The Construction of a Professional Identity: from Teaching Assistant to Teacher

Wendy Dixon

University College London

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Declaration

I, Wendy Dixon, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores how primary teachers, who were once teaching assistants (TAs), have constructed, and are constructing, their professional identity. It uses a qualitative design to describe the timing, time and place of events and the relationships the teachers hold in both their work and family domains. The role of key events and key people through the teachers’ big stories, reveal how these are conducive to, a sense of self, individual self-efficacy, exercise of agency and the construction of a professional identity.

Drawing on possible selves theory and using a life course perspective through a life history design, my research is framed within the field of professional identity. Fieldwork took place in a four-week period, between the end of July and August 2019. Nine primary teachers, aged between 27 and 51, were interviewed at the end of their first year in teaching, using timelines and semi-structured interviews.

Using a hybrid thematic analysis approach, findings show that teachers, who have been TAs, draw on their experience as a TA and acknowledge that familiarity with the school environment, alongside a more realistic understanding of the role of a teacher, are advantages when entering the teaching profession compared to those who become teachers without this experience.

The teachers construct, and continue to shape, their identity through six components: experiences, relationships, skills, knowledge, qualifications and personal qualities. These components, and a sense of one’s self and the hoped-for, expected, future and feared-for selves, establish a context in which they may, or may not, exercise agency. This thesis demonstrates how a life history method can access rich data to understand how TAs make the transition to teacher. This research has implications for teacher education, training and practice: firstly, the findings highlight the unique and rich experience and skills that TAs bring to the teaching profession; secondly, they accentuate the significance of key people in directing teaching employment trajectories.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis is an exploration of how nine former teaching assistants (TAs) are constructing a professional identity as a primary school teacher in their first year of teaching, drawing on their personal and professional experiences.

1.1 Outline

This study is framed within the field of professional identity focussing on the social influences and sociological processes that have impacted on the construction of their identity as a teacher. The theoretical domain of professional identity is where this study is positioned drawing on the theories of possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) and the life course (Elder, 1994) which frames the research questions and analysis of data. The central aim is to use a life history method, through in-depth interviews and timelines, to generate data to gain an understanding of how interactions with key people and key events have become ‘turning points’ (Elder et al., 2003, p. xiv) and how these and individual's agency play a role in the construction of the teachers’ professional identity in their first year after leaving teacher training.

Drawing on a life course perspective (Elder, 1994; Elder et al., 2003; Hutchison, 2018), through life histories (Packard & Conway, 2006; Furlong, 2013; Goodson, 2014), one of the main aims of this research is to capture and relate teachers ‘stories of action’ to ‘histories of context’ (Goodson, 2014, p. 33). This application of the life course perspective also aids identifying the ‘social forces that shape the life course and its developmental consequences’ (Elder, 1994, p. 4; Gillear & Higgs, 2015).

The examination of factors that impact on an individual's life course has been a way of linking individual development with social and political change (Gillear & Higgs, 2015). The relationship and complexity of teachers as ‘active agents’ in the development of their own history has, as Goodson (2014) maintains, been neglected in the past and further research in this area can contribute and inform educational policy, teacher training and TAs' progression into the teaching profession.
Drawing further on the thoughts of Goodson, who argued for the use of life history methods in the understanding of teachers being active agents, the study uses the life history timeline and narrative interviews (Goodson, 2003; Adriansen, 2012; Etherington, 2013; Furlong, 2013; Goodson, 2014) to encourage participants to tell their individual stories on how they have constructed, and are shaping, their current professional identity.

Nine newly qualified teachers (NQTs) (aged between 27 – 51 years), who all graduated in 2018, were individually interviewed during July and August 2019. Interviews were held one year after the participants had completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) with Qualified Teaching Status (QTS) in primary education. Generated data was analysed using a hybrid thematic method incorporating both deductive and inductive approaches practically presented by Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006).

My interest in TAs who have become teachers has been previously explored in my Institution Focused Study (IFS, 2018) which investigated why TAs chose to become teachers. The TAs I worked with for my IFS were employed in school and were in their final year of study on a part-time undergraduate primary education QTS programme, unique to Edge Hill University. The research was a small qualitative study that explored why they had sought to become a teacher through the part-time programme and offers a foundation for this doctoral study.

However, this study emerges not only from the findings of the IFS but is underpinned by my personal perspective within the field of professional identity.

1.2 My Personal and Professional Positioning

In 2010 I was seconded for 12 months from my role as primary class teacher and deputy head to become a Senior Lecturer in the Professional Development department at Edge Hill University in the North West of England. After a further period of 12 months back in school I successfully applied for a permanent position at the same university in primary Initial Teacher Education (ITE). After a number of
roles, both curriculum and pastoral, I was promoted to the position of programme leader for the BA (Hons) Primary Education with QTS programmes.

Reflecting on my own journey to the position of programme leader, I have recognised that key events and people, and my own sense of agency, have influenced the decisions and choices I have made and which, I believe, have contributed to the construction of my professional identity as an educator.

My first role in education was as a TA, or, as they were known in 1988, a classroom assistant, before training to be a primary teacher. To become a TA, or even a teacher, was not part of my career plan but a number of particular people and events placed me in a trajectory that took me to a position in Higher Education (HE).

My passion for teacher training is underpinned by the grounding I received as a TA. However, as much as I recognise the value of this experience, and how it has shaped me in relation to where I am today professionally, there is an underlying sensitivity towards the low status I felt, and still feel, that was associated with the TA role.

During the seven-year period I was a TA (1988 – 1995) I was constantly reminded of my standing within the hierarchy of a primary school. Around 25 years after my experience as a TA, Smith’s (2018) study found that some TAs still felt low self-esteem, reflecting the value they placed upon themselves. One individual in Smith’s study expressed that they were pejoratively viewed as a ‘nobody’ (2018, p.197). A very similar standing of myself as a TA promoted a desire and motivation in me to gain greater status, a professional identity, and recognition of the contribution I could, and was, making to the world of education. Local policy and national policies, which during my time as a TA, saw a relative reduction in TAs’ pay, and an increase in expectations in duties and roles within the classroom, made me question the value that was placed upon TAs, both nationally and in school, and the belief by many TAs, as some studies show (e.g. Dunne et al., 2008a), that the sole professional in the classroom was the teacher.
The transition from being a TA to gaining the professional identity of a qualified teacher was not an easy one; however, I expected to achieve status and a professional identity as a qualified teacher. My journey from child to the present day has been influenced by key people, such as particular colleagues and family, and by a series of key events both of which have created transitions, a change in status, such as marriage, children, the unexpected death of a parent and a divorce. Significantly, my divorce resulted in a turning point (Elder et al., 2003) that set me on a trajectory to become a teacher. This alongside other transitions, turning points, the acquisition of experience, skills and qualifications, including a PA\textsuperscript{1} course, STA\textsuperscript{2} and NPQH\textsuperscript{3} qualifications, were instrumental to my story as I strove to construct an identity as a qualified primary teacher.

By positioning myself in this study as a former TA, I acknowledge my view and belief that TAs have the potential to be a valuable resource for the teaching profession as a qualified teacher. The use of qualified teachers, I believe, is preferable to TAs carrying out teacher duties without training and without suitable recompense.

Although I am aware that my opinion that TAs can be a valuable source for teacher recruitment, I am also realistic enough to acknowledge that some TAs, as identified by Dunne et al. (2008a), may choose either not to pursue a career in teaching or have insufficient qualifications, aptitude or ability to be able to apply for, and gain, a degree.

My own positioning is discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.3 What about Teaching Assistants?

For more than ten years a number of researchers and policy documents have acknowledged the diverse nature of the TA role, and the impact of policy concerning TAs in an everchanging educational landscape (e.g. DfEE, 1997; DfCSF, 2007; Dunne et al., 2008a; Dunne et al. 2008b, Woolhouse et al., 2009; Graves, 2014;

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item [1] Personal Assistant Course \\
\item [2] Specialist Teacher Assistant \\
\item [3] National Professional Qualification for Headship
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Graves & Williams, 2016). Prior to the release of the ‘Good Practice Guide’ (DfEE, 2000), TAs were referred to as ‘general assistants’ or ‘non-teaching assistants’ (Watkinson, 2002, p.2). In 2000 the government introduced the preferred term of ‘Teaching Assistant’ with the role described as one supporting teachers in the classroom in a range of duties (DfEE, 2000).

The remodelling workforce policy of 2003 (DfES, 2003a) focused on developing the TA role further by offering TAs pathways on which to engage in further study. These opportunities included the Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) qualification and the foundation degree, specifically tailored for TAs. Despite the input of these professional development opportunities the role of the TA today remains ambiguous. Smith (2018) maintains that this is due to the varied nature of the role, reflecting Warhurst et al.’s (2014) earlier descriptions, where expectations of TAs duties range from menial tasks, such as washing paint pots, through to taking responsibility for children’s progression in learning through teaching both small groups, and sometimes, the whole class.

While Blatchford et al. (2012) argue that the way TAs are deployed by teachers in the classroom is crucial to children’s progression, some head teachers do not adhere to this advice and choose to utilise TAs, most who have no formal teaching qualification, as teachers. A number of studies have addressed the role of the TA (e.g. Dunne et al., 2008a; Woolhouse et al., 2009; Graves, 2014; Warhurst, 2014) and these are explored further in a review of the literature in Chapter 2.

1.4 Rationale

Although a dearth of teacher numbers was recognised as an issue in this century as early as 2001 (Blatchford, 2009), statistics show that very little has been achieved since then in order to address recruitment and retention. Statistics in the UK show that ‘over 20% of new teachers leave the profession within their first 2 years of teaching, and 33% leave within their first 5 years’ (DfE, 2019, p.10)\(^4\) leading the

government to address this concern through the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Strategy (DfE, 2019).

For over 20 years a model used in North Carolina, USA demonstrated that TAs are a rich addition to the teacher workforce in relation to retention, quality and effectiveness whilst also helping to address teacher shortages (Fortner et al., 2015). Evidence from the study of Fortner et al. (2015) of over 12,000 TAs shows that once trained as a teacher TAs who enter the teaching profession are more resilient and more likely to remain in the profession.

Although it has not been until recently that the UK government has acknowledged TAs as a possible resource to train as teachers to address teacher shortage (DfE, 2019), this study supports the position of Fortner et al. (2015) that TAs can be a valuable resource for recruitment and retention in the primary classroom.

In the context of TAs potentially making a vital contribution to the primary teaching profession there is a need to gain an understanding of how TAs make this transition to teacher so that teacher training programmes can be adapted and schools are appropriately informed. As the role of TA and teacher hold different responsibilities, how individuals adjust and construct their identity by drawing on their past, their present and their possible selves (Hamman et al. 2010) could be vital in the success of such an initiative to address quality teacher recruitment and retention.

The referral to collaborate with universities by the DfE (2019) in designing programmes to provide provision for TAs to train as they work depends on an understanding of the nature of such potential teachers and the unique programmes that should be designed. Edge Hill university has already made a start in providing qualified teacher degree status provision specifically for TAs; however, information from this study could be instrumental in the revalidation of this programme.

This study contributes to what is already known about the TA role and teacher identity but focuses specifically on the transition and construction of a professional identity from TA to teacher. Goodson (2014) states that the complexity of teachers as ‘active agents’ (p. 33) in the development of their own history has been neglected.
To my knowledge there is no research to date that explores how mainstream TAs who have become teachers have constructed their identity as a teacher and, in particular, how and why they have made the transition from TA to qualified teacher.

To address this, knowledge of their personal and professional stories is key. The use of a life course perspective allows the study to explore how the individual participants' experiences over a lifetime contribute to the formation of their professional identity, and how they view themselves as a teacher. The study also explores their reflections on their role as a TA and their aspirations for the future.

Although the main focus on recruitment for teacher training is on school/college leavers (DfE, 2019), I argue that TAs, who, unlike those who have not been employed in a school environment, have experience of building relationships with children, have a good understanding of a school environment, have rich life experiences, acquired skills, knowledge and understanding of how children learn and through their observations have a good working knowledge of the teaching role, should be acknowledged as a significant part of the workforce in their own right and for people who are eligible, and wish to, should be encouraged to train as teachers.

The identification of how TAs form a professional identity as a teacher, the motivating factors that drive their aspiration to reach that goal, and the greater understanding of their journeys, from an early age to teacher, will inform universities and teacher trainers, in the development of degrees, both undergraduate and postgraduate. This can encourage TAs to engage with teacher training and may consequently impact on the teacher workforce.

1.5 Research Questions

I have chosen to use questions that focus on the process of the participants’ journey from TA to teacher. These are underpinned by further questions that search for meaning with a focus on the relationship between events and people that have resulted in shaping their professional identity.
1. What were the teaching assistants’ motivating factors for becoming a teacher?

2. What have been the main transitions and turning points throughout the participants’ trajectories?

3. How are teachers, who have been former teaching assistants, constructing their professional identities, and what have been the main influences?

1.6 The Structure of the Thesis

This chapter has introduced the thesis, placing the study in the context of teachers’ professional identities and the stories they have to tell. The rationale and policy background offer a case for this investigative study and this has been supported by an insight into the stance and position I take as the sole researcher within this study. Following on from this introductory chapter, the thesis is divided into a further four chapters. Chapter 2 will outline some of the key policy reforms, academic studies from the field and will discuss the theories that I have used to underpin the study. After the methodology chapter, Chapter 3, I present the findings in Chapters 4 based around the three research questions. Finally, the conclusions in Chapter 5 will offer to draw together the findings, present contributions to the field, and outline the implications for my personal and professional practice and further research.
Chapter 2: Policy, Literature Review and Theoretical Orientation

This chapter will address some of the key debates and theories that surround the construction of a teacher’s professional identity with a focus on the main research questions of the study. The review will establish the context, background and policy relating to TAs, ITE and teachers before detailing the theoretical framework of Elder’s life course that underpins the study.

Before outlining the five principles of the life course, my view on the conceptualisations of identity (in particular, the professional identity of teachers) will be discussed. This will include a detailed reflection on the principle of agency, presented by Elder (1994) as one of the major principles of the life course.

Following this a review of possible selves theory will present a summary of the relevance of self-concepts that may motivate individuals towards their future selves.

2.1 Background & Policy

2.1.1 Teaching Assistants

TAs are sometimes referred to as paraprofessionals and account for around a quarter of the education workforce in the UK (Skipp & Hopwood, 2019). Currently undefined, a TA’s role is generally viewed as one of support to teachers, ranging in responsibility and duties in order to aid the progression of children’s learning (Webster et al., 2011; Blatchford et al. 2012). Although regarded as a valuable resource in school, the TA’s role has yet to gain a recognised professional status (Dunne et al., 2008a; Graves, 2014; Bennett et al., 2017).

The Wider Participation Strategy (DfES, 2003b) was introduced by the Labour Government in 2003 to address the role and status of the TA (Graves, 2011) and was observed as a way in which to reduce workload for teachers (Edmond, 2010). In order for the strategy to be welcomed by TAs it was promoted as a way of raising
their status and profile through the introduction of new qualifications, notably the HLTA qualification and standards (2003), based on the QTS standards (Edmond, 2010), and the foundation degree (Graves, 2014). Despite there being no requirement of minimum qualifications for the role of TA, the strategy proposed that TAs could be an economic alternative in the role of HLTA which allowed TAs to replace teachers in the classroom for particular and limited periods of time during the teaching week (Dunne et al., 2008a).

However, Warhurst et al. (2014) questioned whether TAs, as HLTAs, were actually ‘overstepping the boundary’ from a supporting role to a whole class teaching role. The creation of this new role appeared to ‘create tensions’ as it was seen to be a conscious act by the government to ‘de-professionalise’ the teaching profession (p. 170).

Since the introduction of the strategy there has been a significant rise in the number of TAs in schools and the range and complexity of their tasks have increased (Anderson & Lyn-Cook, 2016; Bennett et al., 2017). However, within a year of the strategy being introduced, the increase in the expectations of the TA role and the introduction of qualifications, many TAs felt that their workload had doubled in size whilst their pay had remained the same (Smith et al., 2004).

Five years after the strategy was introduced, the interim report of Dunne et al. (2008a), based on their three-year study of exploring the experiences of TAs engaging with a foundation degree, found that the government’s rhetoric that the introduction of the foundation degree would bring career advancement, or kickstart a career, was misleading. Through focus group discussions feelings of guilt and low status were expressed as studying took time away from family life, and they generally felt they were just ‘the eyes and ears of the classroom’ and a ‘substitute mother’ rather than seen as a professional (Dunne et al, 2008a, p. 242).

There has been a continued recommendation for higher quality training for TAs (Brown & Devecchi, 2013) so that they could be equipped and confident to work effectively alongside teachers in the support of children’s learning. This solution was suggested later by Gallego & Busch (2017) through the replication of the USA model
that is used to induct TAs which requires that they gain a qualification equivalent to the foundation degree in the UK.

In 2014, in a continued effort to have a consistently recognisable and agreed role for the TA, the DfE commissioned *The Professional Standards for Teaching Assistants*. However, the government chose not to publish implying that local context was crucial. The report stated:

> Schools are best placed to decide how they use and deploy TAs, and to set standards for the TAs they employ (NEU, 2019).

Therefore, the TA standards today remain non-mandatory and non-statutory. This decision may possibly be political, as the standards were requested by the liberal democrat schools’ minister for the coalition government but completed after the new conservative government was in place.

For those TAs who had engaged with the foundation degree in the UK, Dunne et al. (2008a) found that TAs felt, on completion, they had reached a ‘professional ceiling’ (p. 245) and that the only way they could progress would be to gain QTS. From 189 surveys sent to TAs (all with foundation degrees), the lives of six were explored in depth by Woolhouse et al. (2009) using life history interviews.

Woolhouse et al. (2009) found that for some, the perception that the foundation degree was not a ‘real degree’ (p. 769) was reinforced by some schools believing that the degree was more for personal development rather than professional development. Woolhouse et al. (2009) reported that for these particular TAs, who had taken on more responsibility, they stated that job satisfaction was more important than money.

### 2.1.2 TAs becoming teachers

In 2019, 30,000 individuals were recruited onto ITE programmes in the UK (Foster, 2019). These programmes range from school-based routes to higher education routes where some trainees pay fees, whilst a small proportion are paid a salary
whilst training. The continued focus on the provision of ITE through a variety of routes is to address teacher shortage (DfE, 2019). Another step to address teacher shortages by the government has been the removal of previous classroom practice experience before entering an ITE programme. Further, the decision by the government to remove the professional skills tests\(^5\), for all teachers, in literacy and numeracy, was in response to a recommendation made by the Carter Review (2015) as it was felt that potentially ‘good’ candidates (p. 14) for ITE programmes were being lost. In his paper addressing the achievement gap between disadvantaged and privileged children in the UK, Hood (2016) sets out the importance of getting the right people to become teachers and presents one of the US models where trainee teachers are placed in a school as a TA to gain experience and expertise.

This theme is evident in current government (DfE, 2019) policy that state that it has become ‘increasingly difficult to recruit and retain staff of the calibre required’ (p. 4), and that is imperative that the profession attracts and keeps people in the profession (DfE, 2019). One of the suggestions is to attract TAs to gain QTS, a practice that has been in place for over 20 years in parts of the US (Fortner et al. 2015). However, although to some TAs this may appear to be a natural progression from TA, the routes to achieve QTS are not clear, and to some are unobtainable due to family and financial commitments. Martin (2020), through an online survey and focus groups, found that Learning Support Assistants (LSA) in a secondary special school felt that self-efficacy, motivation and job satisfaction were influential in their decision in becoming a teacher. LSAs were aware of the opportunities that they had to observe, experience, and compare themselves to many practitioners.

Fortner et al. (2015) used a quantitative design that reviewed administrative data records of 12,565 who had chosen to become teachers between 1986 until 2012, with a maximum of five years as a qualified teacher. The robustness of this study allows Fortner et al. (2015), in their longitudinal study of TAs becoming teachers, to maintain that individuals who choose to become teachers, after gaining experience

\(^5\) an entry requirement that was designed to assess the core skills that a teacher needed to fulfil their professional role
through their role as a TA, can be a rich addition to the teacher workforce as good teachers and also help address issues of retention and teacher shortages.

The Department for Education (DfE, 2019), in this latest drive for recruitment and retention, have included plans to encourage universities to provide provision for TAs to train to become teachers whilst they work. TAs require a full degree to be able to train to be a teacher. This study is interested in how TAs construct their professional identity as a teacher and an important part of that is the opportunities for them to train. The university where this research sits has three available routes for TAs into teaching. The traditional route through the full-time three-year degree with QTS programme; the part-time four-year degree with QTS programme that allows TAs to continue in their role whilst training; and the PGCE with QTS programme.

2.1.3 Becoming and being a teacher

In their longitudinal study in the US, following 265 teacher training students into their first year of teaching, McLean et al. (2019) found that, amongst their list of motivating factors, participants included ‘teaching will allow me to influence the next generation’ (p. 205).

This study views motivating factors as stimuli that prompt a response towards a goal, which is similar to Moran et al. (2010) who considered motivating factors in their survey of 466 students training to become teachers in Northern Ireland.

Reeves (2018) draws on Trent (2010, p. 912) to illustrate in pedagogical terms the importance of teacher training to prepare trainee teachers for their role in the classroom:

- Provide trainee teachers with the tools they need to investigate and comprehend local cultural practices in the educational systems, schools and classrooms in which they will teach and how these practices might interact with their own processes of becoming a teacher.

Transferring from an ITE programme to the position of class teacher is viewed to be one of the most ‘critical phases’, or transitions, of a career in teaching (Heikkinen et
al., 2018, p. 1) and Heikkinen et al. (2018) discuss how problems that arise in the early years for teachers in Australia and Finland can result in teachers leaving the profession and have found the issue of retention to be present in many countries.

According to the 2018 workforce census data in the UK, only 84.7% of teachers who qualified in 2017 are still working in schools (DfE, 2019) and a focus on teacher retention has grown in the UK and internationally (Chiong et al., 2017; Lomi & Mbato, 2020). Problems, or issues that are encountered by teachers in primary, secondary and post-compulsory sectors, early in their career and possibly later, may include feelings of inadequacy in their skills and knowledge, their role in the classroom, their role in school, workload, behaviour management and possibly job insecurity (Heikkinen et al., 2018; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Perryman & Calvert (2020) found that of the 3500 new career teachers who had qualified in the past five years from a London University and who had chosen to leave the profession, over half of them had stated that even though they were aware of the challenges of the role of a teacher they found the job had made them ill.

Although Perryman & Calvert (2020) found that teachers did not cite the amount of work as a factor for their decision to leave the teaching profession but rather the nature of their workload, the focus of the workforce remodelling agenda of 2003 (DfES, 2003a) and the recent School Workload Reduction Toolkit (DfE, 2018b) have been intended to reduce the workload of teachers in the recognition of a more equitable work/life balance (Edmond, 2010, Graves, 2014; DfE, 2018a).

Suggestions that the recommendations in the toolkit have been taken onboard can be found in the findings of the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) Teacher Workload Survey of 2019 (Walker et al., 2019). This report of 7,287 teachers found that their working hours had reduced from 54.4 hours to 49.5 hours per week with 70% of primary teachers feeling that they could not complete their workload in 2016 to 23% in 2019, most teachers still felt that too much time was spent on planning and on administrative work. The 2019 survey appears to show that, for primary teachers, the numbers of those viewing their workload as unacceptable fell from 60% in 2016 to 30%.
As most of the research that considers the views, attitudes and feelings towards their role as a teacher has been based on survey research this current study allows for more in-depth investigations of teachers, focussing on those who already have previous experience in school as TAs, through a qualitative approach.

2. 2 Theoretical Approaches to the Construction of a Professional Identity

2.2.1 Professional Identity

Biesta et al. (2008) define, identity as simply a sense of one’s self. Identity is viewed in this thesis to be a concept that includes a sense of one’s self but also that identity is socially constructed, ‘unstable’ and ‘shifting’, influenced by the present but also belonging to the future as well as the past, an identity that can be altered and does not pre-exist (Hall, 1992; Holland et al., 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Swain, 2005, p.4; Buchanan, 2015; Fadjukoff, 2016).

Fitzgerald (2020) defines professional identity through the attributes a profession demands including the acquisition of qualifications, distinct practice, knowledge, accountability, and ethics. A number of studies (Cascio, 2001; Hotho, 2008; Smith, 2016) distinguish professional identity as a concept of how an individual identifies themselves with that profession sharing a strong sense of purpose such as that found in the professions and careers of doctors, nurses, social workers and lawyers.

London (1983) terms professional identity as career identity and outlined important individual elements that formulate this; these included needs, interests, career insight and career resilience, this was later validated in 1997 (London & Noe). In addition, London (1983) also acknowledged that it is important that individuals have a personality that is relevant to their chosen career.

A dimension of this career framework is the confidence, or self-esteem, to achieve a professional identity, having a realistic insight into a career, as individuals will be more likely to achieve satisfaction in that role (London, 1983). London (1983) explains that confidence, which is linked to an individual’s self-esteem, is dependent
on peer approval, or ‘superior approval’ (p. 621). Self esteem and self-efficacy are seen to be important components in the construction of any professional identity alongside clear motivations and relationships within the workplace (Nickel & Crosby, 2021). All these traits and attributes can be aligned with the teaching profession. However, to define the professional identity of a teacher possibly goes beyond this. Chin et al. (2010) expands on this and found that in order to construct a professional identity, trainee teachers in Singapore, on a teacher training programme, required, in addition to motivation, the right attributes, beliefs and values to construct a professional identity; without these, he warns, teachers could leave the profession they are trained for.

Reinforcing this belief and outlining the nature of both the professional self and personal self, Goodson and Sikes (2001) proffer that the professional self of a teacher and the personal self are different, but they are influenced by our perceptions of, social, historical, political events. Day et al. (2006a) concur with Goodson and Sikes (2001), and is the view of this study, that although teachers’ personal and professional identities may be different, they are closely connected, and both of these two identities motivate teachers and influence their commitment to the profession. Nias (1989) established later the relationship between the personal and professional aspects of teachers’ lives and identities and argued that it was vital to recognise an individual’s personal identity in order to understand their professional identity.

Recently, Jonker, et al. (2018), who examined the construction of teacher educators’ professional identity, speculated that identity was more than a close connection, but more of an integration of the personal and professional. Schellings et al. (2010) previously had identified in their qualitative study that a beginning teacher’s professional identity, context and personal identity were critical to the teacher’s sense of self. Although definitions of other professions believe that a professional identity includes the integration of an individual’s personality the work by Amott (2018) considering the professional identity of six teacher educators, who had previously been teachers, did not focus on personal aspects through the life history approach employed. Amott (2018) made a clear distinction between personal and
professional life and suggested that personal life details were not particularly relevant in the formation of a professional identity.

Day et al. (2006a) explored the issues that surround the development of teacher identity, both professional and personal, drawing on individual's circumstances, their use of agency and its relationship with social structures. Their findings, based on a four-year project (VITAE)\(^6\) commissioned by the DfES, of 300 teachers from 100 schools in both the primary and secondary sectors (Day et al., 2006b) demonstrate that in studies of teacher education the concept of self is sometimes used in place of identity and that knowledge of the self, alongside events and personal experiences are linked to their professional roles and therefore their identity. Day et al. (2007) confirmed this later and reiterated that life experiences beyond the classroom context were integral to their identity as a teacher.

Day et al. (2006b) suggest that teachers’ identities are not always ‘stable and are in a state of constant change’ (p. 613), which is a view that is supported by Davey (2013), Buchanan (2015) and Amott (2018) and one that is taken in this thesis. The notion presented by Reeves (2018) that teacher identity is the practice of, and being, a teacher is central to this study and as Furlong (2013) who studied 15 student teachers’ life histories in Eire proffers:

> It is generally accepted that student teachers must undergo a shift in their identities as they move through their initial teacher education and into life in the classroom and may well experience further identity alteration as they progress through their teaching careers (p. 68).

However, this can be a challenge for teachers entering the profession as teachers’ feelings and actions are influenced by constant personal and contextual processes (van der Wal et al. 2019). Although van der Wal et al. believe that teachers may want to establish a stable and positive identity Buchanan (2015) argues this identity will continue to develop throughout their career.

\(^6\) VITAE – Variations in Teachers’ Work Lives and Effectiveness.
Nias (1989) and Beijaard et al. (2004), Buchanan (2015) and Reeves (2018) had already begun to identify multiple selves of teachers and suggested that the construction of these were ongoing through historical, cultural, sociological and psychological influences which formed the identity of a teacher. Amott (2018) also found that a single overarching identity was likely to consist of multiple identities constructed ‘in different contexts for varying purposes’ and discusses how a professional identity constructed within a social context is consequently ‘shaped’ by that context (p. 479).

Hamman et al. (2010) report that there are a series of common themes and agreed understandings that unites teacher identity research. These view identity as being:

- influenced by context
- formed through relationships
- always changing
- involving meaning making (p. 1350)

However, teacher identity research may, depending on the cohort used for the study, differ in focus, varying from a teacher identity emerging from their position in the classroom and children’s learning, to aspects of teacher identity development and formation in a new profession (Hamman et al., 2010). Hamman et al. (2010) discuss how the consideration of ‘situational and contextual factors’ (p. 1350) have been underestimated as context provides a landscape on which a teacher’s professional identity can be placed to gain a better understanding. Previous identities, the culture in which teachers live, government policy, their background and their life experiences accrued over the life course will dictate their views of teaching and of their identity (Holland et al., 1998; Hamman et al., 2010; Bodman et al., 2012; Goodson, 2014).

