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**The accommodation of contested identities: The impact of participation in a practice-based Masters Programme on Beginning Teachers' professional identity and sense of agency.**

**Abstract**

Teachers' professional training and development has been the focus of intense academic and political debate. This paper contributes to this by considering Beginning Teachers' (BTs') self-views of their professional identity. The findings are derived from a mixed methods study with questionnaires (n=886) and focus groups and interviews (n= 60) with BTs in Wales. Drawing on a socio-cultural approach, the findings illustrate how BTs' integration of competing professional identities bolstered their sense of professional agency. These findings have salience within a policy context where both teacher education and professional development are increasingly aligned with the narrow organizational objectives of the school.

**Keywords:** teacher professionalism; sociology of professions; socio-cultural theory; Beginning Teachers; professional development; professional identity; teacher agency.

## Introduction

Sachs (2016, p. 414) poses the rhetorical question: teacher professionalism, why are we still talking about it? Her answer is that we need to talk about it, not least to counter what she categorizes as “top down” approaches to teaching. These top-down approaches have been aligned with what has been categorized as organizational professionalism, often represented as the antithesis of occupational accounts of professional practice. Organisational professionalism is closely aligned to realising organisational objectives through standardisation and technicist decision-making within increasingly hierarchical work structures; while occupational professionalism is based around a collegial commitment to discretion, autonomy within more horizontally-organised professional work structures. However, these antithetical accounts have been superseded by research (Sachs, 2016; Evetts, 2009a; 2012) which focuses on how these competing professional discourses are utilised, appropriated and integrated in professional work settings and practice. This paper will draw on such approaches to illustrate how Beginning Teachers (BTs) studying a practice-based masters programme appropriated, accommodated and in some cases integrated differing understandings of professional practice derived from their initial teacher training, school environment and, in particular, their masters’ study to inform their self-view and sense of professional identity.

The increasing influence of organisational professionalism has resulted in professions generally – and teaching especially – undergoing fundamental change or, as Evetts (2012, p. 1) suggests, “turbulent times”. This turbulence in the UK has manifested in a teacher recruitment shortfall and high levels of attrition amongst beginning teachers (BTs) - see, for example, Authors (2016). The original responses to such turbulence were varied. Some argued that the organizational restructuring of professional work enervated traditional “occupational” professionalism leading to de-professionalization (see – for classic examples – the earlier work of Evetts, 2009a, 2009b; Ball, 2003, 2016; Ozga, 1995); while others claim that such restructuring has precipitated the emergence of alternative professional identities and practices (for a classic account see Hoyle, 1974; or Hargreaves

& Fullan, 2012). Such accounts have been superseded by recent research which has focussed on both the interplay of discourses within professional organizations (Evetts, 2012; Sachs, 2016) and how these are appropriated and integrated by teachers themselves to promote their sense of professional agency (Priestley, Biesta, & Robinson, 2015). However, as Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2015) acknowledge, there are often tensions within education systems as they attempt to foster and promote individual agency and innovation while mandating collective approaches to professional practice that limit the agency of teachers. Within this paper we consider whether approaches to the professional practice of teachers within one country in the UK- Wales- either fosters or limits teachers' professional agency.

Despite extensive theorization of teacher professionalism, there is a lack of substantive, empirically-driven research within the UK into how the interplay of different discourses shape teachers' sense of professionalism and how these play out in their professional lives. The paper starts to address this gap in the research through an analysis of teachers working within the Welsh education system which has developed its own approaches to teacher professionalism. The paper draws on a study conducted with almost 900 BTs working within the Welsh education system who took part in a Welsh Government sponsored Masters level programme of professional development (the Masters in Educational Practice [MEP]).

We will begin by drawing on sociological approaches to the professions to provide an overview of debates around professionalism generally to contextualize classic and contemporary considerations of teachers' – particularly BTs' – professional identity. More specifically we describe how, after a period in which professional identity tended to be theorised in categorical and often oppositional terms which focussed underpinning moral and normative values, debates have moved on to consider 'hybrid' identities and teachers' construction and management of these identities (Sachs, 2016; Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006). We will then provide the policy context within

which the BTs in this study are working and, finally, the background and approach to professional learning which informed the MEP Programme from which the empirical data is derived.

### **Professionalism: a 'Third Logic'?**

The evolutionary narrative of the sociology of the professions is well established (Abbot, 1988). Initial approaches delineated both the attributes and functions of professional practice, while later work attempted to differentiate the professions from bureaucratic or market-based approaches to organizing work (Freidson, 2001). The role played by formal training in an intellectual area was key in attempts to differentiate the "logic" of professional work from that of the market and organization. Freidson (2001, p. 7) argued for the retention of "the ideal typical position of professionalism" whereby "a particular specialization requires a foundation in abstract concepts and formal learning" which facilitates the application of discrete decision-making in complex and often sensitive work environments. Other "logics" of professional work Friedson identified include collegiality in the workplace; ethical practice guided by specialist codes of conduct; and an orientation towards serving the public – often referred to as a 'vocation'. To realize this important contribution to civil society Freidson (2001) argued that professional work required decentralized and horizontal organizational structures and an ethical commitment to foster collaborative work practices necessary for the delivery of inherently complex public services- "logics" that form the basis of an occupational account of professional practice.

