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Portraits of Teachers in Landscapes of Schools: Investigating the Role of Teachers in School Change.

Abstract

This paper is concerned with a discussion of the methodology and early stages of fieldwork of a doctoral study entitled ‘The Role of Teachers in Changing Schools’. This explores teachers’ perceptions of their roles, professional identities and experiences of change within their changing organisational settings, in order to investigate the extent to which individuals are involved in shaping their professional contexts and whether such ideas are valued in their schools. This may relate to current policy, specific school cultures and contexts and the individual dispositions of teachers and headteachers. Central to the study are school responses to policy and internal generation of change, considering the nature and extent of teachers’ involvement in this as implementers, initiators and agents of change.

This purpose of this paper is to explain briefly some of the theoretical background to the study, to discuss the development of the methodology, focussed on portraiture, and to summarise some of the key themes emerging from the early stages of data gathering.

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This paper concerns research in progress to investigate the role of teachers in changing schools, including both teachers’ responses to change and their contributions to change. The aims of the study are to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive their roles and professional identities in relation to school change?
2. How do teachers contribute to, and respond to, school change?
3. What organisational conditions, structures and processes support and hinder teachers’ individual agency and their contribution to school improvement?

The research involves participation of twelve teachers, three from each of four schools, who have been identified by their headteachers. Each teacher will meet with the researcher three times during one school year in order to investigate their perceptions of their role and professional identity and their experience in relation to school change. Contextual information about each changing school is being gathered from a range of sources including headteacher interviews. At the time of writing, the research is in the very early stages: 1 pilot teacher interview, 5 teacher interviews and 3 headteacher interviews have been conducted during visits to three of the schools. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the development of the methodology, following a brief discussion of the conceptual background, then to draw out some themes arising from the earliest stages of data collection, concentrating particularly on the teachers’ evidence.

Teacher professionalism and school change

There are many different interpretations of teacher professionalism, located throughout the educational discourse. Researchers have sought to define professionalism by identifying its characteristics, but as Ozga (1995) has suggested, this may have questionable purpose. It is more helpful to choose a starting point that connects immediately with the relationships between professionalism and school improvement that are the focus of the study.

Teaching has been called ‘the activist profession’ (Sachs, 2003), making explicit links with educational change. However, Sachs identified a ‘crisis of legitimacy’, suggesting that teachers had become de-professionalised, with greater pressure and more surveillance leading to stress, demoralisation and disenfranchisement. Bottery (2004) argues that trust in and of the profession has been eroded. Many have argued that teacher professionalism needs to be reframed and rebuilt to give teachers a greater stake and greater influence in organisational change; arguably they should be at the forefront of improvement, not only as implementers of policy but as designers and drivers. Bascia and Hargreaves (2000), considering why educational reform so often fails, suggest that teachers should be “pulled back from the sharp edge of change and moved towards its leading edge – intellectually, emotionally and politically” (p.20). To what extent are teachers actively engaged in change processes, as participants and as leaders, and how is this achieved?

Since the 1970s, the development of teachers’ ‘extended professionalism’ has focussed, for some, on approaches incorporating enquiry, reflection and collaborative...
activity (Stenhouse, 1975; Sachs, 2000; Day, 2004). Teacher action research involves teachers in gathering and using evidence to inform their professional judgement in particular scenarios, and to increase situational understanding more generally, in order to take action for educational improvement (Somekh, 1995; Elliott, 1991). However, although Somekh (1995) emphasises the collaborative aspect of the process and the powerful imperative for improvement, the extent to which this remains focussed on the individual’s classroom rather than on school improvement depends partly on how the research is framed and facilitated and partly on teachers’ perceptions of their role in relation to school improvement (Durrant and Holden, 2006). There is also a danger that in adopting a research stance there is an emphasis on delivering ‘findings’ as opposed to taking action for improvement (Frost, 2007). Enquiry approaches are often referred to in professional development policy, but in practice tend to be linked to particular projects, initiatives and courses, rather than being considered as integral to practice. They tend also to be focussed on individuals’ development of practice or the commitment of a group, rather than being seen as fundamental to organisational development (Durrant and Holden, 2006). While enquiry-based approaches can be extremely powerful in the development of participants and their schools, it is difficult to envisage widespread engagement with action research as a lever for school improvement across the whole teaching profession.