Although it is believed that teachers new to the profession begin to construct their identity long before they enter the profession (Furlong, 2013), those with no previous experience of working in a school may experience conflict between their expectations, or their preconceived ideas of being a teacher, when they engage in professional practice (Ó Gallchoir). When entering the teaching profession, Dugas (2021, p. 14) claims that ‘it is virtually a truism to say that new teachers go through a
stage of reality shock or survival’. Pre-existing perceptions, such as these found in the teaching profession have also been found in other professions (Glesner Fines, 2018).

In addition to expectations and preconceptions, Buchanan (2015) proffers that when teachers inevitably arrive with past experiences, values and beliefs, alongside their hopes for their future career, they may experience conflict between their philosophy of how to educate children with the expectations that are bestowed upon them when they were young and in school.

In addition to this, UK and international studies identify tensions for the classroom teacher, predictable and unpredictable (Hong et al., 2018), such as knowing how to support pupils, working with multi-agencies, behaviour management, how to position themselves with experienced colleagues, communicating with parents and coping with the transition from a trainee identity to the identity of a teacher (Schellings et al., 2010; Hong et al., 2018; Lomi & Mbato, 2020; Nickel & Crosby, 2021). These tensions, or challenges, Bodman et al. (2010) claim can also be impacted by political and societal expectations of what they, as teachers, should be able to do.

Educational policy, in part, provides a framework of reference for teacher’s professional identity as Bodman et al. (2012, p. 14) stipulate, ‘legislating for high educational standards for all is a laudable government focus’ and, as outlined recently by Skinner et al. (2021), policy changes over the years have made teachers publicly accountable for pupil outcomes. Although many teachers overcome these tensions, Nickel & Crosby (2021) argue that if these are left unresolved this could prompt teachers to lose their sense of identity and leave the profession. This was previously endorsed in the small study of pre-service teachers by Hong et al. (2018) who found a strong connection between the construction of a professional identity and the ability to cope with, or manage, various tensions.

2.2.2 Life course

The term ‘life course’ was introduced by Elder after his ground-breaking work on the US depression (Green, 2017). Elder (1994), Elder et al. (2003) and Mayer (2009)
describe the life course as a theoretical orientation that has matured since its establishment in the 1960s allowing, as Elder & Shanahan (2017) explain, an individual’s trajectory to be followed in terms of their family, their community, their friends and society.

There are several perspectives that are used in the field of identity with the discipline of sociology, identity theory, social identity theory, structuration theory and symbolic interactionism, viewed as the most significant (Smith, 2016). As opposed to examining self-concepts of social groups or how society should be understood in terms of action and structure this study is concerned with the employment trajectories of individuals and the identification of transitions, key events and key people that are relevant to the process of constructing a professional identity as a teacher. The life course perspective also provided me with a series of organising ‘hooks’ to structure the narratives of the participants’ lives on. Therefore, a life course perspective was deemed to be an appropriate theory to employ as a theoretical framework. Alwin (2012) has identified the life course as being particularly advantageous in the study of causes and consequences of life course events and transitions and that it can be a useful tool in the placement of policy during an individual’s employment trajectory.

The life course theory, established by Elder et al. (2003), has become one of the dominant perspectives for the study of individual experiences in biographical time (Alwin, 2012; Hutchison, 2018) and has been valued as a rich resource in the study of teachers. This study will use the five principles of life span development, agency, time and place, timing and linked lives, from the life course, highlighting the concepts of trajectories, transitions and turning points all of which are detailed below.

Previously, Thornton (2002) had warned against using the concept of transitions to avoid errors in the inference of observed patterns. However, the referral to life transitions, relationships, and social change (Hutchison, 2018) acknowledges people’s strength, their use of agency and their capacity for change. Therefore, this framework will identify the perceptions and the impact of these elements within the teachers’ life stories, the stories that unfold over time (Hutchison, 2018), understanding the manner of how life events and role transitions influence outcomes
(Alwin, 2012). There will be a particular focus on key events and people to aid my understanding of how TAs construct their identity as a teacher.

Life course insights have shown that, amongst other fields, this theoretical orientation can offer important outcomes in the study of experience and adjustment (Elder & Shanahan, 2017), as it is attentive to individuals' lifelong experiences and how they 'change, adapt, develop and decline' during their life (Green, 2017, p. 1). As TAs in this study have made that transition to teacher, the life course theory is used to understand how the participants have made an adjustment to a different role, and how they have constructed their professional identity.

The development of the life course approach for social scientists addressed the lack of knowledge and understanding of how life experiences impacted on individual lives. It was felt that they:

…knew little about how people lived their lives from childhood to old age, even less about how their life pathways influenced the course of development and aging, and still less about the importance of historical and geographic contexts (Elder et al. 2003, p. 4).

Therefore, this developing interest in how 'social change alters people’s lives' has meant that the life course has developed into a major research paradigm (Elder, 1994, p. 4).

As well as the need to distinguish the terms such as ‘life span’, ‘life history’ and ‘life cycle’, and to recognise that they are part of the life course vocabulary, it is also important to note that they are not synonymous with the term ‘life course’ (Elder et al., 2003, p. 5). Life span is concerned with lifelong processes of development and ageing, life history focuses on the chronological order of events and activities within a life course, and life cycle is linked to the ‘reproductive process from one generation to the next’ (Elder et al., 2003, p. 5).

Elder et al. (2003) devised aspects that models of the life course should be concerned with, and reflected, that they should include a historical and biographical context focusing on trajectories, transitions and turning points.
Trajectories, which can be defined as a ‘sequence of roles and experiences’ involve education, work and family (Elder, et al., 2003) which are shaped by ‘historical forces’ (p. 8). These can alter through either planned, or unplanned, changes and can include changes in role, also known as transitions, with the time between each transition referred to as a ‘duration’ (Elder, et al. 2003 p. 8). The greater the duration, Elder et al. note, the greater chance of continuity in behaviour during the life course. Although individuals can decide on the path they wish to take these can be limited or constrained and these will be key in the understanding of the trajectories that the participants in this study have taken. This study will consider the employment and educational trajectories of the teachers and how previous employment, the duration of this, and the time spent as a TA before making the decision to become a teacher.

Transitions are distinct changes that relate to status or identity and these can be personal and social (Emler, 2005). Transitions can be prompted by key events and people, some of which can be unforeseen (Elder et al., 2003). Transitions could include going to school, leaving school, getting married, or losing a parent and that transitions can be expected, or unexpected, and can have a ‘profound effect’ (McLeod & Almazan, 2003, p. 395) on an individual.

In this study transitions that have formulated the teachers’ trajectories will be identified and the influence these have had on the participants’ pathways in becoming a teacher.

Turning points, referred to as *epiphanic* events by Cole & Knowles (2001, p. 2), in work and family are, in this study, viewed as a ‘substantial change in the direction of one’s life’ (Elder et al., 2003), created by a key event or an interaction with a key individual, that, at the time of their occurrence on the trajectory, have been instrumental in the direction of the participants’ pathways, whether subjective or objective (McLeod & Almazan, 2003) or the status they may hold (Elder et al., 2003). However, a turning point, can only be determined as a result of the consequences, or repercussions, of that event or interaction with that individual. Key events and key people are considered by this study to be essential in the recognition of particular
transitions that have made distinct changes in the teachers’ lives that have become turning points (Elder et al., 2003) on their trajectory in constructing their identity as a teacher (see Figure 2.1). A turning point can be created either by an event, or series of events, by a person, or number of people, or a combination of both.

**Figure 2.1: The creation of a turning point**

![Diagram of a turning point creation](image_url)

**Turning points** - are defined as a time where a significant change in the direction an individual takes in their life in relation to work, or direction on their pathway, whether subjective or objective (McLeod & Almazan, 2003).

For some, family transitions, for example ‘leaving home, returning home, marrying, entering parenthood’ (Elder et al., 2003, p. 8) may also be identified as a change in direction of an individual’s work life. Wethington et al. (2003) describe a turning point where a transformation regarding employment has changed. An example of this could be a return to education later in life (McLeod & Almazan, 2003; Wethington et al., 2003). This study will examine both work and family transitions to identify any turning points that contribute to the direction of constructing a professional identity.

In their narrative research of mature women, Evans & Biasin (2016) identified turning points in their lives. They found a particular relationship between agency and experience and noticed that events and people could motivate individuals to examine
and change their career pathway. They also found that this interaction could be either positive or negative but still have a similar effect.

When considering the full life course it is important to be sensitive of early transitions and their impact on later experiences, events or choices made by individuals. Early transitions can, Elder et al. (2003) believe, have an impact on trajectories which can ‘shape later events, experiences, and transitions’ (p. 8). The implications of choices and pursuits in early life on later life is a key premise of the life course (Elder, 1994; Leonard & Roberts, 2014) as it is believed that no ‘period of life’ can be removed from prior choices, nor detached from any aspirations for the future (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003, p. xi). This is evident in the lives of the participants in this study.

Elder et al. (2003) established five general principles:

- life span development
- agency
- time and place
- timing
- linked lives

These principles are borne out of research in the social and behavioural sciences that provide a framework for life course study and have been developed from four central themes in the life course: the interplay of human lives and historical times; the timing of lives, linked or interdependent lives, and human agency in choice making (Elder, 1994, p. 5, Elder et al., 2003).

Elder et al. (2003) concluded that these five principles allow a focus on individuals and the choices and the decisions that they make rather than an age-specific focus. Drawing the five principles together will present a guide for inquiry for this study which will promote a ‘holistic understanding of lives over time and across changing social contexts’ (p. 13).

These five principles are detailed below.
The principle of life-span development

Human development and ageing are lifelong processes (Elder et al., 2003, p. 11).

Elder et al. (2003) explain that to understand developmental processes a long-term perspective should be taken so that ‘fundamental changes’ can be acknowledged. To examine individual’s lives over a period of time the relationship between social change with an individual’s development can be observed and increase the opportunity to collect data on ‘relationships, workplaces, schools and communities’ (p. 11). This study views this principle as essential in the consideration of the TAs who have become teachers, as work is seen as being crucial to socioeconomic wellbeing; Vondracek et al. (2019), view work as an integral part of the life-span development and suggest that the field of career development has been neglected.

The principle of agency

Agency is not something people can have...but it is something that people do (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 626).

Marshall (2005), a colleague of Elder, notes that as early as 1985 the issue was raised that, although the term agency is used consistently within different disciplines, it appears to have different ‘underlying concepts’ (p. 58). Agency in the life course is always to do with choice, the ability to choose and the capacity to act (Marshall, 2005) and is a significant aspect of the life course (Elder, 1994; Damman & Henkens, 2017).

Individuals construct their own life course through the life choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstance (Elder et al. 2003, p. 11).

Gecas (2003) notes that every life is shaped by events and external factors, and that individuals are ‘to a large extent architects’ (p. 369) of their life course. Elder had previously raised the importance of individual differences as this affects and impacts the way in which an individual interacts with their changing environments (1994) and how they shape their own trajectory. These choices, or actions, identified by Elder et
al. (2003) are affected by structural constraints and therefore individuals differ in their opportunities where they can exercise agency.

Although Gecas (2003) sees the self at the core of human agency, structural constraints on this, Evans & Biasin (2016) suggest, include social background, gender, ethnicity as well as the personal attributes an individual holds, such as their disposition and any aspirations. Chambers et al. (2018), in their global survey of 20,000 children, found early career aspirations to be influenced by parents and friends. Earlier, Trice (1991) had conducted a survey with 422 8-11 years old children about their aspirations and found that they gravitated towards gender stereotypical roles and that parents’ occupations influenced the children’s choices.

However, Marshall (2005) explains that within these constraints, individuals are still able to be agents within their own life course and that everyone always exercises agency (to different degrees), and agency is most likely to take place during times of transition. This agentic behaviour, Emirbayer & Mische (1998) argue, should be understood as a configuration of influences from the past, orientations towards the future and engagement with the present. However, Gecas (2003) strongly advises that those with high self-efficacy, especially in the domains of education and career, are more likely to be active in shaping their own lives than those with a ‘low sense of personal efficacy’ (p. 370) who may view their lives as a ‘product of forces and circumstances’ which they have no control over. Vondracek et al. (2019) note that an interest in why individuals disengage with one occupation, and possibly use the ‘fruits of their work life’ (preface) so far, to change direction, has recently been developed and this will be explored in this study.

To exercise agency in terms of a career, Biesta et al. (2015) found that, in their one year study of three schools (one primary and two secondary) in Scotland of teacher agency, agency is informed by past experiences that are both personal and professional and that agency is trajected to the future, both short term and long term. Six teachers, two from each setting, were asked to conduct a personal and professional interview prior to being observed and taking part in group interviews. There were similarities in both primary and secondary teachers, in particular, Biesta et al. (2015) found that a teacher’s agency can be driven by personal educational
beliefs, can be dependent on personal attributes, and can rely on how they see themselves in their role as a teacher.

Previous to their study of 2015, Biesta et al. (2008), had interviewed 117 teachers over a period of 3 years and found that the findings indicated that learning across the life course highlighted the relationship between learning, identity and agency, and that agency could give individuals the ability to give a direction to their lives. Biesta et al. offer this project as the ‘first major study’ to use BHPS7 data which they combined with a biographical, life history method.

Although Biesta et al. (2008) recognised that learning is related to agency, they noted that learning may not always be ‘agentically driven’ as it can be ‘self-initiated [or] forced by others or be incidental’ (p.20). Gecas (2003) agrees that some individuals may feel they have a very little impact on the course of their lives, including in terms of education. It was also noted by Biesta et al. (2008) that learning may not always impact on, or increase agency, as individuals may find the acquisition of qualifications difficult, or a painful experience, which could impact on their confidence.

A life course perspective allows the researcher to understand the notion of agency within a professional trajectory (Tao & Gao, 2017). Examining the interplay between teacher agency and identity commitment Tao & Gao (2017) explain that:

In relation to identity, teacher agency has been a crucial component of intentional individuals, underlying a teacher’s construction of themselves as professionals (p. 347).

With the expansion of the study of human lives there has been a development, and acknowledgement of, the ‘interlocking nature of human lives’ and how individuals are ‘choice makers’ and ‘agents of their own lives’ (Elder, 1994, p. 4). Teachers’ beliefs and confidence in themselves, plays a key role in their achievement of agency (Biesta et al., 2008). Agentic behaviour of teachers has been linked to their professional identity by Buchanan (2015) who focused on the role agency played in

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7 British Household Panel Survey
primary teachers' professional identity in the USA. The findings suggested that teacher agency can be understood in a way as ‘identities in motion’ and that ‘agency and identity are intertwined’ (Buchanan, 2015, p. 714; p. 705). This current study views that the choices teachers make, and the circumstances that these actions are taken in, will contribute to the understanding of how a professional identity as a teacher is constructed.

The principle of time and place

The life course of individuals is embedded and shaped by the historical times and places they experience over their lifetime (Elder et al., 2003, p. 11).

The historical context and place that an individual finds themselves in will influence the shape of that individual’s life course. This is particularly relevant for this study due to the change in national education policy and social beliefs. Elder et al. (2003) advise that the impact of a historical event will differ in meaning and in substance to different locations, local, national or global. Place is defined by Gieryn (2000) as the geographic location, the culture of which the individual is in and their investment in both.

Elder (1994) highlights the importance of the timing of lives, as they bring a temporal, age related viewpoint to individuals’ social roles and the events that may take place. This may include the age they marry or when they choose to have children; these could be timely in relation to age norms but may also be ill-timed, for example having children during teenage years. How individuals view, and act, themselves in the present, and how they think about the ‘social world’ could rely on ‘what was happening in the world at the time they were growing up (Alwin & McCammon, 2003, p. 24). The impact of this, Elder argued, could also be influenced by the relationship between the stage at which people are at in their lives (1994).

More recently, technological change has been rapid as has consumerism and expectations of individuals’ lifestyles (Green, 2017). As stipulated by Green (2017) this study acknowledges that to ensure a full understanding of the life course,
societal, technological and political changes must be situated alongside historical, cultural and geographic contexts.

**The principle of timing**

The developmental antecedents and consequences of life transitions, events, and behavioural patterns vary according to the timing in a person's life (Elder et al., 2003, p. 12).

An important aspect of timing is that events or experiences are likely to hold different meanings for individuals and that an event may also have a different meaning for an individual at different times in the life course (Elder et al., 2003). Elder et al. (2003) state that the time when events occur has, through the empirical groundwork of Giele & Holst (2004), been shown to be significant in the shaping of life courses.

**The principle of linked lives**

Lives are interdependently linked and socio-historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships (Elder et al., 2003, p. 13).

Elder (1994) is clear that central to the life course is the notion of interdependent lives, and, later, Elder et al. (2003) described how relationships can have a negative or positive effect on each other. Events, such as divorce or financial difficulties could impact on individuals as well as those around them. It is expected that, in this study, these aspects, along with work and social relationships will impact on the way in which teachers construct their professional identity.

Social relationships with family, colleagues and friends are typically present in individuals’ lives throughout the life span (Elder, 1994, Holland et al., 1998). Green (2017) notes that, due to political and social norms, peers, especially those from similar backgrounds, may influence the behaviour of individuals. New relationships, possibly introduced through ‘turning points’ can, as Elder et al. (2003) proffer, also shape lives. It is important to note that, as Elder et al. (2003) highlight, transitions can affect and involve others. The influence of others, or significant others, a term
coined in 1940 and attributed by Haller & Woelfel (1972) to Sullivan, suggests that individuals can influence others' views of themselves, their self-concept.

In this study, the influence of others, both in personal and work relationships, are considered to be important. As Biesta et al. (2008) found, people, both in their personal and professional lives, can specifically play a part in the construction of a professional identity as a teacher.

Elder et al. (2003) also recognised that the concept of “career” was another way where a life course approach could examine and link the historical roles of an individual that were based in education, work and, or, their family.

The life course theory will be key to the analysis of the data generated in this study. The application of the aspects and principles presented above will assist in the understanding of how TAs construct a professional identity as a teacher.

2.2.3 Possible Selves

Questions about identity and future success often occupy the thinking of individuals during life transitions (Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1349).

Possible selves theory denotes the importance of ‘self-relevant, future orientated self-concepts’ and how these motivate ‘present and future action’ (Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1351). Markus & Nurius (1986) conceive that self-concepts apply to ‘how individuals think about their potential and about their future’ (p. 954). Possible selves for teachers may be multiple but it is important to note that the projection of possible selves is always connected to ‘representations of the current self’ (Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1351).

These representations could include individual hopes, reservations, and possibly fears, that may be influenced by past, and present, social, cultural and possibly environmental experiences (Hamman et al., 2010). Projections of the self are likely to be based on what an individual values, or what they perceive to value, within their ‘specific social experiences’ (Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1351). Markus and Nurius
(1986) asked 210 US female college students in their quantitative study using a questionnaire about ‘possible selves’ in relation to the three possible selves; ‘images of the what people hope to become, expect to become, or fear to become’ (Packard & Conway, 2006, p. 252) and how this continues throughout the life span (Cross & Markus, 1991). Cross & Markus found that those who scored low on life satisfaction had ‘generated different possible selves’ (p. 230) and expectations of what they may become and this in turn, as found by Dunkel & Anthis (2001), contributed to the process of forming an identity.

Whitty (2002), who explores the utility of a narrative approach, sees the feared self as a motivating factor that assists individuals in taking actions that will move them away from that possible self. Whitty also draws on from the research of Higgins (1987, cited in Whitty, 2002, p. 7) who describes the self as an ‘actual self’, an ‘ideal self’ and an ‘ought to self’. Whitty (2002) found that occupation and romantic relationships were considered as the ‘most important’ (p. 18) dreams for future selves. Acquiring the qualifications to be successful in their chosen career and high status in an influential job were identified as sub-themes from the occupational dreams (Whitty, 2002). Acquiring data from a larger study of those training to be clergy, teachers, and clinical psychologists, Ronfeldt & Grossman (2008) had considered how 269 prospective professionals in the US prepared for their future careers. They evaluated how these trainees were constructing their identity through their ‘professional education’ (p. 41). They argue that during this transition the trainees envisage future images of themselves in line with the programme they are engaging with and ‘try out’ (p. 41) their identity as a possible self. Ronfeldt & Grossman (2008) refer to this as the ‘provisional’ (p. 43) self.

There was a clear consensus amongst the trainees in all professions that some ‘aspects of a professional identity’ (Ronfeldt & Grossman, 2008, p. 44) could not be developed. However, it was agreed that personal and professional identities are interwoven and that the training process crafted and ‘sustained professional identities’ (p. 44).

Whitty (2002), and later Leonard & Roberts (2014), reflect that identity is ongoing, but strongly affiliated with the future. Whitty (2002) used a life history method to
explore the hope and dreams of individuals for the future and drawing on Bruner’s thoughts, portrays individuals as ‘storytellers by nature’ (p. 3) and declares that how we see ourselves currently, allows us to see our future possible self.

Hamman et al. (2010) discuss how possible selves theory characterises how individual’s thoughts or aspirations for the future provides ‘identity-relevant information’ (p. 1349) and the motivating factors to seek goals pertinent to themselves.

London (1983) explains that motivating factors relate to an individual’s direction and the persistence in their behaviour which can be accelerated by peer approval and situational characteristics. This study takes the view that this motivational behaviour can be inhibited, shaped and/or accelerated by key people and key events, both personal and professional.

From their study of student teachers in the US, Hamman et al. (2010) advocate possible selves theory for examining the developing identity of 224 new ESL teachers, student teachers and those during their first year of teaching. Ronfeldt & Grossman (2008) had previously found that ‘students enter professional education with a tentative set of possible selves from which to draw’ (p. 45). Studies such as Urzua & Vasquez (2008) that focused on how new teachers in North America were mentored, noted that new teachers reflected on past experiences, events and people to look forward to an imagined future of the teacher they would like to be.

The application of the possible selves theory will be an additional source of literature for this study that will assist in the identification of how the expression, and desire, for a professional goal is a contributing factor in the construction of a professional identity as a teacher.

Discussing the future self establishes a projection of the teacher identity that new teachers are aiming towards whilst offering a further insight into the process of how a professional teacher identity can be constructed (Hamman et al., 2010). Possible

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8 ESL – English-as-a-Second Language
selves theory, which was established in the mid-1980s by Markus & Nurius (1986), is able to provide a framework for describing the development of a new teacher identity by examining the impact of context, motivating factors, concept of self, on the achievement of ‘identity-relevant teacher goals’ (Packard & Conway, 2006; Hamman et al., 2010, p. 1351).

The next chapter discusses the methodology I will be using in more depth and includes the process of analysis and the ethical considerations that this study needed to be aware of.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter gives an outline of the procedures that were used in the generation and analysis of data for this study. I provide an overview of the research design and the rationale that underpins and explains the methodology I used, describing the contexts in which the study took place and will present details of the participants. I will also give an outline of the life histories approach used in this study and the two main methods that were used to generate data, describing how these were analysed. To conclude the chapter a consideration of the ethical issues, and how they were addressed, will be outlined.

3.1 Constructivist Approach

This study takes a constructivist approach to explore how newly qualified teachers view their world by examining their subjective experiences (Schwandt, 1998). The study takes the view that ‘what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective’ (Schwandt, 1998, p. 236).

This study will draw on the guidance of Flick (2014) who states that the acquisition of information through the reaction of individuals to events, based on the meaning that an event holds for them, and the meaning that is taken from any social interaction with others will be identified. Therefore, this study examined how meanings derived from events and people were interpreted, and narrated, by each participant in their world, as identified by Denicolo et al. (2016) as an individual’s paradigm. Thomas’s theorem claims ‘if men (sic) define situations as real, they are real in their consequences’ (Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 572). I deduce from this that the participants’ perception of reality will direct and influence their behaviour, their actions, their use of agency and the construction of their identity as a teacher.

Drawing on the work of Denicolo et al. (2016) this study is underpinned by the belief that individuals use constructs to navigate through their life journey. Therefore, as the participants of this study move from TA to teacher, the experience of their role as a TA, their training to be a teacher, and their role as a teacher, will have contributed in the construction of their professional identity.
I wanted to access the stories of the participants and how they view the world they exist in both professionally and personally. My interests were to find out and explore the subjective understanding of key events and key individuals that have affected the way in which they have been able to construct their professional identity.

In summary I believe this study’s design offers a rigorous but also, sensitive approach to this research. The methods that have been chosen generated information that will add real value in the understanding of how TAs have constructed, and are constructing, their identity as a primary teacher.

### 3.2 Qualitative Approach - Life Histories

Within the constructivist paradigm this study uses a qualitative methodological approach linked to the life course theoretical framework. Qualitative data, outlined by Denicolo et al. (2016), provides a narrative that will provide an insight into the thoughts, feelings and ideas that emerge from the findings. A narrative delivered either through the spoken, or written word, focuses on the lives of individuals told through their own stories (Salkind, 2010). This study will aim to explore the meanings that the teachers apply to their experiences.

It is important that the theoretical framework and methods are able to support the study’s aims. Although a life course perspective has been used extensively in quantitative research it has also been recently recognised as beneficial in identifying the meanings people make of their own lives and across time.

Qualitative life course research aims at reconstructing biographies with a focus on decisions and actions in the life spheres of education, work, family, and retirement from narrative interviews (Heinz, 2017, p. 21).

Biesta et al. (2008) have shown that learning from their life experiences, events and interactions with people, will have an impact on identity and agency. I adopt the view for this study of Elder, promoted by Marshall, that agency is the taking of actions and
of making choices, within the constraints of historical and social circumstances, when opportunities arise (Marshall, 2005).

To explore the construction of oneself as a professional, or the professional identity of an individual, I will be using a narrative method, life histories, that will allow the teachers’ stories to unfold (Packard & Conway, 2006). Verd & López (2011) highlight the benefits of using life histories methods in studies that employ the life course perspective as:

Paying attention to the person and his or her agency—not only at a given time but in a broader perspective that embraces past episodes and projections into the future—is essential in order to consider how individuals use the resources at their disposal (p. 1).

This study will be an analysis of narratives where external thinking is viewed as the organisation of internal thinking. ‘Identity processes are based in narrative’ (Dugas, 2021, p. 1) and becoming a teacher is recognised as a subjective journey. This approach is endorsed by Dugas (2021), drawing on the previous work of Mockler (2011), who professes that teachers’ identities are ‘formed within, but then also out of, the narratives and stories that form the “fabric” of teachers’ lives (p. 519’.

Based on previous research in my IFS, I am aware that life histories will highlight key events and people and give access and insights into the stories of the teachers in this study complementing the theoretical framework I have chosen for this thesis.

Drawing on the work of Dumas & Anderson (2014), Ó Gallchóir et al. (2018), in their small study of identity development in teachers, promote such an approach as it allows for ‘rich descriptions and complex nuanced findings going beyond statistics, measurements and numbers related to a stable and objective reality’ (2018, p. 141).

Goodson and Sikes (2001), in their collection of studies of life history research in educational settings, stipulate that everyone has a story to tell and no-one has a life that is uneventful. Although narrative methods, Whitty (2002) feels, are relatively time consuming, they can present a richer picture and offer insights into how an identity is constructed better than other methods. Amott (2018) maintains that the
life history method has been well established as a ‘rich source of data’ (p. 480) for studying the lives of teachers (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). The telling of an individual’s life story not only allows the expression of one’s sense of self but is also a vehicle for articulating how they have constructed that sense of self (Packard & Conway, 2006; Biesta et al., 2008).

However, Cole & Knowles (2001) have long established that although the life history method can bring the researcher to a closer understanding of individual’s lives, the researcher is the ‘guiding influence in all aspects of a study’ (p. 10). Therefore, they believe, this method can become instead a narrative analysis, rather than analysis of narrative, where meaning is co-constructed from the lens of the researcher’s own reality and may become a representation of their life, as well as the participants.

Amott (2018) employed a ‘Professional History Timeline’ that outlined the chronological story of professional roles before administering the ‘life history narrative event’ (interview) (p. 481). This was so that the timeline could scaffold the interview to give meaning to the story telling. The role of narrative, or the development of the lived life to the told story (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Wengraf, 2004; Bamberg, 2006), allows the individual to recognise and learn from their lives. The use of stories and storytelling to reflect, were found to be a good platform to express this learning (Biesta et al., 2008; Hamman et al., 2010, Buchanan, 2015).

It is acknowledged by this study that stories that people tell about their lives can reveal important insights and provide vital opportunities for further exploration (Goodson and Sikes, 2001) but these reflections can be influenced by recent events that may impact on their recollection. This is reinforced by the work of Amott (2018) who purports that narrative story telling can allow educators to develop a ‘more secure understanding of their professional identity’ and suggests that identities of teaching professionals can be revealed through ‘critical self-reflection’ (p. 487) through the medium of story-telling and that this can assist in enabling participants to develop their understanding of their professional identity.

