

# Chapter 4

## An Exploration of Teacher Educator Identities Within an Irish Context of Reform



Catherine Furlong and Maeve O'Brien

*There is for many in Higher Education a growing sense of ontological insecurity; both a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do. Are we doing things for the 'right' reasons – and how can we know!*  
(Ball 2012)

**Abstract** As teacher education undergoes reform in many jurisdictions, who teacher educators are, their lives and their work, continue to be in the spotlight internationally while remaining relatively underexplored in the Irish context. The research from which this chapter draws is an attempt to address this lacuna. Performativity and accountability agendas globally and the European economic austerity landscape have set the scene for a radical reform agenda in initial teacher education (ITE) in Ireland. From a largely autonomous college-based system of provision at primary level, now ITE is subject to stronger regulation and oversight by the Irish Teaching Council and through a rationalisation of ITE within higher education. Drawing on a phenomenological approach and in depth interviews with ITE educators across five education departments in Ireland, we decode their experiences, values and concerns relative to changing contexts. We explore the diverse pathways, values and experiences that construct them as teacher educators in the present, and gain insight in to the strength of former professional identities. Bourdieu's metaphor of habitus and field enables us to make sense of distinctions in values and practices across the subfields of initial teacher education and to explain why practitioner teacher identity continues to be privileged in the context of this policy agenda.

---

C. Furlong (✉) · M. O'Brien  
Dublin City University, Dublin, Ireland  
e-mail: [catherine.furlong@dcu.ie](mailto:catherine.furlong@dcu.ie); [Maeve.OBrien@dcu.ie](mailto:Maeve.OBrien@dcu.ie)

## 4.1 Introduction

Teacher education has undergone radical reforms in many jurisdictions in recent times, and teacher educators' work has been increasingly in the spotlight. However, the scrutiny and examination of teacher education under the twin pillars of neo-liberalism and accountability and performativity (Ball 2003; Goodson 2003) have not necessarily extended to exploring this work from the perspective of Irish teacher educators themselves, what they value or to how they understand themselves as teacher educators in changing times. This chapter explores how teacher educators themselves, as insiders in the changing teacher education landscape, understand their roles and professional identities.

Within the shifting globalised teacher education context, teacher education in Ireland has experienced its own particular form of scrutiny at national level (Kellaghan 2002; Teaching Council 2011a, b; HEA Report 2012). From various quarters there have been challenges to its traditions, organisation and location within particular religious institutions at primary school level and also in relation to its economic sustainability across a range of diverse institutions nationally. Government has acted upon commissioned reports advocating radical reforms, specifically the amalgamation of initial teacher education (ITE) departments and institutions across primary and post-primary teacher education providers. This is an unprecedented moment in Irish education. Moreover, in addition to these institutional upheavals, the structure and content of teacher education programmes themselves have become subject to the approval of the recently formed Teaching Council (TC), where previously teacher educators in education departments within universities, and in colleges of education, had a large degree of autonomy over the nature of the programmes.

We draw upon a series of qualitative data sets gathered from ethnographic interviews with full-time teacher educators across five institutional settings, all providing initial teacher education in the past 10 years, two schools of education within the universities and three colleges of education affiliated to universities, in order to understand what it means to be a teacher educator in their terms.<sup>1</sup> We revisited the participants to elicit their perspectives on their changing identities relative to institutional and policy contexts over time. As there are a limited number of ITE providers within Ireland, it was imperative that due regard be given to protecting the identities of those involved and their institutional affiliations. While pseudonyms are used in the thematic analysis, we have tried, as far as humanly possible, to use the data judiciously or to edit details without altering meaning materially, as a further protection to participants. This chapter contributes new perspectives on Irish teacher educators, how they see themselves in the changing policy landscape.

---

<sup>1</sup>The situation is complicated by the fact that there are increasing numbers of teacher educators on full-time short contracts and on part-time hours. The employment framework in Ireland in the last 5 years has made the work experience very uncertain for many beginning teacher educators.