Arguably, a systemic and strategic approach, concerned with *leadership*, is needed to connect teachers with change within their organisations. Teachers’ practice, professionalism and leadership can only be understood collectively; the importance of the political and moral imperative, advocating individual ‘meaning making’ and shared leadership as fundamental to organisational improvement, has long been recognised (e.g. Fullan, 1993; Sergiovanni, 2000). This requires commitment on the part of teachers, headteachers and policymakers to teachers’ capacity and responsibility for school improvement, as well as excellence of classroom practice. It moves further than the designation of specific roles, to a reframing of what it means to be a teacher, encompassing leadership of aspects of organisational development as a dimension of teacher professionalism. This research aims to investigate the extent to which such ideas are recognised and interpreted by the teachers, headteachers and schools participating in the study.

The leadership discourse shows increasing emphasis on distributed or shared leadership, from formal designation of leadership tasks and roles through to leadership as exercised by all teachers (Frost and Harris, 2003). Sergiovanni’s concept of ‘leadership density’ (2000) concerns the total leadership exercised across an organisation, which is held to be more significant than the amount of strong leadership vested in one individual, according with Spillane’s notion that leadership is more powerful when ‘stretched’ over the individuals in an organisation to include both formal and informal leadership roles (Spillane, 2003; Frost and Harris, 2003). However, this might be interpreted managerially, ‘functionally downwards’, a false empowerment of teachers to do as they are told, in order to implement external and/or ‘top-down’ change (Gunter, 2001). Conversely, headteachers might orchestrate teachers’ contribution to a shared vision for improvement, exercising leadership in their own situations to bring this about through ‘conjoint agency’ (Gronn, 2003; Durrant and Holden, 2006). In practice, it is likely to be a combination of both.
The concept of individual human agency illuminates change processes and provides a fresh lens through which to examine teacher professionalism in relation to cultures and processes for organisational improvement. Angus (1993) suggests that those in administrative positions may contribute most powerfully to school reform by facilitating teachers’ agency. This involves building self-efficacy to increase the extent to which people can influence their situations, control events that affect their lives and determine their own actions (Bandura, 1989). Teachers can be involved in influencing their organisations and the wider context through this process of structuration (Elliott, 1991, after Giddens, 1984; Frost and Harris, 2003). Frost (2006) argues that agency is central to the symbiotic relationship between leadership and learning, involving discussion about the moral dilemmas and political choices that individuals have to make. By maintaining a learning focus as Frost suggests, the concept of agency may be central to the development of new understandings of the relationship between teacher professionalism and school improvement. This study explores the extent to which the teacher participants feel a sense of self-efficacy and consider themselves as agents of change in school improvement, investigating whether this is a reflection of the organisational context or a matter of personal disposition. It should be possible then to determine whether there are cultural conditions that support the development of this dimension of professionalism.

**The research design**

Four schools from Kent in South East England, were selected using local knowledge, personal professional contacts, recent inspection reports and school websites to identify ‘moving’ schools according to Stoll and Fink’s (1993) typology. There are, as Stoll notes, different kinds of moving schools, some extremely high performing according to the government’s league tables and some “making tremendous strides in extremely difficult circumstances” (ibid). All are characterised as “effective in ‘value added’ terms and for a broad range of pupil outcomes”, while people in them are “actively working together” with a shared sense of direction and purpose, “to respond to their changing context and to keep developing” (Stoll, 1999:38). The four schools that are the subject of this study are:

- a town primary school (age 4-11)
- a non-selective secondary school (age 11-18)
- a newly formed ‘academy’ on the site of the previous secondary school, amalgamating other local schools (age 11-18)
- a special school for students of all ages with profound, severe and complex learning difficulties (age 4-19).

Following initial correspondence, headteachers were visited and, after explanation of the research, asked to select three teachers from their schools to participate. The intention was not to create any kind of representative sample, but to select and approach three teachers with varying ages, roles and teaching experience, including at least one male and one female. The research to date has borne out the wisdom of using headteachers’ insider understanding to make this purposive selection. Headteachers seem enthusiastic about the research and concerned to facilitate its aims; it is clear that they wish to give access to authentic and balanced evidence within the scope of the study.
Insiders, outsiders and co-construction

The aim of revealing and reporting teachers’ voices, experiences and stories over time and exploring the complex relationships within changing organisational contexts suggested that using a series of ‘standard’ semi-structured interviews with teacher respondents would be too limiting for the purposes of this study. There was opportunity to explore new dimensions in the relationship between ‘researcher’ and ‘researched’, by designing a methodology and employing tools that broke the traditional mould of sets of questions and enabled an element of co-construction.