As early as 1981 Goodson (2014) discovered that the theme of teachers, as agents making their own history, had not been explored. Early studies by, for example,
Hargreaves et al. (1975) identified that teachers introduce autobiographical comments into discussions during interviews. These, Goodson (1981) explained, were viewed by some social scientists as being inappropriate for social science research as they were too personal and idiosyncratic, and so Goodson suggested a move from quantitative designs to pursue personal and biographical data using qualitative methodologies. An important aspect of Goodson’s work is that life history studies are advocated as the way to ‘provide a wide range of insights’ into the lives of teachers and allows the exploration of narrative in ‘learning processes’ (Biesta et al., 2008, p. 19). Goodson (2001) draws on the work of Thompson (1988) to justify the life history approach when studying the lives of teachers and stipulates that a teacher’s life and work should be viewed as a social construction and proposes that life history methods can expose and provide evidence of how individuals mediate their identities within the social environments in which they live. Goodson’s later work (2003, 2014) is based on giving teachers a voice but he warns not to look for teachers’ voices that may silence other voices but for those that represent the ‘unique individual’ and the ‘collective voice’ (2014, p. 35).

Whilst Goodson (2003; 2014) believes that using life histories may allow the researcher to see an individual in relation to their history, and connect this with the history of society, Biesta et al. (2008) found that the opportunity to narrate one’s ‘life story’ (p. 19) was an important time for individuals to develop an understanding of their personal narrative. Whitty (2002) suggests that even a small collection of events recalled by individuals is able to represent how they view themselves at that time. Packard & Conway (2006) agree that narrative methods offer the opportunity to ask open-ended questions and can include opportunities to explore future selves.

Drawing on the work of Kelchtermans (1993, p. 449 - 450, cited in Day et al., 2006a) Day et al. detail the importance of five interrelated parts that form a teacher’s story: self-image, self-esteem, job-motivation, task preparation and future perspective. London (1983) portrays self-esteem as part of career identity and the pursuance of a new career. Taking the five interrelated parts that Day et al. (2006a) identify, the generation of data from life histories can identify negative as well as positive aspects of a life story. Hayler & Williams (2016) introduce the terms ‘hero/heroine’ or ‘victim’ narratives which can either portray ‘unjust suffering’ by the individual or they can
promote positive experiences which can assist in others “reimagining” (p. v) themselves. The identification of positive or negative events by the researcher in life history methods that were not recognised initially as seen as being influential by the interviewee, can be described as ‘crucial turning points’ (Hayler & Williams, 2016, p. v) in the lives of educators.

3.3 Methods of Data Generation

The fieldwork for this study took place over a condensed four-week period between the end of July and August 2019 in the participants’ holiday period and was conducted either by telephone or at the university. Heinz (2017, p. 22) stipulates that qualitative research, using a life course perspective, requires ‘methods of discovery’. Therefore, the design for this study generated data through two methods, a timeline and a semi-structured interview, and findings are presented thematically.

Participants were given the opportunity to either complete the timeline before interview or during the face-to-face interviews. The personal life story, outlining key people and events, that was generated from the timeline was then explored further during a semi-structured interview, three of which were by telephone and six face-to-face, alongside pre-prepared questions (see Appendix D) that related to the research questions.

Before deciding on the methods to be used in this study I drew on my previous activities, experiences and reading within the EdD programme. Initially I became very interested in Wengraf’s Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (2001). This method prescribes 19 stages that seek to show that narrative can be defined as a recollection of a series events (experience) with an account of ‘the lived life’ (Wengraf, 2001, p. 232) and the directions state that each stage must be followed. However, I found the prescriptiveness of this method, including the instruction not to speak or communicate with the participant during the writing of the timeline, became too restrictive. For my IFS I adapted Wengraf’s methods to provide opportunities for
the participants to share their personal stories with myself as the interviewer, and, I used this approach for this study, further outlined below.

These methods are twofold, a timeline and a semi-structured interview:

- The timeline allowed the participant to map out their life story from birth to date, identifying key people and key events
- The semi-structured interview allowed the participant to discuss the timeline with myself (the researcher) to gain further knowledge of the participants' life stories, drawing on information given during the timeline and pre-prepared questions relating to the research questions

I chose the life history timeline and semi-structured interview over a structured interview as my aim was to access their stories of experience from birth to the current day.

Robson (2011) describes the initial stages and the way in which the interview is conducted as crucial in the development of a relationship and rapport (Coe et al., 2017) between interviewer and interviewee. This involves establishing a commentary, or a conversation, that will allow the participant to feel relaxed and at ease.

Referring to the term ‘conversational approach’ described by Denicolo et al. (2016, p. 54) this study acknowledges that conversation is a normal way of communicating in everyday interactions and so I applied a conversational tone with each participant, adapting dialogue to put each interviewee at ease. I understood that applying a conversational tone was very different to, what Coe et al. (2017) describe as an everyday conversation, as these interviews were carefully designed for purposeful listening and I, as the interviewer, had an underlying agenda (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Going through the information (see Appendix A) and consent form (see Appendix B), that they had read and signed previously, reassured me that they knew and understood the rationale behind the study.
The format allowed the interviewees to have the flexibility to talk about areas of their lives that they chose, and also allowed their responses to be further defined through extended directive questioning resulting in a greater depth of understanding.

During the first part of the interview I invited the teachers to talk through their timeline whilst I made notes for further discussion. On completion of the timeline disclosure, the participants were offered a break before we continued with the semi-structured interview.

The timeline and the semi-structured interview not only revealed the participants’ life history, but they were also carefully designed to discover the meanings behind the accounts. Denicolo et al. (2016) explain that people use their stories ‘to explain their lives to others’ (p. 94). However, I understand that these individual stories may, change as they are told, due to the feelings that are experienced at the time and place of telling, the recall of events and who it is told to. Their interpretation and reaction to these events are understood to have influenced the way in which their stories were delivered.

The timelines offered the ‘lived life’, the small story of the participants’ lives, whilst the semi-structured interview helped to develop that ‘told story’ (Wengraf, 2006, p. 7), described by Bamberg (2006) as the ‘big’ story (p. 2). Bamberg discusses small stories and distinguishes them from the ‘big’ stories, where the insight into ongoing events and possibly future events are developed further disclosing information and possible further events that were not revealed in the lived life. Therefore, I have used the semi-structured interview to develop the small story from the timeline, which has a role to play, into the ‘big’ story that generated data for this study.

To capture these stories an audio recording was made of each individual interview, including the dialogue around the timeline and the semi-structured interview that followed.

After each stage of the interview and adopting the advice of Wengraf (2004) and Brown & Dowling (1998) for biographical research, I offered a period of time for the
participants to debrief. This moment of reflection allowed them to consider and respond to the methods I had employed, but most importantly the memories they had brought to the fore. On conclusion of the interview, I asked if they had anything else they felt they would like to tell me.

The majority of interviews were held in the morning. Although I was careful not to make assumptions that all interviewees would be able to relay the narrative of their lives, I was hopeful that the very nature of those who choose to become teachers meant that they would not be reticent.

The length of each interview, which included the prepared timeline, varied in time and in word count, and I found all participants to be very open, with some remarking how they found the experience therapeutic and cathartic. The time of the interview ranged from 62 minutes to 121 minutes.

A summary of the participants’ interviews can be seen in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1: Research participants and interview details**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Length of Interview</th>
<th>Face-to-Face Telephone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>20.08.19</td>
<td>81 mins</td>
<td>F-2-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>06.08.19</td>
<td>62 mins</td>
<td>F-2-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>23.07.19</td>
<td>71 mins</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>05.08.19</td>
<td>72 mins</td>
<td>F-2-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>12.08.19</td>
<td>82 mins</td>
<td>F-2-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>12.08.19</td>
<td>74 mins</td>
<td>F-2-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>13.08.19</td>
<td>121 mins</td>
<td>F-2-F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>07.08.19</td>
<td>66 mins</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>09.08.19</td>
<td>80 mins</td>
<td>Telephone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3.1 The timeline

Adriansen (2012) discusses the strengths and weaknesses of timeline interviews in life history research and explains that this method can provide opportunities to place stories into a social, political and environmental context. Goodson & Sikes (2001) serve as a model for this study as they have successfully used this method in educational research to capture an individual’s perceptions of their told stories. This is endorsed by Pell et al. (2020) who have more recently conducted interviews using the timeline within a medical framework and found that this method generated rich data and recommended that it should be used in a range of settings.

Following an introduction to the focus of my research the six teachers who had chosen to meet face-to-face were given the option of either preparing a timeline before the semi-structured interview or to complete one during the meeting. Only one chose to complete this at the face-to-face meeting. Those who brought their timelines with them stated that they felt prepared for the interview.

In order to assist the formulation of a timeline, and to offer a word document for those who were going to request a telephone interview, I provided an example. I also gave the teachers the freedom to create their timeline in a way of their own choosing. Four of the participants followed the suggested format I had shown them, whilst the others produced their own versions: some used pictures, two were handwritten on paper, whilst one was word processed. All were completed in chronological order.

During the interview the participants were asked to talk through their timelines so that I could capture the narrative. Three of the participants’ interviews were conducted by telephone and they had emailed their timelines to me beforehand. Therefore, during the telling of their story I could view their timeline and take opportunities to ask questions exploring events, people and agency in greater depth. After explaining that the interview would be recorded, I also disclosed that I may make notes as prompts for further questions building on their responses to the timeline.
As well as the information sheet, an essential element of the timeline interview is a
guiding statement, or question, including a starting point and an end point
(Adriansen, 2012). Before completing the timeline and within the methodological
framework offered by Brown & Dowling (1998), all of the participants were given a
stimulus in the form of a question that they could respond to:

I am interested in how you have come to the decision to pursue a career as a
primary teacher. Can you please tell me the story of your journey? You may
go back as early as you want to, which could be your childhood, but continue
to the end or your first year in school as an NQT.

At the start of their interview I also asked them to:

Please use the Life History Timeline to tell your story of how you came to the
decision to pursue a career as a primary teacher.

I avoided using the terms ‘key event’, ‘key people’ and ‘professional identity’ in the
initial question as I wanted to ensure that I did not narrow their responses but
identified these constructs through the analysis process (Brown & Dowling, 1998).

Drawing on previous experience of implementing the timeline interviews in one of my
EdD modules, and in my IFS, I was open to the participants moving away from the
focus of the given question. This gave deeper insights into some aspects of their life
that may not have appeared to have been relevant to them when creating the
timeline. This study adopts the view of Adriansen (2012) that through the
acknowledgement of events and the identification of those we interact with, we live
many lives and by using life history timelines these lives can be revealed, at least
partially.

Wengraf (2004) and Bamberg (2006) have conflicting views of how to conduct a
timeline interview. Wengraf (2004) categorically states that there should be no
interaction between the researcher and the participant during the telling of their lived
life. This non-participation, Wengraf (2004) explains, removes any bias or influence
by the researcher in the participants’ responses.
However, Bamberg (2006) stipulates that intervention is a necessary approach to ensure full engagement with the interviewee and allow the researcher to access a fuller life story. Drawing on my experience of implementing timeline interviews during my IFS fieldwork I chose to be led by the participants’ engagement, and by their responses and probed or prompted where I judged it necessary. Even though the timelines, in this study, were prepared prior to interview (bar one), some participants changed the order of events during their interview, identifying, as Adriansen (2012) points out, a de-construction and re-construction of their story.

Although on completion of the telling of their story the participants chose to continue with the interview.

I found that completing the timeline before the interview resulted in better outcomes in the recording of events on the timeline than in my IFS research. Talking through the timeline allowed the teachers to articulate their story and relate it to people who were relevant to their experiences and the choices they made.

One teacher, Carol, however, chose to complete the timeline during the face-to-face interview but did not write anything other than her date of birth, she explained she was unable to write and speak at the same time. I was keen to be flexible in order to complete the interview and therefore made the decision to let her continue without the timeline.

3.3.2 The semi-structured interview

Due to the location of some of the teachers the interviews were completed in two ways, face-to-face or using another effective option, by telephone (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015). Both applications of the interview were interactional but with the researcher holding the agenda. As it was the school summer break the participants’ place of work (i.e. their school) was not a viable venue for the interview. Therefore, the venue agreed upon for the face-to-face interviews was the university, my place of work and their place of teacher training. As this was a familiar place for them to be, I felt that this may help them feel relaxed. For the three participants who were unable to attend the university I arranged a convenient time to talk to them on the telephone.
All conversations were recorded in agreement with each participant. The practice of recording, which I have now used on a number of occasions, helped to not only maintain eye contact (in face to face interviews), avoided the writing of copious notes, captured the exact wording (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2015), and helped to maintain engagement with the participants.

The semi-structured interview was conducted after the participants had told their story using the timeline as a tool. During the timeline interview I had taken a few notes of areas that I wished to explore further so that I could build on their responses and therefore gain a greater depth of knowledge and information about their stories. The decision not to delve deeper at the point of telling would have, from experience, interrupted the flow of that particular part of their story.

Brown & Dowling (1998) discuss how interviews allow the researcher to ‘probe and to prompt’ the participants (p. 73). I used a number of flexible questions available to guide the interview to explore the world of how the participant and to ‘construct an understanding of how the interviewee makes sense of their experiences’ (Brown and Dowling, p. 73), and these were supported by questions that had arisen out of the timeline narrative.

The use of specific questions was not the main aim but a series of general questions were used as a guide to ensure that I accessed information that would address my research questions and in order to ‘give the narrative the chance to develop’ (Flick, 2014, p. 43). The semi-structured interview, as did the timeline request, began with a generative narrative question, mentioned earlier, to act as a narrative stimulus. The question was purposefully broad but specific to the experiential domain in order to guide the participant to the central theme of the study.

The timeline and the semi-structured interview prompted the ‘how’ and probed the ‘why’, aiming as Flick (2014) suggests, for description and greater depth of understanding.
3.3.3 The pilot study

A pilot study was used, as suggested by Denicolo et al. (2016), as a means to investigate whether the methods in this study were suitable to produce the outcomes that were required to encourage the participants to articulate their stories and address the research question.

The pilot study took place in June 2019, a few weeks before the field work for the main study. The individual for the pilot study was not part of the PGCE cohort but had a similar background as a TA before completing a degree and PGCE and entering the teaching profession. The data generated from the pilot study did not contribute to the overall findings.

However, the pilot study and the IFS offered an insight into the way in which the methods would be used and how they should be applied. In my IFS I interviewed five participants in one day, but I soon realised that this was not practical due to time constraints and the mental pressure that it evoked. Due to the nature of the IFS the range of responses in that study helped to form some of the questions for this study. Foddy (1994) and Flick (2014) warn that the structure of questions can affect the way in which it is understood. The pilot study was instrumental in identifying misinterpretations and assisted in the restructuring of some of the questions.

Although the focus of this study is to respond to the aims of the study and the three research questions, I am also interested in the methodological approach used. In particular, I am interested in how the semi-structured interview developed an understanding of the timeline through the life course focussing on key events and key people.

Wengraf (2004) describes developing the *lived story* (timeline) to the *told story* (semi-structured interview). Later, Bamberg (2006) discussed how the *big stories* (semi-structured interview) are derived from the *small stories* (timeline) or, ‘where these two ‘worlds’ are drawn together, [and] becomes visible’ (p. 145).

In working from these two levels of positioning (one with respect to the content of what the story was designed to be about, the other with respect to
the coordination of the interaction between speaker and audience), we are better situated to make assumptions about the ideological positions (or master narratives) within which narrators are positioning a sense of self (2006, p. 145).

3.4 Research Context

Remler & Van Ryzin (2015) describe how important the relationship between the researcher and the participants is in any study. Recognising that participants are key stakeholders in my research I made sure that those I approached met two essential criteria. Firstly, they had to have been a TA (either voluntary or employed) and secondly, they had to have been part of, and completed the PGCE course, gaining QTS in 2018-2019. There were 306 students on the PGCE course during this academic year, with a small proportion (10%) engaging with the university’s school direct programme.

Before the PGCE cohort’s departure in the summer of 2019 I told them about my research idea and said that I would be contacting them after receiving ethical approval to see if any of them would be willing to take part. Those interested gave permission to be contacted through their personal email address.

Once ethical approval had been given, I contacted those, who had registered an interest, by email. This correspondence outlined the character of the interview and contacts were asked to respond if they were interested in taking part. Although within a few days 25 said they would be interested in being an active participant in the study only nine continued to correspond. Reasons for non-engagement were given as going away for the summer or a simple wish to withdraw their interest.

Discussions with my supervisors, and my experience of collecting data from my IFS gave me the confidence to believe that nine participants would generate sufficient data for this study, particularly as these interviews were going to contain many more questions and explore issues in far greater depth than those in my IFS research.
3.5 Sampling and Participants

The short biographical form (see Appendix C) that was given to the teachers at the start of the interview and the information it provided is reported below. All biographical questionnaires were sent and returned by email to accommodate those who required a telephone interview.

The sample included three men and six women all of whom were qualified teachers, who had started their career in education as a TA, and who had trained to be a primary teacher through the PGCE at EHU in 2018/2019. All were White British within the age range of 27 – 51 years old, with the majority over 30. All of the participants were in a relationship bar one, three were married and one was co-habiting with their partner. Four had children within the age range of 8 – 24 years. In line with the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2018) guidelines all participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. The following biographies below are taken from the time at interview.

Anne

Anne, 27, is employed as a Year 1 teacher. After three years in retail and studying for a degree in Entertainment and Management, Anne, with the support of her boyfriend and parents, chose to become a teacher. On the advice of teaching professionals, she gained classroom experience as a TA for 11 months gaining a qualification as TA1.

Carol

Before becoming a TA, Carol, 30, worked in a Maths and English Centre. Six years after leaving school she decided to study for a degree in Early Childhood Studies and, although unqualified, became a TA3 for three years. Currently single, Carol has experience as a TA working with both Key Stage 1 & 2 providing intervention to children with SEND. She is now a Year 5 class teacher in a challenging school.

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability
**Graham**

After studying for a degree and masters in Sport Health and Sport Psychology, respectively, Graham, 27, decided to gain experience as a cover supervisor to secure his aspiration to be a secondary PE teacher. As a result of this role and working with primary age children in a holiday club, Graham changed his career pathway to become a primary teacher. To gain experience he became a TA and HLTA (unqualified), taking full responsibility for an Early Years class for one year. Graham is in a long distance relationship whilst working in Doha in a Year 4 class.

**Joanne**

Joanne, 51, is married with four children. After working as a sales assistant and legal secretary she qualified as a TA3. Joanne was a TA for 17 years supporting children with SEND. She decided to study for a degree 24 years after leaving school and is currently enjoying her role as supply teacher in a primary school.

**Louise**

After a year of being unable to secure a position as a classroom teacher, Louise has chosen to apply for a TA2 role. Before securing a first class degree in Teaching, Learning & Mentoring Practice, Louise worked as a qualified TA3 for 10 years implementing intervention to children with SEND and supporting individual children on a one-to-one basis. Married with two children, her previous work experience includes care assistant, au pair, dental assistant and clinical assistant.

**Mary**

Mary, 47, is in a relationship and has three children. After her role as a gym instructor, she worked, unqualified, as a TA1 for six years, supporting children from Early Years through to Key Stage 2, before studying for a degree in Education and Professional Studies 23 years after leaving school. Currently unemployed, Mary is considering studying for a Masters in Education.
Mark

After two attempts at studying for a degree, Mark, 29, was successful in achieving a degree in Early Childhood Studies. He is in a committed relationship and is currently employed as a primary teacher covering whole school PPA\textsuperscript{10} cover. Before becoming a TA (unqualified) Mark managed two public houses as the licensee landlord.

Rory

Rory, 27, is currently working abroad in Doha as a Year 3 classroom teacher. He is in a long distance relationship and studied for a degree in History, one year after leaving school. He has worked in Nepal, voluntarily, with children before taking up a position as a TA to gain classroom experience. Previous work experience was working in a call centre.

Rose

Rose, 39, chose to take her degree in International Business with a year’s study in Germany, before marrying and having two children. After many years working in charities and recruitment consultancies Rose chose to become a teacher and worked as a qualified TA3 for one year before starting her teacher training. Rose is currently employed as a Year 3 teacher.

The participants’ information is summarised in the following Tables starting with their relationship status in Table 3.2.

\textsuperscript{10} PPA – teachers’ planning, preparation and assessment time
Table 3.2: Participants’ relationship status, and number of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Age (Years)</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Age of Children (Years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14, 23, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19, 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14, 23, 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Co-habiting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>In a relationship</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8, 11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The biographical form also requested information on their TA status, TA qualification and their responsibilities when working as a TA. Of the six who were working as a TA3, only one had the TA3 qualification and only one other in the cohort had a TA qualification. One of the sample had worked as a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) in an early years setting with no TA qualification. The majority of the cohort had experience in working in an early years setting with the same number experiencing a TA role in KS2, working with children aged between 7 and 11 years old. Three of the sample who did not have any TA qualifications were implementing intervention programmes with two of the four, who were qualified as a TA, self-funding their qualification.

Four of the sample were working with children as a support on a 1:1 basis and the majority had worked as a TA between 11 months and 3 years, those who were over 47 years of age had worked over 6 years with one who had worked for 17 years.

This information is summarised in Table 3.3.
Table 3.3: Participants’ TA status, TA qualification, responsibilities, and Length of service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Level of TA</th>
<th>TA Qualification</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
<th>Length of TA (years/months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>TA 1</td>
<td>TA 1</td>
<td>EYFS General Reception Class</td>
<td>11 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>TA 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>KS1/KS2 Intervention groups</td>
<td>3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>HLTA/TA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>EYFS Nursery/Reception</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>TA 3</td>
<td>NVQ3 Self funded</td>
<td>KS1/KS2 1:1, SEND</td>
<td>17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>TA 3</td>
<td>TA 3</td>
<td>EYFS/KS1/KS2 Intervention, 1:1 SEND</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>TA 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>EYFS/KS1/KS2 Reception/Yr. 1, 4</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>TA 2 work of TA 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Learn</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>TA 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>EYFS/KS1/KS2 General TA SEND 1:1 Intervention</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>TA 3</td>
<td>TA 2 (self funded)</td>
<td>1:1 EYFS</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage - Curriculum stage – 3yrs – 5yrs
2 KS1 – Key Stage 1; KS2 – Key Stage 2 – National Curriculum stages for 5yrs – 11yrs
3 NVQ3 – National Vocational Qualification Level 3
4 SEND – Special Educational Needs & Disability

The participants were also asked to state their degree subject and classification, although three chose not to disclose the latter. The majority had completed their degree in the last seven years but one participant, Rose, had completed her degree in 1998 and took 20 years before she decided to train as a teacher. Three of the teachers had completed their degrees at EHU and only four of the cohort had chosen a degree that was child related (see Table 3.4).
Table 3.4: Participants’ degree qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Degree/2nd Degree</th>
<th>Classification</th>
<th>Start Date</th>
<th>No of Years after school when they started degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Entertainment and Management</td>
<td>Not disclosed</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Early Childhood Studies</td>
<td>Not disclosed</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>MSc Applied Sport Psychology</td>
<td>Not disclosed</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>BSc Sports Health &amp; PE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>BA(Hons) English &amp; Child Psychology</td>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Teaching, Learning &amp; Mentoring Practice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Education and Professional Studies</td>
<td>2:2</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies</td>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>BA (Hons) History</td>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>BA (Hons) International Business with German</td>
<td>2:1</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was interesting that only two of the cohort had worked with children before becoming a TA and that none of them had gone straight into the role of TA after leaving school. The remaining seven had previous employment outside of education but felt that these roles had given them transferable skills, such as in communication and customer relationships. As can be seen in Table 3.5, two of the participants had more than three forms of employment before becoming a teacher.
Table 3.5: Participants’ paid employment history

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (pseudonym)</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
<th>5th</th>
<th>6th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Maths &amp; English Centre</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>Cover Supervisor</td>
<td>Holiday Club Entertainer</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Sales Assistant</td>
<td>Legal Secretary</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Supply Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Care Assistant</td>
<td>Au Pair</td>
<td>Dental Surgery Coordinator</td>
<td>Clinical Coordinator</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Gym Instructor</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Supply Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Licensee Landlord</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>Call Centre</td>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Recruitment Consultant</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One year after the completion of their PGCE, six were in full-time jobs, but only two had a permanent contract. Two had chosen to complete their NQT year in Qatar and two were employed as supply teachers (see Table 3.6). One, Louise, had continued to work as a TA.
Table 3.6: Participants’ schools and NQT position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>NQT Position</th>
<th>Full time/ Part time</th>
<th>Contract</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>No on School Roll</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>1 year temporary</td>
<td>Primary UK</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Year 5</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>1 year temporary</td>
<td>Primary UK</td>
<td>517</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>Year 4</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>2 year renewable contract</td>
<td>Primary Doha Qatar</td>
<td>1100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>KS1/KS2</td>
<td>Supply</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Primary UK</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>KS1/KS2</td>
<td>Supply</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Primary UK</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>KS1/KS2</td>
<td>Supply</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Primary UK</td>
<td>Various</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>PPA Teacher</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Primary UK</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MFL Subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>Primary Doha Qatar</td>
<td>1100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maths Subject</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lead</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Full</td>
<td>Fixed Term 1 year</td>
<td>Primary UK</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rochdale</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Data Analysis

The choice of method for data analysis was determined by the research questions but was also influenced by previous practices. Braun & Clarke (2006) stipulate that thematic analysis allows for the identification and analysis of themes within data capturing important elements that relate to a study’s research questions. Therefore, to suit the constructivist approach of this study and the narrative inquiry, a thematic approach was used. Employed as a successful approach in my IFS, that captured important elements of why the TAs chose to become teachers, I chose to use the hybrid thematic analysis again to understand how TAs construct their professional identity as a teacher. This approach is modelled by Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006), and later by Swain (2018) using a practical example to illustrate the process. As reinforced by Freeman et al. (2019, p. 264) in their analysis of interviews using family communication patterns theory combined with inductive analysis, they found that a ‘hybrid thematic analysis approach allows for the consideration of existing theoretical frameworks’ where the deductive codes are ‘theoretically driven’.
Employing the hybrid thematic analysis approach this study used deductive analysis to test Elder’s life course theoretical perspective (1994; Elder et al., 2003) through an empirical approach and was followed by inductive analysis to develop ‘explanations, concepts and theories’ (Denicolo et al., 2016, p. 33) from the empirical data.

Alongside the framework of how a professional identity as a teacher was constructed, the five principles of Elder’s life course (Elder et al., 2003) provided the conceptual framework within which this study is situated and guided the goals and key constructs of the research design. A qualitative design including a narrated life history approach was chosen so that the analysis of contextual data would lead to a ‘general theory of processes’ (Flick, 2014, p. 59) and what Schultz (1963) refers to as the process structures of the individual life course.

3.6.1 Process of analysis

My analysis of the findings is framed by the life course and possible selves theories and validation of the data collection methods and the analysis approach was verified through peer debriefing at my institution’s narrative research group.

I chose not to use coding software, such as NVivo, in the analysis of the data, as I had not used it before. Although Phillips & Lu (2018) advocate the use of NVivo for qualitative research so that data can be sorted, managed and analysed, there is a learning curve in its application. Saldaña (2016) agrees, NVivo is a useful tool, however, the coding software is reliant on the skills of the researcher and more importantly, as Coe et al. (2017) found, it can make you feel distant from the data. Therefore, as I had only nine participants, I felt that hand coding (Saldaña, 2016) would be easily manageable and would give me more control and a deeper ownership of the data.

The dataset includes interview data, taken from audio files, some of which was elicited from further questioning (derived from responses given during the timeline) in the semi-structured interview, the debriefing notes, as well as the timelines. Other data included a short questionnaire that the participants were asked to complete before the interview that provided biographical data.
To ensure confidentiality, but also coherency for myself, I anonymised the participants so I could identify who was speaking in the transcriptions.

From previous experience (IFS), I chose a hybrid thematic approach, identified by Swain (2018), as it complements the research design of this thesis. This thematic approach draws the information generated by the two methods, timeline and semi-structured interview, together to provide rich data for detailed analysis.

The hybrid thematic approach has three phases and seven stages. Figure 3.1 illustrates the process that the hybrid thematic approach sits.

**Figure 3.1: Process of Analysis**

As advised by Braun & Clarke (2006), and a common theme of qualitative analysis, the familiarisation of data was recognised as essential to this study. Therefore, as part of immersing myself in the data and adopting the position of Brown & Dowling
(1998) that transcribing ‘fosters greater familiarity with the text’ (p. 76), I chose to transcribe all of the transcripts myself.

Swain (2018) advises that the three phases of the hybrid thematic analysis approach should be administered in that order; however, the stages within each phase are flexible.

- **Phase 1: Spreadsheet preparation; familiarisation of data; creating *a priori* codes**

Before preparing a spreadsheet to place the *a priori* and *a posteriori* codes, I ensured that I read through the transcripts and timelines of each participant, several times, to continue to familiarise myself with the data and to seek meanings. Through a deductive, theoretical process *a priori codes* (see Appendix E), such as school experience, first career aspirations and personal relationships, were derived, as Silverman (2013) advises, from the research aims, research questions and interview questions and were explored during the interviews.

- **Phase 2: Applying *a priori* codes to data and creating *a posteriori* codes; summarising information from data**

Whilst applying *a priori* codes to the data and to make further sense of the data I began to create *a posteriori* codes, termed as inductive reasoning (Swain, 2018), as they are data driven. These codes were not as easy to predict as they emerged during the timeline, interview, and transcription. The *a posteriori* codes (see Appendix E) included previous employment, confidence and parenting. At the same time, I took the opportunity to summarise the teachers’ responses to the questions.