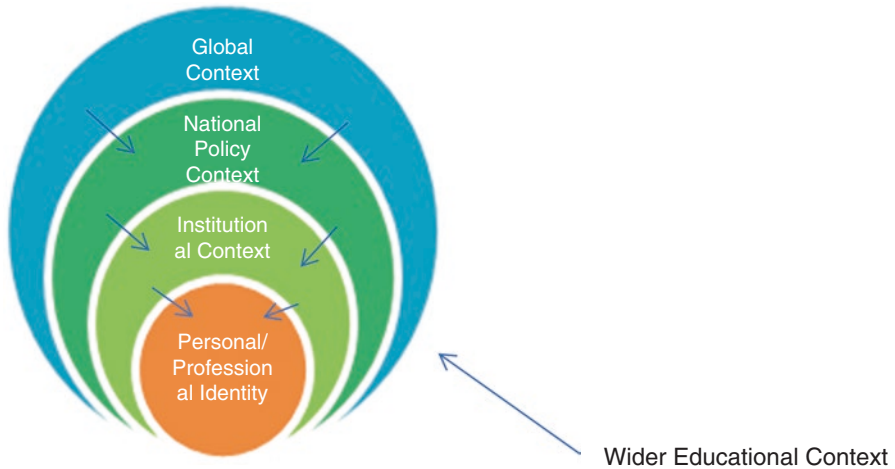
## 4.2 Discourses of Identity and Teacher Educators' Identities

To begin to understand identity is a complex task and, as Beijgaard et al. (2004) suggest, identity is a concept with different meanings and definitions in both the general literature and in the realm of teacher education. Yet, despite the proliferation of perspectives on the question of identity, the problem of identifying identity is one that has a real significance in contemporary theoretical debates. The tensions between traditional understandings of identity as substantive and core and more post-modern perspectives of identity as fluid and performed are worthy of consideration in relation to our research.

Increasingly dominant perspectives on identity in the twenty-first century suggests that there is no fixed point of reference for identity, but rather that it '... is a socialised and socialising process in which identities can be received as well as shaped' (Gunter 2001, p. 5). It is possible to see how a view of a socialised and plastic identity in respect of teacher educators fits more smoothly with a professional identity that can flow with the kinds of upheaval and sea changes that are being wrought within the Irish educational system. We opened with a quotation taken from Stephen Ball's work (2003) from a paper in which he critiques, with ferocity, the 'taken-for-grantedness' around the elasticity and plasticity of educators' professional identities. Ball argues that neo-liberal forces that are anti-education and productivity have colonised the souls of teachers, rendering them as reformed subjects and education workers in the education marketplace (Ball 2003, p. 219).

According to Swennen et al.'s definitions (2010, p. 132), teacher educators are 'a specialised professional group within education with their own specific identity and their own professional development needs'. This suggests a common sense of professional identity and consensus on values, priorities and purpose. While agreeing with Swennen et al. (2010) that teacher educators are indeed a 'specialised professional group', we question the notion that they have a collective identity and assert that this is perhaps even less probable within the fast-changing reform context of Ireland. Moreover, if identity is personally, socially and culturally constructed, and dynamic and responsive to social and cultural contexts, then the notion of a collective global teacher educator identity is highly questionable (Kelchtermans 1993, 2005). Wenger (1998) and Holland et al. (1998) stress the individual and personal aspects of identities and the relationship between identity and personal history.

One of the main issues in trying to conceptualise identity for our research across teacher educators in diverse institutional settings and positioned variously in terms of expertise and academic allegiances is to try and understand how professional identities interplay with each other and are shaped by the social in terms of involvement in the 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger 1991) that are subject to clarion calls for reform. Identity, we suggest, is relational, as we participate in a variety of communities of practice, some of which may or may not overlie others. Our identity is shaped by our involvement within these communities of practice, but equally our identity acts upon or influences these communities. Furthermore, we suggest that the level of reciprocity between our professional 'self' and the particu-



**Fig. 4.1** Spheres of influence on teacher educator identity

lar group may depend on our place and status within the community. Figure 4.1 explores the aforementioned spheres of influences on identity.

Given the nature of the reforms at institutional level in the Irish ITE context, we suggest that particular teacher educators may be disadvantaged by virtue of their positioning and how their location is associated with the kind of teacher educator work they do – and indeed their identity. We explore this conceptualisation informed by the findings of Alsup (2005) and Miller Marsh (2002) who suggest that learning communities possess the potential to facilitate the creation of new identities but that they also have the potential to solidify and reify identities, and therefore practice.