The problematic nature of the relationship between ‘outsider-researchers’ and ‘insider-practitioners’ has been explored by Elliott (1988), who notes the distinctive assumptions and beliefs associated with each concept, linked to associated research styles. Elliott notes the tensions between theory and practice in which social knowledge is thought to be applied by practitioners but “generated by a research process which is independent of them” (p.155). He suggests that it is more valuable to introduce a degree of democratic negotiation and ownership of the research process and outcomes by participants, enabling them to take up a critical stance within the professional situations and the political ideologies within which they work. This takes some account of the individual agency of the teacher participants, as actors with the researcher, in the investigative process. With this aim, the nature of the phenomena under investigation – teachers’ perceptions of professionalism and organisational change - was considered in more detail, so as to develop an appropriate methodology.

Teachers’ stories

The individual world of teachers is complex; their practice is shaped by many voices and is an expression of multiple realities, selves and minds (Holly, 1989; Somekh, 1995). Holly (1989) contends that ‘outsider’ researchers can be ‘theory-bound’, finding difficulty in interpreting, describing, explaining and understanding experiences and motives, and are in danger of overlooking teachers’ personal theories and cognitive complexity. This study concerns teachers’ multiple perspectives, identities and ‘theories-in-use’, requiring the raising to explicit consciousness of teachers’ tacit knowledge. This may be an emancipatory experience as teachers are supported in theorising freely and creatively around their lived experience, with the potential for creativity and learning through participation in the research. While not deliberately developmental, this dimension must be acknowledged as an intervention, and moves closer to Elliott’s (1988) notion of co-construction as explored earlier. At the same time, careful focussing was required for this study in order to enable exploration of teachers’ roles, identities and experiences in relation to school change, rather than simply developing a freely formed narrative about their lives and work.
Pictures and self-portraits

A set of questions was devised to frame the first encounter with teachers, in traditional semi-structured interview format, but it was felt that this could be enriched in order to explore teachers’ perceptions, roles and identities in relation to school change. There was opportunity to employ creative approaches that might capture participants’ imaginations and take researcher and participants into unexplored territory, embracing both scientific and artistic dimensions of interpretation. In planning these encounters with teachers, it seemed particularly interesting and pertinent to explore the ways in which images and diagrams, as well as verbal stimuli, might open up new possibilities for reflection and dialogue. The set of questions therefore incorporated tools that were inserted at appropriate points having been piloted.

Two studies were particularly helpful in this development: Sachs’ (2007) use of picture postcards to research teachers’ professional development and Stronach’s (2007) report of newly qualified teachers’ use of interesting imagery, including ‘juggling’ and time distortion, in describing their professional experiences. The combination of these ideas prompted the creation of a set of twelve images of circus acts which were tested with groups of teachers in a range of professional development programmes. Teachers were asked the simple question, “With which image do you identify most strongly, in your role as a teacher?” This activity was powerful, fascinating, challenging and sometimes moving; importantly, it seemed to be universally enjoyed. Teachers often portrayed themselves as plate spinners and jugglers. Some chose acrobats and pyramid cyclists. All were able to articulate the reasons at some length and there were often different interpretations of the same image. A picture stimulus seemed to offer opportunities for freedom of thought and expression and prompted deeper and more creative thinking than might be gained from a simple question such as ‘how do you see your role?’ It enabled participants to introduce humour and an element of ‘play’, which seemed to help them to talk about serious issues with less embarrassment. Moreover, it offered a tool that enabled teachers to decide how they would like to portray themselves, in effect a briefly sketched self-portrait. Teachers worked hard at this intellectual challenge and qualified their responses carefully to make their tacit understandings explicit. The set of circus pictures was therefore built into this study, recognising limitations in that it does put images and assumptions into people’s minds, and also remembering to allow space for thinking and explanation.

Two other tools were developed and piloted with groups and individuals. A card sorting exercise comprised statements about professional priorities which could be ranked according to a simple set of criteria: ‘this is central to my work’; ‘this is part of my work’; ‘this is not part of my work’. For ease and speed, this was converted into a grid where teachers could write the rankings (see Appendix 1). Finally, teachers were asked to write words and phrases in circles labelled ‘teaching as it is now’ and ‘teaching as I would like it to be’, in order to explore their personal professional values and aspirations (Appendix 2).