- **Phase 3: taking illustrative excerpts from the raw data; create family codes from *a priori* and *a posteriori* codes**

The majority of the illustrative excerpts taken from the raw data, as well as figures and tables derived from the transcripts, were used to illustrate findings in response to the research questions. I established 26 *a priori* codes and 31 *a posteriori* codes. After a process of revising, collapsing, and affirmation from the research narrative
group to verify the authenticity of the coding, the *a priori* and *a posteriori* codes, became nine family codes, or themes (see Appendix E). My findings are organised around the themes, with six of them, experiences, relationships, knowledge, qualifications, qualities, and skills, identified as components that are essential in the construction of a professional identity.

As timelines and semi-structured interviews can create a wealth of data, some of the information did not inform responses to the research questions or the aims of the study, and therefore, was discarded (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

On conclusion of the analysis of the generated data I decided to evaluate how effective the hybrid thematic analysis approach was, and how the two methods of timeline and semi-structured interviews work together to create the teachers’ *big stories* from the *small stories* (Bamberg, 2006) or, as Wengraf (2004) describes, from the lived life into the told story. This is presented in Chapter 4.

Future research ideas, instigated by the limitations of this study, are outlined in Chapter 5.

### 3.7 My Reflexivity

Although it has been 21 years since I have been a TA, I have worked with TAs in the classroom and on three different teacher training programmes; BA (Hons) Primary Education with QTS full-time, part-time and the PGCE Primary Education programme with QTS. I am aware that my biases, and that my experiences and ideologies will influence each stage of this study including the data collection and how these data will be interpreted and represented, and that bias cannot be removed entirely. My role as the researcher in this study is one of interest, passion and I am aware that I also have a story to tell: it is recognising that the participants’ stories are not my stories. I understand that when an individual discusses a situation that they believe to be real, the researcher needs to view this from the perspective of the participants they are studying and not their own (Barrett et al., 2020).
I understand and recognise, as Coe et al. (2017) warn, the dangers of putting words into the participants’ mouths and that my role is to rather encourage opportunities for them to articulate their meanings. I recognise from past experience that this is something to be highly aware of. It can be easy for a researcher who has made the same journey to either agree or empathise with the participant. In past interviews I quickly found that being neutral whilst engaging with respondents that this was the most effective way of gaining an insight into the interpretations of their world. As a researcher, to prompt a response can influence the outcome, Remler & Van Ryzin (2015) describe the prompting, or probing, as a skill. This if applied well can extend an ineffective response however, if administered incorrectly it can shut a reply down straight away.

As this research explores personal events and relationships with people the study takes counsel from Denicolo et al. (2016) who propose that participants should be able to indicate when they reach a point ‘beyond which they do not want to go’ (p. 57). This was discussed with each individual prior to interview. For example, if a teacher was discussing an event that could make them uncomfortable there needed to be a recognition of this by myself, therefore demanding sensitivity on my part. Reciprocity during interviews is a significant aspect, so that both researcher and participant can invest in this relationship.

Important to any interviewing process is the rapport between researcher and participant and the avoidance of jargon which could impact on that developing relationship. Remler & Van Ryzin (2015) insist that the participant needs to know that you, as a researcher, are interested in their views and understandings so that they will talk and ‘open up’ (p. 69). To do this it is important to develop an understanding of the skill of listening. I recognise that listening goes beyond hearing clearly what the participant is saying but extends to an ‘intellectual and emotional engagement’ (Denicolo et al., 2016, p. 73). I was also aware of the possibility that there would be inconsistencies or conflicts within the story telling that would require deconstruction by myself.

Although Clandinin (2010) advocate the benefits of ‘insider research’ I was aware of my previous role as a TA and of my professional role as the participants’ programme
leader on their PGCE course. However, I found that exploring my past professional experiences encouraged reflexivity.

Power relations in research challenges thinking and acting ethically as a qualitative researcher (Reid, et al. 2018) and I acknowledge that my significant role during their time as trainee teachers could have led to the presentation of an idealised picture of their life story. However, as I was no longer in a senior role to them, I was not in a position where I was making assessments or judgments about their teaching capabilities. Therefore, as there was nothing at stake, I began the interviewing process with them as present equals.

I tried not to make any assumptions about the outcomes of this study but instead acknowledged the personal experiences of my journey from TA to teacher. Therefore, I, as suggested by Denicolo et al. (2016) put ‘personal views, beliefs or bias’ (p. 5) to one side as much as I could. In addition, I attempted to remain open-minded to the possibilities of insights into personal meanings that may be derived from this research. Throughout the analysis process I ensured that I cross-validated my interpretations with colleagues within the narrative research group and through presentations at conferences in more than one institution.

The purpose of this work is to gain an understanding of how the individuals in this study have constructed an identity as a teacher. As all participants have started their journey in education as a TA and trained on the same QTS course to become teachers I am acutely aware that any of these participants may have experienced the same event but the way they have made sense of it, or experienced it, will be different (Flick, 2014). Thus, accepting the notion for this study that there are multiple subjective realities.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations address the questions and issues that surround the study that could have an impact on the participants and how that risk can be removed, or minimised. As Flick (2014) and Brown & Dowling (1998) explain, the welfare of the participants is balancing the risks against the benefits. All participants, and in
particular this study, have dignity and rights. Therefore, they are entitled to be given information about the study, anonymity, to complete a consent form, have the right to withdraw and to have knowledge of how any findings will be used (Flick, 2014, Coe et al., 2017). All participants were informed that if they felt they would like to stop or end the interview at any time that this would be perfectly acceptable.

With reference to BERA ethical guidelines (2018), and in line with UCL institutional procedures for doctoral student research, ethics approval was requested and granted. The application process raised issues that may involve some risk to participants. As part of the interview process, I engaged with social conversation before starting the formal interview. For one participant this gave rise to a number of feelings before we had started to reflect on their timeline. This participant, revealed that they had been ‘thinking twice’ about coming and was visibly upset; this was because they felt they were a failure as they were not employed as a teacher and had taken a post as a TA. Uppermost in my mind was respect and the imperative of ‘first, do not harm’ (Coe et al., 2017, p. 187). As a result of the interview process, this I believe, had positive outcomes for both the participant and myself.

At no stage had I thought about the impact that the interviews may have on myself but on completion of Rory’s interview he thanked me for the support I had given him during his PGCE when serious personal issues interrupted his studies and he just needed to go home. He said that the space that I had given him had meant a lot, and I was emotionally moved by this comment.

There were no identified gatekeepers for this research, but participants were asked to inform their head teachers that they were taking part in the research as a matter of courtesy.

Telephone participants were assured that there was no-one else in the room and face-to-face interviews were conducted in a private office, or empty teaching room.

The use of the audio equipment was made clear in a sensitive manner and I explained to all the participants that all recordings would be anonymised and kept private and that personal transcripts would be available for them to view, by request.
The next chapter will present the main themes that have emerged from the data.
Chapter 4: Findings

The underlying aim of this study was to explore how TAs, who have chosen to become a teacher, have constructed, and are constructing, their professional identity.

This chapter presents the main themes that have emerged from the data established within the theoretical framework of a life course perspective (Elder et al., 2003) and possible selves theory (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Cross & Markus, 1991), whilst also considering aspects of professional identity (London, 1983; Nias, 1989; Buchanan, 2015).

The teachers’ employment trajectories created from their stories highlight the key events and key people that have been instrumental in the creation of transitions, and transitions that have become turning points.

In addition to the employment trajectories the inductive and deductive analysis of the teachers’ stories revealed nine main themes drawn from, and based on, the analysis of, the a priori and a posteriori codes. The six themes of experiences, relationships, knowledge, qualifications, qualities, and skills were found, in this study, to be essential in the teachers’ construction, and continuing construction, of their professional identity, and are therefore, categorised as individual components.

The remaining three themes of agency, motivation, and identity (presented as hoped-for self, expected self, feared-for self and future self) will follow the overviews of the teachers’ trajectories and the six components, before drawing these aspects together to show how the teachers have constructed their identity as a teacher.

Although there is a wealth of rich data, I have selected examples that will delineate the themes identified.
4.1 Six components

Although a small study, the findings strongly indicate that TAs who choose to become teachers construct, and continue to construct, their professional identity by drawing on the six components (taken from the analysis of the *a priori* and *a posteriori* codes) of experiences, relationships, knowledge, skills, qualifications, and qualities (see Figure 4.1).

**Figure 4.1: Construction of a professional identity: from TA to teacher**

![Diagram showing the construction of a professional identity](image)

Figure 4.1 shows how the components, taken from my analysis of the teachers’ stories, promote self-efficacy, and illustrates how experiences and relationships are determined by key events and key people during the life course. The timing of these, the sense of oneself and the *hoped-for, expected, future and feared-for* selves, determine how these are experienced, and how, if at all, agency is exercised.

This following section will give an insight into the key events and key people of the teachers’ employment trajectories that I have identified as transitions and the role these have played in the formation of turning points (Elder et al., 2003) (see Figure 2.1).
4.2 Employment Trajectories

This study adopts the views of Elder et al. (2003) that trajectories are a ‘sequence of roles and experiences’ (p.8) that have instigated a transition, a distinct change in role or status (Elmer, 2005), in the life course. These transitions may in turn become turning points on an individual’s employment trajectory.

Evidence shows that events and people can be instrumental on career pathways (London, 1983; Hamman et al., 2010; Goodson, 2014; Evans & Biasin, 2016) and the following chronological overviews, and the subsequent themes, will demonstrate how these events and people have been instrumental in the direction each trajectory has taken in the construction of their identity as a teacher.

The trajectories of the participants demonstrate that they have more than one turning point, involving an event or person (or both), in reaching the same objective (Elder et al., 2003; Evans & Biasin, 2016) of becoming a teacher.

The following discussions of each participant relate to the individual table and employment trajectory presented.

Anne

Table 4.1: Anne’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on her employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anne</th>
<th>Key Events/Key People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points (Bold – Key People)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primary experience/primary teacher; 6th form/ drama teacher/PE teacher/head of year; job in retail; going to church; church youth lead; degree; left university; job in retail; TA role/TA; sister; cousin; father; boyfriend; mother; head teacher; teacher; mentor; friend PGCE; placements; maternity cover teacher role; Permanent teacher role</td>
<td>primary school; church; secondary school; university; degree; leaving university; job in retail; TA role; PGCE; maternity cover teaching role; permanent teacher role</td>
<td>job in retail - boyfriend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TA role – mother, TA &amp; head teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>mentor (PGCE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>maternity cover teaching role</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

75
The four turning points in Anne’s life were created from three key events and five key people. Her childhood was very happy within a Christian ethos. This led to a transition in her life where she became a church youth leader before attending university. Gecas (2003) maintains that we are architects in our own lives and the choice that Anne made after leaving university was steered by her lack of direction. The transition of leaving university made Anne unsure of what she wanted to do, but she settled for a role in retail, following the footpath she had started whilst working in a high street shop during her 6th form.

Towards the end of her three years in retail her partner was influential in the direction her pathway was going to take in the future; he suggested that Anne could be a teacher. This turning point was not immediately evident but became one the moment she began to realise that she may be able to accomplish something else in her work life and, after searching for an admin role in education, she became a TA.

Although this TA role became a further turning point where she believed she could become a teacher, the support of significant people in both the work and home environment was evidently essential. Others can be involved in turning points (Elder et al., 2003) and, for Anne, to make the decision to become a teacher, involved three key people. Her mother, TA and head teacher had seen what her boyfriend had previously recognised in her, the potential to be a teacher, and erased any doubts.
that she had. Later apprehensions that emerged during her PGCE were addressed by her school mentor.

Anne’s story indicates that feelings can belong to the past (Biesta et al., 2008) as she struggles at different points in her life. Her reflections reveal her lack of confidence and how her feelings, located in the past, influenced her sense of self. However, with the help of others during her TA role and PGCE programme she secured a role as a teacher. The full realisation that she could be a teacher, her final turning point (at the time of interview), was when she secured a teaching role.

**Carol**

Table 4.2: Carol’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on her employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carol</th>
<th>Key Events/Key People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points (Bold – Key People)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primary school/teacher; secondary school/teacher; bullied/bully; deferred university; worked in gym; worked in bar, volunteered in primary school; TA agency; forced to give up gym; knee operation; TA role; end of relationship with partner; PGCE; placements; met bully; teacher role mother; father; sister; TA; teacher (TA role); head teacher</td>
<td>primary school; secondary school; first job; degree; voluntary work in primary school; TA role; single status; PGCE</td>
<td>voluntary work in primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TA role</td>
<td>end of partner relationship – teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3: Carol’s employment trajectory towards qualified teacher status
Carol’s timeline revealed three events and one person that resulted in three turning points in her journey in becoming a teacher. Although Carol’s mother, was important in her life, the teacher who she worked with, as a TA, would set her on to her pathway in becoming a teacher.

After deferring her degree and engaging in a variety of temporary jobs, Carol decided to volunteer in a school. This subsequently became a turning point that put her on a pathway to not only become a teacher, but also a ‘choice maker’ (Elder, 1994, p.4), choosing to study a degree that would benefit her in a role in education.

Four years after leaving university and having, what she describes, as no direction in what she would like to do, her experience in volunteering in school allowed her to apply for a role as a TA in a primary school. It was here that she was encouraged by others to become a teacher.

Although this set her on this pathway, it was unfortunate, that due to a childhood interest in netball, causing a knee injury, and a failed relationship with her boyfriend, her plans were interrupted.

Events creating circumstances beyond the teachers’ control (Gecas, 2003) have also played a part in, whether inhibiting or promoting progress, towards a goal. The events that Carol encountered had a profound effect on her (Elder et al., 2003; McLeod & Almazan, 2003) and altered the course of her trajectory. However, further events and encounters during her role as a TA, with the end of a relationship and the encouragement of a teacher, helped her to fulfil her aim to apply for the PGCE programme.
Graham

Table 4.3: Graham’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on his employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Events/Key People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points (Bold – Key People)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sport in primary/teacher; sport in secondary/head of year; A levels; university;</td>
<td>primary and secondary school; university; degree; MA; cover supervisor;</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters degree; swimming coach; secondary school cover supervisor; trip to Australia;</td>
<td>holiday club rep; TA role; PGCE; Teacher role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holiday club rep; TA agency; TA job; HLTA; PGCE; Doha teacher role; mother; father;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brother; head teacher; class teacher; PG friend; girlfriend; head of year (teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>role)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graham’s story is relatively uncomplicated, in that he only spoke about one person that has had any influence on his pathway. This together with two key events became the three turning points in his trajectory. Graham, like Carol, developed a real passion for sport in his primary and secondary schools.

Each step of his education has been recorded as a milestone for his parents as they wanted more for him than they had had after leaving school at 15. However, although they have shown this interest, his mother has only guided him once throughout his education, which he reflects was a steer in the right direction.
Graham’s initial desire to become a secondary school teacher was interrupted after gaining experience as a cover supervisor in a high school. As a reaction to this negative experience in this role, he fulfilled an ambition and went to Australia for a year to visit family. On his return, he worked in a holiday club with young children which gave him an insight into what it would be like to work with primary aged children and steered him towards a career in primary teaching.

On completion of his PGCE he applied with friends, and was successful, securing work abroad in an international school in Qatar.

Joanne

Table 4.4: Joanne’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on her employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Events/Key People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>parents’ divorce; exams; legal secretary training course; sales assistant; married; birth of daughter; birth of twins; grandmother died; moved house; legal secretary role; TA qualification; TA role; GCSE maths; youngest child started at school; TA role; moved house; TA role/lunchtime supervisor; father in law died; start degree with OU; father in nursing home; husband stroke; daughter in car accident; left work to look after husband and daughter; failed assignment; completed degree; PGCE; supply grandmother; father in law; husband; teacher; father; daughters; aunty; parent; head teacher; sister</td>
<td>parents’ divorce; legal secretary role; marriage; birth of children; death of grandmother; moving house; TA qualification; TA role; death of father in law; degree; family illness; caring role; university; degree ceremony; PGCE</td>
<td>Parents’ divorce&lt;br&gt;legal secretary role&lt;br&gt;moving house&lt;br&gt;TA role/family illness (husband stroke; daughter in serious car accident) – teacher (TA role)&lt;br&gt;husband</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Joanne’s resilience and determination are evident throughout her story. The first of five turning points, that involved five key events and two key people, was the unexpected divorce of her parents when Joanne was a teenager about to take her GCSEs and this, she recalls, what McLeod & Almazan (2003) outline, had a profound effect on the way in which she viewed her studies. Joanne felt that if she did not do well in her exams, she could blame this on her parents.

Joanne met her husband to be at 17 and married young before she enrolled and completed a legal secretary course. This transition became an important time in her life as it set her on an employment trajectory. Joanne returned to this role after having children, but she soon became disenchanted with it.

After many years of renting a house and moving many times, Joanne was at last able to move into a council house and this led to a personal sense of safety and independence. Moving house forced her to give up her job at the same time her last child began school and became a turning point in her life where she was able to volunteer in school to fit round her children, take TA qualifications, and secure a TA role. These choices and steps taken by Joanne are a significant aspect of the life course (Elder, 1994; Damman & Henkens, 2017).

However, during her time as a TA Joanne encountered a difficult relationship with a teacher. This became a further turning point in her trajectory. Rather than moving

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11 GCSE - General Certificate of Secondary Education – taken at 16 years old
her away from her thoughts of teaching, the remarks made by the teacher motivated Joanne to make the decision to pursue a career as a teacher.

Whilst she was studying for her degree, events in her personal life became difficult for her to continue work and study. Unfortunately, the year before Joanne started the PGCE, and four weeks after her daughter had a serious car accident, her father had to go into a care home, and her husband had a stroke. Woolhouse (2009) found that when TAs are studying there can be some conflict on a personal level regarding professional aspirations. Unforeseen events such as these can affect the life course (Green, 2017). However, despite acquiring a new role as carer for her husband, which became a major turning point in her life, Joanne continued her quest to be a teacher.

A final turning point for Joanne on her trajectory was during her PGCE ceremony where her husband finally acknowledged, and approved, her desire to become a teacher.

Louise

Table 4.5: Louise's Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on her employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Louise</th>
<th>Key Events/People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points (Bold – Key People)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>primary school/primary teacher /friend; secondary school/maths teacher; put on report; YTS scheme/mother &amp; careers’ advisor; unable to do NNEB: au pair (Sweden); care assistant; dental assistant; hyperemesis; husband working away; Brownie leader; speech and language qualification; ran mum and toddler group; GCSEs; TA role; degree; diagnosis of dyspraxia; letter for skills tests; PGCE; TA role; driving instructor; father; head teacher; TA; teacher (as TA); mentor; Tutor; mother in law; sister; friend (adult)</td>
<td>primary and secondary school; YTS scheme; au pair role; care assistant; dental assistant; Brownie leader; mum and toddler group lead; TA role; degree; diagnosis of dyspraxia; PGCE; TA role</td>
<td>YTS scheme – careers’ advisor &amp; mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TA role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TA role (current position)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Louise has always wanted to work with children. Her trajectory shows three events and two people that have contributed to three turning points. After a difficult time in both primary and secondary, due to her dyspraxia that was not diagnosed until she started her degree, her initial turning point was her first move towards a career.

This move involved her mother, careers advisor and her entry onto the YTS\textsuperscript{12} scheme which altered the direction of her pathway away from being an NNEB\textsuperscript{13} towards the role of care assistant and au pair.

After these roles, and her time as a dental technician, she became ill during her pregnancies with hyperemesis which was made more difficult for her as her husband worked away from home during the week.

Before taking her degree, Louise helped her mother run a toddler group. This transition helped Louise to be successful in securing a TA role, where she decided that being a teacher could be something that she could aspire to. Aspirations, such as these, are a prerequisite, recognised by Evans & Biasin (2016), in the exercising of agency. Although Louise did not require the confidence to go forward to become a teacher the idea was instigated by the teacher she had been working with as a TA. She had seen her as a positive role model (Haller & Woelfel, 1972) and wanted to emulate this in her own life.

\textsuperscript{12} Youth Training Scheme
\textsuperscript{13} NNEB - National Nursery Examining Board
On the completion of her first-class degree, she applied for a position on the PGCE programme achieving a distinction for her academia and a grade of outstanding for her teaching practice.

Unfortunately, at the time of interview Louise had not secured a teaching role but, instead, had settled for a TA role where she had not revealed that she was a qualified teacher\(^{14}\). It was evident that the conclusion to her trajectory at the time of interview was, in her view, a turning point in her life.

*Mary*

**Table 4.6: Mary’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on her employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mary</th>
<th>Key Events/Key People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points (Bold – Key People)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grandfather; went to live with grandfather; arguments; moved out with mother; tried to trace own father; uncle; mother; stepfather; aunty; father; sister; moved house; primary school; primary teacher; NT trust visits with aunt; worked in tax council offices; birth of 1(^{st}) daughter; moved out of mother’s house; moved back to mother’s house; arguments; trained as gym instructor; birth of son; single parent; aunt died; mother diagnosed with cancer; mother died; moved to own house; considered PGCE; had 3(^{rd}) child; stopped working; lone parent; son disorderly; volunteered in primary school; TA role; TA teacher; TA qualification; TA Role; Foundation Degree; BA; PGCE; supply teacher</td>
<td>Father; Mother; Aunt; birth of children; single parent; gym instructor; moving house; death of aunt; volunteered in primary school; TA Role; Degree; PGCE; supply teacher</td>
<td>Aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Gym instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Moving house – Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary work in primary school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Supply Teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{14}\) Louise had not wanted to reveal that she was a qualified teacher to avoid a conversation as to why she was applying for a TA role rather than a teaching role. After an unsuccessful year of applying for teaching roles, Louise had lost confidence in her ability to secure a role as a teacher.
Mary did not indicate any career aspirations, but it was evident throughout her story that she wanted to construct an identity for herself. Mary’s trajectory has evolved through a series of stressful times and difficult relationships that have had long lasting effects on her. There are two key people and five key events that have resulted in six turning points in Mary’s trajectory towards becoming a teacher. Haller & Woelfel (1972) maintain that others can influence the way in which we view ourselves and from the age of nine, Anne’s aunt became the inspiration in her life as she had had a difficult relationship with her mother.

Mary explains that, apart from her aunt, a relationship that can be viewed as the ‘interlocking of human lives’ (Elder, 1994, p.4), there were no positive role models in her life and the area she had been brought up in, and the social constraints (Marshall, 2005) it held, had made it arduous for Mary to believe that she could achieve anything worthwhile.

However, after training and securing a role as a gym instructor, this transition became a turning point as it changed the way in which she viewed her situation and had led her to believe that she could achieve something meaningful in her life. Within constraints such as Mary had experienced, and was experiencing, she demonstrated that it is possible to be an agent (Marshall, 2005) in the direction of her own life course. When the relationship with her mother became difficult Mary made the decision to leave home with her two children to gain independence. Mary, like Joanne, had moved many times and had finally secured her own home, and this had set her on the course to begin to consider a role in the teaching profession.
Following the confidence she gained from successfully bringing up her three children, Mary felt the time was right to focus on other children and began volunteering in a primary school. This became a turning point for her on her employment trajectory. This role enabled her to eventually become a TA and her circumstances, and the opportunities for study at this time (Smith, 2018), allowed her to enrol on a foundation degree before achieving a full degree and her PGCE.

Unfortunately, although Mary has been a supply teacher, she has been unable to secure a full-time teaching role and this, plus the continuing influence of her aunt, who was a teacher and an academic, has steered her towards the acquisition of a higher qualification, a Master of Arts in Education.

**Mark**

**Table 4.7: Mark’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on his employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark</th>
<th>Key Events/Key People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points (Bold – Key People)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents’ divorce; father; brother; mother; uncle; stepmother; stepfather; father forgot to come and visit; grandmother; grandmother’s death; neighbour; elected Youth MP;</td>
<td>parents’ divorce; father, grandmother’s death; mother, neighbour; Youth MP;</td>
<td>Parents’ divorce - father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>denied head boy; secondary head teacher; secondary school teacher; school council lead; senior prefect; ran school library; student governor; degree; mum ill; left university; friend (primary teacher); pub manager; moved in with first boyfriend; opened two pubs; pub licensee; met current partner; degree; bought first home; PGCE; teaching position, high school work experience in primary school; found grandmother dead; carer for mother; went to church; mother fell down stairs;</td>
<td>student governor; pub manager; TA role; degree; coming out; affair; new relationship; partner; PGCE; teaching role</td>
<td>Grandmother’s death – mother, neighbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>counselling for grandmother’s death; coming out;</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coming out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>had an affair; 1st partner; partner; new relationship; PGCE; placements on PGCE; teaching role</td>
<td></td>
<td>Affair – new relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Partner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Air steward, bin man, nurse, primary teacher; these are all the early career aspirations of Mark. Mark’s trajectory involved five turning points made up of five key events and four key people. His first turning point was the divorce of his parents which possibly affected the early relationship he had with his father due to the inconsistency of his visits. Sadly, when he was in Year 6, he found his grandmother, who had passed away suddenly in his house, whilst she was babysitting for him and his brother.

For Mark, this key event, not only lost him a family member whom he was very close too but, due to the circumstances that surrounded his grandmother’s death, he needed to have counselling. The impact of this event has been significant (McLeod & Almazan, 2003), and the transition of losing a close family member became a turning point in his life, affecting the relationship with his mother, and the relationship with himself. The formation of Mark’s trajectory was affected by the way in which he interacted with his everchanging environment. He had to be resourceful and used to go to his neighbour for tea on many occasions; something he thanked her for many years later.

Mark had two points in his life where his father had had an influence, an impression that, as Elder et al (2003) proffers, can impact on others. The first was a disruption of their relationship after his parents’ divorce. The second was when Mark decided to embark on a new personal direction and the turning point for him was when he made the decision to declare his sexuality to his parents. This confirms that, as Nias
(1989) explains, to be able to establish a professional identity, a personal identity has to be involved. For Mark, this revelation was key to him allowing him to be, what he saw, to be his authentic self.

Unfortunately, after starting a degree, Mark had to leave and return home to care for his ill mother, only to begin a second time later at a different university.

Mark encountered several times in his life that where he wanted to make choices these were constrained by the structures that existed in his life. However, after becoming complacent, the time to exercise agency and realise his aspiration to become a teacher, was prompted by his partner. During his first serious relationship Mark found himself having an affair with his current partner and although this, he felt, was out of character for him, it placed him on a pathway towards a career as a teacher. After leaving his first partner and setting up home with Richard, Richard played an important part (Haller & Woelfel, 1972) in encouraging Mark to return to his studies and complete his degree, gaining classroom experience as a TA, before entering the ITE programme.

Mark continues to hope for his own class, whilst working as a PPA\textsuperscript{15} cover teacher, as he felt he could not be a ‘real’ teacher until he had gained that status.

\textit{Rory}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Rory’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on his employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher}
\begin{tabular}{|l|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Rory} & \textbf{Key Events/Key People} & \textbf{Transitions} & \textbf{Turning Points} \\
\hline
& sports in primary school; work experience in primary school; ill with glandular fever; missed opportunity to go to university; volunteered in primary school/teacher; father diagnosed with cancer; TA roles; cared for father; volunteered in Nepal; father terminally ill; PGCE/mother/mentor; PGCE placements. & primary school; degree; voluntary work in primary school; TA role; diagnosis of father’s cancer; death of father; PGCE & voluntary work in primary school; father diagnosed with cancer - father; father; Mother, mentor (PGCE) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{15} PPA – Planning, Preparation & Assessment time for teachers
Similar to Graham and Carol, Rory developed his love of sport during his school days. He had a very happy childhood with a close relationship with his parents. Rory’s first turning point of four, made up of three key events and three key people, came towards the end of his degree.

As with Mark’s, Rory’s trajectory affirms that turning points are related to previous transitions (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2003). Looking towards a primary teaching career was a consequence of volunteering in a primary school during his history degree.

Rory’s father played an important part in his life and when his father was diagnosed with terminal cancer this was devastating to him and his family. Marshall (2005) discusses how circumstances can affect agency and Rory’s relationship with his father had an effect on his life course, delaying his decision to apply for teacher training, eventually leading him to be a carer for his father.

At one point his father went into remission, removing constraints so that Rory could again become the designer of his own life course (Gecas, 2003). In response to this, and with the knowledge that he wanted to be a primary teacher, Rory exercised agency and went to Nepal to volunteer with children and then returned to become a TA to gain experience before applying for the PGCE.
However, during his PGCE, Rory had a difficult time on professional practice around the anniversary of his father’s death and this became a time when Rory began to consider giving up on his aspiration to be a teacher.

The combination of the anniversary and a negative experience during his teacher training had threatened to endanger his career prospects as a teacher, and he reached out to the pastoral support from the university. The involvement of significant others (Haller & Woelfel, 1972) gave Rory the time and space to recharge his desire to become a primary teacher.

The involvement of his university mentor and his mother, became a real turning point on his pathway and this was the point at which he decided he would like to be, and could be, a primary teacher.

*Rose*

**Table 4.9: Rose’s Key Events, Key People, Transitions and Turning Points on her employment trajectory towards becoming a teacher**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rose</th>
<th>Key Events/Key People</th>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>parents' divorce; 10 GCSEs; social life; Sunday school teacher; grandmother died; A levels; university; 18 months in Germany; changed CV; recruitment consultant; moved in with boyfriend; engaged; married; 1st child born; charity administration role; 2nd child born; made redundant; administration role in small firm; conservatives removed funding for charity; letter from child's school for school direct/head teacher; brother; TA role/teacher; applied for School Direct with EHU; PGCE; PGCE placements/visiting tutor; did not want a teaching position at the school she was TA; did not get pool teaching job; teaching role/TA</td>
<td>parents' divorce; Sunday school teacher; grandmother died; degree; married; birth of children; redundancy; TA role; PGCE; teaching role</td>
<td>parents' divorce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rose did not disclose any early career aspirations. Although she referred to eight key people in her story, she did not appear to identify anyone as being key to the turning points on her trajectory in becoming a teacher. Her three turning points were identified through four key events.

