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## Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted: An Exploration of the Influence Research Engagement has on the Professional Identities of University-based Teacher Educators

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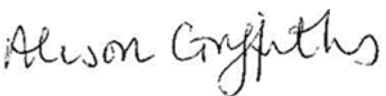
**Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted: An  
Exploration of the Influence Research  
Engagement has on the Professional Identities  
of University-based Teacher Educators**

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the  
University of Chester for the degree of Doctor of Education.

By Alison Griffiths

## Declaration

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

Signed: 

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> December 2024

## Abstract

### **Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted: An Exploration of the Influence Research Engagement has on the Professional Identities of University-based Teacher Educators.**

This thesis explores how engagement both *with* and *in* research shapes the professional identities of those working within the highly regulated and politically contested landscape of teacher education in England (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023). It is grounded in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and draws on the conceptual tools developed in texts such as *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 2007) and *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977), alongside contemporary and affective readings of his work by scholars including Threadgold (2020) and S. Ahmed (2014). Through this lens, the study interrogates the often-marginalised role that research plays in the professional lives of teacher educators (Nicholson & Lander, 2022), offering insight into how teacher educators position themselves as both producers and consumers of research. The thesis assumes that understanding the research engagement of teacher educators requires attention not only to external policies, institutional structures, and academic expectations, but also to the relational, emotional, and affective dimensions of research, all of which shape their evolving professional identities.

The empirical research adopts a single embedded case study design, drawing on semi-structured interviews with four experienced teacher educators based at a university in England. All participants work predominantly with beginning teachers and specialise in the primary age phase. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), with the themes and codes generated, presented, and explored through the presentation of composite narratives. As discussed by Johnston (2024) and Willis (2019), this is an under-theorised but purposeful narrative approach for disseminating findings. Composite narratives present accounts of lived experience using the words of participants, rearticulated through the perspectives of imagined others. This method was chosen both to preserve participant anonymity and to present findings in a form designed to provoke reflection and resonance for the reader.

The study exposes the considerable challenges teacher educators face in sustaining research engagement, which are exacerbated by ongoing systemic reforms and increasing accountability demands. Within this context, research often becomes secondary, as subtle forms of symbolic exclusion contribute to a sense of disconnection from the wider university. These challenges are not only structural but also deeply affective, as feelings of marginalisation, frustration, and diminished professional worth shape how teacher educators experience and enact their roles as researchers. The composite narratives illustrate how teacher educators navigate these pressures, often expressing frustration at the lack of time, institutional support, and recognition afforded to their research endeavours. Yet, despite these constraints, the narratives also reveal important signs of hope. Drawing on the concept of *illusio* (Bourdieu, 2007), the deep, often unexamined investment individuals make in a particular social field, the data point to a strong, enduring commitment to the belief that scholarly and educational work is inherently meaningful and worth pursuing.

This thesis calls on the sector to engage in sustained dialogue about what it means to be a research-engaged teacher educator working within the university in the 21st century. It urges universities to recognise the distinct pressures facing teacher education and to consider how they might cultivate an academic culture that values and respects the contributions of those whose work bridges the arenas of schooling and higher education. At an individual level, it emphasises the importance of claiming the title of *teacher educator* and encourages practitioners to confidently assert their specialised role within the wider educational landscape.

## **Acknowledgement**

With thanks to the staff at the University of Chester for their ongoing support, especially the supervisory “dream team” of Dr Sally Bamber and Dr Daryn Egan-Simon. Your support was very much appreciated.

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To colleagues and friends for the hours of parallel working, study-buddy away days, writing retreats and tempting me with all manner of shiny new things. Completing the “big essay” and getting ready for the “big chat about the big essay” would have been much more painful without your support.

To Paul, thank you for giving me a million reasons to look away from the laptop.

Finally, love and appreciation go to Sandra and Geoffrey, who might not be here to witness what I have achieved but are a presence in every aspect of my life and work.

## Professional Doctorate in Education Programme Profile

**PR8005: Research Methods** “I can try for a bit”: An exploration of the impact of the initial teacher self on the professional learning of a student teacher at the early stages of their professional practice

In the assessment for this module, I demonstrated my understanding of research methodologies and the ontological, epistemological, and methodological positions that underpin them. Adopting an interpretivist stance, I applied this knowledge to a small-scale ethnographic research project exploring how teacher educators support students in negotiating their emerging professional identities during their first school experience.

**PR8006: Social Theory** “It’s what they expect”: *How The Performance of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 2007) can be used to better understand the role of a university tutor working in school.

The small-scale research I developed in this module drew upon *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 2007), which offered valuable insights into how individuals mediate their performances to maintain a credible front across different social contexts. Focusing on the lived experiences of one teacher-educator, I employed semi-structured interviews to explicate the strategies and tools used to maintain an appropriate front when working in schools.

**PR8007: Creativity in Practice** A re-turn to creativity: An exploration of creativity in theory and practice.

The assessment for this module comprised two components. First, I produced a *smash book*, an unstructured, reflective form of scrapbook, which was used to document my evolving thoughts as I engaged with the theoretical perspectives on creativity explored throughout the module. Accompanying this was a written exegesis, in which I articulated my creative process and reflected on the ideas that emerged during the creation of the book. This assignment inspired the development of my "photo-a-day" research field diary, which I adopted as a visual tool to support reflection throughout the design, implementation, and writing of this thesis.

**PR8008: Cultural Practices** “I can’t possibly be seen wearing that!”: An exploration of the embodiment of culture through the practice of choosing the clothes to wear for work.

I conducted an autoethnography during the 2019 Covid lockdown, exploring the idea that clothing carries deep personal, social, and cultural meaning. My research consisted of short vignettes inspired by the items of clothing I regularly wore for work at that time. Using the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) as a theoretical lens, and drawing on the work of thinkers such as Reay (2004), these vignettes offered insights into how I perceive and navigate my professional identity. My work revealed the underlying factors that shape my sense of place within that world, illustrating the intersection of self, society, and cultural norms through the lens of everyday attire.

**PR8002 Institutions, Discontinuities and Systems of Knowledge:** What's so Professional about Professional Studies? A critique of the way professionalism is presented to student teachers at the early stages of Initial Teacher Education.

Written as the Covid-19 lockdown was easing, I analysed a session delivered on the Primary PGCE Professional Studies course that explicitly addressed professional behaviours. Drawing on the work of Foucault as a theoretical lens, the study builds on the work of Adams (2012), Fournier (1999), and Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011) to explore how professionalism, as a discourse, is constructed, appropriated, and manipulated. Using my presentation slides as a point of inquiry, I examined how the university's stated vision and mission, the Teachers' Standards (Department for Education, 2011a), and the emphasis on reflection act as technologies of control that impose a normative gaze (Foucault, 1988) on student teachers, subtly pressuring them to conform to a prescriptive model of the professional teacher without space for critical questioning.

**PR8001 Thesis in Context** Sprinkling on some of that Bourdieusian catnip: An exploration of the relationships that teacher educators have with research and the impact that this has on professional identity.

The assessment for this module offered my first opportunity to share and contextualise my proposed final research project. It enabled me to articulate the aims of the study and explain its significance. I outlined the theoretical framework that would underpin the research, detailed the proposed methodology and methods, and identified potential limitations. I also explained how the use of composite narratives would help ensure participant confidentiality, while supporting an ethically responsible and aesthetic approach to presenting lived experience.

## Table of Contents

<b>Declaration .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Abstract .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgement .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Professional Doctorate in Education Programme Profile .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Trespassers Will be Prosecuted .....</b>	<b>11</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	11
1.2 The Research Question and Related Sub-questions. ....	12
1.3 Introducing the Researcher .....	13
1.4 Introducing the Context.....	15
1.5 Introducing the Teacher Educator .....	16
1.6 Introducing the Landscape .....	17
1.7 My Definition of Research Engagement.....	20
1.8 The Foundations of this Research .....	21
1.9 The Structure of the Thesis.....	22
1.10 To Conclude.....	23
<b>Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinning .....</b>	<b>25</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	25
2.2 Identifying Identity.....	27
2.3 The Conceptual Toolbox of Bourdieu .....	28
2.3a Capital.....	28
2.3b Habitus.....	29
2.3c The Field, Symbolic Capital, and Symbolic Violence .....	32
2.4 Notions of Professionalism and Professional Identity.....	35
2.5 To Conclude.....	37
<b>Chapter 3: The Outside In.....</b>	<b>39</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	39
3.2 The Pull of the University .....	40
3.3 What Constitutes the Good Teacher? .....	42
3.4 An Uncertain Beginning .....	43
3.5 Enter the University .....	45
3.6 Exit the University .....	47
3.7 The Education Wars .....	48
3.8 The Impact of Policy .....	51
3.9 To Conclude.....	53
<b>Chapter 4: The Inside Out.....</b>	<b>54</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	54
4.2 Pushes or Pulls.....	55
4.3 A Difficult Practice That Looks Easy.....	56

4.4 Teaching, Service and Research .....	58
4.4.1 The Importance of Teaching .....	58
4.4.2 The Importance of Service .....	60
4.4.3 The Importance of Research.....	61
4.4.3 The Teacher Educator and Research .....	64
4.4.4 Supporting Professional Learning .....	66
4.5 To Conclude .....	69
<b>Chapter 5: Methodology and Methods. ....</b>	<b>71</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	71
5.2 Recapping My Research Question .....	72
5.3 Providing an Overview.....	73
5.4 The Big Questions .....	73
5.5 Thinking with Bourdieu .....	74
5.6 Qualitative Research and the Case Study .....	75
5.7 Data Gathering: The Semi-Structured Interview.....	77
5.7a Data Gathering: Ethical Considerations.....	81
5.8 Data Analysis: An Introduction to Reflexive Thematic Analysis .....	84
5.8a Data Analysis: Ethical Considerations .....	87
5.9 Sharing Findings: Composite Narratives.....	88
5.9a Ethical Considerations and Limitations of Composite Narratives .....	91
5.10 Assuring the Quality of My Qualitative Research .....	93
5.10a Credibility .....	94
5.10b Transferability.....	95
5.10c Dependability .....	95
5.10d Confirmability .....	96
5.11 To Conclude.....	97
<b>Chapter 6: Findings, Analysis and Discussion .....</b>	<b>98</b>
6.1 Introduction.....	98
6.1a How to Read This Chapter .....	99
6.2 Alex’s Story: Scratching the Itch .....	101
6.2a The Influence of Moving from School into Higher Education .....	102
6.3 Sara’s Story: Meeting the Myth in the Middle.....	105
6.3a The Positioning of Self as an Academic .....	106
6.4 Jo’s Story: Like a Hamster on a Wheel .....	111
6.4a The Place of Teacher Education in the Academic Community .....	112
6.5 Rachel’s Story: Hoop Jumping and Ridiculous Little Videos. ....	115
6.5a The Impact of Centrally Imposed Agendas .....	116
6.6 Clare’ Story: Putting on my School Uniform. ....	120
6.6a Perceptions from outside the university.....	121

6.7 Laura Story: Wearing Two Hats That Don't Fit. ....	124
6.7a Engagement in and with Research.....	125
6.8 Andi's Story: Waving a Magic Wand .....	130
6.8a Reflections on Support and Development .....	131
6.9 In Summary: Connecting the Building Blocks. ....	135
6.9a Negative positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator and not engaged with research .....	136
6.9b Positive positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator, not engaged with research .....	137
6.9c Negative positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator and engaged with research .....	138
6.9d Positive positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator and engaged with research .....	139
6.10 To Conclude.....	140
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>141</b>
7.1 Introduction.....	141
7.2 Returning to the Research Question.....	142
7.3 Returning to the Sub-questions .....	144
7.3a How do teacher educators describe themselves and their role?.....	144
7.3 b and c What motivates their engagement with research? What tensions exist, and how are they reconciled? .....	145
7.3 d What role does the university play in supporting research development?.....	147
7.3 e How do policy and governmental reforms shape research engagement?.....	148
7.4 Limitations of this Study.....	150
7.5 Contributions to Knowledge .....	154
7.5a Contributions to Research about Teacher Education.....	154
7.5b Contributions to Methodology.....	155
7.5c Contributions to how the teacher educators see themselves. ....	155
7.5d Contributions to my own identity as a researcher and teacher educator. ....	155
7.6 Recommendations and Future Research.....	156
7.7 To Conclude .....	158
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>159</b>
Appendix A: Confirmation of Ethical Approval .....	159
Appendix B: Questions Used in the Semi-Structured Interview.....	160
Appendix C: Reflective Thematic Analysis Overview with My Reflections .....	161
Appendix D: Exemplar Audit for the Creation of Composite Narratives .....	169

## List of Figures

Figure 1 Trespassers Will be Prosecuted.....	11
Figure 2 The Glue that Holds Us Together .....	25
Figure 3 The Beast from the East.....	39
Figure 4 Sticks and Strings and Drips of Glue .....	54
Figure 5 Chalk Marks on the Cobblestones.....	71
Figure 6 An Overview of My Research Design. ....	73
Figure 7 Johnston (2024) Six Steps to Creating Composite Narratives. ....	89
Figure 8 A Sandpit Filled with Lego .....	98
Figure 9 The Relationship Between Identity and Research. ....	136
Figure 10 Onwards and Upwards.....	141
Figure 11 Dialogic Engagement with Interview Transcripts.....	161
Figure 12 Taming the Research Beast .....	164

## List of Tables

Table 1 Understanding Capital .....	28
Table 2 An Overview of the Case .....	76
Table 3 Overview of Interviews.....	79
Table 4 Context of Interviews .....	79
Table 5 Mitigation Strategies .....	81
Table 6 Processes of Reflexive Thematic Analysis. ....	86
Table 7 Overview of Composite Narratives.....	89
Table 8 Example Coding of Interview Data.....	163
Table 9 Overview of Codes. ....	164
Table 10 Establishing Themes .....	166
Table 11 Amended Themes.....	167
Table 12 Overview of Themes and Codes.....	167
Table 13 Data for Exemplar Composite Narrative (Part 1).....	170
Table 14 Data for Exemplar Composite Narrative (Part 2).....	172

## Chapter 1: Trespassers Will be Prosecuted



*Figure 1 Trespassers Will be Prosecuted.*

### 1.1 Introduction

It was a dull October day, and as I wandered around the lake and up the hill behind the ice cream kiosks and cafés of the park, I noticed a bramble-covered fence, overgrown and overlooked. In the front and centre, amidst the tendrils and prickles, stood this sign. It was rusty in places and had small dents from air rifle pellets peppering the uppercase imperative from the Director of Education. Behind this, I could hear a rugby match in full flow with shouted expletives and painful crunching as bodies came into contact to gain possession of a ball. Through the small gaps in the foliage, I could just see what was going on, the smoothness of the pitch being very different from the muddy path in the wood that brought me up the hill in the first place. As I began to develop this study, I was reminded of this photograph, which I feel has a lot to say about the focus and purpose of my work.

This thesis is rooted in my experiences as a teacher educator who has worked in the university sector since 2004. In the last twenty years, I have taught thousands of students,

planned hundreds of seminars and extolled to beginning teachers over countless hours the value of research and its potential for transforming their professional practice. I have also become accustomed to carving out pathways through the dense regulatory and systemic undergrowth that pervades all aspects of teacher education, negotiating the thorns and prickles that arise from the imposition of centralised state control. However, despite having completed master's level study, engaging in scholarship to inform my teaching, and undertaking small-scale knowledge exchange, I still felt engagement in research to be something that was prohibited, reserved for those who knew the rules and were prepared to take the inevitable and potentially painful knocks. Until embarking on the Professional Doctorate programme, this aspect of my work was something I felt could only be glimpsed through the foliage, leading me to feel as though I were something of a trespasser in the university.

Whilst this might be seen as a highly personal reflection, when I shared the discomfort provoked by the thought of being a research-engaged teacher educator with others in a similar position in the university sector, I found that I was not alone. An interrogation of existing research provided further resonance with work such as Czerniawski (2018), Davey (2013), J. Murray (2002), and Tack et al. (2023) further reinforcing the pertinence of this area of exploration. From this starting point, my thesis will take a sociological lens through which I will view the research practices of the teacher educator. It will cut back some of the undergrowth to better understand the place of research in their professional lives, explicating the factors that shape it and recognising the impact this has on how they position themselves within the various contexts of their professional practice.

## **1.2 The Research Question and Related Sub-questions.**

This research was initially conceived as an action research project aimed at testing strategies to support colleagues who were struggling with the production of original research. However, as I engaged more deeply with the literature, it became clear that the issue was far more complex than initially anticipated. Following a period of critical reflection, I shifted my focus from seeking solutions to developing a deeper understanding of the problem. This study offers insight into the relationships that experienced, university-based teacher educators have with research, illuminating the factors that shape these engagements. It seeks to answer the following research question:

*How does engagement with and in research affect the professional identities of experienced, university-based teacher educators?*

Five sub-questions have been used to focus my inquiry.

- a) How do teacher educators describe themselves and their role?
- b) What provides the motivation for engagement *in* and *with* research?
- c) What tensions exist that relate to this (if any), and how are they reconciled?
- d) What role does the university play in supporting the development of an academic identity?
- e) How do government policies and practices influence the way that research is perceived?

These sub-questions have facilitated my exploration across two interconnected dimensions:

- **The inside-out (sub-questions a, b, and c)** with priority given to lived experiences, personal motivation, and agency.
- **The outside-in (sub-questions d and e)** which considers the broader societal, institutional, and environmental contexts.

### 1.3 Introducing the Researcher

I was raised in North Wales by two teachers who instilled a deep respect for education in me and my younger sister. After completing secondary school, I enrolled in a four-year Bachelor of Education degree at a teacher training college in the Northwest of England. Upon completing my degree, I returned to my hometown and began teaching at the primary school I had once attended. After five years of classroom practice and being promoted to literacy coordinator and year leader, my head teacher recognised that I needed to broaden my horizons and offered full funding for a Master's in Education programme focused on Creativity and Education. I enrolled and eventually completed the qualification, gaining a newfound confidence in what I could achieve, and a transformed view of what education could and should be.

In search of a new adventure, I eventually left Wales and relocated to London, where I took up a teaching position with leadership responsibility in a primary school just off the Old Kent Road. This experience was pivotal. I was challenged every day by the complexity of teaching in a community that was diverse in every conceivable way. The school offered opportunities I could only have dreamed of as a teacher in North Wales. Driven by a commitment to broadening horizons, the leadership prioritised exposing children to the rich cultural offerings of the capital city, many of whom had never experienced the London which existed beyond their immediate postcode. However, after working in the classroom for many years and as

the pressures of performativity and accountability became more pronounced, I felt I needed a different challenge. I saw a job advertised at a university in another part of London for a primary teacher educator. On a whim, I applied and was successful.

Over the past 20 years, I have held various roles in teacher education across three universities, progressing from literacy tutor to head of teacher education. I have collaborated with inspiring colleagues and passionate student teachers who have shaped my practice and thinking. My leadership roles provided first-hand experience with teacher education regulations and compliance, as well as the systems and processes of university governance. After writing the bid that gained the university accreditation to award Qualified Teacher Status as part of the Initial Teacher Training Market Review (Department for Education, 2021), and negotiating a successful Ofsted inspection, I chose to reclaim my work-life balance. In 2022, I transitioned to leading a PGCE programme at a university in the North of England, returning to my primary education roots.

My longstanding engagement with primary education, teacher education, and the university sector has allowed me to bring a unique perspective to my work. This can be summarised across four key areas:

- **Policy Knowledge:** I have extensive knowledge of current regulatory frameworks and a deep understanding of their affective presence across the working lives of teacher educators.
- **Leadership Experience:** My roles in leadership and management provide an insider perspective on institutional dynamics and the tensions between academic values, institutional priorities, and external accountability.
- **Relational Depth:** My established relationships with participants have allowed me to approach my empirical work with empathy and insight.
- **Lived Practice:** As a practising teacher educator and emerging researcher, I bring to my work a lived experience of negotiating the complexities inherent in assuming these positions.

These experiences have equipped me to engage with this research project in a critically informed and deeply personal way. They also require me to remain reflexive, continually interrogating how my positionality influences the research process, from framing questions to interpreting findings.

To acknowledge the influence of my perspective on this work, each chapter of the thesis opens with a photograph. These images have been carefully selected for their resonance with the focus of that chapter, offering a visual introduction to the ideas explored within. I have maintained a photographic field journal since completing the third module of the Professional Doctorate in Education programme. Each day, I captured a photograph that reflected my thoughts on what I was reading or writing, reminded me of my journey, or provoked further reflection on my work. These pictures provide evidence of what Olmos-Vega et al. (2023) identify as “personal reflexivity” (p.242), highlighting what I feel to have been key moments in the development of my researcher identity over the course of this study.

#### **1.4 Introducing the Context**

My empirical exploration will focus on the experiences of teacher educators who work with student teachers on a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) programme in a university department of education in the southeast of England. The nine-month PGCE combines two master’s level academic modules with non-credit-bearing courses covering pedagogy, curriculum, and essential teaching skills for primary education. Students spend a minimum of 120 days on school placements, mentored by practising teachers under the guidance of university-based teacher educators. To complete the programme, students must demonstrate professional competency against the Teachers’ Standards (Department for Education, 2011a) before being awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS).

Throughout this study, I refer to my participants as *teacher educators* rather than *initial teacher educators*. This deliberate choice reflects the broader scope of their work, which Czerniawski (2018) highlights, extends beyond engagement with beginning teachers. However, I took care to select participants whose roles were predominantly focused on working with students at the start of their teaching careers. This ensured that the research remained firmly grounded in the professional practices, challenges, and expectations most relevant to the aims of the study. In alignment with Murtagh and Rushton (2023), I will use the terms *teacher training* and *trainees* when referencing materials from the Department for Education or the work of other scholars who adopt this terminology. It should be noted that I prefer the terms teacher education and student teachers, as I feel these terms better encapsulate the philosophy and processes involved in fostering the development of beginning teachers within a university context.

## 1.5 Introducing the Teacher Educator

Orchard and Winch (2015) highlight that teachers play a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of education for children and young people. However, until recently, teacher educators remained a relatively under-researched and poorly understood occupational group (Livingston, 2014; J. Murray & Male, 2005). Provoked by the changes imposed on society by neoliberal economic policies and the rise of neoconservatism (Apple, 2006; McIntyre et al., 2019) there has been a renewed interest in what Nicholson and Lander (2022) refer to as this “particular type of academic” (p.6), that recognises the power that they wield in shaping the next generation of teachers, and by extension, the contribution they make to the economic prospects of the country (V. Ellis et al., 2014; Maguire, 2000b).

Providing a concise definition of teacher education and teacher educators is widely regarded as challenging, a perspective that stems from the heterogeneity of the profession (Czerniawski et al., 2019; Izadinia, 2014; Swennen et al., 2010). This diversity includes variations in the contexts in which it takes place such as schools and universities, the experiences and qualifications of its practitioners, and the ethical and moral purposes that underpin their work (White, 2019). To provide some clarity, Boyd and White (2017) define the teacher educator as being part of an occupational group that has a “formal active role in the facilitation of professional learning by student teachers and teachers” (p.124). This perspective, adapted from a European Union directive intended to improve the quality of teacher education (European Commission, 2013), recognises the centrality of the teacher educator in supporting learning across the professional life of teachers. In doing so, it distinguishes teacher education from informal professional learning that might emerge from casual conversations with colleagues in the staffrooms and corridors of schools (Boyd & White, 2017).

Building on the triad of teaching, administration and research that Ducharme and Ducharme (1996) use to explain the work of the teacher educator, the large-scale survey of V. Ellis et al. (2011) highlights the multifaceted nature of the role. They find that teacher educators are required to excel in their teaching practices, demonstrate the social and emotional intelligence necessary to build and sustain sensitive relationships with various stakeholders across both the university and schools, as well as the academic prowess to meet the demands of the modern university. They are also characterised as being Janus Faced (Smith & Flores, 2019), their practice looking to the school and the higher education institution. Whilst the participants in my study bring to their work a range of experiences, qualifications, and expertise, they all meet the criteria outlined by J. Murray and Male (2005)

in that they are “second-order practitioners” (p.126), drawing upon their first-order knowledge of the classroom to inform their work in the university.

In the English context, it is common for individuals to enter teacher education following a substantial period of school-based teaching. Those who follow this trajectory often identify as teachers first and academics second (Boyd & Harris, 2010; Izadinia, 2014; Swennen et al., 2010). This contrasts with countries such as Finland and the Netherlands, where teacher educators are more frequently recruited through academic pathways, often holding doctoral qualifications, and having been immersed in research cultures from the outset (Griffiths et al., 2010; Swennen & Volman, 2019; Tatto & Menter, 2019).

In refining the focus of this study, I examine the lived experiences of teacher educators who specialise in the primary phase of education. These participants are all qualified teachers now employed in a university setting, each with extensive experience of working with children aged three to eleven. With over five years of experience in higher education, they can be situated within what Gutman and Oplatka (2021) describe as the “establishment stage” (p. 539) of their careers, an occupational phase marked by increased professional stability, enhanced autonomy, and a more pragmatic understanding of institutional realities.

## **1.6 Introducing the Landscape**

Teacher education is a globally contested and continuously evolving field, shaped by a complex interplay of political, cultural, and economic forces that manifest differently across national contexts, as explained by Cochran-Smith et al. (2014), Darling-Hammond and Lieberman (2013), and Zeichner (2017). To understand the significance of this small-scale study, which is situated within a university department of education in England, it is important to position it within this international landscape where both teacher education and the professional identities of teacher educators are increasingly shaped by scrutiny, policy reform, and ideological contestation (Czerniawski, 2018; V. Ellis & Childs, 2023; Townsend, 2016).

As Brooks et al. (2024) illustrate, teacher education reform is frequently shaped and justified through policy discourses driven by three key factors: a rationale for change often linked to economic growth and global competitiveness; the technology for change, enacted through accountability measures and regulatory frameworks; and the values underpinning change, which reflect dominant beliefs about the fundamental purpose of schooling. V. Ellis et al. (2019) and Sahlberg et al. (2021) also observe that these dynamics are especially

pronounced in highly marketised education systems such as those in England and the United States. In these contexts, teacher education policy has been significantly influenced by the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg et al., 2021), which is characterised by standardisation, accountability, and data-driven outcomes. Sahlberg et al. (2021) further outline that such approaches promote technocratic, competency-based models of education that prioritise measurable outputs over more reflective, research-informed practice, a position also discussed in relation to teacher education by Biesta (2015), V. Ellis and Childs (2023), and Hordern and Brooks (2024).

At the same time, the place of teacher education in the university is under threat as comprehensively documented by V. Ellis (2023). The rise of school-centred approaches, exemplified by the proliferation of models such as *Teach First*, *Teach for America*, and *Teach for All* (V. Ellis et al., 2019), reflects a view of teaching as a technical task that can be acquired on the job (George & Maguire, 2017). Such developments risk narrowing the conception of teaching, undermining the intellectual, relational, and research-informed dimensions of the profession (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023). In doing so, they further marginalise the role of teacher educators in universities (McIntyre et al., 2019), positioning them as deliverers of content rather than as critical professionals engaged in the production of knowledge, practice, and policy (Hordern & Brooks, 2024). This shift has led Mutton and Burn (2024) to question whether Initial Teacher Education, as distinct from initial teacher training, has a future in England at all.

Engaging with international research further highlights the distinctive trajectory taken in England (V. Ellis et al., 2019; Townsend, 2016), which contrasts with countries such as Finland, where teacher education is deeply embedded in research-intensive universities and underpinned by a strong professional knowledge base (Sahlberg et al., 2021; Thrupp et al., 2023). Similarly, as Choy (2023) finds, in Singapore, teachers are rigorously selected and prepared through centrally coordinated university programmes that place a strong emphasis on professionalism and ongoing professional development. A more balanced model, as described by Swennen and Volman (2019), can be found in the Netherlands, where, despite increasing pressures to present teaching quality in static and instrumental terms, as noted by Snoek (2021), teacher education has come to be characterised by strong collaboration between universities and schools, aimed at fostering the deliberate integration of research and practice.

Even within the United Kingdom, the trajectory of teacher education policy in England stands out as distinct from that of the other devolved jurisdictions (Beauchamp et al., 2015; Mutton & Burn, 2024). Mutton and Burn (2020) highlight how Wales has retained a more coherent and university-led approach to initial teacher education, with a small number of providers, all based within higher education institutions, marking a significant divergence from the fragmented, market-driven system that is found in England (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023). According to Mutton and Breeze (2024), reform in Wales has been shaped less by neoliberal market principles and more by a values-based vision of teaching, influenced by the work of Furlong (2015), which positions teachers as reflective professionals who maintain high expectations for all pupils, are committed to ongoing professional learning, embrace innovation and change, and work collaboratively to improve practice through the use of evidence (Mutton & Breeze, 2024).

A similar ethos is evident in Scotland, where the *Curriculum for Excellence* (Scottish Government, 2008) taught in schools, promotes broader educational goals beyond attainment, aiming to cultivate responsible citizens, who are successful learners, and effective contributors to society (MacDonald & Rae, 2018). In Northern Ireland, while policy development has been less consistent, due in part to periods of political instability and direct rule (Hagan & Eaton, 2020), there remains a strong commitment to research-informed practice, professional standards, and collaborative partnerships between universities and schools (MacPhail & O'Sullivan, 2019). The approaches taken reflect a more professionally grounded, values-driven conception of teacher education across the devolved nations, further underscoring the divergence of England as a site of experimentation shaped by market-based reform (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023; Mutton & Burn, 2024).

To illustrate the impact of these developments in the English context, the next section introduces two significant policy interventions that have shaped the sector in recent years, and which are revisited throughout this thesis.

The first of these is the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (CCF) (Department for Education, 2019), which has recently been reworked and rebranded as the Initial Teacher Training Early Career Framework (ITTECF) (Department for Education, 2024a). These frameworks set out a comprehensive list of what trainee teachers should know and be able to do upon completing their initial training. These lists, curated by a small group of experts appointed by the Department for Education (Benn, 2023), draw upon “the best available evidence from this country and around the world” and represent the “core body of

knowledge, skills and behaviours that define great teaching” (Department for Education, 2024a, p. 4).

Whilst the stakes of ensuring complete curriculum alignment with these entitlements are high, the ante was raised further with the implementation of the Initial Teacher Training Market Review (Department for Education, 2021). With the stated intention of “levelling up education standards” (Department for Education, 2021), this required all providers who wished to be able to award QTS after 2024, regardless of prior experience or reputation, to make a written application to the Department for Education. Spendlove (2023) describes this as a “pledge of allegiance” (p.55) with applications requiring high-level curriculum maps, session resources and an appropriately referenced rationale to demonstrate to unknown assessors, in seven thousand words, how their proposed teacher training programme would adhere to a raft of centrally mandated Quality Requirements. At the end of this process, only 82% of existing providers were granted the necessary accreditation (Whittaker, 2022), with those who failed to attain the necessary approval required to either partner with successfully accredited providers or withdraw from offering teacher education altogether.

My experience aligns with that of Vickers-Hulse et al. (2024), who notes that these reforms influenced how teacher educators see their role but have presented particular challenges for those negotiating their position in the university space. This exploration, undertaken in an institution that gained accreditation, has further resonance in that it provides a situated and emotive account of a potentially marginalised occupational group struggling to reconcile their worth and work at a time of heightened precarity and volatility.

### **1.7 My Definition of Research Engagement**

My understanding of research engagement draws upon the themes addressed in the *Intellectual Knowledge Base of Teacher Education*, published by the University Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET, 2020). This report outlines the core values and principles that underpin research activity for teacher educators, stressing the importance of criticality and reflection, the ability to draw together theory and practice, and the importance of collaborative working. It also highlights the necessity for teacher educators to possess the research skills necessary to interrogate evidence with rigour and competence as well as emphasising qualities of curiosity, innovation, creativity, and openness to new ideas. The work of Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) encapsulates this ethos in their concept of a “habit of mind” (p. 301). A similar perspective is offered by Cochran-Smith (2005) who finds that as

they engage with research, the teacher educator positions themselves in “the dialectic” (p. 219), a contested space where the lines between knowing and doing, theorising and practising become blurred.

I also acknowledge the complexity of defining what is meant by research engagement and feel it is important to clarify how I will use the term in this study. I have drawn on the *Inquiry into the Role of Research in Teacher Education* instigated by the British Education Research Association (BERA-RSA, 2014), which calls for a reimagined role for teacher educators as both consumers and producers of knowledge. In this study, research engagement is understood as encompassing a range of interrelated activities. These include incorporating relevant research to inform the design and structure of the curriculum, using research-based knowledge to shape the content and delivery of learning, and cultivating research literacy to enable critical engagement with and evaluation of research. It also involves conducting original research that contributes new insights and advances understanding within the field of education (BERA-RSA, 2014).

## **1.8 The Foundations of this Research**

This study is based upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, drawing on seminal works including *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977), *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990), *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 2007), and *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). My understanding has been further supported by Grenfell (2012), Jenkins (2008), and Murphy and Costa (2016), whose accessible interpretations and applied insights have helped translate the theoretical concepts posited by Bourdieu into meaningful tools for empirical research. I also draw on contemporary readings posited by scholars such as Reay (2015) and Threadgold (2020), who emphasise the relational and affective dimensions of Bourdieu’s work. Together these sources have enabled me to highlight the emotional investments, tensions, and solidarities that shape how teacher educators navigate and make sense of their academic work.

The empirical exploration takes the form of a single embedded case study (Yin, 2013), constructed from three semi-structured interviews with four, primary specialist teacher educators, conducted over the course of a year. The interviews were transcribed and then analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), an approach chosen for its capacity to acknowledge and incorporate my position as a researcher. Following the guidance of Arjomand (2022), Creese et al. (2021), Johnston (2024), and Willis (2019), the findings are presented in the form of seven composite narratives, written to reflect the codes

and themes generated from the data. Merging the words of my participants into stories told from the perspective of an imagined other, these composite narratives present my research findings succinctly and evocatively, while also protecting the anonymity of the colleagues who entrusted me with their words.

## **1.9 The Structure of the Thesis**

My work has been divided into seven chapters the content of which are outlined below.

### **Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinning**

In chapter two, I establish the theoretical foundations of the study by examining the relevance of the work of Bourdieu as presented in works such as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977), *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990), and *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 2007). I also draw upon the work of related thinkers such as Ahmed (2004), Berlant (2011), Reay (2015), and Threadgold (2020), whose ideas enrich and extend his conceptual framework. Using these perspectives, I critically engage with key concepts such as *capital*, *habitus*, and *field* (Bourdieu, 1977) demonstrating how they are mobilised to inform and structure my analysis. The chapter also explores the contested nature of professionalism, offering a clear distinction between this and professional identity as it is conceptualised and enacted within the context of teacher education.

### **Chapter 3: The Outside In**

In chapter three, I review the literature to provide a contextual overview of the place of teacher education in the university, looking at this from the outside in and noting the factors that have shaped its development. I consider the status historically afforded to the university, before examining the ongoing impact that the origins of teacher education have had on its current standing and the uneasy relationship it maintains with higher education. In this chapter, I also explore who holds power in the current landscape, and how that power is created and reproduced.

### **Chapter 4: The Inside Out**

In chapter four, I shift the focus to an inside-out exploration of teacher education. I examine the literature on what motivates experienced teachers to leave the classroom and transition into university-based roles, and how their professional identities as teachers shape their engagement with research. I investigate the nature of the work of the teacher educator, highlighting the significance of teaching, as well as relationship-building. After exploring my understanding of research and scholarship, the chapter concludes by examining strategies

for professional learning that support teacher educators in developing and sustaining their academic identities.

### **Chapter 5: Methodology and Methods**

In chapter five, I provide details of the methodology and methods that underpin my empirical exploration. I consider some of the philosophical underpinnings, returning to the work of Bourdieu to explain the ontological and epistemological positioning of my work. In this chapter I justify the significance of the case study in providing a rich and thick (Geertz, 1973) exploration of lived experience. I look at the impact of being an insider researcher, noting the benefits and potential limitations of this position. I also review the methods used for data collection, semi-structured interviews, and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I provide a detailed overview of composite narratives which is the method used for sharing findings. To conclude, I explain how my study adheres to the criteria for robust research design as outlined by Guba (1981) of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Chapter 6: Findings, Analysis, and Discussion**

Chapter six centres on the voices of my participants, presenting seven composite narratives crafted to convey my findings. These narratives, derived from data collected during twelve interviews, were developed following reflexive thematic analysis and are organised around the seven most prominent themes that were created from the data. Each narrative is followed by an in-depth analysis, drawing connections to existing literature and incorporating my reflections on the theme. I conclude by synthesising the key findings from the data, looking across the narratives to bring together the professional identities of my participants as teacher educators with their research engagement.

### **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

In chapter seven, I provide an answer to my research question and its related sub-questions. I reflect on the insights gained through the research process, discussing both the contributions of the study and its limitations. The chapter also outlines directions for future research.

### **1.10 To Conclude**

This chapter began with a photograph of a sign (Figure 1) that exemplifies the rationale and purpose of this study. I outlined my research question and sub-questions, providing an overview of the landscape of teacher education and highlighting two of the most significant

reforms that will be referred to across my study. I introduced the teacher educator and explained briefly how the work of Bourdieu has been valuable in explicating their practices. The chapter concludes by reviewing the overall structure of the thesis and is intended to provide a more welcoming signpost than the one photographed in the park on that damp October morning (Figure 1).

## Chapter 2: Conceptual and Theoretical Underpinning



*Figure 2 The Glue that Holds Us Together*

### 2.1 Introduction

This photograph (Figure 2) shows a model made during the first session of the Creativity in Action module of the Professional Doctorate programme (PR8007). During this weekend, we were given a ball of clay and tasked with making a model of a person. At the end of the session, we were invited to reflect upon our creative processes and provide a rationale for what was produced and why. This figure, sitting on a pile of books and looking somewhat downcast, had something to say about my uneasy relationship with sociological theory at that specific point of my doctoral journey.

The clay has cracked since its creation four years ago, and pieces have fallen away. However, rather than discarding it, I practised Kintsugi, the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with golden joinery. Kintsugi embraces flaws and imperfections, viewing cracks as markers of the life of an object, celebrating them rather than rendering the object useless upon damage (Richman-Abdou, 2022). This approach felt fitting, especially given my evolving understanding of theory throughout my doctoral work. The figure, which is held

together with unevenly applied, gold-flecked silicone now reminds me to embrace the gaps and ruptures in my knowledge and persist when my understanding feels fragmented or incomplete. In this way, the model embodies resilience and the generative potential of theory to create coherence out of uncertainty.

In this chapter, I explain how theory has supported my understanding of the various structures that coalesce to shape the professional identity of the university-based teacher educator, and how this is influenced by their engagement with and in research. I begin by considering the complex notion of identity and outline how I have drawn on the theoretical positioning, conceptual tools, and language developed by Pierre Bourdieu, as presented in works such as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977) and *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990), to inform my analysis. I focus specifically on how foundational concepts such as *capital*, *habitus*, and *field* have shaped my understanding. Alongside the work of Bourdieu, I also draw on thinkers who take an affective lens to the social world, such as S. Ahmed (2004), Berlant (2011), Reay (2015), and Threadgold (2020), to explain how additional concepts, including *doxa*, *symbolic violence*, and *illusio*, are used within this study. I conclude by exploring the contested nature of professionalism, offering a clear distinction between this concept and that of professional identity as it is conceptualised and enacted within the context of teacher education.

At this point it is important to acknowledge that while I recognise that the theoretical framework of Bourdieu is deeply attuned to questions of power and inequality, foregrounding those related to social class (Grenfell, 2012), this study is not intended to undertake an analysis of discrete or intersecting characteristics such as race, class or gender. This reflects a methodological decision, shaped by my focus on how research engagement influences teacher educator identity. Issues relating to specific characteristics were not explicitly raised by participants during interviews and, while it is likely that these dimensions implicitly informed their experiences, they did not surface as central themes in the data. Nonetheless, I am acutely aware that such dimensions are never truly absent. As scholars such as S. Ahmed, (2004), J. Murray (2002), and Reay (2004) remind us, categories such as race, class, and gender inevitably shape the ways individuals navigate institutions, access capital, and experience legitimacy, even when these influences are directly articulated. Choosing not to centre these categories analytically introduces a tension that I do not take lightly. I made this choice not to sidestep these critical concerns, but to remain faithful to the scope and aims of the study.