These three tools were incorporated within the sequence of semi-structured interview questions at appropriate points. For the first encounter with teachers, the aim was to establish their perceptions of professional identity, values, priorities and roles and to introduce discussion about school change in general terms, to provide the basis for more detailed discussion about change later in the research.
Although the question of how to investigate the school contexts was still unclear, at this stage of the research design attention turned to planning the methods of analysis and interpretation that would be used to interrogate the qualitative data collected from the twelve teacher participants in order to address the research questions. A balance had to be struck between providing sufficient structure to maintain the focus on teachers’ role in change, while resisting the imposition of rigid external frameworks that might limit the scope of the research, stifle participants’ responses and engagement and constrain analysis and interpretation. A robust, yet empathetic method of presentation and processing of the data was needed, that would enable teachers’ identities and voices to emerge authentically through their dialogue with the researcher.

Towards an ‘authentic’ methodology

Portraiture, as described by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis (1997) in their book ‘The Art and Science of Portraiture’, was immediately appealing as it is about the crossing of boundaries, the navigation of ‘border territory’, the inhabitation of multiple selves, changing roles and identities in transition. These concepts are central to the lives and work of teachers, as discussed earlier (see also Day, 2004). Portraiture is a ‘bridging and balancing’ methodology, countering the problem- and blame-centred analysis prevalent in sociology and the limitations of an academic audience,

…embracing both aesthetics and empiricism, appealing to intellect and emotion, seeking to inform and inspire, and joining the endeavours of documentation, interpretation and intervention.

( ibid, p.xvi).

The authors write of rigorous discipline in art and of creativity and improvisation in research, with a view to capturing not an exact copy, but rather the essence of an image, within a portrait.

The portraiture approach is an attractive proposition for this study, since it offers a way of exploring teachers’ roles as ‘actors’ (significantly this word is used in preference to the more passive ‘subjects’) in the research which itself explores the extent of their agency in their professional contexts, therefore it offers some methodological and conceptual coherence and integrity. Portraiture here is presented as built around semi-structured interviews that scaffold the development of a dialogue with the participants over time, taking additional ‘cues’ from the surrounding context. However, it is the language and ethos of the approach, as portrayed here, which make the method of portraiture most appropriate for the purposes of this study. Its distinctiveness and character can be summarised as follows:

Purpose

Portraiture challenges orthodox research methods and the positivist approach. The researcher aims to find truth in the particular - Simons’ ‘paradox of case study’ (1996) – by capturing the ‘essence’ of people and phenomena – for this study, teachers in their organisational and socio-political settings:
...portraits are designed to capture the richness, complexity and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of those who are negotiating these experiences…

(Lawrence-Lightfoot ad Hoffman Davis, 1997:3)

**Process**

In a reciprocal process, the researcher and participants co-construct the portrait. The process is intentionally generous and transforming and it is recognised that it may instigate change. It is respectful, giving due attention to the participants. It is interventionist in a positive and affirming way.

**Role of the participants**

The researcher listens not to the story, but for the story, taking a rather more active stance than in the ethnographic tradition. The researcher is inevitably included in the portrait and her self within the methodology. Her artistry in the portraiture is acknowledged and made explicit. She is an observer, listener and interpreter, ‘inside’ the work but not a central character, seeking coherence in what she discovers and observes. The teachers and headteachers are also seen as ‘actors’, fully involved in shaping the process and product.

**Audience**

In a further challenge to orthodoxy, the portraitist seeks a wider and more eclectic audience than the academy. Reporting is a creative act, an act of advocacy, seeking to engage, inspire and resonate with a range of different audiences, who negotiate its meaning with a “…vigilance to empirical description and aesthetic expression” (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997:12). The ethics of this method must be carefully attended to in order to preserve the essence of participants' narratives and respect the confidentiality of individuals and schools, while offering something of value to participants in return in the form of understandings and insights gained. Beyond this, the study is relevant to both professional and academic audiences and should also be of interest to policymakers.