### **The de/reprofessionalization debate**

While celebrating the Third Logic of professionalism Freidson (2001) identified a paradigmatic shift within the organization of professional work through "contamination" by the alternative logics of managerialism and commercialism (the tenets of organizational professionalism). These alternative logics manifest themselves in bureaucratic proliferation, enforced standardization, hierarchical structures, technicist approaches to practice and techno-rational approaches to knowledge

implemented in an attempt to promote and foster commercialized practices. Critics of such reforms categorized as “neo-liberal governance models” (Casey, 2012, p. 1) or the proletarianization of professional work (Reed, 2007), have argued that they have resulted in the emergence of a culture of accountability. Ball, for example, dismisses this accountability as the “terror of performativity” (Ball, 2003, p. 215) which is anathema to the integrity and autonomy which is the sine qua non of professional practice.

Fundamental to organisational professionalism is the use of data for governance (Ozga, 2009; Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011): Ball (2015, p. 299) characterizes this as the “tyranny of numbers”, while recent research (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2016; Roberts-Holmes, 2015) argues that “datafication” or the “fetishization of data” (Hardy & Lewis, 2016) has restricted pedagogy and practice within the earliest phases of schooling. This thesis argues that the culmination of data-led “surveillance” is professional uncertainty as one’s social identity is challenged. Within this thesis, the subversion of autonomy rendered by accountability has resulted in the claim that those working within organizations deemed professional have been subjected to a “deprofessionalization”.

Amongst the most committed advocates of such a thesis are those who argue that such organizational restructuring is the antithesis of professional work: Ball (2012, p. 28) invokes Yeats’ *Second Coming* to describe a “rough beast ... slouching towards us” to illustrate the effects that what he categorizes as neoliberal reformulations have had on professional practice.

While not endorsing a ‘deprofessionalisation’ approach, other educational researchers have recognized that shifts in policy have altered teachers’ professional practice and identity in a number of ways: the subversion of teacher autonomy (whether this is real or, as Whitty [2008] suggests, “de facto” autonomy); bureaucratization and managerialism; the prioritization of accountability over performance; a deficit of trust; and the stifling of creativity.

## **Re-professionalisation, integration and agency**

There is a tendency within some accounts of deprofessionalization to represent the professional as a passive victim of the “slouching beast” of regulation, routinization and bureaucracy. Although some authors have highlighted resistance (McCulloch, Helsby, & Knight, 2000) or, more recently, argued for the subjective self as a “site for the politics of refusal” (Ball, 2015, p. 1143), they have been criticized for not recognizing the agency of teachers to resist (individually or collectively), neutralize, subvert, appropriate or actively endorse these organizational restructurings (James, 2017). The latter manifestation of agency (endorsement) has been celebrated by educationalists who argue that the realignment of professional practice with organizational priorities represents a reprofessionalization of teachers’ work, dismissing as “presumptuous” the representation of altered professional identities as being “confused”.

Early work in this area, such as Whitty (2008) and Menter et al. (2010), traced articulations of professional identity which “transcended” the polarities of a crude occupational/organizational account; while recent accounts (Biesta et al., 2015) have tended to give greater emphasis to the role of teachers’ agency to explain the appropriation and integration of different aspects of organizational and occupational professionalism within their hybrid professional identities (Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006; Authors, 2000; Sachs, 2003, 2011). The most recent research has categorized these diverse understandings of professional practice as forms of “professional capital” (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Nolan and Molla, 2017).

This paper sets out to explore how teachers in a key phase of their careers accommodated and, at times, integrated diverse and competing understandings of professional practice into their emergent professional identities. To do this we draw on the socio-cultural perspective and approach to agency outlined by Biesta (2010), Biesta and Tedder (2007) and extended by Etelapelto et al. (2013) - defined as an ‘ecological’ perspective or ‘subject-orientated socio-cultural approach’ to

agency. While we recognise the embodied nature of teachers' professional practice and identity (Etelapelto et al., 2013), this paper focuses on the analysis of the cultural, social, material and discursive resources that framed, constrained or enabled these BTs' sense of professional agency. As Etelapelto et al. (2013, p.60) drawing on Biesta (2010) argues, this approach is particularly important in an era where professional identities are becoming increasingly fragmented, refigured and in many parts of the world, rebranded.

### **Welsh educational policy and The Masters in Educational Practice**

Since the devolution of educational policy within the UK there has been increasing divergence in approaches to teacher education and development (most especially between those of Wales and England – see Authors, 2016). The Welsh Assembly Government outlined its intention to create a framework for teacher professional development that differed from the prescriptive, high accountability model that was furthered in England and had prevailed in Wales prior to devolution. The development of this framework took place against a policy backdrop that claimed that Wales' education system was falling behind comparable education systems both in the UK and internationally (Evans, 2016; Dixon, 2016). In 2009 Wales ranked the lowest of all the countries in the PISA rankings of the UK being graded 43rd in maths; 41st in reading; and 36th in science out of the 65 countries who were included in the survey.<sup>1</sup> One aspect of the system that came under particular pressure was initial teacher education and early career professional development of teachers (Furlong, Hagger, Butcher, & Howson, 2015; Tabberer, 2013). This, in part, resulted in the reformist Education Minister, Leighton Andrews, initiating a raft of reforms to Wales' education system including the early career development of teachers (Andrews, 2011a, 2011b). Andrews was

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<sup>1</sup> Wales' PISA rankings fell in Science in both subsequent tests (2012); in Maths it fell in 2012 but improved to above 2009 levels in 2015; while Reading improved slightly in 2012 before falling again in 2015 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2012; 2015).

bullish in his pronouncements around leveraging accountability into the system and moving away from what he disparaged as “laissez-faire” models of professional development (Andrews, 2011a).