## 2.2 Identifying Identity

Identity has become ubiquitous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, widely used in everyday discourse and as a central theme in social science research (Izadinia, 2014). As Bottero (2010) argues, while the concept was once regarded as a stable reflection of societal factors like occupation or family status, it is now understood as an individualised and dynamic construction which can be shaped by an infinite number of possibilities. In the context of teacher education, exploring identity is particularly complex, as Steadman (2023) explains. Defined as fluid and tentative (Davey, 2013), shaped by personal and professional experiences (Barrow et al., 2022), influenced by the dual contexts of schools and universities (Smith & Flores, 2019), and contingent on balancing the demands of teaching, service, and research (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; V. Ellis et al., 2011), it warrants close attention. My study acknowledges this complexity and, although focused on research, adopts a holistic view of the identity of the teacher educator, recognising the interconnected nature of their work and the ways in which its various elements collectively shape how they position themselves within the wider landscape of education.

As Steadman (2023) notes, research that foregrounds identity has value, enabling individuals and groups that might otherwise be marginalised, such as the teacher educator in the university, to articulate and begin to reconcile their place in the world. Davey (2013) also emphasises the importance of research that makes explicit what teacher educators do, believe, and stand for. She considers this particularly important, given their precarious position in both schools and universities (Davey, 2013). Zeichner (2006) also argues that understanding what constitutes identity is essential if the voices of teacher educators are to be valued in any attempt to define and control their curriculum, content, and purposes. These perspectives are especially relevant when considering the specific context of teacher education in England at this time, where the intensification of marketisation and regulatory control continues to reshape professional roles, institutional priorities, and the value attributed to different forms of knowledge, as documented comprehensively by V. Ellis (2023).

The understanding of identity I adopt here is informed by the perspective of Bottero (2010), who uses the theory of practice posited by Bourdieu (1977) to theorise identity as being multiple, fluid, and dynamic, continually created and reproduced through the interplay of distinct yet intricately interconnected relationships (Bottero, 2010). For Bourdieu (1977) a theory of practice emphasises the relationship between individual agency and structural conditions, proposing that social life is shaped by the dynamic interaction between *habitus*,

understood as embodied dispositions shaped by past experiences, *capital* referring to the resources individuals possess and can mobilise, and *field* which is the social spaces in which individuals act (Manton, 2012). As Bourdieu explains:

The theory of practice as presented here aims to escape from the ritual either/or choices which philosophy proposes by insisting that the most profoundly hidden structures of the different social worlds are the basis of the schemata of perception and appreciation, and hence of the practices characteristic of a social position" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72).

## 2.3 The Conceptual Toolbox of Bourdieu

In the following section, I outline how the key concepts of capital, habitus, and field are employed in this study.

### 2.3a Capital

The notion of capital is fundamental to understanding the interactions that take place in our daily lives (Moore, 2012). Beyond a purely economic interpretation, Bourdieu (1986) broadens the concept of capital to include its cultural, social, and symbolic forms. These different types of capital are important in understanding how individuals and groups navigate social structures, maintain their positions, and exert influence. Table 1 provides the definitions posited by Bourdieu of these types of capital and illustrates how they will be used in the analysis of my empirical data.

Table 1 Understanding Capital

	Definition of Bourdieu	Examples of Application
<b>Economic Capital</b>	<p>Economic capital is the primary form and is characterised by associations with material wealth. Bourdieu (1986) defines it as being that which is, "...immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights" (p. 42).</p> <p>Economic capital underpins other forms of capital. It may be accumulated, converted, or leveraged to shape position and power an individual or group occupies within the social hierarchy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment by the university, including employment contracts and salary.</li> <li>• External funding received by the university for training teachers and tuition fees that encourages recruitment at scale.</li> <li>• Financial reward gained through engagement with the Research Excellence Framework (<i>REF 2029</i>, n.d.)</li> <li>• Funding for resources and training for individuals to engage in professional learning.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Cultural Capital</b></p>	<p>Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and tastes that indicate the social standing of an individual. Bourdieu (1986) distinguishes between three categories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Embodied:</b> the cultural resources, preferences and behaviours that are internalised mostly during socialisation and which act normatively to ensure adherence to established cultural expectations.</li> <li>• <b>Institutionalised:</b> this is the formal recognition from a specific institution, such as a school or a university, that usually takes the form of academic qualifications and allows individuals to be easily compared.</li> <li>• <b>Objectified:</b> tangible objects of culture that one might use to gain an advantage in. This might include clothing, books, or jewellery indicative of a particular social standing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching experience and the knowledge gained through work in the classroom.</li> <li>• Prestige associated with the university and the broader value placed on education.</li> <li>• Holding academic qualifications and degrees.</li> <li>• Knowing how to behave in academic settings, such as conferences or meetings.</li> <li>• Material goods such as filled bookshelves and bulging files filled with notes, which are important in maintaining an appropriate professional performance.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Social Capital</b></p>	<p>Social capital is a resource derived from networks consisting of, the aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 247)</p> <p>It refers to the influence of collective relationships on individual behaviour and how we integrate into or distinguish ourselves within the social contexts in which we operate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collegiality and camaraderie among peers, enabling shared understanding through everyday language</li> <li>• Using connections to influence outcomes, such as access to policymakers</li> <li>• Strong working relationships with students and partner schools</li> <li>• Forming productive relationships with research mentors and knowing whom to approach for academic support.</li> </ul>

### 2.3b Habitus

According to Bourdieu (1990), as individuals engage in their day-to-day lives, their actions are presupposed by a hidden structure of entrenched habits, skills, and dispositions that

enable them to understand their world and perform accordingly. This system he refers to as the habitus. Our habitus adapts and evolves as our social experience widens, from early formative experiences to encompass the rules, values and mores of the various fields we operate in later life, such as education and employment (Reay, 2004). The habitus is largely tacit, operating beneath the level of conscious awareness, and typically only becomes perceptible when individuals find themselves in unfamiliar or dissonant situations (Manton, 2012). This is what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as the “feel for the game” (p. 66), a practical, embodied sense that usually guides our actions seamlessly, but becomes conscious when something feels ‘off’ or when we experience a sense of not belonging (Threadgold, 2020).

As P. Thomson (2012) explains, Bourdieu deliberately employs the metaphor of a game to conceptualise social life, not to imply that it is trivial or inconsequential, but to illuminate the structured yet dynamic nature of social practice. Reay (2004) further explains that within any given field, individuals develop an embodied, intuitive sense of how to act, what is valued, and what is possible. DiCicco-Bloom and Gibson (2010) argue that the game metaphor is apt, given that games are typically governed by rules, often competitive, and involve strategic action. Effective participation requires not only skill but also an embodied understanding of the logic of the field (Bourdieu, 1990), which P. Thomson (2012) further notes as being the underlying principles, values, and regularities that shape what is meaningful, legitimate, and possible within a given social space, and the capacity to navigate the terrain strategically. The rules of these games are not fixed or written down, instead, they are internalised through lived experience and shaped by the position of an individual in the field and their access to different forms of capital (Jenkins, 2008).

My work assumes that as we engage in social practices, such as research in teacher education, we are thrust into situations that require us to select from the accumulated resources we have accrued, consciously and unconsciously making choices that we feel to be the most appropriate to maintain credibility in that specific context. Here the work of Bourdieu (1977) builds upon that of Erving Goffman, who considers identity, or as he defines it, the self, as being something situated and substantial, constructed and maintained in the inner world of the individual (Goffman, 2007).

In one of the small-scale research projects that I have engaged with during my doctoral journey (PR8006), I used the theories of Goffman, drawing on his seminal text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 2007), to explore the identity of the teacher educator as it is performed during their interactions in schools. The dramaturgical metaphors

used across this text (Goffman, 2007) offer a particularly valuable lens for understanding the subtle, often strategic ways in which teacher educators manage their professional roles. His conceptualisation of identity as performance aligns closely with the concerns of this study. However, while I found this work to be helpful in illuminating the performative aspects of professional identity, I was also frustrated by its limited capacity to account for the structural dimensions of power and hierarchy. Bourdieu expressed a similar critique (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), noting that whilst his work has value, one should not consider human encounters without acknowledging the social, temporal or historical positioning that underpins them.

For Goffman (1983), there is a “loose coupling” (p. 13) between interactions, practices and social structures. However, for Bourdieu (1977), these structures are far more significant, becoming internalised and embodied in the minds and practices of individuals through the habitus. This is manifested as a set of dispositions that unconsciously steer individuals towards or away from particular actions, roles, or spaces, often in accordance with what they perceive to be for the likes of them (Bourdieu, 1990). This dynamic is explored in the work of scholars such as Reay (2015) and Threadgold (2020), who explain how particular orientations come to shape educational and professional trajectories, reinforcing patterns of inclusion and exclusion that are further structured by particular social positions. In the context of this study, this may manifest in different responses to research expectations, for instance, enthusiastic engagement with particular projects or a strategic withdrawal in hopes of avoiding scrutiny.

While individual agency plays a crucial role in shaping practice, it is equally important to consider how the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) produces and reproduces enduring dispositions over time. To understand this, Lizardo (2004) highlights the strong connection between the ideas of Bourdieu and the psychological genetic structuralism of Piaget. As someone familiar with the theories of child development proposed by Piaget, particularly those outlined in *Science of Education and the Psychology of the Child* (Piaget, 1970b), I was struck by the broader applicability of his ideas beyond the classroom. Piaget (1970) posits that “knowing reality means constructing systems of transformations that correspond, more or less adequately, with reality” (p. 15), emphasising assimilation and accommodation as key processes. Assimilation integrates new elements into existing dispositions, while accommodation reshapes dispositions to adapt to unfamiliar contexts (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). Although Bourdieu does not explicitly reference Piaget, these processes offer a useful lens for understanding how habitus can be both enduring and responsive (Reay, 2004).

### 2.3c The Field, Symbolic Capital, and Symbolic Violence

In using the term field, Bourdieu (1977) prompts us to transcend descriptions of physical space and instead think relationally about the psychological life spaces in which our daily interactions, practices, and transactions unfold. These fields are not static or discrete; they are dynamic, intersecting spaces that create social, cultural, and epistemological boundaries between different domains of practice (Murphy & Costa, 2016). P. Thomson (2012) highlights that while these may appear transactional, focused on the exchange of goods, services, knowledge, or status, the field also serves as an arena for the production, circulation, and appropriation of capital, with social actors engaged in a continuous struggle to accumulate, exchange, and monopolise the resources available to them. As Bourdieu (1999) elaborates, the field should be understood as being,

...a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field. All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies.

*(Bourdieu, 1999, pp.40–41)*

To support my analysis, I will define teacher education as a field that is a structured social space shaped by specific practices, norms, and power dynamics (Bourdieu, 1990). However, following the work of J. Murray (2002), it will also be recognised as dependent on more dominant fields such as higher education and schooling, all of which are constituent parts of the wider social field of education. Within this framework, a focus on teacher educators who specialise in the primary phase necessitates a more nuanced perspective. I position this as what Grenfell and James (1998) describe as a sub-field, operating within the broader field of teacher education but marked by its own distinct logic and requirements. As J. Murray and Passy (2014) explain, while teacher education in this phase is subject to the overarching structures and expectations of the wider field of education, it also demands specific forms of capital and expertise, such as knowledge of child development, early literacy and numeracy, and the ability to foster a nurturing and inclusive learning environment that distinguishes it from other areas of specialism.

Building on the notion of the field, I am also interested in the boundary work (S. Thomson et al., 2021) that lies at the heart of the role of the teacher educator. The concept of boundaries, initially introduced by Gieryn (1983) to differentiate science from other intellectual activities, is defined as emerging from differences in culture, values, beliefs,

language, or norms within specific areas of practice. Working across boundaries can often highlight discontinuities that impede communication, collaboration, or interaction between fields (Akkerman et al., 2021). Wenger (2010) suggests that these moments of discontinuity can also be generative, prompting the accommodation of new perspectives and supporting situated learning, a process in which knowledge is constructed through authentic participation within a social context. However, Akkerman and Bakker (2011) caution that boundaries may also result in fragmentation, exclusion, or entrenched division, particularly when perceived as being rigid or policed. In this study, I explore teacher educators as boundary workers (S. Thomson et al., 2021), examining how they navigate the intersecting fields of primary schooling and higher education, each with its own, and at times conflicting, regulatory demands, discourses, and expectations.

I also see a resonance here with the concept of symbolic capital, which Bourdieu (1977) explains as the social connections, forms of knowledge, and personal attributes that are most highly valued within the dominant discourse of a given field. This study assumes that the extent to which teacher educators are able, or feel compelled, to engage in boundary work (S. Thomson et al., 2021) is shaped by the location and distribution of symbolic capital within and across the intersecting fields they inhabit. For example, while published research in prestigious journals is valued as symbolic capital within universities, the professional expertise of teacher educators, such as in school partnerships or curriculum design, often lacks equivalent recognition (Roberts & Weston, 2014). I will also examine how teacher educators have responded to the influence wielded by government-appointed experts (Benn, 2023), who have used their collective symbolic power to control what counts as legitimate knowledge within teacher education.

This exertion of control can be understood through the concept of symbolic violence, which Bourdieu (1990) defines as a “subtle, often unnoticed form of social domination that is exercised through cultural symbols and practices” (p. 167). Symbolic violence operates by imposing dominant meanings, values, and norms on individuals or groups, leading them to accept prevailing hierarchies as natural or legitimate (Threadgold, 2020). Crucially, it works through institutions such as education, language, and culture, reinforcing existing power structures without the need for coercion (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2000). The work of Roberts and Weston (2014) highlights that as teacher educators reflect on their positioning in relation to these field boundaries, they may come to internalise feelings of inferiority or inadequacy, coming to believe that certain roles or forms of knowledge are not for the likes of them. In

this way, as Bourdieu (1990) proposes, symbolic violence plays a key role in sustaining the social order and regulating access to power within the field.

The power of emotion is important in my study, and I have found the work of Threadgold (2020) to be particularly valuable in conceptualising this. His work integrates the theoretical position of Bourdieu with that of more contemporary scholars who foreground affect in their work, including S. Ahmed (2004), Berlant (2011), and Reay (2015). In doing so, it aims to offer a nuanced understanding of how practices are always infused with emotion (Threadgold, 2020). This perspective is grounded in the premise that it is impossible to separate what we do from the feelings behind it, or indeed those that emerge as we do it (Threadgold, 2020). For Threadgold (2020), affect is present across all encounters, as personal histories, present situations, and future aspirations intersect, producing affinities, feelings, and emotional investments that shape our everyday practices. I have found this lens particularly useful in understanding the professional identities of teacher educators as boundary crossers (S. Thomson et al., 2021), enabling a move from surface-level descriptions of practice to consider how emotional investment, aspiration, and affinity shape the way they navigate and theorise their work across multiple and often conflicting spaces.

Alongside this affective framing, two further concepts are important to the theoretical framing of this study. The first is *doxa*, which refers to the taken-for-granted assumptions that shape what is seen as natural or normal within a social field (Bourdieu, 1990). As Deer (2012) explains, these *doxic* assumptions, which become internalised through our habitus, form an often invisible backdrop against which professional identities are shaped and enacted. In the context of teacher education for example, the perception that the work is primarily practical rather than academic constitutes a *doxic* position that continues to shape how teacher educators feel they are perceived by others and how they come to understand themselves.

The second concept is *illusio*, which is defined by Bourdieu (1990) as being “what causes the game to be taken seriously, what makes the game worth the trouble of playing” (p. 67). Threadgold (2020) expands on this, finding it to refer to the emotional and intellectual investment individuals make in a field and in its stakes, the belief that what the field offers matters, and that participation is meaningful and worthwhile. In the context of this study, *illusio* helps to explain why teacher educators continue to engage in their roles within higher education, even as they face increasing regulatory pressures, performative accountability measures, and a devaluation of their expertise, as discussed by Clarke and Phelan (2017). It reflects a belief in the value of the game, even when the rules are contested or appear

stacked against them (Vázquez Gutiérrez, 2022). For Threadgold (2020), *illusio* offers a powerful lens through which to understand the interplay of hope and frustration, agency and constraint. It helps explain why teacher educators continue to persist, adapt, and play the game (P. Thomson, 2012), even as they question its fairness, direction, or personal cost. This commitment is often sustained despite the toll it takes on their mental and physical health, or on their wider relationships, evoking a sense of what Berlant (2011) terms *cruel optimism*. This refers to the attachment individuals have to an ideal or goal that, while initially seen as desirable, ultimately hinders their well-being or future potential. However, as Threadgold (2020) notes, *illusio* does not signal naïveté or passivity. Rather, it signals a deeply felt, embodied investment in the field, one that compels teacher educators to remain engaged even when the game feels misaligned with their values or is unsustainable in its demands.

#### **2.4 Notions of Professionalism and Professional Identity**

As Davey (2013) writes, while numerous theoretical approaches exist for understanding identity, defining what makes this professional is particularly challenging. Steadman (2023) echoes this point, observing that although the term professionalism is frequently invoked in educational research, it is often left undefined. Drawing on Williams (2014), she frames professionalism as a “keyword” (Steadman, 2023, p. 7), a term used frequently and uncritically, yet densely packed with assumptions about power, social order, and relationships. In a similar vein, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) critique the concept of a profession, arguing that it conceals the competitive struggles and symbolic violence embedded in all fields. In light of these points, I will now clarify how this study conceptualises both professionalism and professional identity.

Evetts (2013) argues that multiple and sometimes competing definitions of professionalism coexist, which she organises into three main categories. The first is a traditional, taxonomic, and functionalist perspective. As Saks (2012) explains, this associates professionalism with established, high-status occupations such as medicine and law, where specialist knowledge, autonomy, and ethical responsibility are key defining features. The second is an ideological perspective, which Noordegraaf (2007) and Evetts (2011) characterise as focusing on the processes of *professionalisation*, how occupational groups actively seek recognition, jurisdiction, and legitimacy through credentialing, standards, and regulatory mechanisms. Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011) link this conception to the distribution of symbolic capital, highlighting how those with power within a field define what is valued and recognised as professional conduct. The third is a discursive interpretation which informs the understanding

adopted in this study. As described by writers such as Evetts (2011), Hargreaves (2000), and Vanassche et al. (2019), this understanding draws upon both the previous definitions and finds professionalism to be a socially and institutionally constructed concept, one that is externally regulated but also deeply affective, shaping how individuals feel about their work, their place in the world, and themselves.

As Moore and Clarke (2016) argue, for teachers, and by extension teacher educators, whose professional status remains somewhat ambiguous within wider society (V. Ellis et al., 2014; D. Labaree, 2008), the act of claiming, performing, and internalising the label of professional becomes an essential means of securing legitimacy. Here I return to Goffman (2007) and his concept of “impression management” (p. 208), a process involving consciously and unconsciously adopting the behaviours, values, and discourses associated with being professional in order to present oneself as credible, thereby avoiding embarrassment and social stigma. However, it is important to recognise that this work is not solely outward facing. It also operates internally, as individuals evaluate, assimilate, and accommodate their performances in relation to the existing schemas in their habitus (Lizardo, 2004), enabling them to maintain a credible and authentic sense of self (Goffman, 2005). In this way, identity work can be seen as being strategic, relational, and emotionally charged, an act that is shaped by both the gaze of others and an internal desire for recognition and legitimacy.

However, as Adams (2012) reminds us, this understanding of professionalism should not be seen as repressive; it is also productive. Viewed symbolically, as Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011) and Wilkins (2011) write, professionalism is not a fixed or uncontested construct but one that remains open to negotiation and transformation, particularly when individuals are able to mobilise the right forms of capital. Building on this perspective, my study does not assume teacher educators to be passive recipients of institutional pressures and policy demands. Rather, it explores how they might be understood as what S. Ahmed (2014) defines as “willful subjects”, who actively navigate, negotiate, and at times subvert prevailing constructions of teacher educator professionalism.

The extensive contribution that Jean Murray has made to the field (e.g., J. Murray, 2002; J. Murray et al., 2009; J. Murray and Kosnik, 2011; J. Murray and Male, 2005; J. Murray and Passy, 2014) has significantly informed the conceptual framing of both professionalism and professional identity in this study. Across these works, teacher educators are positioned as operating in a liminal space, where they must navigate competing professional expectations, personal histories, and shifting institutional and sectoral demands. The concept of liminality,

which refers to the state of being in-between or occupying a transitional, often ambiguous space between defined roles or contexts, is also addressed by Boyd and Harris (2010) and Davey (2013), and is a notion I have found especially useful for understanding the tensions my participants described as they work across different professional fields. Extending this idea, Swennen et al. (2010) offer a nuanced account of the sub-identities of teacher educators, such as teacher, researcher, mentor, and academic, highlighting that although these professional identities may align at times, they frequently come into tension. These tensions are reflected in the empirical work of Roberts and Weston (2014), who, with specific reference to research engagement, highlight moments of uncertainty, compromise, and resistance within the accounts teacher educators share about their professional lives.

To summarise, this study conceptualises professionalism as an externally constructed and regulated discourse that defines what it means to be a professional within a particular field (Evetts, 2013; Saks, 2012). Drawing on sociological perspectives, posited by Evetts (2011) and Noordegraaf and Schinkel (2011), as well as educational literature such as Hargreaves (2000), Sachs (2016), and Wilkins (2011), professionalism is understood as socially, historically, and politically shaped, often embedded within policy frameworks, accountability measures, and managerial expectations. Viewed through this discursive lens, professionalism is recognised not only as a set of external demands but also as a mechanism that shapes how the work of the teacher educator is defined and valued (J. Murray, 2002).

In contrast, professional identity is understood as the internal, dynamic, and affective sense of self that teacher educators construct in response to these external discourses of professionalism (Vanassche et al., 2019). Informed by works such as Izadinia (2014) and J. Murray (2002), my use of the term professional identity captures how individuals use the capital they have accrued to negotiate, resist, adapt to, and make sense of their roles within the shifting landscape of teacher education. As J. Murray and Passy (2014) find, it reflects the emotional, relational, and intellectual work involved in sustaining a coherent professional self amidst often competing and contradictory expectations.

## **2.5 To Conclude.**

In this chapter, I have established the theoretical foundations of this study by examining the relevance of the work of Bourdieu as presented in works such as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977) and *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990), alongside that of related thinkers such as S. Ahmed (2014), Berlant (2011), Reay (2004), and Threadgold

(2020), whose affective ideas enrich and extend his conceptual framework. Using these perspectives, I engaged with key concepts such as capital, habitus, and field, demonstrating how they are mobilised to inform and structure my analysis. The chapter also explored the contested nature of professionalism, offering a distinction between this and professional identity as it is conceptualised and enacted within the context of teacher education.

Having established the framework for my research, the following chapters will focus specifically on teacher education and the teacher educator. These chapters will adopt two lenses.

- **Chapter 3: The outside-in**, which considers broader societal, institutional, and environmental contexts and how these structure perceptions and practices.
- **Chapter 4: The inside-out**, which prioritises lived experiences, personal motivations, and agency.

## Chapter 3: The Outside In.



*Figure 3 The Beast from the East*

### 3.1 Introduction

The photograph (Figure 3) that I feel best sums up what will be considered in this chapter is a snapshot I took during a march organised by the University and College Union (UCU), protesting about the erosion of pay, working conditions, and pensions for academic workers. It was the culmination of fifteen days of strike action. As if mirroring the dis-ease of those protesting, at the start of the industrial action, the jet stream shifted, a polar vortex hit, and we experienced an extreme weather event referred to locally as the “Beast from the East”. This brought snow and bitterly cold winds, which raged across the university campus, bringing colleagues from across academic departments in the university to huddle around braziers, sharing hip flasks and hand-warmers, and telling stories about our lives and work. During those strike days, I attended rallies and teach-ins with speakers who extolled the importance of higher education, presenting a picture of academia and academics that felt so different from my experiences in teacher education. For the first time in my long career in the university, as the snow swirled and the wind blew, I had the space to think about what it meant as a teacher educator to be a part of the wider academic community.

After establishing the role that theory will play in my study, this chapter explores the political and institutional factors that lie outside of the individual but are significant in influencing the relationship that university-based teacher educators have with research. I begin by examining the deeply felt, embodied investment in the field that Bourdieu (2007) refers to as the *illusio* of the university, before exploring the complexities of defining what constitutes a "good teacher" (Orchard & Winch, 2015) and tracing the evolution of teacher education. I will then interrogate the distribution of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), shedding light on the power dynamics that are currently at play. Finally, I conclude by addressing the status of educational research, emphasising the dominance of paradigms linked to what Furlong and Whitty (2017) describe as the "Science of Education" (p.28).

### **3.2 The Pull of the University**

Reflecting on the photograph that opened this chapter (Figure 3) has led me to consider what motivated individuals to take to the streets of London on that freezing February day, and what this reveals about why being part of the university is important for the participants in my study. Whilst frustration and anger about pay and working conditions lay at the forefront of the protest, from the placards, banners, and chants of the protestors, a profound belief in the moral purpose of higher education was also evident. As Bourdieu (2007) describes in *Homo Academicus*, his sociological analysis of the university field, this belief reflects the deeply ingrained *illusio* of academia. It signals an emotional and intellectual investment in the idea that universities are not merely institutions for the transmission of knowledge but are spaces that uphold critical inquiry, foster intellectual freedom, and contribute to the public good (Boulton & Lucas, 2011; Moscardini et al., 2022). As Collini (2012) describes, the "potency and prestige" (p. 6) that is often associated with the *illusio* of the university exerts a strong force, which Threadgold (2020) refers to as "social gravity" (p. 9). This he defines as a pull which compels suitably disposed individuals to align their practices with the accepted norms, rules and values, of the academic field (Threadgold, 2020).

Boulton and Lucas (2011) trace the pull of modern higher education to the model of the liberal European university that originated in Berlin in the early nineteenth century. It can also be linked with the content of seminal lectures given by John Henry Newman (Collini, 2012) in which he portrayed the university as a space for intellectual collaboration, mutual respect, and the pursuit of a "pure and clear atmosphere of thought" (Newman, 1852, p. 88). This romanticised vision further reinforces the *illusio* of academic life (Bourdieu, 2007). In the

context of this study, for teachers whose professional status is often ambiguous (Etzioni, 1969; D. Labaree, 2000), and whose work leaves little time for meaningful reflection (Barrow & Xu, 2023; Hayler & Williams, 2020), the university could be seen as a sanctuary, a space where they have intellectual autonomy and where their critical thinking might be allowed to flourish.

However, after two decades in academia, I have come to recognise that the reality of working in higher education often contrasts starkly with the idealised visions of the kind discussed above. The modern university has been shaped by the “totalising forces of neoliberalism” (Wood et al., 2024, p. 709), characterised by corporatisation, standardisation, and audit culture, hallmarks of “academic capitalism” (Slaughter & Leslie, 2003), a position that is unpacked further in Ball (2021) and Giroux (2019). Furlong (2013) cites the American historian of higher education Rothblatt (1997), who pointed out almost thirty years ago that the roots of this ideology run deep, and as a result, there is no longer a coherent idea or set of ideas as to what a university is, and as such, no one seems to be able to speak for them. Mula-Falcón and Caballero (2022) highlight how this volatility and precarity have pushed academic practices towards managerialism and market-driven priorities, impacting daily activities and relationships. Ball (2016) warns that the impact of this can be seen not only in our actions but also affecting our emotional well-being, provoking a pervasive feeling of “ontological insecurity”, which he defines as being “a loss of a sense of meaning in what we do and of what is important in what we do” (p.1054).

While performativity and academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 2003) remain deeply entrenched, normalised and embodied in the everyday practices of educators, cracks in this dominance have certainly emerged (Holloway, 2019; Wilkins, 2011). In the university, these are seen in activities that emphasise collective academic agency, such as the growing momentum of movements to decolonise the curriculum, which encourage forms of resistance (Brown 2019). However, Brown (2019) also warns that these risk being co-opted and reframed as more subtle mechanisms of control, with scholars such as Abu Moghli and Kadiwal (2021), S. Ahmed (2012), and Gopal (2021) highlighting how these initiatives can be appropriated to serve institutional branding purposes, often sidelining their potential for driving meaningful structural change. An example of this from my own experience is the development of a curriculum for the PGCE programme that extends beyond the Core Content Framework (Department for Education, 2019). Initially intended to foster reflective teachers and provide a critical alternative to state-driven educational narratives, the curriculum later became a central feature in marketing and recruitment materials used to

differentiate the university's teacher education provision from that of other providers. During a recent Ofsted inspection, the same curriculum was also judged to meet the quality requirements set by the Department for Education. Although teacher educators viewed their work as a form of subversion, its simultaneous alignment with recruitment targets and regulatory demands suggests it was, in practice, more an act of compliance than resistance. In this way, as V. Ellis and Childs (2023) stress, within the English university, teacher education occupies a particularly complex and precarious position, leaving it particularly vulnerable to the forms of control described above (Brown 2019).

In the sections that follow, I will unpack this further but will begin by exploring what I see as being the core purpose of the profession, supporting the development of the good teacher (Orchard & Winch, 2015).

### **3.3 What Constitutes the Good Teacher?**

After outlining the pull of academia, I will now narrow my focus to look at the classroom. Following the work of Furlong (2023), I will begin by reflecting on what makes a good teacher, recognising that the answer given has much to say about the characteristics of the education or training that beginning teachers need. Orchard and Winch (2015) classify possible responses into three broad categories

- The good teacher is seen as an executive technician, who is told by others what to do without needing to understand why they are being told to do it. As Hordern and Brooks (2024) find, this perspective resonates with the current discourse that underpins teacher education and is evidenced in the emphasis placed upon what works, regardless of context (Biesta, 2007). This is also seen in the status afforded to randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews, which are portrayed as being the gold standard of educational research (Hordern & Brooks, 2023)
- The good teacher is an expert craftsperson, whose expertise is based upon situated or tacit know-how that is evident from their practice but is not necessarily put into words (Furlong, 2023). The influence that this understanding has had on the sector can be seen in the privileging of school-led teacher education and the marginalisation of the role of the university, as documented in works such as George and Maguire (2017) and McIntyre et al. (2019).
- The good teacher is a professional, which is the conception advocated in works such as Cochran-Smith et al. (2018), Whitty (2014), and Zeichner (2006). Professional teachers draw on a "practical wisdom" (Orchard & Winch, 2015, p. 14), combining practical know-how with the knowledge gained through engagement with research.

For Biesta (2015), this conception requires the teacher to show virtuosity in their practices, a form of embodied educational wisdom involving the ability to make wise educational judgements about what is to be done based upon what is perceived to be educationally desirable. For teacher education, the development of virtuosity (Biesta, 2015) asks that students be given the time and support to engage in meaningful critical reflection, drawing together experience with theory and practice (Zeichner, 2006). This model aligns with how the university-based teacher educators in this study position themselves. However, the space, time, and resources necessary to support the development of the professional teacher (Orchard & Winch, 2015) make this model appear distant from the context in which this study is situated.

These different understandings demonstrate that, despite being portrayed as a technical or structural concern, teaching and teacher education are inherently and unavoidably political practices (Clarke & Phelan, 2017). The work of Maguire (2000b) reinforces this position, positing that since its beginning, teacher education has been subject to policies legitimised using notions of “value and sense” (p.230). The former refers to the provision of education that is designed to meet the expectations of society, such as the need to overcome illiteracy or the promotion of social mobility. The latter is then called into play when social spending needs to be curtailed, and sensible rationalisations of public services need to be made (Maguire, 2000a).

Over the last twenty years, the changes to how teacher education is funded provide an example of such sensible rationalisations in action. What was once a programme fully funded by the government has gradually shifted to one that is now entirely financed through student fees (Furlong, 2023). Giroux (2019) observes that this change across all of university education redefined students as fee-paying clients, fundamentally altering their relationship with universities. Wood et al. (2024) find this to exert pressure on teacher educators to prioritise curriculum content that is directly applicable to teaching practice. Consequently, broader educational aims, such as fostering critical thinking, reflective practice, and understanding educational theory, risk being sidelined in favour of career-focused practical skills, reflecting what Furlong and Lawn (2010) term a “turn to the practical” (p. 6).

### **3.4 An Uncertain Beginning**

While it is not in the scope of this thesis to present a comprehensive chronology of initial teacher education, it is necessary to understand the complex and uncertain position it has occupied in the university since its very beginning, highlighting certain ambiguities and

complexities that I argue persist to this day. Here, I draw upon the guidance of Beckett and Nuttall (2017), who identify that if we are to fully appreciate the structural and ideological forces that inform practice in the present, it is valuable to develop a historically informed understanding and, in doing so, create a usable past. As Maguire (2000b) suggests, looking back to look forward allows for interrogation of the complex interrelationships within society, that might have been hidden or taken for granted as each specific experience was lived. The perspectives discussed in the following sections have been chosen to highlight that my study does not take place in a vacuum but is deeply influenced by historical contexts and the legacies of the past.

The formal education of teachers emerged at different times and in diverse forms across the globe, shaped by cultural movements, colonial legacies, and socio-political imperatives (Tatto & Menter, 2019). As Furlong et al. (2011) note, in many European countries, such as Germany and Switzerland, traditions of teacher education were established in the eighteenth century. These early programmes were informed by the intellectual and cultural priorities of the Enlightenment, grounded in a belief in education as a tool for moral and intellectual improvement, with teachers positioned as key agents in advancing rational thought and social progress (Furlong et al., 2011). In other parts of the world, this formalisation occurred later, typically as a reactive measure to the expansion of mass education driven by industrialisation, the demands of modernisation, or nation-building efforts aimed at fostering social cohesion and political legitimacy (Green, 2013). In postcolonial contexts such as India and many areas of the African continent, teacher education expanded significantly following independence, as governments sought to build national identity and support social development through mass schooling (Crossley & Watson, 2004). In colonial contexts more broadly, education systems were shaped by the structures and ideologies imposed during colonial rule, which have left enduring imprints on educational practices and policies, including how beginning teachers are trained (Crossley & Watson, 2004; Tikly, 2004).

Within this varied international landscape, the development of teacher education in England was notable both in its relatively late emergence, beginning in the nineteenth century, and in the ideological tensions that shaped its evolution (Furlong, 2023; Hencke, 1978; Maguire, 2000b). From its inception, English teacher training was deeply entangled with social control (Maguire, 2000a). Teachers were expected to embody the scholastic, moral, and physical traits that would promote stability within the working classes, a group the government viewed with suspicion due to its association with potential socialist agitation and perceived moral decline (Hencke, 1978; Maguire, 2000a). As Furlong (2023) notes, the training provided at

the time was primarily practical and governed by a state-imposed curriculum. However, as Maguire (2000b) writes, there was contestation from the outset regarding what teachers should be taught. While some agreement existed on the need for a degree of theoretical grounding, there was substantial debate about whether teachers should be educated as intellectuals or simply trained to deliver the rudiments of knowledge to their pupils (Maguire, 2000a).

Historical interpretations, such as Dent (1977), Gilliard (2018), and Shakoor (1964), alongside the socio-political readings of history presented in Chitty (1992), Hencke (1978), and Maguire (2000a), paint a picture of teacher training in these early days as being valuable and popular but also rife with contestation. For example, Shakoor (1964), whose thesis on the training of teachers between 1900 and 1939 identifies the concerns raised by school inspectors at that time about the intellectual rigour of the curriculum, the quality of teaching, the expertise of those delivering the training, and the robustness of recruitment practices. Reflecting on my experiences in teacher education over the last twenty years, these concerns feel resoundingly familiar.

### **3.5 Enter the University**

The role of universities in teacher education expanded after the Cross Commission Report (Cross Commission, 1880), which enabled select institutions to establish non-residential day colleges for prospective teachers (Gilliard, 2018). This arrangement benefited the government by using existing university resources to address the growing demand for teachers. It was also beneficial for the universities which could draw additional funding for facilitating that training (Patrick, 1986). Unlike underfunded teaching colleges whose programmes were poorly resourced and lacked intellectual rigour (Keating, 2020; Zang, 2020), universities promoted liberal, autonomous thinking through curricula focused on classical and renaissance philosophers and nineteenth-century reformers (Furlong, 2023). However, as Patrick (1986) notes, the move to the university, an institution founded on the autonomy it had to stand aside from state control (Collini, 2012), also reduced the influence that the government had over the specific content of its curriculum. The notion of the university as being an institution that is completely autonomous from the state is a long way removed from the central control currently imposed across higher education by the Office for Students (2018). However, the impact that this sector body has on the university is very different from the ever-increasing regulation and control that is imposed on teacher education.

Even in these early days, the affiliation between higher education and the development of teachers was challenging. As Patrick (1986) notes, the “avowed vocationalism” (p. 243) of teacher training was often met with distaste by those within the university, who were concerned that such an association would force universities to adopt the practical, technical training that was typically found in teacher training colleges, an approach that was seen as illiberal and inferior compared to the academic traditions of higher education (Furlong, 2023). Outside of the university, additional concerns were voiced by those in school, worried that teachers trained in the university would have amassed the cultural capital needed to associate themselves with those who are in power and would come to monopolise the profession, shaping the field to align with their liberal ideals (Patrick, 1986). Nevertheless, as Furlong (2023) finds, the universities and teacher training colleges continued to work in parallel, each taking a different approach to their work that reflected the various perspectives held about the overall purposes of education.

The MacNair Report (Board of Education, 1944), marked another milestone and was produced in response to the haphazard processes for teacher recruitment and training that had evolved during the Second World War (Furlong, 2023). After two years of deliberation, the report proposed that teacher training colleges and universities form an “organic federation” (Patrick, 1986, p. 251) in which they would work more closely together. However, it is also noted that the committee were divided about how to implement this (Crook, 1995). Patrick (1986) attributes this to the dichotomy between education and training, with Crook (1995) reporting the position of MacNair, the chair of the committee and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool, arguing that training was fundamentally distinct from the more intellectual and theoretical pursuit of education and as such had no place within a proper university. Such overt dismissal by a senior university figure is telling, though perhaps not surprising, as it resonates with enduring debates about whether the sector should offer teacher education or teacher training, and reflects the continued struggle over the academic legitimacy and status of teacher preparation programmes within higher education (Murtagh et al., 2023).

The Robbins Report (Committee on Higher Education, 1963) proposed significant reforms to address the hierarchical divide between universities and teacher training colleges (Patrick, 1986). It recommended that existing teacher education programmes be extended from two to three years, with the option of a fourth year for those pursuing the newly introduced Bachelor of Education Honours degree. It also asked that, regardless of whether the training was provided in teacher training colleges or universities, all qualifications be subject to

formal ratification by a university (Committee on Higher Education, 1963). As Furlong (2023) finds, this move was intended to reinforce the position of teaching as a profession, giving it the status of other fields such as medicine and the law. However, as Patrick (1986) observes, this shift ultimately led to the decline of teacher training colleges. By the 1990s, most were closed or, in the case of the university where my study is situated, integrated into existing universities or other higher education institutions.

Maguire (2000a) posits that the enhanced role that the university came to take at this time resulted in teacher education entering a “devil’s bargain” (p.150). First used in relation to teacher education by Goodson (1993), this refers to the assumption that as a result of the move to the university, teacher education has come to be viewed as excessively academic by teachers but is seen as being a vocational pursuit by colleagues in the university. As Maguire, (2000a) finds, this assumption has been operationalised over the past thirty years to justify the increasing control of the state over all aspects of teacher education.

Patrick (1986) highlights the encroachment of the state on teacher education in more recent times, beginning with Circular 3/84 (Department of Education and Science, 1984), which led to the development of the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (CATE). This was a quango created to enforce specific criteria that all teacher training providers were required to meet to be able to award Qualified Teacher Status. CATE, which came to be renamed as the Teacher Training Agency, the Teacher Development Agency, and the Teacher Regulation Agency before being disbanded in 2018 (Furlong, 2023), was tasked with regimenting course length, assuring the recent and relevant experience of teacher educators, steering the content of the taught curriculum and encouraging collaboration and shared ways of working across providers (Childs & Menter, 2013). However, for the university, this also created further tension, as securing and retaining the accreditation required to award Qualified Teacher Status necessitated allowing an unprecedented intervention by the state into its institutional and academic autonomy (Patrick, 1986).