**Interpreting interpretations: developing selves and identities**

This methodological approach has the potential to enable the ‘outsider’ researcher to capture teachers’ stories in context and over time as suggested by Holly (1989), working towards representing the way in which individual teachers have interpreted themselves as particular kinds of people within their current contexts (Beijaard et al., 2004). By visiting the teachers on more than one occasion, a deeper and robust interpretation may be possible compared with a snapshot based on one visit, not only because the visit takes place at a particular moment in the teachers’ lives but because the existing relationship with the researcher and awareness and explicit use of her prior knowledge enable exploration of events that have happened in between the visits, gaining some sense of development over time. We know that concepts of self determine the ways in which teachers work, develop and learn and their attitudes towards educational change (Beijaard et al., following e.g Nias, 1989; Knowles, 1992), therefore by repeated visits this development itself may be captured over time.
As perhaps with any form of narrative enquiry, portraiture can be written in such a way as to gain perspectives over time, looking back and forth over events as interpreted by the teacher narrator and triangulating with other accounts and information. This offers rich opportunities to explore and revisit through the interviews what is important to teachers in both their personal and professional lives, drawing this out in the crafting of the portraits to create the essence of people’s professional identity. It also promises a balanced approach in terms of ethical research aims, and may offer opportunities for positive outcomes for participants and their schools: it may nurture relationships, create connections and perhaps contribute to the building of community, with no sacrifice of analytic rigour (Featherstone, 1998, in Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997). The researcher uses participants’ social and cultural context with them, as a “resource for understanding” (p.12). This enables a holistic interpretation, from which authentic portraits of teachers within their organisational contexts can be created and then interrogated to contribute to a central analysis of teacher professionalism and change in relation to the research questions. The researcher’s distinctive role and the values and experience brought to this qualitative process require a particular emphasis on reflexivity in analysis and interpretation, not least because one visit is likely to lead to the researcher having preconceptions on the next visit. The cross-comparison of data from three different teachers and the headteacher along with observations and other evidence about the schools provided a rich triangulation of data. Some of this conflicted so that sometimes it was not possible to make one interpretation, only to present several strands of a story that could never be resolved into one ‘true’ account.
Analysis, interpretation and artistry

The methods used for the processing of evidence must account for the fact that the phenomena under scrutiny are complex and locally or individually constructed in multiple ways. Interpretations are grounded in a growing understanding of the way that relationships and interactions actually happen in practice and how elements are assembled and embedded in organisational patterns, to give authenticity to the development of written portraits of teachers in their contexts, paying systematic and rigorous attention to details of human experience and social activity. Furthermore, the analytic process of the writing of portraits requires a hopeful disposition, a ‘search for goodness’ (Chapman, 2005), seeking strengths rather than digging for deficits:

... there is never a single story – many could be told. So the portraitist is active in selecting the themes that will be used to tell the story, strategic in deciding on the points of focus and emphasis, and creative in defining the sequence and rhythm of the narrative. The effort to reach coherence must flow organically both from the data and from the interpretive witness of the portraitist.

(Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffmann Davis, 1997:12, my italics)

While the aim is to capture the ‘essence’ of people within their settings, the portraitist must be aware of what may be omitted or concealed (English, 2000). Therefore as a researcher working in the interpretive tradition, she must develop a ‘hermeneutically trained mind’, embedding criticality and, reflexivity not through impossible neutrality or ‘self-extinction’, but a “conscious assimilation of ... fore-meanings and prejudices” (Gadamer, 1979:238) to allow the evidence to ‘assert its own truth’. The presence of the researcher – portraitist – as an actor and advocate must be acknowledged. We are led to a deeper understanding of the phenomena in question, through the skill and artistry of the researcher’s unique perspective and expression. This might rely to a considerable extent upon personal insight that could be difficult to replicate (English (2000) even refers to ‘genius’), but this does not render such an approach any less valid as research or reduce scope for reflexivity. Rather, it requires different means of verification, including a transparent discussion of the analytical process and issues arising, to enable the audience to judge the quality of the evidence and interpretation.

The portrait offers one distilled narrative to represent an individual teacher in their professional context, so the story should be understood not as the truth but a truth, drawing together strands of evidence into a coherent story, to be further interpreted by the audience. Criticality within the methodological explanation supports the authenticity of this interpretation. However, in order to reduce reliance on the portraitist’s analysis alone this study also includes use of particular tools in interviews, as already discussed, to support the portraiture. A summary of interpretations will be fed back to participants for their verification and discussion in the final stages of the fieldwork. In relation to the school context, too, it was important to seek wider terms of reference than the researcher’s own observations on visits to the schools.
From portraits to landscapes

In considering how to approach the data collection to depict the organisational context for individual teachers’ portraits, it is important to consider localised contexts (school structure and culture, changing local community) and also the national political context including current policy drivers and initiatives. All visits to the school and encounters with staff and headteachers offer access to information about the changing school over the period of study, but this needed extension beyond the researcher’s subjective commentary and structuring beyond ad-hoc data gathering to ensure a more systematic and balanced approach.