A key plank of the reform of early career professional development was the introduction of the Masters in Educational Practice for BTs within Wales. While some have aligned the MEP Programme with a retrenchment from the collaborative professional development within the post-devolution approach (Egan & Grigg, 2017), the model developed was very distinct from the organizationally driven approaches developed within England. Initiated in 2011, the bilingual Programme was developed through consultation with a group of international experts convened by the Welsh Government. In many ways the Programme itself reflected the contests over professional development within Wales: While the Programme was practice-based and focussed on specific policy objectives highlighted by Government (reflecting Andrews’ assertion that “we need to move from theory to practice” [2011b, p. 9]), it was premised upon teacher inquiry, rather than the application of predetermined approaches or strategies.

Using Sachs’ (2016) model of Continuing Professional Development as a reference point we can argue that while the government funders did seek to promote aspects of skills development in relation to government’s change agenda, the structure of the Programme was premised on the promotion of an inquiring and critical professional within an occupational understanding of teacher professionalism. The funders’ support of the promotion of critical inquiry was seen a means of encouraging greater use of research and the “evidence base” – more tacitly it was constructed as a means of insulating them against the negative effects of enculturation into school cultures marked by low expectations and insularity. The intended outcomes of the participation were an enhancement of practice; development of understanding of the current evidence base; the development of analytical and critical capacities; and the ability to lead professional learning communities (Authors, 2017). Throughout its initial three year pilot the Programme recruited over

1,300 Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) which constituted over 50 percent of the country's eligible<sup>2</sup> Beginning Teachers (Authors, 2017).

The Programme was delivered by an alliance of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) led by Cardiff University with partners at the Universities of Aberystwyth and Bangor and what was then the Institute of Education (now part of University College London). A key bridge in translating the academic content and research within the modules was provided by over 100 expert academic mentors, recruited on the basis of their professional experience and expertise. This network of mentors were experienced professionals external to the mentees' schools who supported their mentees' practice and their pedagogic values (Daly & Milton, 2017). As an intermediate context between BTs' experiences as students on an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programme and as initiates into various school contexts, the MEP highlighted key choices and tensions in BTs' process of professional identity formation.

## **Methods**

The research adopted a subject orientated socio-cultural approach (Etelapelto et al., 2013) to the study of BTs' experience within the Masters in Educational Practice Programme. This 'ecological' perspective (Biesta, 2010; Biesta and Tedder, 2007) focussed on the cultural, social, material and discursive resources that framed, constrained or enabled their professional agency, and influenced the development of their professional identities.

The data for this study was generated from a mixed methods evaluation which ran from 2015-2017.

The methods used within this evaluation were a survey of students and mentors participating in the Programme (n=886); six focus group and individual interviews with students (60 participants in

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<sup>2</sup> Eligibility criteria were that participants needed to be newly qualified; registered with the General Teaching Council for Wales; employed for at least one full term in one or more maintained schools with the equivalent of at least a 0.4 contract; and have the agreement of the head teacher (Authors, 2017).

total); three focus groups with mentors within the Programme (25 participants); six school-based case studies with participants; and documentary data generated from student assignments and dissertations. The evaluation was placed within the fifth phase of the ROAMEF model for policy research (rational, objectives, appraisal, monitoring, evaluation and feedback) outlined by HM Treasury (2011). The outcomes measured within this evaluation phase were informed by a contextualized logic model (HM Treasury, 2011) and were focussed on the impact of the MEP on individual BTs and their schools. The focus of this paper is data generated in relation to element three of this evaluation – the potential impact of participation on teachers’ professional identity and sense of agency (see Figure 1 below).

**Figure 1 here**

The study used a two phase, sequential mixed methods explanatory design frame (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Between April and June 2015 all teachers who attended one of the Programme’s learning events were surveyed with a response rate of 73 percent (n=886). The questionnaire and protocol for the semi-structured interviews and focus groups focussed on five areas: aspects of professional practice and beliefs (the focus of this study); impacts at a school level; impact on career trajectory; changes in classroom practice; impact on learning and achievement; outcomes for teachers. The initial phase of analysis drew on descriptive statistics to inform the development of the qualitative element. Within this qualitative phase, focus group interviews with 60 Beginning Teachers, 25 mentors and the university team that supported the Programme explored the survey responses. This data was then coded using the typology of Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013), moving from descriptive to inferential codes. Drawing on these codes and our initial analysis we performed more detailed inferential statistical analysis on the quantitative data before drawing our data together through a series of overarching inferential codes. Through such methodological triangulation we have tried to ensure that the data presented is both robust and representative.