### **3.6 Exit the University**

This usable past (Beckett & Nuttall, 2017) sheds light on the ambiguous and contested position that teacher education has historically occupied at the intersection of schooling and higher education. Over the last forty years, its position has become even more tentative, succumbing to a range of policy enactments that are documented comprehensively by V. Ellis (2023), J. Murray and Mutton (2015), and Mutton and Burn (2024). This has resulted in the university being distanced from all policy decisions regarding teacher education

(McIntyre et al., 2019). George and Maguire (2017) exemplify this, noting the privilege afforded to provision that is defined as “school-led”, as seen in the introduction of School Centred Initial Teacher Training Providers (SCITTs), the now-defunct School Direct initiative and most recently in the development of the National Institute of Teaching (NlOT) (Daly, 2023). This change in emphasis was first outlined explicitly in the white paper, *The Importance of Teaching* (Department for Education, 2010), which set out the education policy agenda for the 2010–2015 coalition government. As well as emphasising the connection between teacher quality and the quality of the education system, this white paper made the sweeping claim that the school is the best training environment for beginning teachers to learn their craft (Whitty, 2014).

In the intervening years, the sector has been subject to successive phases of review and reform, which have led to a marked increase in regulatory control (Murtagh & Rushton, 2023). V. Ellis and Childs (2023) argue that this has resulted in intense scrutiny, surveillance, and the silencing of the collective voices of those who work in the university. As seen in the recent de-accreditation of teacher education providers deemed not to have sufficiently addressed the quality criteria outlined in the Initial Teacher Education Market Review, the stakes are undoubtedly high for anyone who does not comply (Vickers-Hulse et al., 2024). More recently, however, this silencing has taken a more sinister turn, extending to individual academics, whose opinions counter the one held by the state (Fazackerly, 2023).

Apple (2012) offers a more nuanced perspective on these changes, emphasising that understanding the position of education today requires recognition of both market-driven reforms and the influence of neoconservative values. He argues that while neoliberalism promotes competition, privatisation, and a reduced state role in education, neoconservatism reinforces an emphasis on traditional values, national identity, and moral standards within the curriculum (Apple, 2006). While the principles of neoliberalism and neoconservatism might seem contradictory, they have come to work together in a “hegemonic alliance” (Apple, 2006, p. 22), driven by the fear that as a society, we have lost control over all aspects of our social, cultural, and economic lives (Watson, 2021). This perspective will be expanded further in relation to teacher education in the next section.

### **3.7 The Education Wars**

As Clarke and Phelan (2017) observe, to justify reform of the kind experienced across teacher education, the state is seen to invoke a crisis, stoking fears that the sector is unable to meet the most pressing needs of society. Spendlove (2023) identifies the current crisis as

centring on social mobility, a politically charged term used by governments across the political spectrum to signal their commitment to equality of opportunity through educational excellence (Mockler, 2014). Initially focused on economic inequalities, social mobility has become tied to the effectiveness of educational strategies aimed at "closing the achievement gaps between disadvantaged and privileged peers" (Eyles et al., 2022, p. 6). In England, the crisis has been exacerbated by data showing that moving up the social ladder in Britain has become harder today than at any point in more than half a century for children born into poor households (Partington, 2023). As Eyles et al. (2022) also find, despite considerable financial, political and ideological intervention, education has failed to function as the great social leveller that successive governments have promised it could be.

Framing this ongoing disparity as a solely educational concern has produced a compelling and emotionally charged narrative, with the blame placed on advocates of progressive, child-centred education (Biesta, 2013; Ravitch, 2014). According to Apple (2006), progressive education has become shorthand to delineate any educational approaches that are perceived as challenging neoconservative or neoliberal values, and which have come to be closely associated with the university-based teacher educator (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023). This connection was explicitly stated in the rhetoric of Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education (2010–2014), who described teacher educators in the university as being part of an educational establishment he labelled as "the Blob", portraying them as being enemies of promise, intent on preventing the poorest children from getting the education they need (Gove, 2013). While Jones (2019) traces this perspective back to the neoconservative influence of the "pamphleteers and policy entrepreneurs of the 1970s and 1980s" (p. 326), Spendlove (2023) identifies that over the last five years, these debates have become particularly vitriolic, an intensification that Benn (2023) and Watson (2021) posit is fuelled by the influence of the populist, strong state factions of the Conservative government that was in power at the time. This rhetoric prompts critical questions that will be explored in my work about how teacher educators perceive their roles within a system that casts them as barriers to reform, undermining their efficacy as practitioners and researchers.

I have found the work of Watson (2021) to be particularly pertinent, identifying how the advancement of social media has further fuelled this discourse, noting the rise of self-identified "trad-micro populists" or "neo-trads" across these platforms. Advocates of these perspectives draw on cognitive psychology and statistics to evidence their position, presenting these as scientifically proven, evidence-informed insights into how children learn (Wrigley & McCusker, 2019). At the same time, they also call for a back-to-basics approach

centred around the transmission of core knowledge, the authority of the teacher, and the maintenance of disciplined learning environments (Jones, 2019). These ideas are frequently distilled into accessible formats through tweets, podcasts, and blogs making them widely available to practitioners (Watson, 2021). Tom Bennett, a leading figure in the “neo-trad” movement, describes social media as driving a “reformation” (Bennett, 2018, p. 8) in education which bypasses traditional academic hierarchies to reshape educational debates. However, as Nelimarkka et al. (2021) argue, while the use of social media has transformed how teachers access educational research, we should engage with caution; their work raising important questions about the quality and accuracy of what is being shared in these online spaces

Tom Bennett is also a founder of ResearchEd, a grassroots, teacher-led initiative that emphasises the use of scientifically grounded, data-driven approaches to improve teaching and learning, providing accessible and digestible insights into fields such as cognitive psychology and their application in the classroom (Bennett, 2013). While this would seem laudable, the approach that it takes has been criticised by writers such as Biesta (2015), V. Ellis and Childs (2023), Horder and Brooks (2024), and Kidd (2015) who argue that it promotes a highly controlled and rigid model of teaching that neglects the nuances of student engagement and the complexity of classroom dynamics. This will be shown to place the teacher educator in an increasingly ambiguous position, as they are expected to embed such principles in their practice, even though they might be dubious of their origins and impact (Vickers-Hulse et al., 2024).

The rise of ResearchEd also serves as an example of how symbolic capital, defined by Bourdieu (1977) as being the prestige and recognition gained within a field, can be accumulated by individuals who manage to attract the attention of the right people in power at the right time (Benn, 2023; Watson, 2021). Events organised by ResearchEd have drawn notable figures from both educational and political spheres, including policymakers such as Nick Gibb, the Minister of State for Schools, a position he held at various points between 2010 and 2023, as well as voices such as Daisy Christodoulou and Katharine Birbalsingh, all of whom advocate for a knowledge-rich, teacher-directed approach to education that can be aligned with neo-traditional education values (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023). By tapping into the anxieties around educational standards and teacher competence, this movement gained traction in a political climate that was receptive to neo-traditional educational ideals (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023).

Building on this position, Benn (2023) observes that while civil servants, senior school leaders, and union representatives have traditionally maintained close ties with the Secretary of State for Education, the dynamics of influence and power have shifted over the past decade. These established actors have been displaced by what Benn (2023) describes as the New Educational Establishment (NEE), a group that includes policy entrepreneurs like Tom Bennett, handpicked special advisors, and chief executives of powerful Multi-Academy Trusts. This phenomenon is not unique to England, with Anderson (2019) noting the rise of what she refers to as “edupreneurs” (p.13) across teacher education in America, who assume that education is failing the most disadvantaged children and that only intervention from the private sector can fix it. Within this shifting landscape, a glance at the now-familiar cast of figures who feature prominently in the policy documentation regulating teacher education in England reveals only limited representation from the university sector (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023).

In the next section, I turn to the development of key teacher education policies, examining how these have been driven by shifting power dynamics and the marginalisation of academic voices.

### **3.8 The Impact of Policy**

To begin to understand how policy has developed in light of such ideological influence, it is important to start with the stated commitment of the Department for Education to create a “world-class teacher development” system (Department for Education, 2022). To achieve this, they have identified a ‘...golden thread of high-quality evidence’ (Department for Education, 2022, p. 5), which should underpin training across all stages of the career of the teacher. While this thread is now woven into the fabric of teacher education, its inception can be traced to the recommendations of *The Carter Review* (2015), whose report on the quality and effectiveness of initial teacher training found inconsistencies in the content, delivery, and quality of provision across the sector. This review recommended that a core curriculum for initial teacher education should be developed by a sector body and also advocated for developing a regulatory framework to support this (Mutton et al., 2017).

A core curriculum was first published in 2016, which set out a broad framework for use by all teacher education providers (Department for Education, 2016). However, as V. Ellis and Childs (2023) identify, while much was made about this framework and its underlying principles, the impact it had across the sector was limited. In 2019, the revised Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework was published, which has since been revised to become

the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (Department for Education, 2024a). These documents are more specific than the original conception and have been constructed by an expanded expert advisory panel, which is comprised of representatives from the New Educational Establishment (Benn, 2023). These frameworks are framed as providing a structured introduction to the core body of knowledge, skills and behaviours that define “great teaching” (Department for Education, 2019, p. 3).

As Hordern and Brooks (2023) observe, these frameworks are distinctive in being supported by a comprehensive reference list designed to ensure that teacher educators engage with state-approved evidence rather than relying on “the comfort of prevailing orthodoxies” (Gibb, 2017). This reference list is badged as comprising the “best available educational research” (Department for Education, 2019, p. 3), but as V. Ellis and Childs (2023) write, the notion of bestness is a highly subjective criterion raising axiological questions about “whose knowledge is privileged and why that might be” (p. 68). However, Hordern & Brooks (2025) posit, what constitutes the best in these frameworks does not need to be inferred. Rather, the status of the “best” refers to research that belongs to what is termed the “New Science of Education” (Furlong & Whitty, 2017, p. 28), and which promises significant improvements in educational outcomes by finding out what works, requiring the application of positivistic, rigorous and systematic research methods (Hordern & Brooks, 2023).

This specific understanding of educational research has been advocated in the approaches promoted by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) (Benn, 2023). The EEF is a Policy Intermediary Organisation (Innes, 2023), groups that have proliferated across all aspects of government in the last twenty years. The EEF receives considerable funding to produce evidence reviews and evaluations of educational interventions that have the purpose of improving social mobility, narrowing the attainment gap between family income and educational attainment (Burnett & Coldwell, 2021). While educational research can be characterised by its rich diversity of positions and purposes (Hordern & Brooks, 2023; Pring, 1999), the EEF privileges research that draws upon Randomised Controlled Trials (RCTs) (Burnett & Coldwell, 2021). Following the findings of influential public figures such as Ben Goldacre (2009), RCTs are identified within the new science of education as the gold standard of educational research (Biesta, 2007; Burnett & Coldwell, 2021).

Until recently, RCTs took a relatively marginal position in the English educational system. However, as a result of the emphasis placed on this form of research by the EEF, the number of RCTs with a specific education focus has grown exponentially (Burnett &

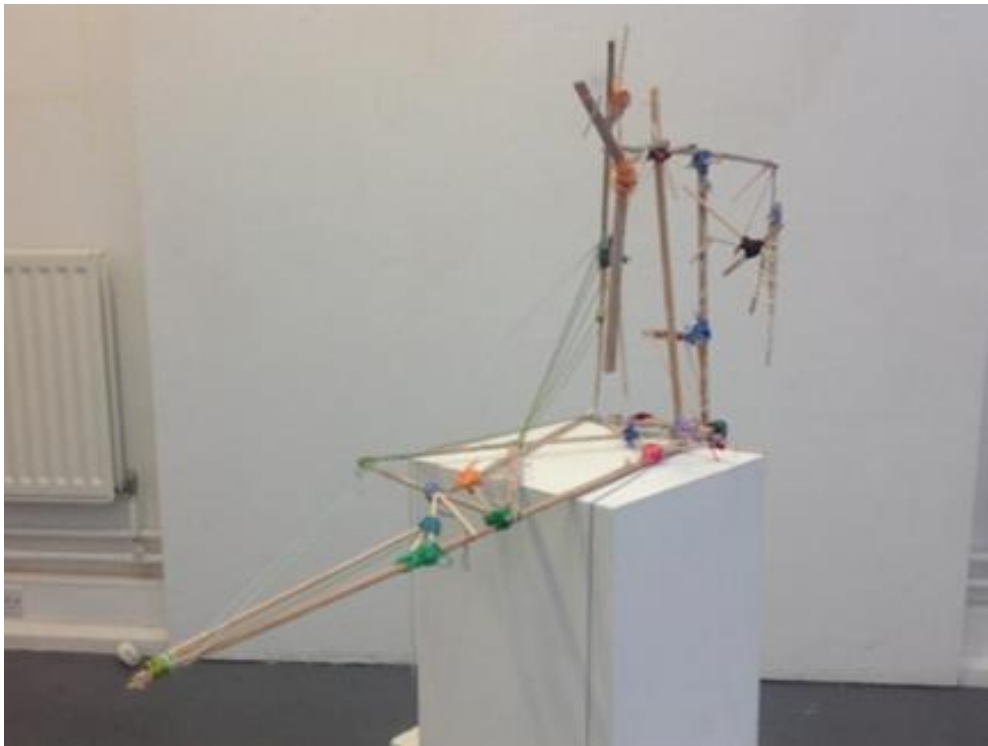
Coldwell, 2021). As works such as Biesta (2007) and Wrigley (2018) identify, while RCTs are a valid research method, if the approach is privileged in an environment where funding for educational research and development is sparse and where a certain kind of evidence is closely tied to accountability measures and metrics, and forms the basis of all that is expected to be taught to students, the impact they have on how teacher educators come to understand their position within the research landscape is potentially profound.

### **3.9 To Conclude.**

From the literature that has been reviewed in this chapter, teacher education can be positioned in a contested space, shaped by various forces that struggle for dominance and legitimacy (P. Thomson, 2012). This is not a new phenomenon but was shown to have developed over time, building from the uncertain beginnings of the profession in the late nineteenth century (Hencke, 1978; Maguire, 2000a). Within the field today, the university-based teacher educator occupies a potentially marginalised position that is devalued by those who align themselves with the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1990) of the university, while at the same time not fully respected by schools and teachers who are encouraged to view their work as being outdated and politically motivated (Gibb, 2017; Gove, 2013). Symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) appears to reside with carefully chosen individuals who align themselves with the ideological positioning of the state (Benn, 2023), and are far removed from the university-based teacher educator, who is required now to prioritise particular research paradigms across their work (Burnett & Coldwell, 2021; Hordern & Brooks, 2024).

The next chapter will interrogate this further, moving from an external viewpoint to an internal one that examines how the habitus of the teacher educator shapes their engagement with research, their navigation of institutional demands, and their ongoing negotiation of professional identity within the university field.

## Chapter 4: The Inside Out.



*Figure 4 Sticks and Strings and Drips of Glue*

### 4.1 Introduction

The contemporary artist leading the training session on that damp November morning pointed to the constructions we had made from balsa wood and hot glue the previous week that were piled in the corner of the studio. They explained that for this workshop session which was part of an Erasmus Plus research project that explored the place of contemporary art in the primary school (Martins, 2018), we would need to deconstruct our previously made constructions, re-use the balsa wood, and make use of anything we could find around the studio to create a new piece that expressed who we are as teachers or teacher educators. We were asked to work collaboratively in this endeavour. This slightly blurry photograph is of the structure that a fellow teacher educator and I created. Reflecting on the various conceptions of professional identity presented in this chapter, I was reminded of that structure and the processes of deconstruction, reconstruction, provocation, and reflection that unfolded materially and conceptually that morning. Participating in this project was a pivotal experience in shaping the development of my own researcher identity, and I feel it is a fitting photograph to frame this chapter.

In the previous chapter, I examined the external factors that have shaped the field of teacher education. In this chapter, I shift the focus inward, exploring what the literature says about

the factors that structure the habitus of teacher educators, including their motivations for entering the profession, how the role is perceived, and how conceptions of the "good teacher" (Orchard & Winch, 2015) influences their practices in the university. I also reflect on what it means to be a teacher educator by analysing the multifaceted nature of the role and the priorities assigned to its various components. I will consider the diverse ways in which teacher educators engage with and in research as part of their professional practices. Referring to the image (Figure 4), the perspectives discussed in this chapter offer a way to reflect on the colours of twine chosen to connect and suspend the components of teacher and researcher identities, where stability and precarity can be found, and why that might be.

## 4.2 Pushes or Pulls

As Barrow and Xu (2023) find, teacher education is often described as an accidental career, one that is fallen into rather than intentionally pursued, a perspective echoed in the narratives of Hayler and Williams (2020). Davey (2013) identifies a range of drivers that lead individuals to make what she describes as the "great escape or leap of faith" (p.49), identifying factors that push individuals out of the classroom towards teacher education. These pushes include feelings of frustration arising from the perceived failures of school leadership, limited pathways for promotion or, as Barrow and Xu (2023) find, the desire to escape from the "nonstop breathlessness" (p. 535) of being a teacher brought on by excessive workloads, relentless accountability and the ever-intensifying needs of children and families.

However, the studies of Barrow and Xu (2023), Davey (2013), and Hales and Clarke (2016) also provide evidence of drivers that pull individuals towards higher education. Their work offers insight into the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1990) of the university, a concept that refers to the shared belief in the value and stakes of academic life. These beliefs include the hope of having greater academic freedom, opportunities to influence the profession more widely, as well as the time to think (Davey, 2013). This position was also noted by Holme et al. (2016), whose study of the motivation for becoming a university-based teacher educator identifies three themes that pull individuals towards teacher education: the potential for career development, the influence of key figures, and a positive stance towards learning. The large-scale study of Richter et al. (2021) notes the influence of both pushes and pulls, their analysis finds that rather than being attributable to a single driver, several motives act simultaneously to push and pull an individual to leave the classroom and enter the university. Their work is particularly relevant to this study, identifying an affective correlation between

the motivation for entering the profession and the emotional well-being and overall job satisfaction experienced later in their careers (Richter et al., 2021).

Understanding this requires consideration of how the role of the teacher educator is initially conceptualised during what J. Murray and Male (2005) refer to as the “anticipatory stage” (p.127) of their careers. This refers to the period before entering university-based work, during which an initial blueprint of what it means to be a teacher educator is formed. This blueprint serves as a reference point, guiding individuals in assessing the credibility and effectiveness of their performance once they take on the role. Reflecting on my own experiences, I was pushed out of education due to feeling unsupported in a climate of intense scrutiny and change. I can also now see that my understanding of what it means to be a teacher educator before starting work was minimal, and I remember feeling very surprised during the first few days in the role, discovering that teacher education is subject to the same external inspections as I had been used to in school. The importance of effective induction, as stressed by Boyd and Harris (2010) and J. Murray and Male (2005), is resonant here. My first few years working in the university felt like something of a rollercoaster, as I gradually realised that being a primary school teacher and being a teacher educator, while sharing some similarities, also require distinct skill sets and forms of knowledge. For the most part, I was left to navigate and figure out these differences on my own.

#### **4.3 A Difficult Practice That Looks Easy**

In my study, the motivation for becoming a university-based teacher educator is assumed to be closely tied to the beliefs individuals hold about what it means to work in higher education and the degree to which they are invested in the values and expectations of the academic field. However, how teacher education is perceived is often far removed from the reality of what it entails. The work of Darling-Hammond (2006), D. Labaree (2008), and Zeichner (2006) posits that teaching and teacher education are complex and difficult practices that are assumed by the general populace to be easy. D. Labaree (2000) provides insight into why this might be, identifying four defining factors that inform these perceptions, which are significant in understanding how teacher educators position themselves and are positioned in the field of education.

The first of these is the influence of what Lortie (1975) defines as the “apprenticeship of observation”, referring to how an individual comes to understand teaching and teachers through the extensive experience they have had as a pupil in school, or as might be extrapolated for this study, an understanding of the work of the teacher educator through the

apprenticeship of observation undertaken during their teacher education. This understanding is drawn from what Goffman (2007) would identify as a front-of-stage performance, which provides a pupil or student teacher's eye view of what it means to be an educator. As Borg (2004) finds, this view is restricted in that it does not account for any activity that might occur behind the scenes. In the case of the teacher educator, this might include the extensive work involved in aligning their curriculum with the frameworks that the government has mandated, the development of mentor training resources and materials, quality assurance activities, and the significant work involved in forming and maintaining relationships with students and schools (V. Ellis et al., 2011).

This assumption is propagated further by the assumed ordinariness of what is taught (D. Labaree, 2000), the expertise of the teacher or teacher educator being in areas of knowledge that everyone already knows, having been taught it as part of their education. This aspect is particularly relevant to my empirical exploration, as the expertise of my participants lies in the teaching of children aged between three and eleven. The work of J. Murray and Passy (2014) highlights characteristics that are specific to teacher educators whose specialism is working with the youngest children. These include supporting students in developing confidence and competence across a wide range of subject areas and fostering the pastoral skills essential for working with young children, while at the same time cultivating the critical and intellectual understanding necessary to deepen their practice and lay a strong foundation for ongoing professional learning (J. Murray, 2002; J. Murray & Passy, 2014).

While these two assumptions relate to both teaching and teacher education, D. Labaree (2000) also posits a further tension, noting that teacher educators are rarely seen as engaged in producing substantive knowledge themselves, but rather act as mediators, adaptors, and translators of work carried out by others. This position is evident objectively in the work of Clapham et al. (2023), whose analysis finds initial teacher education to be scarcely visible across Research Excellence Framework assessments, noting that two-thirds of staff in schools of education are not considered to be research active. This is also seen more subjectively in the work of Roberts and Weston (2014), who report that whilst teacher educators show confidence in mediating the work of others and are adept in supporting students to find their academic voice, they often fear the production and publication of their own research.

To conclude his analysis, D. Labaree (2000) highlights that the central challenge to teacher education in the university lies in its overall purpose, which is to demystify teaching and learning and foster the independence and confidence of novice teachers. This requires the teacher educator to give away their hard-won professional expertise for the betterment of society. This sets it apart from traditional professions such as medicine or law (Etzioni, 1969), where professional expertise is both specialised and safeguarded, and the exclusivity of knowledge and skills creates a boundary that protects the status, authority, and legitimacy of the profession (Evetts, 2013).

#### **4.4 Teaching, Service and Research**

Given the assertion of D. Labaree (2000) that teacher education is a difficult job that is made to look easy, this section will consider the different facets of the role. Davey (2013) notes that professional identities can only be understood if what teacher educators know, feel, believe in, and do are made explicit. While various perspectives exist, such as those proposed by Ben-Peretz (2001), V. Ellis et al. (2011), and Livingston (2014), I have found the seminal framework offered by Ducharme and Ducharme (1996) to be particularly useful. This conceptualises the work of teacher educators in universities as being aligned with their academic peers, dividing their responsibilities into three key areas: teaching, service, and research.

##### **4.4.1 The Importance of Teaching**

Of these three components, for Ducharme and Ducharme (1996), teaching is the one that is perceived by those working in the field as being the most important. The systematic review of literature about the identity of teacher educators carried out by Izadinia (2014) attributes this to their prior experiences of success in the classroom and the resources accrued from these experiences which provide a foundation from which they can build or maintain a sense of professional credibility in the world of higher education, a position also noted by Swennen et al. (2010). However, it is also important to recognise that teaching is not a neutral activity but a practice that draws upon a range of ontological and epistemological positions (Clarke & Phelan, 2017; Furlong, 2023). The approaches and strategies used when teaching are contingent on how the teacher educator sees themselves, the relationship they have with the content of what they teach, the perceptions held about their learners, their philosophies about the purposes of education, and how all of this aligns with their position in the setting in which they work (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014).

While this was considered earlier in my work on conceptions of the “good teacher” (Orchard & Winch, 2015), the work of Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2014) provides a more nuanced view, recognising teaching as an “enacted professionalism” (p. 118). In line with works such as J. Murray (2006) and Vanassche et al. (2019), this emphasises that professionalism in teaching is not simply a static set of attributes or qualifications but is expressed through actions and interactions that are dynamic and context dependent. In this way, the professional identities of teacher educators can be seen to be performed and negotiated within their specific institutional and sociopolitical contexts (Vanassche et al., 2019). In explaining this, Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2014) outline three positionings, which I will explore next, paying particular attention to the potential of each of these for understanding the relationship that teacher educators have with research.

The first of these is the “teacher educator of pedagogues” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014, p. 121), who brings to their teaching a humanistic and relational understanding of education that emphasises the centrality of care, responsibility, and inquiry. Aligned with what is typified as a progressive view of education (Webber & Miller, 2017), teaching for the teacher educator of pedagogues is located in a “community of passion” (Darling, 2001) that requires student teachers to know their children and to use this knowledge as the basis for making judgments about what works and what does not work in a particular context at a specific time. Research engagement for teacher educators here aligns with an interpretivist paradigm that prioritises understanding lived experiences (Chowdhury, 2014). This approach recognises that learning is not a fixed or isolated process but is subjective and deeply interconnected with personal, social, and cultural contexts. As outlined in the previous chapter, this position is often blamed for negatively impacting social mobility (Gibb, 2017; Gove, 2013), and it is interesting to reflect on how this perspective has been almost completely erased from curriculum frameworks that underpin teacher education today (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023; Watson, 2021).

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2014) also identify the teacher educator of “reflective teachers” (p.121), whose teaching is based upon an understanding that the education system will change over time, with teacher education emphasising the skills required to think critically about education and act with integrity. Aligning in many ways with a critical paradigm and echoing the notion of virtuosity posited by Biesta (2015), engagement in research when teaching for reflective teachers is designed to promote research literacies, model strategies for deconstructing research, and present a picture of knowledge as being contingent on the social and cultural conditions of its creation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This

position in teacher education is evidenced in works such as Cochran-Smith et al, (2018), Lander and Nicholson (2020), and Zeichner (2006), who emphasise the potential that teacher education has for exploring issues of social justice. This perspective is particularly relevant given that the university where my study is based has a strong reputation for critically oriented research and prides itself on embedding social justice principles across all its programmes, including teacher education. However, as Spendlove (2023) finds, this approach stands in contrast to the prevailing stance on teacher education held by the government (Biesta, 2007; Wrigley & McCusker, 2019). This creates tension, and in my empirical research, I consider the impact being situated in such seemingly polarised intellectual spaces has on the professional identity of the teacher educator.

The final conception, which Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2014) refer to as the “subject specialist teacher educator” (p.124), focuses on promoting student teacher mastery in specific subject areas. When positioned primarily as a subject expert, the teacher educator assumes the role of transmitting established knowledge to student teachers, ensuring that factual content is correctly understood and remembered. This is described as "single-loop teaching" (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014, p. 124), a process in which the educator identifies and corrects student misconceptions but does not engage in deeper reflection or challenge the underlying assumptions and beliefs that shape these. This approach is underpinned by the perspectives on knowledge held within a post-positivist paradigm, as described by Guba and Lincoln (1994), in which knowledge is viewed as objective and measurable. The role of the teacher educator here is to guide students towards a more accurate understanding of subject matter. While this emphasis on subject specificity might be seen to be most closely related to the secondary age phase, if one looks to the expectations that underpin the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (Department for Education, 2024a), and as the work of Hordern and Brooks (2023) shows, this position can now be seen to be increasingly prevalent across all ages and stages.

#### **4.4.2 The Importance of Service**

My exploration will also consider the second aspect identified by Ducharme and Ducharme (1996), which is defined as administration and service, which forms an invisible yet vital part of teacher education. Davey (2013) identifies this area as expansive in scope, including institutionally focused tasks like administration and management, engagement with the community, and providing pastoral support for students. It also includes what V. Ellis et al. (2011) refer to as relationship maintenance activities, which include liaising with schools regarding the progress of student teachers, as well as addressing concerns and holding

formal and informal meetings with colleagues about issues related to their role. V. Ellis et al. (2011) also note that teacher educators are often called to contribute to the wider community of partnership schools, becoming governors or attending after-school events. Lander and Nicholson (2020) highlight that success in building and maintaining these relationships with schools is vital for maintaining the professional credibility of the individual. These activities are also seen as crucial for fostering partnerships and enhancing the status of the university, particularly given the increasingly competitive nature of teacher education (V. Ellis et al., 2014). As someone who currently has leadership responsibilities and is less involved with direct teaching, this aspect has come to dominate much of my time, and my empirical work will explore how my participants understand this part of their role.

It is also important to emphasise the pastoral and relational dimensions of the work of teacher educators, particularly as my research is in the primary phase of teacher education. As J. Murray and Passy (2014) note, this phase is shaped by gendered norms of care and nurturing. J. Murray (2006) observes that for primary teacher educators, many of whom enter the university with child-centred educational ideals, the alignment between primary schooling and primary teacher education allows them to sustain the validating principles and practices of their professionalism. These are often rooted in feminised, child-centred, and experiential discourses, which are often carried into and reproduced within higher education settings (Maguire & Weiner, 1994). Acker and Dillabough (2007) highlight the tension between these relational aspects of teaching which are often characterised as feminised labour, and the masculinised domains of research and institutional leadership, which are typically more highly valued.

#### **4.4.3 The Importance of Research**

The final aspect of the role of the teacher educator to be considered here is their relationship with research (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996; V. Ellis et al., 2011). However, before exploring the factors that influence the practices of teacher educators in this area, it is important to clarify how key terms will be used, exploring the distinctions between research and scholarship, as well as the practices of research production and consumption. Although often used interchangeably, these terms have distinct meanings and operate within different systems of value and recognition in higher education (Brew, 2017).

Clough and Nutbrown (2012) outline three criteria that allow formal research to be distinguished from other forms of inquiry: it is purposive, addressing a specific question or problem; positional, shaped by the researcher's context and only becoming research when

shared; and political, aiming to make a difference or effect change. A more formalised understanding is stated in international frameworks such as the Frascati Manual (OECD, 2015), which stipulates that research must be novel, methodologically rigorous, and replicable. The Research Excellence Framework Guidance (*REF 2029*, n.d.), further institutionalises this view, evaluating research on originality, significance, and rigour, with peer-reviewed outputs as the primary measure of value. Underpinning these frameworks is a particular conception of legitimate knowledge, one that carries significant symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2007). For those able to produce research that meets these criteria, the rewards are significant taking the form of institutional credibility, promotion, external funding, and elevated professional status (Hazelkorn, 2015).

This study defines research production as the generation and dissemination of original academic work, most often in the form of peer-reviewed publications, book chapters, conference papers, and externally funded projects, that are institutionally recognised as markers of scholarly credibility (Cole, 2000). As Hazelkorn (2015) highlights in her critique of global university rankings, such forms of output are central to institutional performance metrics and individual career progression. However, as Clapham et al. (2023) observe, initial teacher education was “scarcely visible” in the outcomes of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF), the system in the United Kingdom for assessing the quality and impact of academic research (*REF 2029*, n.d.). As discussed by Beauchamp et al. (2013), Clapham et al., (2023), and J. Murray et al. (2009), despite its powerful influence on institutional priorities and resource distribution, the REF appears to marginalise fields like teacher education, where research is often collaborative, close to practice, and not easily captured by traditional metrics of academic excellence. This study will draw on these insights to examine how teacher educators position themselves as research producers, exploring how structural constraints, professional identities, and institutional practices shape their capacity and inclination to generate and share new knowledge.

In contrast, research consumption will be considered in line with the lens of La Velle and Flores (2018), who position teacher educators not merely as transmitters of research-informed content but as critical mediators of educational knowledge. Their work highlights the multifaceted nature of research engagement, where teacher educators acquire and critically engage with current academic literature, mobilise research by selecting and adapting it to meet the specific needs of their Initial Teacher Education programmes, and utilise it by integrating research into their teaching practices and professional discussions (La Velle & Flores, 2018, p. 533). Following this understanding, research consumption will be

seen as an active, interpretive, and situated process. Although often invisible, the consumption of research plays a crucial role in research-informed teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Livingston, 2014). Yet despite its importance, research consumption is rarely recognised within workload models or other institutional frameworks such as performance review criteria or promotion pathways (V. Ellis et al., 2012, 2014; Lander & Nicholson, 2020).

While research is often narrowly defined and formally rewarded, scholarship encompasses a broader and more inclusive spectrum of intellectual activity (Chetty & Lubben, 2010). The typology of Boyer (1997) has been particularly influential in expanding understandings of scholarly work to include the generation of knowledge (discovery), its synthesis across fields (integration), its application to real-world contexts (application), and the examination of teaching and learning (teaching). Within teacher education particularly, writing such as Chetty and Lubben (2010), Lunenberg (2010), and J. Murray (2010) stress that these forms of scholarship often take relational and practice-based forms, such as mentoring student teachers, designing innovative curricula, leading professional learning, or engaging in reflective inquiry. While Cochran-Smith (2005) finds scholarship to be central to construction of professional identity, these contributions are frequently undervalued in environments that prioritise traditional research outputs and production (V. Ellis et al., 2014). Despite this, I am drawn to the more democratic and inclusive vision of scholarship that Boyer (1997) offers, one I feel would resonate deeply with the lived realities of many teacher educators. This study, therefore, seeks not only to explore how participants engage with scholarship but to better understand how they define, value, and navigate it within a system that does not always recognise its worth.

Following the work of Boyd et al. (2014), my conceptualisation of research engagement acknowledges the distinction between research production and research consumption, while also adopting a democratic and practice-oriented view of scholarship that values diverse forms of knowledge generation and use. To help frame this understanding, I have found the *Intellectual Knowledge Base of Teacher Education* (UCET, 2020) particularly valuable. This articulates the core values and principles that should underpin the research practices of teacher educators, placing an emphasis on critical reflection, the interplay between theory and practice, and collaborative engagement. It also highlights the importance of developing research competencies, alongside dispositions such as curiosity, innovation, and openness to new perspectives. In addition, I draw upon the findings of the *Inquiry into the Role of Research in Teacher Education* (BERA-RSA, 2014), which calls for a reimagining of teacher

educators as both producers and consumers of knowledge. Informed by the clarity of this framework, my understanding of research engagement will encompass the following interconnected practices:

- Incorporating relevant research to inform curriculum design and structure.
- Using research-based knowledge to shape the content and delivery of learning.
- Developing research literacy to critically evaluate and engage with evidence.
- Undertaking research to generate new insights and contribute to educational knowledge.

(BERA-RSA, 2014)

Taken together, these perspectives provide a more expansive and inclusive understanding of what it means to engage in research as a teacher educator. By moving beyond narrow definitions of research to embrace a model that also values diverse forms of scholarly activity, this study acknowledges the multiple ways in which teacher educators contribute to knowledge. This broader framing creates space to explore how such engagement shapes and is shaped by their evolving professional identities.

#### **4.4.3 The Teacher Educator and Research**

Over the past three decades, attention to research within teacher education has intensified, highlighting the intertwined roles of practitioner and researcher (Tack et al., 2023; Cochran-Smith, 2005). However, as Hökkä et al. (2012) observe, teacher educators often articulate a confident sense of professional identity as teachers but express uncertainty or constraint when positioned as researchers. Roberts and Weston (2014) describe a polarisation in which participants distinguish sharply between those who publish and those who do not, reinforcing a perception that academic legitimacy is equated with research productivity, an assumption that has been central to this study.

The diversity of relationships that teacher educators have with research is further illustrated in the work of Tack and Vanderlinde (2014). This ranges from those who do not see research as being part of their professional role to others who embrace and are fully involved in researching their practice and that of the sector, as also noted by Griffiths et al. (2014). To understand this heterogeneity of practice and to provide a framework to facilitate reflection, Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) present a typology of what they feel to be the “researcherly dispositions” of teacher educators, which they define as being,

...teacher educators' habit of mind to engage with research—as both consumers and producers of research—to improve their practice and contribute to the knowledge base on teacher education.

(Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014, p. 301)

Their work proposes this disposition to be shaped by three dimensions, which will be valuable to note when considering the research activities of my participants:

- **The behavioural dimension**, which pertains to the inclination or willingness to participate in research activities.
- **The affective dimension**, which involves being attuned to and recognising opportunities for research engagement.
- **The cognitive dimension**, which reflects the capacity and competence to conduct and interact with research as an integral part of their professional role.

(Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014)

While this provides insight into the dispositional factors that facilitate engagement in research, it is also noted that there are a wide variety of ways teacher educators might engage in this intellectual work (Lunenberg, 2010). Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) identify three types of teacher educators, which draw upon the behavioural, affective, and cognitive dimensions explained above. The first category, the “Enquiring Teacher Educator” (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014, p. 306) refers to individuals who are curious and interested in research but lack the skills or knowledge to engage effectively. As a result, their potential to contribute to the production of new knowledge is limited, despite their inclination. Secondly, they refer to the “Well-Read Teacher Educator” (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014, p. 308), referring to those who value research and are familiar with the research base for their area of professional practice. This type is seen to have a greater potential to develop a researcherly disposition but lacks the ability and is not sensitive to research opportunities in their daily practice. The final type is the “Teacher Educator Researcher” (Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014, p. 309), who shows a sensitivity to research opportunities, the ability to engage, and the inclination and motivation to do so.

The more recent large-scale work of Tack et al. (2023) finds that teacher educators today have a more positive disposition towards being research-engaged than might have been initially assumed. These findings contradict works such as Griffiths et al. (2014) and Lander and Nicholson (2020), who find that teacher educators often struggle with this aspect of their role. Tack et al. (2023) attribute this to the emphasis that is currently placed within schools

on evidence-informed practice. Within the university context, they also note the significance of professional learning, which, because of pressures brought to bear by mechanisms such as the Research Excellence Framework, are increasingly focused on the quality of research produced by all suitably contracted staff (Clapham et al., 2023). While Cole (2000) notes that for teacher educators, the “publish or perish” mantra might not be as significant as it is for colleagues in other disciplines, the impetus for the university to provide effective ongoing professional learning in this area might be seen to be having an impact.

#### **4.4.4 Supporting Professional Learning**

The importance of sustained and purposeful professional learning across the career span of teacher educators has been well documented over the past two decades in works such as Czerniawski et al. (2017), Lander and Nicholson (2020), J. Murray et al. (2009), and Roberts and Weston (2014). The term professional learning is used deliberately here to distinguish it from professional development, which is often characterised by externally driven, top-down interventions that are short-term, skill-focused, and aligned with institutional or policy imperatives (Czerniawski, 2018). Such initiatives frequently position educators as passive recipients of knowledge, with limited agency or opportunity for meaningful engagement (Kennedy, 2014). In contrast, professional learning is understood as a more expansive, ongoing, and situated process. It is embedded in the everyday practice of teacher educators and shaped through reflection, critical inquiry, and collaboration (Czerniawski et al., 2017). Rather than responding to perceived deficits, professional learning is oriented toward the continuous development of identity and intellectual engagement (Webster-Wright, 2009). As Timperley (2011) asserts, effective professional learning is not peripheral to teaching but central to it, and is sustained through shared purpose, mutual trust, and collaborative cultures.

In considering what should constitute professional learning for teacher educators, it is also important to acknowledge the international efforts to establish a coherent and robust knowledge base for teacher education that have emerged in the last twenty years (Czerniawski, 2018). Such efforts recognise that professional learning must be grounded in a clear and collectively developed understanding of the purposes, practices, and theoretical foundations of teacher education. As discussed by Czerniawski et al. (2019), Swennen et al. (2010), and Swennen and Volman (2019), these have emerged as a response to the often fragmented and diverse contexts within which teacher education operates, as well as the varying backgrounds, roles, and expertise of teacher educators themselves. While Dengerink and Lunenberg (2020), Klecka (2009), and Korthagen et al. (2006) provide some

examples, an important contribution has been made by the International Forum for Teacher Education Development (InFo-TED), a pan-European network committed to enhancing teacher educator professionalism (International Forum for Teacher Educator Development, n.d.).

InFo-TED has developed a framework comprising thirteen "building blocks" of teacher educator development, which are intended to offer a structured way to conceptualise the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required across the career span of teacher educators. These building blocks recognise the multi-layered influences on teacher educator practice, encompassing macro-level factors (e.g., national policy and reform), meso-level factors (e.g., institutional cultures and structures), and micro-level factors (e.g., personal beliefs, identities, and practices) (Czerniawski, 2018). This multi-level, holistic perspective provides a valuable foundation for designing coherent and contextually responsive programmes of professional learning for teacher educators (International Forum for Teacher Educator Development, n.d.).

