Changing career and changing identity: how do teacher career changers exercise agency in identity construction?

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Abstract   The quest to understand what it means to 'become' a teacher and the conditions in which such aspirations can be translated into lived experience, continues to exercise teacher educators and researchers alike. Whilst the literature points towards the importance of developing teacher identity, little attention has been given to understanding the transitional processes of individuals coming into teaching at a later point in their working lives. The research reported here was part of a wider project investigating the experiences of early career science teachers. In this study we follow one mature, highly qualified science graduate as she moved through initial teacher education and beyond into her first teaching post. Drawing on theories of identity and self-verification, the analysis reveals how disparity between strongly-held archetypal teacher images and socially constructed teacher identity played out and led this teacher to step away from her new career. Fostering a strong sense of self-efficacy is suggested as critical in supporting mid-career changers in making durable adjustments to new working roles and contexts of teaching.

1 Introduction

Although there is increasing interest in the development of teacher identity, (Beauchamp and Thomas 2009; Chong and Low 2009; Day et al. 2005; Jephcote and Salisbury 2009) there has been very little empirical research carried out about the experiences of mid-career teachers, (Johnson et al. 2005) nor is there a deep

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understanding of why many career changers find the transition difficult and even leave teaching during initial teacher education or after only a few years in post. This exploratory study uses identity and self-verification theories to view the life of one mid career science teacher as she moves through Initial Teacher Education and beyond into her first teaching post.

1.1 Changing career

There are increasing numbers of new teachers who enter the profession having already had a previous career. In shortage subjects, such as science in particular, these mid career entrants bring different but important life skills and experiences to teaching. Unlike first career entrants who move directly from being students to teaching students, those in mid-career have been away from schools for varying amounts of time. They do however often have direct experience of learning in the workplace. Furthermore many of these mid-career entrants have previous experience of supervisory responsibilities and of working in teams. Mature entrants may have chosen to move to teaching because of either redundancy in a previous career or dissatisfaction with the values and demands of their prior workplace. For them teaching offers a promise of more meaningful work (Johnson and Birkeland 2003). Many career changers also bring specialised subject-related knowledge, skills and experiences gained in real world enterprises, for example, as chemists, engineers, or journalists. Often they are parents who enter the classroom more confident than their first career counterparts about their role as an authority figure.

2 Identity formation and self verification theories

The study is based on the premise that learning to teach is actually a process of becoming a teacher. Newcomers learn about pedagogy through both personal construction and socially mediated dialogue in authentic classrooms alongside expert teachers (Garrick 1999: Wilson and Demetriou 2007). If we accept that initial teacher education is a time of formation and transformation (Britzman 1991) then becoming a teacher is therefore, 'an identity forming process whereby individuals define themselves and are viewed by others as teachers' (Danielwicz 2001, p. 4). Furthermore it is clear that becoming a teacher goes beyond simply being appointed to the role of a teacher or acquiring skills and knowledge to perform the functions of a teacher but rather is also about developing a sense of self-identity and purpose (Mayer 1999). This is particularly pertinent for career changers who in effect have to develop a new work role identity. The sense of becoming a teacher has been conveyed through identity narratives. Teacher narratives are temporally ordered accounts which unify past events and characters and relate these causally to one another. Such narratives provide the details of intricate and complex actions that a teacher has taken both personally and professionally. Additionally, teacher narratives help make the process of identity formation more explicit (Beijaard et al. 2000).

2.1 Identity and self concept

The nature of self and identity has been grappled with for the past 50 years (Leary and Tangney 2003). Although there are still many controversies in the literature in various fields about these concepts, there are some common threads and conceptual agreement. In the context of teacher education Rodgers and Scott define self to

> 'subsume teacher identities and to be an evolving, yet, coherent being that consciously and unconsciously constructs and is constructed, reconstructs and is reconstructed in interaction with cultural contexts, institutions, and people with which the self lives, learns and functions' (Rodgers and Scott, 2008, p751).