Portraiture of schools is a well established methodology (initiated by Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983), but while the portraiture of individual teachers is a reasonable methodological interpretation of the painting analogy, capturing an organisation’s characteristics and culture seemed to require broader scope and to encompass more layers and variables than a portrait. In order to clarify this distinction between individual accounts and organisational context, so as to examine the relationships and forces within school change more clearly, the notion of ‘portraits of teachers within landscapes of schools’ was developed. While the teacher portraits would be drawn from encounters as described above, following a semi-structured interview format incorporating the additional tools, the organisational complexity of schools required a multi-faceted approach. There was a need to guard against over-reliance on the researcher’s interpretation based on her own observations alone, which might create a ‘circular definition of truth’ in which the account can only be validated by itself (English, 2000). There was also a danger of over-emphasising the headteacher’s perspective. Clearly data from a greater range of sources was needed. The table below summarises the 10 indicators upon which the interpretation of the school’s ‘landscape’ will be based. This has been explained to headteachers and is currently in progress. At this early stage it is already clear that the headteachers are the brokers of much of this information, but the comparisons of observations during visits, the school’s publicity materials and external views from inspection reports and the media, alongside teachers’ narratives, offers substantial opportunities for triangulation and exploration of any discrepancies.

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<td>Headteacher’s perspective</td>
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<td>School improvement plan</td>
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<td>How the school presents itself</td>
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<td>How the school is judged</td>
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<td>Representation in the media</td>
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<td>How the school is observed</td>
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It is worth noting that headteachers have been most valuable informants; the interviews have engaged them in reflection about the changes that their schools have undergone and their testimonies reveal deep professional and emotional commitment to the organisation and members of the school community. This element of the data collection offers understanding of the school’s trajectory and in particular the vision and moral purpose underpinning the change and decision making, the influences and outcomes of which are recounted by the teachers. At the time of writing it seems that headteachers’ accounts, although secondary to the portraits of teachers, will be more prominent in the research than was first thought, since they have offered so many honest insights from their perspective of processes of school change.

Emerging ideas and themes

Despite the overall intention to interpret through portraiture, early analysis of some of the patterns across the series of individual accounts was also undertaken and informed the writing of an earlier paper (Durrant, 2010). This analysis followed initial interviews with just 5 teachers, yet was extremely rich in terms of the insights gained about teachers’ interpretations of the question ‘who am I at this moment’ (Beijaard et al., 2004) and the revelations of their concerns and activities in relation to multiple layers and phases of organisational change with which they were engaging. The intention was not to substitute for the portraits or subvert the individual representations of teachers’ identities and activities, but to inform the development of the methods of analysis within the portraiture and the strands of meaning they had begun to reveal, in order to inform the research in progress. It aided the researcher as portraitist in further search for ‘the story’. The initial analysis comprised:

- Tentative summaries of the emerging data were made in the form of the following:

- Collation of the circus images chosen by teachers, with their comments, examples of which are shown in Figure 1.

- Ranking of role/priority statements from the table in appendix. 1, by adding teachers’ ‘scores’ across all responses. The highest and lowest priority statements are shown in Figure 2.

- Creation of ‘word clouds’ collating responses to the statements ‘teaching as it is now’ and ‘teaching as I would like it to be’, as shown in Figures 3 and 4.

These early summaries, considered in the light of teachers’ narratives, suggested that for this small group of teachers from very different schools and backgrounds, classroom relationships and interactions are in the foreground of their thinking and that some processes, frameworks and structures, particularly related to external accountability, are perceived to interfere or detract from what they see as their core work. For all teachers here, there are tensions between what they feel they should be doing in order to meet children and young people’s (and to a lesser extent colleagues’
needs, what they are required to do, and how their success or ‘performance’ is judged. There is evidence that teachers’ enacted professionalism (as observed, perceived and interpreted) is different from that which is prescribed (envisaged or recommended) and demanded (Evans, 2008). Emerging both from the individual teachers’ narratives and from headteachers’ accounts is evidence of the ways in which demands and prescriptions from internal and external sources are negotiated and enacted, sometimes resulting in tension and in forms of reconciliation. Evan’s interpretation (2008) is again helpful, in identifying

- **ironies of adaptation** – where teachers and heads work round prescriptions and expectations in order to meet pupils’ needs in the local context, and

- **ironies of representation** where teachers and heads represent work to meet accountability requirements.