Although a detailed review of all thirteen areas is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will conclude by focusing on one, namely research. Given that universities are traditionally regarded as sites to produce new knowledge (Collini, 2012), it would be assumed that they would have a pivotal role to play in developing the academic confidence and competence of teacher educators. However, as has been exemplified in this chapter, the literature highlights the challenges teacher educators face in this area, where research expectations are high, but support is often unevenly distributed or entirely absent (Lander & Nicholson, 2020; Roberts & Weston, 2014).

One important strategy for addressing this challenge is effective research mentoring. As discussed by Griffiths et al. (2010) and Lander & Nicholson (2020) effective research mentoring, in which early-career or teaching-focused teacher educators are paired with experienced colleagues, provides a structured and relational space in which teacher educators can develop research skills, build academic confidence, and cultivate a sense of scholarly identity. For teacher educators, particularly those transitioning from teaching roles into academia (J. Murray & Male, 2005) research mentoring provides access to the dominant *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1990; Deer, 2012) of the university, including the values, dispositions, and practices that are associated with academic productivity. Griffiths et al. (2010) find that the journey to becoming a researcher is slow, but the appointment of a mentor can act as an important bridge. Lander and Nicholson (2020) argue similarly, noting that mentoring should

be recognised as central to the development of a strong researcher identity, particularly during the induction phase and into the early stages of an academic career.

Alongside mentoring, structured writing groups represent another effective form of support. Lee and Boud (2003) outline these as being collaborative spaces that provide a practical, task-focused approach to academic writing and offer structured support for drafting, revising, and reflecting on research outputs. Lander and Nicholson (2020) posit that to be effective, such groups should be facilitated by experienced academics who can offer targeted feedback, share publication strategies, and support participants in navigating the complexities of scholarly writing. R. Murray and Moore (2010) and Roberts and Weston (2014) also find writing groups can build confidence particularly if they set attainable goals within a supportive and collegial environment. For teacher educators who may be uncertain about their academic identity in relation to research, these groups can serve as affirming spaces in which to develop their scholarly voice and sense of belonging within the research community (Lee & Boud, 2003; J. Murray, 2014).

While the two approaches advocated above look at support available at individual and group level, it is also important to acknowledge the role the university plays in supporting the development of a researcher identity. In this case, I refer specifically to activities that take place in the wider university, such as research afternoons where colleagues from across the department come together to discuss their work, departmental research conferences, and research seminar sessions that linked to specific university research centres. These events are designed to normalise research engagement as a collective endeavour and embed it within the everyday rhythms of academic life (Roberts & Weston, 2014). Importantly, they provide visibility to research activity, reinforce shared values around inquiry and knowledge production, and create opportunities for teacher educators to align themselves with disciplinary and institutional research cultures (Brew, 2010).

Such events also offer vital exposure to scholarly norms, discourse, and networks, allowing teacher educators to gain exposure to the norms, language, and expectations of the research community (Griffiths et al., 2010), which is essential for developing a sense of belonging. J. Murray and Kosnik (2011) identify this as central to the formation of academic identity. These events are also often designed to function as gateways to more sustained engagement, leading to involvement in research centres, externally funded projects, or collaborative publications. In this way, they support progression from peripheral to fuller participation within a research community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). However, as

the literature also makes clear (V. Ellis et al., 2014; Lander & Nicholson, 2020; Lee & Boud, 2003; Mulholland et al., 2023; Roberts & Weston, 2014), the effectiveness of such institutional efforts to support teacher educator development is contingent on how inclusive and well-resourced they are. This requires not only adequate time allocations and purposeful and focused developmental support, but also the formal recognition of a broad range of scholarly activities, including blog writing, podcast creation, and other forms of informal knowledge exchange, as legitimate and valuable contributions to academic life.

Building on these understandings, this study highlights how institutional cultures, policies, and value systems can either legitimise or marginalise particular ways of being and knowing within academia. In contexts where time is limited, developmental opportunities uneven, and research narrowly defined, teacher educators often struggle to position themselves in relation to research engagement (Barrow & Xu, 2023; Davey, 2013; Roberts & Weston, 2014). Conversely, where inclusive practices and structural support are present, research engagement can become a site of professional agency, identity affirmation, and belonging (J. Murray et al., 2009; Zeichner, 2017).

#### **4.5 To Conclude**

Referring to the photograph (Figure 4), this chapter has explicated the sticks and strings, and drips of glue that structure the identities of the teacher educator, explaining the specific characteristics of this “particular type of academic” (Lander & Nicholson, 2020, p. 6) and what their work entails. I examined the assumptions that individuals hold about what it means to be a university-based teacher educator, describing it as being “a difficult practice that is made to look easy” (D. Labaree, 2000, p. 228). In reference to the academic triad of teaching, service, and research (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996), I considered the ontological and epistemological understandings that teacher educators bring to their teaching (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014), before identifying the impact of service and administration (V. Ellis et al., 2011). I looked at what the literature tells us about research, noting the different dispositions that teacher educators have and why that might be (Tack et al., 2023; Tack & Vanderlinde, 2014), considering the impact that professional learning opportunities might have on the relationships that my participants have with research and scholarship (Czerniawski et al., 2017; Nicholson & Lander, 2022; Roberts & Weston, 2014).

Having outlined in Chapter 2 how the work of Bourdieu would be used in my work, chapters 3 and 4 have explored what the literature tells us about the identities of the teacher educator

from both the inside out and the outside in. The next chapter will outline the methodology and methods that form the foundation of my empirical investigation.

## Chapter 5: Methodology and Methods.



Figure 5 Chalk Marks on the Cobblestones

### 5.1 Introduction

The photograph (Figure 5) that inspired this chapter is of a game I found chalked on the cobblestones of a park that once formed part of the docks of London. It was taken in the third year of my doctoral study, which coincided with the first Covid-19 lockdown. At that time, schooling moved online, and parents were asked to educate their children at home. The photograph provides a snapshot of life as it was lived at that period. However, I was also struck by how this apparently simple game could be seen as a material manifestation of the assumptions, dispositions, and motivations of those who chalked the marks on that glorious June day. Building on this reflection, in this chapter I outline the assumptions, dispositions, and motivations that have shaped my empirical approaches, which have allowed me to zoom, dance, and sing my way towards a purposeful answer to my research question.

This chapter will also consider the influence of my presence as the person who holds the chalk across all aspects of the research process, a process Bourdieu (2003) refers to as *participant objectification*. Grenfell (2012) notes that, when using the work of Bourdieu, it is an “epistemological necessity” (p. 224) to recognise the biographical boundaries of the researcher, as well as acknowledging the influence the academic zeitgeist has on their

specific ways of knowing. In line with this, the residual chalk marks of my positionality are threaded across each of the following sections in this chapter.

I will begin by looking holistically, recapping my research question, and providing an overview of my research design. I will explain the ontological and epistemological stances that have informed my work, and how the thinking tools of Bourdieu, as outlined in texts such as *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1977), *The Logic of Practice* (Bourdieu, 1990), *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 2007), and *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), have allowed me to look relationally at the professional identities of my participants. As well as explaining my research design, the chapter provides a justification for the methods chosen to collect data, and will consider why reflexive thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2022), was chosen to support the interrogation of the words of my participants. Drawing on works such as Johnston (2024) and Willis (2019), I also explain how the composite narratives were created to frame my findings, and the limitations presented by this approach. I will conclude by looking at the trustworthiness of my work, using the criteria outlined by Guba (1981): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

## **5.2 Recapping My Research Question**

The methodology and methods that will be explicated across the chapter have been designed to allow me to answer the following research question.

*How does engagement with and in research affect the professional identities of experienced, university-based teacher educators?*

Five sub-questions have been used to focus my inquiry.

- a) How do teacher educators describe themselves and their role?
- b) What provides the motivation for engagement *in* and *with* research?
- c) What tensions exist that relate to this (if any), and how are they reconciled?
- d) What role does the university play in supporting the development of an academic identity?
- e) How do government policies and practices influence the way that research is perceived?

These questions have enabled me to explore the relationships my participants have with research through two interrelated dimensions:

- **Inside-out** (sub-questions a, b, and c) Emphasising lived experiences, personal motivations, and individual agency.
- **Outside-in** (sub-questions d and e) Emphasising broader societal, institutional, and environmental contexts, focusing specifically on how these external factors shape perceptions and practices.

### 5.3 Providing an Overview

Figure 6 provides a holistic overview of my data gathering, analysis and reporting processes. Each element will be explored in more detail in the sections that follow.

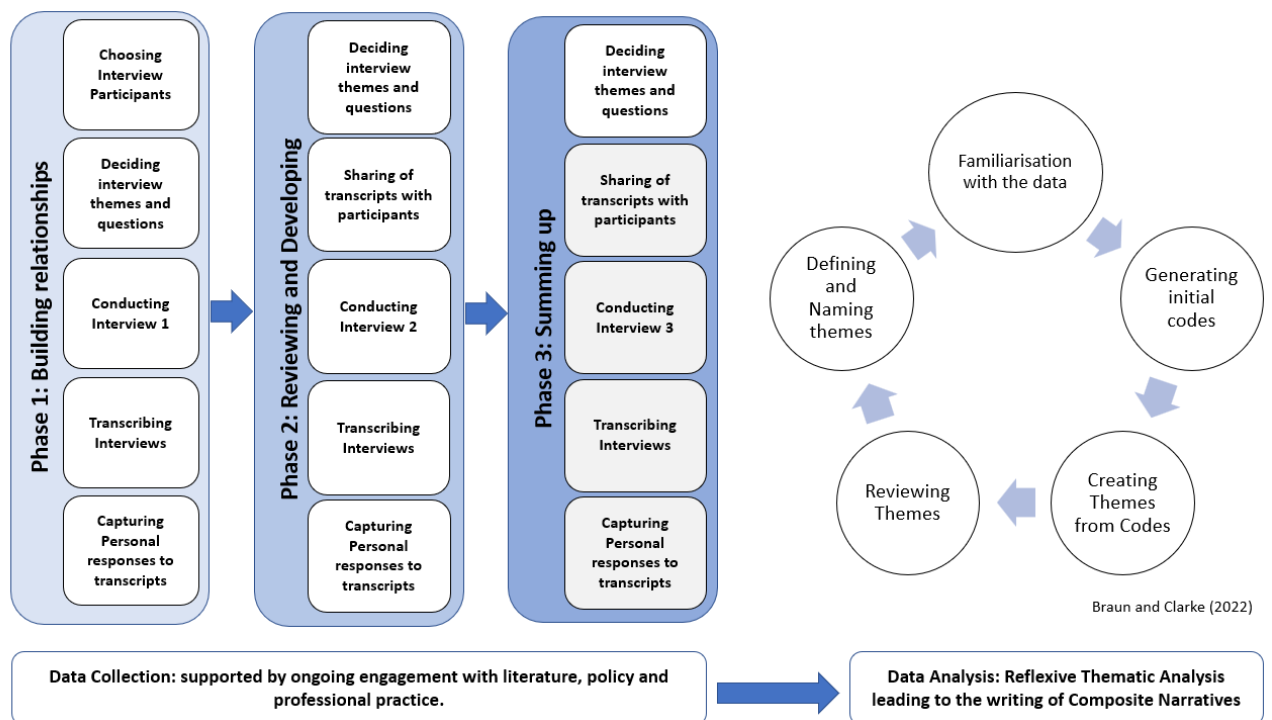


Figure 6 An Overview of My Research Design.

### 5.4 The Big Questions

As outlined by Scotland (2012), any explanation of methodology requires a researcher to make the assumptions they bring to their work explicit from the start. This includes considering answers to the big questions of what can be known (ontology) and how one can come to know what can be known (epistemology) (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). At the inception of my research, I assumed that I would be working within an interpretivist paradigm. I understand this as an umbrella term encompassing a range of methodologies and methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), all of which assume the ontological position that what we view as reality is relative, differing from person to person (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Across much of the small-scale research that I have undertaken as part of my doctoral

journey, I have taken this stance, assuming reality to be mediated by our senses, only emerging when our consciousness engages with phenomena that are “already pregnant with meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43).

However, as I began to formalise my thesis proposal, I became increasingly aware that this position was not entirely adequate. My experiences within teacher education made it difficult to ignore traces of an objective reality that exists beyond the individual, such as implicit biases surrounding meritocracy, the differential valuing of knowledge types, and the hierarchical structures embedded within the education system. Yet adopting a positivist stance, with its realist ontology and emphasis on objectivity, was equally unsuitable for my study, as I am not seeking to establish immutable or universally generalisable facts about the phenomena under investigation (Garrick, 1999). In response, I follow the example of works such as J. Murray (2002), Reay (2004), Roberts and Weston (2014), and Threadgold (2020), who use the work of Bourdieu to emphasise the significance of the relationships that exist between these dichotomous ontological and epistemological positions.

### **5.5 Thinking with Bourdieu**

As Grenfell (2012) explains, the work of Bourdieu offers researchers a set of conceptual tools and a shared language designed to support the analysis of everyday aspects of lived experience. His approach to reflexive sociology, as outlined in Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), encourages researchers to adopt a relational perspective, one that moves beyond traditional binaries such as structure versus agency, objectivism versus subjectivism, and the internal versus external. According to Jenkins (2008), this relational stance enables a more holistic understanding of the complexities of contemporary social life.

This thesis is underpinned by the philosophical assumption that while reality is shaped by individual awareness and experience, it is also constrained by socially constructed, objective structures that shape how individuals engage with the world. Bourdieu (1990) situates this position at the heart of what he terms “constructivist structuralism” or “structuralist constructivism” (p. 123). As Jenkins (2008) explains, this approach bridges the divide between conventional structuralist perspectives, which assume the existence of a universal social reality independent of individual consciousness, and constructivist views, which emphasise the multiplicity of realities as individually constructed and inseparable from human experience.

Extending this position and adopting the relational perspective advocated by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), I will assume that everything we know about the world is established and developed as a consequence of acts of perception. However, I will also acknowledge these perceptions to be contingent on the existence of defining principles which Grenfell (2012) refers to as the “logic of differentiation” (p. 45). This perspective rejects the notion that lived experience exists in a value-free, Platonic realm. Instead, it recognises that our reality is historically produced and shaped by the distribution of power. For example, as Maguire, (2000a) describes, the perception of teacher education as inferior to other academic disciplines is not a neutral judgment but one rooted in historical hierarchies that privilege certain forms of knowledge over others. As Grenfell and James (1998) argue, the overall function of this is to sustain and reproduce the existing social order.

### **5.6 Qualitative Research and the Case Study**

Building on this ontological and epistemological positioning, and while Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) argue against adopting a methodological monotheism, given the nature of my research question, I have chosen a qualitative approach that embraces the complexity of the phenomena under investigation. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that qualitative research necessitates a naturalistic approach, studying subjects in their real-world settings and interpreting phenomena through the meanings individuals and groups assign to them. Patton (1978) emphasises that qualitative inquiry is particularly well-suited to exploring situations in their particularity, shaped by context, meaning, and interaction. The aim, he argues, is not to predict outcomes but rather to develop a rich, contextualised understanding of the setting and the significance it holds for those involved.

This research takes the form of an embedded, single case study which is designed to explore the professional identities of experienced teacher educators who work with primary phase student teachers within a university department in the southeast of England. My understanding of case study research is informed by Yin (2013), who conceptualises the case as a bounded system that allows for an in-depth exploration of “real people in real contexts” (p. 376). While case studies of this type are sometimes critiqued for their limited generalisability (Stake, 2005), I take the view that the rich, contextual insights they offer can make a meaningful contribution to understanding teacher educator identity. By exploring how experienced teacher educators navigate their professional roles, engage with research, and respond to the structural, institutional, and policy conditions that shape their work, this study aims to add valuable perspectives to ongoing conversations within the field of teacher

education. Drawing on the work of Flyvbjerg (2006), I maintain that the power of the case study lies in its ability to illuminate broader phenomena through detailed attention to the particular.

As Yin (2013) states, outlining contextual details about the case is essential for understanding the specific institutional conditions and relational dynamics that shaped the experiences of participants and informed the interpretation of the data. While I am mindful of the need to protect the identity of the institution, certain contextual factors relevant to this specific case must be acknowledged. These are outlined in Table 2.

*Table 2 An Overview of the Case*

### **An Overview of the Case**

- At the start of data collection, I was Head of Teacher Education in the department, having worked in the university for over twelve years in various academic and leadership capacities.
- The university offers a broad portfolio of programmes in a range of subject disciplines, but its inception was as a teacher training college.
- The Department of Education runs a variety of degrees at undergraduate, master's and PhD levels. It has a reputation for engaging in creative and critical research that focuses specifically on issues of social justice.
- The largest cohorts in the department are in the Post Graduate Certificate in Education programmes, which specialise in primary and secondary age phases.
- At the point of collecting data, the university was engaged in a significant restructuring of staff. As part of this, all administrative and student support services were being centralised, and new systems and processes were being established.
- The department had been impacted significantly by local and national University College Union industrial action.
- During the data collection period, the department was subject to an Ofsted inspection.
- The department had successfully gained accreditation to award Qualified Teacher Status after 2024 as part of the Initial Teacher Training Market Review (Department for Education, 2021). It was in the process of developing materials to prove it had met regulatory criteria sufficiently to deliver this teacher training provision.

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted, enabling the selection of participants most likely to provide “appropriate and useful information” (Kelly, 2010, p. 317), in alignment with the aims of the study. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- They had a minimum of five years’ experience working in university-based teacher education.
- They held a Master’s-level qualification but had not undertaken study beyond this level.
- At least 75% of their allocated workload was dedicated to Primary Initial Teacher Education.
- They had voluntarily engaged in university-led research support activities, such as research mentoring or participation in writing groups.

As a full-time teacher educator, a part-time doctoral student, and an early career researcher, adopting this approach enabled me to use my available research resources both strategically and effectively (Palinkas et al., 2015). In line with the guidance of Malterud et al. (2016), I determined that my sample size would offer sufficient “information power” (p. 1754), recognising that in-depth contextual knowledge can reduce the need for a larger number of participants. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that the small sample size presents limitations. It may not fully reflect the diversity of experiences across the broader population of university-based teacher educators, particularly those working in different institutional contexts or holding varying levels of research involvement and responsibility, a point that will be discussed in more detail in relation to the specific limitations of this study.

### **5.7 Data Gathering: The Semi-Structured Interview**

In choosing semi-structured interviews, I aimed to facilitate what Burgess (2002) refers to as a “conversation with a purpose” (p.153). This method balances structure with flexibility, using a guide of open-ended questions and topics to direct the dialogue (Mashuri et al., 2022). While the questions serve to focus the inquiry, this method also allows space for deeper exploration (Cohen et al., 2018), allowing the interviewer and interviewee to engage in meaningful and possibly unexpected discussions (Creswell, 2003; Mashuri et al., 2022). This method was appropriate, given the small, purposively selected sample of participants. In addition, it aligned with the depth-oriented aims of the study and would allow for the generation of rich, contextualised data that captured the lived experiences of colleagues working within this institutional setting. As a novice researcher, I also found outlining the questions ahead of the interviews to be a necessary scaffold to help maintain direction in the conversation. As Greene (2014) highlights, this is particularly important to keep the data

collection on track, especially when the researcher has pre-existing relationships with participants.

The questions I selected for my interviews were generated deductively (Mashuri et al., 2022), informed by a combination of relevant literature on teacher educator identity, prior research engagement, as well as my own practical knowledge of the institutional context. They were designed to align with my overarching research question and sub-questions. In developing the questions, I focused on eliciting reflective narratives about the professional roles of participants across the span of their professional practice, asking about their work with schools and students, their prior experiences, and their understanding of professional learning. An outline of the questions can be found in Appendix B.

While each interview was structured around broad themes, participants brought distinct perspectives, which often led to deviations from my planned questions. For example, all interviews touched on the ongoing university restructuring and the effects of government reforms. Participants also frequently made connections to their personal lives. However, I redacted these details from the transcripts to protect participant anonymity prior to analysis. I also noted the use of institution-specific language and coded references to individuals or practices, which I needed to handle carefully to ensure the reputation of the institution remained protected.

As a result of moving to work in a different part of the country, interviews two and three were conducted online, and participants were interviewed via MS Teams using both voice and video. While I initially anticipated all interviews would be face-to-face, as Quickfall (2014) notes, moving them online allowed greater flexibility in timings and also reduced my travel costs. Opdenakker (2006) discusses the advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face and remote interviews, finding that although face-to-face interviews can build rapport between participant and researcher and lead to more precise understandings of meaning through body language, facial expression, and tone, there are benefits to online interviewing as they provide a more convenient and comfortable environment for participants, which may encourage more open and honest responses. A rich source of data emerged from the curiosity of my participants about practices at my new university. I feel their curiosity about other institutions, as well as my distance from the immediate context, worked positively to enrich the interactions.

At the request of one participant, I shared the questions I was going to ask before each interview. However, I was keen to adopt an informal conversational style, weaving in and out of the prepared questions and allowing for the discussion to be guided by the emerging themes my participants were raising. I conducted three interviews with each participant, each taking place at a different point in the academic year. I was careful to bind interviews to around 30 minutes. This had a practical and ethical purpose. Time is often cited as a constraining factor for teacher educators (Barrow & Xu, 2023; V. Ellis et al., 2011), and I was keen to ensure that participating in my study would not add additional workload to my colleagues who were already operating under significant time focused pressures. Where interviews ran over the designated time, it was either due to the participant wanting to provide more details or due to a slightly tangential conversation taking place during the interview. An overview of timings can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 Overview of Interviews

	Interview length		
<b>Participant A</b>	25 mins	40 mins	40 mins
<b>Participant B</b>	29 mins	31 mins	29 mins
<b>Participant C</b>	24 mins	24 mins	41 mins
<b>Participant D</b>	26 mins	30 mins	38 mins

I recognise from the work of Edwards and Holland (2013) that the location in space and time of any interview produces specific ‘micro-geographies’ (p. 650) of relationships and meaning. I was keen to conduct interviews at different points of the academic year, the differing contexts providing additional information to add depth to my analysis. Kvale (1996) also identifies the potential of interviews to be iterative, instigating a process of self-reflection, that can lead to new ways of personal understanding. This might be inferred from the reflection of one of my participants at the start of their final interview,

*I know we kind of talked about this last time a bit, but I did go away and have a think. It was good because it came up in the teaching and learning committee thing as well last week... you know. I don't think I've got an answer, but I'm still thinking about it.*

An outline of the context of each interview can be found in the table below.

Table 4 Context of Interviews

	Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3
<b>Location</b>	In-person,	via MS Teams	via MS Teams
<b>Timing</b>	Spring (n=1) /Summer term (n=3)	Autumn (n=3) / Spring term (n=1)	Spring (n=2) / Summer term (n=2)

<p><b>Context</b></p>	<p>One interview occurred just before the department received notification about an Ofsted inspection; three took place in the weeks after.</p> <p>At the time, the department had just gained accreditation to deliver QTS from 2024.</p> <p>The three post Ofsted interviews took place after colleagues had attended an initial meeting with representatives from the Department for Education that outlined what is expected of them as a result of gaining accreditation to award QTS.</p>	<p>All interviews were arranged to occur after visits to observe student teachers in school.</p> <p>Colleagues were at the start of compiling materials to evidence their “market readiness.”</p> <p>The impact of the restructuring of professional service staff was beginning to be understood.</p> <p>Strike action and action short of a strike were in force in this period and the department was anticipating the impact of a marking and assessment boycott in line with the UCU mandate.</p>	<p>The department was in the final throes of developing curricular and related materials to demonstrate “market readiness” to their Department for Education Associate.</p> <p>The impact of institutional restructuring and marking and assessment boycotts was known, and relevant actions had been taken to mediate the impact this had on students and the wider partnership.</p>
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McMullin (2023) emphasises that while demonstrating rigour in qualitative research often focuses on the mechanisms of data collection and analysis, the critical role of transcription, the process of converting recorded audio into written text, is frequently overlooked. As Davidson (2009) highlights, transcription is not merely a procedural step but an interpretive act that edits and reshapes the words of participants to align with the aims of the researcher. As such, the process should also be seen as requiring ethical consideration (McMullin, 2023). For example, decisions about whether to include pauses, hesitations, or overlapping speech can subtly influence how a participant is represented. Having previously used external transcription services in smaller-scale research, finding the process detached and lacking the intimacy necessary for meaning to be made, I chose to personally transcribe my interviews to maintain a closer connection with the data.

I sent draft transcripts to my participants to review and included time at the start of each interview for sense-checking (Birt et al., 2016), allowing them to raise any issues that emerged or further clarify any points they wished to make. However, as teacher educators, the time they had to review these transcripts was limited, and comments were often restricted to remarks such as, “I can’t believe I use so many ‘urms’ and ‘ahhs’,” or “Do I really

*use 'like' so much*". Where I was unsure of the meaning and felt a contradiction or lack of clarity, I could target specific questions to clarify further. After the final interview, participants were offered an opportunity to respond to the transcript via email as part of the research debrief. One participant met with me to talk about the transcript, and some slight adaptations were made as they felt they had not been clear about a particular aspect of their scholarly activity during the interview.

### **5.7a Data Gathering: Ethical Considerations**

As Dwyer and Buckle (2009) and R. Labaree (2002) observe, all empirical research involves navigating a complex interplay between familiarity and distance, access, and accountability. Acknowledging this, I took several deliberate steps to mitigate potential risks associated with my research design and its implementation. My work adheres to the Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research as outlined by the British Educational Research Association (2024) and ethical approval was formally granted by the ethics committee of the University of Chester (see Appendix A). Before beginning my data collection, gatekeeper consent was obtained from the head of department, ensuring I had institutional support.

Participation in the research was entirely voluntary and clearly stated as such in both written and verbal communication. Participants were drawn from colleagues outside my direct line-management responsibilities, and I explicitly acknowledged the professional relationships involved, both in interviews and in the documentation that supported the research. Before their first interview, participants were provided with a comprehensive information sheet and signed a consent form confirming their voluntary participation. At the outset of each interview, participants were reminded that complete anonymity could not be guaranteed and that they retained the right to withdraw their data at any point during the study. Axiology, the branch of philosophy concerned with values (Scotland, 2012), is particularly important in qualitative inquiry, where the beliefs and ethical commitments of the researcher inevitably shape the study. These decisions, therefore, were not only procedural but also axiological, guided by the values that underpin my research practice.

I recognise that I am working as what Chávez (2015) and Dwyer and Buckle (2009) would define as being an insider researcher. In light of this, my initial research design recognised the challenges inherent in the position and included a range of mitigation strategies, that are outlined in Table 5.

*Table 5 Mitigation Strategies*

Challenges	Mitigation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Risk of Bias:</b> Familiarity with the context and participants could influence data interpretation, reinforcing assumptions or selective emphasis.</li> <li>• <b>Power Dynamics:</b> Pre-existing relationships might create imbalances, leading participants to alter their responses or assume shared understanding.</li> <li>• <b>Ethical Concerns:</b> Being both insider and researcher raised issues around confidentiality and consent, potentially limiting disclosure of sensitive information.</li> <li>• <b>Over-familiarity:</b> Deep embedding in the field risks taking certain practices or perspectives for granted, reducing analytical depth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reflexivity:</b> I used photographs representing each theme rather than traditional journaling to critically examine assumptions and enhance my understanding of positionality.</li> <li>• <b>Critical Friends:</b> These were colleagues and mentors outside the research context who provided alternative perspectives and challenged interpretations. <i>The nature of this will be unpacked below.</i></li> <li>• <b>Participant Validation:</b> Sharing transcripts with participants allowed for clarification and deeper insights.</li> <li>• <b>Ethical Protocols:</b> Adhering to ethical guidelines, including anonymisation and informed consent, safeguarded confidentiality and maintained trust.</li> </ul>

The decision to conduct research within my own setting was driven by both pragmatic and theoretical considerations. As Chávez (2015) and Greene (2014) stress, as an insider in the department, I had access to rich contextual knowledge and longstanding collegial relationships, enabling me to explore phenomena with depth and authenticity. Importantly, the research questions I sought to investigate emerged directly from my lived experience within this context, making it both a relevant and necessary site of inquiry. However, as Floyd and Arthur (2012) suggest, ethical dilemmas in insider research rarely conform to neat procedural solutions, as might be inferred from the table above. Instead, they are often morally ambiguous and demand ongoing consideration of power, trust, and responsibility across all aspects of research.

I found the work of Guillemin and Gillam (2004), and their understanding of “ethics in practice” (p.262), referring to the everyday ethical issues that arise in the doing of research, to be valuable here. Beyond institutional ethics procedures, Guillemin and Gillam (2004) argue that a researcher needs to be vigilant, attending to how power and positionality shape the research encounter. For example, during one interview, a participant disclosed concerns about the departmental research training session that echoed my own frustrations. In that moment, I had to navigate a difficult tension between empathising as a colleague and maintaining my role as a researcher. It was challenging to remain neutral in the moment, especially as the concerns being voiced closely echoed my own experiences. In an effort to maintain the integrity of the interview, I responded with empathy, listening attentively without

disclosing my own position, to avoid allowing our shared experiences to overtly shape the direction of the conversation.

My positionality as a senior academic within the department where the research was conducted brought both unique advantages and complex challenges. On one hand, my status afforded what Bourdieu (1977) would describe as symbolic capital, enabling me to navigate the field with a level of institutional access, legitimacy, and trust that may not have been available to an external researcher. This insider knowledge gave me a nuanced understanding of the organisational practices and informal discourses that shape research engagement within the department. However, while Chávez (2015) describes research of this kind as offering “expediency of access,” (p.479), it also increases the risk of bias, over-familiarity, and blurred boundaries between the professional and the personal. I was not only a researcher, but also a colleague and a leader with longstanding relationships and a shared professional history with participants. As Drake and Heath (2008) and Dwyer and Buckle, (2009) highlight, this positioning made it essential to remain alert to the ways in which power relations, expectations of loyalty, or assumptions of shared understanding might influence both the interview process and subsequent analysis.

For example, one participant spoke candidly about their frustration regarding the nature of employment contracts in the university, knowing I had previously voiced similar concerns the week before. This raised important ethical questions about whether such reflections were shaped by a desire to align with my known views, rather than emerging independently. It highlighted the need for transparency and rigour in my analytic processes, particularly when working with data that might reflect shared discontent. To mitigate this, I took several specific steps. I reflected on how my own prior views might have influenced the direction of the conversation or the willingness of the participant to disclose certain opinions. I then examined the transcript closely, looking for how the participant positioned themselves, for example, through language of agreement, alignment, or solidarity, and considered alternative interpretations of their comments. In the analysis phase, I cross-checked this data with other accounts, especially from those less familiar with my views, to identify whether similar concerns emerged independently. After undertaking these actions, I felt it was important to include this perspective in Jo’s Story (Chapter 6.4).

As outlined in the table above (Table 3), I also drew on the support of critical friends to enhance the reflexivity and rigour of my research. The use of critical friends is a well-established strategy in educational research (Lees et al., 2022), involving the invitation of

trusted colleagues to provide an external perspective that supports analytical depth and methodological robustness. Typically, a critical friend shares a similar background but remains outside the immediate research context, allowing them to offer constructive critique without being embedded in the same institutional dynamics (Foulger, 2010). This combination of shared understanding and necessary distance fosters both trust and the capacity to illuminate aspects of the research that might otherwise go unexamined.

In the context of this study, my critical friends included an associate professor from my current institution, who reviewed the composite narratives and offered feedback on their coherence, resonance, and relevance. This external perspective also prompted alternative readings of the data, encouraging deeper critical reflection. I also worked closely with a research mentor, a senior academic colleague who supported me in identifying the methodological value of incorporating reflexive thematic analysis as a vital intermediary step between the interview transcripts and the construction of the composite narratives as will be discussed in the next section. In addition, I actively sought feedback from colleagues in the sector through participation in research seminars and presentations at conferences, both within my institution and at national events such as those hosted by the British Educational Research Association and the University Council for the Education of Teachers. These engagements provided important opportunities to test and refine my thinking in response to peer critique.

### **5.8 Data Analysis: An Introduction to Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

A reflective conversation with my research mentor made me aware of the need for an intermediary analytical step in my empirical work, one that would create distance from the immediacy and emotional pull of the interview narratives while enhancing the rigour and transparency of the research process. This recognition led me to adopt reflexive thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), a flexible and iterative approach for identifying and interpreting patterns across qualitative data. Rather than moving directly from raw transcripts to the construction of composite narratives, I engaged in systematic coding and theme development, in line with the emphasis Cartwright (2019) places on maintaining analytical rigour and transparency. This involved mapping recurring ideas in the data, which then informed the creative and reflexive decisions I made about how to represent these themes narratively in the findings of the study.

Braun and Clarke (2022) outline six phases of analysis, which have been instrumental in structuring my analytical process. These phases are summarised alongside the

corresponding activities undertaken in Table E, with a detailed account of how each stage was applied provided in Appendix C.

Table 6 Processes of Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

RTA Steps		Research Activity
1	<b>Familiarisation with the data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active listening to each interview. This did not involve notetaking but required me to focus on what my participants were conveying.</li> <li>• At the end of each interview, I kept some brief notes, recalling the emotions that were provoked and the specific context of each interview.</li> <li>• Multiple reviews of the recorded data were undertaken to support the manual transcription of each interview.</li> <li>• Dialogic engagement with the transcript content, noting the initial trends and areas I found most interesting and resonant. (See Appendix C: Step 1)</li> </ul>
2	<b>Generating initial codes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generating initial codes relating to the research question and revisiting and revising where multiple interpretations exist.</li> <li>• Categorisation of the strongest codes – noting where patterns can be elicited across multiple interviews/ participants.</li> <li>• Creating a Mind Map to collate codes generated across interviews/ participants (See Appendix C: Step 2).</li> </ul>
3	<b>Creating themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing engagement with reading and reflections on personal experience.</li> <li>• Categorisation of codes into groups that reflect the answer to my research question.</li> <li>• Identification of working themes.</li> <li>• Further dialogic engagement. Discussion about potential themes with colleagues, justifying why they are significant and how they relate to the research question.</li> <li>• Moving from seven themes rather than the five (See Appendix C: Step 3).</li> </ul>
4	<b>Reviewing themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noting the internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity between themes.</li> <li>• Creation of tables of coded verbatim quotations that relate to each theme to provide a source for constructing composite narratives.</li> <li>• Linking the theme back to the literature review and personal experience.</li> </ul>
5	<b>Defining and naming themes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewing themes and naming them in readiness for the creation of composites. (See Appendix C: Steps 4 and 5).</li> </ul>
6	<b>Producing a Report</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of composite narratives.</li> <li>• Deciding the order in which themes will be presented to ensure a logical progression in ideas.</li> </ul>

*Adapted from Clarke and Braun (2006)*

### **5.8a Data Analysis: Ethical Considerations**

In addition to following the structures and processes outlined in Table 6 and Appendix C, I sought to remain attuned to the nuance, complexity, and contradiction inherent in any claims to knowledge, consistent with what Braun and Clarke (2022) describe as “qualitative sensibility” (p. 41). Pillow (2003) similarly emphasises the importance of researchers acknowledging the way “who I am, who I have been, who I think I am, and how I feel affect data collection and analysis” (p. 176). Adopting reflexive thematic analysis as my approach to data analysis required ongoing, critical reflection on the role of the researcher in co-constructing meaning, ensuring that personal positionality was acknowledged and thoughtfully integrated into the interpretive process (Braun & Clarke, 2024). In this way, as I analysed the data, reflexivity became not a practice that was confined to a single moment at the end of analysis but rather, as Braun and Clarke (2024) advocate, was sustained throughout, contributing to the creation of a richer and more resonant interpretive accounts.

In line with this, I approached the analysis of the transcripts as an interpretive and relational act, recognising that meaning is co-constructed through the dynamic interplay between researcher and data (Braun & Clarke, 2024). My positionality as a fellow teacher educator, with shared experiences of institutional constraint and academic precarity, inevitably shaped how I analysed the words of my participants. Rather than seeking to bracket or neutralise this influence, I treated it as a lens through which particular themes gained prominence (Joy et al., 2023). This was evident in one of the codes that informed Clare’s narrative (Chapter 6.6), contributing to the storyline centred on perceptions from outside the university. The experience of having academic achievements met with scepticism by senior leaders in schools, mentioned by two participants, resonated with my own experiences. These brief comments could easily have been overlooked; however, my personal history allowed me to recognise their significance and include them as a meaningful element of the narrative.

Another example arose when a participant spoke about feeling overwhelmed by the demand to produce ‘impactful’ research while juggling heavy teaching responsibilities. During analysis, I found myself empathising strongly with this account, prompting critical reflection on how my own experiences of exhaustion and institutional pressure at that time might be shaping my interpretation. In line with the reflexive principles underpinning reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), I did not seek to eliminate this subjectivity but, following Joy et al., (2023), instead examined how it might influence the analytical process. I revisited the dataset to consider the resonance of this experience across other narratives and looked for thematic patterns beyond my initial response. Although the broader pressures of managing the teacher

educator role featured prominently across all interviews, the specific attribution of these pressures to a heavy teaching load was mentioned briefly only once. As such, while this insight was important and noted analytically, it did not warrant the development of a standalone theme or code.

### **5.9 Sharing Findings: Composite Narratives**

As I began to engage potential participants for this research, a persistent concern emerged. While colleagues expressed a willingness to share their experiences, they were anxious about being identifiable in the final presentation of findings. These early conversations highlighted the importance of being attuned from the outset of my research design to the potential consequences of participation. In response to these concerns and, inspired by the work of Arjomand (2022), Johnston (2024), and Willis (2019), I chose to use composite narratives as a way of representing the experiences of participants in a way that preserved their anonymity.

The creation of composite narratives involves synthesising the accounts of multiple participants into anonymised, thematically coherent narratives that foreground shared patterns and concerns. In contrast to presenting stories with a view to exploring similarities and differences between lived experiences, the creation of composite narratives calls upon the researcher to combine the words of a range of participants to tell the story of a specific theme from the perspective of an imagined other, using words that have been taken verbatim from interview data (Johnston, 2024). Originally developed in psychotherapy contexts where protecting anonymity was essential (Willis, 2019), the approach has more recently been adopted in qualitative research as a means of communicating findings in a form that is both engaging and rigorous (Johnston, 2024). Todres and Galvin (2008), whose work on embodied interpretation is widely regarded as a foundational influence on the use of composite narratives, caution that while all writing holds the potential to be evocative, academic writing can often become overly sanitised. As a result, engaging with research findings can feel more like an anaesthetic experience, dulling the emotional and sensory impact, rather than an aesthetic one that invites the reader to connect with the lived realities being described.

The model presented below (Figure 7) outlines the six steps that were undertaken to produce each narrative.

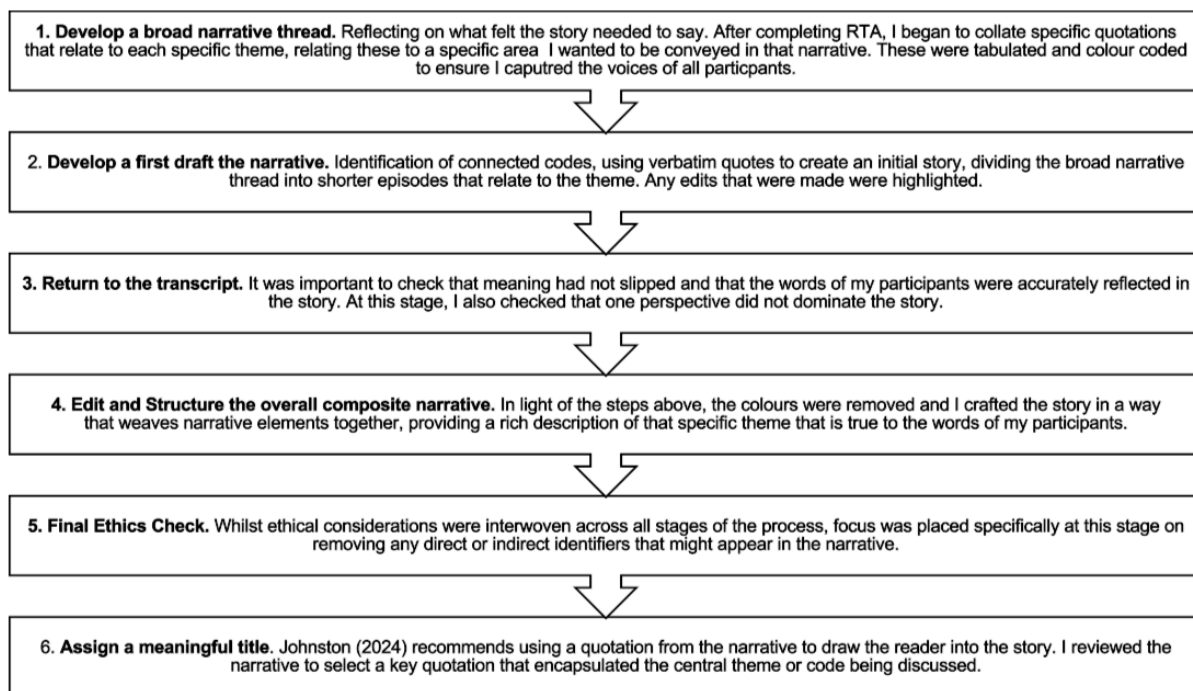


Figure 7 Johnston (2024) Six Steps to Creating Composite Narratives.