In workplace contexts, self is perceived as an active agent through which an individual establishes competence, resolves life phase conflicts and mastery in real world terms. Self is also viewed as a social creation moulded by a person's interactions with others, past and ongoing affiliations and experiences within and across social contexts and institutional affiliations (Oysermann 2001).

Identity is understood to be a major component of self, and the self has been used as an organizing construct for understanding identity (Leary and Tangney 2003; Markus and Wurf 1987). Indeed, self-concept and identity are terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature, though self-concept may be better described as a theory about who one was, is, and may become articulated via an array of personal and social identities (Oysermann 2001). In other words self-concept and identity are what come to mind when we think of ourselves (Neisser 1993) and our personal and social identities (Stryker 1980/2000; Taijfel 1981).

Owens suggests that self actually subsumes identity or self-concept and that any distinctions are a matter of hierarchical ordering of the concepts. Self is distinguished from identity by virtue of 'being a process and organization born of self-reflection' (Owens 2007, p. 217). More recent work in social cognition research and emerging knowledge about biological systems conceptualizes the articulation of self-concept as 'a not-well-integrated array of personal and social identities' (Oysermann 2009, p. 2).

In simple terms 'self concept and identity provide answers to the basic questions; 'Who am I?, Where do I belong?, and How do I fit (or fit in)?' (Oysermann 2001, p. 499). In summary, self concept is an amalgam of all the cognitive and affective components of the different identities that make us up and which guide our behaviour (Owens 2007) and is therefore a social force for self change (Bandura's 2001).

2.2 Personal and social identity

Despite the use of a variety of terms, it is now widely believed that self concept is formed and articulated through both personal and social identities (Leary and Tangney 2003; Howard 2000; Oysermann 2001). Personal identity or individual self includes idiosyncratic traits such as a person's physical characteristics, talents, skills, beliefs, emotions, concerns and goals (Owens 2007) which are not context specific (Oysermann 2001). This individual or personal identity is based on the idea that we

construct our own sense of self from identifying with ideas, positions and beliefs linked to the various social relationships encountered (Giddens 1991).

In contrast, social identities are contextualised; they include the traits, characteristics and goals linked to a social role or social group of which the person was, is, or may become a member. Social identities range from broad temporally expansive core identities associated with demographic categories such as race and gender (Owens 2007) to narrow temporally specific identities such as being a teacher (Ragins 2009). Social identity formed at the workplace level is grounded in intergroup communicative actions, group behaviours and individual encounters (Hogg et al. 1995). For instance, within groups, individuals align their actions in order to maintain or build their confidence in pursuit of positive self-respect; this includes gaining memberships in groups that support their individual identity definitions (Taijfel and Turner 1986). Social identity involves defining oneself in relation to others (Ragins 2009) and in work-related contexts this relational identity is invariably about acting out an expected role (Owens 2007).

Identity, therefore, can be conceptualised as a series of categories or processes by which individuals or groups specify who they are and where they locate themselves relative to other people (Michener and Delamater 1999). Moreover, an overall identity is made up of multiple constituent identities that vary and compete within and across social situations. These identities may not be fixed over the life course, but may change as a result of conscious choices. Identity can be thought of as an "internalized positional designation" (Stryker 1980/2000, p. 60), for each of the different positions or role relationships the person holds in society. Thus, self as mother is an identity, as is self as colleague, self as teacher, and self as any of the other myriad of possibilities corresponding to the various roles we may play. Furthermore, structural symbolic interaction or identity theory takes the central premise that individuals face multiple and competing expectations and demands from others (Stryker and Burke 2006). It is these competing demands or roles (e.g. mother, teacher) that make up an individual's whole identity.

Identities are also the meanings we have as a group member, role-holder, or individual. Indeed these meanings are not only socially constructed but also need to be socially validated or affirmed through the response of others (Ashforth et al. 2001). Therefore, what it means to be a teacher, mother or a colleague is the *content* of the identities (Owens 2007).

