Chapter Nine – A professional compass

If teachers can be seen as working in professional knowledge landscapes, then they need a professional compass to navigate those landscapes. In this book, the argument has been made that teachers' values, particularly those that have come from their subject identity, are a key part of that professional compass. When faced with challenges, from their school context and broader educational reforms, teachers can use this professional compass to guide them in how they respond. But the professional compass is just a metaphor for how and why teachers behave in the way they do. In this chapter, I outline why this is a useful idea for understanding teachers' personal and emotional lives, and in understanding teacher professionalism and the politics that surround teachers' work, but also for thinking about teacher development. I return to some of the themes and ideas explored throughout this book, in particular the interplay between contexts and identities, and the idea of pedagogical content knowledge and recontextualisation, and illustrate why taking a values perspective can lead to a deeper understanding of teachers' work.

The argument developed throughout this book has been that teacher subject identity can be an important part of professional identity and a powerful influence on professional practice. The data taken from a range of geography teachers illustrate the unique and individual ways that teachers can recount and use their subject identity, and the differing degrees to which it can influence their practice. The importance of subject identity is that it emphasises the moral and ethical dimensions of a teacher's work. Subject identity is part of professional identity, and can also be linked to personal identity. The metaphor of a professional compass can help to illustrate how this can influence professional practice.

The metaphor of a professional compass is similar to the popular metaphor of a moral compass. The function of a compass is to point the user towards north. The compass user can then use this sense of direction to orientate themselves: to determine their current location, identify their destination and decide how to navigate the route between. The compass does not prescribe which route is to be taken nor where the final destination is likely to be. To be used effectively, the compass also requires an accurate map, preferably with some defining landmarks. To relate this metaphor to a teaching context, a professional compass will not necessarily determine which decisions the teacher should make, the desired learning outcomes or the curriculum goals they are working towards. The teacher will need to understand their own particular professional landscapes, but are still required to determine the directions in which they need to travel.

Teacher's professional and personal identities

To understand how the professional compass works, it has to be seen within the context of identity and identity formation. Since the 1980s there has been a growth of interest in identity studies from a range of disciplinary fields. Combining the findings from psychology, philosophy, anthropological (Beauchamp & Thomas 2009) and socio-and cultural studies has yielded a complex but valuable understanding of how teachers make sense of their professional work and practice.

One of the key themes to emerge from the literature on teachers' identity is the importance of a teacher's concept of themselves. Firstly, there is a need to distinguish between a teacher's personal and professional identity. Particularly in the early development of

teachers, teachers need to develop their concept of themselves as a teacher through connecting personal and professional aspects of their identity (Meijer et al 2009). Pre-service teachers do not necessarily begin with an image of themselves as teachers, and Danielewicz (1995) argues that becoming a teacher means that an individual must adopt an identity which requires the development of personal theories of action. The personal nature of these theories of action illustrates that developing a teacher identity is highly individualised, as it requires teachers to explore aspects of their personal identity. These aspects of their personal identity may include dimensions such as gender, social class (Van Galen 2010), politics (Huddey 2001) or religious affiliation (White 2009) and also their beliefs about teaching and what it means to them to become a teacher. Teacher identity can also include how it feels to be a teacher in the classroom. Identity formation therefore requires imagination (Trent & Lim 2010) and a negotiation between both personal and professional identities (what Alsup (2005) highlights can also be distinctive to each other). Alsup describes these identities as "discursive borderlands". Whilst there is a ready made set of teacher identities (or images) available to teachers (such as those through popular culture and our own experiences of education), Søreide (2006) argues that putting them into effect produces different ontological narratives.

One of these narratives is that of subject identity, a neglected aspect of the research on teacher identity. The neglect of subject identity is significant, because when someone decides they want to become a teacher of a subject (or a particular phase), they will already have fairly clear images of what teaching that subject (or phase) will look like. But how these idealised images of teaching can affect the identity formation of teachers is an emotional and highly individualised process (Zemblyas 2003) and involves resistance, transformation

and compliance, as individuals juggle with alternative images and conceptions of what it means to be a teacher. This is particularly the case when teachers find themselves behaving in ways that may not match up with their image of the teacher they want to be. The pressure to behave in a certain way that is contrary to your own values, may lead teachers to feel disempowered. In this way teachers can feel like they are a sub-ordinated group, disempowered to act as autonomous. Such feelings of being disempowered or de-professionalised can lead people to behave in particular ways as Andrew Sayer (2005: 160) explains:

> The struggle of subordinated groups for self-respect is particularly likely to lead to contradictory dispositions and opinions. They may try to make a virtue out of their position and their toughness and fortitude in bearing burdens, at the same time as they feel shame about having to bear those burdens. These are simultaneously responses of resistance and compliance.