To ensure transparency, Appendix C outlines the analytic process in detail, including my reflective notes, while Appendix D provides illustrative examples of how reflexive thematic analysis informed the development of the composite narratives. This process resulted in the creation of seven narratives, each of which captures key themes that were created from the interview data. An overview of these narratives is presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Overview of Composite Narratives

Name of Imagined other	Theme	Title of Composite	Codes
Alex	The influence of moving from school into higher education.	Scratching the Itch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What brought me into teacher education in the first place?</li> <li>• Pushes and pulls.</li> <li>• The image of the university.</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of prior experiences.</li> </ul>
Sara	The positioning of self as an academic.	Meeting the Myth in the Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describing what you do.</li> <li>• Imposter syndrome.</li> <li>• The status of proper academics.</li> </ul>

Jo	The place of teacher education in the academic community	Like a Hamster in a Wheel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing in the fees.</li> <li>• A stacked system.</li> <li>• Impact of leadership and management.</li> <li>• Notions of “Them and Us”.</li> </ul>
Rachel	The impact of centrally imposed agendas	Hoop Jumping and Ridiculous Little Videos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The influence of the Market Review.</li> <li>• Playing the game and notions of quality.</li> <li>• Getting in with the “In Crowd”.</li> <li>• Naval gazing and lines in the sand.</li> </ul>
Clare	Perceptions from outside the University	Putting on my School Uniform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mistrust and maintaining credentials.</li> <li>• Selling the university product.</li> <li>• Fads, trends, and research with a little r.</li> </ul>
Laura	Engaging in research	Like Wearing Two Hats that Don’t Fit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The flesh is willing, but time is lacking.</li> <li>• Research and scholarship.</li> <li>• Constraints and opportunities.</li> </ul>
Andi	Reflections on support and training	Waving a Magic Wand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The power of the mentor.</li> <li>• What doesn’t work?</li> <li>• The importance of the small group.</li> <li>• The impact of being a primary specialist.</li> <li>• It’s all about the money.</li> </ul>

Engaging with research such as Creese et al. (2021), Johnston et al. (2023), Porter and Byrd (2023), and Willis (2019), all of which employ composite narratives, led me to recognise that the philosophical foundations of this method closely align with the epistemological and ontological stance underpinning my own research. From the perspective of Bourdieu (1990), knowledge is not neutral or objective; it is socially situated, relational, and shaped by the distribution of capital and the dynamics of power within particular fields. Drawing on the guidance of Johnston (2024), and what I have learned about the traditions of narrative inquiry from writers such as Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Nasheeda et al. (2019), and Squire et al. (2008), my use of composite narratives will explore how experiences are assembled, negotiated, and mediated rather than simply reported or described.

While this method requires the careful identification of shared themes, rather than striving for coherence or objectivity (Arjomand, 2022), the narratives also make space for ambiguity, contradiction, and multiplicity, and in doing so, make visible the partial and situated nature of knowledge (Pillow, 2003). For example, in *Andi’s Story* (Chapter 6.8), the composite presents

conflicting views on institutional support for research. Two voices expressed appreciation for structured mentoring and writing groups, while others described feeling excluded from such opportunities, emphasising the pressures of having to “*sound clever*”. Rather than resolving these contradictions, the narrative holds them in tension, reflecting the varied and sometimes conflicting ways teacher educators experience research culture. This complexity could be flattened in a single account, but through the composite, it becomes possible to surface these tensions and acknowledge the fragmented, context-dependent nature of professional identities.

### **5.9a Ethical Considerations and Limitations of Composite Narratives**

Although using composite narratives as an approach to sharing findings has become increasingly popular across disciplines such as education, environmental science, and medicine, as seen in works such as J. Ellis et al. (2019), Johnston et al. (2023), and Willis (2018), their theoretical foundations are still described as under-theorised (Johnston, 2024; Willis, 2019). Arjomand (2022) notes that composite narratives are often adopted as pragmatic tools to preserve participant anonymity, particularly in sensitive or close-knit research contexts, which was a key consideration in my own study. However, he also argues that using composite narratives solely for protective purposes risks overlooking important ontological and epistemological questions about voice, representation, and knowledge construction (Arjomand, 2022). In response to these concerns, I adopted a transparent and critically informed approach, drawing on relevant literature to conceptualise composite narratives not merely as a representational tool, but as a creative and interpretive methodological practice (Willis, 2019), as will be explored further in this section.

As McElhinney and Kennedy (2021) suggest, a common critique is the lack of transparency in how composite narratives are constructed, specifically, how many participants contributed, how differing perspectives were reconciled and how conflicting views were negotiated. Each composite narrative in this study was constructed using data from four participants. This approach is consistent with the work of Willis (2018), whose work was influential in shaping my research design and who constructed her research on attitudes to climate change using data from three to five members of parliament. While the work of Creese et al. (2021) and Porter and Byrd (2023) draws upon a larger number of participants, Willis (2019) argues that smaller datasets enable researchers to engage more intimately with the complexities of lived experience, allowing for richer and more nuanced interpretations. In doing so, they also help to avoid potential narrative flattening or generalisation that can occur when larger samples prioritise coherence over complexity (Willis, 2019). In his review of narrative fiction research

methods, Clough (2010) similarly emphasises that small sample sizes allow for authentic, emotionally resonant insights that may not emerge in studies with larger, less personal datasets.

To mitigate some of these risks, I followed the guidance of Johnston (2024) employing a reflexive and transparent approach, which included sustained dialogue with academic colleagues outside the immediate research context (Foulger, 2010), as well as the systematic use of reflective notes to document and interrogate my evolving interpretations. Following Braun and Clarke (2024) and Olmos-Vega et al.(2023), I remained critically attuned to the ethical dimensions of representation, continuously asking whose voices were being foregrounded, whose might be marginalised, and how my own positioning as an insider within the field influenced these dynamics (Chávez, 2015; Greene, 2014). This ongoing reflexive engagement was central to maintaining the integrity and trustworthiness of the research.

However, in this study, even with my small sample, I found I was walking a fine line between synthesis and simplification. For example, in one interview, a participant voiced a strong opinion about being an older academic, a perspective not widely shared by others, and one that was difficult to fully integrate into the composite narrative without diminishing its distinctiveness. Such outlier views, while not representative in the dataset, are nonetheless important and highlight the need for further inquiry into divergent attitudes toward research engagement in the future. I also recognise that the small number of participants who contributed to each composite limits the extent to which any claims to generalisability can be made. However, the aim of this research was not to generate generalisable findings in a positivist sense, but rather to offer situated, theoretically informed insights into the lived experiences of teacher educators.

Importantly, the use of composite narratives was not a departure from my aim to produce thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973), but a deliberate strategy to realise it. Built from interview transcripts and grounded in context, the composites were designed to preserve emotional texture, ambiguity, and contradiction. An example of this can be seen in Alex's Story (Chapter 6.2),

*If anyone asks me what I do, I say I work with students who want to become teachers. It's just easier. If I say I lecture at a university, they say, 'What do you teach?' and I say, 'Teacher education', and then I have to ...dot dot dot... it just gets complicated. I would never describe myself as a teacher educator... I mean, what even is that? [laughs]. I don't know. I wouldn't use that language.*

This excerpt exemplifies thick description, not simply stating facts but revealing the discursive, emotional, and social complexity underpinning the uncertainty of the speaker. The ellipses, silences, laughter, and reluctance to adopt the label “teacher educator” point to a deeper negotiation between personal experience and public discourse. As Geertz (1973) writes, such accounts illuminate the “webs of significance” (p. 5) in which the voice is suspended, caught between institutional designation, personal identification, and societal assumptions about academic roles. As such, this passage does not just report, it renders the lived complexity of inhabiting a space that is difficult to name, let alone explain.

I chose not to share the composite narratives with participants, a decision they were informed about at the start of the process through the participant information sheet. While participant validation is a recognised strategy for enhancing trustworthiness (Birt et al., 2016), and although participants will have access to the narratives in the final published thesis, sharing the narratives during the process of construction raised both ethical and methodological concerns. In the context of a tightly connected professional community, I felt this could risk provoking discomfort, or even unintended breaches of confidentiality, particularly if individuals attempted to identify themselves or others within the draft narratives. In addition, the final narratives represent an interpretive synthesis shaped by my analytic and theoretical positioning and were developed to be analytic tools designed to illuminate shared patterns and tensions, rather than co-authored texts that required the approval of my participants. This approach aligns with Willis (2019), who cautions that while composite narratives may draw on participant voices, they are ultimately the interpretive work of the researcher and are not intended to be verified or authorised by those they are derived from.

### **5.10 Assuring the Quality of My Qualitative Research**

Denzin and Lincoln (2000) posit that it is essential for anyone working within qualitative research to be explicit about the choices made across all aspects of their research design, and to exemplify the steps taken to ensure the trustworthiness of their work (Guba, 1981). This is important, as Stahl and King (2020) write:

“One can learn so much from another’s experience, and from a good story. Yet, the degree of trust one has in the person telling the tale has much to do with the degree of trust attributed to the telling.”

(Stahl & King, 2020, p. 26).

Trustworthiness in this context refers to the actions I have taken to represent the data, the theory, and the lived experiences of my participants, as well as the extent to which my work

resonates with the experiences of others. To conclude this chapter, I will explain why my work should be trusted referring to the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability which are central to the notion of trustworthiness (Guba, 1990). While more recent explorations, outlined in works such as S. Ahmed (2024), Cartwright (2019), Nowell et al. (2017), and Stahl and King (2020), have expanded the language around qualitative rigour, I have found the seminal model proposed by Guba (1990) to be an accessible tool for evaluating trustworthiness in interpretivist research. It aligns well with the philosophical positioning of this study, providing a clear structure through which to critically reflect on the quality and integrity of the research process.

### **5.10a Credibility**

The credibility of this study is underpinned by both my longstanding professional experience and my sustained reflexive engagement with the research process. With over twenty years of experience in the field, I approached this research as an insider (Drake & Heath, 2008; Humphrey, 2013), bringing contextual knowledge that supported access, trust, and nuanced understanding. However, I did not rely solely on this familiarity. Through critical engagement with the literature and ongoing dialogue with others researching in this space, I interrogated and unsettled my own assumptions, allowing space for alternative perspectives and insights beyond my immediate lived experience.

As a senior academic within the research setting, I was acutely aware of the symbolic power I held (Drake & Heath, 2008) and the potential influence this may have had on the responses of participants, whether in fostering openness or generating dynamics of deference, loyalty, or caution. To navigate this complexity, I drew on the principles of participant objectification (Bourdieu, 2003) and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), which supported me in critically examining the conditions under which the data were produced. Rather than striving for detachment or a false sense of neutrality and in line with the argument of Pillow (2003), I acknowledged my positionality as integral to the research process and that reflexivity does not diminish rigour but can also enhance it. My voice, therefore, is not a contaminant but a legitimate and transparent part of the knowledge construction process.

The credibility of the study is further strengthened by the depth rather than breadth, of the data. Although the sample size was small, it generated what Malterud et al. (2016) term "information power" (p. 1754), allowing for the production of rich, contextually situated accounts. Through thick description (Geertz, 1973), I aimed to illuminate the emotional, conceptual, and practical dimensions of teacher educator identity, offering theoretically

informed and meaningful insights that remain grounded in the specificity of the research context (Stahl & King, 2020).

### **5.10b Transferability**

This study is designed as an embedded, single case study (Yin, 2013), and I do not claim that its findings can be directly transferred to other contexts with predictable or uniform outcomes. To do so would be to disregard the situated, relational, and contingent nature of qualitative inquiry. As Pratt et al. (2020) note, transferability is not determined by the researcher but by the reader, who evaluates the extent to which the findings resonate with or apply to their own context. Recognising the limitations of traditional notions of generalisability in qualitative research, I instead draw on the concept of “fittingness” as proposed by Guba (1981). Fittingness refers to the extent to which the context and participants of a study are sufficiently similar to those of interest to the reader, making the findings meaningful and potentially relevant (Guba, 1981). This concept aligns more closely with the epistemological and philosophical underpinnings of this research, which emphasise depth, nuance, and contextual understanding over breadth or universality.

I argue that this study is fitting, rather than transferable in a conventional sense. While rooted in a particular institutional and professional context, it has been constructed with the intention of provoking recognition and critical reflection among teacher educators situated in similar roles across the sector. As Johnston (2024) argues, the use of composite narratives enhances this potential by enabling readers to identify patterns, tensions, and affective dimensions that may mirror or contrast with their own experiences.

### **5.10c Dependability**

Dependability refers to the extent to which research processes are consistent, transparent, and capable of being traced or repeated over time (Bridges & Smith, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It requires a systematic approach to evaluating findings, interpretations, and recommendations, ensuring they are demonstrably grounded in the data provided by participants. In line with this, my study adopts well-established qualitative methods widely used in the social sciences, including semi-structured interviews and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Mashuri et al., 2022). These approaches have been chosen for their capacity to support both rigour and interpretive depth, and I have provided a detailed account of their application and rationale throughout this chapter and in the accompanying appendices.

To support dependability, I have documented each stage of the research process, drawing on the categories of data identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985). These include:

- **Raw data:** Interview recordings and verbatim transcripts underpin the analysis. An example transcript extract is included in Appendix B.
- **Research notes and reflexive materials:** My photographic field journal, ongoing reflective notes, and rationale for methodological decisions, distributed across all chapters and in Appendices C and D, offer insight into my positionality.
- **Instrument development information:** The design and justification for the use of composite narratives are detailed in Sections 5.9, with supplementary material provided in Appendix D.
- **Data reconstruction and synthesis:** The analytic process is further evidenced through the reflexive thematic analysis coding framework (Appendix C), an exemplar audit trail for a composite narrative (Appendix D) and the narratives in Chapter 6.

By making the methodological processes transparent and linking analytic claims to specific sources of evidence, I have aimed to demonstrate that this study is both dependable and well-grounded, offering a coherent and trustworthy account of the phenomena under investigation.

#### **5.10d Confirmability**

Confirmability relates to the extent to which research findings are shaped by the participants and the data, rather than by researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Traditionally associated with notions of objectivity and neutrality. This criterion presents particular challenges when considered in light of my positioning as a qualitative researcher. Drawing on S.K. Ahmed (2024), I understand confirmability not as the erasure of researcher influence, but as a commitment to transparency and accountability, acknowledging how subjectivity shapes, rather than contaminates, the research process. Again, the concept of *participant objectification* (Bourdieu, 2003) has been instrumental here, offering a means to critically examine the conditions under which knowledge is produced. Rather than striving for unattainable neutrality, I have instead worked to make visible the values, assumptions, and positionalities that inform this study. This aligns with the work of Pillow (2003) and her call for “reflexivities of discomfort” (p.193), a stance that resists the idea that reflexivity can ever provide complete clarity or certainty. Instead, discomfort, contradiction, and partiality are seen as integral to a more rigorous and ethically attuned research process.

For example, I was unsettled when a participant expressed frustration about the lack of financial support for research in teacher education, describing it as a significant barrier to

developing their researcher identity. Their comment resonated sharply, as it followed a conversation we had earlier that week in which I had to inform them that funding for a conference application had been denied due to departmental budget constraints. This moment forced me to confront the gap between the academic priorities I am expected to uphold and my own positioning as an emerging researcher and advocate for research engagement. Sitting with this discomfort prompted deeper reflection on how structural limitations, and my role within them, can shape both opportunities and perceptions of research in practice. This perspective was also shared by other participants, becoming a code in the data, and is presented as part of *Andi's story* (Chapter 6.7).

By embracing such reflexivity, not to control or eliminate bias, but to confront it honestly and critically, I argue that this study meets the criterion of confirmability. It does so by documenting the interpretive processes behind its findings, acknowledging their partial and situated nature, and foregrounding the ethical and epistemological implications of my role in the research.

### **5.11 To Conclude**

In this chapter, I have explained the ontological and epistemological stances that have informed my work and how the thinking tools of Bourdieu found in texts such as *An invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) and *Participant Objectification* (Bourdieu, 2003) have allowed me to look relationally at the professional identities of my participants. In explaining my research design, the chapter justified the methods chosen for data collection, outlining the relevance of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) to the interrogation of empirical data. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Arjomand (2022), Johnston (2024), and Willis (2019), I also provided an overview of the creation of composite narratives, and I concluded by considering the trustworthiness of my work, using the criteria posited by (Guba, 1981) of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

In the following chapter, I present my research findings through seven composite narratives, each shared in full to allow readers the space to engage and interpret the words on their own terms. After each narrative, I offer my analysis, drawing connections to relevant literature and critically reflecting on how research engagement shapes the professional identities of university-based teacher educators.

## Chapter 6: Findings, Analysis and Discussion



*Figure 8 A Sandpit Filled with Lego*

### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with another photograph (Figure 8), this time of a sandpit filled with Lego taken during a research trip to the Future Classrooms Lab, an innovative learning space situated in Carlsberg University, Copenhagen. This image has a particular connection with the analysis and discussion that will inform this chapter: the plastic blocks serving as the raw material from which myriad objects might be made. Creating using these blocks is an activity that is limited only by the imagination, experience, and prior knowledge of the creator. Whilst there are instruction manuals that might be followed, the Lego in this space was designed to facilitate free exploration, identify potential, piece disparate elements together to make and remake, before evaluating and discussing outcomes that could then be broken apart and reassembled into something completely different.

The image (Figure 8) is presented as a reminder that the discussions that follow are my own constructions and, as such, are shaped both by the structures of my habitus, understood as a system of embodied dispositions shaped by past experiences and social conditions that guide how individuals perceive, think, and act in the world (Bourdieu, 1990), and by the expectations imposed by the academic field in which this study is situated. The ways in which I selected, organised, and interpreted the data throughout this thesis were inevitably influenced by my

own positioning. What I chose to highlight, or question reflects not only the dispositions of my habitus, but also the institutional norms that define what counts as legitimate knowledge in doctoral research. Recognising this reflects my commitment to what Bourdieu (2003) terms *participant objectification*, which recognises the influence the researcher and the context of the research has on what comes to be known, as well as the view articulated by Braun and Clarke (2022), who argue that “data does not emerge” (p. 4), but is actively constructed through the processes involved in reflexive thematic analysis.

### **6.1a How to Read This Chapter**

The composite narratives, presented in full in this chapter, were constructed from data gathered during twelve interviews and developed to reflect the seven themes that featured most prominently across the accounts of participants. As Johnston (2024) suggests, these narratives are designed to encourage readers to bring their own interpretations to the text, enabling a more personal and aesthetic engagement with the research. This approach invites multiple readings and meanings (Willis, 2019). Such openness is a key principle of presenting findings in this way, as it acknowledges the complexity of human experience and avoids reducing the narrative to a single, definitive interpretation.

However, as I am writing to answer an overarching research question, after sharing each narrative, I will present my interpretation and analysis of the codes that relate to that theme. This analysis will draw together the words of my participants, resonances with literature, and my reflections and understanding. The focus for each section is outlined below.

- Alex’s Story: The influence of moving from school into higher education.
- Sara’s Story: The positioning of self as an academic.
- Jo’s Story: The place of teacher education in the academic community.
- Rachel’s Story: The impact of centrally imposed agendas.
- Clare’s Story: Perceptions from outside the university.
- Laura’s Story: Engagement in and with research.
- Andi’s Story: Reflections on support and training

This chapter will conclude by synthesising the evidence of research engagement with the ways individuals position themselves as teacher educators, highlighting the complex and dynamic interrelationship between these two elements. This synthesis will form the basis for the final chapter of the thesis, where I will address how the data answers the central research question and sub-questions, acknowledge the limitations of the study, and explore its

implications for the teacher education sector, for policy and practice within universities, and for the professional development of teacher educators.

## 6.2 Alex's Story: Scratching the Itch

I fell into higher education by accident. I had no real ambitions to be here but, with hindsight, I could see there were lots of things that were kind of dragging me in that direction. I was a lead teacher and then an AST. People were sent to watch me teach and I got to go around different schools doing a bit of moderation work. I really enjoyed that part of my job. But, at the same time, school was getting to be a hard place to work. You know, you go through the rounds and teach the same thing. You can get in a rut, and that's how I felt. I didn't share this with anyone at the school, but I thought, if I carry on like this, I'm going to burn myself out in a couple of years. There was just no real headspace, you know, time to think. God, if I still had a full timetable at school, it'd be completely knacker.

I'm not a particularly confrontational person, but I do like to ask why, and I was getting frustrated with the smoke and mirrors. I would often ask colleagues, "This isn't working... why?" That doesn't always work in school because I felt that most teachers are like, "It doesn't matter; this is what we have to do." The government would introduce a new policy, and it was like we would genuinely sit there in staff meetings being told, "No, this is how it is...this is how it's always been...this is what best practice looks like", and I'd be sitting there thinking, "No it isn't. Two months ago, something else was best practice." I don't mind change, but I want to have that... no...I **need** to have that discussion about why. Towards the end, I was starting to get an itch...that need to go back and get back into the whys of education.

Then a job came up. With the experience I had, I kind of felt like I was a little bit familiar with the territory. I guess I also had this image of what it might be, a bit of a dream, working in a university. I thought, "D'you know what, I wonder if I could?" I was really shocked when I got the job because I thought I had no real experience, apart from the bits of CPD stuff in school of course, but obviously it was the time of the National Strategies, and they said they were desperate for somebody straight from school. I haven't regretted it. I think it's probably one of the best decisions I've ever made, despite everything.

## 6.2a The Influence of Moving from School into Higher Education

Alex's story of her transition from the classroom to the university highlights the complex interplay between professional identity and the changing dynamics of the field of education. On the surface, Alex could be defined as a second-order practitioner. Her work undertaken with student teachers in the university firmly grounded on the knowledge, skills, and experiences gained from the first-order context of the primary school aligning with the findings of Izadinia (2014) and J. Murray (2002). While Alex has significant experience as a teacher, she also recognises that the educational influence she had when she was in school was wider than her own classroom. She exemplifies this with reference to her work as an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) and her moderation activities. Drawing upon the definition of the teacher educator as someone who "plays a formal active role in the facilitation of professional learning by student teachers and teachers" (Boyd & White, 2017, p. 124), Alex has clearly accrued a range of economic, social, and cultural resources from her experiences. Her words suggest that she could objectively claim to possess the capital (Bourdieu, 1986) required to be a teacher educator before beginning work at the university.

She reports a feeling of surprise when she was successful in her application to become a teacher educator. I found the words she uses here to be particularly interesting, implying that for Alex, although she felt "*a bit familiar*" with what would be expected of her in the university, there was a disconnection between what she refers to as "*the bits of CPD stuff*", and the work she currently undertakes with student teachers. Another tension emerges as Alex expands on why she feels she was appointed, stating, "... *they were desperate for somebody straight from school.*" While this statement may reflect a conscious attempt to moderate her achievements, aligning with the findings of Richter et al. (2021), it also reveals a more profound uncertainty about whether her appointment to the university was based on her merits or on serendipitous timing.

Alex refers to her experience implementing the National Strategies, the extensive curriculum and pedagogical frameworks that were part of a suite of state-mandated reforms intended to improve teaching and learning in schools which were in force between 1997 and 2011 (Department for Education, 2011b). From my own experience in the classroom at that time, I recall how they influenced education profoundly, shaping not only what should be taught in literacy and numeracy but also specifying the teaching methods and language that were expected to be used. As Moss (2009) observes, these strategies conveyed a clear message that education could be fixed through government intervention, reinforcing a technocratic view of teaching as a problem to be solved with standardised approaches. As Hordern and Brooks

(2024) similarly highlight, this discourse is evident in the frameworks and policies shaping teacher education today.

Alex's reflections also echo the work of Kosnik et al. (2022), who examine how the intense politicisation of education has shaped the professional dispositions of teacher educators. They raise important questions about how deeply held beliefs and values, both conscious and unconscious, are shaped through repeated exposure to policies such as the National Strategies. In what Wilkins (2011) describes as an era of post-performativity, Alex's efforts to navigate her role within these policy legacies reflect the concerns of Goodley and Perryman (2022), who advocate for the creation of spaces that enable teachers to critically reflect on how accountability systems have shaped their practice. Without such reflective spaces, Brown (2019) warns, even if performative pressures lessen over time, their lingering influence remains, subtly but persistently shaping professional identities.

As Richter et al. (2021) note, push and pull factors often operate simultaneously, making it difficult to identify a single reason why teachers move from the classroom into higher education. In Alex's case, however, the response of senior leaders in her school to ongoing educational reforms emerges as particularly significant. Her reference to "*smoke and mirrors*" captures the tensions within a system where compliance is prioritised over critical engagement. Alex's account also illustrates the concept of *hysteresis* (Bourdieu, 1990), a misalignment between a habitus shaped by her identity as an effective classroom practitioner and the evolving expectations imposed by school leadership. This disjuncture is experienced affectively as what Graham (2020) describes as a deep sense of unease when the habitus no longer aligns with the field, a sensation Barrow and Xu (2023) characterise as a state of "non-stop breathlessness" (p.535). For Alex, this emotional and professional dissonance can be understood as a powerful push factor that contributed to her decision to leave the primary classroom.

While her work outside the classroom allowed Alex to reflect on what might lie beyond her immediate context, she increasingly felt that the primary school was becoming a "*hard place to work*". Her fears about burnout, coupled with a perceived lack of space for meaningful reflection, highlight the emotional labour (Hochschild, 2012) involved in managing feelings in order to work in a system driven by performative demands. She also doubts that her thoughts would be valued even if reflective space were available, describing an environment where autonomy and criticality seem to be systematically undermined. Alex further reflects on the physical strain of teaching, stating, "*God, if I still had a full timetable at school, it'd be*

*completely knackered*". Here, she refers to the physicality of her role, the constant movement, vocal projection, and sustained energy that is integral to being a primary school teacher. When such demanding embodied practices are compounded by feelings of limited recognition or diminished agency, it is unsurprising that Alex became receptive to exploring alternative employment opportunities away from the school. These insights also resonate with the findings of Brady and Wilson (2021), who warn of the detrimental effects that arise when school leaders fail to address the psychological and physical needs of their staff.

Alex's words also illustrate what Threadgold (2020) refers to as a "sticky affinity", a profound emotional connection that ties an individual to a particular field or practice. These affinities are fuelled by significant emotional investments, shaping how individuals perceive their roles and sustain their engagement with the field. At the same time, Alex's experiences also show evidence of cruel optimism, as defined by Berlant (2011), which describes how the aspirations or ideals we hold about certain aspects of our lives can ultimately hinder our flourishing. For Alex, this emerges as her strong investment in teaching, rooted in a deep sense of duty and emotional commitment to making a difference, clashes with the reality of a system offering little space for meaningful reflection or growth.

Alex's journey to academia appears driven by a desire to work in an environment where she could critically question educational practices rather than simply conform. Although it might be inferred that she doubts her credibility as an academic, she has clearly engaged in scholarly activity, supporting the development of teaching and learning beyond her classroom. These practices align with broader conceptions of scholarship as posited by Boyer (1997). Frustrations with having to implement restrictive policies, such as the National Strategies, propelled her toward the university, a place where she hoped she would be able to reclaim her voice. As Quickfall and Wood (2024) find, teacher retention has become a persistent and pervasive concern, yet despite the challenges that she has faced, Alex is not lost to primary education entirely. Instead, her commitment to the value of education has been transferred from working with children in the classroom and now underpins the work she undertakes with beginning teachers at the university.

### 6.3 Sara's Story: Meeting the Myth in the Middle.

Do I see myself as an academic? That's another tricky question [laughs]. I do sort of see myself that way, well, at some points, but not always. When I came here, I had a lot of things I wanted to research, loads of ideas, mainly problems or things that were not right from school. Then I got caught up with the day-to-day things, and everything got a bit bitty. I must admit to being completely floored by the idea of academia and thinking no way is this for me... massive impostor syndrome. I do think that there's a myth about being an academic, which doesn't always help. When I first got the job, I thought I was going to be sitting in an office... no... a library. That's the image in my mind, sitting in a library, you know.... shiny mahogany bookcases the lot. I would be immersed in books and reading. I thought that most of my work would be sitting in a kind of sitting room, talking seriously to this small group of eager students [laughs]. I was going to be Dumbledore basically. It's nothing like that in reality; I mean, just look around you.

If anyone asks me what I do, I say I work with students who want to become teachers. It's just easier. If I say I lecture at a university, they say, "What do you teach?" and I say, "Teacher education", and then I have to ...dot dot dot... it just gets complicated. I would never describe myself as a teacher educator... I mean, what even is that? [laughs]. I don't know. I wouldn't use that language. Mind you, I find teacher trainer more difficult... I feel like I do more than train. I think I'm there to kind of provoke and to get them to really think and understand what teaching and what learning is and what it could be. Although when I think about it, with my taxi driver yesterday, I said that I train teachers, I used that word...training [shudders]...I don't know why, maybe it's to try to explain what I do when I'm talking to somebody who's not in the field. To be honest, semantic battles bother me less than real battles. We have enough of those to fight at the moment. Most people are not that interested anyway, it's a bit of a job no one cares about, isn't it [Laughs].

Mind you, I like to think that I am a university lecturer, and I do like the word academic. I would like to think of myself as being an academic and I would really like to be described as one, but I don't really feel that I am one until I do certain things, like research, that I haven't properly done yet. I consider myself to be just above average intelligence you know; I don't think I'm amazing and super, but I'm definitely interested and want to do more. I thought about this coming onto campus today actually. I used to think university professors... doctors, you know those *proper academics*, I used to think they're like up there [points finger upwards] but they're not really... well not the whole lot of them. I think

maybe that you kind of grow into academia, I guess you meet it in the middle, the myth becomes less in reality. I think it becomes like... it's just a job isn't it.

### 6.3a The Positioning of Self as an Academic

Sara's story illustrates the power of *illusio*, the deeply held belief and investment in the stakes of a field, as defined by Bourdieu (1990). Her words provide a glimpse into her "primary habitus" (Threadgold, 2020, p. 56). This structure is informed by the capital she has accrued from the social and historical influences of her upbringing and is manifested in the social gravity or seriousness with which she talks about education. She admits to bringing to the university "*loads of ideas, mainly problems or things that were not right from school*" that she wanted to research, providing an insight into her "secondary habitus" (Threadgold, 2020, p. 56), which has been structured by her wider life experiences, most notably as a first-order primary school teacher (J. Murray, 2002). This also evidences her understanding that higher education is a space for providing solutions through research. Her words paint an enticing picture of the university as an institution very different from the frenetic image of the primary school portrayed in Alex's story.

Echoes of what Collini (2012) would see as the traditional conception of the modern university are evident here. Sara's words seem to draw upon the tropes of academia informed by images of the university that are presented in popular culture. Her words invoke a picture of the university as an institution that is ivy-clad and ivory-towered, where committed students hang on every word of their all-knowing professors. Sara is cognisant of the impact that this has had. After describing the mahogany-cloaked library, she draws upon her knowledge of the Harry Potter franchise, joking, "*I was going to be Dumbledore basically*". The power of popular media to shape how we understand different social arenas is identified in the work of Marquis et al. (2020), who acknowledge how film media constructs images of the university to which audiences respond in complex ways. They cite the work of Stuart Hall (1997), who finds popular media texts serve to produce knowledge that "...regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practised, and studied" (p. xxii). Sara's joking self-description reveals that she is aware of the impact these cultural constructs have had, influencing her understanding of what the university is and her place within it.

Building from this, Sara's reflection that "*there's a myth about being an academic which doesn't always help*" also reveals her recognition of the tensions between the idealised visions of academia and its lived realities. This acknowledgment speaks to the dual nature of *illusio*

(Bourdieu, 1990), which, while serving as a motivating force that sustains investment in the field, can also generate cognitive dissonance when aspirational schemas fail to align with lived reality (Threadgold, 2020). The department in which Sara now works, with its 1960s architecture, shared offices, and the pervasive pressures of a field increasingly shaped by neoliberal and performative agendas (Wood et al., 2024), stands in stark contrast to the romanticised, Oxbridge-like vision of academia portrayed in her Harry Potter analogy. Her candid remark, “*It’s nothing like that in reality; I mean, just look around you,*” encapsulates the gap between the symbolic ideal of the university and the material conditions of the environment in which she currently works.

Sara’s description of being “*completely floored*” by the thought of academia, which she labels as “*massive impostor syndrome,*” also highlights the affective challenges of navigating the academic field. Originally defined by Clance and Imes (1978) to describe feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and “phoniness” (p. 241) experienced by high-achieving white women, impostor syndrome has since become ubiquitous across Western societies (Bravata et al., 2020), often pathologised as being an individual problem solvable through workshops, self-help texts, or extensive self-reflection. However, reframing Sara’s words through the lens of Bourdieu (2007) allows for a different perspective that highlights Sara’s impostor syndrome to be seen as something other than a personal failing. Instead, it can be understood as a discontinuity between the habitus, shaped by her aspirations and investment in academia, and the *doxa*, which Bourdieu (2007) understands as being the taken-for-granted assumptions that shape what is seen as natural or normal within the academic field.

The notion of affective economies posited by S. Ahmed (2004) provides a valuable framework for understanding this aspect of Sara’s story. Her work emphasises that emotions are not just internal and individual but instead can be seen as socially mediated forces that attach to bodies, objects, and ideas, influencing self-perception and interactions with others, a perspective also explored by writers such as Reay (2015) and Threadgold (2020). Echoed in Sara’s words is the belief of S. Ahmed (2010) that “the attribution of feeling to an object (I feel afraid because you are fearsome) is an effect of the encounter, which moves the subject away from the object” (p. 8). This separation is evident as Sara discusses her feelings of inadequacy, admitting to not really feeling like an academic until she does “*certain things*” expected of academic colleagues. These “*certain things*” can be understood as performative acts that align with the norms and expectations of academia and are perceived as very separate from Sara’s day-to-day practices.

This sense of disconnection is something that should be addressed during induction, as the work of J. Murray and Male (2005) stresses. The large-scale review by Izadinia (2014) identifies that induction into teacher education should foster learning communities, cultivate supportive professional relationships, encourage self-inquiry, and engage teacher educators in reflective practices. These principles also resonate beyond teacher education, aligning with the work of Mulholland et al. (2023), who consider the characteristics of effective induction for early-career academics across disciplinary fields. However, it is striking that none of my participants reported receiving a formal induction into their role. The absence of this may have intensified the disconnection, leaving individuals like Sara to navigate these emotional and professional tensions independently, without institutional support to help bridge the gap between her established teacher and emerging academic identities.

Her use of the term “*proper academics*” is also striking as it suggests that despite working in the university for many years, Sara continues to perceive herself as distinct from the professors and doctors she views as possessing credibility through institutionalised cultural capital, such as advanced qualifications or professional accolades (Bourdieu, 2007). Sara’s description of her intelligence as being “*just above average*” seems to reinforce this sense of separation, effectively drawing a boundary between herself and her academic colleagues, whom she perceives as having a superior intellect.

This perception also reinforces her sense of inadequacy, providing an example of misrecognition, which occurs when social hierarchies and power struggles are accepted as being something natural, obscuring the mechanisms through which capital is accrued and deployed to maintain dominance within the field (Threadgold, 2020). By attributing the academic status of her colleagues to a presumed superior intelligence, Sara overlooks strategies these individuals might have employed to accumulate and leverage specific capital. This might include engaging in networking or mentoring and using the connections to access to additional resources or opportunities that reinforce their status in the field.

However, Sara’s reflections also reveal a pragmatic shift in her habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) as she begins to critically engage with the realities of working in the university over time. She remarks, “*I think maybe that you kind of grow into academia, I guess you meet it in the middle, the myth becomes less in reality.*” The work of Archer (2003) emphasises the centrality of internal conversation in the human capacity to mediate one’s environment and offers a valuable lens through which to interpret this change. In rejecting the view that habitus is overly deterministic, Archer (2003) emphasises the importance of individual agency, arguing that

through reflexive thought that operates at different levels, people come to critically assess their circumstances, navigate structural constraints, and make choices that are aligned with their specific goals and values. Sara's reflections align with what Archer (2003) describes as "meta-reflexivity" (p. 275), a process of critically evaluating not only one's personal situation but also the broader social systems that are in force. As Lizardo (2004) might argue, the assimilation of her schema that led to her perceiving academia as an overwhelming "*myth*" to understanding it as "*just a job*" illustrates her recognition of the dynamic interplay between structure and agency. However, while Sara's "meta-reflexivity" (Archer, 2003, p. 275) allows her to critically evaluate her position within the university and demystify the institutional structures she once idealised, from my own experiences of working in the department, I feel this has not been translated into the transformation of academic practices.

However, if she is troubled by self-identifying as an academic, it is also clear that Sara finds explaining her role to others to be just as problematic. Her inability to describe what she does concisely to those outside the profession indicates the ambiguity inherent in being a teacher educator. This position aligns with the general underappreciation of its importance by the wider public, as seen in the work of scholars such as Darling-Hammond (2006), D. Labaree (2000), and Zeichner (2006). Sara chooses to explain her role as "*working with students who want to be teachers*". This is a rather bland description, which does not reflect the intellectual, pastoral, and pedagogical expertise that I know from my experience is a significant part of the role. In the last two decades, the term teacher educator has become more prevalent as a moniker intended to highlight the significance of the role in supporting learning across the professional life of teachers (White, 2019), but Sara dismisses this term. Although clearly committed to the role, Sara is resigned to the fact that teacher educator is a job title that is not understood outside the field of teacher education. Instead, she adopts a subjugated stance, noting that the title "*doesn't matter as it's a job no one cares about*".

However, she is also very clear about the terminology she would never use, stating, "*I find teacher trainer more difficult... I feel like I do more than train*". Although many years have passed since Sara entered the university, she has maintained an ongoing affinity with what the university purports to offer, aspiring to encourage a critical understanding of teaching and learning in her students. This came over strongly across the data, my participants viewing themselves as what Vanassche and Kelchterman (2014) would define as "teacher educators of reflective teachers" (p.121). At a time when the university is being marginalised across all aspects of teacher education (McIntyre et al., 2019), the significance of identifying as an educator rather than a trainer is clearly important, a position also highlighted by Murtagh and

Rushton (2023). However, I feel that these words also present a potential paradox. While Sara, as a “teacher educator of reflective teachers” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014, p. 121), wants to encourage her students to think about what learning could be, she is asking them to engage in the reflection and criticality that led her to leave the classroom in the first place.

#### 6.4 Jo's Story: Like a Hamster on a Wheel

When I first started here in some ways we were valued, financially anyway, the TDA used to give us loads of money, training to teach was funded then. You know, the good old days, and the university used to take their 40% cut. We stopped being seen as being significant when the free money stopped. Now we still provide a lot of income for the university through fees, but it feels like that's not acknowledged. In the university certain aspects are more highly valued, even though they bring in a lot less money. The only time we are really recognised is when they want something from us, like our links to schools or access to children. It feels like we're seen as a kind of administrator, something other than academics. It's not a comfortable fit.

There's that thing, "Oh, they're only working in schools; they don't know anything." But as a department, we don't help ourselves. I don't think that we really know where we fit in either. We work with students, with pupils, we work with senior managers in schools, and we work with so many different people. We've got such a richness that a lot of the other departments don't have. It's more than a lot of them could ever dream of, but maybe we don't make the most of it. I think that some professors don't see teacher education as being important, which doesn't help. They can be so far removed from what we actually do in ITE, but they write papers and books about how awful it is anyway.

