access and tracking of large data volumes and cross referencing has the potential to jeopardize the quality of the emergent theory. Therefore, as suggested by Maher et al. (2018), coding phases using physical approaches such as sticky notes, coloured pens and writing to a whiteboard were combined with the use of NVivo to develop personal immersion.

#### 5.8.02 Focused Coding

Grounded theory coding is at least a two-step process of initial or open coding, followed by focused or selective coding (Charmaz, 2001). Data analysis proceeds through several coding phases of identifying categories, clustering around categories, and illuminating theory grounded in the data. The phases and procedure vary depending on the strand of grounded theory being followed, with nuances of the strands led by the researcher's theoretical perspective. This is a process of interacting specifically with data: asking questions, making comparisons, and deriving concepts to raise raw data to a conceptual level (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

Focused coding means making decisions about which codes from the open coding make most analytic sense to categorise data, and using the most significant or frequent of these to analyse substantial amounts of data (Charmaz, 2014). The phase of focused coding is distinct to constructivist grounded theory as the strands of grounded theory on which it is based, Classic Glaserian and Straussian, focus on immersion in the data to discover a 'core category'. By adopting the constructivist grounded theory approach,

identification of categories starts earlier in the data analysis process. This allows the researcher to move towards theoretic coding, engaging the constant comparative method to underpin this.

### 5.8.03 Constant Comparison

Constant comparison is an approach where the researcher compares each incident in their data with other incidents to illuminate similarities and to group data together under higher level descriptive concepts (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Urquhart (2013) describes this as an 'incredibly simple, but deceptively powerful rule of thumb for analysing data' as it keeps the meaning and construction of concepts under review allowing for fuller and more nuanced understanding of emergent categories to be developed. As Urquhart (2013) also highlights, comparative approaches are commonly used in data analysis in social research. It is the approach of *constant* comparison as a key part of the method which is distinct to grounded theory methodologies. Gasson and Waters (2013) describe this as forming part of a 'troublesome trinity' alongside theoretic sampling and theoretic saturation (discussed later in this chapter) which gives grounded theory a systematic, rigorous approach with 'considerable explanatory power' not found in other methodological approaches.

Within this enquiry, constant comparison was employed throughout but with three distinct relationships between data of which I was particularly mindful, and which were useful to me. Across these areas constant comparison provided a key principle of the research approach which was, reflecting comment by Hallberg (2006), 'strict enough to be helpful to the researcher in exploring the

content and meaning in the data, but not saddled with so many strict rules to be too rigid for a grounded theory researcher’.

The first relationship was to compare across interviews. From the second interview initial concepts began to develop of what might emerge as a category. This allowed early concepts to be probed as they arose in later interviews. It was also important however, particularly during narrative interviews, to constantly compare to understand what was *not* emerging as a category. For example, I was mindful that one-off points of interest might arise, not constituting a category but which were tempting to prompt comment from further interviewees. This was important as it guided my own awareness of my influence over the interview. I was conscious not to prompt discussion into areas not emergent as categories.

The second relationship was to compare across datatypes. My interviewing approach resulted in data being captured as video. This allowed engagement with the data as the video while sat at a desk, as audio while listening on headphones in other environments, and as text transcriptions read both on screen in analysis software and on paper. Based on this I also generated memos and journal entries both during and after interviews, as well as voice memos, physical notes, sticky labels, and whiteboard sketches of data. These generated multiple forms of data but also captured thoughts on the data in differing environments with differing emphasis. It was therefore important to consider the influence of this and ensure that this valuable exploration and immersion in the data was captured.

The third relationship was to compare across phases of data collection. My research design provided for two phases conducted four months apart. A



further six months intermission due to a suspension of study resulting from ill health extended the break to ten months. This placed significant distance both for me and interviewees between interviews during a time of significant societal disruption due to the coronavirus pandemic. It was therefore vital to utilise the constant comparison method not only to inform and develop data categories but to reconnect with the enquiry both myself as the researcher and for the interviewees. My experience was that the method of constant comparison generated a story in the data. The narrative underpinning my enquiry meant that, after an unplanned break from study during a significantly challenging time, I was able to reconnect with my analysis of the data and did not find myself revisiting and rethinking prior steps in the process.

#### 5.8.04 Theoretical Sampling

As Gasson and Waters (2013) suggest, developing coding into theory relies on a theoretical sampling strategy that selects appropriate new data to test and extend the emerging theory. Theoretical sampling is a pivotal stage in grounded theory methodologies where data collection shifts from open gathering to being guided by, and with the intention of developing, emerging theory. In this enquiry the move to theoretic sampling occurred during phase two interviews, with the use of questions to further explore and develop emergent categories as theory. While some key concepts emerged, a great deal of this stage is focused on grouping codes into categories and sub-categories. Theoretic sampling involves gathering further data which focuses on categories which develop emerging theory.

The main purpose of theoretical sampling is to elaborate and refine the categories emerging from the data which constitute theory and to continue

doing so until no new categories emerge (Charmaz, 2014). This is where theoretical sampling in grounded theory differs from approaches in other forms of qualitative research. The purpose of this is not representativeness, but to allow the theory to emerge. As the researcher collects data, and illuminates codes and categories, these codes and categories then determine the proceeding data collection activities (Cohen et al., 2011; Corbin and Holt, 2011). As Draucker et al. (2007) highlight, other approaches to qualitative research may use a selective sample from a group of participants at the beginning of the research to test the hypothesis. As grounded theory does not start from a hypothesis from the outset, once one begins to emerge, we can use theoretical sampling to prove or disprove this.

#### 5.8.05 Saturation

A key characteristic of grounded theory methodologies is the arrival, through this process, at theoretical density and saturation at which point no new concepts emerge (Dey, 1999; Hutchison et al., 2010). Theoretical saturation is reached when additional data analysis reveals no new concepts related to the 'core category' (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Morse (2012) describes this in more detail as the point where the researcher has reached a point in sampling and analysing data where no new data appears, concepts and linkages between the concepts are well developed and, crucially, no aspects of the theory remain hypothetical. At the point of theoretical saturation, the necessity to collect new data to further explore code and categories ceases. In this enquiry, theoretic saturation was achieved upon completion of the analysis of data from the second phase of interviewing. By this point, initial codes had been used to

define focused codes based on first phase data, implemented, and developed using theoretic sampling through questioning in the second phase.

## **5.9 Chapter Conclusion**

In this chapter I have presented the associated methods used in this study to realise my constructivist grounded theory methodology. This has been intended to give a descriptive account of the journey I have taken through my enquiries phase of data collection and analysis. However, as alluded to throughout the chapter, while my description of this is linear, constructivist grounded theory is not engaged with in a linear, successive way. It is an iterative journey through overlapping phases of data collection, analysis, and comparison to a point of developing categories of data which represent theory, saturated to the point of reality emerging from the data. In the next chapter I offer my findings from data collection, my development of codes, categories, and emergent theory, and offer my reflections on this journey.

## **Chapter 6. Data Collection and Analysis**

Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 explored my research design and summarised my research activities. In this chapter I discuss the application of these, presenting my data collection and analysis. This draws together the narrative of my implementation of the constructivist grounded theory method. The main findings from the data collected and analysed during two distinct phases are presented. Data analysis in the first of these phases involved in-depth reading of transcripts and initial (open) coding followed by focused (selective) coding. These codes were used to develop a series of questions, as discussed above in 5.7.02. In the second phase, these questions were posed to interviewees, enabling the further exploration and development of codes into categories and theory. The structure of this chapter maps to this approach.

The chapter begins with a full summary of my codes and categories from across both phases of data analysis, accompanied by a limited description. Detailed descriptions of emergent codes from the first phase of data collection and analysis are then presented. Each code is accompanied by a description, an indication of the breadth and depth of discussion this represented in the data, and verbatim extracts from interviewee transcripts. Extracts from phase one are limited for brevity and to avoid repetition in phase two. I conclude this section by offering reflection both on the initial data analysis and on the experience of implementing my research method. Presentation of the second phase of data collection and analysis echoes the first. Description of emergent categories from the second phase of data collection are presented alongside more substantial verbatim extracts than for phase one codes.

In presenting verbatim extracts from interviewees and broader descriptions, I have consciously sacrificed some contextual specificity for brevity but also to preserve anonymity. The nature of responses by interviewees was at times very personal. In some interviews, interviewees went as far as to request points they had discussed were not included in any final transcript or analysis. These points were noted and removed.

## **6.1 Summary of Codes and Categories**

The initial findings in phase one data analysis are summarised as the emergent focused codes listed below. These are clustered around troublesome areas related to professional identity.

### (i) Phase 1 Codes - Summary

#### 1. Agency

1a. Increased prescription of practice by management.

1b. Decreased prescription of practice by colleagues.

#### 2. Interaction

2a. Difficulty building rapport with students.

2b. Increased formality of / or relationships with students and colleagues.

#### 3. Performance

3a. Shift from teacher to performer.

3b. Broken or distorted visual interaction.

3c. Inability to use body language in online teaching.

#### 4. Self-Worth

4a. Detachment from learning materials.

4b. Increased vulnerability online.

## 5. Wellbeing

### 5a. Isolation from colleagues.

#### (ii) Phase 2 Categories – Summary

The findings in phase 2 data analysis are summarised as the categories listed below. They are also clustered into troublesome areas related to professional identity.

1. Presentation of Self - Actions taken by interviewees to manage their identity in the online space.
2. Self-Perception - Tension between how interviewees felt in relation to how they wanted to be perceived by students online, how they perceived themselves, and how they believed their students perceived them.
3. Problems with Communication - How interviewees felt online technology presents an incomplete or broken version of their teacher identity.
4. Feelings of Disconnection - Impact on interviewees teacher image of capturing their image in online learning materials.

## **6.2 Phase 1 Interviews: February – March 2021**

### 6.2.01 Phase 1 Codes

#### 1. Agency

##### 1a. Agency - Increased prescription of practice by management.

Interviewees shared experiences where they felt their teaching practice was more prescribed by management. Although not discussed in depth, these experiences were common across phase one interviews indicating a feeling of increased control or coercion as an online teacher compared to teaching in a physical environment. Interviewees linked this to the growth in online learning

resulting from the pandemic. There was an acknowledgement that there were genuine reasons driving this development such as a desire for consistency in student experience and to set expectations for those unfamiliar with online teaching. However, this was described as a challenge to academic agency, and an experience of being controlled which was felt to be unpleasant and unexpected.

*“I think when it's an option I've really enjoyed doing online teaching, but it became compulsory. And I think people telling us how to do it also made it less enjoyable... ..being so prescriptive as you now have to pre-record your lectures for example, um, was really not enjoyable because you were constrained with 'this is what we're expecting.'” (Drew)*

In the above excerpt from the first interview conducted, the management decision referred to was that all lectures should be recorded in advance for online learning. This was described as frustrating, challenging existing developed practices in online teaching, and impacting the agency of the teacher. Another interviewee, Jessie, shared how management in their school had encouraged the advance recording of lectures, describing how this left colleague's feeling redundant, losing a point of live contact with students as well as control over the currency of content of their lecture. Drew described this as a feeling that their “wings were being clipped”, in part by management but also by their own generated content as the pre-recorded video removed some of the ‘freedom and creativity that you would want to have around how you plan your sessions’.

This feeling of control was also felt in management being perceived to set expectations of what should not be done, as well as what should be, as shared in this extract from interview 5 with Elliot.

*“Messages from [Senior Management] saying that the evidence seems to be... ..an indication that the attempt to teach online simultaneously with face-to-face had been deemed not to work. But I, if there's a place for me to put my oar in, I absolutely disagree with this.” (Elliot)*

Here they discussed their experience of ‘hybrid teaching’, where a student cohort are simultaneously taught both in the physical and virtual classroom. While he felt his experience of this was good and he received positive feedback from students, he felt pressure from senior management to stop and align with others in the school.

#### 1b. Agency - Decreased prescription of practice by colleagues.

While interviewees shared their experiences of practice being more controlled by management, the converse of this was several interviewees suggesting they had found increased autonomy due to a feeling of not being watched by colleagues. This was suggested by a smaller number of interviewees who were younger or more junior members of teaching teams. This feeling related to teaching content, materials, and approach.

*“There's a lecturer where I did a lecture for them, and I used their slides, and their slides... I know they were 15 years old because they still had their old university logo on it. So, I thought, well this is great. For me it was an opportunity to make the changes I*



*wanted for the students anyway, with the materials that had been given.” (Aiden)*

Here Aiden describes frustration at a more senior colleague dictating what and how she should teach in the face-to-face environment. However, when online, they felt more agency to make changes by updating materials and introducing their own teaching activities. This suggests the online and remote mode of working disrupted the hierarchy of the teaching team, offering some increased independence for teachers like Aiden.

A similar disruption to the hierarchy of the team which mirrored this and appeared to level the culture of senior teachers defining practice related to the use of technology. Taylor, Aiden, and Jamie, all early in their academic career, commented that their ability to use the technologies required for online teaching over more experienced teaching colleagues legitimised them in their teaching team. Taylor shared an experience of how, when creating digital learning materials, they had received better student feedback than more experienced colleagues regarding the materials they created. After exploration of why Taylor’s feedback was more favourable, the decision was made to follow their example. This gave them a feeling of ability to influence others which they reported had impacted how they viewed themselves and their value in their academic team.

## 2. Interaction

### 2a. Interaction - Difficulty building rapport with students

A strong theme emerging from discussion with the majority of interviewees was the challenge when teaching in the online space was building rapport with students. This was manifest in unsuccessful experiences attempting to engage

and interact with students and an inability to break social barriers in the class. This was linked to not having a physical space to fully interact with students and observe their activities, but also the barriers to generating similar interaction presented by technologies. Andie highlighted the value to teachers of developing rapport with and between students through informal interaction in the physical space.

*“The studio wall is a really valuable communication tool. Put something up on your studio wall, somebody will wander along and comment on it... ..that’s where a great deal of the teaching happens in fine art. Through those informal, valuable, rich exchanges.” (Andie)*

Their response to moving online was to use digital tools to replicate this interaction. However, the impersonal nature of these tools, reducing interaction and discussion to written text comments significantly impacted rapport, and as a result the connection Andie felt with their students.

The challenge of building rapport and the impersonal nature of this had was similarly discussed by most interviewees in relation to teaching via a webcam and microphone. Lesley described his frustration with students not turning on their camera during teaching sessions via video conference software.

*“They just won’t do it... I can’t get over this thing where students will put pictures of themselves up on Instagram happily and put it out so anybody in the world can watch it but they won’t turn it on for their lecturer and it’s so difficult to judge if somebody actually understands.” (Lesley)*

Here the impact of restricted interaction with students was described as shifting from having a suitable platform to interact on to the frustration of student simply not appearing to be present. Lesley went on to describe the desire of the teacher to 'actually just talk to someone'. The feeling of their students not appearing present through a webcam or microphone was a common theme with all interviewees. Comments reflected a suspicion they were teaching an empty room along with a belief students would log on and then leave. The experience of Aiden, whose daughter was studying at the time, confirmed this suspicion for her.