Teachers can justify particular actions in the light of what they perceive is needed, expected or required. The process is therefore one of continual negotiation.

Such continual negotiation, or to borrow from Barnett, "being a teacher", can be seen in the narratives discussed in the previous chapters, where teachers negotiate their sense of the teacher they want to be, with the reforms and contexts that are influencing their work. For some this can feel like a highly personal struggle.

So to understand the professional compass and how it can influence teachers' work, it is important to see it as part of the transition between teachers' personal and professional identities. Bérci (2006) notes how important it is for teachers to integrate their self into

their work if they are to move beyond teaching as a technical or mechanical act. Aspects of teachers' personal lives will therefore affect their work. These observations are supported by much work into how teachers' values affect their practice (Council of Europe 1985; Dunne & Wragg 1994; Starratt 1994; Thompson 1995; Kyriacou 1997), and their classroom environments (Mortimore et al 1988). Teachers' opinions and beliefs reflect their unique range of experiences and perspectives but it is not always possible to distinguish between the professional and personal values of teachers as both will affect their practice (Van Mannen 1995; Carr 2004). Whilst Friedman's (2006) work acknowledges that they can be conflicting, values always affect the cognitive domain, and so will affect teachers' practice right down to deciding what to teach (Slater 1996).

This recognition of the centrality of teachers' values emphasises the emotional investment that is placed in their work. Teaching is acknowledged as an emotional activity (Bullough & Draper 2004), and the classroom is the main site for teachers' self-esteem and fulfilment, which in turn can affect their understanding of their practice (van Veen & Lasky 2005) and their emotions about teaching (for example, through experiencing guilt (Hargreaves 1994)). Teachers are required to engage in emotional relationships with several groups of people (including colleagues, students, parents) (Hargreaves 2001). Teachers work at these relationships and they reflect the personal nature of teaching and how it can affect how a teacher interacts with others. At the core of this investment then are the values that drive a teacher's professional practice (Korthagen 2004).

Korthagen suggests that teacher identity encompasses a series of levels nested like the layers of an onion (2004). The central components of mission and identity influence the beliefs of a teacher, which in turn will translate into their practice and behaviour. Related to

this deep sense of mission is the idea that teaching is a moral activity (Campbell et al 2004). This has been reflected in much work on teaching (see Campbell 2003) and it has been noted the bi-polar nature of teaching as between mission and power (Friedman 2006).

One of the debates in this area that has yet to be resolved is the transient or permanent nature of teachers' identities on their practice. Fang (1996) calls this the two competing theses between consistency and inconsistency: that teachers' identities appear to be both stable and dynamic at the same time. It is not therefore enough to look at who a person is, but also the contexts they have found themselves in and how this has affected their values and beliefs, and also where these values and beliefs come from and why they are meaningful to the teacher. The subject stories retold in earlier chapters reveal the complexity of this interplay between context and identity and how the alignment of values is central to the impact they can have on individuals.

Teacher development

Throughout this book, I have emphasised that values are an implicit part of teacher professional practice. However, they are also a significantly neglected part of teacher development. Although the exhibition of professional values is often seen as a key part of teacher certification and qualification, the definition of those values are often more in line with professional conduct or an ethical code rather than the particular values of individual teachers. This is not to say that the importance of teacher values has not been recognised. Indeed, it has been widely recognised that an understanding of teachers' values is an important part of appreciating how they understand and relate to their subject knowledge

(Grossman et al 1989; Gudmundsdottir 1990; 1991). The dimension that has been emphasised here is that these values often have a subject dimension to them: they are grounded in what it is about the subject that appeals to individual teachers. In the case of geography, Morgan (2011) has described this as geo-ethics, but one could also argue there are science-ethics, history-ethics and so on. Having a detailed understanding, through the lens of a discipline, changes how one views and values the world, and undoubtedly in the case of teachers will affect how we teach about it.

But attention to subject or disciplinary values is not always a strong feature of initial teacher education. The teachers in this research connected with the subject at different points of time. For Paul it was before he had encountered the subject of geography at school; for others like Dan and Daisy it was much later in their school career, when an aspect of school geography connected with their understandings of the world. For Nicola it was later still. None of the teachers I spoke with discussed examining these values during their initial teacher education, and appeared to develop these value positions independently of any formal education training.

The findings of this research should lead us to question whether we should be paying more attention to subject values during initial teacher education. Anecdotal accounts of the interviewing process for ITE courses outline how pre-service teachers can struggle with basic questions of why they want to teach their subject (Rawding, 2010). Indeed, the trend in teacher education in England (and England is rather a special case here, and lies in contrast to teacher education trends in Ireland, Canada and Australia) is for teachers to be trained on school-led programmes with increasingly limited access to subject specialists (for a detailed critique of the impact of these policies on the development of geography teachers see

Tapsfield et al, 2015)). As the report from the Geographical Association suggests, this raises concerns not just about the supply of teachers but also the range of exposure they get beyond their school placement, and to other professionals.