I also don't think those higher up in the university really understand the massive weight of responsibility that we have. We are seen as training teachers rather than providing higher education, and that's a hard image to break. I mean the number of times we have had to fight just to get...you know...the toilets open in September because they don't recognise that we've got an early start to get the days in. It feels sometimes like the system is stacked against us. You can't really move from a Teaching and Scholarship contract to a Teaching and Research contract unless you kill yourself to do it. But even if you do, there's still that perception of...people's histories of ...you know, the narrative they have about you being "just" a teacher. Interestingly, I don't think anyone has ever moved from teaching and research to teaching and scholarship. That says a lot, doesn't it? It's a one-way street. It's black and white. Academic or not academic.

You and I would never get a whole six months of study leave... six weeks or even six days. We've got to keep everything going. You can't leave students in school on their own. Can you imagine! So, you have to sacrifice things if you want to go in a different direction. But then where do you go? There's no real career trajectory. I wouldn't want to go higher up in

the institution. I dipped my toe in, and I know emphatically that I would not want to go there... but then you end up doing the same old same old... like a hamster in a wheel. God, that makes everything sound bleak doesn't it. And sometimes it is, but not all the time. It sounds very silly, but I really like telling people I work here. I like the name. It gives what I do a status, and I think that really matters.

#### **6.4a The Place of Teacher Education in the Academic Community**

Jo's narrative presents a critical perspective on the place and perceived status of teacher education within the university, beginning with a reflection on how its value appears to be primarily linked to the economic capital it generates (Bourdieu, 1986). She recalls the period when the Training and Development Agency (TDA) funded teacher education, describing it nostalgically as the "*good old days*". Aside from distributing funding and steering the curriculum from afar, as Furlong (2023) writes, the TDA also fostered sector-wide collaboration by supporting training events and practice-based research, forms of collective development that stand in sharp contrast to the current climate of heightened competition and increasing centralised control that is now experienced across the sector (V. Ellis, 2023). The emphasis Jo places on the perceived financial imperative reflects the discourse of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 2003), echoing the critique of Giroux (2019), who argues that the modern university has shifted away from education as a public good toward the logic of economic enterprise. In the institution where Jo works, which depends heavily on student fees to maintain financial viability, the loss of TDA funding significantly reshaped how teacher education is positioned within the university.

However, despite being the largest programme in the education department and generating substantial revenue through student fees, Jo also perceives that teacher education in her institution is undervalued in ways that transcend purely financial concerns. Her words show that while it is financially beneficial, the programme struggles to turn this economic value into symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). As such, its contribution is not matched by institutional recognition. This perspective is also found in the work of Hoult et al. (2024), who cite the supine approach of senior leaders to the monumental changes that the field has endured over the last few years as evidence of the lack of value placed upon teacher education. For Jo, this discomfort manifests internally in a perception that her role is viewed primarily as "*training teachers*" rather than "*providing higher education*", a perspective that aligns with the tension expressed in Sara's story and is something she feels is difficult to reconcile.

The ambiguous position of teacher education within the university is also reflected in material realities. Jo's example of recurrent struggles to secure basic resources, such as ensuring toilets are operational in time for the early start of the programme illustrates this. While this may be dismissed as thoughtlessness, I believe Jo's recurring experiences have a particular significance, viewing them as a form of symbolic violence. This concept from Bourdieu (1977) referring to how meanings, norms, and values are imposed on individuals or groups, leading them to perceive social hierarchies to be natural or legitimate. In this case, such oversights communicate that the needs of teacher education, and by extension, those who work within it, are peripheral to the core priorities of the university. Although seemingly inconsequential, such repeated slights accumulate, reinforcing a sense of exclusion and providing another indication that academia is not for the likes of the teacher educator.

This sense of exclusion is also evident in the restricted opportunities that Jo feels she has for career progression, as the traditional pathways within the university are perceived not to align with the specific contributions and needs of teacher educators. This frustration reflects the broader structural inequalities in academia as outlined in *Homo Academicus* (Bourdieu, 2007), where career advancement is often contingent on meeting narrowly defined criteria that are tied to research outputs, a position also noted in Houlst et al. (2024). All the participants in my study have worked in higher education for some time and are paid at the top end of the senior lecturer salary scale. They all have leadership and management responsibilities, but at the time of writing, the university did not have any established procedures for promoting colleagues aside from those directly associated with the production of research. For Jo, this pathway to promotion is perceived as being out of reach, requiring her to "*sacrifice things*" if she wants to go in "*a different direction*".

Jo's sense of being "*stuck*" on a Teaching and Scholarship contract, with limited avenues for progression, exacerbates her frustration with the institution. Although no formal distinctions in pay between teaching and scholarship and teaching and research contracts exist, the allocation of hours is different, with the latter having allocated time specifically for research for inclusion in the Research Excellence Framework submission of the department. She describes these contract types as being a "*one-way street*", noting that she does not think "*anyone has ever moved from teaching and research to teaching and scholarship*". For Jo, this reinforces a binary view of academia as "*black and white*," divided into "*academic or not academic*" categories, where research is seen as having a higher status. Her perspective presents a different assumption from that proposed in the literature, such as Zeichner (2010), who locates the teacher educator in a hybrid position, emphasising the "non-

hierarchical interplay between academic, practitioner, and community expertise” (p. 89). While the model proposed by Zeichner (2010) disrupts traditional paradigms that position academic knowledge as the sole authoritative source, it seems that Jo's lived reality is more clearly differentiated.

Jo's experiences echo those of V. Ellis et al. (2011), illustrating how she has accumulated substantial social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) through cultivating strong relationships with schools. This capital is relational, built on mutual trust and respect. However, Jo perceives this aspect of her work as undervalued by the university, which only superficially acknowledges her extensive connections. The instrumentalisation of Jo's social capital provides another example of misrecognition (Threadgold, 2020), where the value of her contributions becomes obscured by institutional structures that privilege other forms of capital. For Jo, her work across the boundaries of the primary school and university (S. Thomson et al., 2021) is something to celebrate, offering a breadth of perspectives that distinguishes the teacher educator from the narrower, more specialised focus she associates with academic work in other disciplines.

Across the data, although participants reported that they were frustrated with the restrictive systems and a lack of recognition for their contributions, they also expressed a strong affiliation and pride in being part of an institution with a rich history of teacher education and a core mission that is centred on social justice. This tension underscores the broader challenge for teacher educators in reconciling their professional identities within a complex and often dismissive academic landscape. However, Jo's reflections also raise a critical question. If teacher educators struggle to define their place within the academic community and feel marginalised within their home institutions, how can they challenge external perceptions that diminish their legitimacy outside the university?

## 6.5 Rachel's Story: Hoop Jumping and Ridiculous Little Videos.

To be quite honest, the whole Market Review thing doesn't make any sense to me. What we are doing is just a lot of hoop jumping. I don't know; maybe I'm just thick, and I don't get it, but it's not making me any better at my job. We're a university. You know, who are these people that have the audacity to tell a university that we need to provide some slides to prove that we know what we're doing? There's an artifice around it, but equally, you know that there's a lot riding on it. You can either go for it, or you give up. It's just how it is. The whole thing is making it feel very unstable and volatile again.

Remember that meeting, the DfE meeting. We were online with them when we were told very, very clearly that there was no place for research or thinking around how children learn. That it. We know how it works. So, we should teach this. Everything else is confusing to the students. That really stayed with me. I think that meeting was pivotal. Not so much in just saying what they did so openly but also that no one really fought back from it. None of us felt able in that situation to question. That's quite scary ground. So now we are told that we must be evidence-informed, but the evidence we have to use isn't properly proven and doesn't connect with the primary context, the subject context or our local context, but it has to go in anyway. It's about what works, but you know that it doesn't. It's really hard to get excited about it.

What we've been doing isn't really curriculum development with any quality. It's creating these ridiculous little videos and endless documents to keep the government happy, some of which we wouldn't be creating if we didn't have to because they are not going to serve any purpose. It sends me right back to what we went through with the phonics review back in the day. It's depressing, but they got away with that, which has enabled them to take control now. I think, in a sense, we lost at that point.

It's pretty clear that the government wants this institute, The National Institute for Teaching, whatever they want to call it, to take over and almost limit people's choice. So, when you think about it, it's not a market all. Then you've got these people or organisations that have got proper influence, but they don't really understand the landscape. Then you've got us foot soldiers doing it, who have become really good at making it work. I listen to the people that have a voice in all of this, who now tell us what to do. They seem to all write blogs, have a YouTube channel, or have some nefarious link to the DfE [laughs]. I think it should be an expectation that teachers receive good quality CPD just so that they can critique some of the nonsense that's coming through. But that

won't happen, will it? The power definitely sits with some big beasts, and it feels like the universities are well below that, floundering.

Between you and me, just looking at our department, I think that our hyper-criticality has also been our undoing in some way. We can get really nasal gazy, can't we? Maybe as a result our practice does get stuck in the past a bit. You don't move forward if you're looking backwards all the time. Also, there is a lot of politicisation that stops us. I think sometimes we should just get on with it, but there's always suspicion. Sometimes you need to engage with these things, so you know where your line in the sand is. You know, recognise what to fight for. Maybe I should begin to do some work about that... if I had the time.

### **6.5a The Impact of Centrally Imposed Agendas**

The interviews that informed the creation of the composite narratives were conducted when Initial Teacher Education in England was navigating significant instability, renegotiating its position within a shifting educational landscape (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023). Over the course of the twelve interviews, participants were engaged in tasks such as developing curriculum materials, preparing resources, and designing mentor training to meet the Quality Requirements as outlined by the Department for Education (Department for Education, 2024b). It was unsurprising that the tensions that arose from this compliance with centrally imposed agendas were a theme that emerged strongly across the data.

Rachel's reflections shed light on the performative nature of these processes, prompting her to question whether such tasks genuinely enhance the quality of her practice. Her observations align with the work of Brooks (2023), who argues that the notion of quality has become a discursive tool used to justify the imposition of a narrow and prescriptive approach to what is now labelled by the government as "Teacher Training" (Department for Education, 2024b). This perspective also echoes the findings of Vickers-Hulse et al. (2024), whose participants describe the development of curriculum materials as instruments for accountability and compliance rather than meaningful pedagogical resources. Rachel's story also illustrates the strong feelings that were provoked during this intense period of what she describes as being "*hoop jumping*", and she questions the credibility of individuals who have what she feels to be the "*audacity to tell a university that we need to provide some slides to prove that we know what we're doing.*" Her words suggest that these activities serve to reinforce hierarchical power structures, marginalise the voices of teacher educators and, in doing so, promote a narrow, technocratic vision of teaching (Hordern & Brooks, 2024).

A pivotal moment in Rachel's narrative is a meeting with representatives from the Department for Education after the university successfully gained accreditation to award QTS. This meeting, which was widely attended by colleagues from across the sector, dictated that the only theoretical underpinning required in the teacher training curriculum is that which is informed by cognitive science, as advocated in the work of scholars such as Sweller et al. (2019). I was also present at this meeting and found the message conveyed to be striking, encapsulated by Rachel's summary, "*That's it. We know how it works, so we should just teach this. Everything else confuses the students.*" While this perspective contrasts with the longstanding traditions of educational thought that emphasise reflective, context-sensitive approaches to teaching, a position that is discussed in detail by Hordern and Brooks (2024), it also exemplifies symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1977), which leads to alternative perspectives becoming sidelined and agency diminished. Rachel's response is interesting. She remarks, "*Maybe I'm just thick, and I don't get it.*" This statement reflects a potential erosion in confidence, as the structural pressures to conform, coupled with the strong convictions of those possessing the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) to dictate curriculum content, may be internalised and interpreted as personal shortcomings rather than systemic challenges.

Rachel's discomfort also reflects the growing emphasis on evidence within current curriculum frameworks, such as the ITTECF (Department for Education, 2024a). These frameworks prioritise findings from randomised controlled trials and systematic reviews, often touted as the "gold standard" of educational research (Diery et al., 2020). Her critique that this evidence is "*not properly proven*" is interesting, given the dominance of quantitative methodologies across the evidence base, which claims to offer objectivity, replicability, and generalisability (Guba, 1981). Rachel's story also raises concerns about the largely unquestioned legitimacy granted to such research approaches, highlighting the tension between their theoretical promises and the practical realities of applying them within complex, context-dependent educational settings. Her position here aligns with Denzin (2009), who suggests that for qualitative researchers, the term evidence has become an "intruder whose presence cannot be ignored" (p. 139).

The narrative also highlights her perception of the unequal distribution of power within the wider social field of education. She describes a hierarchy in which the "big *beasts*", individuals possessing significant symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) and "*nefarious*" links to the Department for Education, wield disproportionate influence over policy decisions, a characterisation that aligns with Benn (2023). In contrast, she feels that teacher educators like herself are relegated to the role of "*foot soldiers*," responsible for implementing reforms but

excluded from meaningful decision-making. These entrenched power structures serve to ensure that the symbolic capital of the dominant group is continually legitimised and reproduced (Bourdieu, 1977), reinforcing their authority by shaping the direction of education policy. Meanwhile, those in less privileged positions, like Rachel, find themselves constrained by the reforms they are obligated to enforce, perpetuating a system that marginalises their voices and autonomy.

Her words indicate that she sees the university sector as “*floundering*” in its attempts to negotiate its position in an uncertain educational landscape. Reflecting on responses of colleagues in meetings such as the one mentioned above, she expresses surprise that “*no one really fought back from it*”. The apparent acquiescence of the sector to these reforms can be traced to several interconnected factors rooted in a rhetoric that frames such policies as solutions to perceived or manufactured crises (Clarke & Phelan, 2017). This framing is evidenced in unsupported claims that initial teacher education within the university is politically motivated, of poor quality, and inadequate in preparing teachers to support their pupils effectively (Spendlove, 2023). This makes state intervention both necessary and urgent, rendering resistance as irresponsible or counterproductive (Clarke & Phelan, 2017).

Rachel also reflects on her complicity, identifying parallels with her response to reforms, which mandated that systematic synthetic phonics (SSP) should be the primary approach used to teach early reading across the education sector. She observes that the government at the time “*got away with that*”, referring to the heightened surveillance and accountability measures imposed on initial teacher education to ensure SSP was firmly embedded in the curriculum. This she feels to have “*enabled them now to take control*”. She states, “*I think, in a sense, we lost at that point,*” suggesting that these concessions paved the way for the more extensive regulatory control that characterises the current landscape. At the same time, I acknowledge that compliance is often a pragmatic choice driven by the need to safeguard access to funding, accreditation, and resources. Even when reforms directly conflict with professional values, the perceived risks of resistance frequently outweigh any potential benefits of dissent. This dynamic further exemplifies what Berlant (2011) defines as cruel optimism, the teacher education sector and the individuals within it choosing to comply with these reforms while clinging to the hope of remaining relevant and having a meaningful role in shaping the direction of future educational policy.

Rachel also reflects on how her colleagues have responded to recent changes in teacher education. She acknowledges the politicisation that permeates the department she works in,

noting, “*there’s always suspicion*”. This suspicion, while understandable considering the extent of governmental intervention, is compounded by a major staffing restructure undertaken in the institution as well as ongoing University and College Union industrial action regarding pay and working conditions. However, while she acknowledges a lack of enthusiasm for implementing government-mandated frameworks, I noted that she does not express an explicit opposition to change. Her comment, “*you don’t move forward if you’re looking backwards all the time,*” reflects a pragmatic acceptance, one which can be seen as both a coping mechanism and as an attempt to find agency within a landscape where meaningful resistance feels increasingly unattainable.

This narrative underscores the frustration and disempowerment felt across the sector as Rachel describes how her practice has been reduced to compliance-driven tasks, stripping away opportunities to foster critical thinking or improve educational quality. However, I also find in her words a potentially unintended consequence of engaging with these reforms, offering a glimmer of hope amidst the challenges. She reflects:

*“Sometimes you need to engage with these things, so you know where your line in the sand is. You know, recognise what to fight for. Maybe I should begin to do some work about that if I had the time.”*

This reflection aligns with the findings of Wood et al. (2024), who challenge the notion of teacher educators as being passive recipients. Instead, they emphasise the agency of these professionals to resist, disrupt, or even ignore the pressures exerted by neoliberal interventions. Across the data, I noted that there was a shared recognition of the need for teacher educators to protect their professional values and autonomy, coupled with a desire to push back against imposed reforms that align with the work of Wilkins (2011). However, I also noticed a sense of hesitation. While there is a clear acknowledgement of the need to fight for what matters, my experience tells me that there is an underlying uncertainty about where, or how, to begin.

## 6.6 Clare' Story: Putting on my School Uniform.

I know schools sometimes mistrust universities in terms of us not being up to date with practice, not really knowing the realities. Well, we do; we live it every day, but I think that myth is one of the biggest challenges we have. When I was in school, I remember that we were fairly disparaging about university tutors. Nothing has changed much either. I was in a lovely school the other day, and the mentor said, "Oh, you've actually been a class teacher then." I thought that was really interesting. She'd just assumed I was this academic who had no idea what was going on.

When I go into school, I put on my school uniform. You know, try to dress like a teacher [laughs]. I think it helps. I try to throw in a few things just so they know that I'm still up to date. I think it's fair to say I still know my stuff in school, mostly. Mind you, it does feel like the schools just pay lip service to the PGCE. They often can't see that actually having an understanding of why you're doing things is important. Sometimes, it feels like when I go into school, I'm selling the university product, you know, explaining why thinking is important. Schools seem to have forgotten that. I enjoy that aspect, you know, talking about the importance of the university for teachers, I go into a different professional zone, but I know that they don't always want to hear it from me.

When I told my old head teacher that I had an MA, I was really surprised that it wasn't seen as a good thing. She was like, "Urm, OK". She didn't exactly say, "Oh well, never mind", like I had an illness [laughs], but basically, she said, "Oh, OK. Now let's get on with this instead." In other countries, teaching is a Master's profession, and I think that's what should happen in the UK. It should be up there, with teachers engaged in researching their practice but doing it in a way that actually is robust. When schools say they're doing research, it's almost like with the little r, ask them about ethics, ask them about this and that and they don't have a squiggly do. But my gut feeling is that schools seem savvier about research than they used to be. However, they have like a 10% knowledge about specific areas or skewed views of things like cultural capital or cognitive science.

I've been horrified by some of the things that have been sold to them...and then hearing governors and head teachers going, "Yeah, this is really good." People are making a lot of money from fads, trends and ideas that can be easily digested. It makes you realise how we've got to make what we do more user-friendly so that schools actually realise that we are on the same page. You know, proper knowledge exchange activity.

### **6.6a Perceptions from outside the university**

Clare's reflections begin by highlighting the assumption that school colleagues hold about university teacher educators. Her experiences resonate with the concept of the "devil's bargain" (Goodson, 1993), which describes the compromises made when teacher education became more closely aligned with universities. While this alignment promised increased professionalisation (Hargreaves, 2000), it has resulted in a dual disconnection as teacher education becomes separated from both school-based practice and traditional academic contexts. Although over three decades have passed since Goodson (1993) wrote this critique, Clare perceives this divide as enduring, despite research that outlines strategies that might bridge this gap, as seen in Beck and Kosnik (2002), Fancourt et al. (2015), Loughran et al. (2008), and Zeichner (2010). Reflecting on her time in the classroom, Clare recalls how the stereotypes portraying academics as out of touch remain prevalent, echoing the findings of Barrow & Xu (2023). Her reflections highlight how these entrenched attitudes persist, shedding light on the tensions they create for teacher educators who are expected to prioritise one aspect of their role while distancing themselves from another.

Building on this idea, the work of Koerner et al. (2002) and J. Murray et al. (2019) suggest that both student teachers and their mentors regarded extensive school experience as the most significant marker of an effective university tutor, a view that aligns with broader policy discourses favouring school-led training (George & Maguire, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2019; Mutton et al., 2017). From a dramaturgical perspective, the actions Clare takes in school illustrate what Goffman (2007) would describe as "idealisation", where individuals present themselves in ways that highlight desirable traits in order to conform to cultural and social expectations. Her clothing functions as a costume that connects her to school practices, while her use of classroom-specific language acts as a script, reinforcing her credibility. These performances, shaped by social cues, strategically foreground an idealised teacher identity to mitigate perceptions of being out-of-touch and align her presentation of self with the expectations of her school-based audience. However, at the same time, the actions that Clare takes may also be seen as reproducing the discourse that prioritises the teacher self over the university-based teacher educator self, contributing to what Goffman (1983) describes as the "expressive rejuvenation and reaffirmation of the moral values of the community" (p. 45).

As a teacher educator, Clare's role is also that of a knowledge broker (Knight, 2024), a position that involves her in translating and adapting theoretical insights into accessible and actionable strategies that teachers can implement within the constraints and opportunities of their professional context (Rycroft-Smith, 2022). However, she sees her role as enhancing

disciplinary rather than substantive knowledge, emphasising "*why thinking is important*" over what is being specifically thought about. This aligns with the perspective of Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2014) and the relationship with knowledge that is indicative of the "teacher educator of reflective teachers" (p. 121). As highlighted in Sara's story, this emphasis on fostering critical reflection was a recurring theme across the narratives and is further reinforced by the department's commitment to research situated within a critical paradigm. Yet, Clare also refers to this part of her role as "*selling the university product*," a phrase that reveals the tension between pedagogical ideals and the commercial realities of higher education. Her choice of language reflects the growing pressure on universities to assert their value within an increasingly competitive and marketised sector (Clarke & Phelan, 2017), where their relevance and future position are far from guaranteed.

Clare's reflections also highlight the differing values placed on academic achievements in school and university settings. While her master's degree represents a form of symbolic capital within the field of higher education (Bourdieu, 2007), it garners limited recognition in schools. Clare illustrates this disparity by referring to the dismissive response from her headteacher after sharing that she had a master's qualification. This interaction provides evidence of a broader power dynamic, as noted by Nuttall (2024) and Snoek and Volman (2014), who argue that further study is often overlooked or undervalued in schools unless it is explicitly tied to measurable school improvement. This disparity is further reflected in the current emphasis on professional development activities that are tightly regulated by the Department for Education. These initiatives prioritise content delivered by a small, select group of school-based providers (Daly, 2023), such as the suite of National Professional Qualifications (NPQs). Branded as part of the "golden thread" (Department for Education, 2022) that connects professional development across the career of the teacher, these qualifications emphasise practical and immediately applicable training. This approach contrasts sharply with the academically grounded, critical perspectives of Master's-level study, which Clare describes as being "*robust*", fostering deeper, more reflective engagement with educational theory and practice.

Clare also critiques the trend in schools to engage in research-like practices but expresses concern that they lack a strong foundation in ethics or methodology. As such, she defines them as being "*little r' research*". This phrase connects to the distinction made by Gardner (1993) between "big and little c creativity", both seen as having value, but the lower-case version refers to locally focused practices with a limited societal impact. Her belief reflects a commitment to preserving the *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1990) of higher education, where the ethical

and methodological rigour of research forms a type of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that works to legitimate its authority. Clare's words also reflect her experience with the "*fads and trends*" often marketed to schools as quick-fix solutions that claim to transform teaching and learning with minimal effort (Paul & Elder, 2019), such as those posited by Lemov (2021). Clare is particularly concerned that what she sees as complex educational concepts with substantial implications are frequently reduced to oversimplified, easily digestible ideas, leaving little room for meaningful reflection or critical analysis. She sees this reductionism as depriving educators of the depth needed to engage critically with the principles behind these approaches.

While Clare acknowledges the challenges facing universities, her reflections suggest a continued belief that they have a vital role to play in teacher education. She identifies opportunities for universities to reassert their relevance by fostering meaningful knowledge exchange that bridges the gap between academic research and school-based practice, a position advocated by Knight (2024). However, Clare's narrative also reveals the complexity of this relationship. She strives to broker knowledge in ways that are accessible and meaningful to practitioners, while simultaneously upholding the rigour and ethical standards associated with more traditional conceptions of research. The labour involved in this translational work is intellectually demanding and relationally complex, yet it is often under recognised within institutional structures that privilege conventional metrics of research productivity (V. Ellis et al., 2014). This brings with it the risk of further marginalising academic identity, as teacher educators may be positioned primarily as intermediaries, translators, or facilitators of knowledge produced by others, rather than as scholars in their own right. In this context, their contributions to research, theory, and critical pedagogy risk being overshadowed by the pressures to serve external agendas and demonstrate immediate utility to the school sector.

## 6.7 Laura Story: Wearing Two Hats That Don't Fit.

I think I had a lot of fire in my belly when I first joined the university. There were a lot of things that had pissed me off to a point in school where I just couldn't... and I assumed I would write these many things to deal with it all, but then you just get sucked into your job and you don't write anything, and then those thoughts disappear, and you're like... what were they again [laughs]. What I have noticed though is that experienced people who want to do proper research have to escape from teacher education. They volunteer to work more on the MA, or really do more of anything. Everyone knows that our job sucks all of your time and stifles the possibilities you might have to do anything else.

We are expected to do scholarship though, whatever that is. At least that's what it says on our contracts. Teaching and scholarship. Basically, I think it means we're seen as not being good enough to do research [laughs]. When I first started here, they said that you had to have a certain number of bits of research published each year, and that freaked me out a lot. I did try, but I didn't ever really manage it. It's better now that we don't have that pressure. There's enough in our job to feel bad about, we don't need that as well. What do I see as being proper research? That's a good question. It seems so straightforward when you try to explain it. We do that all the time with our students don't we. Make it all seem easy. I'm thinking in terms of journal articles and that kind of thing, right? I suppose you pick something, and you look at it more closely in real life. I would say, for me, it's about practical thinking about things, reflecting on things, and, you know, investigating them thoroughly.

But at the same time, it causes a lot of fear and anxiety. At the moment, doing it on my own I would feel a bit at sea, a bit lost. Maybe if we had a day to do research...like a day a week. But there is just so much other stuff to negotiate. One thing that's really struck me is that proper research is a slow process. It takes time and within teacher education, everything is so fast. ITE is full on, isn't it? You're just so busy all the time, but research is a slow process, and it's a meandering process. It's like to be a teacher educator and a researcher, you've got to wear these two hats all the time, but y'know they don't really fit.

Back in the day, I was pushed by my old Head of Department to write a book. It was quite scary, but in the end, I really loved it. I mean, I'm not out there selling myself, but I think if someone in the Department said to me you need to do this or can you write a chapter about this then I would say, "Yeah, yeah I can do it". I think you have to be brave enough

to say yes, when opportunities come along, even when you're not sure. As teachers we can be a bit hesitant.

I would say I am an avid consumer of research though. I try to keep up to date, mainly via links on Twitter. I like reading round what I'm teaching where I can, and when I've got time. We owe this to the students don't we. I've got this beautiful bookshelf but to be honest I don't actually read the books, and I've still got boxes of them at home that I probably need to bring into my office, but I very rarely read when I'm sitting here. I'm usually in a meeting or picking up someone who's crying and trying to sort them out. My job is a lot more administration than research, in some ways, the administration takes you so much further away from research. It's frustrating at times. I do like learning new things and it could be such a dynamic job. I don't think you ever stop wanting to learn and to improve your practice and that's kind of like research for me. I wish I could do a bit more; I really do.

### **6.7a Engagement in and with Research**

Laura's narrative encapsulates the ambivalence many university-based teacher educators face when engaging with research, echoing the work of Roberts and Weston (2014). As seen in the narratives of Alex and Sara, Laura entered academia with a strong sense of purpose, motivated by a desire to address unresolved issues from her time in schools. She had what Tack and Vanderlinde (2014) describe as an inclination towards research, driven by a belief in its potential to provoke meaningful change. However, her experiences reveal a disconnect between her aspirations as a researcher and the everyday realities of teacher education. She attributes this to the demands of working on the PGCE programme, describing an environment that "*sucks all of your time*," inhibiting the capacity for scholarly inquiry and relegating research to a secondary pursuit. Her words paint a picture that aligns with the work of Ellis et al. (2014), who define teacher educators as being a "particular class of academic workers" (p. 268) in that they are subject to different expectations from their non-teacher educator colleagues, and are denied opportunities to accumulate the academic capital that is required to be successful in the university context.

The data gathered from all twelve interviews revealed a recurring ambiguity around terms like "research" and "scholarship", with participants expressing uncertainty about their definitions and practical applications. Laura's portrayal of "scholarship" positions it as a vague and diminished form of academic engagement, highlighting its perceived lack of legitimacy compared to what she identifies as "*proper research*." This perspective contrasts with the

more democratic and inclusive model proposed by Boyer (1997), which redefines scholarship to encompass discovery, integration, application, and teaching. However, Laura's view about her work in this area appears narrowly focused on traditional research outputs, such as journal articles and book chapters, reflecting the perception she holds of where conventional academic markers of success reside.

Laura's experiences also illustrate the emotional and psychological challenges of navigating institutional pressures to publish, a reality also faced by many academics who work in other practice-based fields such as nursing, as discussed in Keen (2007) and Stone et al. (2010). She recounts a time when her department required teacher educators to meet specific research output targets, which she describes as having "*a certain number of bits of research published each year.*" While teacher educators increasingly expected to be active in the production of research in order to reflect on their own practices, advance educational knowledge, critique dominant discourse and enhance the quality of teacher training and education more widely (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Davey, 2013; Nicholson & Lander, 2022), Laura appears to be describing something different. From my experiences of working in the department, I recognise that the expectations she outlines seem to have arisen in response to the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which is used across the United Kingdom for assessing the quality of research in higher education institutions, and the outcomes of which determine public funding allocations for research (REF 2029, n.d.). While intended to incentivise high-quality research, this framework also imposes significant pressures, particularly on teacher-educators, who are required to navigate their dual roles as practitioners and researchers (Roberts & Weston, 2014).

Laura's words also reveal how these expectations not only shape her practices but also inflict significant emotional strain, triggering fear and anxiety about meeting institutional demands. I feel that the concept of *affective violence* (Threadgold, 2020) provides a valuable lens for understanding this dynamic, referring to the harm caused when institutional systems and expectations generate intense emotional responses, such as fear, anxiety, and inadequacy, that ultimately shape an individual's capacity to act. For Laura, the pressure to "publish or perish" (Wilson, 1995) imposed by the university at that time not only "*freaked her out*" but also eroded her confidence, limiting her ability to engage meaningfully in research production. This struggle is evident as she reflects, "*I did try, but I didn't ever really manage it. It's better now that we don't have that pressure.*" Laura's reflection illustrates the cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) of striving to produce research under significant institutional pressure. Her experiences provide clear evidence of how the terrors of performativity (Ball, 2003), inherent in processes

such as the REF can deeply affect professional identity, shaping not only how teacher educators perceive their roles but also impacting their emotional wellbeing. However, while her comment, “*we make it all seem easy,*” suggests confidence in demystifying research for her students, she candidly acknowledges the challenges she faces in navigating those same complexities in her own research engagement.

Laura reflects on the challenges of balancing the competing demands of her role, observing that instead of engaging in research, she is often “*picking up someone who’s crying and trying to sort them out.*” This highlights the centrality of the pastoral dimensions of the triad of responsibilities of the teacher educator (Ducharme & Ducharme, 1996), where the emotional and personal needs of students, as well as the importance of teaching, frequently take precedence over academic work. Davey (2013) captures this dynamic with the term “academic handmaids” (p. 74), highlighting how teacher educators are frequently relied upon to provide care and support, acting as good departmental citizens who uphold the functioning of the university. Yet, as Lander and Nicholson (2020) argue, despite the significant impact this relational, student-focused work has on key outcomes such as student experience, retention, and progression, all central to meeting the registration conditions outlined by the Office for Students, the independent regulator of higher education in England, it remains frequently overlooked or undervalued by the very institutions that depend on it.

Laura’s reflections also highlight the gendered nature of professional identities, particularly as they relate to primary education. As J. Murray (2006) notes, primary school teaching is widely regarded as a feminised occupation that is shaped by gendered discourses and practices associated with care and nurturing. As primary initial teacher education is a space where the culture of the primary school is produced and reproduced, it should also be understood as being influenced by these gendered norms (Maguire & Weiner, 1994). Laura’s position also aligns with the conception of being a “teacher educator of pedagogues” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014, p. 121), who bring a humanistic and relational understanding to their work. These values are further reinforced through daily interactions with student teachers and often become a core part of how individuals understand and enact their identity as teacher educators. Laura’s words align with J. Murray and Passy (2014), who highlight the moral fulfilment that comes from prioritising care and relational practices not only affirms their significance but also cements their place at the heart of the professional identity of the teacher educator, ensuring their continued prominence in the field.

Across the data, my participants reported engaging with research in some form during their experiences as teacher educators, emphasising the importance of staying informed about

current developments in their areas of specialism. However, as Laura notes, she “...*like(s) reading round what I’m teaching where I can and when I’ve got time*”, which suggests that engagement with research, while valued, is often seen as a secondary activity, contingent on available time rather than being a systematically integrated aspect of her role. The use of “*we owe this to the students, don’t we?*” reveals a moral imperative that underpins this engagement, positioning staying informed as an obligation to ensure she meets the expectations of her students rather than something to benefit the wider education community or indeed her own professional learning.

All participants highlighted time as a significant barrier to engaging with research. To navigate this challenge, as Laura observes, social media, particularly Twitter, was often used as a convenient tool for accessing current thinking and staying updated on policy developments. While social media provides a platform for rapid information sharing, Nelimarkka et al. (2021) raise important questions about the quality and accuracy of what is being shared in these spaces. On platforms like Twitter, algorithms designed to maximise engagement curate information in ways that often reinforce homogeneity and restrict access to diverse viewpoints, placing the time-poor teacher educator like Laura in a virtual echo chamber. The work of Pillow (2003) is relevant here, highlighting an epistemic tension where educators may believe they are critically engaging with current issues, yet their engagement is often constrained by a pre-filtered knowledge pool that limits access to alternative viewpoints. Pillow (2003) posits that our understanding of reflexivity must go beyond individual efforts to critically assess the content of knowledge and involve an awareness of the power dynamics and structural limitations that lie beneath its construction and dissemination. This presents a significant challenge for time-strapped teacher educators, who may already have an ambiguous or uncertain relationship with research.

All participants had experience with research production, although it was often described as a highly scaffolded process rather than an independent endeavour. This indicates that, as a group, they were inclined to engage in research, understood its demands, and had contributed meaningfully to research-focused projects that yielded tangible outcomes. In Laura’s case, drawing on the taxonomy proposed by Tack et al. (2023), she could be objectively classified as a “teacher educator researcher” (p. 309). However, Laura herself acknowledged that despite this experience, she still relies on external encouragement or a “push” to initiate research activity, suggesting that confidence and autonomy in research may not always align with demonstrated capability. She notes,

*I’m not out there selling myself, but I think if someone important in the department said to me you need to do this or can you write a chapter then I think I would say, “Yeah,*

*yeah I can do it." I think you have to be brave enough to say yes, when opportunities come along, even when you're not sure. As teachers we can be a bit hesitant.*

I found this comment to be interesting. Laura referred to herself as a teacher, which allows her practice to be distanced from what might be expected of her by the university. Her framing of research production as an act of bravery also resonates with the "*fear and anxiety*" she expressed earlier in her narrative. This highlights the emotional dimensions of research engagement and the critical role of support and development. These are themes that are explored further in Andi's story.

## 6.8 Andi's Story: Waving a Magic Wand

There's been support, at least on the surface. I think having a friendly research mentor helped me. Someone who is encouraging, that was the key for me. Someone who was not too...academic...but you know... was able to make it simple. I also liked the writing group. It's a bit hard when you feel you must comment on things to sound clever, but I think sometimes just to listen to others, you know, you learn so much. We also have the research afternoons as well. I mean, to be honest, they're not that useful...they're quite hands off and there's no expectation that we go. I literally couldn't tell you what the last one was about. I don't want to be disrespectful, but I genuinely feel in a sense that feeds into the idea of what is celebrated and what's not. You tend to sit there, and you listen to other people, you know the clever ones who've got time for research. So, then you start by feeling "oh, that's really interesting" and then you start to feel really bad about I'm not doing it, and then you kind of get kind of pulled down into a kind of...I don't know... it starts to feel quite miserable and uncomfortable. Then you get distracted, switch off and go online shopping [laughs].

I also think sometimes if the people in charge of or with responsibility for research aren't always the best people to actually include other people. They tend to be very good researchers and really successful, people know them, but that doesn't necessarily lend itself to taking people along with them and we've got to do that at the moment; we've all got to be taken along whether you want to be or not. Oh, that sounds critical... it's not critical in any personal way. I just wonder if in some ways that the head of research should be somebody that isn't necessarily a successful researcher but rather someone like us who gets that it's really hard. I wonder if it feels like this because we are primary specialists. You know, you're so used to being a Jack of all Trades. Also, as primary school teachers we've always got this sense of we're not as good as secondary because of the level of knowledge that they have in their subject. Even though our level of knowledge is wider but there's is higher up. I think it's quite hard for us to pin down that one thing you are interested in when you are so used to thinking about it all.

My advice to new colleagues would be to try to find someone who can help you find out what you want to focus on. Doing research can feel a bit like a closed shop sometimes and if you are new, it is a bit scary you know having all of that autonomy to do what you want to do. Also, no one will tell you if its right, and it feels like it is easy to get it wrong. I'm mentoring a new member of staff at the moment who's just come from school all excited and talking about wanting to do her PhD and wanting to go on courses, and I have to be

the person to say, "No, sorry. There's no money." I'm finding it sad because I don't want her to be like me. I see somebody so excited wanting to do the research and think hard about things, but I'm not able to facilitate that. When I take it higher, I'm told no. I feel frustrated by that because it feels like you can't be both in this job you can't be a researcher, and on the PGCE it's a really big issue that we need to look at, but then you know no one has any time to look at these big issues because they're all reacting all the time, creating the documents, meeting the deadlines. The reality is excited teachers are coming into the profession, but as it stands, it's really hard to enable them to do things differently. It's more of the same old, same old.

### **6.8a Reflections on Support and Development**

Andi's story highlights the critical role that mentoring played in shaping her confidence and competence as a researcher, and her reflections provide insight into the structural and relational dynamics that are at play as she engages both with and in research. Andi's positive experiences highlight the importance of personalised and emotionally attuned mentorship, a position supported across the literature as seen in Griffiths et al. (2014), Nicholson and Lander, (2022), and Roberts and Weston (2014). This is something that should be unsurprising to teacher educators, given the emphasis that is placed upon the effective mentoring of student teachers and the focused work that has been undertaken in this area as a result of the Initial Teacher Training Market Review, in which mentoring played a significant part (Department for Education, 2021).

The "*encouraging*" and "*not too...academic*" approach of her mentor reflects a style that prioritises accessibility over formality, which Andi feels met her needs as a novice researcher navigating a complex academic environment. This is an example of what Lave and Wenger (1991) define as "legitimate peripheral participation" (p.29), activities that support an individual in transitioning from the periphery of academic practices toward a position of greater confidence and competence. However, Andi's observations about research leadership within her department present a different picture. While she acknowledges the social capital and institutional status of senior researchers, referring to them as being "*known*" and "*successful*" (Bourdieu, 2007), she also questions their suitability to offer inclusive and empathetic guidance to less experienced colleagues. Her desire for leadership that "*gets that it's really hard*" also provides evidence of a perceived disconnection between those experienced researchers and teacher educators. This statement can be seen as being another moment of meta-reflexivity (Archer, 2003) as Andi moves beyond viewing research engagement as an

individual challenge to begin to recognise it as being rooted in systemic issues that arise from the complexities inherent in working across the borders of the school and university.

Andi's reference to "*being taken along*" encapsulates the complexities of symbolic power within academia, as described by Bourdieu (2007). The apprenticeship model, in which senior academics involve neophyte researchers in producing research that might be eligible for entry into the REF, was part of the strategy employed in the department to enhance its profile within the university by engaging more of the teacher education team in research. The ambivalence that Andi expresses about this is reflected in her comment, "*we've all got to be taken along whether you want to be or not*". This suggests a passive role for the teacher educator in this process, raising questions about whether this model genuinely supports the development of academic identities or works to reinforce existing departmental hierarchies.