*"I'd seen her with her three-hour lecture session where she quite literally left the laptop in the living room and went off and did whatever and I was left listening to it going on. And I thought, I don't want that to be me." (Aiden)*

#### 2b. Interaction - Increased formality of relationships with students and colleagues.

A strong theme that emerged across several interviews, exemplified in the section below, was the impact the inability to casually 'keep tabs' had on the teacher's perceived detachment from students and the influence this had on their perception of their role as a teacher.

*"I probably get 100 emails a day dealing with things that could have been dealt with in a heartbeat by walking through the studio and somebody going 'can I just ask you how do I deal with this?'. Instead, it's a very formal arrangement where they have to email*

*me. If they're not confident with emails, then they drop off the radar.” (Andie)*

Andie went on to link the inability to informally check in on a student to a lack of informal contact with colleagues. Their relationship with colleagues had been reduced during remote working removing the ability to informally discuss a student's progress, or to confirm their concerns about a student. This made them feel the need to pursue students rather than focusing on teaching them, impacting the tone of interaction and, subsequently, changing the way they viewed themselves as a teacher.

This was discussed by other interviewees who suggested relationships with students and colleagues had also become more formal while working online, where communication was via email or written 'chat'.

*“I'm not necessarily sure that I can convey the same sort of easy-going personality in the chat function, when actually I'm getting quite annoyed that no one's participating.” (Jamie)*

Relating to the above Jamie described the issues of synchronous online discussions, with students using online chat tools which, due to the reductive nature of text removing tone of voice and body language, forced discussion to be more formal and at times appearing rude. Later in the interview they also linked this to the software being used for teaching displaying full names, and often not the names used socially by the student. This combination of written chat as communication, formal or given names being provided and as previously explored, the inability to see students or even know if they are present was felt to be a significant barrier to forming a bond with the student

cohort. The result was an increased feeling of isolation as a teacher by many interviewees in the enquiry.

### 3. Performance

#### 3a. Performance - Shift from teacher to performer.

Linked to the above points around how the inability to see students resulted in more formalised communication, interviewees also shared how the interaction with students via a webcam shifted their teacher identity. They felt that they moved to being more 'presenter' or 'performer' orientated. This was described as 'teaching the webcam', rather than the students, with interviewees describing moving the format of teaching sessions to a more structured, teacher centred approach.

*"It was basically like a podcast panel with the three of us and we just kept talking to each other." (Jessie)*

Several interviewees shared examples of engaging with alternate forms of delivery drawing on examples from the media, such as the above from Jessie. These were described as enjoyable experiences, however they also described this as being highly restrictive. Frustration with this was linked with the level of student interaction created. As discussed in the above code, the challenge of building rapport with and, more crucially, between students online heightened the feeling of perceiving themselves as a presenter, creating a barrier to facilitating student interaction.

*"How do they interact with each other; how do they sort of talk to each other? All this was going through my mind. How do I do these group things, how do I do... because a lot of the work that*

*I do is about them working with each other, so they get to know each other and build connections.” (Lesley)*

This barrier to student interaction and the reduction of the teacher identity to a presenter also brought about insecurity and challenges of legitimacy in the teaching role. In the following excerpt from Jamie, they share how in the face-to-face environment, as a young lecturer, they would often doubt the legitimacy of their teacher identity, particularly when tutoring mature students.

*“I was always really nervous to teach mature students. I was really, really concerned about how they would perceive me... .. I found that easier face to face because we just addressed it there and then had a little bit of a laugh about it and then moved on” (Jamie)*

Jamie went on to describe how they attempted to communicate their identity in this restricted situation.

*“It's probably a little bit exaggerated and over the top like in the videos. it's like ‘hi guys, you alright!!!’, and then I just look back and like that's so cringy. but it is probably what I would do in a seminar, but it wouldn't be recorded, and I would do it because it would make people laugh and, and it just breaks the ice, and everything starts. But then when it's in a recorded format it's, it's, the reaction's not going to be the same is it, because I use the reaction to move forward with the seminar. But that's obviously not the purpose in the video, and I do feel like it's an exaggerated personality and it's quite draining to be honest.” (Jamie)*

Here Jamie described attempting to capture some of the energy they bring to the classroom in the online space. However, due to the performative nature of the online role this becomes an exaggerated version of themselves they are uncomfortable with. By mimicking their own actions they would use in the classroom environment to address potential barriers with students, they feel they have created a false version of themselves online which they were uncomfortable with.

### 3b. Performance - Broken or distorted visual interaction.

Building on the performative nature of the teaching they found themselves delivering, several interviewees shared how conscious they were of the background of their video and the role this played in defining them as teachers. Many referred to this background jokingly as ‘the academic bookshelf’, where they had positioned items deliberately to influence student perception of them. This was recognised by Riley, both in himself and others.

*“People seem to be dismantling this identity they have face to face and building an online one based on sort of, a lot of the time, the ivory tower, so the superiority thing you know. It's like they're doing that to try to preserve something around them and not let them see, you know, the background. like in the background of mine I have a bookshelf, but it's half empty.”*

*(Riley)*

While Riley links this to teachers positioning themselves with authority in the online space, through the interviews this had two purposes which were broader. The first was to present a version of themselves to their students while the second focuses on hiding their home identity from the students’ vision. Some,

such as Lesley, went as far as to use this as a tool to make them feel more approachable, or less formal, by making backgrounds informal with items from their own hobbies.

This action of presenting a desired teacher identity while hiding their home identity stretched beyond the background for some to how they dressed and presented themselves. Descriptions of this indicated a further awareness of the frame of the video camera, and how this could be manipulated to present a version of themselves they wanted their students to see, even where this might not be true to their full identity.

*“So, I had like a blouse or whatever I would usually wear for work, and I probably combed my hair, but actually on the bottom half of my body I had a scruffy pair of denim shorts and a pair of flip-flops. So, it's like we've become half a person, where's the other half gone?!?” (Andie)*

The idea Andie shared of being ‘half a person’ resonated across several interviews. Interviewees shared they felt there was an insincerity to how they presented their teacher identity through the webcam, distorting their identity to that of the teacher they wanted to be seen as. Lesley describes dressing in clothes he reserved for work and would not usually wear at home so as it made him feel and look more like his teacher persona. Others, such as Frankie, described the difficulty of finding a space in their apartment where their home space was not on display, and how their discomfort with this led to them not switching on their webcam at all.

#### 4. Self-Worth

##### 4a. Self-Worth - Detachment from learning materials.



The recording of learning materials, in particular video, was a topic informing many codes emerging from the first phase of data collection. Aligning with the above codes relating to performance as well as the prescription of practice described in the first code, several interviewees developed this idea into feelings of detachment from preprepared online learning materials. Their reasons that they suggested for this ranged from not relating to themselves as teachers in the video and the odd feeling of watching their teacher performance to disagreeing with themselves in videos recorded as they had developed more current ideas since recording. They also included feeling that students were more inclined to be negative about the teacher in the video as they had not met them in person.

Video had been a core feature of online delivery by interviewees and most examples related to this. However, similar feelings were shared regarding text, audio, and graphical materials. Taylor shared the experience of working with a colleague who she managed who, while having little involvement in the synchronous interaction with a student group, had prepared learning resources delivered via the virtual learning environment. Students contacted the school senior leadership team with extremely negative and personal feedback about the colleague, with Taylor sharing they found the nature of feedback and the escalation quite shocking. The colleague was deeply upset by this. Taylor shared they felt the extreme response from the students resulted from them not seeing the colleague as a real person. They also shared that having spoken with the students it was felt that in a face-to-face situation, where the colleague had some interaction with the cohort, the student criticism may have been easily addressed through discussion in the classroom.

#### 4b. Self-Worth – Increased vulnerability online.

The excerpt from Taylor above also linked into a separate code relating to self-worth which was the personalisation felt by interviewees as they shifted their teaching practice online. They discussed a feeling of being more vulnerable online as students appear to be more critical and personal in response to online learning materials. Jessie, Frankie, Andie, Campbell and Jamie all shared experiences echoing this, where they felt students had behaved in a manner suggesting they did not see them as people. Interestingly, in Taylor's example the colleague who had received extremely critical feedback and a complaint via senior management had subsequently taught the student group face to face and received feedback that was highly positive. Jamie described their own experience as students 'not seeing the academic' when they engage with online materials and recordings. She considered that one result of this was that students were faster to be dismissive, critical, or personally disrespectful.

*"I tend to try and introduce myself throughout videos, rather than just 'here's a bit about me' at the beginning. But even then, I'm worried that in the videos I just come across as like, a little girl, like speaking to them and introducing their law module to them. Like, I feel like they need to meet me to know that I know my stuff rather than, than the not me, to do it rather than being online." (Jamie)*

#### 5. Wellbeing

##### 5a. Wellbeing - Isolation from colleagues.

The final code drawn from phase one data related to the isolation interviewees experienced while teaching online. This was exacerbated at the time by the

conditions of the pandemic, but many of the challenges shared by interviewees could be applied to teaching online outside of these times due to their link to 'in the moment' interaction with colleagues to inform teaching. Andie described the experience of not having regular contact in her office with teaching colleagues.

*“Um, we've become extremely autonomous, making decisions on our own for ourselves, for our students, and then going "I've done this guys and I've done this". Um, whereas usually we'd have gone "what should we do about so and so", and you just can't do it by email.” (Andie)*

Interviewees discussed the benefit to identity development of the physical campus with some suggesting a need to attend campus to feel 'academic' through connection with others. Interviewees also discussed the challenge of isolation from colleagues while working online and suggested this has eroded working relationships.

#### 6.2.02 Phase 1 Reflections

Many other points which would have been interesting to explore were raised by interviewees in interviews. The above represent a distillation of key points of commonality between the challenges interviewees shared. These were used to inform the design of semi-structured interviews in phase two. The purpose of this was to develop ideas from the first phase of interviews and move towards developing categories and theoretic sampling. The second part of this chapter focuses on the design of these interviews and then the analysis of data gathered to develop categories. Before going on to discuss this however it is felt to be useful at this point to pause and to offer some broad but brief

reflection on the enquiry, analysing the experiences which have impacted my trajectory, but which may not be clear from data findings.

Using open, narrative interviews in the first phase worked well to illicit wide-ranging data from colleagues in order to bring the disparate challenges they have experienced to the surface. However, at times this proved complex and unwieldy as I considered the narratives of interviewees to illuminate shared challenges to their identity as teachers. As described above, a series of codes were identifiable that aligned well with my focus on exploring 'troublesome' practices or knowledge encountered while working online. However, an area of my approach did become apparent as requiring refinement prior to continuing into the second phase of data collection. This related to the notion of 'academic identity' which I was using to focus interviewees, but which was challenging to several interviewees and not a term they related to.

As I have suggested above, discussion of the experiences of interviewees framed around 'academic identity' garnered wide-ranging examples of challenges experienced in the shift to online learning. Codes around developing academic identity offered interesting insights across areas such as 'Colleagues', 'Students', 'Discipline', 'Industry', 'Own Studies', 'Societal Pressure', 'Academic Others' and 'Managerial Pressures'. However, the term 'academic identity' was problematic. Interviewees did not relate to the term 'academic identity', were confused by it, or viewed it as a labelling for other 'more academic' colleagues than they viewed themselves. Interviewees who shared career paths involving dedicated PhD study and research positions were more comfortable with the term. Most interviewees who shared career pathways involving another profession prior to working in higher education

responded to the idea of being 'academic' as resulting from luck or 'right place, right time'. They described themselves as 'imposters' not fitting what they viewed as an academic mould.

Discussion of academic practice for most shifted to focus on teaching practice, rather than the broader profile of academic endeavour. While there was some discussion of administrative and research tasks, this was generally when specifically prompted and much of the discussion of the dimensions of academic activity had overlapped with teaching practice. This was dealt with by refining the focus of professional identity in interviewees to relate to teacher identity and activity. Based on this, phase two moved on to focus specifically on this area of practice allowing the broader study to become more focused on professional identity in university teachers.

### **6.3 Phase 2 Interviews: June – July 2021**

The second phase of data collection made use of semi-structured interviews where the emerging codes from a phase one data underpinned a core set of questions. The second phase was used to explore patterns within the data and concentrate analysis on any emerging theory.

#### **6.3.01 Phase 2 Categories and Data Sampling**

The second phase of data analysis began from a point of focused coding, continuing to explore the emergent codes from phase one. The purpose of this phase was, through phase two interview questions discussed in section 5.7.02, to explore phase 1 codes (referred to as 'emergent codes') in more detail. In parallel, it was also important to ensure any new areas of exploration identified

were illuminated. While this resulted in some repetition of discussion or examples of practice that had been shared by interviewees during phase one, a semi-structured approach allowed more focused discussion to be used to develop a set of four phase two codes ('more focused codes') which could be used for theoretic sampling. These more focused codes are described briefly below. Discussion of the development of these is presented in the remainder of this chapter. The emergent theory is discussed and further developed in the following chapter.

1. 'Presentation of Self', how self-image in university teachers is distorted when presented in the online space.
2. 'Self-Perception', how university teachers believe they are perceived by their students in an online space.
3. 'Problems with Communication', the challenge to university teachers self-concept when communicating with students online.
4. 'Feelings of Disconnection', how the practice of recording resources for online delivery is problematic for university teachers.

While there was no chronology to the emergence of these codes, I present them in the order above as I perceive them to be linked in terms of interviewees recognising the problematic nature of their identity in an online space. That is, first in how interviewees act when faced with identity disruption in the online teaching space, second how this disruption impacts their professional identity as teachers, third how technology exacerbates this disruption, and finally the impact this has on the teacher.

(i) Presentation of Self

This first more focused code captured examples of how interviewees had attempted to manage their identity when their move to online teaching presented challenges to them in terms of how they presented themselves as teachers. For example, Jessie discussed how she felt delivering a lecture in the online space placed emphasis on her slides over her as the teacher. To attempt to address this she would purposefully keep her video large for the first section of any sessions to greet students and attempt to connect with them.

*“I always start my seminars with me full screen you know and just kind of give them a little wave so they can sort of see me and you know say hi and I can ask them how they are and stuff like that before I become the tiny avatar with the PowerPoint in the text.” (Jessie)*

This echoed Elliot who, during the phase one interviews shared a technique he called the “Big Me” and the “Wee Me” where he used additional software to move from a small video of himself in the corner of the screen to a big video of himself to prompt discussion with students and attempt to make students feel more connected.

Discussion of video backgrounds and how interviewees dressed on screen was also explored in more detail during phase two.