There are, however, limitations to this study. The main issue is selection bias within the sample in

respect of both which BTs became involved and the range of schools that supported BTs' engagement. The BTs on the programme were broadly representative of the population in regard to gender, age, geographical spread and the types of schools they worked in. It is likely though that they were amongst the more committed and confident of their cohort and the evaluation data itself indicated that over time they became a less representative group as those who moved schools in the first three years of their careers were more likely not to progress with the programme. There was a great deal of anecdotal evidence from participants and mentors that a number of school leaders discouraged BTs' engagement with the Programme as they feared it would negatively affect their performance. The sample of schools within the Programme is therefore likely to be biased towards those with more supportive leadership and more positive learning environments. We also faced the methodological and ethical issues in relation to many of the research team's dual roles as researcher and instructor on the Programme. We tried to mitigate this through reinforcing principles of anonymity and confidentiality; having interviews and focus groups conducted by a researcher who had no involvement in the Programme; and through our own reflexivity and methodological and researcher triangulation while evaluating and interpreting the data.

## **Findings**

The findings reported here focus on two broad analytical categories that describe particular interactions between organisational and occupational discourses surrounding the notion of becoming a professional. The first is concerned with the nature, and role, of one's own learning in determining one's professionalism. These discourses touched upon notions of credentialism - a policy rhetoric of making teaching a masters level profession was current at the time of the MEP's development and implementation - and the role of the teacher as an active contributor to, rather than a passive consumer of, the knowledge that underpins their professional practice. The second analytical category focusses on issues of professional agency and the culture of accountability within schools. The pressures BTs felt they were placed under within certain schools' accountability

cultures is contrasted with their relationship with their mentors and peers. The tensions between contrasting notions of organisational and occupational professionalism are evidenced by the contested role played by 'data' in judgments about pupil learning and teachers' performance.

### ***Status, professional knowledge and collaboration***

The survey data indicated that BTs within the MEP believed that participation in the Programme improved their "professional status". As Figure 2 indicates, of the respondents to this statement (n=662) 80 percent of cohort one; 70 percent of cohort two; and 74 percent of cohort three either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that participation in the Programme had "improved their sense of professional status."

#### **Figure 2 here**

While this is an important finding, what this data does *not* tell us is what teachers believe that *professional status* actually means to them. However, when students invoked the discourse of professionalism, they illustrated how they understood teacher professionalism and the role that the MEP played in framing their nascent professional identity:

*Hmm. I think it makes you more skilled and more professional doesn't it and you don't always notice that in the here and now, and actually when you look back you start noticing the differences and where you've come from and how far within just three years.*

*...I think it's just giving you skills and professionalism that other people just haven't had available to them.*

Within both these accounts, "skills and professionalism" are coupled together as forming distinct aspects of their practice encompassing both an organizational (skills) and occupational (professionalism) account of teacher professionalism. This is consistent with Evetts' (2012) typology where these BTs are mastering the skills (or in Sachs' [2016] framework "functional development")

required to “perform” within their organization and the “professionalism” which is aligned with an emergent occupational identity (Evetts, 2012).

For some BTs gaining a master level qualification played a particular role in their emergent identities. In the following extract being a professional and gaining a credential are conflated (an “extra level of profession”) under the idea of ‘credibility’. A conflation that indicates the degree of personal fragility in the BTs sense of professionalism and the significance therefore given to the public nature of the credentialist kudos conferred by gaining a ‘Masters’:

*What the MEP has done or what it was intended to do was raise the professional standing of teachers. So teachers have a degree, what about if they were Masters qualified – so, wonderful – what you are adding is an extra level of profession and from that comes extra levels of credibility, I think credibility should be there anyway but having a Masters takes it to that level again...*

It is perhaps understandable that BTs who had so recently undergone, and some were still undergoing, a series of assessments to establish themselves as qualified teachers should link what constitutes a profession to credentials and qualifications (to a degree ignoring what that qualification equips teachers to *do*). From a critical perspective, the use of a credential to “bolster” one’s professional credibility also speaks to issues of occupational market closure, social contestation and the wider social function served by professions that can feed into the political condemnation of professional elites.

Beyond gaining the qualification associated with the MEP, the Programme’s aim of fostering professional collaborative inquiry led the BTs to engage with how authority is conferred upon an occupational group and on what basis it claims a strong professional status through access to and authority over a body of expert knowledge. Freidson (2001, p. 202) describes a profession as a

“pale” within which members share a common body of formal knowledge and skills (this analogy seems particularly apt for teaching as just like the original Pale –an area of Ireland around Dublin under English control- teaching’s boundaries are particularly and increasingly weak). The creation and protection of this ‘pale’ is contingent upon professional collaboration, consensus and professional authority rooted in the validity of the forms of knowledge that arise from collegial inquiry (Hoyle, 1974; Evetts, 2012; Sachs, 2016). Participation in school-based projects were a feature of the MEP, and were aimed at fostering the skills and dispositions required to engage in professional collaborative inquiry. The school-based projects heightened BTs’ engagement with the dominant approach to problem-solving in their schools, which in many cases was a technical rational one based around the identification of the ‘correct’ form of professional knowledge and the adoption of effective practices.