Similar to Mark and Joanne, Rose’s parents’ divorce in her teens had an effect on her feeling that she had been cheated out of, what she had believed to have been, a happy childhood.

After completing her degree, that involved 18 months in Germany, she returned home to the UK to become a recruitment consultant, eventually working for a charity.

Rose’s story reveals how she found her way into teaching after being made redundant unexpectedly, due to the withdrawal of funding for the charity she was working for, and a letter from school explaining that they were initiating a school direct cluster with Edge Hill University. McLeod & Almazan (2003) discuss how unforeseen or unexpected events, formerly addressed by Elder et al. (2003), can instigate a transition and, consequently, the exercise of agency. Events such as this enabled her to become a ‘choice maker’ (Elder, 1994, p. 4) and after Rose had spoken with the head teacher, who informed her that she needed experience in a classroom, she volunteered in a school.

After a short time, Rose applied for a TA role, despite creating a problem with childcare and less income than she would have received if she had applied for positions in her previous line of work. However, as Rose began to acquire the knowledge and
skills through her role as a TA, that are necessary in enabling agency (Biesta et al., 2015), and integral to the development of a professional identity (Bodman et al., 2012), she began to feel prepared for the role of a trainee teacher on the school direct programme.

Rose’s final turning point was her role as a class teacher that she had at the time of interview. Up until that time, Rose had been covering a seconded teacher and this role was soon to become permanent for her. This, she felt, was finally a time of stability and longevity, ending her uncertainty of finding a secure role.

The trajectories taken from the teachers’ stories highlight the events and people that were prominent in directing their employment pathway. The following section gives an overview of the experiences that have been revealed through the key events and key people the teachers have encountered. A deeper exploration and understanding of how these have contributed to the construction of their professional identity are presented through a selection of excerpts taken from the teachers’ stories.

4.3 Experiences

Buchanan (2015) found that ‘each individual teacher brings with him, or her, a unique mix of personal and professional experiences and commitments’ (p. 700), and, although the teachers’ stories vary in how they have constructed their identities, the way in which they have done this is underpinned by their experiences through the key events and key people in their life course.

4.3.1 Key events

Overall, there were more key events, than key people, identified as turning points, and thirteen of these events were related to either working, or volunteering, in school. Table 4.10 shows the collective transitions and turning points taken from the teachers’ stories.
Table 4.10: Key Events identified in Transitions and turning points in their trajectories to become a qualified teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Experience</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School Experience</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Childhood trips</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College/YTS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate degree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving university</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work in school</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary work</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Illness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Employment</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA role</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGCE</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further study</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’ Divorce</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death of Family member</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New relationship</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Relationship</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moving House</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Illness/Accident</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Search</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Coming out’</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Position</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current role</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All identified events have been shown to have influenced the teachers' employment trajectories. Early transitions (Elder et al., 2003) have been particularly prominent in some of the lives of the participants and have shown that they can impact later in life. Early events experienced by the teachers included divorce, upheaval from the family home, and the loss of close family members.

This can be seen especially with three of the participants, Mark, Louise, and Anne. The death of a grandparent, an undiagnosed condition, and an unexpected school experience, respectively, have become part of their persona. Although not all
transitions become turning points, they can still shape events in later life (Elder et al., 2003) and foster the way in which individuals react or perform in certain situations. Mark recounts the event of the loss of his grandmother that became a turning point:

[I was in] Year 6 and it was the first day of the holidays and my grandma come round to look after us as my mum went to work until 10…and it was the first day of the six weeks holidays and she was collapsed in the toilet. I woke up and did not know where she was, went down and so yeah, she was collapsed, and I found her... It was horrible. I ran next door to one neighbour, as I knew they would be in, as I did not want to move anything as you are told do not touch, do not move anything.

Mark has drawn on this tragic experience to assist in the way he interacts with children who may have similar events in their lives. Although not identified as a turning point, Louise has also carried her experience into the way in which she supports children. Her beliefs are framed around her resentment of her undiagnosed dyspraxia during her school days. She explains:

That’s what frustrates me about working with children, if they are not given the chance to articulate things. I want to remove the barriers for them, for me I want to give them feedback.

Mortimer & Shanahan (2003) believe that prior experiences cannot be separated from the future and Anne’s belief is testimony to this. Similarly, Anne’s experience of being ‘invisible’ in primary school, was not a turning point, but has made her very aware of her role as a teacher and claims that she can ‘spot those children who are in the class’ and relate to them. In addition to this, Anne’s experience of how she was embarrassed by a teacher in primary school has deeply impacted on the way she interacts with children as she recalls: ‘I don’t ever want to disappoint like that in school’.

Reflections of long held beliefs can, as Buchanan (2015) maintains, give an intimation of their developing professional identity. Although the position in this thesis agrees with the views of Buchanan (2015), that identities are ongoing and not as fixed, as suggested by the testimonies by Anne and Louise, their reflections could be considered as more residual, hardwearing, and trenchant delineations of beliefs.
which are resistant to change and experiences. This suggests that some parts of identity are enduring and much less resistant to change.

Gecas (2003) explains that some individuals are unable to have an impact on the course their education can take due to parental choices. The way in which parents are involved in their children’s schooling is suggested by Elder et al. (2003), drawing on the work of Croscoe (2001), structured by the resources available to them.

Carol’s mother was able to request an alternative setting for her daughter’s education as she felt it would develop her personal identity through the exposure to a contrasting school environment compared to the privileged one that was available in her catchment area. Carol’s mother was very open about what she wanted for her daughter. ‘My mum thought it would be good to get some inner-city experience education’, and so Carol went to a school that would be very different to the catchment area in which she lived. This transition would affect the way in which she viewed her professional identity as a teacher when she began to look for teaching positions, as she chose to work with disadvantaged children.

Some events can be foreseeable, whilst others are sudden and unexpected. The unanticipated redundancy Rose experienced, forced by government policy, prompted an immediate reaction:

> There was a government change, and all of our jobs were made redundant in 2011. The conservative government withdrew funding. So, at the time, I thought how am I going to survive?

However this situation, fortunately, this placed Rose on a different pathway, one that she had not considered earlier in life. She explained that ‘a letter had come home’ from her child’s school, who had joined a cluster of school direct, saying that they ‘were looking to recruit teachers’. After taking advice from the head teacher, to gain classroom experience before applying for a place, Rose accepted a position in a local school as a TA.

Although following a different pathway, after her experience in a variety of roles, Louise volunteered with a local toddler group. Following this, she took the
opportunity to become a TA, and this became a turning point as an introduction to a career in education.

Turning points materialised for Carol, Mary and Rory, as a result of volunteering in a primary school. Carol had chosen this to gain experience and Mary had volunteered as she felt ready to try something new after her children had become independent. Rory’s experience in school affected a long-held desire to be a secondary school teacher.

During his degree, Rory began volunteering in his ex-primary school, and this became, what Elder et al. (2003), and later Evans & Biasin (2016), define as a turning point, steering him towards a career in the primary sector.

Although the result of his own actions, the outcome from his experiences, for Graham, was the same as Rory’s. Graham had made a conscious decision to gain experience in a secondary school, something that would alter the way he saw his future. Graham’s childhood aspiration was abandoned after an unsettling experience as a cover supervisor, supervising classes without any previous behaviour management experience, and, in reaction to this, he made the decision to go to Australia for 12 months to visit relatives.

I thought I should go and get some experience in schools, so I volunteered in a high school as a cover supervisor and through this I got a job in a high school. I was a cover supervisor and did a lot of the sport. I started in September and left in January as I did not like it. So, I moved to Australia for a year to get over the high school experience.

The effect of experience on behaviour, as discussed by Elder et al. (2003), is evident in the study of Evans & Biasin (2016) and can be applied to this study. The following section considers the people that were involved in the experiences that were highlighted on the teachers’ trajectories.
4.3.2  Key people

Alongside the collective number of individuals who have been involved in the teachers’ lives, Table 4.11 also shows the range of people. In the creation of turning points for the teachers, seven of the key people were involved in education, whilst 14 were family members, including partners. It was evident that there were more positive engagements with people, than negative, and it was found that close family members, especially mothers, were particularly important in helping to shape their life course.

Table 4.11: Key People involved in Transitions and Turning Points in their trajectories to become a qualified teacher

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitions</th>
<th>Turning Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PEOPLE</td>
<td>PEOPLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary School Teachers 3</td>
<td>Primary School Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary School teachers 4</td>
<td>Secondary School teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School peers          1</td>
<td>School peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Lecturers  1</td>
<td>University Lecturers 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mother             5</td>
<td>- Mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Father             1</td>
<td>- Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stepparent         1</td>
<td>- Stepparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Grandparent        1</td>
<td>- Grandparent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sister             1</td>
<td>- Sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children           1</td>
<td>- Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Aunt               1</td>
<td>- Aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband / Partner / Boyfriend 4</td>
<td>Husband / Partner / Boyfriend 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbour            1</td>
<td>Neighbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends              1</td>
<td>Friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers advisor      1</td>
<td>Careers advisor 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head teacher         5</td>
<td>Head teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully                1</td>
<td>Bully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA                   3</td>
<td>TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher              4</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor (PGCE)        1</td>
<td>Mentor (PGCE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Although Rose did not identify anyone in her life who had contributed to a turning point, underpinned by her comment, ‘...[it] has very much come from me’, she presented her family, friends, and colleagues in supportive roles.

In summary, for most of the teachers, early experiences in school and in the family, guided the way in which they interacted with children as a TA, and consequently in their current workplace. Although not all events and interactions with people became transitions and turning points it was evident that the experiences the teachers referred to in their stories, whether at home, work, or school directed their pathway and shaped the construction of their professional identity.

The following section will consider the essence of the relationships that the teachers were involved with, in both their personal and working lives.

### 4.4 Relationships

In this study the theme of ‘relationships’ has drawn attention to the importance of significant others in the lives of the teachers as they progressed through life, and how they were an essential ingredient in the construction of their identity as a teacher, giving a higher priority to the role of key people in the lives of individuals than Elder et al. (2003). The interaction with others is an important part of the life course and an employment trajectory. Holland et al. (1998) and Elder (1994) stress how these relationships are present during the life span of individuals, and people who have had a key and profound effect on an individual’s life can be, and can continue to be, influential.

#### 4.4.1. Personal

Day et al. (2006a) maintain that the way in which individuals view themselves and define themselves to others impacts on their identity. The interactions with family or close relationships can also be as, or more, influential, as those who you work with, on the direction an employment trajectory can take.
Elder et al. (2003) maintain that relationships can be affected by events and found that a similar kind of event, such as divorce, can affect individuals differently due to the timing they take place, their personal resilience, the support structures that surround the individual, or past experiences. The unexpected event of Rose’s parents’ divorce is illustrated in her reflection, which indicates this was a significant moment for her:

I put on there [timeline] that I had a happy childhood, or so I thought, the reason being my parents divorced and I had no idea whatsoever that there were problems in their marriage. There were never any arguments, cross words, nothing – it was big thing at 14.

Whitty (2002) argues that the way in which we view ourselves is expressed in how we see ourselves at the time of recall and the way in which we react to events can be different (Buckner, 2005). Of the three participants who had disclosed that their parents had divorced when they were still at school, two felt the way in which they had viewed their education and their identity had changed. Social relationships within the family are present throughout the life span (Elder, 1994; Holland et al. 1998) and Mark, and both of his parents, suffered as a consequence of the divorce, with the relationships still affecting personal lives, many years later.

Anne’s parents also played important roles in her life. Her decision to become a teacher, as she explains, was initially a random thought. However, she was struggling to find the confidence to secure a career until it had become a possible reality. This for her, as McLeod & Almazan (2003) describe, was a lasting shift in her life course, and provoked a strong reaction from her parents:

…one morning I said to my mum and dad, quite randomly, ‘I think I want to be a primary school teacher’. My mum cried and my dad, I think, was on the brink of tears. My mum was not like ‘you never said’ she was like ‘yes you can do it’.

The delight demonstrated by Anne’s mother and the encouragement of these words, ‘if I can be a TA, you can be a teacher’ gave her the approval by someone she felt was significant in her life (Haller & Woelfel, 1972; London, 1983) and gave Anne the confidence to consider a career in teaching and set her on course to apply for a TA
role to get the experience she felt she needed. An action such as this approval is considered by Hood (2016) to be essential to the role and identity of a teacher.

Mothers were particularly prominent in the teachers’ stories and, for some, were influential in the direction their education and employment went. Elder (1994) explains that we are all agents of our own lives and have the ability to make choices. However, education has not always been ‘agentically driven’ (Biesta et al., 2008, p. 20) and Louise found her initial career pathway to be instigated by others. Her mother, in collusion with the careers’ advisor at school, had decided a new course of action regarding Louise’s future. Louise’s reflects on such a time, and the relationship she had with her mother:

I was meant to be starting the NNEB in the September, in the summer holidays I went tomato picking and when I came home one day my mum said that the careers had been on the phone, and they had a marvellous course that I should go on. They sold it to mum – I mean it was 1984 and I suppose employment was not great. So, my mum said why don’t you go to the interview they are going to do placements in nurseries? It was YTS and it was basically social care, and I thought mum knows best really…so, I did just that – the power of adults in your life.

Relationships such as this, Evans & Biasin (2016) suggest, can affect the disposition of an individual and although this was not the pathway that Louise had wanted, she took the advice of her mother.

Graham and Rory’s mothers have played a positive role in their stories and in the creation of turning points. After his aspiration to be a footballer had not come to fruition, Graham turned his interest to a career in teaching sport in the secondary sector. Graham’s mother, seen as a significant other, as defined by Haller & Woelfel (1972), insisted that he went to university straight from school rather than wait:

That’s the only time my mum has interfered with anything, she said, ‘if you don’t go to uni now you will never go’. She was 100% right; I would never have gone back!

This transition steered by a significant other (Biesta et al., 2008) would, his mother felt, give him a direction in life as she feared he would not have gone to university.
Rory’s mother also gave wise counsel. This transpired when he was faced with a difficult time during his first professional practice on the PGCE. Rory turned to his mother for advice:

I came home for a few days… and I spoke to my mum… and thought you know what, I will try phase 2 and if it is like the other [previous placement] I will leave basically.

Consequently, he completed the placement and went on to another practice where he received the support he needed to complete successfully.

The demands of their relationships with their mothers are evident throughout Mary and Mark’s life course and has had an impact on the choices they have made throughout their lives. The effect of losing her mother affected Marks’ mother dramatically, and, at times, this also made life difficult for Mark from an early age. Living alone with his mother, she began to suffer from depression and anxiety, and Mark found it difficult to share this with anyone. He recalled, ‘I did not tell anyone, friends did not really know. My teachers did not know. I kept it all to myself’.

Mary also experienced difficulties in her relationship with her mother but after she had children. Excited about her first job as a gym instructor this was dampened as it was met with obstacles related to her relationship with her mother, as she requested childcare from her:

My mum was very harsh she used to say to me you have had your children, now you look after them, but I think in a way it was because, in a way, she didn’t.

Although this delayed her journey towards becoming a qualified teacher, Mary waited until her children were old enough to be independent before applying for a TA role. As Evans & Biasin (2008) maintain, the interaction with others can assist in the direction of a career pathway and although mothers were mentioned more often than fathers, they also played a part in their contribution in the creation of turning points.
This was particularly true in the stories of Rory, Mark, and Mary. After a very difficult time caring for his father, the following excerpt captures the moment Rory found out his success at interview, of gaining a place on the PGCE, and the importance of the relationship he had with his father.

I was pleased as my father found out just before he passed that I got a place on the interview, he was so happy because he knew that was my passion to work with children and I had worked so hard at these interviews in even getting there – so he was delighted.

The effect of his parents’ divorce affected Mark’s early relationship with his father after he had left the family home:

Tended to see my dad on a Sunday, picked us up at 10 and dropped us back at six, but that is if he remembered – sometimes he was late or sometimes I remember waiting on the chair, looking out the window and saying right today dad and being a bit like, grrrr.

Despite early interactions with his father that indicate frustrations within their relationship the response from his father, after Mark had revealed his sexuality to him, was one that allowed Mark to be who he wanted to be:

I rang my dad and said, ‘can you come up tomorrow’ he said, ‘what is wrong,’ and I said, ‘I just want to talk to you’. He said, ‘what is going on?’ I said, ‘nothing, I just want to talk to you.’ He said, ‘right ok’ [when he arrived]…I ran downstairs and said get back in your car and basically I told him in the car and he just sat there and played with his steering wheel for a bit and just said, ‘you are my son and I love you, but it’s not something I agree with or conform with but I love you’ and that was it and I was in floods of tears.

Relationships with fathers were deemed to be important, but Mary’s father had been absent from her whole life and although she knew who he was, she had not met him, and this had affected her confidence:

…we tried to trace him through the Salvation Army when I was about 10 - and they could not go any further - I am 47 this year so don’t know if he is still alive you know. I am constantly wondering, it affects my confidence…my aunty knew about it, but it was never spoken about it was always hush, hush.
Apart from parental relationships, partner relationships were seen to be prominent in three of the teachers’ stories. Anne, Mark and Joanne’s trajectories show incidents where their aspiration to be a teacher has either been instigated or hindered.

Anne reflected on how the conversation she had had with her boyfriend had been the start of her pathway to becoming a teacher. She had needed the encouragement from her boyfriend to see herself differently.

So, I felt from that moment when that seed had been planted by my boyfriend it has been like a jigsaw puzzle and although it has not been easy, every piece has slotted together.

Mark’s story reveals a need to please others not only in his working life but also in his personal life, with a complicated relationship with his mother and a requirement to become a financial contributor in his relationship with his partner. These relationships have assisted in shaping his life course. Mark expressed that the desire to teach had always been there, but becoming a teacher, was only a reality when his partner intervened.

It was very much Richard that talked about teaching, I don’t think it was a discussion. He just told me he was not going to support me financially anymore, so I had to go and find something…I have always said if it was not for Richard, I would not be teaching now.

The unfortunate and tragic situation for Joanne and her husband has been a trial as she has pursued her aim to become a teacher. She explains the situation with her husband after he had a stroke:

He lost the use of his right side, and luckily not his left, as he is left-handed. Did not lose his speech but he lost his job as a meter reader. Walking six and a ½ miles every day and of course he could not do that. And now three years on he struggles but, is better. Still has pins and needles in his face. He had to retrain how to walk. I did a mindfulness course and I realised how he was feeling… he is getting his mobility back. He has depression, he had it anyway but has anxiety now and will only go to certain places.

Despite being a carer for her husband, Joanne continued her studies and became a qualified teacher, proving to herself that it was possible.
Relationships, as discussed by Evans & Biasin (2008), can have a negative or positive effect on individuals. As Haller & Woelfel (1972) found, the support and influence of others assists in the construction of an identity, but sometimes this is not always a positive interaction. Mary effectively explains her early position in her life course before she developed a connection with her aunt:

Again, going back to family where I have come from there was no work ethic … so where was the work ethic – I suppose if you have no one else to follow or ask, it is hard to find it for yourself. And living on an estate where there was nothing around to aspire to.

Apart from family members, Mark’s story revealed a relationship with a neighbour which had supported him after his grandmother had died. Mark sadly reflected on his early memories after the loss of his grandmother:

…I remember coming home and thinking what am I going to do for my tea? And like every night I went round the neighbours and had something there. But I pretend to be like, I will just ask my mum if I can stay for tea. And then disappearing and coming back round. They knew she wasn’t well, I think. I see Fiona, the neighbour, quite a lot and about a year ago; I saw her in Sainsbury’s and stopped her and said, ‘I have never said this to you, but thank you’. She said, ‘what for?’ and I said, ‘when I was growing up you were there for me’. And she said, ‘don’t worry about it, this is what we do’.

Supportive and difficult relationships were also evident in the workplace.

4.4.2 Work

Teachers, more than head teachers (as identified in my IFS), were found to be particularly influential as significant others (Haller & Woelfel, 1972). Predominantly as role models, providing encouragement and support throughout the participants’ time as a TA, trainee teacher and teacher. However, there were occasions that this was not the case.

At times ‘superior approval’ (London, 1983, p. 621) is required to act as a stimulus for individuals. This type of approval from a teacher, with a position of authority and experience, gave Carol, after volunteering in a number of schools, what she needed
to make the decision to apply for the PGCE, as she was ‘not in a good place’ in relation to her confidence.

Carol needed reassurance and confirmation that she could be a teacher from her fellow colleagues in school. The confirmation from her teacher that she was ‘wasted’ as a TA gave her, what Marshall (2005) define, the impetus to choose and therefore she applied for the PGCE.

Interestingly, Mary, Rose, Rory, Graham and Mark’s stories did not highlight their TA role as a turning point in their trajectory towards the transition of becoming a teacher. However, the remaining four participants did. However, Anne, like Carol, had become complacent in her role as a TA and had to have encouragement from her mother, a fellow TA, and the head teacher to allow her to make that transition from TA to teacher. Drawing on her experiences of the past, the present and the future (Biesta et al. 2008) allowed Anne to choose a career, take the experience she held as a TA, and to see herself as a teacher:

I enjoyed my job so much then I started to go ‘...can I be the teacher? Is this where I am meant to be?’ it took [the TA] to say ‘no, you really need to go on and do this’ so [she] played quite a big part in me in taking that leap from being a TA to a teacher. Because I got a little bit comfortable being a TA, as I absolutely loved it, and thought this, I felt that I was challenging myself anyway. So, I almost went to myself ‘can you be the teacher?’ but I am so glad I did, the head teacher was really supportive, and he would say to me ‘how are you getting on with the application? When is your next interview? And if you want to come and do a mock interview with me you can’.

In contrast, although recognised by her peers, Joanne had not been encouraged by the teaching staff, or head teacher, to take advantage of the opportunities available to her. However, Joanne was encouraged during her TA role to become a teacher by other TAs, and one, in particular:

There was a TA in Year 3, she was a big inspiration to me, and she used to say, “you need to teach”. She retired, and then died...we were really friendly – but she does not know [I have become a teacher] and she told me to do it’.

The interviewees’ trajectories revealed that not all interactions with others during their school days were positive and, as Elder (1994) established, the principle of
linked lives is central to the life course across the life span and therefore can influence the construction of an identity, both personal and professional. This notion is supported by Buchanan (2015) who strongly proposes that teachers draw on their previous experience to construct their professional identity and use this to shape their identity in the classroom.

Graham’s experience of working with TAs differed to Joanne. Graham had whole class responsibility as a HLTA, a position that was, as Graves (2011) proffers, intended to raise the status of a TA. He reveals the frustrations and the restrictions he experienced, within school, whilst working with colleagues. The responsibility for the children’s learning as a TA was not seen to be the same as that of a teacher by Graham’s fellow TAs, and, consequently, he felt his role as a HLTA was not respected as it would have been if he had been a teacher.

If I went back now there would be more of a challenge to do it my way. I was, at the time trying to soak it up as I knew I was going to be a teacher. I loved it and worked hard but I knew I was going to move on to be a teacher, I was left to do things, but I could not ask other TAs to help or do things as their attitude was, I am a TA, and you are a TA, and I am not taking orders from you.

Frustrations of working with TAs were also raised by Rose. Her disappointment was with her relationship with her fellow TA, who may have seen her as a threat:

She did not like me having my own ideas and opinions and it took me a long time to build that relationship with her – she had a lot of experience, more than me, and she was probably uncomfortable with my ideas.

Other work relationships between the teachers, during their time as a TA, with teachers have not resulted in a positive experience. Warhurst (2014) refers to tensions that can arise in school, especially between teachers and TAs (Dunne et al., 2008a), regarding their roles. However, such an experience for Joanne gave her the impetus to pursue a career in teaching.

Despite the encouragement by her previous teacher as a TA, Anne continued to have doubts and feelings of inadequacy early on in her teacher training. Her response identifies how:
I did my first lesson, we laugh about it now, it was a geography lesson, and it was in the afternoon on a Thursday which is never great for Year 1s. And…they were a lively class anyway…I did the first lesson and I remember thinking half way through ‘what are you doing?’ ‘What have you done?’ it just went awful! It went absolutely awful and when, it was the last lesson so they all went home after it and all Julie said to me was ‘how do you think that went?’ and I just burst out crying I went…and she was like ‘come on, come on – stop! Come on – what’s the matter?’ and I was just like, ‘I don’t think I can do it, I don’t think I can do this’, and she was going, ‘this is your first lesson, it was on a Thursday and it was geography! Don’t worry about it’. But I remember I was just back in that thing thinking I should have just stayed as a TA as I was comfortable there.

However, the intervention of her mentor provided Anne with what Marshall (2005) describes as, the resources, the capacity and behaviour to continue in her quest to become a teacher.

This feeling of inadequacy is described by Whitty (2002) as a notion of the feared self and can debilitate an individual’s progress towards a goal. However, the interjection by a more experienced person can be powerful, not only did Anne continue and successfully complete her placement, at the time the of interview, she was employed in the school where this lesson took place. Mentoring students on professional practice is an important training role, and this relationship, for two of the participants, had a negative influence on their engagement with the ITE programme which had to be resolved by the university. The role of the mentor with the mentee on teacher training programmes is designed, as suggested by Hamman et al. (2010), to ‘gauge progress’ and to give trainee teachers an ‘authentic’ view of themselves.

Although all of the teachers had completed their professional practices successfully, Graham and Rory had both found one of their placements difficult, due to the teachers and mentors they had worked with, and this had had a negative effect on them both. These events could have become, as Hayler & Williams (2016) describe a ‘critical turning point’ (p.v) where they may have left the teacher training programme. However, Graham and Rory, both sought, and found, the support from professional others (Haller & Woelfel, 1972) and their mothers, to encourage them to continue.
Carol also found that the expectations of her professional practice placement did not match her own:

…I was left on my own…I did ask why, and the teacher said I was more than capable…I was fine doing it but I was supposed to be trained. She thought she was teaching me to be on my own. From group chats we all had very different experiences from our placements. Some were constantly monitored and some were left just like me.

Rose had a similar experience. Although it could have been the confident way in which she presented (Hamman et al., 2010) herself, Rose felt it was her age:

One thing that was different was my age, because I was older people just thought that I could do it. So, I was left alone and if I asked for support it was thought to be a big problem when only it was, I just wanted some advice. My age, I am still learning.

Urzua & Vasquez (2008) explored the role of mentor and how trainee teachers were encouraged to look toward their future as the teacher they hoped to be. Although mentors are generally deemed to have excellent interpersonal skills and be professionally competent (Fitzgerald, 2020) this study has shown that experiences with mentors can differ and can sometimes threaten a career trajectory.

To summarise, the way in which we view ourselves determines the length, or duration, that we engage with an aspect of the life course (Elder et al., 2003) and, without the intervention of a significant other (Haller, Woelfel, 1972; Elder, 1994), some of the participants may have left the programme.

The majority of key relationships, both personal and work related, have been supportive and encouraging, promoting the confidence of the teachers, although others have placed obstacles, whether intentionally or not, that have interrupted the course of the teachers' trajectories. Relationships - and in particular, significant others, how we interact with them, and how they may play a part in the way in which we view ourselves, both in our private lives and in our work lives (Haller & Woelfel, 1972) - have shown to be central to the life course (Evans & Biasin, 2016) influencing the direction a pathway may take. Biesta et al. (2008) discuss the
importance of key people, both professionally and personally in the development of an identity. Therefore, significant others, or key people, can be divided into two categories: those who have ‘key relationships’ with the participants such as close members of family, longstanding partnerships or friendships, and a second category, of a professional nature, might include teachers and work colleagues. However, the effects of these relationships, whatever the length or closeness, can have a lasting impact on individuals. These interdependent lives, or relationships, can also have a negative or positive effect on each other (Elder, 1994; Elder et al., 2003).

The following section considers the knowledge that the teachers have drawn on in the construction of their identity as a teacher, both professional and personal.

4.5 Knowledge

Fortner et al. (2015) strongly denote that TAs generally have an in-depth knowledge of children’s cultures, how to provide academic support and experience of ‘actively’ (p. 6) engaging in the classroom. The stories given by the teachers validate the findings of Fortner et al. (2015).

4.5.1 Professional

Buchanan (2015) states that a teacher’s professional identity continues to develop throughout their careers where teachers require subject matter initially before developing their pedagogical expertise.

An in-depth understanding of the teaching role was identified as invaluable in the pursuance of a career as a teacher, especially during the teachers’ time as a trainee teacher. The role of TA was expressed by the teachers, in a number of ways, as an important part in the construction of their professional identity as a teacher.

The benefits of being a TA, referred to by the teachers, before entering teacher training included knowledge of the school environment, what it is like to be in a primary classroom, the routines, how to manage children, and how to work with other members of staff. Most importantly they felt that working, and observing, a number
of teachers as a TA, contributed greatly to their understanding of the teacher role and relationships within the school. For example, these relationships allowed Anne to reflect on her position as a TA. She alludes to the hierarchal relationships within the school and the classroom as she expresses that ‘children always notice that the teacher is above the TA’. Joanne validated this view on her return to the classroom as a teacher rather than as a TA that, although she has learnt a lot through the TA role on how to work with children, she feels that she has ‘more control as a teacher’ than she did as a TA.