*“I usually blur my background so [my students] can't see the room. I don't know why I do that; I just do. And depending on the teaching that I'm doing I try to make the effort to wear something more appropriate like a little bit more smart-casual, as opposed*

*to something super comfortable. Oh, and I put my lanyard on if I'm doing assessments and things on video.” (Taylor)*

While discussion of dress and background had been explored during phase one interviews, an interesting development in the discussion with Taylor was dressing more smartly and wearing their staff badge and lanyard for more official interactions. These included activities such as assessment and those where the video would be recorded. When the latter was probed further, they shared they felt this was a subconscious act, but that it was connected to a desire to present themselves as more authoritative due to the recording of these events as they were unsure of who the final audience could be. Taylor also linked this to feeling as if they were in the physical teaching space, even down to how having their office key attached to their lanyard made them feel more connected to campus in their remote teaching space. This was echoed by others, with Lesley likening the experience to a job interview he had attended online. For this, he had dressed as if attending in person, then left his home and returned to feel as if he was “going somewhere”. He shared similar approaches to preparing for teaching, mimicking his morning commute by cycling before sessions with students. Taylor concluded her discussion with the comment; “it just makes me feel like I’m there”. While disconnection with colleagues and campus emerging in phase one had been heavily linked with isolation due to the pandemic, phase two illuminated this further as comments were increasingly linked to techniques which could be considered as activating a teacher identity while away from a teaching space.

(ii) Self-Perception



This code captures the tension between how interviewees felt in relation to how they wanted to be perceived by students online, how they perceived themselves, and how they believed their students perceived them. As this developed through analysis a key focus became how this disruption impacts professional identity as they perceived a disconnect between how they wanted to be viewed online, and how they believed they were viewed. Interviewees shared how it was more difficult to present yourself as the teacher that you wanted to be when engaged in synchronous online teaching sessions using video conferencing. Developing this, it was apparent that this challenge increased as humanising aspects of their identity were removed. For example, asynchronous communication through tools such as email were perceived by a few interviewees as resulting in more formal types of communication which would have been considered very informal in a face-to-face setting. Discussion of this suggested interviewees felt their identity as a teacher was misrepresented to students.

The removal of the ability to see students and appreciate they can see you played a particular role in this. Linked closely to frustrations shared by many regarding students not switching on webcams or microphones during teaching sessions was the feeling that if a student was not present and watching them, their identity as a teacher was eroded or would shift to a version of themselves with which they were not comfortable. For example, Andie shared how not knowing a student was present impacted both their practice as a teacher, as they felt they became less interactive to avoid embarrassment of receiving no response to questions posed. They shared that they found this devaluing as a teacher.

*“It’s that little nagging notion that have they wandered off to make some toast, or have gone back to sleep and just logged on, it’s that... am I giving anybody any value here? There’s no sort of visceral feeling of looking up and somebody, seeing somebody’s eyes watching you or like scrunching up their face or going “oh” and making a note. There’s no feedback and that is really disheartening sometimes.” (Andie)*

There is much overlap here with the previous more focused code around presentation of self. However, what makes these codes distinct is the level of control the interviewee feels over the situation. Whereas interviewee data coded around ‘presentation of self’ relates to engaging in acts to control their identity, here we find interviewees feeling more helplessness as a result of teaching in the online environment.

Examples interviewees shared included a feeling of being locked to a single size in a webcam displayed in video software and how this felt like being trapped. They also described feeling that their opportunities to interact and develop rapport with students were being restricted or led by technology. A significant issue experienced by interviewees was students not turning on webcams or microphones and the impact this had on how interviewees viewed themselves as teachers.

*“It wasn’t ever a case of I’m going to turn my camera on and turn the microphone on and host this debate, like getting anyone to turn their camera on or their microphone was near impossible.”*  
*(Jamie)*

Interviewees described finding it troublesome that a version of their identity was being presented to students which was partly dictated by software layout, webcam, or video backgrounds. Some described creative ways to address this such as the 'academic bookshelf', editing webcam size on recordings or adding video effects both to try and present themselves as more approachable and to move focus onto them.

### (iii) Problems with Communication

The challenges interviewee explored of forming a teacher identity and finding the fine balance between approachability and authority were often exacerbated by how interviewees felt online technology restricted or disrupted their identity. Having their image captured in a particular window or box in a piece of software, or the feeling of being reduced to a text-based discussion, presented an incomplete or broken version of teacher identity. Interviewees in the study discussed their feelings of frustration with this.

Interviewees also reported a feeling of becoming a 'novice' again. This often linked back to discussions from phase one of changes in agency and difficulties presented by challenges around interaction.

*"It was basically like having to learn how to teach again and I didn't get it right all the time." (Jessie)*

An area coded in phase one which was explored in more detail was the increased formality interviewees experienced, and the impact they felt this had on how students perceived them. The use of technology was perceived as pushing them to be more formal in what would previously be very informal communication, and this reflected on their identity as a teacher. This was

described as a significant challenge to interviewees as they attempted to mediate relationships with students through formal modes of communication.

*“It’s a very fine balance between maintaining your professionalism and getting the information across and being approachable when I’m mediated by my screen and their screen.” (Andie)*

The formalising of teacher identity was also linked to feelings of isolation and a loss of the benefits of informality and corridor chat. Interviewees shared how they found troublesome their self-perception of being too formal and inapproachable and how they feared this would impact their relationship with students.

A further area where interviewees reported their relationship with students appearing to be impacted related to behaviour. The formalisation, or impersonalisation of their teacher identity was perceived to have created an environment where students were in some cases more aggressive, challenging teacher agency and authority. This ranged from very personal complaints raised against academics, such as the example from Taylor reported anecdotally in phase one where students entered a formal dispute with the school over how they perceived the quality of learning materials provided. In that case the complaint was described as having been based on highly personal, criticism regarding the capability of the teacher without there having been interaction between the students and the teacher.

Similarly, interviewees in phase two reported students using text facilities in webinars to engage in communication which was deemed abusive to each other and the teacher. One example shared by Jessie prompted her to ask the

question why students feel that it was appropriate to communicate online in a way that would never be accepted in the classroom. This difference between online and in person challenges to teachers resulting in them questioning their self-perception was described by Jamie.

*“What's weird as well [is] a lot of students... ...sort of questioning, not like authority but sort of questioning things that I don't think they would have done in person. So, for example we had an HPA [hourly paid academic] marker for family law help me out and [the students] don't know that person so they see these initials that they don't know on their work when they're doing the marking and they instantly invalidate it. And the amount of emails I had that came through to me saying ‘I don't know who this person is’, remark my work!” (Jamie)*

In Jamie's example, they went on to describe how they felt as if the colleague had been stripped of their identity as a teacher as students who had not interacted synchronously with them refused to accept them as a teacher on the programme.

A barrier was also present in the digital skills of others. Lesley described tools that were available which could mitigate some of the disruptive experiences by creating more interaction. However, there was a feeling not all teachers in teams had the technical ability to use these tools and consistency of student experience was encouraged over development of teacher presence and interaction.

*“So, I’ve used Padlet like using a bit this year and I thought that was great, really useful. But it’s that thing of being able to gauge quick response. Now I know you can hack it a bit I’ve been a bit hacky with it but again that’s because I can think on the fly with technology and ways to use it, whereas not everyone can. Yeah, you know and it would, yeah having something like that would be really useful for the teacher because it’s just, but you know there’s not much we can do in that regard at this point.” (Lesley)*

In several cases, interviewees described how they had reduced their use of the technology to hide aspects of their identity, rather than subject themselves to potential disruption or embarrassment. This related to anxiety around the reliability of many of the technologies in use. For example, Frankie shared that he no longer switched on his webcam for live or recorded sessions, both for reasons of privacy as already described, but also due to a fear of encountering technical issues. This was echoed by Jessie in the excerpt below.

*“So, because obviously we don’t know what glitches happen with what sort of setup where and when. So, I just started recording audio for things, really good quality audio and that was fine. I’m not sure um, I’m not sure if there’s been any studies done on you know whether or not having a tiny face, how engaging that is or isn’t.” (Jessie)*

#### (iv) Feelings of Disconnection

Throughout both phases of interviews interviewees described the discomfort felt in relation to capturing a version of themselves in online learning materials, primarily in reference to recording lectures. This related to both a feeling they

should record lectures in advance of a module and then teach 'alongside' these during term, and the expectation of some colleagues (particularly management) that they would share recordings. This has raised several troublesome areas impacting teacher identity. Most prominent in discussions has been how interviewees relate to 'the teacher in the video', or the version of themselves captured in the video which they often feel uncomfortable with.

When discussing the reuse of existing videos in the phase one interview, Frankie described his relationship with a series of learning videos he had created. This particularly related to Frankie's perception of himself in the videos. He discussed his physical appearance captured in the video with which he was uncomfortable, and how he perceived his delivery or performance in the videos to be low quality. Frankie described how videos he had created were available to students, and he had been encouraged by management in his school to reuse them, but he struggled to identify with his identity in the videos.

*"I knew that the recordings had been done, finalized and processed, I just wiped it from my memory. I have totally distanced myself from them." (Frankie)*

This discomfort with video recordings of themselves was evident in all the 12 interviews conducted in phase one. A particular dimension of this discomfort was the time elapsed since the recording and the connection the teacher felt with this recording as a result. Constant comparison led to this becoming an area of increasing interest in phase two with a question posed to all interviewees regarding feelings towards video recordings. To varying extents, this question was followed up by questions around the development of hypothetical scenarios where another teacher would use the video, generating

depth in the responses. These scenarios were developed along two axes. The first was relinquished ownership of the video, for example where the video was passed to colleagues, developing to where the teacher might leave the University, but the video remains a teaching resource. The second was elapsed time, where the video was reused by the teacher in subsequent years. Comments around these two axes differed, with the idea of relinquishing ownership challenging the interviewee in terms of who was instructing the students in the moment they watched the video. Discussion of elapsed time opened debate about whether the interviewee still related to the version of themselves in the video. Interestingly, language in discussion of both began to shape around how “alive” the teacher in the video was.

*“At some point it's going to turn into a chap in a corduroy jacket with leather arm pads standing at a blackboard in a 1974 overnight Open University maths lecture and he's going to be fossilized, so there must be a transition over the years where the life gets drained out of it.” (Elliot)*

In the above extract, Elliot uses interesting language to describe himself in a video which has been recorded, likening it to being fossilised. He also describes how the ‘life gets drained out of it’. This removal of ‘life’ from the individual in the video was also suggested by Taylor. The following extract is from a broader discussion where Taylor explored the idea of a video being delivered by a colleague who was tutoring the students in the moment they watched the video. This discussion of her identity as a teacher, and the difference between her using a video with her students or a colleague doing so, suggested a detachment from the video.



*“I feel like because the person who's the module leader or whatever, they've chosen my video, they're [the students] gonna think that that person is teaching them. I think. Even though I'm doing the video, if that makes sense. Because I'm not a real person. I'm not alive.” (Taylor)*

Taylor's example also captures discomfort or a feeling of disconnection as a teacher when learning resources or videos were reused by colleagues. Here their reasoning for being the teacher in relation to their own students but not their colleagues was captured in the description of them not being 'a real person' in the eyes of their colleagues' students. This suggested a disconnection from the teacher identity in the video as it was utilised by students in a scenario where Taylor was not the named teacher.

### 6.3.02 Phase 2 Reflections

The second phase of interviewing and data collection proved successful in that it allowed emergent codes to be explored in more detail. Emergent codes were merged, and more focused codes were developed as interviewees shared thoughts and experiences which unpacked findings from earlier data collection, as described by Charmaz and Thornberg (2021). The codes generated during the open coding phase were used to give structure and focus to the interview questions. They also formed a basis for more focused codes to be used to analyse phase two interview data and illuminate emergent theory.

## 6.4 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented a narrative of my journey through data collection and analysis, exploring and reflecting on key activities as well as

presenting and discussing data collected. In doing so I have mapped the process by which this work has been used to generate four theoretic hypotheses reflecting prominent areas relating to how interviewees in this study develop but also struggle with their teacher professional identity when teaching online. These are the challenges of teachers presenting themselves in an online space; the tensions between how they want to be perceived as a teacher and how they are, or believe they are, perceived by students; the challenges technology presented in managing teacher identity; and the impact key areas of these challenges have on their perception of themselves as a teacher. Within each of these areas, challenges can be linked with the ability to exercise choice in how teachers present themselves. In the following chapter I will explore and discuss the four grounded theories emergent within my data, critiquing and discussing these through the lens of my definition and analytic schema of identity developed in Chapter 3.

## **Chapter 7. Discussion of Theory**

The principal goal of this enquiry has been to locate troublesome experiences and practices for university teachers' when engaging with online education and to theorise how these relate to teacher professional identity. This has provided a basis on which to analyse and reflect on how these experiences might be understood better with a view to informing and supporting university teachers in reframing how they identify as a teacher in an online environment.

This chapter critically discusses theory emergent from the data, presented in the previous chapter under the following four key areas:

1. 'Presentation of Self', how self-image in university teachers is distorted when presented in the online space.
2. 'Self-Perception', how university teachers believe they are perceived by their students in an online space.
3. 'Problems with Communication', the challenge to university teachers self-concept when communicating with students online.
4. 'Feelings of Disconnection', how the practice of recording resources for online delivery is problematic for university teachers.

Through critical discussion, I explore the challenges to university teachers' resulting from the disruption to their professional self-concept in these areas. I argue these are challenges unique to the online teaching space, and I position these as alienating and problematic. In Chapter 8 I move on to present the four emergent theoretic areas identified in my data as a reflective framework.

## 7.1 Discussing Constructed Grounded Theory

Discussion in this chapter is formed around the theoretic position regarding teacher professional identity developed in Chapter 3. That is;

*Teacher professional identity is our attempt to validate our self-concept through identification as a teacher within our professional environment. It is an illusory notion which exists momentarily, consciously and unconsciously, as we continually negotiate the teacher we are with the teacher we want to be, the teacher we should be, and the teacher we are not. It is our ongoing attempt at self-validation in a professional reality beyond our control.*

My discussion and development of theory emergent from my data employs those Lacanian concepts underpinning my definition of professional identity, discussed and informing my analytic schema in chapter 3 (Figure 5 - Analytic Schema of Teacher Professional Identification) to enable a deeper critical discussion and interpretation of the emergent theories in my data. My interpretation of where interviewees shared their attempts at self-validation in, and interpretation of, their professional reality underpins this discussion.

It is important at this stage to reiterate the relationship between my research methodology, constructivist grounded theory, and my theoretic positioning of teacher professional identity which is based in Lacanianism. As described in detail in chapter 4, constructivist grounded theory is my overarching research methodology. It has guided and structured my research methods and activity, allowing the hypothesis presented and discussed in this chapter to be constructed based on emergent theory, grounded in the data. My theoretic

definition and schema of teacher professional identity provides a Lacanian lens through which I critique that emergent theory. It underpins a mapping from which theory generated can be located, connected, discussed and further developed.