### 4.3 Irish Social and Policy Landscape: Seismic Shifts

Since the early 1990s, Irish education has seen substantial change regarding policy formulation, legislation and reform (Coolahan 2004), and there appears to be agreement among educationalists and politicians that a high-quality education system is vital if Ireland is to grow and thrive within a globalised knowledge society. The latter aspiration has brought to the fore a central policy debate about issues of both performativity and accountability, raising key questions about the state and schooling. Most recently this has been discernible with the publication of a National Plan for Literacy and Numeracy to address the perceived low rate of both literacy and numeracy standards when compared with international level (Department of Education and Skills (DES) 2011).

The overwhelming thrust of policy, at both national and local levels, has been to increase pressure on accountability for measured student performance, paralleling societal trends towards an increased focus on productivity. However, it is only in

recent years that the issue of teacher education has moved under the spotlight with the inception of an Irish TC and Higher Education Authority (HEA) reviewing initial teacher education within the state, against a milieu of recession and austerity.

In 2006 when the Teaching Council was established, it commissioned a review of teacher education (Coolahan 2007) which subsequently led to a range of policies and new regulations in relation to teacher education (TC 2011a, b, 2012). Key changes were the introduction of a 4-year BEd programme and a 2-year professional masters (PME) with a substantial increase in the time spent in schools. Moreover, colleges of education and university education departments who had previously enjoyed significant freedom in relation to the design both curricula and syllabi (Dupont and Sugure 2007) were now witnessing an erosion of their autonomy as their new programmes required accreditation by the university *and* professional accreditation by the TC. Not only had the length of courses been increased but the content of such programmes specified in much greater detail (TC 2011b). The latter was a new departure for all concerned.

However, initial teacher education at primary level, while within the ambit of the university system, has traditionally been provided on separate campuses and in denominational institutions. (This is despite the fact that there have been a burgeoning number of multi-denominational primary schools within the state.) There are five such colleges of education, four of which are privately owned by Catholic bodies, and the fifth is owned by the Church of Ireland (the Anglican Church in Ireland). Since the early 1990s, the two largest of the colleges diversified to provide a variety of humanities programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Primary student teachers receive their professional formation in isolation from mainstream university programmes and their students, while second level (secondary) student teacher education has been traditionally located within university departments (Sugrue 2003). In 2002, in addition to the five initial primary teacher providers, a private 'virtual' provider of initial teacher education was recognised by the Irish government. The programme offered by this provider is a part-time consecutive postgraduate course which adds approximately 500 primary teachers to the market annually.

A significant moment in initial teacher education occurred in 2012 when the HEA, the governing authority for higher education in the country, endorsed the streamlining of provision of initial teacher programmes across the higher education sector (HEA 2012). This report singled out teacher education from all other sectors of professional education requiring the rationalisation of provision nationally, setting the terms for the particular institutional clusters of amalgamation. All providers were required to engage in merger and rationalisation negotiations within their allocated groupings without consultation as to the appropriateness of these clusters and the resultant grouping. The mergers within the configured groups are at various stages at the time of writing.

Against this backdrop of changes in the demands of education in Ireland, teacher education – and, more particularly, the professional identities of teacher educators – is best considered as teacher education reflects the influence of the surrounding societal and more particularly education landscape in Ireland. Whether this is true

within the fields of initial teacher education in Ireland as policy discourses challenge traditional modes of teacher formation in terms of substance and process (TC 2011a, b), and ethos and institutional traditions and their viability (HEA 2012), is a question we hope to address. Amalgamations of diverse teacher education institutions assume that teacher educators and their work are amenable to universalising and homogenising of differences in traditions, purposes and values. In the following sections, we take three of the most significant findings from our explorations with ITE educators over the course of several years.

#### **4.4 The Relationship Between Teacher Educator as Practitioner and Teacher Educator as Academic**

The majority of ITE educators in Ireland have been teachers at some point in their careers, and this experience of being a practising teacher and having a felt sense of a teacher identity was observed in their understandings of themselves as teacher educators. Moreover, the traditional nature of teacher education in Ireland, particularly at primary level, has meant that many teacher educators have come from within the small number of colleges within the ITE system itself and have experienced similar teacher formation. In our research, this kind of teacher identity was most strongly articulated by teacher educators in the colleges of education over those in the universities, where the institutional culture of the academy appears to have a moderating effect on teacher identity vis-a-vis academic/researcher identity. One might say there is no real sense of a discontinuity between teacher identity and teacher educator identity for many of those we interviewed, though not all interviewees subscribed to a teacher identity. This sense of continuity with a teacher identity and focus on teaching is clearly articulated by one of the interviewees, Moss, who works in a large teacher education college. When commenting on the transition, he made from his previous post to the college: 'I really, really love teaching...I like the interaction with the students'. Interestingly, he adds that he would like to be 'doing less of it!'. An early childhood educator in a teacher education college states her prioritisation of a teacher identity:

I take most pride in the students being a good teacher, as a result of my work, I would like to see them doing well, I see myself primarily as a teacher. I think with the students definitely, I think once they get the vibe that you are removed from schooling they're not interested. (Teresa)

There is a strong sense of the vocational here, that this is an endeavour focused on the transmission of practical knowledge and the craft of teaching. Another colleague from that college suggests that he is primarily a teacher and tells how 'a man was doing work in my home asked me what I did, saying to me that I looked like a teacher'.

Gleeson (2004), however, contends that over time in Ireland, as some forms of teacher education moved from dedicated colleges of education more fully into the

academy, there was a resultant concern with academic respectability; the foundation disciplines of education gained dominance over what Gleeson (2004) refers to as the ‘craft’ of teaching. This is not something that we observed in the traditional colleges of education, where interviewees mainly agreed that teaching and being a good teacher is a priority. Seamus, who had not been a primary school teacher and was more a subject specialist, comments on his ‘feeling of lack’ in relation to practical teaching experiences:

When I came there was more emphasis on academic strength. The X<sup>2</sup> education was seen as an inter-disciplinary subject where it involved X, psychology and education .... So that meant that you had to be strong in X, you had to know something about psychology and then education came in. Also you needed to be engaged in research. In more recent years there’s more emphasis having very specific practical experience first, in other words, substantial primary teaching experience. That the people coming in now are very strong practitioners first and the research expertise comes next. (Seamus)

A similar consciousness is evident in Moss’s narrative. While remarking on the rapid and intense expansion in curricular areas of the BEd (undergraduate) programme, he notes that the course has become more ‘hands on or practical as a result’, a move which he favours. In contrast, a disciplinary/academic identity dominated within the universities and is best illuminated through the words of both Adam and Colm. Adam a philosopher remarked: ‘I am not a specialist on school...my interest is in the field of the study of education that (sic) very broad human process...I never aimed to be a teacher educator I fell into that’, while Colm similarly remarked ‘I am a psychologist and I happen to be in education’.

These teacher educators appear to have moved into initial teacher education by default and not by design. They define their professional identities in terms of their areas of specialisation and the research in which they are engaged. Unlike in the colleges of education, those working within schools of education within universities perceived clear messages within the university that teaching or what Dinkelman et al. (2006: 32) refer to as ‘ground-level practice in teacher education’ is little valued – and what appears to be valued is the reputation that one gains from research and publications. Their research provides the cultural capital they require to survive within their universities. The reality for Colm is that his fellow university colleagues ‘...look at us as second rate as sort of playing at being university lecturer, so we have that battle to fight’. The result for these teacher educators is that their identities are more academically focused than professional, as their work is more oriented towards the academic within a graduate school of education studies rather a school of teacher education. This finding is not unique as Labaree (2004, p. 302) drawing from the American experience noted that ‘Overall, education schools tend toward the professional or academic pole with relatively few occupying the middle ground’.

As a teacher identity dominated for those interviewed from the colleges of education but not from those in the university, we ask why this was so. We suggest that

---

<sup>2</sup>The X refers to the subject that Seamus teaches, but this has been taken out as it would lead to identifying the participant, given the small number of teacher educators in Ireland (approximately 500 ITE in total).

the explanation may be threefold. First, while the pressure to engage in research in the colleges of education is gaining traction, teaching is still more highly valued within these institutions where the main focus is still on the provision of initial teacher education. We suspect that the current organisational cultures of the institutions in question privilege those educators whose professional core identities most closely match those of the culturally defined primary school teacher. The majority of teacher educators within the colleges of education are working alongside like-minded individuals who share similar professional life experiences as teachers operating out of 'shared' value and belief systems. This is evident in the earlier comments of both Peter and Moss. A lack of cognitive dissonance and resultant critical engagement with their developing professional selves results in the strengthening of their existing beliefs and values (Alsup 2005). Second, as articulated earlier, the policy direction of TC has resulted in a greater push towards practice, with students spending more time in schools engaged in longer blocks of school placement. For teacher educators this inevitably means more time engaged with schools on placement (practicum) supervision. Practice is being privileged and therefore holds considerable status. The tendency for teacher educators to revert to previously held classroom teacher identities and practice when working with students and cooperating teachers on placement – or the 'third space' as defined by Williams (2014, p. 315) – is well documented (Korthagen et al. 2006). A further explanation as to the retention of past identities may be explained by the teacher educators themselves. These teacher educators' narratives are lodged within the belief that they are *real* teachers, even though the context of their teaching has moved and changed radically over time.