Finally, the multiplicity of identities organized within the self are activated in different social settings. Activation of each identity is premised on a hierarchy of prominence. In other words identities perceived to be most important will take precedence over other identities believed to be less important (Stryker and Burke 2006). For example, in the case of working parents, the role of parent may be prioritised over the role of co-worker when a family situation forces an individual to make choices over which course of action to take.

In the next section we will consider how identity is self evaluated. We will assume that identity focuses on the meanings comprising self as an object, gives structure and content to self concept, and anchors the self to social systems (Gecas 1982), when we consider how career changers self-evaluate their teacher identity.

2.3 Operating the self concept: how is identity self–evaluated?

As we observe, evaluate, and ultimately draw conclusions about our self, two key motives protect and maintain our existing self-concept: self-esteem and self-verification (Owens 2007).

Self-esteem deals with the evaluative and emotional dimensions of the self-concept (Gecas 1982). Self-esteem is made up of two dimensions, a worth-based dimension which determines how much an individual believes they are accepted and valued, and an efficacy-based dimension, which determines whether an individual believes that they are competent and capable in a particular role (Bandura's 2001).

The second driver, self-verification, or seeking feedback to corroborate and validate self-concept is motivated by a need to establish consistency by anticipating how other people will react (Polzer et al. 2002). Individuals create and organize notions of reality in relation to themselves, even though such notions can be resistant to challenge or change (Swann 1996).

2.4 Agency: driving self-evaluation

Agency is a combination of intention and action that results in making things happen (Cochran 1997). The experience of agency seems to lie at the heart of the experience of self (Gecas 1982). Bandura's (2001) defined agency as a combination of capacity and potential that assists a person to exercise some control over the nature and quality of his or her own life. Agency shapes and drives the direction taken and the subsequent course of action. In the case of teachers, self-evaluations are often judgements of their capabilities to organize and carry out their teacher role (Bandura's 2001).

It may be the case then that during the transition to becoming a teacher, agency is acted out through a self-verification process. In teaching contexts practice-based normative judgements made in classrooms provide possible alterable trajectories of action in response to emerging demands, dilemmas, and ambiguities. In other words, the tensions related to becoming a teacher may actually be about fluctuations in agency over time. Others have suggested that this might be the case. Billett argues that the contribution of personal agency in enacting, remaking and transforming culturally derived practices is central to the regeneration and transformation of work and learning (Billet 2008).

Personal agency is required to both enact and transform practices. Cole (2002, cited in Billett) gives examples of new teachers in challenging American high schools and argues that historically derived classroom management practices are not helpful. Cole believes it is better for new teachers to deploy their personal agency in remaking classroom management practices in the classrooms in which they teach (Cole 2002).That is to say it is the agency of individuals in adapting and transforming historically derived knowledge that sustains and advances the sociocultural practice of teaching (Billet 2008).

2.5 Identity control: a mechanism for change?

The process of self-verification and identity change may occur through a continuously operating and self-adjusting feedback loop. This operation may prompt individuals to continually adjust behaviour to keep their reflected appraisals (that is, their views of how they are seen by others) congruent with their identity standards or references (Burke 1991). We suggest that agency is the driving mechanism for changing identities and that feedback resulting in change is informed by a self-verification process which either goes to enhance or diminish self-esteem. This feedback process therefore has implications for future intentions. Our study focuses on how one new teacher exercised agency in identity construction.

3 The study

The case reported here is part of a larger longitudinal study of beginning teachers as they move through pre-service initial teacher education (ITE) courses and beyond into their first teaching posts. Kim's story has been selected because it is of direct interest to our overall project aim, that is to understand why some new teachers give up their teaching posts early in their careers. Kim was a very well qualified science graduate, holding a relevant Ph.D. and recent work experience including 3 years as a programme manager in process biochemical engineering and 4 years in a secondary school as a science laboratory technician. Kim joined the pre-service postgraduate course at the authors' university, during which time she was placed in two large partnership schools for her school based practicum. She was very conscientious, a highly committed beginning teacher who was hard working and produced outstanding written work. However early in her pre-service course she started to doubt her classroom performance. Kim's school based mentors and university tutor supported her very closely during her practicum and helped her to cope with difficult classroom situations involving disaffected students. Kim persevered with this and was awarded qualified teacher status at the end of her pre-service course. Subsequently Kim took up a part-time science teaching post in a large secondary school near her home, but resigned from this first teaching post at the end of her first term during the research study.