However, while Andi sees this approach as problematic, she is also intimidated by the thought of engaging in research on her own. While independence and autonomy are celebrated as a cornerstone of academic work, for Andi, whose habitus is shaped by the collaborative, structured, and warm spaces of primary education (Roberts & Weston, 2014). The move from these familiar, supportive spaces to the perceived isolation of academic research highlights a significant shift in expectations and practice. Drawing on the work of S. Ahmed (2004), such experiences can be understood as being shaped by the affective economies of academia, where emotions like fear, anxiety, and discomfort are generated through encounters with institutional norms and expectations. These affective structures position individuals within the field in ways that may reinforce feelings of alienation or inadequacy, making the process of developing an academic identity even more fraught.

Departmental research afternoons, intended as supportive forums for colleagues to share their work and collaborate, are met with criticism from Andi, who perceives them as reinforcing hierarchical divides rather than fostering meaningful collaboration and working to reproduce distinctions between those deemed "academic" and those who feel they are not. Echoing the experiences of participants in the study of Roberts and Weston (2014), Andi feels these sessions also position research-active colleagues as being superior members of the department, exacerbating her feelings of inadequacy and alienation. However, Andi is not passive in her response, revealing that her disengagement results in her "*switching off*" or "*going online shopping*". These can be seen as acts of wilfulness (S. Ahmed, 2014), a strategy for coping in an environment that she feels is alienating and disconnected.

For S. Ahmed (2014), a willful act is defined as being an act of defiance or resistance to established norms, expectations, or authority, where individuals assert their agency by refusing to comply or go along with what is expected, often being labelled as troublesome or disruptive as a result. She argues that institutions often interpret certain responses, such as disengagement or resistance, as indications of individual disinterest or incompetence, and I was curious about how those with symbolic capital in the university (Bourdieu, 2007), such as those senior academics who facilitate the research afternoons, would view Andi's actions. By framing these behaviours as personal failings, the blame can be shifted onto individuals, allowing exclusionary practices within the institution to persist unchallenged. This process masks the structural constraints at play and allows exclusionary practices to persist unchallenged under the guise of meritocracy or professionalism.

However, Andi's experience with a monthly writing group offers a counterpoint to the hierarchical and alienating structures she encounters elsewhere. She describes this as a "safe" space where teacher educators at different stages of their careers come together to share their work. This group could be seen to lessen power dynamics and foster mutual respect and was described as particularly valuable in creating a feeling of academic belonging. Such inclusive communities of practice (Wenger, 2010), resonate with the findings of J. Murray et al. (2009), who emphasise the critical role that writing groups of this kind play in developing the capacity of teacher educators to engage in research. Lee and Boud (2003) find "academic identities, including identities as researchers, are forged, rehearsed and remade in local sites of practice." (p.197) and, for Andi, the opportunity to engage with and in scholarly writing with others in the department on her own terms was clearly beneficial.

While these opportunities were undoubtedly valuable, it is also clear that Andi remains highly conscious of managing how she presents herself, particularly in her efforts to '*sound clever*'. Drawing on the work of Goffman (2007) and his concept of "impression management" (p. 208), this reflects the deliberate shaping of the impression one "gives" through the deliberate mediation of language and speech and "gives off" through demeanour and practice, allowing others to infer professional status. As Rawls (1987) explains, the primary aim of impression management is to sustain the interaction, but it also serves the actor's interests. For Andi, performing 'cleverness' not only helps maintain her credibility in professional settings but also contributes to the accumulation of social capital (Bourdieu, 2007), building partnership with schools and relationships with teachers, which V. Ellis et al. (2011) identify as being key markers of success in university-based teacher education.

Andi's reflections also highlight why it can be particularly challenging for primary teacher educators to establish themselves as researchers within the university. As a primary education specialist, she describes herself as a "*jack of all trades*," and her words reveal her perception that her breadth of knowledge across the curriculum is less valued than the depth of subject expertise associated with specialists in secondary education. This perception also reinforces her sense of holding a lower status within the academic community, where greater value is often placed on narrow, highly focused disciplinary specialisation. These challenges are consistent with the observations of J. Murray and Passy (2014), who write about the difficulties that primary teacher educators face navigating their practice in an academic environment that often overlooks the complexity and skill involved in teaching young children multiple subjects. While this point resonates with both Clare and Sara's stories. I feel that Andi's position here also aligns with the characterisation presented by D. Labaree (2000) of teacher education as being a "difficult practice that is made to look easy" (p.228) in that it is rooted in knowledge that everyone already knows, having been taught it in their own education.

Andi also reflects on her experiences with a colleague who has recently transitioned into teacher education at the university after working in the primary school sector. While my analysis so far has focused on the internal and affective dimensions of research support, Andi's words acknowledge the impact that material and economically driven institutional decisions have on the research practices of teacher educators. With regard to questions from her mentee about professional learning, she notes somewhat pessimistically, "*I have to be the person to say, 'No, sorry. There's no money.' I'm finding it sad because I don't want her to be like me.*" To contextualise Andi's words, the university was undergoing a significant restructure at the time the data was collected, driven by declining student numbers and stringent financial controls, particularly over funding that might previously have supported research development. These financial constraints reflect the shifting logic of the institutional field, where the economic imperative increasingly dominates all aspects of university life (Giroux, 2019; Slaughter & Leslie, 2003). Maguire's (2000a) description of cost as a sensible rationalisation in the face of financial pressures resonates here. However, the emotional toll of these changes is clear, particularly for Andi, who, as a gatekeeper, seeks to provide support but is repeatedly denied the resources to do so.

Andi also draws attention to a further constraint, the immediate, reactive nature of much of the work within teacher education, which she captures in the phrase '*creating the documents, meeting the deadlines.*' Her observation reflects a broader pattern in the English teacher education landscape, where efficiency and adherence to external regulations often override

the time and intellectual space needed for critical reflection, creativity, and innovation (V. Ellis & Childs, 2023). Andi's remark that '*no one has any time to look at these big issues*' prompted me to reflect on how the field may have been intentionally structured to limit the potential for transformative practice, particularly those that might challenge or deviate from the prescriptions embedded in curriculum frameworks and policy documentation. For Andi, such constraints do not simply inhibit progress; they entrench a sense of futility, sustaining what she describes as '*more of the same old, same old.*' In this way, the system not only resists meaningful change but actively works to reproduce the status quo.

### **6.9 In Summary: Connecting the Building Blocks.**

In the preceding sections, I have explored in depth the themes and codes that emerged from the language and experiences shared by my participants, which have also informed the development of my seven composite narratives and subsequent analysis. In this section, I will synthesise the most significant elements from this chapter, extracting the key insights that address my research question: *How does engagement with and in research affect the professional identities of experienced, university-based teacher educators?*

To support the synthesis of my analysis, I developed a simple quadrant diagram (Figure 9), which served as a conceptual tool to help connect emerging insights about research engagement and the professional identities of university-based teacher educators. The model is intended as an illustrative framework rather than a means of categorising or labelling individuals, and I make no claim to its objective or universal validity. Participant responses could be situated in any of the four quadrants, depending on the context of the discussion, the particular aspects of their role being described, and the experiences they chose to emphasise. This interpretive flexibility underscores the fluid and multifaceted nature of professional identity, shaped continuously by both internal dispositions and external conditions.

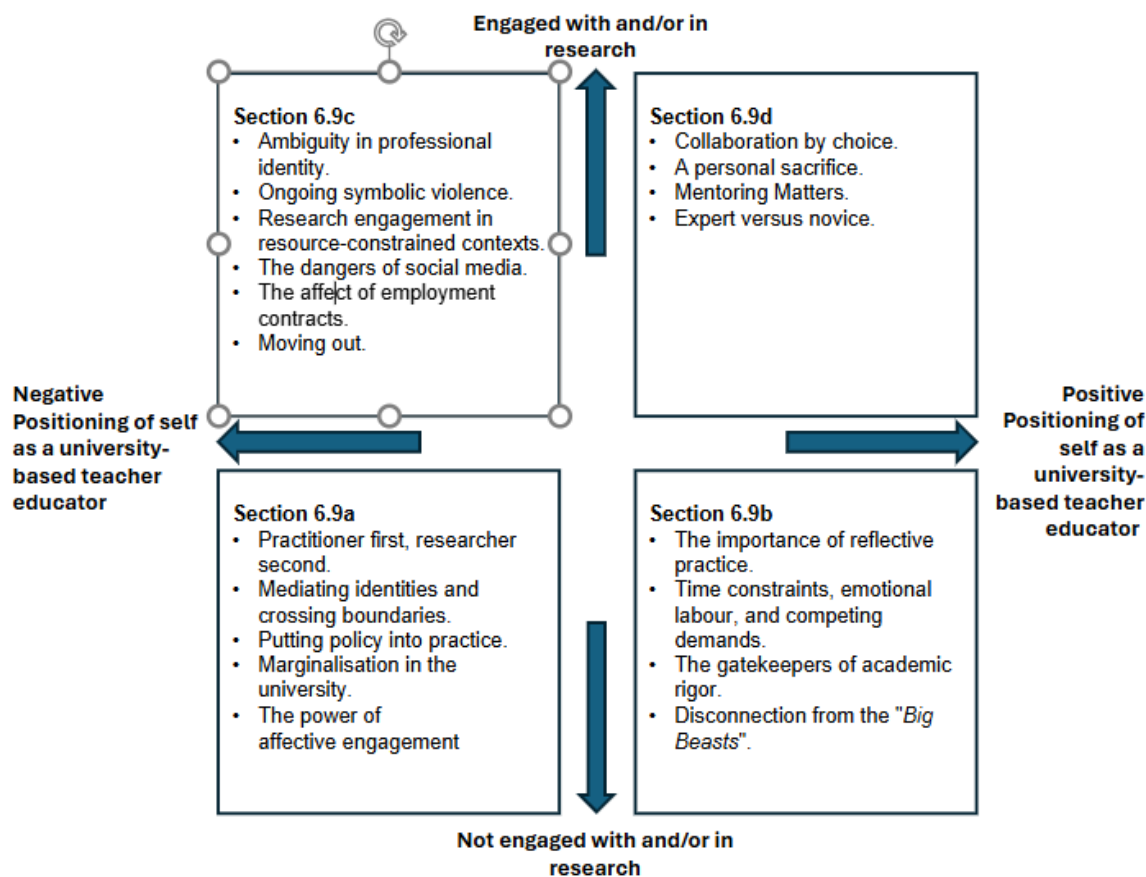


Figure 9 The Relationship Between Identity and Research.

Drawing on this model, I now summarise the key insights generated through my analysis regarding the relationship between research engagement and professional identity.

### 6.9a Negative positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator and not engaged with research

- Participants expressed a strong sense of distinction from academics in other disciplines, consistently identifying themselves as teachers. Their words aligned with those of Izadinia (2014), demonstrating that even after an extended period away from the classroom, this identity continued to shape their university practices.
- Negative perceptions from practicing teachers forced participants to prove they were not just “*out of touch academics*.” They described the strategies used to maintain a credible professional identity when working with schools. This included adjusting the language they used, their appearance, and their behaviour, a connection that resonates with the notion of impression management described by Goffman (2007).
- As Rachel’s story shows, recent extensive policy changes now require teacher educators to implement prescribed curricula, often regardless of personal or professional

beliefs. As Vickers-Hulse et al. (2024) note, the impact of this is far reaching. Andi's narrative highlights how the intellectual and emotional labour involved in implementing these changes has reduced both the capacity and motivation for engagement in research activity.

- A sense of dissonance also emerged in their relationship with the university. As Jo illustrates, institutions that prioritise research outputs over practice left participants feeling undervalued and out of place.
- Participants also spoke of emotional strain that they associated with research engagement. Alex's story illustrates how early uncertainty evolved into anxiety, guilt, and a persistent sense of inadequacy of the kind also noted by Roberts and Weston (2014). These emotions often led to inaction, deepening the disconnection between teacher and researcher identities.

### **6.9b Positive positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator, not engaged with research**

- Participants saw themselves as “teacher educators of reflective teachers” (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014), aiming to foster critical thinking in students. Alex entered academia seeking intellectual freedom, and Sara valued the prestige of a university affiliation. However, as illustrated in the stories of Laura and Andi, these aspirations were frequently constrained by structural pressures and regulatory demands, which left limited space for sustained scholarly activity.
- Lack of time emerged as a major barrier to engaging in intellectual work. Jo's story illustrates how such work is frequently postponed due to competing demands, particularly those linked to the gendered expectations of care that, as noted by Maguire and Weiner (1994) and J. Murray and Passy, (2014) are often associated with primary education. However, Andi's narrative raises questions about whether disengagement from research was a willful act (S. Ahmed, 2014), or a product of systematic and structural constraint. Together, these accounts highlight the complex interplay between personal agency and institutional conditions in shaping research engagement.
- Participants were sceptical of how research is marketed to teachers. Clare's story critiques “*fads and trends*,” something also identified by Paul and Elder (2019), while others questioned the quality of school-based research lacking university oversight, dismissing it as “little ‘r’” research. Despite not engaging in research production themselves, they positioned themselves as gatekeepers of academic rigour, though

this role was complicated by feelings attributed to imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978), as noted in Sara's narrative.

- Rachel raised concerns about state-sanctioned research and the dominance of those “*big beasts*” with symbolic power (Benn, 2023). Despite recognising their marginal position, she expressed guilt over past inaction and acknowledged that today's climate makes resistance feel impossible.
- Participants viewed themselves as vital to teacher education, and Sara's rejection of the term “*teacher training*” underscored this belief. Yet, when asked to define this commitment in practice, responses seemed vague, revealing an unresolved tension between academic ideals and their enactment.

### **6.9c Negative positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator and engaged with research**

- Participants struggled to articulate their role, often avoiding the term “teacher educator.” A perceived lack of value placed on their work, of the kind discussed by D. Labaree (2000), within the university, school and wider society, added to this uncertainty. As Alex stated bluntly, “*It's a job no one cares about.*”
- While boundary work, such as building and sustaining relationships with schools (S. Thomson et al., 2021), was highly valued by participants, it was often overlooked or undervalued within the university context. In addition, the cumulative effect of everyday oversights, such as Jo's anecdote about the toilets not being open at the start of term, was experienced as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1990). These seemingly minor acts serve to reinforce hierarchies and signal a lack of institutional recognition, subtly devaluing the role and professional identity of the teacher educator.
- Participants showed a commitment to using research to inform their teaching and curriculum development. Symbols like Andi's “*beautiful bookshelf*,” conveyed a commitment to research consumption, but time constraints limited such engagement in practice. As Laura notes, many relied on Twitter for digests of research, a method that, while accessible, risks creating echo chambers without space for critical reflexivity (Pillow, 2003).
- Confusion between research and scholarship was common. As Jo observed, their contracts referenced both, yet few understood the distinction. Being placed on a teaching and scholarship contract was often seen as a judgment on academic capability, reinforcing feelings of exclusion and inadequacy. While literature suggests teacher educators inhabit a liminal space (Davey, 2013; J. Murray, 2002), Jo's “*one-*

*way street*" metaphor highlights a more rigid binary between teaching and research identities.

- Participants expressed deep frustration about the status of teacher education in the institution. Sara's story suggests that legitimacy as an academic required moving away from working with student teachers into traditionally recognised academic domains.

#### **6.9d Positive positioning of self as a university-based teacher educator and engaged with research**

This was the least populated quadrant, with participants offering only occasional glimpses of alignment between academic identity and research engagement.

- Participation in a voluntary writing group supported engagement with research. In line with the findings of J. Murray et al. (2009), Andi's story shows how the group offered feedback, peer learning, and a space to refine academic voice. The optional nature of attendance was key to its collaborative and supportive ethos giving the teacher educator some agency in their professional learning.
- These accounts also revealed the personal sacrifices required to progress academically. Jo and Andi described giving up breaks and self-funding study to gain the experience needed for promotion, invoking a sense of cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011). The very thing they desired was bound up with conditions that were expensive, exhausting, or harmful, making the pursuit itself a source of strain rather than fulfilment.
- Research mentors played a pivotal role in sustaining engagement. As Andi's narrative suggests, and in line with Lander and Nicholson (2020), carefully chosen mentors helped demystify research, making it feel more achievable despite barriers such as time and confidence.
- All participants had engaged in both research and scholarship at various points in their careers. However, there was a shared sense that scholarly activity, particularly that which was practice-oriented or pedagogically focused, was not always recognised or valued within the university. Alex's story highlights this disconnect, illustrating how practical, school-based expertise often held limited status in academic settings. As a result, teacher educators found themselves caught between roles, positioned simultaneously as experts in teaching and novices within the research-focused hierarchies of the university.

## **6.10 To Conclude**

The photograph of a swimming pool filled with Lego that opened this chapter (Figure 8) offers a fitting analogy for what has been discussed, analysed, and synthesised in this chapter. Each small brick represents a distinct aspect of the professional lives and perceptions of my participants, who appear to struggle to piece these blocks together into a coherent whole. Just as Lego bricks can be arranged and rearranged to create different structures, teacher educators must continuously assemble and reassemble their professional identities. However, unlike a simple Lego model, where pieces lock easily into place, there is no instruction manual. I also recognise the professional lives of my participants as being shaped by emotional, intellectual, and institutional pressures that often create gaps and mismatches. These tensions reflect the complex and often contradictory dynamics that influence their professional identities, and the practices underpinning their work.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I will reflect on the insights gained from this study and critically examine its limitations. I will highlight emerging actions and identify areas for further research, noting how constructing this thesis has played a pivotal role in transforming my professional identity as a teacher educator within the university.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion.



Figure 10 Onwards and Upwards

### 7.1 Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis comes full circle, returning to where it all began with another photograph of a sign encountered on a walk in the park. Unlike the stark warning, *'Trespassers will be Prosecuted'* (Figure 1), which framed the opening of this study, this new sign (Figure 10) offers an alternative perspective, inviting a different kind of reflection. Just as that initial image provoked questions about boundaries and constraints, this chapter reflects the journey taken through the thesis, revisiting its structure, and highlighting key findings and limitations. I explore how this research has shaped my growth as a teacher educator and a researcher and consider how it contributes to the broader literature on this theme. I conclude by pointing towards the actions that have emerged from these findings for the university, the teacher educator, and myself.

The study has been designed to answer the following overarching question,

*How does engagement with and in research affect the professional identities of experienced, university-based teacher educators?*

I was guided by five key sub-questions, aligned with two interconnected dimensions, which enabled me to take a holistic view of the practices of experienced, university-based teacher educators working with student teachers in the primary age phase.

**The Inside Out:** This dimension focused on the experiences and professional identities of teacher educators, exploring their motivations for entering academia and examining how their identity as teachers influences their engagement with research. It considered what constitutes their work and how they can be supported in developing and sustaining an academic identity.

My sub-questions were as follows:

- How do teacher educators describe themselves and their role?
- What provides the motivation for engagement in and with research?
- What tensions are felt to exist, and how are they reconciled?

**The Outside In:** This dimension examined the external factors shaping teacher education, including the status of the university and the historical roots of the profession, and considered the ongoing impact these have on its standing. It also explored how power, influence and authority are established and maintained. My sub-questions were as follows:

- What part does the university play in supporting the development of an academic identity?
- How do governmental policies and practices influence how research is perceived?

In the following sections, I will draw upon what I have learned from this study and will outline my responses to each of the questions listed above.

## **7.2 Returning to the Research Question**

### **How does engagement with and in research affect the professional identities of experienced, university-based teacher educators?**

Addressing this question required more than a narrow examination of how teacher educators engage with research. It called for a deeper inquiry into the complex interplay of personal, institutional, and political forces that shape their professional lives. Research engagement emerged not as a discrete act, but as one deeply entangled with broader dynamics. These include the operation of symbolic power and the evolving policy landscape surrounding teacher education (V. Ellis, 2023; Hordern & Brooks, 2024), as well as the historical and

hierarchical structures of the institutions in which teacher educators work (Furlong, 2023; George & Maguire, 2017; Hoult et al., 2024). It also required attention to the personal and affective dimensions that shape professional identity and practice from within, as explored by writers such as Barrow and Xu (2023) and Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2014).

The findings demonstrate that engaging with research is not simply a professional requirement or a performative act, but a deeply affective and identity-forming process. In line with the work of Lander and Nicholson (2020) and J. Murray and Male (2005), research was shown to provide participants with a means of making sense of their prior classroom experiences and of asserting their expertise. It was described not solely as an externally imposed task, but as a possible space of intellectual investment and personal meaning, one that plays a constitutive role in how teacher educators come to understand who they are and how they are perceived both inside and outside the university.

However, my findings also resonate with the work of Barrow and Xu (2023), Kosnik et al. (2022), and J. Murray and Kosnik (2011), who acknowledge that engagement with research is often fraught with tension and can disrupt professional identity. Although valued in principle, research was experienced by my participants as emotionally demanding, particularly when juxtaposed with institutional hierarchies that tend to privilege more conventional forms of scholarship. Participants often described a sense of exclusion from the domain of the “*proper*” academic, locating themselves instead on the periphery of the academic field. This contradiction of being expected to engage in research while simultaneously feeling unrecognised or illegitimate was a persistent theme. These tensions were explored through the concept of *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1990), which highlighted the emotional investments teacher educators make in the academic game, even as they encounter barriers that hinder their full participation.

The study also shows how this engagement is mediated by external structures. Institutional cultures and government policy significantly shape the conditions under which research is pursued (J. Murray et al., 2009; Nicholson & Lander, 2022). Teacher educators experienced the university as offering uneven and often misaligned, support for their development as researchers. At the same time, government reforms, such as the implementation of the Initial Teacher Training Core Content Framework (Department for Education, 2024a), have intensified performative pressures, narrowed curricular frameworks, and prescribed evidence bases, most notably those privileging cognitive science (Hordern & Brooks, 2025). These reforms were widely viewed as undermining critical engagement and intellectual autonomy.

Yet despite these constraints, participants positioned research as a vital component of a broader project of professional identity. It was described not only as a means of making sense of, or enduring, present conditions but also as a vehicle for asserting pedagogical values and professional purpose. A strong identification with the role of the "teacher educator of reflective teachers" (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2014, p. 121) was evident across the data, and research was viewed as a space through which participants could resist reductive narratives, challenge policy orthodoxies, and reimagine teacher education as a principled and reflective practice (Biesta, 2015). However, there was also some ambiguity about where and how to begin.

### **7.3 Returning to the Sub-questions**

#### **7.3a How do teacher educators describe themselves and their role?**

In line with Barrow and Xu (2023), V. Ellis et al. (2011), J. Murray (2006), and Smith and Flores (2019), teacher educators described their role as complex and multidimensional, positioned at the intersection of schools, universities, and policy frameworks. Their accounts revealed a professional landscape shaped by constant negotiation, balancing the demands of multiple stakeholders while striving to remain aligned with their own values and professional commitments. This reflects the view put forward by Davey (2013), who describes teacher educators as working "betwixt and between" (p. 2), a role defined by ambiguity, fragmentation, and competing expectations. Participants described their work as marked by persistent tensions, as they negotiated the conflicting demands of academic productivity and professional practice. Within shifting and often contradictory institutional contexts, they grappled with the challenge of constructing a coherent professional identity.

While they expressed a strong sense of commitment to both teaching and scholarship, they also articulated discomfort with the title teacher educator, which was perceived as ambiguous or lacking recognition. There was unanimous rejection of the term teacher trainer, which was viewed as representative of technician, de-professionalised models of teacher preparation. Participants sought to position themselves as facilitators of research-informed practice that aligned with their conceptions of the characteristics of a "good teacher" as outlined by Orchard and Winch (2015). However, they often lacked confidence in the language needed to articulate this identity in ways that would be recognised or valued beyond their immediate context.

The teacher educators also recognised tensions between their idealised visions of academia and its lived realities. This awareness reflects the dual nature of *illusio*, as described by

Bourdieu (1990) to be a belief in the value and rules of the academic game that motivates continued investment, but which can also give rise to disillusionment when everyday experiences fall short of those expectations. One participant described being “*completely floored*” by the thought of academia, underscoring the emotional weight of navigating this space, often accompanied by a persistent sense of imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978). However, rather than interpreting these feelings as personal failings, I argue that they are better understood as emerging from a misalignment between the habitus of the individual, the embodied dispositions and ways of being shaped by past experiences (Bourdieu, 1977), and the *doxa*, the taken-for-granted norms and values of the academic field (Bourdieu, 1990).

### **7.3 b and c What motivates their engagement with research? What tensions exist, and how are they reconciled?**

Research engagement was described as driven by an intrinsic desire to make sense of practice and contribute meaningfully to the preparation of future teachers. Participants spoke of the need to “*scratch the itches*” left by their classroom experiences, a metaphor that captures the lingering questions and unresolved tensions that continued to shape their thinking. This echoes the findings of Barrow and Xu (2023) and Richter et al. (2023), who observe that such feelings often prompt practitioners to move from the classroom into the university and towards academic inquiry. However, although this motivation was experienced as personally and professionally meaningful, engaging in research to address these “*itches*” was often perceived as marginal within their professional roles and at times, felt overwhelming.

For participants, research engagement was often seen as something of a luxury, an intellectually fulfilling endeavour that could only be pursued once more immediate, institutionally valued responsibilities had been met and, as V. Ellis et al. (2014) also found, only when sufficient time and financial support were available. In this sense, research was framed less as a formal expectation and more as a professional aspiration. While participants expressed admiration for colleagues recognised as “*proper*” academics, they frequently saw themselves as excluded from that status. As Roberts and Weston (2014) also found, there seemed to be a conflation between “being” an academic and “doing” academic work, an example of misrecognition in which social hierarchies are accepted as something natural, not as the result of “conflict and struggle between competing interests that usually advantages vested interests” (Threadgold, 2020, p. 37). Symbolic capital, as defined by Bourdieu (2007) to refer to the recognition, legitimacy, and prestige that individuals hold within a particular field, derived from how their authority, expertise, or status is perceived and valued by others, was

perceived to be concentrated among those with high research outputs, particularly in the form of publications and grant income.

Although all participants reported engaging with research to inform their teaching, supervision, and curriculum design, this form of consumption was seen as limited in scope and rarely afforded the same institutional value as research production, which was more directly associated with academic prestige and legitimacy. Drawing on the taxonomy developed by Tack and Vanderlinde (2014), participants expressed a strong aspiration to be both cognitively and affectively engaged with research, what the authors describe as “enquiring teacher educators” (p. 306) and “well-read teacher educators” (p. 308). Yet this aspiration was constrained by structural conditions within both the university and the wider policy environment. As also noted by Vickers-Hulse et al. (2024), participants described a professional landscape dominated by regulatory compliance and performative quality assurance tasks, which left little space or support for sustained, meaningful engagement with research.

However, it would be too simplistic to view teacher educators as merely passive subjects shaped by institutional and policy demands. Across the data, there was also evidence of distinction (Bourdieu, 2010), which refers to the ways individuals assert identity and status by marking difference from others within a social field. In this case, teacher educators distinguished themselves from academic colleagues through their values, priorities, and professional practices, which they reported as being anchored in pastoral care, practice-based knowledge, and a deep commitment to the development of future teachers. In addition, while participants recognised that increasing structural demands, accountability frameworks, and policy expectations had constrained their work, these forces were not simply experienced as external impositions. Instead, they appeared to have been internalised as constitutive elements of what it now means to be a teacher educator. The acceptance, and in some cases, the embrace, of these limitations raises important questions about agency, compliance, and the shifting boundaries of what is considered legitimate practice in teacher education.

Importantly, participants viewed forms of knowledge generated through practice, such as curriculum design, mentoring, and partnership work, as valid, meaningful, and impactful. Yet, they also recognised that such contributions often fall outside the metrics traditionally used to measure academic success. As a result, many expressed a sense of disconnection from dominant academic norms. They implicitly and explicitly rejected institutional expectations surrounding research engagement, particularly those grounded in narrow definitions of

productivity and prestige. In this way, they can be understood as willful subjects (S. Ahmed, 2014), individuals who actively resist dominant narratives about what it means to succeed in academia, choosing instead to assert a different, practice-oriented vision of professional worth. Paradoxically, this stance may shape how they are perceived within the university, where research outputs and grant income were seen as primary markers of credibility. As a result of their actions, participants risk being viewed as less ambitious, less scholarly, or even less legitimate than colleagues who align more closely with institutional norms. As S. Ahmed (2014) finds, this reflects a complex and often contradictory dynamic in which acts of professional distinction affirm personal identity and integrity, yet simultaneously risk reinforcing the very marginalisation participants seek to resist.

### **7.3 d What role does the university play in supporting research development?**

A key finding from this study is the persistent sense of ambiguity participants expressed regarding their status within the university. Although teacher education has historically played a central role in the development of higher education, with many universities originating as teacher training colleges (Furlong, 2023; Maguire, 2000b; Patrick, 1986), all participants described feeling uncertain about their standing within their institution. This sense of marginality may be partly explained by revisiting the work of Hencke (1978), who highlights the vocational and modest origins of teacher education. The narratives presented in this study suggest that the historical roots of teacher education, which are distinct from the traditional academic foundations of more socially prestigious professions such as medicine and law (Evetts, 2011), continue to influence how it is positioned and perceived within the university hierarchy.

Pastoral care and relationship building, described as central to teacher education, particularly in the primary phase (Maguire & Weiner, 1994; J. Murray & Passy, 2014), were also seen as being fundamental to maintaining a stable and credible professional identity. However, participants felt that this form of knowledge was regarded as less legitimate within the university and took up a vast proportion of their time. As a result, participants believed that meaningful academic recognition was largely inaccessible unless they either moved away from their current roles or made significant personal sacrifices.

The data also revealed a recurring ambiguity around terms like research and scholarship, with participants expressing uncertainty about their definitions and practical applications. Scholarship was positioned as a vague and diminished form of academic engagement, highlighting its perceived lack of legitimacy compared to what was identified as “*proper*”

research. This perspective contrasts with the more democratic and inclusive model proposed by Boyer (1997). For the teacher educators in the study, the notion of research was aligned with a narrow understanding of traditional research outputs, such as journal articles and book chapters, reflecting where they perceive symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) to lie. Participants also admitted to making research appear straightforward, reflecting their confidence in demystifying it for their students. However, they candidly acknowledged experiencing significant challenges when navigating these same complexities in their own research production.

The university was described as occupying a contradictory role in supporting the research development of teacher educators. While it appeared to promote research as a core aspect of academic life, the underlying structures, values, and priorities within the institution were often misaligned with the realities of teacher education. Initiatives such as departmental research afternoons were met with scepticism, as participants felt these events reinforced hierarchical divides rather than fostering genuine collaboration. Instead of inclusion, such initiatives were seen to reproduce distinctions between those considered "*academic*" and those who felt excluded from that category. This sense of disconnection contributed to disengagement, with participants describing responses such as "*switching off*" or "*going online shopping*", further examples of willful acts (S. Ahmed, 2014) that highlight the subtle forms of agency individuals exercise when navigating environments perceived as alienating and disconnected from their professional identities.

Nevertheless, participants did identify certain university-provided support, particularly mentorship and peer writing groups, as valuable to their research development, something that was also found in the work of Mulholland et al. (2023), J. Murray et al. (2009), and Roberts and Weston (2014). However, this support seemed sporadic, unevenly distributed, and heavily reliant on individual goodwill rather than institutional policy or infrastructure. These initiatives were described as emerging informally or were sustained by committed individuals rather than being part of a coherent institutional strategy. As a result, access to meaningful research support was often a matter of luck rather than entitlement, further reinforcing feelings of marginalisation and precarity that also impacted research practices.

### **7.3 e How do policy and governmental reforms shape research engagement?**

Unsurprisingly, the recent reforms experienced across the teacher education sector, such as the ITT Market Review (Department for Education, 2021) and the implementation of the Initial Teacher Training Early Career Framework (ITTECF) (Department for Education, 2024a) have

further entrenched a performative culture in which research is simultaneously demanded and devalued. Participants in this study described being required to evidence that their teaching was research-informed yet expressed feeling constrained by state-mandated reading lists and frameworks heavily influenced by cognitive science (Hordern & Brooks, 2025). These frameworks were widely perceived as ideologically narrow and prescriptive, leaving little room for critical engagement, creativity, or values-led curiosity. Rather than fostering research-literate educators, the reforms were seen as encouraging compliance with a restricted view of what constitutes valid knowledge. As the work of V. Ellis and Childs (2023) finds, this is one closely aligned with government agendas rather than the nuanced realities of classroom practice. In addition, the time and energy required to align programmes with these imposed frameworks, prepare for inspection, and demonstrate compliance with bureaucratic processes left little space for teacher educators to engage in sustained research activity.

The findings reveal that while participants described having some agency in how they navigated recent policy reforms, this was accompanied by a growing sense of alienation. Many attributed the design and direction of these changes to what one participant called “*the big beasts*,” a term used to describe those with significant symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) within policy and academic arenas, aligning with the characterisation of the New Educational Establishment identified by Benn (2023). These individuals were perceived as operating from positions of influence and detachment, shaping discourse without direct engagement with the realities of teacher education. At the same time, participants acknowledged a degree of complicity in enacting reforms they privately resisted, reflecting critically on their roles in embedding policies that conflicted with their professional values. There was a shared recognition that earlier, more incremental incursions into their professional and intellectual autonomy had often gone unchallenged, gradually contributing to the normalisation of a culture of constraint.

While frustration and disempowerment emerged as common themes, the data also revealed a potentially unintended consequence of engaging with these reforms, one that offers a tentative note of optimism. In line with the work of Wood et al. (2024), who reject the portrayal of teacher educators as passive agents subjugated by the power of the state, this study highlights their capacity for agency. Participants demonstrated an ability to resist, subvert, or selectively disengage from the pressures of neoliberal reform, a perspective also supported by Goodley and Perryman (2022). Across the dataset, there was a shared recognition of the importance of safeguarding professional values and autonomy, accompanied by a growing

resolve to challenge imposed reforms. This suggests that engagement with constraint can also catalyse critical reflection and collective forms of resistance.

#### **7.4 Limitations of this Study**

This study was conducted within a single university and focused on a purposively selected (Campbell et al., 2020) small group of participants, all of whom were involved in the same teacher education programme. This approach reflects an intentional and strategically informed methodological choice, consistent with an embedded single case study design (Yin, 2013). While such a design limits the potential for statistical generalisation, this was not the aim of the research. Rather, the goal was to provide a rich, contextually embedded understanding of how research engagement is experienced by teacher educators within a specific institutional setting. As Flyvbjerg (2006) argues, in-depth qualitative inquiry allows for a nuanced exploration of complex social phenomena, highlighting how the particular can offer insight into broader theoretical and practical concerns. Although a broader comparative design, incorporating a larger sample size, multiple institutions or alternative university contexts, might have introduced greater variability in factors such as policy enactment, leadership practices, and research cultures, such an approach could have risked compromising the analytical depth of the study. By concentrating on a single, bounded case, the research closely examined the situated interplay between research engagement, professional identity, and institutional conditions. As Flyvbjerg (2006) finds, this reflects a commitment to qualitative traditions that privilege depth over breadth and value the explanatory power of contextually grounded knowledge.

My position as a senior member of staff within the department significantly shaped the research design, and I recognise that I occupied a position of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1990), which I feel carried both affordances and constraints. As noted by Chávez (2015) and Humphrey (2013), my seniority facilitated privileged access to participants and enabled me to draw upon a historically informed and context-sensitive understanding of the relational, cultural, and structural dynamics that influence research engagement in this setting. My seniority also facilitated trust-based relationships with participants, as well as the recognition of informal norms and discourses that may have been invisible to an external researcher (Greene, 2014). I felt that these advantages enriched the research with empirical depth and grounded the study in the lived realities of participants, enabling a more authentic and contextually nuanced account of their experiences with research engagement.

However, this also introduced a distinct set of ethical and interpretive challenges. My institutional authority may have influenced the willingness of participants to take part or shaped how they represented their experiences, potentially resulting in deference, self-censorship, or the presentation of over-curated narratives (Drake & Heath, 2008). To address these risks, I implemented several ethical safeguards which were detailed on participant information sheets that were shared at the start of data collection and revisited across the span of the interviews. This meant carefully considering how to invite colleagues to participate without exerting implicit pressure due to my senior position. I made it clear, both verbally and in writing, that participation was entirely voluntary, and I emphasised that choosing not to take part would have no bearing on our professional relationships. I also avoided recruiting individuals with whom I had direct managerial responsibilities, to further reduce the risk of perceived obligation or power imbalance.

However, as Floyd and Arthur (2012) find, ethical considerations in insider research are rarely straightforward. They often extend beyond formal procedures into the messy, lived realities of professional relationships, where moral and ethical dilemmas arise that require careful negotiation. These dilemmas may involve questions of loyalty, confidentiality, and how to navigate dual roles as both colleague and researcher. In such contexts, maintaining ethical integrity involves more than adherence to institutional protocols. Alongside the proactive strategies that were built into research design, during the analysis phase I returned to the transcripts with a heightened awareness of my positionality, carefully attending to moments of hesitancy, ambiguity, and alignment that might suggest the subtle influence of institutional hierarchies or professional expectations on participant accounts. I asked myself whether certain narratives appeared overly cautious, rehearsed, or shaped by an implicit understanding of our shared roles within the department. For example, I paid close attention to how participants described institutional constraints, noting instances where critique was softened or framed indirectly. I also considered how familiarity and shared language might have led to unspoken assumptions or underdeveloped explanations, requiring me to read between the lines while remaining cautious not to over-interpret.

In this way, rather than treating my seniority as a methodological liability, I approached it as a form of institutional and epistemic capital that enriched the research process by facilitating access, trust, and depth of insight. While I remained critically aware of the potential risks associated with power and proximity in insider research, I also recognised, following Chávez (2015), Dwyer and Buckle (2009), and R. Labaree (2002), the potential it offered for enriching my work. Nonetheless, the process surfaced discomforts that required sustained reflexive

engagement. I wrestled with the ethical and emotional complexities of being both known and knowing, and the uneasy intimacy this dual role produced. While my position afforded certain advantages, it also raised questions about complicity, representation, and relational boundaries. These tensions became part of the interpretive work, demanding that I remain critically attuned to how my assumptions and institutional positioning shaped the knowledge produced, and to the affective labour involved in navigating these entanglements.

In retrospect, while the decision to focus on a single programme within one institution allowed for a high degree of contextual sensitivity and interpretive depth, it also inevitably limited the scope of the study. The small number of participants drawn from a single setting constrains the breadth of perspectives captured and raises questions about the extent to which the findings can be considered transferable beyond this specific institutional culture. Although the study was not intended to produce generalisable conclusions, I now recognise that including participants from more than one institution, or from different programmes within the same institution, could have enhanced the analytic robustness by allowing for more variation in institutional conditions and career trajectories. Expanding the sample in this way might also have enabled more confident theorising around how research engagement and identity are shaped by different organisational structures or research cultures. This limitation does not undermine the value of the findings presented here, but it does highlight the importance of future research that builds on these insights with a broader and more diverse sample of participants.

However, it is also important to recognise that this study does not stand in isolation, nor do I position myself as an insider researcher working alone. While the research is grounded in a single institutional context, it is shaped by, and contributes to, a wider community of scholars who are grappling with similar questions about teacher educator identity, research engagement, and the complexities of academic work in practice-based fields. My reflections and findings are in dialogue with the work of J. Murray et al. (2009), Nicholson and Lander, (2022), and Tack et al. (2023) among others, who have illuminated the tensions, affordances, and politics of research within teacher education. By drawing on and extending this body of work, I locate my insider inquiry within a broader landscape of critical scholarship. It is through this ongoing scholarly conversation that the study gains strength, showing that while my focus is local, the insights have wider relevance.

The choice to use semi-structured interviews also introduced certain limitations, particularly in relation to the type of data collected. While this method generated rich and relevant insights

aligned with the research questions, the data were necessarily confined to what participants chose to articulate during the interview process. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) emphasise, interviews are not neutral instruments but socially constructed encounters, shaped by power relations, context, and mutual expectations. Within this dynamic, the study captures only the spoken accounts of participants, meaning that other forms of knowing, such as embodied, intuitive, or affective understandings, remain outside its scope. Although the inclusion of additional data collection methods, such as visual or arts-based approaches, might have deepened and diversified the findings, this was not feasible due to the limited availability and capacity of participants. Visual methods, including participant-generated photographs or drawings, have been shown to offer valuable access to more tacit and affectively charged dimensions of experience, which may be difficult to express through language alone (Irwin & Springay, 2008; Selkrig et al., 2022). Future research could build on this study by incorporating such approaches, expanding the interpretive possibilities, and offering richer insight into the affective, spatial, and sensory dimensions of the professional worlds inhabited by teacher educators.