The contrast between the professional learning approach the BTs encountered in the MEP and their experience of school-based professional development was summarised by one participant as *“the thing about the MEP is that you haven’t told us anything”*. The BTs’ interaction with the dominant technical rationale discourse became increasingly based upon a recognition of the partiality of ‘expert’ knowledge and how engagement in inquiry would require risk-taking, experimentation and failure:

*Through the MEP I felt you were able to say to a colleague oh I’ve been working with this I’m really into this ... You don’t know actually if it’s going to work you can’t just make that assumption that it’s going to improve anything. I’m more willing to discuss with other teachers, at first if something was not working I thought that it was my fault and a weakness of mine, but now I’m more willing to talk to teachers about things, and not see weaknesses as a negative but rather as something that can be improved.*

The emphasis on professional inquiry within the Programme contrasted with a discourse of professional knowing based on training that was organizationally orientated towards a “restricted” focus on immediate, generic and imposed solutions:

*But what I find sometimes that maybe this is why I think the MEP is better than other forms of CPD<sup>3</sup> and training and things like that is because I've had other forms of training that have come from like say people who used to work who have now become consultants and things like that, and they're just giving you models of teaching which they used to use and used to work in their contexts when things were maybe a little bit different, or it's coming from the top down and it's just being told like do this.*

This is not to suggest that these BTs did not value immediate, practical solutions which allowed them to meet the professional objectives within their organization: as asserted by Day (2017) this is an important element – even a prerequisite – but not the *raison d'être*, of their professional practice. The “restricted” nature of BTs’ experiences of professional learning outside of the MEP included aspects of their Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Although eighty-six percent of students said that the standard of their ITE was “good or better” - broadly consistent with research in England which found that 89 percent of primary and 91 percent of secondary teachers categorized their training as good or very good (Adewoye, Porter, & Donnelly, 2014) -they recognised it was somewhat restricted in respect of its approach to inculcating key skills and dispositions, such as reflection, to support their professional learning. Participants acknowledged that while “reflective practice” – a key concept within accounts of occupational professionalism – was celebrated and encouraged, the immediate mastery of the “skills” of teaching took precedence:

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<sup>3</sup> Continuing Professional Development

*You don't understand (reflection), you don't know how to interpret it and grasp the concept of it. You don't have time to think about it you're just, it's one tick box that you've got to do isn't it in the PGCE<sup>4</sup>?*

The pressure to 'learn how to teach' meant that at this stage of their careers BTs found it "difficult to sit back" from practice and generate professional theories based on reflection in and on continued practice experimentation (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), an approach that would require risk-taking and involve occasional failure.

*I think it helps to do that, (reflect on interventions in the classroom) when you do things like that on your PGCE course you're at such an early stage of teaching and it's very difficult to step back and look at this ...*

The MEP programme provided access to extended professional collegial networks of other BTs and these were seen as key in helping solidify those aspects of their nascent professional identities associated with risk taking and sharing practice.

*I'm much more open now, if something does not work. I'm more willing to accept that and to improve my weaknesses or make changes.*

The extended professional networks also provided BTs with access to an alternative professional learning space beyond the "set regimes" many found within their schools.

*The MEP has allowed me to be open to new practices that I may not have been open to or that the school may not have been open to when they have had set regimes and set teaching methods. The MEP has allowed us to trial new teaching methods, new pedagogies without the fear of failure.*

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<sup>4</sup> PGCE refers to the Post Graduate Certificate in Education which is the qualification most teachers in the UK complete before commencing teaching.

The valuing of professional contacts beyond their schools was a consistent theme within the data. The survey results indicated that the two of the aspects of the Programme that BTs valued most were working with fellow teachers (over 85 percent finding this quite or very helpful) and working with an external mentor (over 90 percent finding this either quite or very helpful) - findings which were consistent with previous research (Poet, Rudd, & Kelly, 2010) that has stressed collaborative learning and collegial interaction as the most valued of professional development opportunities. Collaborative working opportunities within BTs' schools were limited, with less than half, 43.4 percent, experiencing frequent in-school collaboration and only 12.2 percent experiencing frequent collaboration with teachers outside of their school.

**Table 1 here**

The extended collaborative elements of the programme contrasted starkly with the atomization and individualization many of the BTs had experienced in their first years of teaching where opportunities for professional dialogue and collaboration were often limited:

*Very very restricted to time with peers, for example in our setting you rarely really see them out of school... we're like passing ships quite a lot of the time ... So I think that time is not, in my school anyway, there's not a lot of time to discuss with peers things that are actually going on.*

This access to professional, collegial networks solidified these nascent teachers' professional identity and, concomitantly, built their confidence, thus allowing them to take risks, be critical and share practice with colleagues without feeling exposed:

*I'm much more open now, if something does not work. I'm more willing to accept that and to improve my weaknesses or make changes.*

*Yeah I think that like networking is a big thing and you know coming across ... people saying the same as you also like it builds my confidence as well sometimes.*

*The MEP has allowed me to be open to new practices that I may not have been open to or that the school may not have been open to when they have had set regimes and set teaching methods. The MEP has allowed us to trial new teaching methods, new pedagogies without the fear of failure.*

Both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that the most highly regarded element within the Programme were the BTs' external mentors, with 90% of respondents agreeing that their mentor was either quite or very helpful in working through professional difficulties. What distinguishes this finding from previous research on the early years of teaching that have found mentors being similarly valued (Young and Cates, 2010; National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2015) was that in this instance these mentors were 'external' to the BTs' school. The externality of the mentor was fundamental to their role, and BTs' positive view of them, partly because they acted as brokers to the collaborative learning networks discussed earlier but mainly because their relationship with the BTs constituted a bounded and protective space outside the pressures and accountability mechanisms of their schools. These protective spaces re-enforced aspects of occupational professionalism by supporting early career teachers to reflect, be critical of the poor practice they encountered and allowing for the exploration of broader constructions of teaching and practice than many encountered in schools.