In this chapter I apply my Lacanian lens to discuss, develop and articulate the theory which has been constructed from the data in the previous chapter. I do not use this lens to make rigid classifications. Rather, the schema and definition developed in chapter 3 have been used to illuminate Lacanian concepts which are useful when discussing interviewee experiences. The concepts I have adopted from the work of Lacan have been selected to allow exploration of the interdependency and interconnectedness of these emergent theory in more critical depth.

## **7.2 Presenting Constructed Grounded Theory**

Following Charmaz (2014), I suggest that theory in the context of constructivist grounded theory enquiries should offer an understanding of the relationship between abstract concepts arising, prioritising analysis of those concepts emerging from both the experiences of and relationships with interviewees in the enquiry. Through an interpretive approach, the 'how' and sometimes 'why' of interviewee experience is presented in a form which accepts two key assumptions. The first is that the theory presented should be grounded in the experiences of interviewees in this study. The second is that the theory presented should result from an interpretation of those experiences by both the interviewees and me as the researcher, with the claims presented fundamentally existing within my view as the researcher.

Responding to these two key assumptions, to ensure the following discussion remains grounded in the experiences of interviewees, I have interpreted the four key areas prominent within the data and articulated the interpretation of each as a vignette at the beginning of each section. Vignettes are incomplete short stories based on multiple perspectives or observations created to communicate the substance of a setting, person, or event in real-life situations. They are often used in qualitative research to present sketches of fictional scenarios or abstracted real life situations, written in an uncomplicated way, to enable researchers and research interviewees to imagine how the central character in a scenario might behave or react in response to complex problems or hypothetical situations (Finch, 1987; Bloor and Wood, 2006; Nieveen, 2007).

My adoption of vignettes in this chapter allows me to present multiple experiences shared by interviewees which have informed the theory grounded in my data in a concise and focused form. While the vignettes are fictionalised, they draw directly from the experiences of interviewees, using key extracts from interview transcripts as source material. The vignettes are formed around the character 'Sam', an enthusiastic new teacher who recently joined the department where she had been an undergraduate. She now teaches alongside several of her own former teachers and particularly enjoys teaching in a face-to-face environment. She is increasingly being asked to teach online, and while willing she does not yet feel comfortable teaching in an online environment.

The four vignettes presented capture Sam's experience engaging with practices or concepts which have challenged her feeling of legitimacy as a teacher. The subsequent discussion in each section employs Lacanian theory

to explore the reason for this challenge to legitimacy and how this is manifest in the experience's interviewees have shared. Based on this, potential responses are posited that teachers experiencing similar challenge to their professional identity might adopt.

### **7.3 Vignette 1 - Presentation of Self**

Sam sits at the desk in the corner of her bedroom in silence. Her class begins in a few minutes. She is still quite new to teaching this group and wants to make a good impression. She has put on a smart top and quickly makes sure her hair is tidy. It feels a bit odd given she is otherwise dressed casually and still has slippers on, but they are below the frame of the video and will not be seen. How about the background? She starts Microsoft Teams and checks the video preview, angling her webcam to ensure that the untidy bed is not visible in the video, but the bookshelf is. She has intentionally positioned academic books to make it look more like she is in an office, but also a copy of Harry Potter. She does not want to come across as too stuffy.

One copy of Harry Potter... is that really how much fun she wants her students to think she is? Too late to rethink now though. Her students are logging in. She switches on her camera and microphone to greet them, waving at the camera and splitting the silence with an exaggerated "Good afternoon, everybody, how are we all today?!" Two students' type 'hello' into the chat box. A more muted response than her greeting. But

then, what should she expect? She blushes, takes a deep breath, and gets on with the session.

(i) Link to Interviewee Experiences

In this vignette I draw together experiences' interviewees shared where they have manipulated their image or exaggerated their performance as they present themselves to students via the webcam. The description of these actions by interviewees suggests that they are an attempt to feel legitimate as an online teacher. However, these actions are troublesome as they result in a difference between how the teacher perceives themselves in the moment, and how they view themselves as they will be perceived by their students in the webcam. Andie shared how when teaching she felt the need to dress smartly, but when teaching online only did so from the waist up as this was visible to her students. In response to this, she described herself as feeling like 'half a person'. Riley discussed his 'academic bookshelf', the term he used to describe positioning academic literature in the vision of the webcam. He described the vanity and shame he felt in doing so, showing me a messy spare room in his family home he was teaching from and which he described as representing his real self. Similarly, Lesley mocked himself for displaying models, boardgames and comics in his background in an attempt to appear more relatable to his students. Describing a more performative experience, Jamie shared her attempt to emphasise her friendly, energetic classroom persona in her videos with exaggerated speech and gesticulation, only to view this retrospectively with embarrassment.

(ii) Emergent Theory

The theory I have presented in this vignette posits that attempts to distort the presentation of one's image as a teacher via a webcam can result in a



detachment of a teacher's self-concept and their perceived image, as viewed back via the webcam. The result is a sense of awkwardness which interviewees described experiencing when engaged with this practice. It was described as an uncomfortable, disorientating experience, leaving interviewees uneasy with how they were perceived as a teacher. I suggest this demonstrates a tension between self-concept as a teacher and the teacher image presented in the webcam, projecting into the online teaching space. It is this tension, the possible reason it has occurred, and why it causes discomfort which I discuss below.

### (iii) Discussion of Theory - The Mirror Stage and The Webcam

To describe and discuss the theory above, I adopt the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage. To summarise discussion of this offered in Chapter 3, the mirror stage is used to describe the moment when an infant first identifies with the image of themselves they see in the mirror. That is, it is the point at which they ask the question 'who am I?' The answer to this question is presented in the mirror, an image Lacan describes as our imaginary 'other'. The Lacanian argument is that it is through identification with the imaginary other we create 'ego', or conscious self, that is, the sense of who and what we are. The mirror stage is a period of self-recognition where ego takes shape.

The common account of Lacan's mirror stage describes infants forming self-concept for the first time. However, this does not exclude me from adopting the mirror stage as a useful model through which to explore the theory above.

Indeed, I view the mirror stage as being portable in that, as described by Chiesa (2007), it can be considered to be a process of self-recognition that is not limited to the experience of infants.

In Chapter 2 I discuss university teachers constantly evolving way of being, and of being seen as, a teacher, as they integrate a dynamic constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, motives, experiences, and diverse knowledge into a coherent image of self. In chapter 3 I consider how this chimes with the description of the imaginary other offered by Chiesa (2007) as a 'model for the entirety' of the many imaginary identifications one encounters throughout life. For university teachers I suggest their imaginary other is the image of self with which they identify and feel seen by themselves and others as legitimate in the university context. That is, with reference to my analytic schema, 'the teacher I want to be'.

Considering the experience of Sam, I propose the mirror stage occurs within the moment the online teacher sees themselves in their own webcam. That is, as a teacher views the video from their webcam in the software they are using to teach, their image as an online university teacher is projected back to them and based on this, they form a sense of a legitimate self as a teacher. The theory above, emergent in this study, leads me to suggest that this becomes problematic for the teacher where they manipulate this image. Drawing on Lacan's notion of the ideal-ego and ego-ideal, discussed in Chapter 3, I propose that teachers relate to and gain a sense of legitimacy from seeing a successful version of themselves in the webcam, their 'ideal-ego' formed around the 'teacher they want to be'. However, the manipulations they make are based on a sense of what they believe is expected of them, 'the teacher I should be', their 'ego-ideal' formed in response to their symbolic 'Other'

Based on this, I argue that the teachers understanding of who they are is formed around their ideal-ego which they expect to see in their webcam. The

manipulations they make however merge the ego-ideal, what they believe is expected of them, into the image they see. Rather than developing their legitimacy as a teacher as these actions are intended, they create a sense of threat and fragmentation between who they are and who they see which erodes their legitimacy.

(iv) Who am I?

In summary, in this section I have illuminated practices which interviewees in this research have adopted to manipulate or exaggerate how they appear online in their webcam video. I have suggested that, based on the description of experiences by several interviewees, this practice is problematic. The reason for this I suggest is that as the teacher manipulates their image, notions of who they are as an online teacher and who they believe they are expected to be come into conflict. This theory is based on critical discussion of interviewee experiences and on the Lacanian concepts of the mirror stage and the dualism of the ideal-ego and ego-ideal. From this I suggest the process of image manipulation described by interviewees is a narcissistic action and one which results in feelings of threat, fragmentation and embarrassment.

Based on my discussion of the theory presented in this vignette, I suggest teachers may respond to these feelings through reflective analysis of practices where they deliberately or unintentionally manipulate their image. Questioning why they engage in the practices they do, and what informs this action, may support teachers to address the reason they experience conflict in their notion of self as a teacher. Starting from a question central to identification during the mirror stage, teachers can ask of their image they view in the webcam 'who am I?'. This question forms the basis of the first of four reflective lenses I will

propose as a framework in the following chapter. I refer to this lens as the 'projected self' as it focuses critical reflection on the image a teacher projects in the online teaching environment, and whether this is an image they gain a feeling of legitimacy from. In discussion of this lens in the following chapter I will suggest how reflection through this lens can aid an understanding of identification as a teacher in the online educational space.

#### **7.4 Vignette 2 - Self-Perception**

Sam is halfway through a live seminar hosted online, talking at length about a case study. Of 36 students who are logged in, none have their webcam or microphone on. There is little response in the text chat when she asks a question. A few 'thumbs up' icons if she is lucky. She feels so disconnected with the students. There is no feedback, no visual cue that they 'get it', that they are happy, it is like talking into a void, as if there are no students even watching. There probably aren't. Her colleague suggested students are logging in, then just going off to make some lunch as they just want their attendance noted. They said they had watched their niece last week log on to an online lecture and then just turn away and switch on the TV. Sam just wants to know there is somebody there, but what if her students are making lunch or watching TV? She puts up a poll asking a couple of simple questions. There is some response. For the final question, she simply asks 'are you there'?

(i) [Link to Interviewee Experiences](#)

In the above vignette, Sam's experience draws on descriptions by several interviewees of synchronous online teaching scenarios where students declined to or resisted switching on their microphone or webcam. This resistance by the student removed them completely from the view of their teacher. Interviewees shared feelings and responses indicating frustration and anxiety resulting from not being able to see their students. For example, Andie described "that little nagging notion" that students had logged in to appear present but were not actually engaging. They described not being able to see their students as disheartening. Aiden shared how she had watched a 'real world' student log on to an online teaching session only for them to walk away from the computer, and the negative impact this had on her confidence as an online teacher. Lesley shared how his students refused to switch on their webcam video. He described this as a hinderance to his ability to view student progress, but also indicated that he was bewildered as students would happily share images of themselves on social media. Frankie described how he attempted to engage students through chat and quizzes during live sessions which culminated in a question of 'are you there?' with little response. Not being able to see their students was a cause of anxiety for interviewees with interviewees describing altering their behaviour in response to this.

#### (ii) Emergent Theory

In this vignette Sam's story captures the feelings of frustration and isolation experienced while teaching online that interviewees shared, as well as limited examples of practice attempting to manage this. The theory I have constructed from these accounts of participant experience is that frustration around student engagement is often linked more to anxiety resulting from not seeing students than any evidence of student disengagement. As a result of not being able to

see their students, the teacher may make a negative assumption that their students are not engaged. This assumption, and their emotional and practical response to this is based on their interpretation of activity by students they cannot see. This assumption made by a number of interviewees appeared to be based on hearsay and suggestion by others rather than actions they have themselves witnessed. Discussion in the following section explores the source of both the anxiety and frustration Sam is experiencing, and the basis for her interpretation of the scenario.

### (iii) Discussion of Theory - The Webcam and the Gaze

To discuss the emergent theory outlined above, I suggest the feelings and actions shared by interviewees resulting from their inability to see their students can be explored through the Lacanian link between the ego and the symbolic Other. As discussed in Chapter 3, the Other is an individual's secondary point of recognition based in the symbolic order of language and culture in which they exist. Lacan (1973) conceptualises the 'gaze' as the relationship between the ego and the symbolic Other. It places an individual's ego, or sense of self, as an object in the view of that symbolic Other (Evans, 1996). The result is the anxious state of mind that comes with the self-awareness that one can be seen and looked at, an uncanny sense of being watched. According to Lacan the effect this has on the individual is a loss of autonomy and anxiety.

Lacan's interpretation of the gaze is a useful concept as we can position the webcam as an object from which we are seen. The webcam is, in a very literal sense, representative of the gaze. When teaching, it becomes the focal point of the teacher, as it is a point where they focus their ego, presented as their professional identity. The teacher will talk and present to the webcam when in

the online environment, gaining stimulation from the students interacting on their computer screen and via the audio of their students' responses. Where this becomes disrupted is when students are invisible to the teacher. There is not the stimulus the teacher desires on screen, but the teacher still must 'teach' the webcam. In this scenario, my argument is that as teachers lose the sight and sound of their students, how they believe they are perceived by their students shifts from being based on interaction, to being construed from the teachers' beliefs of what is expected of them. With reference to my analytic schema developed in chapter 3, 'the teacher I am' loses the confirmation of 'the teacher I want to be' drawn from interacting with students, and instead turns to 'the teacher I should be', seeking confirmation of their legitimacy. This becomes troublesome as the stimulation the teacher draws from being watched by their students ceases. They no longer gain response to, or affirmation of, their legitimacy as a teacher. The teacher desires stimulation from being watched by their students, but when interaction is reduced to engagement with the webcam the response they perceive, I argue, is the gaze of the Other.

This relationship between the teacher and the gaze is exemplified in the descriptions of beliefs, feelings and actions interviewees have shared in this study. Andie's 'little nagging notion' is, I suggest, the paranoia and anxiety that their students are not present, and they have no control over this. I also suggest Aiden, who like many interviewees shared their belief students simply log in and walk away from their online seminar sessions, based their belief on negative prior experiences and observations, and they are responding to their teaching 'Other' which is formed around these prior experiences and observations. The actions of interviewees such as Frankie asking 'are you

there' suggests not only a paranoia that the students are not watching, but a desire to teach them.

Vanheule (2011) suggests the gaze can prompt us to ask questions such as 'what would people think of me?' In my analytic schema, I liken this to the question 'who is the teacher I should be?' In this research, I suggest participants described attempts at reaffirming acts, such as asking 'are you there?', but also feelings of paranoia and anxiety that students are not present, are not learning.