At the start of the course Kim was highly motivated to become a teacher. The reasons she gave were:

> I was working in a school (as a science laboratory technician) and so it (teaching) had been there in my face for 4 years, and I was feeling that I wasn't being ful-filled in what I was doing, and I had a lot more to give, and I wanted a challenge because I'd not been challenged really since having the children, not intellectu-ally, obviously it had been a challenge having the children, and that was enough to start with, but then I wasn't feeling that I'd been challenged or wasn't using my ability so – and I wanted to do something that was useful and I wanted to do something that fitted in with my family

Table 1 Analytical framework

Theoretical construct	Key question: self perception
Social construction of identity	How do others judge me?
Social validation of identity	How do I compare with others?
Self verification	How am I performing relative to my own expectations of the required standard?
Psychological centrality	Which identity is most important to me at this time?

Kim's previous experience, performance at interview and references suggested that she had the capacity to become a very good teacher. In the next sections we will discuss Kim's narrative over an 18 month period using self concept as an analytical framework.

3.1 The focus of the study and data collection methods

The overall research question guiding our larger study was: how do new teachers exercise agency in identity construction? In this paper we draw on several data sources, including Kim's pre-course written reflective educational biography. We also use pre-service documents including Kim's reflective blog which was accessible only to the ITE course team) and the reports written by school-based mentors about her performance during her about her school-based practicum. We also interviewed Kim at the end of each term during the pre-service course and again at the end of her first term after she had resigned from her post. We subsequently analysed the data using self-verification theories of identity construction (Stryker 1991), framed under the following headings: i) Reflected appraisal: how do I perceive that others judge me? ii); Social comparison: how do I think I compare with others? iii), Self attribution: how am I performing relative to my own expectations of the required standard? iv) Psychological centrality: which identity is the most important to me at this time? (Table 1)

3.2 Data analysis

All four interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Kim was invited to review the material and to elaborate on any point if wished, but in the event, had no changes to suggest.

Pre-course, blog and interview data were scrutinised for statements relating to the four themes described above (see 3.1), and coded accordingly, using standard word processing software. The coded segments were summarised—and drawing upon these, a contextualised, nuanced, narrative account was developed. Recognising the highly interpretive nature of our analysis (Juzwik 2006), we invited Kim to feed back on our findings. The account was finalised in light of this verification.

4 Discussion of findings

Despite successfully completing a demanding year of pre-service teacher education and securing a part-time post near her home, Kim gave up being a teacher after one term. Kim's personal validation of herself as a teacher was unacceptable to her. Her beliefs about the sort of teacher she wanted to be were not matched by the perception she had constructed of her actual teacher identity. This mismatch caused tension and considerable emotional stress resulting in Kim making the decision to leave her post so that she could devote more time to other identities.

We structure our discussion under the following headings: social construction of identity, social validation of identity, self-verification of identity and identity positioning, psychological centrality.

4.1 Social construction of identity

Social construction of role identity in work contexts is invariably about acting out an expected role (Owens 2007; Ragins 2009). Kim's identity as a teacher was moulded by her experiences in three very different, largely supportive, schools. However her perceived negative self concept was coloured and formed by her lack of self-efficacy and was manifested in her continued struggle to establish and sustain positive working relationships with some students in her classes. Kim found teaching students who were not as self-motivated as she herself had been, to be very difficult and this caused her considerable anxiety. For that reason connecting with and establishing positive working relationships with some of the disaffected students presented a continual challenge. More importantly Kim had not been able to 'act out' successfully a different role or to visualise any change in this identity or future improvement in this situation.