The strong unifying insight among all of the participants was that teacher education is struggling for status in the new landscape. As a seasoned teacher educator with a disciplinary background commented:

The other thing that I would have ... driven me a lot ... and it still is a major issue with me ... has to do with the prestige of, as a teacher educator...the prestige of teacher education and primary teaching specifically. I'm still a bit concerned that primary teaching is ... in colleges of education which are marginal to the Universities to some extent with a small sector, not very powerful and if you contrast that with say, with the way nursing has gone. (Mori)

## 4.5 Teacher Educator Identifications and Institutional Positionings

Identification work is not neat and tidy, rather it is prone to the 'idiosyncratic nature of people and the myriad and flowing situations in which they exist' (Gaudelli and Ousley 2009, p. 932). How teacher educators manage their identities in a radically shifting environment (policy and institutional reforms) is predicated not only on the ways in which they endeavour to position themselves, but also, how they are positioned by those they consider important in their professional lives, and by the



predominant culture and values of the organisations in which they work. It has been our experience gathering data from teacher educators across five initial Irish teacher education providers that teacher educator identity suffers from conceptual pluralism. Irish teacher educators themselves are challenged in terms of their understandings of their own professional identities as they inhabit a strange space in the borderlands of education (a third space).

Table 4.1 below provides a summary of the dominant tendencies which exist in how these teacher educators regard their professional identities: those who hold to a teacher identity and those who define their teacher educator identity around their discipline/subject. We are aware that a typography built from the data may not allow for the subtle nuances that exists within the life histories of these teacher educators, but it does allow us to explain more clearly our findings.

The findings displayed in Table 4.1 indicate the historically dichotomised structure of teacher education in Ireland and how this has allowed for a binarisation of teacher educator identities across the teacher/academic identity axis. Teacher educators now find themselves in a precarious position as tightrope walker in a pull towards teacher identity in the colleges of education and a push away towards academic identity with the academy. The new policy directives are shaking that tightrope. On one side, the HEA directive for the merger of colleges of education to be incorporated into the universities and for the schools of education across the universities to also amalgamate disturbs and fractures these traditional identity tensions. The imperatives of the TC for practice, the holding of certain teacher qualifications and an emphasis and surveillance of content and pedagogy of teacher education programmes all contribute to shaping teacher educator identity as a *teacher identity*.

In relation to our data, we have already discussed the traditional tensions between versions of teacher educator identity, but the most recent wave of the data suggests the unravelling and unpicking of traditional binarised identities as the ground shifts, and those involved in teacher education question how they will position themselves into the future. In the final wave of data, Kathleen, working in a college, comments

**Table 4.1** Teacher educator/academic identity axis

Axis 1. Teacher/practice	Disciplinary/educator/theory
Curricular/professional/pedagogical	Foundation disciplines
Practice-orientated research	Disciplinary research
Teacher identity	Disciplinary identity
Social and cultural capital within school and with students	Social/cultural capital within academia
Local status but lacks global status	Wider status
Want to teach – subject is the vehicle	Disciplinary engagement
Caring for students and caring about their subject	Caring about ideas and student learning
Intervening	Reflecting

on the ebbs and flows historically in relation to the privileging of teacher and practitioner identity over disciplinary identity in a college of education:

but I do see within the institution and within the wider realm of teacher education that the kind of ebb and flow vis-a-vis theory and practice, and I think we are going through a very heightened period of focus on the practice and I think that's the influence of the political and the regulatory bodies, because that's where they come from, I think they want to know what's going on in the classroom (*in higher education*).