In discussion of my first vignette my argument is that it is the actions of teachers manipulating the image they project into the online space which results in the difference between how they perceive themselves and how they believe they are perceived. I suggest that in my second vignette the teacher has a similar experience of difference, but it is the teachers lack of ability to see their students, and the resulting feeling of being watched by the gaze, which is disruptive for their sense of self and legitimacy as a teacher. This is beyond the control of the teacher, but is nonetheless a troublesome experience, causing anxiety and paranoia and impacting of the teacher's notion of legitimacy and how they identify as a teacher in the online space.

#### (iv) Who is there?

In summary, in this section I have explored and discussed the experiences of interviewees who shared how they responded to students not being visible to them in the online classroom. I have suggested that this experience is troublesome for teachers as, when they are unable to observe the students who they are teaching, this causes feelings of anxiety and paranoia. These feelings can, I suggest, be explained by considering Lacan's notion of the gaze.



That is, I posit that when teaching online, if the teacher cannot hear or see their students because they have switched off their webcam and microphone, they imagine that they are being watched by another, but that other is the symbolic Other. They developed a sense they are being watched by a notion of what they perceive is expected of them. I suggest teachers may manage these feelings through reflection on their perception of their Other. They might question who, when the students switch off their webcams, they believe is still watching them.

Based on this, a question I suggest teachers can ask when they reflect on not being able to see their students is 'who is watching me?'. This question underpins the second of four reflective lenses I propose as a framework in the following chapter. I refer to this lens as the 'watched self' as it is intended to focus critical reflection on the students watching the teacher in the online environment, and whether the teacher's interpretation of their student's perspective influences their validation and self-concept as a teacher. I will discuss and propose how reflection through this lens has the potential to support teachers to form a stronger sense of legitimacy in the online educational environment, developing their sense of legitimacy in this space.

### **7.5 Vignette 3 - Problems with Communication**

Sam is teaching another online seminar using the virtual classroom. She has never met this group physically but has been teaching them for a few weeks. There is some difficult student behaviour. Some text messages in the chat seem very blunt, rude, even aggressive. She has asked the students to moderate their tone and language. However, it does not seem to be

improving. “Did you watch the video from Laura?” she asks. Laura is her colleague who recently joined the teaching team. “WHO WAS THAT? BORING LOL!” was the reply in the text chat from one student. Sam defends Laura. “SOZ – WAS JUST JOKING” came the reply from the student, but other students were getting involved now with messages which were increasingly negative, turning to a recent assessment. “She marked my assignment. Is she even a proper member of staff?” The comment about the assignment unleashes a flurry of critical comments about Laura’s marking. After the session Sam gets an email from a student. The subject line reads ‘RE-MARK MY WORK!’

(i) Link to Interviewee Experiences

In this vignette I have merged several experiences shared by interviewees which, while not always within similar scenarios, relate to challenges interviewees shared regarding communication with students. Interviewees suggested that these challenges resulted in a feeling they or their colleagues were not seen as a teacher in the eyes of their students, that they were not legitimate. Jessie and Aiden both described increased impoliteness, bordering on aggressiveness at times, from students communicating via chat with them in online seminars. They indicated that this made them question whether they were seen as a teacher by their students. In another example, Taylor described her upset when a group of her students submitted a formal complaint about a colleague who she managed directly to senior leadership in the school. The students had not met her colleague, having only viewed her in a recorded video. Taylor described being shocked by the immediate escalation to a

complaint, challenging her colleague's legitimacy in the video as a teacher. She had also been surprised that the students had not raised the issue with her in the first instance. In addition, Jamie received complaints regarding another colleague, but, in her judgement, this was simply where students were unfamiliar with the colleague who had marked their work. However, Jamie's students demanded she reassessed their work as they did not trust the colleague.

#### (ii) Emergent Theory

Sam's story merges these experiences into a single exchange, but these incidents occurred across several scenarios shared by interviewees. What links these experiences are the feelings of illegitimacy and alienation the teacher has in response to their perception of the actions of their students when they teach online. The theory I suggest is emergent in this data is while the students appeared blunt and at times aggressive, this can be linked to the lack of a common culture in the online classroom, challenging the legitimacy of the teacher in the virtual learning space. The reality of the classroom is split for all involved, placing the individuals in remote spaces where they are unable to interpret the roles and expectations of others, particularly their teacher. This impacts how student conduct is projected and received while communicating. A message formed in the reality of a student's own physical space may be appropriate to how they act in that physical space, but this is not aligned with the reality of others in the virtual classroom. This appears to result in misinterpretation, misunderstanding and feelings of isolation and hostility.

#### (iii) Discussion of Theory - Symbolic Fractures in Virtual Spaces

I explore the theory presented above by theorising a gap between the reality of the teacher and the reality of the student. More specifically, I suggest the

socially defined 'constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, and motives' in which teachers form self-concept and legitimacy as a professional, are disconnected from those of the students in the virtual classroom. To hypothesise the impact of this disconnection on teachers, I further draw on Lacan's symbolic Other. I have introduced the symbolic 'Other' in previous sections of this chapter as well as in my earlier discussion in Chapter 3. While as I have previously discussed, the symbolic Other exists around us, key to my discussion here is that, as Žižek (2009) suggests, the Other and symbolic order is a 'subjective presupposition' that only exists as far as individuals 'act as if it exists'. That is, something assumed based on our perception of our world, the 'teacher I should be', as described in chapter 3. As Žižek (2009) posits, 'when I violate a certain rule of decency, I never simply do something that most others do not do, I do what "one" doesn't do.' That is, when we act as we believe is the commonly accepted way to act, we are acting in response to the Other. We are acting in response to the limitations of what is acceptable as is defined by the social and symbolic order we exist within in the moment. The problem I perceived with the virtual teaching space encountered online is there is a fracture in the symbolic Other not experienced in the face-to-face classroom. While the Other we experience is unique to us, in the face-to-face classroom there is some commonality based on our shared physical space, there is a 'one' which does or does not do. In the virtual classroom it is likely there is a much-reduced understanding of who 'one' is.

This means the notion of the symbolic Other can become problematic when we interact in virtual spaces. For clarity at this stage 'virtual' can be defined as 'nearly as described, but not completely' (Cambridge University Press, 2022). More specifically in relation to this thesis it can be defined as 'not physically

existing as such but made by software to appear to do so' (Oxford University Press, 2022). 'Virtual' is a key term often used to describe the online educational space and is embedded in university culture through tools such as virtual learning environments and virtual classrooms. Taking a moment to consider this illuminates where a problem exists with communication during 'virtual' learning activities or in 'virtual' teaching spaces.

Žižek (2007) describes how in virtual spaces we experience a disintegration of the Other resulting from the 'inconsistent and incompatible universes' we access the virtual space from. I suggest the sense of shock and challenge to professional validity experienced results from the teacher and their students responding from incompatible universes. This results from teaching in the virtual classroom, with students each logging in from different remote, inconsistent spaces. In the physical classroom, certain language, laws, and culture may be aligned as the 'one' of that classroom. As a result, the teacher and students have a collective understanding of decency, and of what constitutes 'the teacher I should be'. My suggestion is where teachers and students communicate within the virtual classroom there is a fracturing of the symbolic Other shared with students, and a breakdown in understanding of the 'teacher I should be'.

By engaging with students in a 'virtual' space, the 'one' of the classroom can become split between the 'one' of the physical reality the student is in, and the 'one' they interpret in the virtual classroom. The teacher and students will still have a sense of 'what one does', but this is likely to be specific to the remote physical space from which they join the virtual space from. Drawing on Lacan's proposition of the split subject discussed in chapter 3, if our unconscious self,

or subject, is necessary split to enter the Symbolic Order of language and culture which surrounds us, what is the result of the Symbolic Order itself being fractured and disintegrated across incompatible universes? I suggest the result may be students, such as Taylor's who complain about the teacher in the video, or Jamie's who asked for their work to be re-marked, acting in a way not compatible with the 'one' of the classroom the teacher expects.

My argument here is therefore when students are learning online, how they view and respond to their teacher is based in part on their own surroundings, their reality. When the teacher engages with students through a "virtual" teaching space, I suggest they fracture and disintegrate the symbolic order informed by the laws, language, and culture of the classroom. Referring to Lacan's split subject and Žižek's 'what one doesn't do', if the teachers symbolic order and that of their students exists across incompatible realities, they, the subject, are each split to form a sense of how one acts in response to a very different Other. The shared notion of established decency they expect becomes lost as both the teacher and their students misrecognise the 'Other' of their remote space as the 'Other' of the virtual classroom.

#### (iv) Who are we?

In summary, in this section I have argued that behaviours and actions by students we perceive in the virtual classroom are formed in response to fragmented and incompatible realities experienced by teachers and students. Taking the idea of the virtual classroom being 'virtual' in the sense of being partial and incomplete, I have suggested that this results in a perception of a symbolic Other in this space which informs the teacher's understanding of what one does. However, the 'one' we based this on is part shared with our students,

part formed by the teacher remotely. As a result, I suggest teachers experience shock or discomfort with the actions of their students, which is interpreted as delegitimising as a teacher.

Communicating through language and actions with students online is virtual in its true sense, being partial or incomplete as the words are spoken in the context of the teacher's reality, but then stripped of meaning and reconstituted in the reality of their students, and vice-versa. Based on this discussion, reflection on who the teacher is based in their own surroundings, who the students are in their own surrounds, and what shared symbolic order can exist in the virtual space may support better understanding of self-concept by the teacher. Teachers might ask the question of those in the virtual classroom, 'who are we?' Asking the question 'who are we?' is not just an attempt to find a commonality with remote students. It is to explore, returning to discussion of professional identity in chapter 2, the values, behaviours, and attributes we projected, but also lost, in the virtual space.

The question 'who are we' forms the basis of the third reflective lens in the framework I will propose in the following chapter. I refer to this lens as the 'partial self' as it focuses critical reflection on the partial aspects of teacher professional identity which may not be visible in the online teaching space, and how this influences a teacher's sense of legitimacy.

## **7.6 Vignette 4 - Feelings of Disconnection**

Sam was asked to record a series of lecture videos a few months ago, outside of term time, in advance of the delivery of her module. This is not the way she likes to teach, but the leadership of her school considered it to be a way to spread workload more

evenly through the year. Now that it is term time students watch the recordings, and she just delivers online seminars. However, Sam struggles to recall exactly what she said in the videos and finds it unnerving. At one point in a seminar a student asks a question. She answers, but the student points out she has contradicted what she had said in the video. She describes this as embarrassing. Who is wrong? Is she wrong? Or is the Sam in the video wrong? Sam struggles to clarify for the student. After the session she watches the video again. Her opinions have changed so much in just a few months. There are several points she finds herself questioning in her video. Who even is the person in the video? And more importantly, who do her students believe is the 'real' Sam?

(i) Link to Interviewee Experiences

In this vignette I present one perspective on a complex challenge all interviewees discussed, some in depth. That is, the recording of lectures which can be digitally duplicated and become persistent. This was discussed by Frankie in terms of contested ownership of intellectual property presented in the video; by Jessie regarding fears of redundancy resulting from videos replacing live delivery; and by Drew relating to feelings of losing control over their teaching practice. These discussions alluded to issues of self-concept and legitimacy which were more explicit in experiences shared by Jamie and Elliot. Jamie shared discomfort with her identity as a teacher being in a video delivered to a group of students she would not meet. This discomfort was with the idea students would be taught by an image of her identity in the video where she was not 'live' and where it would not feel like a live version of her.



Elliot described himself as a teacher in a video being reused by students as 'fossilised', trapped in the video and drained of life.

#### (ii) Emergent Theory

The theory presented in the above vignette, and emergent from the associated experiences of participants, is that the act of recording videos of teachers intended for ongoing reuse by students results in a loss of connection between the teacher's self-concept and the image they perceive in the video. What I suggest is being experienced by interviewees is an uncomfortable detachment from the snapshot of the teacher's self-image which the video captures. Students they will never meet may be taught by the version of the teacher in the video. The teacher may find themselves teaching alongside the teacher in the video. The resultant feeling of detachment and the teacher's lack of control over this version of their identity can be argued, at least in part, to underpin the concerns faced by Frankie, Jessie and Drew.

#### (iii) Discussion of Theory - The Recorded Teacher as Lacan's Lamella

To form a critical discussion of this theory, I draw on the fable told by Lacan (1966) of the Lamella as an analogy of Sam's vignette. The Lamella is used by Lacan to describe the interface between the imaginary Other and the Real, respectively described in Chapter 3 as the primary points of recognition for the entirety of our often-fragmented identity, and what is beyond the language of our Symbolic order. Lacan (1966) uses 'the Lamella' to describe an aspect of the imaginary other which detaches from the self to create a partial representation of the person which exists within the Real. Žižek (2009) offers a useful, descriptive analogy of this, through the aliens in the movie "Invasion of the Body Snatchers". In this, those infected by the alien appear to be familiar,

which we can liken to the imaginary other. However, the infected body is under the control of something which cannot be described, an illustration of the Real.

The descriptions and language interviewees used to explain their response to their own videos suggest a discomfort with loss of autonomy. My argument here is that this is, in part at least, due to the image becoming a more distant and less familiar version of the teacher's imaginary other. That is, with reference to my analytic schema in chapter 3, upon recording their image as a teacher in a video, the 'teacher I want to be', which the 'teacher I am' primarily relates to, begins to fade into 'the teacher I am not'. As a result, I suggest based on my data, there is a sense of loss of control over their diverse knowledge and experience presented in the video. This is now captured and, for the teacher in the video, cannot change. The teacher also loses control over the constellation of attributes, beliefs, values, and motives informing the way they appear in the video. Their values may change, but as the video is used the teacher is to a certain degree hostage to their professional image frozen at the time of recording. The impact of this, I suggest, is a break in the teacher's coherent image of the self which underpins their feeling of legitimacy.

As I have suggested in my definition developed in chapter 3, teacher professional identity is a notion of self within a moment, an attempt to find legitimacy and stability as a teacher in a complex and constantly shifting and evolving professional landscape. The practice of teachers recording themselves captures a frozen, 'fossilised' or 'not alive' version of the teacher which, over time, they become unfamiliar with. The dynamic landscape of the profession, their symbolic Other, and the teacher's sense of self as a professional, all evolve. The result, I argue, is that the teacher's imaginary other at the time of

recording becomes their professional 'Lamella', slowly engulfed by the Real. The teachers' image of self and the language of the Other is rewritten, subtly shifting while the image in the video remains fixed, presented through an unfamiliar medium and contextualised by the technology used to present it.

Returning to Zizek's (2009) likening to "Invasion of the Body Snatchers", in this film there is not much more than a small detail that makes the difference between a person and an infected 'body'. As with the teacher vividly represented in the video, the body is out of the control of the teacher, but this lack of control is often something which cannot be described, the Real.