The valuing of an alternative space beyond the "set regimes" within the BTs' schools was a consistent theme within the data. Participants recounted that the Programme provided them with both pedagogical approaches and, more importantly, the skills and confidence to evaluate and consider strategies which failed. The building of confidence is essential in animating BTs' "professional capital" especially the third element – decisional capital – which is key to fostering a sense of professional agency (Nolan & Molla, 2017; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). As outlined in the last two extracts above,

the key to developing such professional capitals is the fostering of collaborative and individual inquiry within an environment that creates a space to trial “*new pedagogies without the fear of failure*”, reinforcing BTs’ confidence in their professional practice: This was confirmed by the survey data which indicated that over 80 percent of respondents in the three cohorts of students either agreed or strongly agreed that participation in the MEP Programme had increased their confidence as practitioners.

### ***Externality, accountability and data***

BTs’ appropriation and accommodation of less context-bound and individualized manifestations of teaching as a profession – or in Goodson and Hargreaves’ (2002) words fostering and developing “occupational heteronomy” – was achieved through developing professional networks both inside and outside of the their immediate department, school and sector. This newly created space for professional collaboration made teaching a much less localized activity, allowing BTs to engage with teaching as an occupation with extended social aims (Priestley et al., 2015). The space for fostering occupational professional development away from a restrictive form of contextualised craft-orientated understanding of professional practice was facilitated by access to support and mentoring outside of the school:

*we share resources and it’s great to belong to a core group who have shared experiences and by working with an external mentor she opened doors personally and professionally.*

Table 1 below illustrates that two of the aspects of the Programme that BTs valued most were working with fellow teachers (over 85 percent finding this quite or very helpful) and working with an external mentor (over 90 percent finding this either quite or very helpful).

**Table 1 here**

The valuing of the role of mentors is consistent with the National College for Teaching and Leadership 2015 survey of NQTs (NCTL, 2015) and the work of Young and Cates (2010) on the importance of mentors within the early years of teaching. The role of the external mentor was fundamental as a catalyst for external collaborative learning and for providing a bounded, protective space outside the accountability mechanisms within participants' schools. These spaces facilitated the development of characteristics of occupational professionalism allowing early career teachers to reflect, be critical and explore a broader conception of teaching and practice (as well as experience of the practical tools needed to teach). Ninety percent of respondents agreed that the mentor was either quite or very helpful in working through professional difficulties.

The fact that the mentor was external was of paramount importance to BTs in schools where they perceived themselves to be vulnerable, in the sense of being isolated, and facing extreme accountability pressures:

*Particularly in the kind of departments that I've worked in, in the two schools I've been in were very insular and there are problems which are compounded in the microcosm so getting an external viewpoint and a little bit of sanity has been hugely beneficial.*

*Because I work in a very challenging department so just having somebody a little bit further back to provide some perspective because school is so consuming you would, you do just get ... You get stuck in a bottle don't you?*

The space created by BTs' relationship with their external mentors allowed for dialogue and interactions that were set in stark contrast to those that took place in schools whose cultures were overly influenced by accountability structures. BTs described working in such schools as being "stuck in a bottle" and being "pressured by the system", terms that embodied the felt effects on their agency.

*Having external mentors I could go to them and not feel pressurised by the system I'm in, I didn't feel as though I was ... you know whistle-blowing so to speak but I could confide in them and speak to them about issues I was having. So I feel that was a huge benefit, of having an external mentor.*

The tensions between being held accountable within hierarchical organizational cultures and BTs' engagement with the forms of occupational professionalism that the Programme represented often coalesced around the construction, use and ownership of pupil data. Within the Programme students were not only provided with instruction in the analysis and use of such data but also encouraged to critique its limitations, particularly the notions of causality used to link pupil outcomes with the individual performance of teachers, a central tenet of modern accountability systems. Some schools' reaction to BTs' agentic and critical use of pupil data illustrated how data can be used within organizations in ways which limit the agency of teachers. Many BTs found their requests to have access to 'their' data relating to their teaching and pupils was met with a degree of incredulity by school management, some even found it difficult to access it at all:

*Assignment one was about data analysis and the senior management were like what do you need to know about tracking data, that is a senior management role.*

*And even asking for the data, I felt like when I asked for the data I felt the school was a bit funny, oh why do you want that for you know, why you looking at that for?*

*Yeah it was very difficult to get a meeting with the data manager, very difficult to ... He was only in school at certain times yeah ... Yeah we were emailing all the time and he was making it very difficult for us to go and even have a conversation with him.*

Data can be used to either limit or extend the BTs' sense of occupational professionalism. In schools where data was constructed as being the monopoly of management, beyond the bailiwick of a newly qualified teacher, lack of access to a key cultural resource placed a severe restriction on BTs' agency, which was re-enforced when data was appropriated as a surveillance mechanism within a

hierarchical accountability system. However, when BTs felt that they had ownership of the data – even if they recognized its limitations – they exercised their agency in using it to illustrate that they were realizing organizational objectives and, thus, reinforcing their professional status.