Similar to Graham, Rory’s story revealed how he was frustrated as a TA and was ready to make the move to become a teacher. Graham felt that his initiative was taken away and that as a TA ‘you are only following other people’s instructions’. Buchanan (2015) found that teachers that have previous schooling experience may want to do things differently and this can cause frustration and tensions. Rory expressed how he felt when he was unable to implement his own ideas:

The teacher is the main person in that class, and I found that hard because you know the teacher is the main person in the class, the TA will take the back seat of what they are doing…you [TA] want to go a certain way with these children, but you can’t because they are the teacher.

Graham agreed that the teacher relationship was totally different but saw the benefit of the relationship between TA and the children and elaborated further. Graham felt that as a TA ‘you are so close to them you can be the good guy. As a teacher you have to be more distant’.

Drawing information from the employment trajectories, six of the participants chose to become a TA to gain experience that they felt, or had been told, they needed to be able to apply for the PGCE programme. This action to learn is described by Biesta et al. (2008) to be self-initiated as, at the time the teachers applied for the PGCE, the requirement was only ten days classroom practice.

Anne was advised that she needed experience in school, albeit a requirement of ten days, but the knowledge she took from her role as a TA would help her to get a place
on teacher training and prepared for the demands of such a course. Anne reflects on her journey before embarking on her professional practice:

I just felt that all those stepping-stones had put me in a position where I was ready to be all consumed and to be able to go headfirst into this role…I kind of understood what was expected of me.

Rory chose to work as a TA to gain an understanding of working with children in a school environment. Whilst working in a multi-cultural environment he began to gain knowledge of how to teach children whose first language was not English. This knowledge he has used in his current role (at time of interview) as a teacher in Doha.

Rose also had a similar experience of working with EAL\textsuperscript{16} children. She reflects that ‘it was eye-opening, and I loved it…I loved working with the staff, and I loved working with the children to see what made them tick’. Mary also felt that the knowledge she learnt as a TA was invaluable. However, her experience was with disadvantaged children, and recalls being able to have an insight into, ‘what they are doing and hearing what they say’.

Louise worked with four teachers every day in her TA role and drew on her knowledge of her own difficulties, of accessing information, to assist a child with dyslexia to ‘remove barriers for the child’. Louise used her degree and extended her knowledge of reading recovery and how to break down learning into small steps, whilst she studied to enhance her engagement as she continued to work as a TA in school.

Whilst Anne also shows how her learning prepared her for children with SEND, she feels that she has developed her relationships with TAs as a teacher:

Where I worked there were behavioural units as well - that really opened my eyes, I am really glad that I had that experience as I used to cover sometimes in those classes, and we had verbal and non-verbal ASD classes and the behavioural unit. I feel that it would been way above my head if I had never witnessed or dealt with that before. Especially, when you have the challenges

\textsuperscript{16} EAL – English as an Additional Language
in the class you can also understand what your TAs are going through. But you can also understand how to deal with situations when they arise.

4.5.2 Personal

Although Amott (2018) felt that personal events were not important in the formulation of a professional identity, Mark’s recollection illustrates, what Jonker et al. (2018) view as the integration of a personal and professional identity. This study has found that personal and professional identity are intertwined and cannot be separated.

Drawing on the knowledge of how he reacted and coped with the traumatic death of his grandmother and his parents’ divorce, Mark reflects how these experiences have helped him to develop relationships with children in his role as a teacher:

You can create those links [with children], I am not saying that if you have not been through something you can’t have that empathy, but I think, if you have been through it, you have a greater level of empathy.

Mark had been able to embed his personal life experiences into his identity as a teacher as he felt he could relate to the children in his care. He explains:

Having worked in school now you still see the impact this sort of thing can have now and it's providing that level of service and that compassion to the child in need, who arguably needs it. At first, I thought this was something that just happened. But then it is not until you get older that you think, oh right. I always think in my life that I have parents that have separated, so you can get kids in school who say my parents are going through a tough time and you can say ‘that’s ok’ because my parents have separated and all of a sudden you have that link.

Past events and people, Elder et al. (2003) proffer, affect the way in which we view things. To be able to recollect how events can affect attitudes and beliefs was, Mark believes, advantageous in his ability to work with children.

Rose has found that being a parent has also given her the knowledge that younger teachers may not have. She explains that ‘being a parent has definitely helped. For
example, even to the buttoning up of jackets on reception children, which a young NQT\textsuperscript{17} did not even think about’.

Anne drew on her parents’ wisdom and guidance. Through her reflections she recalls how her father has given her the knowledge of how to engage with children:

\begin{quote}
I have the voice of my dad in my head all of the time, every school day you know. He’s told me that behind every behaviour there is a need and I have been told that since I was about seven and I understood that children have their needs. I think we have had that environment in our home…whenever I went home and said so and so is doing this in class my dad would say, ‘do you know what, there is something probably going on’ and he told me to be just kind to them [children], to show them a bit of kindness.
\end{quote}

The benefits of drawing on previous experience, Buchanan (2015) maintains, continue as teachers establish their identity in the classroom. Carol’s experience has given her the knowledge of how to support children. Her time in an inner-city secondary school allowed her to enter a section of society she was unfamiliar with. Although she has used this experience to focus her role as a teacher with disadvantaged children, her exposure to bullying has had a long-lasting effect as she ‘had a lot of issues with girls bullying me. I was really given a lot of grief’. Carol has since worked in a school where she witnessed unacceptable behaviour and was able to use this knowledge to direct the way in which she handled the situation.

To draw this together, professional knowledge (London, 1983) and personal knowledge (Jonker et al., 2018) are intertwined and have emerged as imperative for the teachers in the construction of their professional identity. The two aspects have been shown to have given the teachers knowledge of both life beyond, and in, the classroom that they have integrated into their teaching. Their experience as a TA have allowed them to implement this knowledge of the curriculum before embarking on a teacher training programme.

Knowledge is also believed to have been drawn from the teachers’ times of study and is considered in the next section.

\textsuperscript{17} NQT – Newly Qualified Teacher
4.6 Qualifications

Qualifications are essential in the acquisition of a professional identity (Fitzgerald, 2020). To become a teacher requires a degree, QTS and five GCSEs including English, mathematics, and science. The teachers in this study chose to take their degrees before entering a teacher training programme instead of a three year undergraduate QTS programme, either because of personal circumstances, a change in their career choice, or the study options available to them at the time. Dunne et al. (2008a) found that some TAs were comfortable in their roles and did not want to make a move to either gaining further qualifications nor a role as a teacher. This was a feeling that Anne expressed and, despite her earlier academic achievement, would have stayed as a TA had she not been given a prompt from her teacher who recognised her ability in the classroom.

For the participants in this study the acquisition of a degree was, for some, planned and, for others, a response to a transition or turning point (Elder et al., 2003). Although specific subject-based degree requirements outlined for a teaching career have changed for primary education programmes, Table 4.12 shows that those who chose to become a teacher, before completing their degree, chose a degree that would complement their career progression into teaching.
Table 4.12: Degree choice, age when started degree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age at start of degree (years)</th>
<th>Degree choice</th>
<th>Decision for choice of degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Entertainment and Management</td>
<td>To be in theatre management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Early Childhood Studies</td>
<td>To become a primary teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>BSc Sports Health &amp; PE</td>
<td>To become a secondary PE teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>BA(Hons) English &amp; Child Psychology</td>
<td>To become a primary teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>BA(Hons) Teaching, Learning &amp; Mentoring Practice</td>
<td>To become a primary teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Education and Professional Studies</td>
<td>To become a primary teacher academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies</td>
<td>To become a primary teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>BA (Hons) History</td>
<td>To become a secondary history teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>BA (Hons) International Business with German</td>
<td>No career choice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this study there are two categories of TAs: those who chose to become a TA to gain classroom experience so they can become a teacher (Anne, Carol, Graham, Mark, Rory and Rose), and those who chose to become a teacher after many years as a TA (Joanne, Louise and Mary). Similar to Fortner et al. (2015), this study found that TAs who chose to pursue a career as a teacher were generally older and less qualified with more financial and family commitments than those who entered the teaching profession at an earlier age. This was the case for Louise, Mary and Joanne, who took their degrees later in life (see Table 4.12). In particular, Joanne, after an encounter with a teacher, decided:

\[ \text{I could do this, so I signed up for my degree, whilst raising my children, studying in the evening, tutorials in Liverpool on Saturday morning and online tutorials.} \]

Despite opportunities instigated in 2003 for TAs, through the wider participation agenda, the reticence of TAs to study was identified by Dunne et al. (2008a) to include a lack of self-efficacy, where TAs felt they were unable to perceive themselves as learners. Louise, Mary and Joanne were 47, 51 & 51 years old at the time of interview and had taken their degree over 20 years after leaving school and.
had 33 years TA experience between them, which was a similar profile to that of the TAs in my IFS.

After deferring her degree and engaging in several temporary jobs, Carol ended up volunteering in a school. This subsequently became a turning point that put her on a pathway to not only become a teacher, but also a ‘choice maker’ (Elder, 1994, p.4) choosing to study a degree that would benefit her in a role as a teacher. This was also the case for Rory. He had to defer his degree due to illness and this led him to reconsider his choice of teaching in the secondary sector.

Her experience during her degree in Germany allowed Rose to, in her words, ‘grow up, after being knocked’ by her parents’ divorce. The degree choice for Anne was also dictated by her feelings, this describes her low confidence. The planning of exercising agency and making choices is, as Elder et al. (2003) maintain, limited by the environment in which people exist. Anne chose to go to university with no future concept of what she wanted to do as a career and allowed others to influence her choice of degree. Although Anne ‘loved doing drama and performing arts in school’, her choice of degree in Entertainment Management was encouraged by her teachers. She did not want to be on the stage but thought of ‘maybe behind the scenes stuff’. However, in her teaching role Anne now draws on this love of drama and performing arts in her teaching. She reflected, ‘now I am more confident…I think “oh, my goodness!”’.

Although Mary had a strong motivation to teach, at the time of interview, she was still feeling motivated by a strong desire to prove to herself that she could be an academic as well as a teacher: this feeling came from her aunt. Although her aunt had passed away 24 years earlier, midway through her PhD, the memories of the experiences that she had with her as a child were still with her, and she felt a need to show to her that she could follow in her footsteps.

Part of me did the degree to teach, but the other part of me felt that I had a level of academic in me that I could pursue. So in my head in the background I have always got my aunty and watching her a little voice in the background and on her gravestone she has got PGCE and MA and every time I think of that I have got that PGCE now and now the MA is next…
Only one of the participants had enrolled on a degree twice. The reliance of his mother on him had made it difficult for Mark to continue with his first degree and he had to put his career plans on hold whilst he cared for her. In a different role to Mark’s mother, Graham’s mother insisted he went to university after leaving school, this he did and left with a degree and Masters in Applied Sport Psychology.

Louise, Joanne and Mary were TAs before they enrolled on a degree programme and on completion of their degree went on to study a PGCE. Louise chose a degree that built on her TA experience and unlike Joanne, who had to make a lot of adjustments to complete her degree, Louise was within an uncomplicated home environment. However, she reflected on her time studying for her degree and recalls how her confidence has caused her to sometimes doubt her self-belief. Before her diagnosis of her dyspraxia at university, that made sense of her struggles in school, she explained how she felt: ‘I did not think that somebody like me should be doing a degree’.

Joanne did not doubt that she should be doing a degree, but her husband was not always of the same opinion. The approval by her husband was key and necessary for Joanne to enable her to continue her journey to be a teacher, demonstrating not only as London (1983) points out, career resilience, but also personal resilience.

Geoff [husband] used to say, ‘why are you doing it, why don’t you stay as a TA’? He was not sort of believing in me. The girls believed in me, but he [husband] came to the graduation and I think he realised then.

To recap, although the teachers’ study journeys have all been different, all have been successful in achieving a degree before entering a teacher training programme. The acquisition of a higher qualification has given them the capacity to act and to make choices on their career pathway and in boosting their confidence, especially in those who were more mature.

Family values and working with others have allowed the teachers to develop their own distinctive persona as a teacher. The following section explores the qualities that the teachers have drawn from their experiences including times at school, family
morals, and the role models they have worked with, and observed, during their time as a TA.

### 4.7 Personal qualities

Experiences, and interactions with teachers, in both primary and secondary school, as a child and teenager, were prevalent for some of the teachers in how they have constructed their identity as a teacher. London (1983) maintains that to be suited to a career an individual requires particular attributes and characteristics, or personal qualities to fit a chosen role. Characteristics in this study are defined as a feature serving to identify a teacher, and a quality is an attribute possessed by the teacher such as, nurturer, carer, a team player, communicator, and listener (Klassen et al., 2017).

Relationships within the family, especially if it involves joint activities can, Elder et al. (2003) explain, have a positive influence on the development of a personal identity. Anne felt she was fortunate as she had a strong bond with her family which was rooted in the church; this gave her the morals that she has continued to draw on throughout her life influencing the way she interacts with others.

Anne also drew on her family and their involvement with the church and the role her father had working with children:

> He [father] was working and looking after children who did not have parents. And that had a big impact on me and my sister as well as she does the same job now, the same as he did. So, I think both of us grew up with that understanding of mum’s job made a difference and dad’s job did. Perhaps that’s where my feelings of …having no purpose [when in retail job]

Anne confirms that she has ‘been brought up with those values from quite a young age’ and has put these into practice in her TA and teaching role. Joanne also mentions memories from when she was younger. She recalls the qualities of a particular secondary teacher who was a good listener. Joanne was able to confide in them during the time her parents were going through a divorce.
Reflecting on her role as a TA, Rose recalls the times she felt proud, working together as a team, promoting success for individual children’s learning. She has taken this quality through to her role as a teacher and illustrates her thoughts through these words: ‘Knowing that I helped them do that, and also the parents who thank you for helping their child, I like the way we all work together in school. I really enjoy that’.

Mark’s comments illustrate the views of Buchanan (2015) who describes the ‘apprentice of observation’ where the act of observing others in their profession has a ‘profound influence on one’s understanding of the work and role of a teacher as well as on their own teaching practice’ (p. 702). The time as a TA, Mark felt, allowed him to capture the qualities of ‘good’ teachers. Mark became a TA before studying, then further as part of his degree course. Mark reflects on his experiences as a TA:

This is why I liked being a TA first as being a TA rather than coming into it [teacher training] and it was like ok – they have never observed other teachers before, whereas I can say I really like the way she has done that, so I was able to take bits from teachers to inform my practice. Which is what I loved about being a TA.

Building on her time as a TA, Anne also found that whilst on professional practice, during her teacher training, that she was advised that she would ‘learn a lot from them [job share teachers]’ and she felt that this ‘was an experience in itself’ to refine her understanding further of how teachers interact with children.

Day et al. (2006a) maintain that recognising the learning that takes place through events and personal experiences is inevitably linked to establishing an identity. Rory reflects how the teacher had told him that he ‘had made a big difference’ in a child’s journey and illustrates how important it is to develop a relationship with children:

I really enjoyed that I worked with a little boy who had ADHD, it was my first experience of dealing with that ... it was a great eye-opening experience but also a great learning experience too. Grasp that connection...I knew if he came through the door, I would know if it was going to be a good day or a bad day. That connection, if you can get that with a child, you know, that was what I got from it most, the role [TA], connection with children. But I feel that with the experience as a TA...it has helped me to develop as a teacher.
Mary found a primary teacher to be a ‘lovely lady - very straight, very clear in what she wanted and what she would expect from you’ which she liked and has taken this as a quality for herself. Louise also acquired personal qualities from a teacher, that she believes sustained her through her primary years and that she has emulated this professionalism in her current role:

There was one teacher who stuck out for me just because she was lovely and kind, and it is an ethos I have taken myself. I have taken the best bits of school and I thought if people are kind to you and see what you are good at and praise you for it you feel much better about yourself. She always made me feel that I was her favourite, but I think she did that for everyone and she was probably the only person in primary school that did that.

In his current role, Graham feels that working with TAs with no qualifications is acceptable as he views the qualities of nurturing and caring of children outweighs a TA qualification and refers to his mother:

I think the more experience you have it is better…I would personally have a TA who has no qualifications. For example, my mum left school with no qualifications, and I would rather have her in my classroom than me!

To illustrate the impact of her time as a mum and as a TA, Rose explains how she waited to become a teacher:

So many people have said, ‘don’t you wish you could have done it [teaching] years ago?’ I say, ‘no, I would not have been able to have done it years ago! I had no interest at 20 and would have been a hopeless teacher, whereas now that I have my own children and seen what happens in schools’…I am passionate and energetic!

Identifying personal qualities that a ‘good’ teacher should have by the teachers, promotes an image of their hoped-for self, and Dunkel & Anthis (2001) maintain that to have the hoped-for self in mind will allow a consistent approach towards a goal. Carol reflects on one of her primary school teachers who she returned to work with voluntarily: ‘A teacher that I went back and did the reading, she really stood out…she was always really supportive and bubbly…she definitely inspires!’
Summarising, as a TA the teachers were able to have opportunities to work with, and observe, a variety of roles in a school leading to them being able to replicate and reproduce the qualities of good practice that they had seen modelled. During their time as a TA they were given the opportunity to employ these qualities alongside their acquired knowledge and skills in order to progress learning for children before they took part in a teacher training programme. In addition to the pursuance of a goal, the provision of a service to others, Elder et al. (2003) point out, and to hold the values and personal qualities in our work lives, will influence our work experience.

To have the ability to do something well is a skill and each profession has a unique set of skills (Fitzgerald, 2020). The following section examines the skills the participants feel that they have secured to have the self-efficacy to become a teacher.

4.8 Skills

The teachers in this study reflected on the skills that they have developed during their TA role and their previous employment that they feel have been beneficial as they embarked on their teacher training and their role as a qualified teacher.

4.8.1 Skills gained working as a TA

Fortner et al. (2015) support the ‘exposure’ to the classroom as TAs, because this benefits a teacher's ‘performance and persistence’ (p. 6) as they go on to teach. Mark illustrates this point:

I am going to be quite controversial; I think my way of becoming a teacher in terms of life experience is important because I think because people who have never been in school before, put the brakes on and are gone and decide it is not for me. Whereas, if you have been in that environment and worked - you know. In terms of resilience and bouncing back yeah, they are qualities that you need as a teacher and if you have not had the opportunities to learn things, whether it be an easier or a hard way, you need that to do a degree.

Anne explained that her experience as a TA has given her the ability to deal with challenging situations in the classroom. The challenge for Anne as a TA was ‘getting
on with other TAs’ and she reflects on the skills she has gained and how grateful she was for that experience:

Everyone said I had the magic touch with Maisie. It was more of a challenge of managing her but not managing her when the teacher was not there, but this has probably put me in good stead in managing TAs as a teacher.

To work with TAs that were established within the school was also a challenge for Rose. Rose’s story reveals the time it took to build that relationship with her.

The lady [TA] had been there for 15 years and knew the school inside out and would not look me in the eye to start off with…it took a long time to build that relationship with her – she had a lot of experience, more than me.

Rose explains that she has come across relationships such as this, before and since, but has drawn on this experience to have a successful relationship with the long-standing TA she was working with at the time of interview.

Although Anne felt that it was possible to train as a teacher without TA experience, she felt that her TA experience benefitted her and gave her, as she describes, ‘a suit of armour going into it [teaching]’. She continues:

I think it could have been possible, but I just remember being on the PGCE programme and thinking – I am so glad that I have been in school and having that feeling that I have dipped my toe in the pond, or the water, a little bit. I spent the whole year thinking I am glad I have done my TA role.

Most of the teachers referred to their confidence that had been affected by their choices in life and their past experiences but felt that the role of TA had developed their confidence enough to make the move to become a teacher.

Carol felt the skills that she had acquired as a TA helped her to become more ‘resilient’ as you know and understand the commitments of the teaching role. She feels that ‘you are practically doing it as a TA’ and become proficient in working with children in intervention groups, seeing and understanding progression in learning.

On his return to England, Graham turned his attention to working with younger children as a sports coach in holiday clubs. Through his TA and HLTA role this
became a turning point (Elder et al., 2003; Hayler & Williams, 2016) where knowing how to implement different strategies, to make a difference, would set him on the path to become a primary teacher. He found it difficult to express how he felt:

I cannot put it into words, as soon as I started working with [younger] children, I just loved seeing them grow and progress - a cliché answer. Exciting to find different ways to get the best out of them.

Rory was fortunate in the acknowledgements that were made by the class teacher which made him feel that his contribution mattered, and this he had carried as a motivating factor with him into his teaching role for making a difference with children. Rory explained, ‘I had a little log and used smiley faces and stickers, really simple things that the teacher told me that made a big difference in the child’s journey’.

Joanne found the experience of working with others, in one of her roles as a TA and receiving the support on how to enhance the learning for children was ‘a huge support’ to her and ‘probably couldn’t have done it [TA role]’ without that engagement. After taking a few courses and helping with a mum and toddler group Louise felt she had the knowledge, skills, and qualities to go forward to volunteer as a TA. Reflecting on the skills that she learnt during her time as a volunteer TA, and employed TA, Mary believes that there can be barriers between teachers and TAs and that there is ‘a stopping point where TAs can go’ and felt that the skills she learnt were due to the ‘following other people’s instructions’.

After completing their degrees and drawing on their TA role, the participants were able to make choices and apply for a place on teacher training programme. To enter teacher training allowed the ‘trying on’ of an identity (Packard & Conway, 2006, p. 252), or what Ronfeldt & Grossmen (2008) term as, an engagement in their provisional selves in preparation for their role as a teacher. With the support of the university tutors and school mentors the teachers received 24 weeks in school as part of their programme.

Carol’s experience during teacher training in her first placement helped her to reflect on the skills and personal qualities that she had gained as a TA:
I would go the extra mile— I think this comes back to my TA role - so I was experienced in interventions and did lunch interventions. In a way I think I had a head start as I had been in a school environment but obviously, I had not been a teacher at the front. So, in one sense, I had a lot more experience. Some in my PG group had literally done two to three weeks in a school. Wow, I had seven years...

However, despite achieving a degree, a successful time as a TA, and acceptance on the PGCE primary education programme, Anne always believed that she did not deserve to be on the PGCE programme. Hamman et al. (2010) believe that self-concept and identity share features such as how we present ourselves to others.

Although the teachers drew on their role and experiences as a TA to highlight the skills that they had learnt, they also referred to the skills they had gained in their previous employment.

4.8.2 Skills gained in previous employments

It was noted that all the teachers’ previous employments (see Table 4.13) had revealed common features of roles that helped them to develop their skills of customer relations and interpersonal skills, both of which are important in the teaching profession. Other skills in their chosen jobs were also identified as relevant to a teacher’s identity, such as team player, listening and organisational skills (see Table 4.13).
Table 4.13: Previous employment before role as TA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Previous Employment</th>
<th>Skills Learnt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>communication, interpersonal, team player, listening, organisational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Maths &amp; English Centre</td>
<td>communication, interpersonal, team player, listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>Cover Supervisor Leisure Centre Entertainer</td>
<td>team player, planning, working with children, organisation, listening, communication, observational, interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Sales Assistant Legal Secretary</td>
<td>administrative, interpersonal, team player, listening, communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Care Assistant Au Pair Dental Surgery Organiser Clinical Coordinator</td>
<td>interpersonal, team player, organisational, planning, listening, communication, administrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Gym Instructor</td>
<td>interpersonal, planning, team player, communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Licensee Landlord</td>
<td>managerial, team player, organisational, planning, listening, communication, interpersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>Call Centre</td>
<td>communication, interpersonal, listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Recruitment Consultant Administrator</td>
<td>administrative, interpersonal, planning, communication, organisational, team player</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, pedagogical knowledge has been found for all the participants to be essential to the construction of a professional identity as a teacher. The skills to implement this knowledge have been acquired, and put into practice, during their time as a TA and in previous employment, and have been beneficial in how to address, for example, behaviour management issues, implementing intervention programmes for SEND and EAL children, working with others, and conducting assessment requirements.

The teachers’ stories have provided six components that have been shown to be essential to their sense of self, and how they have exercised agency in the construction of their professional identity. Instances of how they have demonstrated agentic behaviour in their employment trajectories are explored further in the following section.
4.9 Summary of the six components

Key events and key people, identified in the employment trajectories, reveal the experiences and relationships the teachers have had on their journey in becoming a teacher and in the construction of their identity as a professional. Their stories reveal how they have drawn on their experiences, their relationships, their qualifications and the knowledge, qualities and skills they have gained on their journey.

They have taken their experiences as a TA to illustrate how invaluable the time spent in this role, whether it was 11 months or 17 years, to develop their pedagogical knowledge, how to work with others, manage behaviour, become familiar with school routines, understand how schools work and acquire a sense of self in readiness for the challenges of a teacher training programme. The teachers’ reflections of their time as a TA reveal frustrations pinpointing the time they felt they had the capacity to seek a role that would ultimately give them the responsibility and care of their own class, as a teacher.

4.10 Agency

As a significant aspect of the life course (Elder, 1994; Damman & Henkin, 2017), agency has been found to be an important component of constructing the teachers’ professional identity. The use of agency, as viewed by Biesta et al. (2008), gave the individuals the ability to instigate directions in their lives. Buchanan (2015) has shown in her study that although individuals have the capacity to exercise agency, the timing can restrict the options available to them (Elder, 1994) and therefore, identity is constructed through the sources that are accessible at the time (Holland et al., 1998). This is evident in the teachers’ stories where experiences have been shown to either act as an enabling factor, or as a constraint, in their use of agency. However, the ultimate responsibility of exercising personal agency, is as Marshall (2005) proffers, remains with the self.

Self-initiated agentic behaviour was found to be either incidental, or dictated by others (Biesta, et al., 2008) and more likely to be exercised during a transition
(Marshall, 2005). Where the teachers made the decision to enrol on the PGCE programme, and make the transition from TA to teacher trainee, it required, what Elder et al. (2003) describe as, agency planfulness, defined by ‘self-confidence and intellectual investment’ (p. 11). Therefore, the ability to exercise agency at this time required the confidence to do so (Elder et al., 2003; Biesta et al., 2008). However, this study has shown that through planfulness, the exercise of agency is not always a result of a critical turning point or transition (Elder et al., 2003). Therefore, the use of agency and the construction of an identity as a teacher are, as Buchanan (2015) maintains, ‘intertwined’ (p. 705).

Motivation is key to making choices and a range of motivating factors can affect the way and timing in which agency can be exercised (Elder et al., 2003). The following section will consider the motivating factors that have been identified in the teachers’ stories.

4.1 Motivation

The construction of a professional identity (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Elder, 1994; Day et al., 2006a; Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Buchanan, 2015) is underpinned by motivating factors that can direct an individual’s pathway towards achieving a professional status (London, 1983). This study illustrates how motivating factors have played an important role in the success of the teachers achieving their goal of becoming a teacher.

Reinforced by the outcomes of Moran et al. (2010), the teachers in this study have demonstrated that motivating factors have been promoted by events and people in the construction of their professional identity. Events and people, as suggested by Evans & Biasin (2016) and Elder et al. (2003), can act as motivating factors, whether negative or positive, in the way in which individuals reflect, exercise agency, and change their career pathway. The results of these events can instigate motivating factors that can influence the way in which individuals then ‘construct a sense of self’ (Packard & Conway, 2006, p. 251), how they exercise agency and their thoughts of who they hope to become (Hamman et al., 2010). This is endorsed by Swain &
Hammond (2011, p. 599), who argue in their study of mature part-time students, that motivating factors are ‘inextricably linked’ to people’s identities.

Although all of the participants were able to identify a key motivating factor for them in their decision to become a teacher there were other motivating factors within their stories that gave an insight into the timing and the complexity of this decision. These motivating factors are presented in Table 4.14.

**Table 4.14: Identified motivating factors**

|                         | | Motivating Factors | | Extrinsic | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|-------------------|---|-----------|---|---|---|
|                         | | Making a difference | Self-fulfilment | Job-satisfaction | Purpose | Early Aspirations | Pleasing others | Money | Improvement in career | Responsibility | Status |
| Anne                    | | × | × | | | | | | | | | |
| Carol                   | | × | | | | | | × | × | | |
| Graham                  | | × | | | | | | | | | |
| Joanne                  | | × | × | | | | | | | × | |
| Louise                  | | × | × × | | | | | | | | |
| Mary                    | | × | × | | | | | | | × | |
| Mark                    | | × | | x | x | x | | | | | x |
| Rory                    | | × | | | | | | | | × | |
| Rose                    | | × | × | | | | | | × | | x |

Ten main motivating factors were identified from the interviews and participants’ timelines and are grouped as either intrinsic or extrinsic. I use these terms as a heuristic device and show that of the ten motivating factors, six were intrinsic. This study acknowledges that intrinsically motivated behaviour occurs where there is no ‘obvious external reward’ but is internally satisfying to the individual (Swain & Hammond, 2011), whereas extrinsically motivated behaviour will result in an external reward, such as financial gain. It is acknowledged that intrinsic and extrinsic are not mutually exclusive. For example, the achievement of self-fulfilment could be from a feeling of having a higher status. The number of motivating factors that were identified ranged from five (Mark) to one (Graham). Although of similar age, Mark and Graham’s lives have been very different. As previously explored, both have
experienced events that have affected their life course (Elder et al., 2003), but Graham’s story does not contain as many constraining events, or people, as Mark’s.