Over time, the teacher's Lamella in the video presents students with a version of their teacher identity trapped in the imaginary and symbolic orders of the time. As the student then watches this video, the video itself becomes the Lamella, moving over the face of the teacher. The relationship between the image of the teacher in the video and the self-concept of the existing teacher is broken. The video looks like the teacher, and may act like the teacher, but it is a now dead version of the teacher that haunts their teaching. Concerns shared by participants in this study suggests an anxiety the video may supersede the teacher in the eyes of their students, stripping the teacher of their sense of autonomy and control.

#### (iv) Who is that?

I have suggested above that the practice of capturing and reusing recordings of teaching is problematic and can result in troublesome outcomes for teacher professional identity. My theoretic suggestion based on the data and my discussion above is that the recording captures an in-the-moment version of the teacher which quickly becomes dated. As a result, teachers become detached

from this image of them as a professional. From my discussion of this theory, I suggest this has the potential to position the teacher in the video at the interface between their Imaginary other and the Real. That is, the image from which they form ego, or conscious self-concept, is captured in the video and as time passes, they identify less with that image, losing connection with and recognition of that image.

To respond to this experience of disconnection with the self-image, I suggest reflection can be prompted by asking of the video 'who is that?', or more accurately, 'is that you?' This is intended to prompt acknowledgement of the difference between the teacher's self-concept and the image of a teacher in the video. This reflection can lead to further questions regarding points of difference in the constellation of notions that forms their professional self-concept. These questions form the basis of the final reflective lens in the framework I will propose in the following chapter. I refer to this lens as the 'detached self' as it focuses critical reflection on the difference between teacher professional identity in the moment they exist, and in the moment they created a learning resource such as a video. In discussion of this lens in the following chapter I suggest how reflection through this lens may support teachers to increase feelings of autonomy and control over their image, potentially enabling a more legitimate self-concept as a teacher to develop.

## **7.7 Chapter Conclusions**

In this chapter I have critically discussed theory grounded in my data in response to my research question 'how do specific concepts or practices utilised by university teachers influence their professional identity when teaching online?' Based on my review of literature and on the insights gained

from my direct research and drawing on my definition and schema of identity developed around Lacanian theories and constructs in chapter 3, I have presented my interpretation and discussion of four main theoretic areas emergent in my data. This discussion has illuminated a theme that crosses each of my theorised areas. Through this critical discussion, I recognise how particular concepts and practices relating to teaching online shared by participants can create difference between how they perceive themselves and how they believe they are perceived by others. This is apparent in the distorted image teachers view of themselves in the webcam; the abstract view they believe their students have when they cannot see them; the partial view students have of them in the virtual space; and the frozen image of them in their videos.

Recognising the impact of these concepts and practices has potential to support reflection in university teachers as they attempt to create a coherent self-image through which they feel legitimate in their own eyes and feel seen as legitimate in the eyes of others. This recognition is not intended to directly resolve the challenges faced by providing answers. Rather, it is intended to illuminate differences between how participants in this enquiry have perceived themselves, and how they believe they have been perceived, in the online education space. Recognition of this, I argue, can contribute to guidance and support for university teachers as they encounter challenges around self-concept and legitimacy during online teaching.

Turning towards the practical application of these findings, I have distilled theory emerging from the data in the form of four questions.

- Who am I?

- Who is there?
- Who are we?
- Who is that?

These questions are intended to prompt reflection in response to the four troublesome areas emergent in this study. In the following chapter I position these questions within a framework of reflective lenses encompassing the key issues discussed and developed above and employ them in the creation of a toolkit supporting teacher reflection.

## **Chapter 8. A Framework for Online Teacher Professional Identity**

The vignettes presented and discussed in the previous chapter illuminate four interesting but troublesome experiences emergent from this study. These experiences each relate to how concepts and practices commonly applied or encountered when teaching online result in an awareness by teachers of the difference between how they perceive themselves and how they believe they are perceived by others. These experiences are:

- Where teachers manipulate how they look in their webcam and this distorts their self-image.
- When teachers cannot view or interact with their students online and construe the perception of someone watching them.
- Where teaching in a virtual classroom results in the fracturing of shared norms and decency between the teacher and students.
- When teachers create video recordings and capture a version of their professional image in the video which they become detached from.

For teachers undergoing similar experiences, reflecting on these troublesome notions are potentially useful in building a better understanding of their self-concept and validation as an online teacher. In this chapter I draw on the discussion in Chapter 7 to develop a framework composed of four reflective lenses. These are intended to support university teacher development, assisting teachers to address the troublesome experiences surfaced in this enquiry. I then consider the opportunities I propose these lenses present for academic developers and those in similar roles supporting teacher development for online education. I discuss how the framework may be

implemented to guide these practitioners as they support the academic development of university teachers.

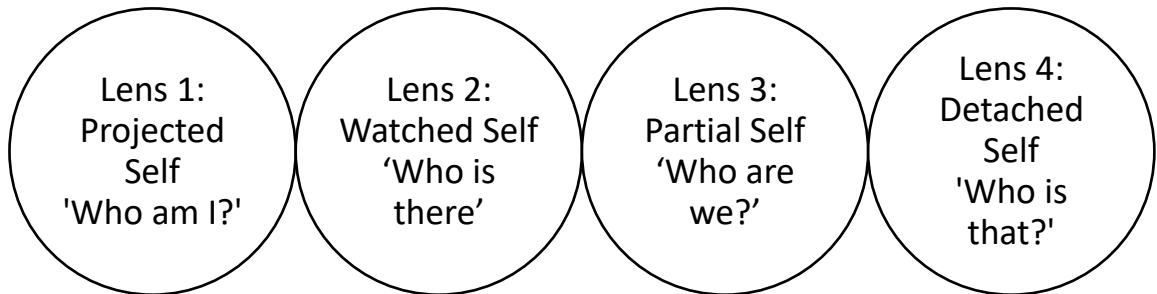
### **8.1 Reflection**

In Chapter 2 I have discussed the importance of reflection in the development of university teacher professional identity. I also considered the use of clear frameworks by academic developers to guide teachers through this process. Taking a similar position to Brookfield (1995) I position my findings in the section which follows as a reflective framework of questions. These are drawn together under the four perspectives or lenses noted above which can be used to critically reflect on being a teacher in the online space. My intention is that these lenses are used during reflection by teachers developing their practice teaching online, enabling deeper, critical analysis of their experiences. This in turn is intended to support teachers to make sense of the concepts or practices they may face as they transition to online teaching, and its impact on their self-validation and feeling of stability as a teacher. I argue that through reflective questioning using these lenses, teachers can respond to complex, ill-structured, troublesome experiences they encounter when teaching online for which there may be no obvious solution.

Aligning with a format and language used in other reflective models presents the output of my research in a familiar presentation which is similar to teacher development tools already in use. My intention in doing this is to emphasise the value of the findings of this research to teachers, teaching teams, academic developers, and others involved in support and development of teaching practice in online spaces.



## 8.2 A Reflective Framework for Managing Professional Identity when Teaching Online



*Figure 6 - Critical Lens Framework for Reflection on Online Teacher Professional Identity*

The framework presented in Figure 6 is based on the theory emergent in this enquiry and critically explored in the previous chapter. A summary description of each of the four lenses is provided below along with suggested reflective questions. Following these descriptions, I suggest examples for practical application of the framework and consider implications of these findings for those supporting teacher identity development.

### 8.2.01 Lens 1 - The Projected Self

The lens I label the 'projected self' is intended to prompt the teacher to consider the image of themselves they 'project' into the online learning environment, and which they view on screen back through the video from their own webcam. The perspective which underpins this lens is based on the premise developed in discussing the first vignette in chapter 7. This suggests that when teaching online, the person the teacher sees by way of their own webcam is not an accurate projection of their teacher professional identity as a teacher in that moment. Rather, it is a distorted version of their professional image

manipulated by them to influence how they are perceived as a teacher by their students.

This lens is intended to prompt teachers to ask the question 'is that me?' This is based on my argument in Vignette 1 - Presentation of Self that the ability of a teacher to superficially manipulate how they are presented in the webcam allows them to project a distortion of their professional image. By doing so I suggest a teacher may be tempted to conflate the image of who they would like to be as a teacher with the image of who they believe is the perfect teacher in the eyes of others. While the intention of these manipulations may be based in a desire to increase their sense of legitimacy as a teacher, the responses of interviewees in this study suggest that this can result in feelings of embarrassment, discomfort, or inauthenticity with the image the teacher sees of themselves.

To respond to this and project a professional image more representative of their self-concept as a teacher, I suggest when a teacher views their image in the webcam video they should ask, relating to the image they see, "who am I?" Where they feel embarrassment, discomfort, or inauthenticity because of asking this question they should ask themselves why this is. Questions which may guide them include:

- Who is the teacher I want to be?
- Who do I feel I should be in the webcam video?
- Who expects me to be that person?
- How do manipulations I have made to my image make me feel?

By asking these questions, I argue a teacher can reflect on how and why they present themselves as they do through the webcam. They can also consider

how this presentation informs their self-concept and validation as a teacher in the online space. By doing so I suggest the teacher is guided to reflect on what they perceive as their acceptable and desirable image when teaching online, and whether the way that they represent themselves through the lens of their 'projected self' reflects this. This is intended to prompt the teacher to recognise aspects of their projected image which they can change to feel more comfortable and validated as an online teacher.

#### 8.2.02 Lens 2 – The Watched Self

The second of the four lenses, the 'watched self' is intended to prompt the teacher to challenge their experience, or feeling, of being 'watched' in the online environment. This is based on responses of interviewees discussed in Vignette 2 - Self-Perception which suggest that when teaching online, if the teacher cannot see or interact with their students, they experience feelings of anxiety and loss of control. My argument is that this results from a subconscious change in their perception of who is watching them. When watched by their students I suggest the teacher draws stimulation and legitimacy from the reactions of their students. Experiences participants in this study have shared suggest when they cannot see or hear their students, they still desire the stimulation of being watched, but construe a subconscious image of who is watching them based on their belief of what is expected of them by others. It is the feeling that, for a teacher, I argue is formed around the ideals they aim to live up to, the image they hold of the perfect teacher in the eyes of others.

Critical reflection through this lens is intended to challenge this view, starting from the question 'who is there?', or 'who is watching me?'. Responding to this

question reflectively may support teachers to explore what they think their students expect of them. It is possible this prompts further reflection on where response is based on an actual experience with their student group, and where the response is based on an idealised version of a teacher image formed around opinions they perceive in broader society and culture. By better understanding the reality of the expectations that they have of themselves, I suggest teachers can be better placed to respond to the anxiety and loss of control suggested in the experiences shared by interviewees in this study.

Starting from the question 'who is there?', the following questions are intended to challenge the expectations teachers feel are placed upon them.

- Who is the teacher my students think I should be?
- What do I enjoy about being seen by my students?
- Do I feel restricted by the opinions of my students?
- Do my students make me anxious when I cannot see them?

These questions are intended to be used to assist teachers to query when they gain little or no interaction with students in an online space, their perception of what their students are doing or what their student's perception is of them. This can be supportive, exploring the experience of not being watched, and how anxieties teachers may experience as a result may not be accurately based on the opinions of their students. By doing this, I suggest the teacher can develop a clearer rationale of the expectations of their students, and the expectations they place upon themselves, strengthening their sense of legitimacy as a teacher.

### 8.2.03 Lens 3 – The Partial Self

The 'partial self' is a broader reflective lens than others in the framework in that it aims to prompt reflection by the teacher on the values and social norms they share with their students in the online environment. This lens takes the perspective, developed in discussion of Vignette 3 - Problems with Communication, of a teacher's validation and self-concept being formed partly in response to the social space they share with students. It is based on my argument that, where a teaching space is virtual, it is incomplete.

The intention of this lens is to support teachers to reflect on the teacher image they project, the image of their students they perceive, and the different contexts and physical environments these are formed in. It suggests the perception of the teacher and their students is subject to their own physical space and this may cause confusion or even shock at the actions or responses of others. It is intended to prompt teachers to reflect on aspects of their teacher image which underpin their self-concept and professional validation, where they can share these via the virtual environment, and where they cannot. Through reflection, where there is collective understanding of behaviour and actions between the teacher and their students in the online space, and importantly where there is not, may be illuminated.

Critical reflection through this lens starts from the question 'who are we?'. The following questions are intended to support reflective exploration of the shared culture and norms, and the limitations of these, in the virtual classroom.

- What do I expect of my students in the virtual classroom?
- Do my students' actions make me feel legitimate as their teacher, and why?

- Do my students share my understanding of what is appropriate behaviour in the virtual classroom?
- Where do I perceive student understanding of appropriate behaviour in the virtual classroom to not be the same as mine, and why?

Asking these questions is intended to prompt reflection on the notion that the image a teacher shares in an online environment may only be a partial version of the teacher they want to be seen as. The aim is to highlight aspects of our professional identity, our attributes, beliefs, and values which are challenged in the virtual space when mutual understanding is lost. By doing so a teacher may recognise where misunderstanding of their professional identity by their students can potentially cause them to doubt their legitimacy as a teacher.

#### 8.2.04 Lens 4 – The Detached Self

The lens I label the ‘detached self’ is intended to illuminate my argument that when we create learning materials which capture vivid versions of a teacher’s image, that version of their image is subject to the moment in which it is captured. As I have posited in

Vignette 4 - Feelings of Disconnection, my suggestion is at this point the teachers constantly evolving way of being is frozen or ‘fossilised’. This reflects descriptions from participants in this study that suggest as they develop and evolve their self-concept as a teacher and respond to new and varying teaching situations, this ‘fossilised’ image becomes detached from what they perceive as their professional identity. The lens is intended to prompt recognition and reflection on the difference and tension between teacher professional identity in the moment, and the teacher image viewed in the video.

By acknowledging the difference between these versions of a teacher's image, reflection may be used to explore how a teacher relates to the version of themselves in the video. In addition, I suggest it can support consideration of how over time they can feel detached from this version of their image as a teacher.

Critical reflection through this lens starts from the question 'who is that?' This is intended to prompt consideration by the teacher that the image of themselves they perceive in the video does not represent their notion of their professional identity in the moment they exist. From here this lens is intended to explore if, how and why the teacher presented in the video is different. This can be difficult to describe as changes may be subtle and exist in our own understanding of the language we use to describe ourselves as teachers. Questions proposed to support reflection through this lens are focused on acknowledging change, rather than defining the image of the teacher in the video.

- Do you feel connected to the person in the video?
- Who were you at the time you made that video?
- How have you changed since recording the video?
- Do you still believe the message in the video?

As indicated above, prompting these questions is intended to support recognition of potential differences between the teacher in the moment they exist, and the image of the teacher captured in the moment of recording the video. This can support reflection on how the teacher has changed, and how that change may subsequently impact how they view themselves in the video, and how that change may impact the students who watch the video.