Similarly, the Carter Review on initial teacher education in England emphasised the importance of subject knowledge and subject specific pedagogy:

> The breadth of subject knowledge that primary teachers need to teach the new curriculum may be difficult to cover, especially within a one year programme. In subjects like modern foreign languages, music and computer science, trainees are more likely to lack subject knowledge, experience and confidence. (2015: 51)

The Review goes on to emphasise the importance of subject-specific pedagogy and makes particular mention of practical experiments in science and fieldwork in geography.

The trend, however, for both the recommendations made in the Carter Review and in teacher education generally is to focus on the technical aspects of teaching: the acquisition of teaching skills. The point being made here is a different one. I am not suggesting that skills are not an important part of teacher development; indeed, they are vital. However, trends in education change, and for a teacher to adapt their practice throughout their career they will need to be able to rely on more than teaching skills, namely also an ability to assess, review and analysis education reform, in order to decide how to respond. Research into teachers' practices suggests that they do this anyway (see Ball & Goodson 1985; Ball & Bowe, 1992; Ball 2003; Ball et al, 2012; and see Roberts 1995 for a geography example). However, no doubt teachers would be better equipped to adapt and respond to

education reform if they had a better understanding of the value system they are bringing to the table.

To offer a specific example, in Chapter Six, I outlined how two teachers were responding to a similar educational reform environment, articulated differently in two schools. Both schools were enacting similar reform agendas, and were using similar management strategies. The narratives from Mandy and Daisy suggest that how their schools were enacting these reforms varied. But what is more striking are the different ways that Mandy and Daisy responded to these changes. The data suggested that their responses to school reforms are not necessarily connected to the reform agendas that are taking place, but are possibly related to how the values that are implicit within them are communicated, and the extent they are in line with the teacher's own values. I would suggest that making values an explicit part of the conversation in school, and within initial teacher education programmes, could go some way to supporting teachers to understand and adapt to change that is taking place.

The argument has already been made that making values explicit is a key part of successful school reform. Fullan has outlined how making the moral purpose explicit is a key way to implement change successfully in schools (2001). For teachers to be able to ride the ebb and flow of educational change, they will need an awareness of their own values, as well as an understanding of how value systems can change within educational contexts.

Related to the issue of teacher development is, of course, the issue of teacher recruitment and retention. Of the eight teachers who have featured in this book, one has retired and two have left teaching. Of the five that have remained in teaching, one has described herself as feeling miserable and two of the others talked about finding contexts they can work in

where they feel comfortable. Disquiet is obvious even in such a small sample. The figures on teacher recruitment (four in ten teachers leaving the profession within their first year ATL, 2015) suggest this is a wider trend. For this reason alone, it is important to pay attention to how teachers feel about their work.

However, the significance of the findings here go beyond a sense of teacher happiness or wellbeing (although of course that is important). Being conscious of your values as a teacher is an important part of your teacher identity and how you relate to the contexts you work in.

Teacher professionalism

The last point that I wish to make here is to underline the professional part of the professional compass. For me, this is the most significant part of understanding why the professional compass matters. Metaphors have limitations and are, at best, a representation. The professional compass metaphor is valuable because it reflects the relationship between a teacher's sense of purpose and the professional knowledge landscape that can influence their practice. A professional compass is individual and value-orientated.

The use of the term 'value' here is deliberate. Campbell (2003) distinguishes between morals and ethics, on the one hand, and values on the other. She highlights the interchangeability of ethics and morals as ideas but acknowledges that their usage differs. However, she distinguishes both from values, as these can be non-moral preferences held by individuals. For example, Steven's subject story expressed through the idea of balance represents a value for him, but one that would be difficult to justify as a moral or ethical

code. Whilst the distinction between an individual's "values" and professional "ethics" is useful, the recognition of the importance of an individual's values is also, I would argue, part of their professionalism.

As Eraut (1994) notes, the values of the individual professional are only one set of values involved in ethical conduct at work. Schools, the educational community and legislative bodies (such as governments) also play a role in setting out the ethical landscape of teachers' practice. Lunt (2008) highlights how ethical codes, historically an important part of a profession's claims for public trust and self-regulation, are no longer sufficient. In the modern era of accountability, the status and role of the professions in society have changed. It is important then to note Eraut's (1994) four sets of values that can impinge on ethical conduct at work:

- Legal values

- Values of the profession

- Values of individual professionals

- Values of employing organisations.