The messages from the policy agendas are received loud and clear by those engaged in teacher education regardless of their institutional settings. Reform is happening and will continue to intensify. All involved feel the uncertainties and pressure associated with the rapidly changing institutional and policy context. The colleges that have focused on teaching and teacher identity are now aware of the dangers associated with holding onto what was once a prized practitioner identity. Cognisant of the power of the TC, they realise that a teacher identity is *still* valued by this statutory organisation but also that for their other master, the academy, academic research and competition are now part of the new world of teacher education when placed within the academy. Moreover, those who appeared to be privileged as educators within the hallowed halls of the academy are now subject to the regime of the TC and the drive for relevance and practice. They too will have to reform their identities within the wider and more professionally focused context of teacher education.

The landscape poses a significant challenge to ITE educators as the appropriate activation of various types of capital is almost impossible given the pull and pushes from different and opposing directions. Teacher educators, irrespective of their institutional settings, are aware of the demands upon them from both quarters, but because nothing is solid and everything for now is fluid, they are uncertain how to activate resources in a field which has no real borders.

## 4.6 Performance and Performativity Tensions Across Teaching and Research

Murray (2012) has explored the effects of performativity culture on teacher educators in England and builds on the work of Ducharme (1996) and others who suggest that teacher educators experience longer working hours and particular tensions associated with the nature of teacher education pedagogies. Murray's analysis echoes strongly in the reformed teacher education context in Ireland. The autonomy of the teacher educator in Ireland has been eroded as the globalised culture of performativity is now felt by teacher educators here on the western tip of Europe. Teacher education at primary level, as we have described here, is now more fully incorporated in the university system, although the pull in the longer 4-year BEd degree is towards practice, and this means greater time on school placement and participating in continuous school placement supervision. Within the university

system, the culture has traditionally been more oriented towards research and publication; more recently league table ratings which compare institutional research outputs have intensified this pressure on teacher educators. We pose the question how teacher educators can maintain the teacher identity that they value within the new culture of performativity, and furthermore, we explore how their practice and status are affected by this.

In our sample groups, concern and anxieties are widespread as what was once was of real value for teacher educators is now devalued, and that previous identities have to be reformed. Right across the sample, with the exception of those from a small and independently managed college, teacher educators are trying to reform themselves with varying degrees of success and appetite for the new world they find themselves inhabiting. One university-based educator commented on this tension between teacher educators and other academics within the university:

I think there is a difference here than other colleges, the brief here is strongly on research, research will aid teaching. Your own reading and studies will inform your teaching and there are serious difficulties because my colleagues elsewhere (*in the university*) don't have the same degree of contact hours and professional development as us, so they have considerably more space to do research, we have our teaching practice, we have our briefing of students, we have our picking up of problems and then you add on supervision. (Kathlyn)

A teacher educator within one of the recently merged colleges reflects on the reality of competitiveness and how the drive for research comes from within as well as without. Tara states:

... at the end of the day we have to fill in a form documenting the research that we do so that is part of the pressure. But it also I suppose comes from within ourselves and watching what others are doing. It is also very difficult to work in this field without conducting some sort of research and the more you do that the more you possibly want to do it.

But the reality of performativity culture does not end here; participation is not left up to the individual capacity and inclination of teacher educators within a truly free academic market, rather, it comes under the regulation of government and public perceptions of the institutional ratings. The DES is concerned with the international league tables in student literacy and numeracy (PISA) and is mindful of the status of the teaching profession within this frame. They have named numeracy and literacy as national priorities. Moss, who has prized his teacher identity as a teacher educator, interviewed a second time several years later, commented on the back-to-basic trend and the performativity problem that dictates curricular emphases:

There is a whole plethora of perceived negative findings and there is a worry that we are going to lose our place as having a great education system or indeed being competitive but I believe that when people go back to basics there is something very market driven about that. The danger in colleges is we are being forced to do more of what are considered the basics.

The culture of performativity and policy from both DES and TC in relation to teacher education has also been shaped by a drive for relevance. It would take an entire chapter to unpack what is meant by 'relevance' here, but the teacher educators in our research have commented on this underlying feature of educational policy

with respect to their work. It is evidenced in their comments on the issue of length of school placement and the mixed views on how this is both a benefit to students in terms of practice and a challenge in that it has squeezed time for teaching in the colleges. Tara suggested that some voices have managed to find the appropriate ear, in the competition for space, to teach into their areas of expertise, especially in a context where some fields are now deemed *not* a priority, and thus relegated and made more marginal in the competition for subject space.