During a series of school-based projects participants were required to utilise school-generated pupil data, supplement it with data generated as part of the project, and discuss the analysis of their project outcomes within the school. The reaction to these projects in some schools highlighted how data was used as a management tool to justify specific interpretations of what constituted the ‘problems’ that needed to be addressed, reinforce implicit and explicit assumptions about their causes, and to close down discussion of how issues could be dealt with and what constituted a worthwhile resolution beyond the simplistic rhetoric of imposed targets. As two participants described data was often used as “*a stick to beat us with*”, rather than as tool to open up a professional dialogue.

*I find that sometimes like the way data is used can be very different ... like they [the school] will look at these scores and then ‘this is what this looks like, and then this is what we should be achieving and then let’s be aspirational’ ... I feel there is two sides to that data and sometimes it’s positive from an individual point of view, or classroom point of view, but then sometimes it’s kind of negative in that it’s used for other means ... I felt, it could take away from what I was doing and almost they were trying to use it as the answer when I was kind of saying ‘but you’re not taking any consideration of the soft data, or the context, or the bigger picture of what I’m trying to achieve long term, you’re just taking a snapshot of right now and saying nothing has been achieved.*

The BTs’ ambivalent and contradictory relationship with data seems to align with what Hardy and Lewis (2016, p,1) categorize as the “doublethink” of data, where data, through its “contradictory and contested logics”, is both “deified and denied”. This resonates with research that questions the logic models often presented in relation to data use as a simple linear causal process where increased access and use of data will lead to improved performance. As Mandinach and Jimerson (2016) argue,

the use of data is a messy, iterative process which requires criticality on the part of the teacher. This is clearly expressed in the excerpt above where the BT explains that what is missing is “the soft data, the context or the long term picture”.

## **Conclusion**

The MEP Programme was, at a policy level, an intervention that aimed to disrupt the process of BTs’ professional identity formation by providing alternative, occupationally-aligned approaches to those experienced within their initial teacher education and the organizationally-driven accountability structures within their own schools. The data suggested that the development of these BTs’ occupational professionalism was achieved through cycles of inquiry; external collaboration; external mentoring; and data ownership. These resources served to foster BTs’ agency and animate their sense of occupational professionalism.

The findings reported here focused on the role and nature of learning and knowledge in respect of defining different forms of professionalism and the use of data. It contrasted the production of warranted assertions around practice (Dewey, 1941) that BTs produced during cycles of inquiry with the dominant types of school-based CPD based upon the utilisation of generic expert knowledge within a techno-rationalist approach to professional practice. Through studying in learning groups facilitated by experienced external practitioners, the BTs were exposed to understandings of professional practice and approaches to teaching which went beyond the organizational imperatives of their schools. The data within this study suggested that where BTs are given opportunities to critique and reflect outside of the organization, as well as through the development of trans-organizational professional networks which foster professional collegiality, their sense of professional agency was emboldened, animated or, drawing on Hoyle (1974) “extended”. As Evetts (2012) illustrates, such agency is a key element within accounts of occupational professionalism.

This increased agency should allow these BTs to accept, reject and/or amend organisational norms around teaching as “choices”, rather than passively accepting their “inevitability” (Biesta et al., 2015, p. 638)- or as Whitty (2008) asserts, reconstitute them as agents, rather than victims of change.

This empowerment is illustrated most clearly in the data “on data” where ownership of data gave BTs both agency in meeting the performance demands of the organization – an essential part of their performance of professionalism – and confidence to contextualize, analyze and critique data.

This evidenced BTs’ awareness that pupil data was a key element within the school’s performative logics, while recognizing that it only represented a limited, decontextualized account of their work.

The contextualization of pupil data by BTs introduced alternative logics, aligned with occupational professionalism, into their professional practice. This management of data developed their agency and sense of occupational professionalism where data was no longer perceived to be a disciplinary management tool.

As the education and professional development of teachers becomes more aligned with organizational objectives and techno-rational solutions, there is a danger that the promotion of the local, immediate concerns of the organization and its understandings of teacher professionalism will further limit teachers’ sense of agency beyond the realization of locally determined targets (Authors, 2016). While the realization of such targets is undoubtedly important they should, as claimed by Sachs (2016) and Day (2017), be one element – not the totality – of teacher professionalism: As Day argued almost two decades ago “professional development is the process by which, alone or with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching” (Day, 1999, p. 4). The professional learning opportunities within the MEP provided BTs with the resources to move beyond organizational professionalism and to accommodate key aspects of a wider occupational professionalism and, concomitantly, engaged them with the wider social and ethical elements of their professional practice. The need for a programme such as the MEP to provide the space and resource to facilitate such accommodations,

the political recognition of the dangers of certain restrictive forms of organisational professionalism that led to its development, and the role played by the resultant professional identities in fostering BTs' sense of agency, has highlighted not only the significance, but also the contested nature of identity formation in this formative stage of teachers' professional development.