The use of composite narratives was particularly valuable in capturing shared experiences while preserving individual anonymity within a close-knit and potentially vulnerable professional community. As Johnston (2024) observes, this method allows researchers to represent collective dynamics without compromising participant confidentiality. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that synthesising multiple accounts into a single narrative voice may have led to the loss of some individual nuance and specificity. This trade-off is a recognised limitation of the method (Arjomand, 2022), but one I navigated with careful ethical consideration. Given the broader context of sectoral and institutional precarity at the time of data collection, protecting participants from potential professional risk was a central concern. In this light, the adoption of composite narratives, despite their constraints, was consistent with my broader ethical commitment to care, responsibility, and the safeguarding of participant wellbeing.

Although the theoretical framework provided by Bourdieu is strongly oriented toward questions of power and inequality, particularly in relation to social class (Grenfell, 2012; Jenkins, 2008), this study does not offer an analysis of categories of identity such as race, class, or gender. This reflects a methodological decision to focus specifically on how institutional structures and sectoral dynamics shape teacher educator identities and research engagement, rather than centring individual demographic variables. However, I fully acknowledge that characteristics such as race, class, and gender profoundly influence access to capital and the formation of

professional subjectivity, and their omission from direct analytical focus constitutes a limitation of this study.

In addition, while the work of Bourdieu formed the central theoretical framework, I also recognise critiques of his work, most notably the concern with structural determinism (Archer, 2003; Bottero, 2010). These critiques stem from the emphasis Bourdieu places on the formative influence of external structures on habitus, which can risk portraying social reproduction as inevitable (Bottero, 2010). In response, I have sought to foreground the dynamic relationship between habitus and field, drawing on the recognition that transformation is always possible through reflexive practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In doing so, this study has followed the work of Threadgold (2020) to move beyond static readings of Bourdieu, instead highlighting agency, fluidity, and the continual negotiation of identity within the constraints and possibilities of institutional life.

## **7.5 Contributions to Knowledge**

### **7.5a Contributions to Research about Teacher Education**

My work provides a nuanced exploration of the lived experiences of teacher educators during a period of unprecedented upheaval in university-based teacher education. While existing studies such as Barrow and Xu (2023), Davey (2013), and J. Murray and Kosnik (2011) offer valuable insights into the field. My study is distinctive in its focus on the emotional impact of the rapid and extensive reforms over the past five years, looking specifically at how these have influenced relationships with research. By situating these experiences within the broader context of a sectoral crisis, my research sheds light on the unique challenges that university-based teacher educators face, a group that Livingston (2014) and J. Murray and Male (2005) have found to be often misrepresented, misunderstood, and overlooked in wider educational discourse

Although rooted in the specific context of one university, my research has been designed to open broader conversations relevant to colleagues in similar contexts. It challenges simplistic narratives about the place of research in teacher education as a problem that can be solved with the correct intervention, foregrounding the complexities and tensions that are inherent across the sector. In doing so, my work offers a deep understanding of how experienced university-based teacher educators feel about their intellectual work. It advocates for greater recognition of the critical yet often invisible contributions they make to the field of education.

### **7.5b Contributions to Methodology**

The use of composite narratives in this study offers a distinct methodological contribution by applying an approach that remains relatively under-theorised within educational research (Johnston, 2024; Willis, 2019). While initially adopted as a means of protecting participant anonymity, the method evolved into a powerful tool for representing the complexity and interconnectedness of teacher educator experiences. Through the creation of seven composite narratives, each grounded in the data and structured around key themes, I was able to generate rich, situated insights that addressed my central research questions. This approach foregrounds the potential of composite narratives to not only safeguard identities but also to convey the emotional, relational, and structural dimensions of professional life with clarity and depth (Arjomand, 2022).

The narratives have proven to be an effective medium for knowledge mobilisation. They have been shared in research presentations both within my home institution and at national conferences, where they prompted meaningful dialogue and critical reflection. The responses from these audiences suggest that composite narratives are a method deserving of further exploration, particularly for studies that seek to communicate complex experiences while attending to the ethical demands of anonymity and representation. This study thus adds to a growing body of work that positions composite narrative as a valuable and versatile approach within qualitative educational research.

### **7.5c Contributions to how the teacher educators see themselves.**

From an external perspective, my study created a valuable opportunity for participants to reflect on their experiences with research, providing a forum to share their fears, challenges, and aspirations with someone who is also immersed in the field. While I am cautious about claiming that participation in this study directly influenced their practices, I did observe moments of meta-reflexivity (Archer, 2003) in their responses. These moments suggest that engaging in dialogue about their professional identities and research practices encouraged deeper personal insights. However, the longer-term impact that this might have had on their practice is beyond the scope of this exploration.

### **7.5d Contributions to my own identity as a researcher and teacher educator.**

At a recent research conference, I was asked at the end of my presentation whether my work had yielded any surprises, a question rooted in my closeness to the context of my writing. At the time, I struggled to provide a clear answer. However, on reflection, I now recognise that the most significant surprise was the extent to which the relationships that teacher educators

have with research are shaped, and often constrained, by policy and institutional frameworks, more than I initially assumed. Although I have long been involved in supporting colleagues to engage with research and have championed practices that promote criticality and professional autonomy, the data revealed how deeply embedded performative practices remain. What I once regarded as spaces for intellectual freedom and professional growth were, in fact, often bounded by accountability demands, regulatory expectations, and narrow definitions of evidence.

Over the past five years, my research literacy has grown exponentially. I never imagined I would be capable of writing a thesis, submitting a conference abstract, or confidently presenting my work to colleagues, yet here I am. As I near the end of my doctoral journey, I realise that this experience has been as much about my own development as a researcher as it has been about exploring the voices of my participants. Getting to this point has been far from easy. Having long identified as a teacher, my habitus was deeply rooted in the structures of the field of primary education, where I felt entirely at ease, “a fish in water” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127). However, as I began developing my thesis, I became acutely aware of the limitations of my own social and cultural capital, which created a profound sense of discontinuity that resonates strongly with the experiences shared by my participants. While I know I still have much to learn as a researcher, I am leaving this study with a clearer sense of who I want to be as a university-based teacher educator.

## **7.6 Recommendations and Future Research**

Looking to the future, my research emphasises the importance of teacher educators engaging in open and reflective dialogue about the nature of their work within the context of the contemporary university. Paradoxically, the pervasive influence of recent sweeping reforms designed to enforce control has served to refocus the attention of the sector on the role and significance of research in teacher education, as reflected in the strategic priorities of organisations such as the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET), which recently took the intellectual foundation of teacher education as a key focus at its annual conference. There is now an appetite to move beyond the criticism of market-driven reforms, which for many years came to dominate conversations across the sector, and to address more profound questions about professional identities, values, and aspirations, as seen in works such as Houlton et al. (2025), Mutton and Burn (2024), and Vickers-Hulse et al. (2024). While the role of the university in teacher education remains uncertain, my work adds a glimmer to the spotlight that is now placed on this aspect of practice, which has begun to foster a sense of cautious optimism about what the university can offer the next generation of teachers.

I urge senior leaders to critically reflect on the positioning of teacher education within the university, acknowledging that while it generates significant economic income, it often struggles to convert this into forms of capital traditionally valorised in higher education, as outlined by Bourdieu (2007). This necessitates rethinking existing systems and processes to better support teacher educators in developing their research activities and academic contributions. Given the existential challenges facing the field, it is equally important to recognise the cumulative impact of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1986; Threadgold, 2020), such as inadequate timetabling, on the professional status and identity of teacher educators within their institutions. Addressing some of these systemic issues could contribute significantly to fostering a culture of value, respect, and belonging for teacher educators. Without such institutional support and recognition, how can teacher educators effectively champion the significance and wider impact of their intellectual work within and beyond the university?

I call upon colleagues to confidently embrace their identity by referring to themselves as teacher educators. Where a sense of otherness or deficit currently frames their identity, owning and using the title of teacher educator is a first step towards affirming their expertise, challenging the undervaluation of their work, and highlighting the significance of the contributions they make to the broader field of education. I also encourage teacher educators to take an active role in shaping the future of the profession by engaging in sector-wide conversations, whether through blogs, podcasts, or collaborative research projects led by peers, thereby amplifying their voices and strengthening collective agency. Collective action of this kind has the potential to drive meaningful change, and the prevalence of social media offers an opportunity to share the importance of teacher education as a reflective and critical endeavour.

This study underscores the significant role emotions play in shaping professional practice, providing a valuable lens for understanding the nuanced and often contested terrain of teacher education within the university. Looking ahead, I am keen to extend this line of inquiry by exploring how emotions not only influence but actively construct, sustain, and reconfigure professional identities. I intend to deepen this exploration within teacher education and expand it to other practice-based professions now situated in the university context, such as policing and nursing, where similar tensions and affective dynamics are likely to be at play.

## 7.7 To Conclude

I conclude by returning to the image of the “Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted” sign (Figure 1), which framed the opening of this thesis. Grounded in the lived experiences and assumptions of university-based teacher educators, this study has illuminated the persistent tension of occupying a marginal position within the academy, outsiders who look in, apprehensive of being exposed as illegitimate, peering through the foliage at something that remains elusive and only partially accessible. It has interrogated why such boundaries exist, proposing that educational research is often constructed as a fenced-off domain, detached from the muddy, uncertain terrain of education policy and practice. At the same time, the sign may function to contain research itself, lest it entice others onto a more unruly and disruptive path. The dents left by air rifle pellets on the sign metaphorically represent the resistance enacted by teacher educators, an insistence on challenging these boundaries and asserting the value of the university as a space for deep, reflective engagement between practice and scholarship. Yet the damage remains superficial, the sign endures, its warning intact.

The path towards this point remains uneven and uncertain, tangled with policies and regulatory frameworks that force teacher educators to tread carefully, often struggling to place their feet on firm ground. My work suggests that whether we choose to continue to trespass as teacher educators onto this terrain depends on more than shifts in policy or institutional reforms. The future of the profession rests on the collective resolve of teacher educators to challenge imposed boundaries and assert their dual identities as both educators and scholars. By doing so, they can ensure that their voices are not only heard but meaningfully embedded in the decisions that shape their work, their profession, and the purpose of teacher education itself.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Confirmation of Ethical Approval



School of Education

Ref: PR80090012  
18<sup>th</sup> December 2024

By email only: [098800056@chester.ac.uk](mailto:098800056@chester.ac.uk)

Dear Alison,

Your application to the School of Education Ethics Committee was reviewed for approval in December 2021, for your project entitled:

***An exploration of the relationships that teacher educators have with research and the impact that this has on professional identity***

In reviewing applications, the Committee refers to the criteria set out in the University of Chester Research Governance Handbook.

**The Ethics Committee is pleased to confirm that your application was reviewed by the committee on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2021 and was granted approval to move onto the next stage.** This approval was sent to you by, the then chair of the Ethics Committee, Dr Paul Moran, via email, on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022.

Whilst approval has been granted on the basis of your information provided, please note that **if there are any changes to your study you will need to submit an updated proposal for further consideration.** It is recommended that you maintain regular contact with your supervisor to ensure that your study continues to meet with ethical standards.

**Please note that in accordance with University of Chester protocols, data collected for research projects that may be disseminated in the public domain MUST be retained for a minimum of 10 years (or indefinitely, depending on the circumstances).** Guidance for the retention and storage of data is available by request from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee.

Please also find included an 'End of Project Report Form'. You will need to submit this to the ethics committee within one month of completing your project.

The School of Education Ethics Committee wish you every success with your research.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DM'.

**Dawn Martin (on behalf of the School of Education Ethics Committee)**  
**Research & Innovation Administrative Officer**  
Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Science  
University of Chester  
Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ

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Please direct all correspondence relating to ethics applications to: [ahsresearch.innovation@chester.ac.uk](mailto:ahsresearch.innovation@chester.ac.uk)

## **Appendix B: Questions Used in the Semi-Structured Interview**

### **Interview 1:**

- Tell me what brought you to the university.
- How do you explain what you do to people who are not involved in higher education?
- What do you find to be the best part of your job?
- What do you understand by the following terms, research, scholarly activity, knowledge exchange?

### **Interview 2:**

- What do you think schools think about the university?
- Do you think your job is different from that of school-based colleagues?
- What are the biggest factors that stop you from doing your job as you would want to?
- Tell me about your research background and experience.

### **Interview 3:**

- Tell me about a time you have used research to inform your teaching?
- What kind of support have you received from the university to support you with research?
- If you had a magic wand to change something about your work as an academic in this university what would this be?

## Appendix C: Reflective Thematic Analysis Overview with My Reflections

### Step 1: An example of my dialogue with the data

After conducting the interviews, I began my analysis by manually annotating a printed version of the transcript but found that, while convenient, working on paper meant it was difficult to maintain an overview of what I was noting and some of my comments were rushed and difficult to interpret. Using Word and adding typed comments slowed down this process, which I found to be beneficial, and working at a desk on the computer allowed me the space to engage in meaningful reflection rather than making quick notes when I could. These initial reflections were valuable in supporting the analysis of my findings. An example of this can be found in Figure 11.

1 Speaker 2: Yeah, yeah.

2 Speaker 1 And ~~and~~ I thought it was really interesting cause A at the time A who...this is  
3 too much information... she got a job at the same time. And I'm oversharing  
4 here... but she got on a higher pay scale than I did based on I think basically  
5 based on arguing because she was basically better at arguing.

6 Speaker 2: Right, yeah.

7 Speaker 1: But but what I what I realised very quickly was having an MA didn't give  
8 you any additional advantage in school... which I thought was strange

9 Speaker 2: Right, yeah, yeah.

10 Speaker 1: I mean, it might be different now but that that was my experience to start.

11 Speaker 2: That's really interesting. So, moving on a bit How would you explain your role  
12 to someone outside of education?

13 Speaker 1: It's a tricky one... cause there is so much too it. I I always kind of say that I  
14 train teachers, I always use those words...training. I don't know why. Then I  
15 say that I go out into schools and then I say I lecture in education. It just  
16 makes it easier for people to understand. Always these three things... like with  
17 my hairdresser, she always asks what I do... I don't know why but she does  
18 every time and I always say that I train teachers, I go into schools and I  
19 lecture in education and they are like, "oh I know about these schools", and its  
20 good because I know the schools they are talking about. There is a  
21 connection there. It's really hard to explain otherwise.

22 Speaker 2: Yeah... know exactly what you mean. Do you see yourself as an academic?

23 Speaker 1: Yeah well kind of... I sort of do see myself as an academic but not always.  
24 When I came to work I had a lot of things I wanted to research, loads of  
25 ideas, mainly problems or things that were not right from school. Then I got  
26 caught up with the day-to-day things and everything got a bit bitty and I lost  
27 my focus on them...but now I really want to get back to it...I think I had too  
28 many ideas at first and cause there were so many it was hard to know what to

Alison Griffiths  
Interesting link here to arguing- connection to not being a confrontational person maybe? To succeed school (and get paid  
Reply

Alison Griffiths  
Linked to what is valued- finding it strange (good use of words). Why should it be valued?  
Reply

Alison Griffiths  
I get this, the language we also emphasise in the uni but how do we refer to ourselves. I don't think I know. Is this important? School:  
Reply

Alison Griffiths  
I think this might have been a leading question but I does not deny it. Not sure how relevant this will be.  
29 October 2024, 09:55  
Reply

Alison Griffiths  
Motivation for leaving school. Things not right- this seems to be appearing everywhere- something I can appreciate. I've been there  
Reply

Figure 11 Dialogic Engagement with Interview Transcripts

**Step 2: Generating Initial Codes**

I experimented with NVivo during this stage, receiving training from my university, which also provided access to the software. While I can see the value that this would offer, I felt it added a complication to my analysis. For Step 2, where the formal interrogation of the words of my participants began, I found Excel to be a useful tool. I use Excel regularly in my day-to-day work. I am familiar with its functionality and could see its potential. After importing transcripts from Word into an Excel workbook, I was then able to capture my emerging codes, refining them as necessary. A screenshot of this from one interview can be found overleaf.

Table 8 Example Coding of Interview Data

A	B	C	D	E	F
Line Ref			Code	Code	Code
51-62	C1	Then M, who was here asked me to apply for this job and yeah.... so I wasn't sure at first and I think you remember, while I was sort of doing things here, I was still applying for jobs elsewhere in schools. I kind of felt like I was a little bit familiar territory and I... yeah... I haven't regretted it. I think it's probably one of the best decisions I've ever made really, especially with my age. I think at times, I think gosh, if I still had a full timetable at school, it'd be knacker. And also, you know... you go through the rounds don't you at school after a few years. It feels like the same thing each year. You always start fresh I guess at university... you have a fresh start each year with the PGCE. So, I wanted something different but I'm... I'm yeah... I'm... I'm really glad that I'm here.	Reasons for applying for the job	The push out of school	Stresses of working in school
	C1	<i>Is it what you thought it was going to be?</i>			
64-70	C1	Uh, probably yes. Actually, I think I was... because I had done some training and also R got me to... I met R and I sort of mentioned to her that I had, you know, these experiences. Anyway, we met at the conference, and she said, oh, actually would you mind coming in and observing. I've got some students who need to be observed in primary schools. Can you do... could you be an external? And I did that for I don't know how many... maybe one or two years?	Prior experience		
	C1	<i>Yeah, 'cause we used to get students in January didn't we for like 3 or four weeks?</i>			
73-79	C1	They used to come and then I had to observe them. Yeah, I had to go and.... so I was doing lesson observations. Anyway... so yeah... I was kind of gradually introduced. I... I thought, you know, I mean... you know the school regime... as you know... I mean after having been 22 years in school, my life was ruled by the school bell. At the start I was a bit shell shocked cos nobody asked where I was. Can I go to lunch? Can I go outside and be in the real world? That was weird, yeah so... but otherwise no.	Prior experience	Stresses of working in school	
	C1	So how would you explain if you're talking to somebody who doesn't work... who doesn't do what we do, how do you explain your role? What do you say when people say, "So S, what do you do?"			
83-93	C1	OK. So, what would I say if people ask me? Sort of I'd say, well... I'm... I'm training teachers? I support, teach, educate teachers? Uhhhm... what do I say that I do? I would say... well... I have various roles as I do my job, and I would say you know that one of them is supervising students going into schools, liaising with schools is one part, one part is managing and leading. I think more leading a whole program. Yeah, being a head of program that the biggest bit you know, having, that leadership role. There's so many tutors and teaching at the university, which is great. I like that but it's difficult at times. I think people probably would think only that we teach, that's probably what people would think. We just teach. But there are so many other bits people just don't know about. Yeah... leading a program and also marking.	Description of the role	A lot going on/what do I do?	
	C1	<i>Cause you your role is massive in terms of so many different component parts. Your saying it's quite hard to kind of sum up in one word?</i>			
96-99	C1	I think I mainly say to people I work in teacher education, I train teachers and that's all I do (Shudders). I rarely ever explain what the programme is because it's so... I sometimes say I lead a big programme.	Education or Training		
	C1	Speaker 2: Yeah yeah, yeah, yeah.			
101-102	C1	Speaker 1: I kind of explain a little bit if people want to know but to be honest most people are not that interested (Laughs).	Assumptions		
	C1	Speaker 2: So obviously we're based in a university and with the SCITT program you know we work with teacher educators like Y and V who are based in school. What's your... how do you feel about the title academic? And do you consider yourself to be an academic? We've got it on our little passes, haven't we?			
107-113	C1	Speaker 1: Initially, I was completely floored by it. Initially I was thinking no way... massive impostor syndrome. Uhm, but... I guess it's so... so it's, it's... there are two things. On one level there is... you kind of become an academic because you can get involved in more, you read and whatnot... you are, you know... marking assignments, I think that's really informing, you know. You have to prepare lectures, so you've got to read the stuff around it... so you actually begin to read like an academic. Like it's got a purpose. I have been approached to write a book chapter actually, so I have done that, and I have written a journal article which I never would do if I wasn't here and so there's that. But also, I think that there's a slight myth about academics. That becomes dispelled when you know really think about academia... I actually, I thought about this coming onto campus today. Like you know how I used to think university professors... doctors, you know those who are proper academics... I used to think they're like up there (points finger upwards) but actually they're not really... well not the whole lot of them.	Imposter Syndrome	The myth of Academia	What do I do?

However, after completing my analysis of the first interview, I became aware that I was overcoding and had generated so many individualised codes that creating categories to help sort these was very difficult. As I engaged with the analysis of the remaining interviews, I began to refine my process, looking for connections in the data rather than trying to describe it, referring to the purpose of my research, which was to represent the words of my participants as an occupational group, not to capture an individual perspective. Following this shift, the codes I created were based on repeating ideas that can be seen across several, if not all, of the responses of my participants.

While the structure of my Excel spreadsheets might imply order, I found this stage of the process to be incredibly messy. After my initial attempt at coding, I created a mind map (Figure 13) to tame the large amount of data I was working with, which spanned twelve different Excel spreadsheets, one per participant and interview. This mind map also helped me to identify the possible themes that would be developed further in Stage 3 of the process.

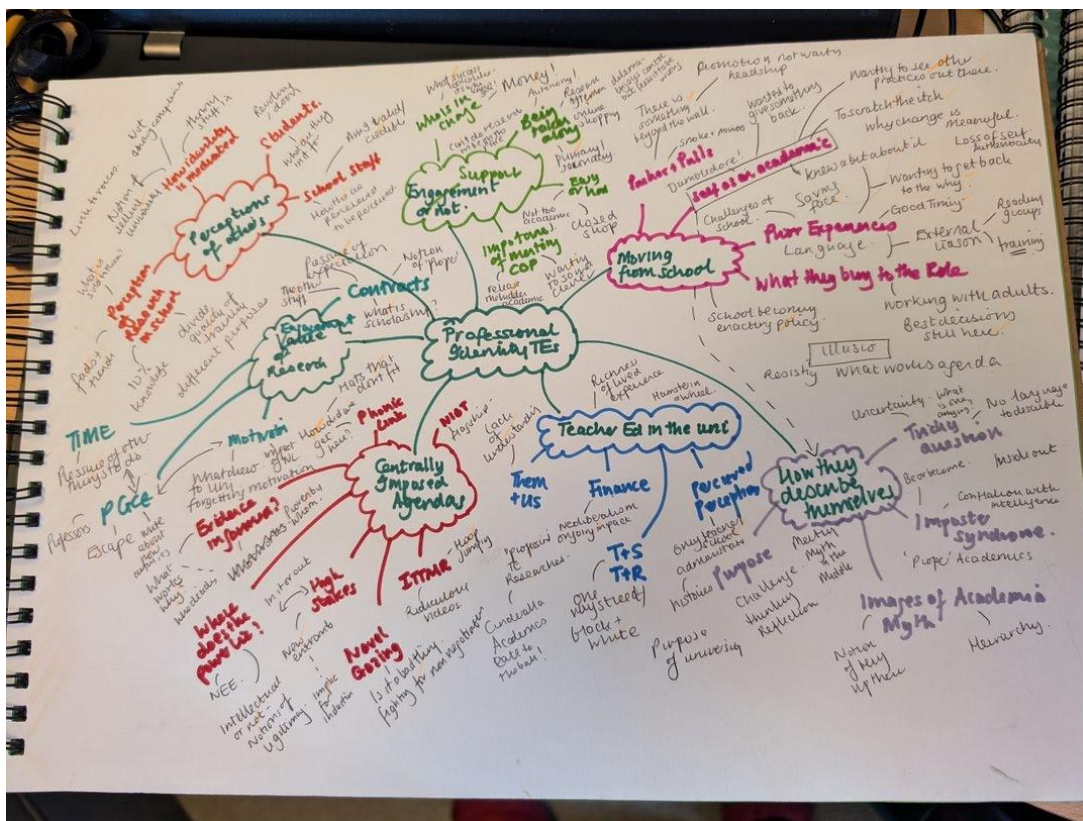


Figure 12 Taming the Research Beast

At the end of the process, I was left with the following twenty-six codes which are outlined in Table 9.

Table 9 Overview of Codes.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What brought me into teacher education in the first place.</li> <li>• Pushes and pulls.</li> <li>• The image of the university.</li> <li>• Acknowledgement of prior experiences.</li> <li>• Describing what you do.</li> <li>• Imposter syndrome.</li> <li>• The status of proper academics.</li> <li>• Bringing in the fees.</li> <li>• A stacked system.</li> <li>• Impact of leadership and management.</li> <li>• Notions of “Them and Us”.</li> <li>• The influence of the Market Review.</li> <li>• Playing the game and notions of quality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting in with the “In Crowd”.</li> <li>• Naval gazing and lines in the sand.</li> <li>• Mistrust and maintaining credentials.</li> <li>• Selling the university product.</li> <li>• Fads, trends, and research with a little r.</li> <li>• The flesh is willing, but time is lacking.</li> <li>• Research and scholarship.</li> <li>• Constraints and opportunities.</li> <li>• The power of the mentor.</li> <li>• What doesn’t work.</li> <li>• The importance of the small group.</li> <li>• The impact of being a primary specialist.</li> <li>• It’s all about the money.</li> </ul>
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### Step 3: Creating Themes

I then began to group the codes I created into more formal categories or emerging themes. I found it useful to reflect on which codes would be most valuable to inform my composite narratives. Being systematic in the approach I used to code my data supported this, but I found that further refinement was needed when the data from all interviews were drawn together as themes. A snapshot of this process can be found in Table 10.

Table 10 Establishing Themes

Code	Review	Interview		Theme	
Pushes and Pulls	Prior Experiences	A1	153-161	I sort of do see myself as an academic but not always. When I came to Goldsmiths I had a lot of things I wanted to research, loads of ideas, mainly problems or things that were not right from school. Then I got caught up with the day-to-day things and everything got a bit bitty and I lost my focus on them...but now I really want to get back to it...I think I had too many ideas at first and cause there were so many it was hard to know what to focus on exactly...like where to start... maybe now I will be able to focus a bit more	2
The Myth of Acadmeia		A1	162-164	it was good with my wife's father, telling him that I work in a university. He thought that was good. It's up there... definitely a good thing saying that I work at a university.	2
How they describe themselves	Training or Education	A1	143-151	It's a tricky one... cause there is so much to it. I always kind of say that I train teachers, I always use those words...training. I don't know why. Then I say that I go out into schools and then I say I lecture in education. It just makes it easier for people to understand. Always these three things... like with my hairdresser, she always asks what I do...I don't know why but she does every time and I always say that I train teachers, I go into schools and I lecture in education and they are like, "oh I know about these schools", and it's good because I know the schools they are talking about. There is a connection there. It's really hard to explain otherwise.	2
What do I do?	Training or Education	B1	155-160	I always say I work with students who want to become teachers. It's just easier cause they say, "What do you teach?" and I say, "teacher education" and then I have to ...dot dot dot...I say that I work with students who want to become teachers and then I might say PGCE. I don't talk a lot about the xxxxx and all the other bits around periphery. Yeah, that's generally how I describe my role.	2
Asumptions	How they describe themselves	B1	162-164	I do, because people.... when you say you work at the university there's this assumption that you either work in the library or are an administrator.	2
Asumptions		B1	166-168	Yeah. Even the Uber drivers that collect me. When they ask I say I'm an academic...ah... and then that opens up a conversation. There's always that surprise, there's an automatic assumption that I couldn't possibly be academic.	2
What do I do?		C1	83-93	OK. So, what would I say if people ask me? Sort of I'd say, well...I'm...I'm training teachers? I support, teach, educate teachers? Uhhh... what do I say that I do? I would say... well... I have various roles as I do my job, and I would say you know that one of them is supervising students going into schools, liaising with schools is one part, one part is managing and leading. I think more leading a whole program. Yeah, being a head of program that the biggest bit you know, having, that leadership role. There's so many tutors and teaching at the university, which is great. I like that but it's difficult at times. I think people probably would think only that we teach, that's probably what people would think. We just teach. But there are so many other bits people just don't know about. Yeah...leading a program and also marking.	2
Asumptions		C1	83-93	I think people probably would think only that we teach, that's probably what people would think. We just teach. But there are so many other bits people just don't know about. Yeah...leading a program and also marking.	2
Training or education		C1	96-99	think I mainly say to people I work in teacher education, and I train teachers and that's what I do [Shudders]. I rarely ever explain what the programme is because it's so... I sometimes say I lead a big programme.	2
Inposter Syndrome		C1	107-113	Initially, I was completely floored by it. Initially I was thinking no way... massive impostor syndrome. Uhm, but... I guess it's so...so it's, it's...there are two things. On one level there is... you kind of become an academic because you can get involved in more, you read and whatnot...you are, you know...marking assignments, I think that's really informing, you know. You have to prepare lectures, so you've got to read the stuff around it... so you actually begin to read like an academic. Like it's got a purpose.	2
The Myth of Acadmeia		D1	59-64	I thought I was going to be sitting in an office...no,no... in a library. That's the image in my mind, sitting in a library. You know.... shiny mahogany bookcases and I would be immersed in books and and and and and reading. And then I'm sitting maybe in a kind of sitting room talking to the students. (Laughs) I was going to be Dumbledore basically. I mean...I don't know...I think I have this image, an old-fashioned image of what a university lecturer is maybe.	2
What do I do?		D1	102-105	I say ...I teach teachers...yeah that's...probably what I say to taxi drivers. It depends who asks me, I guess. I'm trying to think yeah, so I think I might say I teach on a PGCE or I train teachers...do I say I train teachers? Usually, I might say I train teachers to somebody who's not in the... field.	2

I began by dividing my codes into five themes, but after returning to the transcript and thinking about how the composite narratives would be constructed, I decided to split two themes in half. The initial and final iterations are outlined below, the themes in bold being ones that were split.

Table 11 Amended Themes

Version 1: Five Themes	Version 2: Seven Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The positioning of self as an academic.</li> <li>• The place of teacher education in the academic community.</li> <li>• The impact of centrally imposed agendas.</li> <li>• Perceptions from outside the university.</li> <li>• Engagement in and with research.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The influence of moving from school into higher education.</li> <li>• The positioning of self as an academic.</li> <li>• The place of teacher education in the academic community.</li> <li>• The impact of centrally imposed agendas.</li> <li>• Perceptions from outside the university.</li> <li>• Engagement in and with research.</li> <li>• Reflections on support and training.</li> </ul>

#### Steps 4 and 5: Reviewing and Naming Themes

The final themes were then reviewed, and I had to adapt my original titles to reflect the codes that contributed to them. Once again, the knowledge that these would be presented as composite narratives supported this process. The final themes and related codes are outlined on the table below.

Table 12 Overview of Themes and Codes

Theme	Codes
The influence of moving from school into higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What brought me into teacher education in the first place.</li> <li>• Pushes and pulls.</li> <li>• The image of the university. Acknowledgement of prior experiences.</li> </ul>
The positioning of self as an academic.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describing what you do.</li> <li>• Imposter syndrome.</li> <li>• The status of proper academics.</li> </ul>
The place of teacher education in the academic community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bringing in the fees.</li> <li>• A stacked system.</li> <li>• Impact of leadership and management.</li> <li>• Notions of “Them and Us”.</li> </ul>

<p>The impact of centrally imposed agendas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The influence of the Market Review.</li> <li>• Playing the game and notions of quality.</li> <li>• Getting in with the “In Crowd”.</li> <li>• Naval gazing and lines in the sand.</li> </ul>
<p>Perceptions from outside the University</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mistrust and maintaining credentials.</li> <li>• Selling the university product.</li> <li>• Fads, trends, and research with a little r.</li> </ul>
<p>Engaging in research</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The flesh is willing the time is lacking.</li> <li>• Research and scholarship.</li> <li>• Constraints and opportunities.</li> </ul>
<p>Reflections on support and training</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The power of the mentor.</li> <li>• What doesn’t work.</li> <li>• The importance of the small group.</li> <li>• The impact of being a primary specialist.</li> <li>• It’s all about the money.</li> </ul>

## **Appendix D: Exemplar Audit for the Creation of Composite Narratives**

As part of the process of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022), I identified themes and codes which would be used to construct each composite narrative. The sample audit presented below provides an example of how these were created. It is based on the first composite narrative, Alex's Story: Scratching an Itch.

### **Creating the Composite: Step 1**

As part of my analysis, I compiled an Excel workbook containing all the quotations related to each specific code, which could be sorted into one of seven themes. The example below relates to the code, "what brought me into teacher education". The words of my participants that I felt aligned most closely with this code were captured verbatim, along with references to the specific interview, participant, and line. This enabled me to easily return to the transcript to check for accuracy and ensure that I maintained the spirit of what was being said as I constructed my narrative. Using colour-coding to indicate each speaker also allowed me to ensure that I had the voices of all participants included in each composite. An example of this can be found overleaf.

Table 13 Data for Exemplar Composite Narrative (Part 1)

Theme	Code	Interview	Line Ref	
1	What brought me into teacher education	A1	105	So...urm...with all of the stuff I had done there were lots of things that were kind of dragging me in that direction
1	What brought me into teacher education	B1	57-58	So, I started in primary school, and I fell into higher education by accident.
1	What brought me into teacher education	B1	69-73	Because I had no ambitions to go to work in higher education. At the time I'd had a job... had gone for a job interview and was offered a job as a deputy in school with a Deaf Unit because I was really interested in deaf awareness. I'd done a BSL Stage One Course.
1	What brought me into teacher education	B1	84	It was literally by accident. And then I stayed in it ever since
1	What brought me into teacher education	C1	48-50	I kind of felt like I was a little bit familiar with the territory and I yeah, I haven't regretted it I think it's probably one of the best decisions I've ever made really especially with my age.
1	What brought me into teacher education	D1	34-42	I was also lead English teacher for the local authority, so that was really interesting, and I went on a lot of training. I did reading recovery training and people were sent to me to watch me teach and I really enjoyed that part and the third prompt, I suppose, was that I didn't want to be a head, so I thought...the idea of kind of financial management didn't appeal to me at all...urm... then I started thinking all of these parts...urm actually what do I do next. I thought I'd like to work with adults and young people and then I was thinking about doing becoming an advisory teacher and then I can't remember why I didn't go down that route... I think it's not very well paid.
1	What brought me into teacher education	D1	47-51	So, I...so I thought, d'you know what...I wonder if I could...it was a bit of a dream working in the university. I had this image and urm...then a job came up. You know you start; you just start looking vaguely. I applied for it and got it... so I was really shocked because I thought I had no experience I'm straight from school, but obviously it was the time of the Literacy Strategy...they said they were desperate for somebody straight from school, so it was just good timing.

I then identified specific quotes from within the table that I felt would be important to include in my composite narrative. These were then formed into a short draft vignette. Presented below is an example of this in relation to the first code, with the text that I have edited, added, or amended shown in black. Where text has been removed, it has been struck out. In this instance, it was removed as it would potentially be a direct identifier of the participant.

I fell into higher education by accident. I had no ambitions to ~~go to work in higher education~~ (be here but) with all of the stuff I had done there were lots of things that were kind of dragging me in that direction. ~~I was also lead English teacher for the local authority, so that was really interesting, and I went on a lot of training...~~ (P)eople were sent to me to watch me teach and I got to go around different schools doing a bit of moderation work I really enjoyed that part, I (knew I) didn't want to be a head. Then a job came up, I kind of felt like I was a little bit familiar with the territory with all of the stuff I had done I thought, d'you know what...I wonder if I could. I was really shocked because I thought I had no experience I was straight from school, but obviously it was the time of the Literacy Strategy...they said they were desperate for somebody straight from school. I haven't regretted it. I think it's probably one of the best decisions I've ever made.

The same process was then followed for the second code, which was designated the title *Pushes and Pulls*. Again, a table was created to capture the quotes from my participants. It should be noted here that some quotations were used across multiple codes and themes. An example of this can be found below.

Table 14 Data for Exemplar Composite Narrative (Part 2)

1	Pushes and Pulls	B1	69-73	Because I had no ambitions to go to work in higher education. At the time I'd had a job... had gone for a job interview and was offered a job as a deputy in school with a Deaf Unit because I was really interested in deaf awareness. I'd done a BSL Stage One Course.
1	Pushes and Pulls	A1	76-83	I kind of I kind of thought what do I want? I didn't have a lot of headspace in school. I didn't share this with anyone at the school ever, but I kind of thought if I carry on like this, I'm gonna burn myself out in a couple years and I need to think what my next step is. So, I started to read more around theory because I kind of thought, at some point I thought I want to get into the University sector mm-hmm. It's partly because I enjoyed being here... I did well on my MA. That counts a lot doesn't it.
1	Pushes and Pulls	A1	100 -103	I'm not... a I'm not a confrontational person, but I do like to ask why. So I'm like, "This isn't working... why?" That doesn't always work because most people in school are like, "This is what we have to do. Let's see how we do it." So, I was starting to get that itch...that need to go back and get back into the why.
1	Pushes and Pulls	C1	50-53	(Laughs) God, if I still have a full timetable at school, it'll be so knacker. Also I think you go through the rounds, well you know, in school. You teach the same thing; you can get in a rut. I guess at university you have a chance at a fresh start each year.
1	Pushes and Pulls	D1	44-46	School was getting to be a hard place to work...so I thought I'm better paid as deputy than I would have been as an advisory teacher, and it seemed like they had no holidays. It seemed like all the perks that I'd accumulated by that point we're kind of undermined by advisory teaching. Looking back, it wouldn't have been a good move.
1	Pushes and Pulls	D1	47-51	So, I...so I thought, d'you know what...I wonder if I could...it was a bit of a dream working in the university. I had this image and urm...then a job came up. You know you start; you just start looking vaguely. I applied for it and got it... so I was really shocked because I thought I had no experience I'm straight from school, but obviously it was the time of the Literacy Strategy...they said they were desperate for somebody straight from school, so it was just good timing.

As above, these words were then used to construct another vignette that captured the voices of all of my participants as they pertained to this code. The title for this composite was drawn from this section of the narrative and was adapted from the comment, *I was starting to get that itch.*

God, if I still have a full timetable at school, it'll (it would) be so knackerin', but you know apart from that school was getting to be a hard place to work. You go through the rounds; you teach the same thing; you can get in a rut and that's how I felt. I didn't share this with anyone at the school ever, but I thought, if carry on like this, I'm gonna burn myself out in a couple years and just wanted to do things I was interested in ~~I was really interested in deaf awareness and had done a BSL Stage One course~~. Also, I'm not a confrontational person, but I do like to ask why. So, I'm like, "This isn't working... why?" and that doesn't always work because most people in school are like, "This is what we have to do." I was starting to get that itch...that need to go back and get back into the why. In that way, I suppose it was a bit of a dream working in the university.

The final stage of the process required me to weave the coded vignettes together to create a composite narrative that captures the spirit of the words of my participants and tells a story that exemplifies the focus of that specific theme. This stage uses the vignettes presented above to create a cohesive and evocative narrative that provides an overview of the lived experiences of my participants, and which has resonance outside of the immediate case. An example of one version of Alex's story can be found below.

### **Alex Story (Version 1): Scratching the Itch**

So, I fell into higher education by accident. I had no real ambitions but with hindsight I could see there were lots of things that were kind of dragging me in that direction. I was the lead teacher, and I went on a lot of training. People were sent to watch me teach as well and I really enjoyed that part of my job, but I knew that I didn't want to be a head. School was getting to be a hard place to work. You go through the rounds; you teach the same thing; you can get in a rut and that's how I felt. I didn't share this with anyone at the school ever, but I thought, if I carry on like this, I'm going to burn myself out in a couple of years. There was just no headspace. God, if I still had a full timetable at school, it'd be knackerin'. I'm not a confrontational person, but I do like to ask why. So, would often ask colleagues, "This isn't working... why?" and that doesn't always work in school because I felt that most teachers are like, "It doesn't matter, this is what we have to do." So, on top of everything else, I was starting to get an itch...that need to go back and get back into the why. Then a

job came up. With the experience I had, I kind of felt like I was a little bit familiar with the territory. I guess I had this image of what it might be, a bit of a dream, working in a university. I thought, "d'you know what, I wonder if I could?" I was really shocked when I got the job because I thought I had no experience, but obviously it was the time of the National Strategies, and they said they were desperate for somebody straight from school. I haven't regretted it. I think it's probably one of the best decisions I've ever made really. Despite it all I've stayed in it ever since.

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