I would say that the Teaching Council have the strongest voice in terms of dictating changes in teacher education at the moment. I think also that the colleges are responding to these changes. They are not passive recipients but they too are making their voice heard... However, to take the bigger picture, that is not the case for everybody. (Tara)

Research too is not exempt from surveillance and performativity. The kinds of research undertaken that may have traditionally been written in non-peer-reviewed journals are no longer acceptable or counted, and the research itself is open to scrutiny in terms of how others deem it relevant or not. As Tara states, 'I think that there is a demand on the universities to be accountable to the HEA or the funders, there is accountability now, we must show how our research is impacting, and you have to show the relevance'.

#### 4.6.1 *Conclusions*

As we bring this chapter to its conclusion, it is interesting to note that none of the teacher educators interviewed defined themselves as *teacher educators*. They described themselves as teachers, educators, researchers and even facilitators. We contend that Irish teacher educator identity is in effect a 'non-identity'. Until relatively recently, the organisational culture of the initial teacher education provider casts a long shadow over the identities of teacher educators in Ireland. Teacher educators have, it may be argued, been playing a safe game of performing surface reformations (Hochschild 1983) by aligning themselves with the dominant habitus of their institution. This has allowed them to maintain insider status within their respective institution and with their colleagues. As the recent policy changes, articulated, for example, through the Teaching Council and the HEA, have impacted at all levels of initial teacher education, we see that teacher educators' capacities to resist and critique dominant discourses and directives are considerably weakened. This, we argue, is problematic for both the educators and for their students. For the teacher educators, the problem of maintaining and developing a critical professional identity resides in the intensity, relentlessness and multi-faceted nature of changes currently on-going within initial teacher education. The teacher educator needs to have a strong sense of his/her own role *and* professional self in order to enable student teachers to have a strong understanding of self as professional. If teacher educators are restricted in the development and expression of their own identities (O'Brien

and Furlong 2010), then this is a recipe for the reproduction of dominant norms and values in the education system.

Too much externally forced change may create either resistance or compliance. Certainly, the teacher educators in this study feel that this is the case. It would appear from the most recent wave of data collection that these recent policy shifts in initial teacher education in Ireland have left the teacher educators, by their own admission, in a more precarious position of having no anchor within these shifting educational seas – engaged in the ‘forced’ reformation of identity in line with policy directives – but having no guiding light or port in sight. The real insiders, who appear to have the greater influence in shaping ITE, are now the policymakers, while the traditional insiders in the field and in practice – the teacher educators – are left to reidentify with a system which privileges compliance rather than criticality.

Although our research found that none of our participants referred to themselves as teacher educators, there is yet a common sense of purpose amongst them; despite differences in emphasis, institutional cultures and level of focus in education, as ‘teachers of teachers, they are bound together in an endeavour that is concerned with teachers’ formation and education. In some senses this unity reflects their sense of belonging to communities of practice in teacher education. We deliberately use the plural here because there are communities, that emphasise theory more than practice or research over teaching, but regardless they confer a sense of identity as a *certain kind of teacher educator*. One of the principal anxieties expressed is around pressures on the community from without and a consequent diminution of freedom as a professional educator, with all the disillusionment that this creates within the community. The other common concerns which unite these teacher educators are around their marginal positionings, their powerlessness to meet the conflicting demands of the university and the TC and the intensification of both research and practice. The pressure to keep one’s eye on ‘demands from without’ has the capacity to wither away what is most valuable in terms of a sense of professional purpose and freedom and the means to develop what one values most as a teacher and teacher educator.

## References

- Alsop, J. (2005). *Teacher identity discourses*. London: Routledge.
- Ball, S. (2003). The teacher’s soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 18(2), 215–228.
- Ball, S. (2012). Performativity, commodification and commitment: an ‘I spy’ guide to the neoliberal university. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60(1), 17–28.
- Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C., & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teachers’ professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20, 107–128.
- Coolahan, J. (2004). The historical development of teacher education in Ireland. In A. Burke (Ed.), *Teacher education in the Republic of Ireland: Retrospect and prospect*. Armagh: Centre for Cross-Border Studies, Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS).