4.2 Social validation of identity

In this section we focus on how Kim has interpreted what it means to be a teacher and identified a mismatch between an ideal and the actual role identity that she created. Here we have defined teacher role identity as the characteristics and expectations that simultaneously give meaning to a teacher's daily routine because they largely determine a teacher's interpretations of the situations and events that take place in schools and classrooms (Stryker 1980/2000). Kim's interpretation of the meaning of teacher identity was created and based on her own notions of an archetypal teacher reality which she matched against her own socially constructed teacher identify. Kim's conceptualisation of being a good teacher was informed by both her own educational and recent work experience and was very different from how she viewed the newly formed teacher identity which she had constructed from her own experience of being in a classroom. In her educational biography written just before the start of the course Kim wrote about her archetypal definitions of good and poor teachers;

> The good teachers that I remember were those who were enthusiastic and interested in their subject, but also able to keep the attention of the class. I have

particular memories of English and science teachers who had the gift of being able to engage with teenage pupils without seeming patronising or over familiar – maintaining their authority whilst being interesting and interested. Most poor teaching was inevitably accompanied by poor behaviour, as even usually willing pupils became bored and disruptive. The weak teachers were also those that had little control over their pupils and no respect from them or for them

This archetypal role identity provided Kim's frame of reference for assessing thoughts and feelings regarding her own teaching performance. In other words, through social comparisons, Kim judged and evaluated her self in comparison to her ideal teacher and also to her colleagues. She subsequently drew conclusions about her self and attributed what she perceived as unacceptable outcomes to her own lack of competence. This conceptualisation was formed early in her pre service programme and proved difficult to later or shift.

> I don't think I have enough authority with the pupils and I don't know whether it's because I don't feel I have it, and therefore they pick up on that – if you see what I mean – which is what I don't want to be, I really don't want to be, you know, the teacher that isn't in control and that's partly why I'm doing this course, rather than going straight into teaching or doing it in a different kind of way because I recognise that as, personally, a weakness – if you see what I mean – or personally, not necessarily a weakness, but a difficulty that I might have with teaching that I need to deal with.

Both school and faculty based mentors worked closely with Kim during both her practicum placements to help her reflect on and respond to students in her classroom. The professional conversations took both a more distanced reflexive approach as well as proving practical strategies which could be adopted immediately in the classrooms.

Nonetheless Kim's perceived mismatch between her beliefs about her ideal teacher and her own constructed identity did not alter during the ITE course or beyond into her first teaching post. It became the main point of stress and caused Kim great anxiety, eventually resulting in her becoming exhausted, drained and unable to sleep. Such negative emotions stemming directly from the discrepancy between ideal and perceived identity have also been reported in earlier studies (Stets and Burke 2003; Sfard and Prusak 2005). Kim's exasperation came across very emphatically in the final interview following her resignation, when she was asked to articulate the sort of teacher she had wanted to be. This is summed up very poignantly in the final interview following her resignation.

> Herein lies the problem, doesn't it! No, I think I was the teacher 'Oh no, we've got so and so, it's going to be another lesson where we' … 'Oh it's going to be another boring lesson or a lesson where so and so chats and she moans at him and someone gets moved' and all that kind of thing so I felt I was the teacher I didn't want to be. The teacher which like I say, they think 'She's not quite got control of us properly' and you know 'I'm not going to enjoy this and it might be boring' and all that kind of thing.

Kim seemed to have high worth-based but low efficacy-based self-esteem throughout ITE and beyond. She felt valued and supported by her colleagues in all the schools and by some of the students. She described positive interrelations with colleagues in her first post thus;

> I was immediately part of the team I guess. In the summer we had a couple of days in the school before we started – one was mainly induction of new teachers, that was centrally, but the second day was like an INSET day for the department and the department had like an away day only within the village so we spent the whole day together as a department then – things like you're part of a rota – part of this, part of that, I mean I was just you know part of the department I guess, and like I say, they were extremely welcoming and very happy to help – much more so than any of the departments I'd been in my training – certainly than my second placement.