### **8.3 Implications of Findings for Wider Professional Practice**

As with other reflective frameworks used in teacher development including those I have discussed earlier in this chapter, my intention is for this framework to be practically implemented in a range of scenarios. These include use by individual teachers, teaching teams, academic developers, learning technologists, and university leaders and policy makers.

#### **8.3.01 Individual Teachers**

As with other reflective models highlighted earlier in this chapter, a direct use of the framework of reflective lenses generated in this research is in stimulating and supporting individual reflection by teachers. This might be within informal settings such as reflective diary keeping, colleague conversations, or simply individual reflection. It may also be appropriate in more formal settings such as learning design, module reports or curriculum development plans. Across these activities, the framework of lenses provides prompts and structure based on the theory grounded in the data of this research. This framework therefore has potential to guide individuals into a more critical and informed reflection on their practice, and the challenges they face teaching online.

#### **8.3.02 Teaching Teams**

Like the suggestion above regarding utility of the proposed framework for the critique and development of practice by individual teachers, there is also scope for this to be applied within team settings. Through similar activities, both formal and informal, the series of lenses serve as a prompt for critique and development. The distinct benefit of this to teaching teams is that the lenses provide a common structure and language to share reflections and discuss



collective development of practice. Application of the framework in team workshops and development sessions can provide a common set of perspectives from which to discuss teaching practice within a team, and share reflection on experiences which focus on the troublesome questions posed by the framework.

### 8.3.03 Academic Developers

In this study I hold a dual role as both the researcher and as an academic developer, as the insider. This study has been conceived based on challenges to university teachers I have viewed from my perspective as an academic developer. I suggest that it is on the practice of my peer group of academic developers that the outcomes of this research will have the broadest potential impact. As I have already highlighted earlier in this chapter, reflective frameworks or models are core technologies of academic developers as they support the development of teachers across a range of discipline areas. Reflective writing, professional conversations and critical feedback on online teaching are key activities for university teachers as online education is increasingly imposed on them. Support of their development not just of their practice, but of their identity and self-concept as a teacher are increasingly important in these areas.

The framework I propose can guide both the design of development activities, and the discourse of academic developers, as they support teachers who are increasingly teaching online. For example, observations of online teachers intended to support their development can take the form of reviews of resources, viewing a live teaching session, or reviewing a recording of a session. The lenses proposed above may, for example be used as prompts by

the observer to guide feedback and discussion, supporting the development of teacher self-concept and professional identity. Similarly, the lenses and questions may be used as a structure to guide professional conversations between teachers and academic developers, prompting reflection on self-concept and professional identity as an online teacher,

#### 8.3.04 Learning Technologists

Learning technologists play a significant role in supporting the development of online educational experiences for students. How they work with university teachers to develop technical capability, practice, and teaching resources is, for many teachers, a critical area of support. How they form working relationships with university teachers is also critical to the development of the teacher's professional identity in the online space. The lenses of the reflective framework I propose have the potential to guide practice by those in these support roles, developing an understanding of their role not just in enabling the practice of the teacher, but supporting the transition in the teachers' professional identity. For example, referring to Hanson (2009) suggestion of the learning technologist reducing the teacher to knowledge worker, the reflective framework may provide support for learning technologist to avoid causing teachers to feel this way. By viewing those they support through these lenses, learning technologist will be supported to be sensitive to teachers' experiences of feeling projected, watched, partial and detached, revising working practices to help teachers address these troublesome issues.

### 8.3.05 University Leaders and Policy Makers

The framework of lenses is also intended to influence discussion by those exercising power over the practice of teachers such as university leaders and policy makers. The lenses of the framework provide a prompt for exploring the impact of online teaching experiences on teacher confidence and mental wellbeing. For example, recalling interviewees' discussion of the impact of creating video recordings, one area of consideration could be the negative impact my research suggests this has on university teacher professional identity. This could, for example, prompt reconsideration of a leadership decision or policy encouraging or requiring the recording of video teaching. My hope is the lenses provided might offer a prompt for reflection on and reframing by decision makers, raising awareness of the potential impact of these decisions and resulting in the exploration of alternative options.

## **8.4 Chapter Conclusions**

In this chapter I have used the vignettes presented and discussed in Chapter 7 to underpin and develop a framework of reflective lenses. The purpose of these is to prompt and guide reflection by teachers when engaging in online education so as to explore their understanding of their professional identity. I have also considered the implication of this for academic developers and those in similar roles supporting teacher development for online education. I have discussed how the framework can inform these practitioners to support the development of professional identity in university teachers.

In the following chapter I present my final conclusions from this thesis. I highlight the outcomes of this thesis which make my original contribution to knowledge. I also consider potential limitations and improvements to this thesis,

and further potential avenues for enquiry stemming from this research. Finally, I offer my closing reflections on the journey and experience of the Professional Doctorate programme.

## **Chapter 9. Conclusions**

I commenced study of the Educational Doctorate programme in September 2016. At this time, reading the Student Handbook for the programme I first encountered the assessment criteria for The Thesis. It states that the thesis must 'make a substantial and original contribution to knowledge or understanding'. This contribution should relate to professional concerns and enable me to accomplish a number of objectives:

- create original knowledge relating to the focus of inquiry;
- further integrate knowledge of research with the nature of professionalism;
- act and reflect critically within a context of professional inquiry;
- contribute originally or creatively to research methodology or methods.

In this final chapter I will articulate my belief that I have achieved these objectives. I will offer concluding comments on my theory and the generation of the reflective framework presented in the previous chapter, highlighting the original knowledge I contribute to the collective knowledge and understanding of those in my professional role and discipline area.

### **9.1 Concluding Comments**

In this research I have designed and implemented an enquiry in response to the question 'how do specific concepts or practices utilised by university teachers influence their professional identity when teaching online?' This thesis has presented the existing knowledge and theoretic foundation informing this enquiry; the design of the research approach; analysis of the data collected;

theory generated from analysis of the data; and the proposal of a reflective framework based on this theory for use in university teacher development.

The strength of the emergent theory and the conclusions summarised below is grounded in the experiences of interviewees in this study as described directly to me in their own voices. The theory is based on rigorous interpretation of these experiences both by the interviewees and by me as the researcher with the claims presented emerging from my view as the researcher.

Several core conclusions can be drawn from the work.

- Specific concepts and practices utilised by university teachers when teaching online can cause them troublesome experiences. These can include feelings of anxiety, frustration, embarrassment and narcissism.
- These feelings often result from a fragmentation between the teacher's self-concept and the image they believe is perceived by others, particularly their students.
- As a result of this, teachers can experience feelings of 'stuckness' in during their development in the online space.
- This 'stuckness' manifests as a phase of liminality where teachers struggle to form a coherent image of self through which they feel seen by themselves and others as legitimate in the university context.
- Established approaches in teacher development using critical reflection on teacher identity offer a useful practical approach to engaging with these challenges. One such approach is the use of a reflective framework.

The framework proposed in this thesis is based on four lenses, each of which is grounded in the data collected during this research. The framework is intended

to assist teachers to focus their reflection on the challenges resulting from the fragmentation of self-concept and self-image noted above. The lenses can most usefully focus on four challenges facing university teachers moving into and operating in the online space.

- 'Presentation of Self': that is, consideration of how their image as a teacher is distorted when presented in the online space.
- 'Self-Perception': how university teachers believe they are perceived by their students in an online space.
- 'Problems with Communication': the challenges to their image as a teacher experience when communicating with students online.
- 'Feelings of Disconnection': how the practice of recording resources for online delivery is problematic for university teachers.

Consideration of each lens can be supported by the use of a series of focused questions as set out in the Framework in Chapter 8.

In drawing these conclusions in this final chapter of my thesis, I must ask myself whether I believe I have achieved the objectives set out for this study and have satisfied the criteria set for the award of the Educational Doctorate. My view is that I have accomplished these objectives. In the remainder of this chapter, I offer concluding comments on my theory and the generation of the reflective framework presented in the previous chapter. In this, I highlight the original knowledge I contribute to the collective knowledge and understanding of those in my professional role and discipline area. I reflect on how this knowledge and my experience of conducting this enquiry integrates in my professional practice and my notion of myself as a professional. I also reflect on

the impact of the suggestions I have posed in the previous chapter regarding the application of my findings.

It is also appropriate at this stage to consider the potential methodological and other improvements which, on reflection, could have improved this study and strengthened its outcomes. Alongside this, I consider potential avenues for further research, both extending directly from this enquiry and resulting from the study process.

Finally, I turn the reflective spotlight on myself and my experience of developing this thesis. Having reached the conclusion, I consider the professional and personal development that I have experienced as a result of engaging with studying a Professional Doctorate and carrying out Doctoral level postgraduate research.

## **9.2 Limitations and Improvements**

Reflecting on the design and implementation of the research, a number of changes can be identified that could have resulted in richer findings. It could be argued, for example, that the sample size could have been larger than the 12 interviewees involved. However, from the outset of the research design, I deemed the approach adopted to be suitable to the study I wished to conduct, wishing to prioritise depth of analysis over breadth of representation.

In addition to engaging with a larger cohort, the research could have benefitted from a number of additional dimensions such as drawing interviewees from several, as opposed to a single institution and the creation of subgroups to allow comparison of the experience of teachers with different levels of involvement in online teaching. Further insights could also have been achieved



by differentiating between the responses of those willing and those reluctant to engage in online teaching. However, given the complexity of the area in focus in the study, my view is that carrying out an in depth, focused piece of work was the correct choice. By illuminating the issues in focus, this research represents a step forward in understanding challenges to the professional identity of teachers operating online. In addition, it provides the foundation on which further work can be taken forward.

In considering the limitations of the research, a practical point that is of note relates to the global pandemic. While the pandemic created the unique and extraordinary circumstances which enabled this enquiry, it should also be acknowledged this was a disruptive time to engage with research. Two suspensions of study arising from the impact of the pandemic caused my own detachment from the research as my focus was required elsewhere. The issues being addressed in this study are complex and returning to the enquiry was challenging.

The impact of the pandemic on interviewees in this study also must be acknowledged. While the pandemic resulted in an acceleration of the adoption of online learning by universities, these were stressful times for teachers. In the interest of wellbeing of interviewees, changes were made to the research design, reducing the commitment required. The research was conducted, and will always be located, in the experiences of teachers during the global pandemic, with the stresses, frustrations, and anxieties of this time present in interviewees and the experiences they shared.

### **9.3 Further Research**

Completion of this thesis marks not just the end of a significant professional and academic journey, but the beginning of new opportunities for study and exploration. As I have alluded to in the section above, the research presented in this thesis is not without its flaws. Reflection at the point of completion indicates areas where this study may have been strengthened or improved. This gives reason to continue enquiry into this interesting area of my practice and to revisit this study in new and revised forms. There are also areas I have explored and found significant interest in linked to this study, but which have been beyond the scope of this thesis or which I considered to add complexity to the study but not benefit.

Within this thesis I have adopted Lacanian language, theory, and perspective to create a theoretic definition and analytic schema through which to critique and discuss theory relating to teacher professional identity in the online space.

Aligning this with the notion of liminality, I have focused on self-concept and teacher legitimacy in times of transition and disruption, and how we might analyse both conscious and subconscious issues we encounter. While I have applied Lacanian theory as designed, as I have become more familiar with the work and perspectives of Lacan there are concepts I have deliberately avoided including in the discussion due to the practical and work focused nature of my thesis. For example, there are more fundamental concepts within Lacan's work relating to psychoanalysis I have deliberately considered beyond the scope of this research. Notions of desire and drive underpin many of the Lacanian concepts adopted, and have been considered in my theoretic critique of identity, but added complexity to the research design which I did not perceive

and impacting my emergent definition and schema. This is an area which would be of interest to develop, developing further my schema and definition.

There is also an interesting alignment which has emerged between the use of Lacan to explore film theory, and how we present ourselves via a web cam. My emergent theories regarding teacher presentation of self and the gaze touch on this idea. It is an area of interest and which I have explored in the development of this thesis. This again added complexity which was not valuable to my understanding of transition. It is however an avenue for specific enquiry which would warrant further exploration in future.

Each of the four reflective lenses I have proposed has illuminated a complex dimension of teacher self-concept when transitioning to online teaching. The purpose of this thesis has been to illuminate and generate theory around these troublesome areas. Each of the four lenses do, in themselves, warrant further research through enquiry specifically into each. As discussed in Chapter 4, I considered the ability to focus on developing concepts through grounded theory most beneficial to this study and the messy context in which it has taken place. However, the criticism levelled by a colleague, discussed in Chapter 4, that as an academic developer my research method was that I should focus on intervening or bringing about change remains a point for reflection. Having identified the four troublesome areas emergent in this study, I have formed four hypotheses. These are hypotheses which will underpin further studies, adopting more interventionist approaches to both test these hypotheses and to bring about change through my research practice.

## **9.4 Final Reflections on the Journey**

At the time of submitting this thesis it will have been six and a half years since I commenced studying the Educational Doctorate programme. When I was accepted onto the programme, having secured long sought-after funding and support from my employer, my son Joshua was 6 months old. A month prior to submission of my thesis I watched him play the lead narrator in his school nativity play. Speaking to an audience of around 100 parents and siblings he was clear, articulate, and confident, and I was immensely proud. This also triggered a memory in me and gave me a point for reflection. When I commenced the Educational Doctorate programme, I recall a discussion with my own father about his experience studying an Educational Doctorate. He shared his belief that while the programme would introduce me to innovative ideas and I would find new areas of interests, fundamentally it would teach me to communicate ideas which are clear, articulate and to do so with confidence. While he may now read this thesis and question if that has happened, his prediction was accurate, and this has had significant impact on my development. While Joshua's journey of growth and development over the time of my studies has certainly been more dramatic than my own, I can draw parallels. I have progressed both professionally and academically, developing confidence in my own ideas and interests, and my ability to explore, justify and communicate these ideas in a form I believe is clear, articulate, and confident.

### **9.4.01 Professional Development**

For much of the time I have been engaged with this research project I have been an academic developer. As is thread throughout the story of this thesis, this has been a turbulent time. Not least due to the direct impact of the global

pandemic, but also from the related political and social landscape of unstable government, economic crises, and the new and dynamic hybrid and remote working practices utilising technologies which play a central role in this research. As an academic developer with specific interest and skillset in online, remote, and blended learning I have be faced with intense periods of work ranging from staff and curriculum development to technology procurement, institutional policy writing and review, and consultancy to senior University leaders on approach and strategy. During this time, because of my ongoing development through this programme, I have been able to provide valuable information and key advice to university colleagues in a manner with increasing clarity and confidence.