- Coolahan, J. (2007). *A review paper on thinking and policies relating to teacher education in Ireland*. Paper commissioned by the Teaching Council. [www.teachingcouncil.ie](http://www.teachingcouncil.ie)
- Department of Education and Skills. (2011). *Literacy and numeracy for learning and life: The national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy among children and young people 2011–2020*. [http://www.education.ie/admin/servlet/blobservlet/lit\\_num\\_strat.pdf](http://www.education.ie/admin/servlet/blobservlet/lit_num_strat.pdf)
- Dinkelman, T., Margolis, J., & Sikkenga, K. (2006). From teacher to teacher educator: Experiences, expectations, and expatriation. *Studying Teacher Education*, 2(1), 5–23.
- Ducharme, M. (1996). A study of teacher educators: Research from the USA. *Journal of Education for Teaching. International Research and Pedagogy*, 22(1), 57–70.
- Dupont, M., & Sugrue, C. (2007). Irish primary teachers' work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing contexts. European schoolteachers work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing context. In J. Müller, F. Hernández, J. Sancho, et al., *European Schoolteachers work and life under restructuring: Professional experiences, knowledge and expertise in changing context* (pp. 252–299). [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Joerg\\_Mueller7/publication/226619618\\_European\\_Schoolteachers%27\\_Work\\_And\\_Life\\_Under\\_Restructuring/links/0deec523707f477bc3000000/European-Schoolteachers-Work-And-Life-Under-Restructuring.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Joerg_Mueller7/publication/226619618_European_Schoolteachers%27_Work_And_Life_Under_Restructuring/links/0deec523707f477bc3000000/European-Schoolteachers-Work-And-Life-Under-Restructuring.pdf)
- Gaudelli, W., & Ousley, D. (2009). From clothing to skin: Identity work of student teachers in culminating field experiences. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25, 931–939.
- Gleeson, J. (2004). Cultural and political contexts of Irish post-primary curriculum: Influences, interests and issues. In *Curriculum and ideology: Irish experiences international perspectives* (pp. 102–140). Dublin: Liffey Press.
- Goodson, I. F. (2003). *Professional knowledge, professional lives*. Maidenhead/Philadelphia: OUP.
- Gunter, H. (2001). *Leaders and leadership in education*. London: Paul Chapman Publishing.
- Higher Education Authority. (2012). *A review of the structure of initial teacher education provision in Ireland: Background paper for the international review team*. Dublin: HEA.
- Hochschild, A. (1983). *The managed heart: The commercialisation of human feeling*. Berkeley: University College Press.
- Holland, D., Lachicotte, J. W., Skinner, D., & Cain, C. (1998). *Identity and agency in cultural worlds*. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press.
- Kelchtermans, G. (1993). Getting the story, understanding the lives: from career stories to teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 9(5–6), 443–456.
- Kelchtermans, G. (2005). Teachers' emotions in educational reforms: Self-understanding, vulnerable commitment and micropolitical literacy. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 995–1006.
- Kellaghan, T. (2002). *Preparing teachers for the 21st century report of the Working Group on Primary Preservice Teacher Education*. Dublin: The Stationary Office.
- Korthagen, F., Loughran, J., & Russell, T. (2006). Developing fundamental principles for teacher education programs and practices. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 22(8), 1020–1041.
- Labaree, D. F. (2004). *The trouble with Ed Schools*. New Haven/London: Yale University Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miller Marsh, M. (2002). Examining the discourse that shape out teacher identities. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 32(4), 453–469.
- Murray, J. (2012). Performativity cultures and their effects on teacher educators' work. *Research in Teacher Education*, 2(2), 19–23.
- O'Brien, M., & Furlong, C. (2010, August). *Teacher educators' disciplining identities cultural conformity and/or dissonance*. Paper presented at the European conference on educational research, Helsinki, Finland.
- Sugrue, C. (2003). Teacher education in Ireland. In B. Moon, L. Vlasceanu, & L. Conley Barrows (Eds.), *Institutional approaches to teacher education within Higher Education in Europe: Current models and new developments*. Bucharest: UNESCO CEPES.

- Swennen, A., Jones, K., & Volman, M. (2010). Teacher educators: Their identities, sub-identities and implications for professional development. *Professional Development in Education*, 36(1–2), 131–148.
- Teaching Council of Ireland. (2011a). *Initial teacher education: Criteria and guidelines for programme providers*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.
- Teaching Council of Ireland. (2011b). *Initial teacher education strategy for review and professional accreditation of existing programmes*. Maynooth: Teaching Council.
- Teaching Council of Ireland. (2012). *Code of professional conduct for teachers* (2nd ed.). Maynooth: Teaching Council.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Williams, J. (2014). Teacher educator professional learning in the third space implications of identity and practice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 65(4), 315–326.