Intrinsic motivating factors were more prevalent than extrinsic, and that, although the sentiment was expressed in different ways, the overwhelming motivating factor was similar to the findings of Mclean et al. (2019), who found that, post one year of training, the underlying motivating factor in becoming a teacher, as perceived at the time of interview, was to make a difference to children, to ‘influence the next generation’ (p. 205). As these views are retrospective, time has lapsed between their role as TA to post one year of training, and therefore as established by Moran et al. (2010) perceptions can be different as a TA rather than as a qualified teacher.

Developing and building the confidence in children, to motivate them, to give them aspirations for the future, to encourage them to do well through their knowledge and skills, were some of the ways that the teachers’ referred to in their motivations to make a difference to children.

Rose explains how making a difference to children had further meaning for her, as she felt that making a difference to children, by becoming a teacher, also makes a difference to her own life. She illustrates this through her planned activity that unintentionally exposed the children to a new experience:

I have always wanted to make a difference to children, but also to make a difference to my own life…I love helping, I love when children achieve, I get a big buzz from that. And I thoroughly enjoy what I do and the feedback that I get from that is I am doing something well and I am having an impact on other people. I love little people who you can influence so much. I have taken them outside for walks and things as not all children have that opportunity but to be able to go into school and tell them about the big world out there – go out and enjoy it – especially the area we live in. I did the Iron Man and then took them to Crosby beach and I had all of these plans but they just played on the beach as some of them had never seen sand – they loved it, we took a ball and hoola hoops and they still talk about it, and they had to do a report and they said their best day was going to Crosby beach with Mrs Jones. I have opened their minds to more in life than Rochdale.

The planned trip became more than a resource to support the learning in the classroom by becoming a life experience for the children for the first time, which
would hopefully broaden their horizons and their perspective towards their future self (Whitty, 2002).

The influence of previous experience, as referred to by Holland et al. (1998), can shape views and identities. Rory draws on his observations of a teacher and his earlier interactions with children to illustrate how this has shaped the construction of his professional identity as a teacher, and why making a difference to children was the prime motivating factor for him.

I think the motivation for me to become a teacher was when I was volunteering in a school and there were these two children, they started in the October, they did not speak any English and by June time they had come on greatly and it was all down to a teacher and the school and I knew her - and I thought I wanted to be able to do that, I want to make children to become more confident in themselves...to help the children to become something.

Rory was able to acknowledge what he saw as life-changing results through the actions of the class teacher, and he wanted to emulate that in his own career.

The age range of the participants of this study was between 27 and 51 years of age and all would be classified as mature students at the time of training to be a teacher (Moran et al., 2010). However, the findings of this study conflicted with that of Moran et al. (2010) who highlighted that making a difference for children was a ‘significantly weaker’ motivation in mature trainee teachers than those under the age of 25 years.

Not only was this motivating factor in contrast to the findings of Moran et al. (2010), it was also in contrast to the findings of my IFS study. The TAs\(^{18}\) in my IFS study attributed their prime motivating factor in becoming a teacher as self-fulfilment for themselves in what they had achieved academically, by realising the hopes of their future self of becoming a teacher (Whitty, 2002). In this study only four out of the nine teachers mentioned self-fulfilment. However, their prime motivating factor of making a difference, rather than self-fulfilment, may reflect the teachers position at the time of interview as they were in the early stages of their career. The motivating

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\(^{18}\) who were in their third year of a four year BA (Hons) Primary Education with QTS programme
factor of self-fulfilment, cited by three of the four teachers, could be attributed to their age and the number of years before they started a degree programme.

The TAs in my IFS were still trainee teachers, whilst the teachers in this study were already qualified one year after completing their training. This suggests, as in the study by McLean et al. (2019), that the experience of being a teacher enhances, or even changes, any motivating factors that were held at the time of training and are now being contemplated retrospectively.

In addition to the acquisition of a degree, the successful completion of a PGCE and the achievement of the status of being a teacher later in life could explain their reason that self-fulfilment was a motivating factor for them.

Rose, who was 39, and who chose self-fulfilment as a motivating factor, did not fit the same profile as the others, in that she had only one year’s experience as a TA and, unlike the other three, had taken her degree straight after leaving school. Rose initially revealed ‘I was not the brightest in the class, I was in the middle, so I was left alone’ and later in her story reflecting on the reality of what she felt the teaching profession to be, she acknowledges monetary gain and defined self-fulfilment, after working for a charity, as a sense of intellectual achievement and self-satisfaction:

\[
\text{Going into teaching I knew the salary was going to be more than I had earned before ever, and I knew it wasn’t going to be an amazing salary, but I knew there was somewhere to go with it I knew there was a pay scale and you can move up it. Also I went into it with my eyes completely open that I would be working a lot of hours and the pay does not marry up with the number of hours but I knew that it was going to be a lot more than being a TA. Although it was a motivating factor it was more about self-satisfaction and achievement.}
\]

Louise was the only teacher who referred to job satisfaction in this study, but this was as a contributory factor for her motivation of wanting to make a difference. However, she elaborated on what she meant by job satisfaction and expressed that she just wanted to be appreciated wherever she ended up working: ‘because if I am not then I am not going to get my job satisfaction’. Woolhouse et al. (2009) do not define the term ‘job satisfaction’ but imply that, for the TAs in their study, it referred to enjoying and successfully meeting the expectations of their role as a TA.
Motivating factors, and the way in which we look to the future drawing on the past and present, influence the decisions that we make when opportunities are presented to us. As addressed by McLean et al. (2019), motivating factors change depending on what stage prospective and qualified teachers were at in their pathway towards becoming a teacher.

Pre-training students reported money as a motivating factor, mirrored by Moran et al. (2010) and the findings of my IFS, trainee teachers referred to a sense of intellectual achievement and personal fulfilment, whilst newly qualified teachers referred to ‘having a job that was enjoyable’ (p.205). It was evident from the teachers’ stories that motivating factors can be interconnected and sometimes overlap. For example, Mark’s relationship and childhood explain how his extrinsic motivating factors of money and status were linked to wanting to please others and to realise an early career aspiration.

Although all of the teachers referred to financial gain, only three viewed this as being a motivating factor. Carol, Mark and Rose specifically remarked that teaching would provide for them the chance of a different quality of life. The remaining five participants demonstrated an awareness that pay and conditions would be more preferable than those of a TA, as found by Smith (2018), but they declared it was not a major motivating factor.

Mary’s view is similar to the outcomes of Woolhouse et al.’s (2009) study where money had not featured as a motivating factor but was only as a consequence of gaining a qualification and new role. Her experience as a mother illustrates how, as Elder et al. (2003) propose, a transition can ‘open up opportunities for behaviour change’ (p. 8). Mary explained how she had nurtured her own children and felt it was time, as her children were now older, to move towards helping others. She explains: ‘In 2011 I had given to my own children, I felt that there was something still in me that I could give other children’.

Although Evans & Biasin (2016) found in their study of mature women, that pay for some of their participants with financial difficulties was a motivating factor, Mary’s
income, as a single parent, would have increased quite dramatically, but she did not equate money with teaching. She, Graham and Joanne had similar views on how teaching should be regarded. Mary simply stated, ‘teaching is not about money, it is about giving’. Goodson (2014) and Hamman et al. (2010) suggest that strong, and perhaps unexpected reflections such as this, are created through experiences and events that are encountered through the life course.

Although Anne and Carol had positive feedback from teachers, Joanne’s experience differed, as mentioned earlier, but she had not realised this as being a motivating factor until she had begun to write her timeline and revealed this in her story (Bamberg, 2006).

But that year, it was not until I wrote this timeline that I realised, but that year the teacher, who is now a head teacher, we clashed a bit – she is the only teacher I have not been able to get on with in all the years I have been in school she is the only one I have found difficult – she was very critical and when I stepped back she used to criticise my work…she came from a business background and she used to talk down to me. Not like a partnership – so I think then it was that year that I thought that I could do this, but I did not have a degree, so I had to get a degree, so I did an open university degree.

As explained by Schellings et al. (2010), and later by Evans & Biasin (2016), a negative interaction can hinder the construction of a professional identity, but it can also motivate an individual. Joanne found the last class teacher she had worked with had given her the impetus to consider a career as a teacher after, what she had felt was, unfair treatment. Although Woolhouse et al. (2009) found this kind of behaviour towards TAs, by teachers, demotivated TAs to study, or further their career, Joanne, in contrast, had taken this negativity and turned it into a positive outcome.

Many of the events that were identified as being motivating in the teachers’ trajectories for them to become teachers were unforeseen. Elder et al. (2003) describe how unforeseen events across the life course can influence life trajectories and become motivating factors. These were particularly poignant in the cases of Rose, Rory and Graham. Rose lost her job through redundancy, and Rory and
Graham both experienced events that changed their career pathways and their earlier career aspiration to teach in a secondary school.

Table 4.14 shows that only four of the participants, Mark, Louise, Mary and Joanne, had referred to increasing status as a motivating factor as they were not able to make decisions or be fully responsible for children’s learning as a TA.

Whilst five of the participants had secured a teaching position with full class responsibility, and therefore had achieved the status of a teacher, Mark was covering the school’s teacher’s PPA\(^\text{19}\) without a class of his own. Although he recognised that he was a qualified teacher he did not believe that he had accomplished the full status that defines a teacher. His views on his status are captured below:

> It is a weird one because I am a teacher… I am absolutely a teacher, but do I feel I am a teacher as a teacher should be? No, not yet as that will come when I get my own class and Mr Smith is on the door, then I will feel like a proper teacher.

Louise, Mary and Joanne had not yet secured a position at the time of interview and therefore, status continued to be a motivating factor for them.

### 4.12 Identity – possible selves

Underpinning any aim to achieve a goal is a belief that it can be accomplished and, the individual has the ability to envisage that goal (Biesta et al., 2008). For the teachers in this study, and for such a career, they needed to believe that to become a teacher was a possibility (Hamman et al. 2010) and that they were confident, and in a position, to be able to exercise agency. As Biesta et al. (2008) found, agency can be driven by personal educational beliefs and how individuals see themselves in their hoped-for, as Packard & Conway (2006) describe, future role.

This section will reflect on the participants’ hoped-for self, expected self, feared-for self, current self, and future self (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Packard & Conway, 2006)

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\(^{19}\) Planning, Preparation and Assessment (PPA) – time allocated to teachers during the school day
4.12.1 Hoped-for self

The term *hoped-for self* in my study refers to the early career aspirations that had been decided upon during the teachers’ childhoods.

Biesta et al. (2015) proffer that the influence of past and present experiences is evident in trajectories; therefore, this study reviews the teachers’ trajectories from their first career aspirations and concludes with their future career aspirations. The term aspiration, rather than ambition, has been used for this study and is defined as having a strong desire to achieve something that is of a higher status. The findings of Mortimer & Shanahan (2003) highlight, that, prior events cannot be detached from aspirations for the future.

As discussed previously, motivating factors are key to the realisation of an aspiration. Elder (1994), endorsed later by Leonard & Roberts (2014), specifies that early life choices have a place in future choices. However, the early career aspirations referred to by all of the teachers, only included one, by Mark, that specified ‘primary teacher’, as an aspiration. Similarly, in the study conducted by Trice (1991), men were more likely to have more career aspirations than women. Shown in Table 4.15, Carol was the only female teacher who offered two aspirations from her childhood, with three females unable to identify one, and the remaining two, Louise and Joanne, a single aspiration. Mark spoke about four aspirations whilst Graham and Rory discussed two.
Chambers et al. (2018) stipulate that the selection of an early career aspiration in primary age children is said to be mostly influenced by parents or friends and more likely to be, as Trice (1991) argues, akin to the parents’ occupations. Early choices can affect the life course later in life and early aspirations had no connection to their parents’ occupations, as Trice (1991) found in their study, but as Chambers et al. (2018) discovered the interviewees’ career options were supported and, or, influenced by parents, especially their mothers. Only three of the parents had been to university, Carol and Rose’s mothers and Louise’s father.

Although all of the men’s parents did not have degrees, Rory, Graham and Mark’s early career aspirations were to be employed in a professional capacity involving a degree qualification.

Carol’s interest in netball had influenced her choice of early career aspirations whilst she was at secondary school. Carol’s referral to two possible career aspirations, at the age of nine, became passing thoughts as she compared herself to her brother who had fulfilled his aspiration.

My brother always wanted to be a photographer and to be rich; and wanted to make money. I did think about being a midwife but the thought of blood and stuff turned me off the idea. So, then I was really struggling, it was more to do
with the sports side, it was about what can I do – I did not really have a specific job in mind. I originally looked at PE teaching, but secondary children terrified me.

Carol’s recollection of her early career aspirations indicates her lack of confidence which affects her ability to exercise agency. This resonates with the work of Gecas (2003) who argues that those who have low personal efficacy are unable to be successful in shaping their lives regarding their career and look elsewhere to explain this.

Although Table 4.15 shows no link between the teachers’ early career aspirations to that of their parents’ occupations, the influence of significant others (Haller & Woelfel, 1972) was revealed in some of their stories illuminating how their parents had influenced, whether indirectly or directly, their career pathways at different stages of the life course. The stories also show that these pathways were not always into teaching.

Leonard & Roberts (2014), drawing on Elder (1994), discuss how early choices can affect the life course in later life, and Graham’s two early career aspirations illustrate this concept. As Evans & Biasin (2016) suggest an aspiration needs to be present to exercise agency. Graham’s first aspiration to be a footballer was clearly lost through the choices he had made, whilst his second was rejected through experience:

My first aspiration was to be a footballer, my career aspiration 100%. I probably had the chance to be a footballer, but I was playing badminton at the same time, and I played at international level for Wales, but then I kind of let the football go even though I was playing football at county level. I did not enjoy badminton as much but, by the time I got back to football, it was too late.

Although Graham did not disclose his father’s occupation, he talked about the hopes his parents had for him from a young age and the reasons behind their concerns:

My parents have always been encouraging and my dad would take me anywhere. They always encouraged us academically as they wanted more for us than them because they left school at 15, they hated school… they supported me…they are really proud of me.
Although Anne said her parents were ‘not pushy’ her story reveals her mother’s concern after she left university with no direction about what she would like to do.

So, I went home in the October and I remember my mum saying to me ‘so what’s next, what do you want to do?’ And I was like ‘I don’t know’, but they didn’t really, ‘but you have just done your degree, surely you have thought about it’ and I did think about it but I couldn’t think about it because I had no idea – it did all stem from that lack of confidence I used to look at job advertisements and think I couldn’t do that! I am not applying for that, why would they want me…to do that job, that is how it always felt. It was frustrating for me as it was for my mum, she was never horrible about it she was always concerned, almost constantly.

Anne, Mary and Rose did not have an early career aspiration. However, Anne explains how ironic her childhood was:

Funnily enough, if I think about what I would play the most – I loved Barbies I was Queen of Barbies, but I always used to play school! And then that’s funny, but I never once said ‘I am going to be a teacher’. I used to play school, I used to make register books and my cousins used to live around the corner and we used to hold clubs in the Wendy House, which is kind of similar, but I never once said that’s what I want to be. I just think children say ‘I want to be a vet’ but it was never like that [for me].

Although Rose did not have any early ideas of what she wanted to be, or indeed, throughout her life course, her aspiration to teach came much later after becoming redundant. However, the possibility of teaching was present in three of the teachers’ aspirations, Rory, Graham and Carol, but was in the secondary sector, rather than primary. Mark was the only one of the nine participants who had mentioned being a primary teacher at a young age, but this was within a range of other aspirations.

A career as a vet was also raised by two of the teachers, Joanne and Rory, as an early aspiration. Unfortunately, Joanne was unable to fulfil this goal as the veterinary college she had hoped to go to would not accept applications from her location. Rory’s recollection came from conversations with his mother.

I remember when I was really younger that my mother used to tell me that I wanted to be a vet. But when I had done secondary school, I realised that the job was harder than what I thought it was. I knew that was not going to
happen. I always loved history a lot, so I thought I was going to be a history teacher in a secondary school.

Mark, as shown in his story, had four aspirations as a child, explained below, one of which he fulfilled and one that was perhaps chosen to illustrate the relationship with his sibling:

First of all, I wanted to be a bin man and my brother wanted to be a doctor so you can kind of see the difference between us. [Then] I wanted to be an air steward, then I wanted to be a nurse – my grandma always used to say to me you would be a fantastic nurse and then that always stuck in my head and then I wanted to be a teacher and that is what I have wanted for years and years and years.

Louise and Mark fulfilled their early career aspiration to work with children. However, the other participants’ primary indications of a career were not upheld due to their experiences, the events that took place, and the people that shaped their life course (Elder, 1994, Green, 2017).

The hoped-for self, as defined by Markus & Nurius (1986) and later by Cross & Markus (1991), is being able to visualise the position that you may wish to become, whilst the feared self is a place where individuals do not want to be.

4.12.2 Expected self

The trajectories show that the time at which the participants had decided that they could visualise themselves, or expected self, a term referred to by Packard & Conway (2006), as a teacher, came at different stages in their life course, and for most of the teachers it was because of a turning point in their lives (see Table 4.16).
Louise, Joanne and Mary had not achieved classroom teacher roles, however, they had all had different reactions to this position. Joanne was working as a supply teacher. After 17 years as a TA, she saw herself as a teacher and this expected self was maintained, despite personal obstacles, over the eight years whilst she studied to become a teacher. At the time of interview Mary was considering an MA and Louise had settled for a TA role. Unfortunately, the acquisition of the relevant qualifications and experience, a sub-theme, as suggested by Whitty (2002), for those who want to achieve their occupational dream, have still not enabled Louise to secure her expected self as a class teacher.

The arrival of a letter from school around the same time Rose was made redundant took her away from her role as an administrator and like Anne and Carol who, after a series of events and interventions by others, eventually realised her expected self on completion of the PGCE.

Elder (1994) noticed the importance of individual differences in the way in which individuals can interact with their personal environments, and Joanne’s story

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Table 4.16: *Expected selves – age of participants and gap between turning point to become a teacher and entry onto PGCE programme*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turning Point – Key Event/Key Person</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age on entry to PGCE</th>
<th>Gap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne  TA Role</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol  TA Role</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham  Holiday Club work</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne  TA Role</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise  TA Role</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary  Aunt</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark  Partner</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory  Voluntary work in a primary school</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose  Redundancy/National Policy</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
demonstrates her resilience and the way she has met and coped with her difficulties with a positive attitude.

Rory, like Graham, had expected to be a secondary teacher but his *expected* self as a primary teacher became a reality during his voluntary work in a primary school, this transition, only to be reaffirmed, after a doubt was raised by himself during his PGCE.

Mary had chosen to train as a teacher, to emulate the career pathway of her aunt. The relationship with her aunt within the complex environment that Mary lived in, ‘an estate where there was nothing around to aspire to’, helped to formulate an image of her *hoped-for self* (Packard & Conway, 2006):

> I had a good relationship with my aunty, my mum’s sister, she was probably, early on, and between when I was born, and up to [her death] - she did have a part to play. And I think that was where the identity of who I could be started to develop.

However, although the influence of her aunt continued after her aunt’s death when Mary was 22, the *expected* self of becoming a teacher did not transpire until she was 45 years old. Even though most of the teachers had considered the idea of becoming a teacher earlier than they could actually visualise themselves as one (Packard & Conway, 2006), the realisation of this dream, occurred in a relatively short time. Mark’s *expected* self as a teacher become a reality on the completion of his degree and TA role and continued during his training.

However, for three of the participants (see Table 4.16), the time between *expected-self* and their entry onto the PGCE programme was longer than the one – three years of the remaining teachers. Joanne and Louise decided to take a degree, then a PGCE, rather than take the three year QTS programme as they would only have one year without an income; the five year gap for Rory from seeing himself as a teacher to starting the PGCE programme was due to his own illness, his father’s illness and his decision to volunteer in Nepal.
4.12.3 Feared-for self

Individual fears for ourselves (Hamman et al. 2010; Packard & Conway, 2006) can continue through our life span (Cross & Marius, 1991). Table 4.17 shows the participants feared-for self, whether personal or career related.

Table 4.17: Feared-for self of the participants at the time of interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Feared-for self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>Continuing to work in retail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Health - knees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>Working in the UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>Nothing evident in story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>To continue to be a TA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>To be a TA/Supply Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Classless teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>Nothing evident in story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Nothing evident in story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five of the feared-for selves taken from the teacher’s trajectories were work related, one health related and the remaining three had no evident feared-for self.

Elder et al. (2003) stress the importance of timing and how events can shape the life course but may affect people in different ways. After 20 years of playing netball Carol’s motivation to apply for the PGCE course was halted by the need for her to have operations on both knees. Shortly afterwards, she broke up with her boyfriend of 10 years and although others may have found an event such as this inhibiting, this transition, or change, in personal status, described by Emler (2005) and Giele & Holst (2004), was significant in shaping her life course. This event became a turning point and accelerated her decision to apply for the PGCE course and saw it not only as motivating but, also a time of healing.
Then I split up with my boyfriend of 10 years and then started on the PG...I threw myself in but found myself in a career as well. It was a positive turn around, a motivator, a lot to cope with, [at the time] I did not realise the PG was my distraction, I threw myself into it.

However, the concern around her health remains with her: ‘I might need to have new knees...I have to be at least 40... [and they are] painful when it is winter’. Graham was quite adamant that he wanted to continue to work abroad and that returning to the UK to teach was something that he really did not want to do. Mark was very happy to teach in the UK but feared that, as a cover teacher, he would not gain a class of his own.

The stories relayed by Rory, Joanne and Rose give an indication as to why they did not have a feared-for self. It may be that they had experienced their feared-for selves; Rory through the loss of his father, Joanne through the illness her husband was experiencing and Rose, through the loss of her administration job.

Fears for future repercussions are evident at different points in the life course affected by constraints within the environment. These fears transpired as either personal or work-related but all of these, if realised, would affect the life course. This is shown in the reality of not achieving the expected-self (Packard & Conway, 2006) as it prompted different responses from those who had not secured a role as a class teacher steering them away from the role they had chosen to pursue. Unfortunately, the experience of their first year for Joanne, Mary and Louise as a qualified teacher has not been what they had expected.

Although they have all been employed as supply teachers their experience of this role has been different. Joanne has been very happy in this role, but Mary and Louise have not enjoyed it and therefore it has put them on a trajectory, possibly away from teaching (Wethington et al., 2003). Mary has reached back to the memory of her aunt and was considering, at the time of interview, the option of studying for an MA rather than continuing to look for a teaching position. It was clear that Louise’s feared-for self (Packard & Conway, 2006) appears to have become her current self and the reality of this was affecting her negatively. Settling for a TA role
was affecting her confidence and self-esteem quite strongly as she had said she was not sure whether to come to the interview or not.

Another driving factor for Anne to continue her pathway towards becoming a teacher was her feared-for self (Packard & Conway, 2006) was the thought of returning to her role in retail continued to motivate her. Anne questioned her role in her previous employment:

I used to think, why am I doing this job? This is not making an impact on anybody’s life – I am not doing anything that gives me a spark of enjoyment at all.

This revelation to herself was a turning point in seeking another direction in her life and ultimately, after time as a TA, in a professional role as a teacher. After three years in a job she disliked, Anne decided that she would like to work in education as her mother was a TA but she had no intentions of following in her mother’s footsteps:

So that was my plan, I will just get a little job in a school, an admin job or some kind of role in there – I never, ever thought about being a TA or thought about being a teacher, that would have never have come into my mind.

Elder et al. (2003) state that the examination of the life span over a long period of time assists in the understanding of how lifelong processes of social change can affect an individual’s development. Therefore, it is possible to speculate that the feared-for self was perhaps not evident in either of Joanne or Rose’s stories as they demonstrated a resilience, a quality of career identity (London, 1983), throughout. Despite the numerous personal setbacks that Joanne has experienced she has always managed to view a positive outlook.

4.12.4 Current self

The choices made by individuals affected by structural constraints shapes their life course (Elder et al., 2003). The previous employment of six of the teachers in this study is shown in Table 4.18.
All of the teachers who are employed have full-time positions with five in permanent contracts. Joanne is happy to be a supply teacher and at the time of the interview and explains that becoming a teacher was the ‘best thing’ that she had ever done and ‘should have done it years ago’ but she had children and other responsibilities that had delayed her action in completing her aspiration.
As the first person in his family to become a teacher, Rory explains how teaching in Doha was the right decision to move his career forward:

The best decision I have ever made to become a teacher, the best decision I have ever made to go to Doha, and I can’t wait to go back to meet my children, their different personalities and to be able to help them all.

After securing a maternity cover in one of her training schools, Anne felt she had, what Marshall (2005) describes the capacity to act and applied for a permanent teaching position. This was a final turning point in her trajectory so far, as she saw this as a way forward for the rest of working life, secure in the role as a class teacher.

Although Anne’s account supports that of McLean et al. (2019) of having a role that is enjoyable, after three years in retail, she saw the move to teacher as an improvement in the richness and quality of her life. Her story is explicit in how this has changed her life, how she feels it has given her self-fulfilment and how she felt she ‘had a purpose’. This extract defines what this means to her.

I can’t imagine myself doing anything else at the moment. I am almost relieved that I have finally found, it sounds silly, but I have found something that I enjoy so much. And even now I never wake up in the morning and think, ‘oh…work!’. I do a lot of work, but I do not feel like it is a burden, I feel it has enhanced me really, enhanced my life and how I view things.

Emirbayer & Mische (1998) see this type of configuration of influences from the past, looking towards the future, whilst engaging with the present, as agentic behaviour.

Carol feels that becoming a teacher was the ‘best decision’ she had ever made and felt that if she had gone to train after leaving school, she would never have chosen teaching: ‘the way I have done it definitely worked for me’.

When asked to define their current professional identity, the participants initially found this difficult. However, Rose, Mark and Anne were able to articulate their understanding of what they feel a teacher’s professional identity is and referred to
the prestige they feel it holds. Rose compares the teaching profession to another
profession:

And that [teacher role] comes with certain levels of gravitas with it. You are in
a certain level in society, professional identity...teaching is a rare profession
where people are called Mr and Mrs – other than the doctors where else
would you be called this? I think that holds a certain level of authority with it
and also we have all been to school and when I have parents coming in I think
back to, as a teacher you’re held with an esteem because it is Mr and Mrs.

Whilst the reflection of Rose on her professional identity highlights status as a key
element Mark acknowledges the accountability of a teacher:

A teacher’s professional identity is ... that you are shaping children’s lives and
being there for that guidance. But the teacher has that level of responsibility,
it stops with them.

However, Anne’s reflection was more of a practical nature but also drew on her TA
role:

I am never going to finish, it is a spiral that just keeps going, there is no end
result, it just keeps going even when we have finished the school year, it is
still going! It will be like this forever and I knew that before going into it.
There’s a lot in media about teachers leaving due to stress...but I think I have
that understanding of what I am going into. That is where, I think that [being a
TA] did help me a lot really.

At the end of the first year as a qualified teacher the teachers were at different
stages in their career. Anne feels that she could not: ‘imagine myself doing anything
else at the moment’ and expresses her delight in becoming a teacher:

I am almost relieved that I have finally found, it sounds silly, but I have found
something that I enjoy so much...I do a lot of work, but I do not feel like it is a
burden. I feel it has enhanced me really, enhanced my life and how I view
things.

Buchanan (2015) draws on the work of Mockler (2011) to explain that a professional
identity is formed and re-formed constantly over the course of a career and mediated
by a ‘complex interplay of personal, professional and political dimensions of teachers
lives’ (2011, p. 518). This was evident in Mark and Rory’s responses. Mark expresses:

I don’t think that point will ever come where you are a full teacher, or shouldn’t do, as things change – legislation and your development, it should never stop it should be continuous – I think for me the day that I am done – it is time to leave.

Similarly, Rory reflects:

I feel that I have only just got my first year of teaching over so there is a lot more to learn, a lot more for me to do to become a better teacher you know because you never finish becoming a better teacher. You are never at that point, this comes from talking to other teachers over the years. There is always something you can do to improve that learning, it is always a constant learning experience and that will never end.

Graham and Rory both work in Qatar. Graham has shown how he has grown during his first year and how his identity as a teacher continues to develop. He reflects: ‘My first year of teaching was good, but if you had asked me in my first term would I take on a subject I would say, “no way”’.

Joanne, Mary and Louise had not found employment as a full-time teacher but Joanne found that ‘working as a supply has given me self-belief, and I would never have thought I could walk into a school and deliver a lesson’.

The way in which individuals construct a sense of self influences the way they react within their environment (London, 1983; Elder et al, 2003; Packard & Conway, 2006). Although Louise was a qualified teacher with a first-class degree, she had been unable to secure a teaching role and remarked ‘I know that I won’t be a teacher’.

Anne’s concluding comments demonstrate her belief that the fact she is a teacher had still not quite been absorbed as she reflects:

Still very much a beginner, very much…I still think I am earning my professional identity. When I say that I am a teacher I still say it with a bit of a giggle, because I still often think, when the class are looking at me, I have these 30 sets of eyes just waiting… I do sometimes go ‘oh, gosh’ you know. It
still feels a little, you know that out of body experience – and I think ‘oh my
goodness’ I still have that feeling ‘I can’t believe that people are allowing me
to do this, Monday to Friday!’ I am very aware that I have still got a lot to
learn, I did not feel I was a teacher until I started my first job.