In the final interview following her resignation Kim acknowledged that the school had provided sufficient support and that her decision to leave teaching was not attributable to poor relationships with colleagues.

> Res: So you didn't feel isolated and battling alone
> Kim: No, not really at all, no. And I still came out! You know, I think in a way, I suppose in some ways that made me make the decision, made me even more sure of the decision in that I was in this very supportive environment where I couldn't – if I can put it that way – I couldn't blame or say that it's because I'm not being supported or it's because the Head of Department is useless, or it's because I was not getting support or whatever so I couldn't say it's because of that that I'm really not happy or not fulfilled.

Nonetheless Kim did appear to have low self-efficacy in that she did not believe that she was a competent or capable teacher. This recurring theme of low self-efficacy was sustained throughout her ITE course and beyond. Kim's self-perception, that she had poor relationships with students, caused her to feel stressed and consequently emotionally unfulfilled in the role.

> I wasn't achieving what I should be, what I wanted to be, and a bit beaten down, and sometimes it can be quite humiliating when you've got a class of children and you can't manage them, or one of them says 'Tell them to be quiet miss' and you are telling them to be quiet but the rest of them are just, you know, yeah… and you kind of think 'Well if you'd be quiet it would be a start!' Other teachers got it, but when you get things like 'You haven't taught us anything', 'We haven't learnt anything, that's why I did useless in this test' – and other teachers I know they'd say the same to, and I knew that I had taught them stuff but yes, it probably hadn't gone in because they'd been disruptive.

So although Kim believed that she had a lot to offer the teaching profession she came to believe that she would not ever become the type of teacher she had aspired to be.

4.3 Self-verification

In this section we analyse how Kim exercised agency. We use Bandura's (2001) definition of human agency, that is that agency is an amalgam of human capacity and potential that assists a person to exercise some control over the nature and quality of his or her own life. In other words as free agents, individuals can make or create a role by making behavioural choices and decisions.

Furthermore we argue that the mechanism by which agency can drive identity change in career changers take places through a self-verification process. In Kim's case this self-verification or identity control was a continuously operating, informed by her classroom interactions and feedback from faculty and school-based tutors which informed her self-adjusting, feedback loop. However Kim did not appear to be able to make appropriate adjustments to her approach in response to the mismatch between her archetypal view and actual constructed teacher identity (Burke 1991 p. 840). Consequently as Kim's stress levels increased, her cognitive reasoning capacity diminished to the point that she came to believe that her inability to deal with disaffected students was not changeable but was a fixed, stable trait within in her (Dweck 2000). This might go some way to explaining why Kim had not been able to act on advice and support offered by tutors and expert teachers. It may be that Kim believed that classroom dynamics were outside her control and hence irredeemable in her eyes as illustrated by the following statement.

> You know I'd been given various strategies and I'd tried lots of behaviour management strategies, ones I'd done in the PGCE and ones that were suggested to me by other teachers there. But I think in the end it came down to me not… me, rather than the strategy.

This inability to change came across forcibly in the final interview following her resignation when Kim said

> I found doing the (PGCE course) assignments most fulfilling…….that's where my talents lie much more than necessarily the interpersonal stuff which I'm not so immediately good at – which I kind of knew, anyway, but it's been made more obvious with that. I don't have that need or interpersonal understanding or ability to influence people I guess, which is what you have to do as a teacher. You have to be able to influence them to do what you want them to do and I've not got that.

In summary, Kim did not believe that she could change what for her were her innate traits so consequently, was not able to respond to feedback from mentors and tutors. The negative downward spiral which Kim entered also prevented her from visualising an acceptable positive identity in the future.

> I've seen the teacher I am – if you see what I mean! I can only think of the classes where I've found interesting ways of teaching and covering the material, being able to explain things clearly that they didn't understand before – being able to be happy in the classroom which I think I wasn't most of the time I was not happy, and then of course they pick up on that, so yeah, but also being able

to deal with the awkward so and so who – and I think that was the problem – not being able to deal with that well enough meant that everything else goes a bit haywire because you end up not happy and then you can't teach in the way you want to in a more exciting or interesting way.