In the months prior to submission, I achieved promotion to a leadership role within the same university I already worked. The role was in a new team formed of existing and new colleagues. It was politically challenging, resulting from a restructure, and would require notable change to be implemented in the team to support them to find new individual and shared professional identities. My understanding of professional identity developed during this research became incredibly valuable as I was able to manage and lead my new team with a deeper, more critical understanding of the process of liminality and transition they were experiencing. I was also able to communicate my vision for the team effectively, in a form that is clear, articulate, and confident.

#### 9.4.02 Personal Development

While I have focused my reflection on my development above on professional attributes, my personal development is more internalised. Beyond a global pandemic, relentless societal crises, and professional upheaval in my own

career, during my time studying the Professional Doctorate I have also experienced tragedy in my personal life, as well as the wonderful but demanding experience of raising two young children. Where I feel I have developed personally because of this thesis is that I find solace in being interested. At times where I have felt overwhelmed, my studies have provided a much-needed focus on an endeavour within my control.

This ability to focus on study has not always been easy for me. During school and my undergraduate studies, I struggled academically, and lacked confidence in my ability to engage with academic study. During the Educational Doctorate programme, I have developed confidence in myself academically, and through this have found new avenues of interest. I have found interest in human behaviour, society, culture and communication which would not have occurred to me as being of interest to me prior to the Educational Doctorate programme. I have found a desire to find out more about these topics, rather than feeling a requirement to. Through exploration of these areas, I believe I have developed my understanding of those around me. My friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances. I feel my development at a personal level has enabled me to better understand these people, to better communicate and empathise with them and to support them.

## **9.5 Final Comments**

The recent global pandemic and its impact on higher education has ignited an interest around professional identity in university teachers, and more broadly in teachers across all stages of education. This is an area of enquiry which, while grounded in the context of the current day, is informed by development in the university sector over the past two decades. This includes both the changing

professional identity of teachers as the identity of universities themselves change, and the introduction of digital technologies for learning to the higher education environment.

In this thesis I have set out to explore the impact of this on university teachers, finding the lens of reflection on professional identity as key to this. Through this exploration I have, by identifying common concepts and practices university teachers use to form professional identity in online environments, proposed a reframing of four troublesome questions which may aid university teachers address these concepts and practices in a productive way.

Dissemination of the ideas presented in this thesis through publication, presentation and sharing of practice are an initial next step. However, as discussed in this closing chapter there are aspects of this enquiry which could be addressed differently to gain richer results. There are areas of literature I have encountered which may position a similar study differently. This thesis presents findings and ideas that I argue are new and bring knowledge to the profession of academic development as well as broader higher education. In this emergent area of scholarly enquiry though, my final thought on my finding in this thesis is there is much more to find out.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. First Contact Email to Participants

Hi .....

Thanks again for volunteering to participate in my research. I really appreciate your time and input into this.

To summarise, participation in this research will involve a series of three one-to-one interviews over the next 9 – 12 months. I would like the first to take place this month or in early March. This will then be followed by the second in May / June, and the third in August / September. Interviews will take place via Microsoft Teams and will last between 30 minutes and 60 minutes. There is no time commitment outside of the scheduled interviews.

I have attached a participant information sheet with further information regarding this study. I have also attached a copy of the participant consent form. This is just for information currently though. One point I would highlight in the attached document. This research forms part of my thesis for the Doctor of Education programme at Manchester Metropolitan University. The research is not being carried out in my capacity as an Academic Developer at the University of Salford. On this basis, all data gathered during these interviews will not be visible to colleagues at the University of Salford other than in the form of the final thesis where all data will be anonymised.

It would be great if we could schedule our first interview. To hopefully make this easy for you, I've opened up my diary via the link below.

<https://outlook.office365.com/owa/calendar/MeetingswithCalum@edu.salford.ac.uk/bookings/>

Can I ask you use the calendar to find a time that works for you and select it? If you can then add your name and email address in the boxes below and click 'Book' it will book the time out for us and set up a Teams meeting. Any problems with this do let me know.

I look forward to talking during our first interview.

Many thanks,

Calum

Appendix 2. Consent Form



Date: \_\_ / \_\_ / \_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Department: \_\_\_\_\_  
School: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Consent Form

**Title of Project: Online Professional Identity Development in University Teachers**

**Name of Researcher: Calum Thomson**

Participant Identification Code for this project: \_\_\_\_\_ Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the interview procedure.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason to the named researcher.
3. I understand that my responses will be sound recorded and transcribed to be used for analysis for this research project.
4. I understand that the researcher is carrying out this research as part of a doctoral programme and not in their capacity as an employee of the University of Salford.
5. I give/do not give permission for my interview transcription to be archived as part of this research project, making it available to future researchers.
6. I understand that my responses will remain anonymous.
7. I agree to take part in the above research project.
8. I understand that quotes from my responses might be used within published articles and/or conference presentations but with all identifying information removed.
9. I understand that at my request a transcript of my interview can be made available to me.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Signature

*To be signed and dated in presence of the participant*

*Once this has been signed, you will receive a copy of your signed and dated consent form and information sheet by email.*

## **Participant Information Sheet**

### **Online Professional Identity Development in University**

#### **Teachers**

##### 1. Invitation to research

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study as part of a student project. My name is Calum Thomson. This research is being carried out as part of my studies on the Doctor of Education (EdD) programme at Manchester Metropolitan University. It is not being carried out in my capacity as an Academic Developer at the University of Salford.

This research is examining the formation of or shift in academic identity in those who make a transition from face to face to online academic practices. The aim of this is to create a theoretic framework supporting deeper engagement with reflective practice within the University setting by academics who make this transition.

Before you decide to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and decide whether you wish to take part. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

##### 2. Why have I been invited?

Further to initial contact, I have approached you in your capacity as a member of staff at the University of Salford based on the following criteria.

- You hold an academic role at the University of Salford.
- You have experience in your academic role in a face to face, campus based university environment.
- You have engaged with academic activities (teaching, research, university outreach and / or other interaction with fellow academics) using online tools, platforms, and spaces in the past year.

### 3. Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide. I will describe the study and go through this information sheet with you during the first interview. I will then ask you to sign a consent form to show you agreed to take part. You are free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason.

### 4. What will I be asked to do?

Participation in this research will involve a series of three one-to-one interviews over a one-year period. Interviews will last between 30 minutes and 60 minutes. There is no time commitment from participants outside of the scheduled interviews.

- The first interview will be open-ended, allowing your practice and identity to be explored in your own words, illuminating what matters to you.
- The second interview will be semi-structured using emergent themes from initial data analysis to explore a core set of questions.
- The third interview will focus on a series of vignettes describing hypothetical scenarios developed based on theory emerging from further analysis.

Interviews will be conducted via Microsoft Teams. Notes will be taken, and interviews will be recorded and later transcribed. Your identity will be anonymised throughout the research. You will be protected from identification in the following ways:

- All recordings will be stored securely and never shared. All data will be stored and retained in line with EU General Data Protection Regulation.
- You will be referred to in transcriptions by the participant identification code noted on your consent form and never by your real name.
- Transcriptions will be stored securely and will never be shared unless your consent has been given to do so under point 5 on the consent form.
- Extracts of transcriptions used in the final thesis and any subsequent published or presented work will only refer to the participant identification code or a pseudonym and any features of the text which may identify you will be removed.
- 

### 5. Are there any risks if I participate?



There are no perceived risks associated with participation in this research.

6. Are there any advantages if I participate?

There are no direct advantages to your participation in this research. It is however perceived that this research comes at an important time as the recent move en masse to online and remote working by universities has challenged many aspects of our academic identity. It is the intention of this research to make an original contribution to the understanding of academic identity when engaged with academic practices online and your contribution to this is of a great value.

8. What will happen with the data I provide?

When you agree to participate in this research, I will collect from you personally identifiable information. Manchester Metropolitan University ('the University') is the Data Controller in respect of this research and any personal data that you provide as a research participant.

The University is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and manages personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's Data Protection Policy.

I may collect personal data as part of this research (such as name, telephone numbers or age). As a public authority acting in the public interest the University relies upon the 'public task' lawful basis. When the University collects special category data (such as medical information or ethnicity) we rely upon the research and archiving purposes in the public interest lawful basis.

Your rights to access, change or move your information are limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be

reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we will keep the information about you that we have already obtained.

We will not share your personal data collected in this form with any third parties.

If your data is shared this will be under the terms of a Research Collaboration Agreement which defines use and agrees confidentiality and information security provisions. It is the University's policy to only publish anonymised data unless you have given your explicit written consent to be identified in the research. **The University never sells personal data to third parties.**

We will only retain your personal data for as long as is necessary to achieve the research purpose.

Audio files, transcriptions of these and any associated notes from interviews will be stored digitally and securely and not shared. Any hard copies produced will be disposed of immediately after use via confidential waste services.

Any excerpts from transcriptions used in submitted or published materials will be fully anonymised, removing any names or descriptions of identifying characteristics of the interviewee and individuals referred to.

Identifiable personal data generated during the project will be stored for a maximum of six months after the project has ended. Pseudo anonymised data generated by the project will be stored for a maximum of two years.

For further information about use of your personal data and your data protection rights please see the [University's Data Protection Pages](#).

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

Upon completion of EdD assessment, the thesis and published materials will be made available to you upon your request.

The findings of the research may also be disseminated through publication and conference presentation.

### **Who has reviewed this research project?**

This research has been reviewed by:

- Director of Studies: Dr Matthew Carlin
- First Supervisor: Dr Jane McDonnell

The research project has also been subject to scrutineers' review.

The research has received ethical approval from Manchester Metropolitan University's Research Ethics Committee.

### **Who do I contact if I have concerns about this study or I wish to complain?**

*For general questions:*

Calum Thomson - Researcher

Email: [CALUM.THOMSON@stu.mmu.ac.uk](mailto:CALUM.THOMSON@stu.mmu.ac.uk) / Tel: 0161 295 4457

Dr Matthew Carlin - Director of Studies

Email: [M.Carlin@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:M.Carlin@mmu.ac.uk) / Tel: 0161 247 2230

*For Concerns or Complaints:*

Professor Ricardo Nemirovsky - Faculty Head of Research Ethics and Governance

Email: [R.Nemirovsky@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:R.Nemirovsky@mmu.ac.uk) / Tel: 0161 247 3700

If you have any concerns regarding the personal data collected from you, our Data Protection Officer can be contacted using the [legal@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:legal@mmu.ac.uk) e-mail address, by calling 0161 247 3331 or in writing to: Data Protection Officer, Legal Services, All Saints Building, Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, M15 6BH. You also have a right to lodge a complaint in respect of the processing of your personal data with the Information Commissioner's Office as the supervisory authority. Please see:

<https://ico.org.uk/global/contact-us/>

**THANK YOU FOR CONSIDERING PARTICIPATING IN THIS PROJECT**

#### Appendix 4. Phase 1 Script & Questions

Before beginning:

- Share that session will be recorded and start recording.
- Ask if they have any questions about the research.
- State that the consent form and information sheet have been shared, if they need this again at any point just to ask, and ask them to give consent formally by returning the consent form.
- Highlight role in academic development and awareness of how this might mean I, or a colleague, may be part of the information they share.
- Invite the interviewee to be open and honest, even where their experience overlaps with my activities.
- Reiterate that this research is for my studies at MMU, and data will not be shared other than in the form of the final thesis, where data will be anonymised.

Warming Questions:

1. *How long have you been an academic?*
2. *In your own words, what is your discipline area?*
3. *Can you tell me briefly what you understand by the term 'academic identity'?*

*For this interview I'm going to ask you two further questions. These are narrative questions and are intended to illicit a story. What I'm interested in is your story, in your own words and based on your own experiences. This can be as long as you feel appropriate, and as detailed as you are comfortable with sharing. Take as much time as you feel necessary. Ask me to repeat the question at any time. Unless prompted I will not interrupt you or say anything until you tell me you are finished. I will remain silent, but rest assured what you are saying is of interest, my silence is deliberate. I will also take notes, so this is what I am doing if I am looking away or appear to be typing.*

1. *Could you tell me the story of how you arrived in your academic role at the University? Please tell me everything about your journey that, in your opinion, has influenced how you currently view yourself as an academic.*

2. *For the purpose of this next question, I refer to 'academic practice' to mean all teaching, research, and administrative work engaged with, both as part of your academic roll at a University and as part of any external academic networks, external consultancy roles or community initiatives.*

*When and why did you move your academic practice online or to a remote way of working? Please tell me about your journey through this transition and in particular any experiences which you feel have challenged how you currently view yourself as an academic.*

## Appendix 5. Phase 2 Script & Questions

So just as a refresher, in the last interview we discussed the idea of 'academic identity' and how the way you view yourself as an academic might have shifted when moving to online practices. In this interview I'd like to focus more on you specifically as a teacher and your experiences interacting with students online. I have 10 questions this time. These are all open ended. Feel free to say as much or as little as you want about each. If you want to say lots please do, but I don't want to take up too much of your time, so we'll try and give each question a maximum of 5 minutes.

1. Who have you been teaching during the past trimester, and what have you been teaching them?
  - a. What technologies did you use most for this?
  - b. Do you think students engaged well with your teaching?

Thanks for your responses to those questions, I can almost visualise you teaching your students. I'm now going to ask some questions about your opinion and feelings about yourself as an online teacher. I would encourage you to be open and honest, but if there's anything you don't feel comfortable with sharing obviously feel free not to.

2. How do you think your students would describe you as an online teacher?
  - a. Does this reflect how you see yourself?
  - b. Is this how you want to be viewed?
  - c. Why do you think they see you that way?
3. Do you use any techniques in Collaborate or Teams sessions to influence how your students see you as a teacher?
  - a. Are these techniques you have developed yourself, or which you have observed someone else doing?
  - b. Have you use any techniques which worked particularly well, or any which haven't worked?

4. If another teacher used a video you created with their own students, who would you feel is teaching their students in the moment they watch it and why?
  - a. Similarly, if you record a session for one group of students and then reuse this with another group at a later date, do you feel you are still teaching those students?
5. In what ways do you feel working online has impacted your relationship with your colleagues?
  - a. Has this impacted your teaching?
6. What makes you feel valued by others when you are teaching online?
  - a. Is there anything you'd like to share which makes you feel unvalued?
7. In what ways do you feel teaching online has impacted your independence as a teacher?
  - a. Do you feel more control, or do you feel you have increased freedom when teaching online?
8. In terms of teaching, what have you missed about campus?
  - a. Is there anything you don't miss?

Transition – That's great. I've just got two more questions.

9. You've just finished online teaching session. How do you feel and what do you do immediately after?
  - a. Is this different to teaching face to face?

Great. Ok, last question and I just wanted to prompt a bit of general reflection on your experience of teaching online. Although I mention the pandemic for context, I would ask that we focus on your teaching practice.



10. When campus fully reopens, which practices or behaviours from working remotely would you like to continue, and which would like to end.

1.