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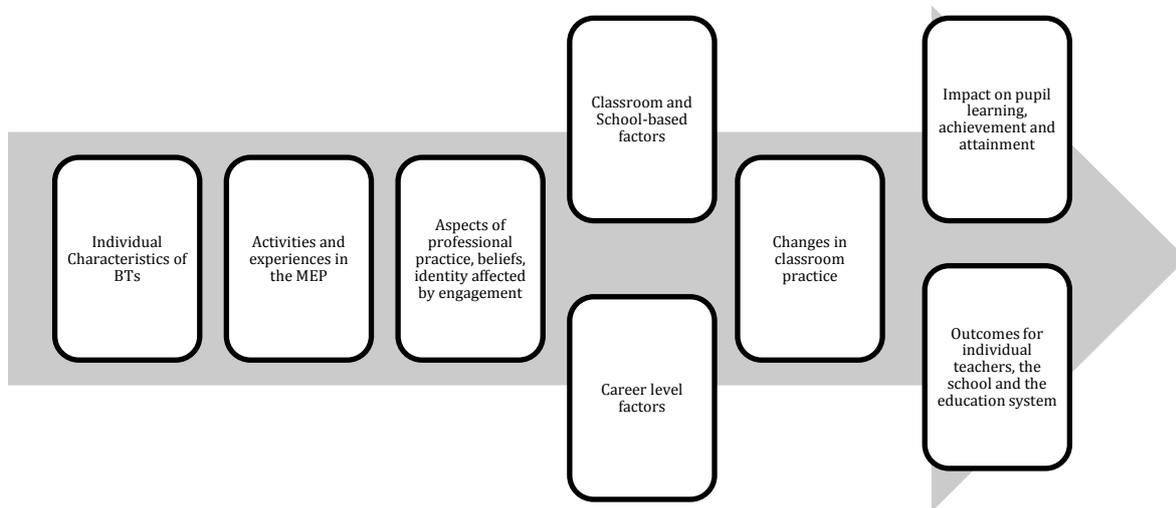


Figure 1 A logic model of the potential impact of the MEP on individual BTs and their schools

**MEP cohort response to the question "The MEP has improved your sense of professional status" (n=662)**

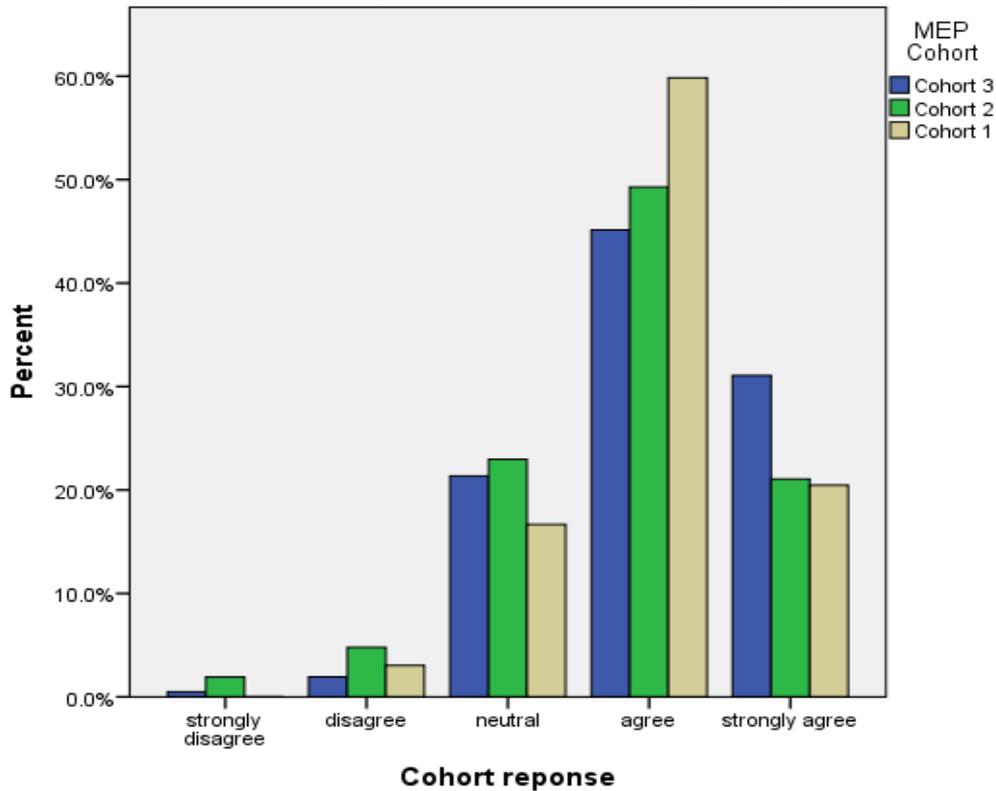


Figure Two: MEP cohort response to the statement: The MEP has improved your sense of professional status.

To what extent have the following elements of the MEP been helpful in improving your practice?	very unhelpful	quite unhelpful	neutral	quite helpful	very helpful
Support / advice from MEP academic tutors	2.0%	1.5%	16.0%	46.4%	34.1%
Online tools (e.g. discussion boards)	4.4%	9.5%	25.3%	44.4%	16.4%
Module materials on Learning Central	1.7%	2.7%	10.3%	49.4%	35.9%
Your professional learning journal	4.7%	11.2%	32.0%	39.1%	13.0%
Learning event days	1.9%	4.6%	13.0%	48.5%	32.1%
Learning from other students on the MEP	1.5%	1.7%	11.7%	47.9%	37.2%
Written assessments	2.9%	5.8%	16.6%	57.9%	16.9%

Working with your current mentor	2.0%	1.5%	5.9%	33.3%	57.3%
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Table One: The perceived impact of participation in MEP programme on participants' practice