4.4 Psychological centrality

Finally we argue that an additional factor precipitated Kim's resignation from her first post, that of psychological centrality. Stryker and Serpe (1994) argue that individuals prioritise the relative importance of the different component of their own identities. Kim's multiple, interdependent identities were re-evaluated when she was under stress. Kim had three active role identities; that of mother, wife and most recently beginning teacher. These roles were obligatory roles (Thoits 1992).

Kim's latent obligatory role identities included being a postdoctoral biochemical researcher and science laboratory technician.

In addition, Kim had two activated voluntary identities, that of practicing church attender and Sunday school volunteer. Thoits (1992) argues that such voluntary roles have the potential to significantly reduce psychological stress and tension by temporarily deactivating stressful obligatory role identities.

Furthermore when individuals respond with negative emotion then the identity which generates negative feelings may be less likely to be played out and move down the hierarchy of identities while identities which cause positive feelings will be played out more often and move up the identity hierarchy (Thoits 1992). In Kim's case, her negative obligatory teacher identity encroached on and became more integrated with her other two obligatory identities of wife and mother. When she became more stressed her co-activation of all three roles caused further conflict as she carried over her anxieties and the work demands of her teacher identity into her home life beyond the school. This became unacceptable to Kim as she could not see how her situation would improve.

Concurrently with this increase in pressure and because of the demands made on her time, Kim also reduced the time spent on her voluntary, potentially stress reducing identity roles, thus making the negative situation even more stressful.

In the end Kim chose to modify the situation by resigning from her teaching post, deactivating her teacher identity and withdrawing from the stressful situation. Kim explained that her identities as parent and wife were more important and so she acted to reduce her overall stress by removing her main source of stress, her teacher identity. In the final interview with Kim after she resigned she said.

It has to fit round my family - as I discovered it was more important than I thought it was going to be. Obviously I went into teaching because it would fit round my family, but because I was bringing it home, because you have to work at home a lot, and then I'm there physically but I certainly wasn't there mentally or emotionally a lot of the time, so it would have to be one where I could put them first. Somewhere where I could use all that I've learnt, not necessarily the teaching stuff, but some of the educational, yes – or my science knowledge, but

actually to feel that I was achieving something using that knowledge but in an effective way and I wasn't being effective so I wasn't using what I know and what I've got and whatever, effectively.

In summary, Kim struggled to connect and establish a working relationship with some of disaffected students in her classes. This caused her to question her own competence which resulted in her coming to believe that she did not have the appropriate personal traits to become the archetypal teacher she wanted to be.

Secondly because Kim's socially constructed teacher identity did not match up to her ideal teacher image and she became stressed and emotionally unfulfilled. She believed that the cause of her problems was related to a fixed innate personal trait which was beyond her control and she could not change her constructed teacher identity.

Finally when Kim's negative teacher identity encroached into her home life she made the decision to deactivate this and to resign from her teaching post.

5 Conclusion and implications

In the UK at the time of writing there is a drive to encourage career changers into teaching, particularly in shortage subjects such as science. In our experience career changers present different challenges to university pre-service course providers. This study, although of a single case, has highlighted the importance of enhancing mature pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. It has also made us question potential links between self-theories of ability (Dweck 2000) and developing self-efficacy in professional learning situations. We have come to see that part of our role as teacher educators is to pay attention to the developmental diversity of our students and to intervene so that we might help new teachers to become more self-aware so that we can help them make a smooth transition to becoming teachers and ultimately we may even reduce the numbers of new teachers leaving the profession.

We concur with Beauchamp and Thomas (2009) when they suggest that instilling awareness of the need to help novices develop an awareness of their on-going sense of identity should be embedded in teacher education programmes. Indicators from our study also underline the particular importance of developing theoretically and situationally informed approaches to supporting mature entrants as they embark on a fresh stage of their career trajectory.

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