This distinction draws attention to the mismatch between the values of the profession (in this case teaching), what regulatory frameworks require teachers to do by law (legal values), how schools interpret education policies and institute their own (values of employing organisations) and the individual values of the teacher. In the narratives explored in previous chapters, there are examples of when these values have come into conflict, and how teachers have sought to handle the situation. Daisy is an example of a teacher who has found such dilemmas difficult to reconcile, and has decided to leave teaching as a result. Andrew has been able to reconcile these dilemmas more amicably, and Isobel has sought

solace in her subject identity to help her find a sense of purpose in negotiating such challenges. These individual stories reflect what Lunt calls the "modern ethical professionalism" which is determined by four ethical principles: competence, respect, integrity and responsibility. The narratives show how these principles have been differently interpreted by these teachers, and the different extent to which they have found reconciliation and resistance to be acts of integrity and responsibility. Viewed in this way, we can see echoes of the "shifting moral landscapes" described by Clandinin and Hogan (1995).

However, discussions about ethics and morals (and to some extent values) are always tricky as they include expectations of how people should behave. In his work on professional ethics, Martin (2000) acknowledges that there is often a spiritual affiliation implied in discussions about ethics and morals. However, as Campbell (2003) notes, when discussing ethics and morals, it is important to consider the social and culture context from where particular values originate and whose values should take priority:

> In other words, in insisting that a good teacher is neither cruel nor unfair, we need not haggle over why this is essentially a moral imperative, rather than merely a culturally and socially constructed norm reflecting the interests of some over others. (2003: 15)

The issue therefore is not to suggest that the individual values expressed here are 'right' or 'wrong' or that the school values implicit in the policies or directives are 'right' or 'wrong', but to look at the dilemmas and contradictions that can occur when they are misaligned.

The metaphor of a professional compass is useful here, as a compass points towards the direction of magnetic north but the traveller need not follow this direction. The traveller may take an alternative and indirect route in order to reach their destination. The compass does not show you how to get to your destination, but indicates where north is, so that you can orientate yourself within the landscape, and consequently navigate direction. The compass therefore relies on the traveller having both a map (and knowledge of the landscape), and an idea of where they want to go. It is this last point, knowing where you want to go, that is encompassed with Barton and Lesvik's phrase "a sense of purpose".

The professional compass can therefore:

- Direct the teacher in their professional decision-making (in this sense can be viewed as a part of their "moral self", or moral compass) and, as such, can enable teachers to distinguish between teaching young people and seeking to educate them.

- Operate at a variety of levels within classroom practice, and wider engagement in education and school life.

- Enable teachers to move beyond a "delivery" mode of instruction to become "curriculum makers" responsible for a locally-relevant and responsive curriculum.

- Be seen as a powerful tool for individual reflection, and meaning making, contributing to the teacher's professional identity, resilience and commitment.

There are clearly limitations of the professional compass metaphor. No doubt there are some teachers who do not have a strong sense of their subject identity, or who cannot recollect a strong subject story, and it is not the intention of this work to suggest that they

are somehow lacking or deficient. The aim of using the metaphor is to raise awareness of the subject dimension of teacher identity. The data discussed suggest that awareness of this subject identity can be a powerful driver for understanding teachers' work. Whilst the research upon which these observations are based is limited in the number of teachers presented, the focus of the research has been on developing a detailed understanding of their practice: shedding light on the mechanisms that affect their work. The strength of the influence of subject identity across a range of teachers with different backgrounds, histories and motivations, suggest that these findings are significant. The metaphor itself is merely a convenient expression of the way that teachers have articulated this practice, and one that aligns neatly with the professional knowledge landscape metaphor.

It is also not the intention of this work to suggest that all teachers' values are going to be helpful or socially acceptable. In England, as in many other countries, professional values are a significant dimension of being granted Qualified Teacher Status, and demonstrating professional values are an important part of gaining this status. Clearly as in all professional contexts, there needs to be a frame of what is considered acceptable values, and those that are deemed unprofessional need to be dealt with. However, the alternative is equally undesirable: that teachers are perceived as technical workers unable to exercise professional judgement. The argument here is not that teachers should be given free rein to exercise their own values, but for a recognition that teachers' values, and particularly those related to their subject, are important and are deserving of more attention.

In the light of changes within education, we need a more nuanced way of understanding teachers' professional practice; delivery of subject content is an inadequate way of understanding teachers' work or their relationship with subject expertise. Having a

professional compass can help teachers to deal with the range of demands placed on them through school-based reform. Awareness of a professional compass could enable teachers to see the positionality of these arguments, and could be used by them to resist fads and trends, and to focus on what is important in the educating of young people. The professional compass can be used as a way of understanding what it means to be a teacher in this day and age.