Although the teachers agreed, that to have QTS gives you the status of qualified
teacher, they felt that they were not fulfilling this role until they were employed, either
full time or part time, as a classroom teacher.

Although Hamman et al. (2010) suggest that individuals should seek goals that are
pertinent to themselves, Louise has been affected both personally and professionally
by her experiences during her first year as a qualified teacher. Her story gives a
deep insight into how her first year as a qualified teacher had made her become
disenchanted with the profession.

I wasn’t sure whether to come today because it is going all over it again. I do
a feel a failure. I have not got a teacher job\footnote{At this point in the conversation, I stopped the recording and we discussed this in more depth. A result of this was to offer support, something she had not engaged with offered for alumni. As a consequence of this conversation, I put her in touch with an agency where teachers tutor children on a one-to-one basis. This she followed up and was successful.}. I have got a job it is support job
a TA 2 job. I do know two people who have tried supply – but in my naivety I
just thought with my first-class degree and my PGCE distinction and my
experience it would be just down to interview. I did not think I would walk a job
but I thought I would get an interview. I went for all the maternity jobs, was
really positive up until Christmas and thought things would work out for the
best. Was going for jobs all over the place, it got to about June and I could
not take it anymore I could not put myself through it anymore, it is starting to
affect me and the people around me. I have a job as a TA and the governor
said that I had outshone everyone and did not understand why I had not gone
for a teaching job.

It was evident that the experiences the past and present informed the teachers
perception of their future self.

4.12.5 Future self

Looking to the future, the teachers were able to articulate where they would like to
see themselves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). The way in which individuals view
themselves will influence, and be influenced, by future goals (Haman et al, 2010) and although Mary acknowledges she is a teacher she would also like to be regarded as an academic:

I still struggle saying that I am a teacher as I am not stuck up, I am not stuck up, and I am not one of those people - I am one of those people who go in and work hard. At parents evening I do not tell the teachers I am a teacher as I find they will start changing the way they speak to you. I want to feel that I have developed a status in the academic world, so to speak, albeit at a middle level.

Mary’s view of herself as a qualified teacher gives an insight into her views of teachers, as a profession, which may be attributed to her childhood and poor experience at secondary school.

All of those who had gained employment as a teacher, either supply or full-time, were content to continue to be a classroom teacher in the short term, but Carol said she would like to work abroad. Graham, like Rory, wanted to continue in Qatar for now but his future, he revealed, would be down to his partner, who currently works in the UK.

Hamman et al. (2010) argue that to be able to visualise your future self will act as a stimulus on actions taken in the present. Rose was contemplating seeking a further teaching position with SEN children.

Seeing the future self (Hamman et al. 2010) can be instigated by not only those who are experienced in the profession, but those who are close. Anne’s boyfriend was key to suggesting the idea of becoming a teacher.

…my boyfriend said to me – and we were out one night and he said ‘you would make a really good primary school teacher’. And I laughed and said, ‘Me? I couldn’t be a primary school teacher, like what have 30 kids and do… I said ‘no that is too responsible and I couldn't, why would I do that?’ but I think he planted a little seed inside me that made me go, ‘well could I?’.

Table 4.19 shows that the trajectories of the nine teachers in this study concluded with an aspiration to become or continue to be a classroom teacher with only one,
Rose, having an aspiration to become a head teacher. Four of the teachers would like to lead a subject and three identified that they would be interested in a position on the senior management team. Although two were already working abroad, they wished to continue to do this and Carol also suggested that she would like to consider working abroad, in Dubai, where she had connections.

Table 4.19: The participants’ Future selves at the time of interview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Class Teacher</th>
<th>Head Teacher</th>
<th>Subject Lead</th>
<th>Deputy/Senior Leadership</th>
<th>Work Abroad</th>
<th>MA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graham</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rory</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The construction of Graham’s life course through the actions and choices he has made has moved him away from his first expected self (Packard & Conway, 2006) as a secondary teacher to a position where he sees opportunities for himself in the future (Hamman et al., 2010).

The opportunity to reflect allowed Joanne to appreciate that a negative interaction with another person, a significant other (Haller & Woelfel, 1972) who was in a position of authority over Joanne, could result in a good outcome. Through this critical reflection of herself (Amott, 2018) she began to reveal an understanding of her future self as a teacher. Although discouraged, both Mark and Louise had not discounted at some point in the future of being a class teacher.
Rory wishes to continue to teach abroad, whether it is in the Middle East or China, and personally he hopes to take his relationship with his girlfriend further. He shared the following thought:

I will definitely be teaching but don’t see myself teaching in the UK anytime soon. I just love it and am so happy for it and I coming up to 27 and I see myself at least for the next years over there [Middle East], but you never know what is going to happen in the future.

4.13 Discussion

It has been established in this study that employment trajectories are created through a series of roles and experiences (Elder et al., 2003), creating transitions and turning points through interactions with key events and key people, and these can alter the direction of their trajectory, motivate, or demotivate, and affect agency at both personal and professional levels. This study found that although the employment trajectories of the teachers were not identical, they were similar and shared common themes.

4.14 Discussion on Professional identity

Identities have been found to be constructed by drawing on the past, the present and looking towards the future (Hamman et al., 2010). During these periods, the construction of an identity and the exercise of agency (Elder, 1994) were found to be influenced by events, people, social factors, contextual factors, socio-contextual factors, and structures such as gender, ethnicity, and age. These are all embodied in the six components of experiences, relationships, skills, knowledge, qualifications, personal qualities, and influenced by their motivations and their perceived possible selves.

Teachers, who have been TAs, draw on these six components to be able to be motivated, have a sense of one self, and perform agentic behaviour in the construction of their identity as a professional.
Markus & Nurius (1986) have long established that the way in which we view ourselves and having a sense of one's self (Biesta et al., 2008) throughout the life course are integral in the construction of our identity. To continue to construct their identity as a teacher, it was found that self-efficacy was essential. It was not only their sense of self, but also the way in which they defined themselves to others (Buchanan, 2015) that formed their identity as a teacher. It was also found that the teachers could be an agent in difficult circumstances as well as good, but that they still required the capacity to act, determined by their self-efficacy.

Buchanan (2015) maintains that ‘the process of developing a teacher identity begins long before a new teacher’ (p. 702) enters teacher training and Elder et al. (2003) stress how the timing of when an event occurs can affect the way in which we react to them and shape our life course, and therefore our identity. This was evident in the experiences, including those that occurred earlier in their lives, (Elder et al., 2003; McLeod & Almazan, 2003) as they were seen to affect the way in which the teachers thought and acted. All of the participants reflected on their school experiences, and, for some, the memories remained and were influential in the way they presented themselves. These experiences, whether they were negative or positive (Evans & Biasin, 2016), have been found, for some, to have had a ‘profound effect’ (McLeod & Almazan, 2003, p.395), becoming integral in the construction of their professional identity.

Interests developed during the school years affected the career trajectories of some of the teachers. Drama, taken at high school, influenced Anne to initially pursue a career in the theatre, whilst Rory and Graham chose a career in secondary education identifying history and sport, respectively, as their main subjects. Dunkel & Anthis (2001) suggest, that interests such as these, that do not materialise as careers, are a form of identity exploration and are part of the process required in the formation of an identity.

All of the teachers found their time as a TA essential in the construction of their identity as a teacher. They drew from their TA and life experiences demonstrating resilience in the face of obstacles that either delayed or threatened their aim to become a teacher.
As Jonker et al. (2018) argue, the construction of an identity is not only related to professional development but also to personal and the two, this study found, cannot be separated as turning points within their personal development affected the direction their professional trajectory took.

Although not a focus of this study it was apparent that each teacher had shown some resilience in their pursuit of a professional identity as a teacher. Life events and interactions with people, whether short encounters or long-standing relationships posed circumstances, that posed a threat to their continuation on their planned employment trajectory. All of the teachers overcame these obstacles to become a qualified teacher.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

This chapter will offer an overview of the study, an evaluation of the two methods used and the hybrid thematic analysis approach employed, before returning to each research question to discuss how, and to what extent, the aims of the study have been met. The chapter will then present eight key findings that I have identified from the research before giving an outline of how I believe that this thesis has made a distinctive contribution to knowledge in the field of professional identity. After considering the implications of the findings, for my personal and professional practice, the chapter will conclude with an account of the areas of research, and development of professional practice, that I would like to explore further, given the opportunity.

5.1 Overview of Study

This study has taken a constructivist approach using a thematic analysis method to explore the employment trajectories of TAs who have become teachers with an aim to identifying the key events and people that have created transitions and turning points that have been influential in the construction of their professional identity as a teacher. I have drawn on the theories of the life course (Elder, 1994) and possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986) to delineate and interrogate the key events, key people, and exercise of agency that have contributed to the construction of a professional identity.

5.2 Reflections of the methods used to generate data

The aim of this study was to access the participants’ stories of how they had constructed their identity as a teacher using the life course (Elder, 1994) and possible selves theories (Markus & Nurius, 1986) as a theoretical framework. Life histories methods have long been valued to source rich data in the lives of teachers (Goodson, 2014) and are viewed as a ‘suitable tool’ Verd & López, 2011, p. 3) when applying a life course perspective. The use of life histories methods in this study have enabled the identification of key events, key people, transitions and turning points, or significant moments, in the teacher’s personal and work lives, detailing the
resources available to them at the time and how they have exercised agency throughout their employment trajectory.

The combination of the two methods, the timeline and the semi-structured interview, were designed to access the told story from the lived life (Goodson & Sikes, 2001; Wengraf, 2004).

After offering a suggested, but not constraining, template for the timeline with an outline of the study to the participants they were asked to prepare their timeline before the interview. Each of the participants, apart from Carol who had not prepared one beforehand, talked through their timeline, which was a useful scaffold (Amott, 2018) and acted as a vehicle for the dialogue. This, and my relationship with the teachers, assisted in maintaining a conversational tone (Denicolo et al., 2016) throughout the meeting and it was easy to be interested in their stories.

A further focus of this study was to identify transitions and turning points through key events and people.

Although Carol had not prepared her timeline, her story, accessed through the application of a semi-structured interview, generated rich data. However, her interview was the shortest and the hardest to conduct. Initially, her responses were short and rushed, discussing going to university within the fourth sentence of the interview. Therefore, to ensure I was able to generate the data required to respond to the research questions I needed to prompt more than in the other interviews.

As Carol did not prepare a timeline for the meeting, and was unable to complete one during our meeting, her results are not included in the following analysis of the timeline and semi-structured interviews.

Although the semi-structured interviews revealed key events that were not on the timeline, the timeline was productive in identifying the key events on the teachers’ life course. However, the semi-structured interview was more inclined to pinpoint key people, who were instrumental in formulating their personal and professional identities. In the case of Graham, this was all of them.
This shows that, for this study, the use of semi-structured interviews, as suggested by Packard & Conway (2006), encouraged participants to engage further in the generation of data and provides, as Whitty (2002) found, a richer and more in-depth image of how an identity is constructed. More importantly, although the timelines offered limited detail, they did give an outline of the teachers’ personal and employment trajectory and assisted in the generation of rich data through the semi-structured interview (Amott, 2018). The life histories methods provided a ‘practical and holistic methodological approach’ (Atkinson, 2007, p. 24) in the examination of the teachers’ stories and developed the small story into the big story (Bamberg, 2006).

5.3 The hybrid thematic approach

The hybrid thematic approach allowed for the life course and possible selves theory to work in conjunction with inductive coding to produce nine family codes, to successfully present the findings of this study of how a professional identity as a teacher is constructed by those who have once been TAs. Through the application of both deductive and inductive coding this study has shown that the employment of a theoretical framework utilising the deductive concepts of time, agency, linked lives, life span, time and place, and possible selves, enhances and contributes to the traditional methods of inductive coding in the production of rich data.

The following chapter will draw together the findings of this study and will outline eight key findings from this thesis before discussing contributions to the field, implications for personal and professional practice and opportunities for personal future research.

5.4 Returning to my Research Questions

RQ 1: What were the teaching assistants’ motivating factors for becoming a teacher?

As the life course is concerned with the interaction between the social worlds that are within the family, co-workers and friends (Elder, 1994), key events, key people,
motivating factors and the exercise of agency are considered by this study to be important in the construction of the participants’ professional identity as a teacher. This study acknowledges the role of motivating factors created by turning points and underpinned how, and why, TAs progressed towards their possible selves (Packard & Conway, 2006).

For a number of the teachers the sense of self-fulfilment in working towards their goal was, for some, a motivating factor as was the desire for some to be responsible and accountable for children’s progression of learning. Status, and an increase in salary, although not a prime motivating factor, was referred to by some of the teachers as part of their motivation.

The research found that TAs were specifically intrinsically motivated to become a teacher in order to make a difference to the lives of children, and that intrinsic motivating factors were more prevalent than extrinsic ones.

**RQ 2: What have been the main transitions and turning points throughout the participants’ trajectories?**

This study recognises that, through transitions, and those that have become turning points, key events and people were influential on the teachers sense of self and their use of agency. Turning points were found to be constructed from a transition that was created through a key event, or an interaction with a key person or a combination of both and was not always evident at the time of occurrence.

This study has found that transitions and turning points were rooted in experiences in education, family life and their work life. Both primary and secondary schools were referred to as a time where transitions were first apparent, where both negative and positive experiences resulted in positive outcomes in the way in which they currently interact with children and make choices as a teacher.

For most of the participants the acquisition of a degree was a significant transition giving them a sense of achievement and the capacity to choose a professional pathway. Employment that either ended abruptly, or did not result in job satisfaction,
became a significant turning point in the way in which employment trajectories developed. Opportunities to volunteer in school were also found to be a main turning point, as this experience exposed the teachers to an environment, that for some, they had not considered entering.

Transitions and turning points were also revealed through personal revelations of close relationships and events at home and school. While most experiences were positive and resulted in a turning point, some of the teachers highlighted the challenges and difficulties these relationships have entailed.

Although the study has revealed the main transitions and turning points for the teachers, none of the teachers, before becoming a TA, had chosen their previous employment in order to specifically lead them to a career in teaching and only one had an aspiration to be a primary teacher at a young age. Individually, the transitions and turning points they have experienced have collectively contributed to the direction in which their employment trajectory has taken.

*RQ 3: How are teachers, who have been former teaching assistants, constructing their professional identities, and what have been the main influences?*

This study confirmed that identity is a process and a product that is unstable and shifting (Hall, 1992) influenced by ‘past experiences, shaped by current circumstances, constantly in motion, developing as teachers engage’ within the contexts in which they are contained (Buchanan, 2015, p. 704). A key part in becoming an effective teacher entails the ability to embrace the challenges that a classroom can bring and navigating the school and policy landscapes (Hong et al. 2018). Reeves (2018) believes that the construction of a teacher’s identity begins during their teacher training; however, for the TAs that chose to become teachers in this study, findings show that the construction of their professional identity began long before their PGCE course.

The main influences in the construction of their professional identity came from the teachers’ experiences and relationships that were identified on their trajectories throughout the life course. These influenced the decision of the teachers to become
a TA and during their time in this role, they were influenced by the teachers and TAs they worked with generally through encouragement support and, occasionally, through criticism.

This study identified six components: experiences, relationships, skills, knowledge, qualifications, and personal qualities, that underpinned and influenced the construction of their professional identity. The participants, as TAs, self-belief to become a teacher, their identity, their motivation, and their use of agency was shaped by their understanding of their current self, their hoped-for self, influenced by their feared-for self and motivated by their future self.

5.5 Key Findings

I suggest that this study has eight key findings:

1. TAs constructing a professional identity as a teacher require self-efficacy and a supporting context in which to exercise agency. Self-efficacy of TAs, who wish to become teachers, is reliant on six components: experiences, relationships, skills, knowledge, qualifications and personal qualities. Two of these components, experiences and relationships, are created through key events and key people. The timing of events and interactions with people provides a context where TAs draw on their sense of self to determine how, and if, agency is performed.

2. Elements of a TA’s and a teacher’s identity termed as current self, hoped-for self, expected self, feared-for self and future self, influence the way in which agency is exercised and the way in which events and people are responded to. TAs are motivated to search for the possible self through a representation of the current self, drawing on hopes and fears, and influenced by the past.

3. Turning points were identified as a significant change in the TAs’ employment trajectories and were useful in identifying the key events and key people that affected their career pathway. Turning points were found to be created
through one or more key events, through the interaction with one person, or a number of key people, or a combination of both event(s) and people.

4. In the formation of their professional identity as a teacher, the TAs draw on early experiences which have become entrenched in their current practice.

5. Motivating factors are essential in the construction of a professional identity and are as a result of key events or interactions with key people. Intrinsic motivating factors are more prevalent than extrinsic. All of the teachers identified that, as a TA, making a difference to the lives of children was their key motivating factor in becoming a teacher and that monetary gain was considered to be of low importance.

6. The participants experienced two types of relationships; long term relationships associated with family and partners and short-term working associations with TAs, teachers, head teachers or mentors. Both types of relationships showed the potential to be significant in the direction of a career pathway.

7. The methodological benefits of using the combination of two methods, a timeline and semi-structured interviews, provided rich data and an insight into the stories of the participants. The timeline acted as a support for the semi-structured interview developing the lived story to the told story, identifying transitions and turning points in the lives of the TAs who chose to become teachers.

8. TAs draw on their experience as a TA to provide a foundation on which to build. They acknowledge that the acquisition of skills, an understanding of a school environment and a realistic understanding of the role of a teacher, through their observations, compared to those who enter teacher training without experience, are all advantages when entering a teacher training programme and their first teaching role.
5.6 Contribution to Knowledge and Field

Drawing on the self-efficacy gained from the six components identified by this study, the teachers have been motivated and enabled to exercise agency in the construction of their professional identity.

This section will discuss how this thesis contributes to life course theory and the field of professional identity. Before outlining the original contribution to new knowledge, the findings of this study, and how it adds to the current surrounding literature within that field, will be discussed.

My findings generally support the work of Woolhouse et al. (2009) and McLean (2019), as the TAs in this study found working with children, and making a difference to their lives, are more important than financial gain. This thesis also found, as highlighted by Hamman et al. (2010), Schellings et al. (2010), Goodson (2014) and Buchanan (2015), that identity is influenced by context and is always changing. In addition to this, as found by Biesta et al. (2015), the teachers in this study exercised agency by drawing on the educational beliefs and attributes they developed as a TA.

However, the findings of this study disagree with the work of Dunne et al.’s (2008a) research, as the TAs in this study positioned themselves as learners and drew on their life experiences to enhance their pathway. The feelings of guilt, due to time spent away from family studying, found in the research of Dunne et al. (2008a), were not evident in the stories of the TAs in this thesis. I argue that life experiences, combined with their experience as a TA, confirmed by the work of Fortner et al. (2015) and Hood (2016), were conducive and productive in the construction of their professional identity and developed their resilience to enter a profession that has a generally poor attrition rate.

To access how the construction of a professional identity occurs, this thesis found, as in the work of Packard & Conway (2006), Woolhouse et al. (2009) and Goodson (2014), that the use of a life histories methodology allowed participants’ stories to unfold and be related to context through key events and key people.
I argue that this thesis makes five original contributions to the knowledge in the field of professional identity in the following ways:

- Although similarities, such as identities being influenced by context, confidence in the classroom by drawing on previous experiences, and being motivated by the desire to make a difference to the lives of children, have been found in studies that have examined the construction of a professional identity for new teachers, to my knowledge there are no studies to date that consider the transition of primary TAs to teachers, or which seeks a greater understanding of who they are, and which explores the construction of their identities. This is despite an acknowledgement by the government (DfE, 2019), and research by Hood (2016), that TAs can be a resource to draw on to address the shortage of teachers and could make a distinctive and vital contribution to the profession and children’s learning and development.

- This thesis gives a distinct insight and presents a nuanced picture of how the construction of a professional identity as a teacher for the nine participants, who were previously TAs, in this study is complex, drawing on the six components of experiences, relationships, skills, knowledge, qualifications and qualities. With recruitment targets met in 2020 – 2021 (Moss et al., 2021) there is still a shortfall in the number of teachers in the UK. It is known that becoming a teacher can be a complex and vulnerable process of identities in motion, and that experiences in an ever-changing landscape can be unsettling and conflictive (Ó Gallchóir, 2018; Dugas, 2021). With the frequent changes in policy, both national and local, the study argues that TAs who have become teachers have shown that they can have an advantage over those who have not had the experience of being a TA as, through the observation of, and the engagement with, practising teachers, they are likely to have more knowledge and a deeper understanding of the role, the tensions, and the environment that they are choosing to enter than those who have chosen other routes.

- Elder et al. (2003) promote the five principles of the life course as guidance for the social sciences. However, the principle of linked lives does not highlight sufficiently the critical role of relationships within the family and work
environments that have in determining the life course of individuals. This study places significant others at the centre of the life course; it has found that key people can be important influencers in the life course and the development of a professional identity, and that relationships, both new and old, can be significant in the creation of turning points and the direction in which an employment trajectory may take.

• Recent research (Beijaard et al., 2004; Hamman et al., 2010) has concentrated on who new teachers are, rather than on what they know, as identified by Dugas (2020) in earlier identity research. This study draws both aspects together, it shows where these teachers have come from; who they are; what values they hold; what their views are; and what they know; what their aspirations are as they have constructed their professional identity.

Implications of these findings are not only applicable to the UK but can be applied internationally and highlight several issues and themes that are likely to be particularly common for TAs working throughout the world.
References


Barrett, A., Kajamaa, A. & Johnston, J. (2020). ‘How to be reflexive when conducting qualitative research’, *The Clinical Teacher*. 17 (1), 9 – 12


Reeves, J. (2018). ‘Teacher Identity’, Faculty Publications: Department of Teaching, Learning and Teacher Education, University of Nebraska


Appendix
A: Information sheet

The construction of a professional identity: from Teaching Assistant to Teacher

Who is conducting the research?

My name is Wendy Dixon and I am inviting you to take part in my research project ‘The construction of a professional identity: from Teaching Assistant to Teacher’.

Please take your time to read through this information sheet which is designed to answer any questions that you may have about this research. However, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Why am I doing this research?

The White Paper ‘Educational Excellence Everywhere’ (2016) identified a shortage of teachers in the UK and the number of teachers leaving the profession each year equals the number of teachers entering. Research in the USA (Fortner et al., 2015) has shown that the retention of teachers who have been formerly teaching assistants is much higher than that of teachers who have no experience as a teaching assistant. This research aims to explore how teaching assistants who have taken a PGCE construct an identity as a teacher. The results of this study will provide information for teaching assistants, head teachers and ITE providers and will hopefully encourage more teaching assistants to become teachers, encourage head teachers to recognise the potential in teaching assistants and encourage providers of ITE more opportunities for teaching assistants to make the transition to teacher.

Why am I being invited to take part?

You have been invited to take part as you have made the decision at some point in your life to become a teacher and enrolled on the PGCE course to achieve this goal. Your reflections on this journey will be helpful to me in identifying the events and people who have influenced your decision but also in how you are constructing a new identity as a primary teacher.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

You will be invited to meet with me at a convenient time and place to yourself. You will be given a single question to reflect on and then asked to complete a Life History timeline with this question in mind. Following this you will then be interviewed by myself. On completion of this interview your responses and reflections will be transcribed. If it is felt as a requirement, you may be invited for a further interview to respond to questions that may arise from the transcriptions.
Will anyone know I have been involved?
Your responses will be used and analysed to be presented as findings and you will be given access to a brief overview of these. I can reassure you that your name will not be used and strict confidentiality guidelines will be adhered to.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?
No problems are envisaged and a reassurance that your participation in this research will not have any adverse effect on your role in school.

What will happen to the findings of the research?
There is an intention to publish the findings of this study and will be presented at a number of conferences in the UK. All data will be kept secure and held by UCL in encrypted form.

Do I have to take part?
There is no obligation to take part and there will be no consequences if you wish to withdraw during the project.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this information sheet.
If you would like to be involved, please complete the consent form and return to Wendy Dixon by 8th July 2019.
If you have any further questions before you decide whether to take part, you can contact me on:

Local Data Protection Privacy Notice:
The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study. Further information on how UCL uses participant information can be found in our ‘general’ privacy notice:

For participants in research studies, click here

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general' privacy notices.

The lawful basis that will be used to process your personal data is ‘Public task’ for personal data.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project. If we are able to anonymise or pseudonymise the personal data you provide we will undertake this, and will endeavour to minimise the processing of personal data wherever possible.
If you are concerned about how your personal data is being processed, or if you would like to contact us about your rights, please contact UCL in the first instance at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the UCL IOE Research Ethics Committee Number: Z6364106 2019 05 142
The construction of a professional identity: from Teaching Assistant to Teacher

Start and end dates: June 2019 – August 2020

If you are happy to participate, please complete this consent form and return to Wendy Dixon by 8th July

I have read and understood the information leaflet about the research

I agree to be interviewed as outlined on the information sheet.

I am happy for my interview to be audio recorded.

I understand that if any of my words are used in reports or presentations they will not be attributed to me and that anonymity will be maintained.

I understand that I can withdraw from the project at any time, and that if I choose to do this, any data I have contributed will not be used.

I understand that I can contact Wendy Dixon at any time with regard to the study.

I understand that the results may be shared with the academic community, UCL and other interested parties.

I understand the aims of this research

Name ______________________ Email
Signed __________________________
Date_____________________
Researcher’s name Wendy Dixon Signed

Yes  No
### C: Biographical form

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**Teaching Assistant Information**

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<td>Number of hours employed</td>
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**School Name**

| Approx number on roll |  |
| Infant/ Junior/Primary |  |

| Main Previous Employment (s) |  |
| Qualifications – including A levels, degree and PGCE |  |

**Primary Teacher Information**

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D: Interview questions

School Experience

1. What was your experience of school like? (primary and secondary?). What were your most favourite and least favourite subjects at school? Did you have a favourite teacher? If so, why?

2. What were your first career aspirations and at what age, if you remember, did you think about what you would like to be when you grew up?

3. Did you receive Career Guidance at school? If so, what was their advice? Did you follow it?

Becoming a TA

4. At what point in your life did you choose to become a Teaching Assistant? How old were you?

5. Were there any specific event or series of events, or perhaps people, that influenced your decision? Did you discuss this with anyone? What were your choices at the time of your decision? What enabled you to make this decision?

6. What did you enjoy about your role as a Teaching Assistant? What was your motivation in becoming a teacher? Were you faced with any challenges during your time as a Teaching Assistant?

Becoming a Teacher

7. I see you were a Teaching Assistant for XX years; what was it that made you consider becoming a teacher? Was it something you had considered before?

8. Were there any specific event or series of events, or perhaps people, that influenced your decision? Did you discuss this with anyone? What were your choices at the time of your decision? What enabled you to make this decision?

9. When did you decide that perhaps teaching may be an option? Did anyone suggest to you that you should be a teacher?

10. At what point did you take action to make this move? What did you do?

11. What did you do initially to help you to find out about becoming a teacher?
12. What has been the motivation for you to make that journey from Teaching Assistant to Teacher? Pause. Have financial circumstances had any influence? Personal satisfaction? Status?

13. How do you feel now about your decision to become a teacher?

14. What qualifications, experiences, qualities or skills do you feel you have gained in your role in school as a TA that has been useful to you when you were a trainee teacher and teacher?

15. What are your current roles and duties? How do you feel about your role? As a trainee teacher? As a teacher?

16. How have your relationships within school changed since you have become a teacher? Pause. What were your relationships like with other members of staff in school as a Teaching Assistant/Trainee Teacher/Teacher? (Pupils? Head teacher? Teaching Assistants? Teachers?)

17. How do you see the differences between when you were a teaching assistant and now that you are a teacher? Pause. Could you explain this in regard to the responsibilities you hold now to those you held as a Teaching Assistant? Your workload? Subject knowledge? Behaviour management?

18. Do you feel friends, family, colleagues (teachers and teaching assistants) view you differently since you became a teacher? If so, in what kind of ways?

19. Up to now what differences have you noticed for you at work, at home, in your social life and your personal life (me-time)?

20. Referring to your timeline why were these key events/key persons?

Possible Selves

21. What career aspiration(s) do you have now that you have come to the end of your NQT year? Where do you see yourself in 5 years both personally and professionally?

22. If you reflect back could you see your future self? Both professional and personal?

Identity

23. Now that you have completed your first year in teaching how would you describe your identity? Both professional and personal? In other words, who do you feel you are? What kind of person are you? How would you describe yourself? What are your best and worst characteristics?
24. The literature talks about ‘a teachers’ professional identity’, what do you think this means?

25. What are the characteristics of a ‘good’ teacher? *Pause – if no response –* expert communicator, superior listening skills, knowledge and passion for teaching, approachability, strong work ethic.

26. Is there a point where you see a teacher’s identity becoming fixed? Or is it a work in progress?

27. What characteristics would a teaching assistant have? Do you see these as different to those of a teacher?

28. Do you think teachers’ professional identities are something that is given to them when they receive QTS or do you think that is a work in progress?

29. Regarding both your personal and professional life do you feel that you have had control, in particular with your decisions to become a Teaching Assistant and then a Teacher? Or do you feel that others have greatly influenced your decisions?

30. Do you prefer being a teacher or a teaching assistant?
### Table: E: a priori, a posteriori and Family Codes

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