Worthy of further exploration through the portraiture within its school contexts is the extent to which teachers’ attitudes and dispositions mediate what is presented as functional change. All teachers spoke about the difficulties of achieving this balance and most wanted to have more time to focus on what they considered important: the relationships and learning within their classes and professional community. Broadly summarised, they wanted to have more fun with the children, a more interesting and relevant curriculum, more space for learning and dialogue and more opportunities to support the building of relationships and self-esteem, development of confidence and life skills and the raising of aspirations amongst their students.

In relation to change, all these teachers were involved as implementers, participants, leaders and initiators, including change beyond the classroom, yet did not prioritise the statements related to this in the ranking exercise. There are early indications from the interview data that there is a discontinuity between imposed educational reform and the work teachers feel they need to do in the classroom, particularly with regard to assessment but also in relation to the prescribed curriculum. Several described considerable suspicion of change and ‘initiative overload’ amongst colleagues, but most identified successful changes that they and others had implemented, for which they could see positive outcomes. Essentially, they wanted reassurance that their efforts would reap benefits for the children in the broader terms outlined above, but were not convinced that this was always the case. All were fully committed to maintaining excellent standards of practice and were working hard to develop new approaches to meet students’ changing needs, often *despite* the requirements and pressures of their classroom and leadership roles.

Returning to the theoretical framework for the study, the early data suggested that without exception, teachers are not only participants but leaders in improving learning within and beyond their classrooms and contributing to organisational improvement, but this is not fully and clearly articulated. Tacit knowledge and understanding needs to be drawn out through the dialogue between researcher and participants, as discussed earlier, in order to explore this further. It is not yet clear whether the apparently tacit nature of much of teachers’ knowledge and understanding of their roles in school improvement limits their agency, self-efficacy and the extent to which they are willing and able to exercise leadership and contribute to change. Most evident from the interviews is teachers’ commitment to the learning and development of children and young people, the nurturing of relationships and an ethos of care,
encouragement and participation. Teachers continually sketched their students into the developing portraits. They wanted change to show positive benefits for children and young people and judged initiatives on this basis. All were frustrated when time, energy and resources were diverted from what they saw as their core work.

These early interpretations formed the basis of deeper discussion in later visits to these teachers, and with the teachers in the remaining study schools, as the research progressed.

**Developing portraits**

The process of developing the individual teacher portraits has evolved into a series of stages as follows:

1. Audio-tape and handwritten notes of initial semi-structured interview
2. Detailed note taking from audio tape to inform second visit
3. Audio-tape and handwritten notes from second visit
4. Writing of an individual account comprising narrative from both interviews
5. Development of this writing into a ‘portrait’ being mindful of the research questions focussing on teachers’ interpretations of their professional role and identity in relation to change
6. Checking of this account against the original tapes and with teachers at the third visit, in order to make any necessary amendments of interpretation.

The final two stages of the process are the most challenging, in moving from what is essentially a paraphrased transcript to an interpretation: the portrait is not data that will inform the analysis but has *become* the analysis.

The process of creating the school landscapes has proved to be more subject to circumstances, less controllable by the researcher, but is essentially as follows:

1. Collection of data using the framework on p.10
2. Writing of an individual account comprising this data
3. Development of this writing into a ‘landscape’ that will form the backdrop to the teacher portraits

It is intended that once all the portraits and landscapes are complete, a full meta-analysis will be undertaken using the approaches already trialled, in order to search for patterns and messages within these individual interpretations but they are also intended to stand for themselves as analyses of how teachers see themselves in relation to school change, who they think they are, what they think their work is about and how it has developed over the short period of this study.
References


Judy Durrant. Canterbury Christ Church University, U.K. BERA Annual Conference, University of Warwick, September 2010.


*This document was added to the Education-line collection on 28 March 2011*
### Appendix 1

**Professional priorities tool: card statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Making a difference to children's lives</th>
<th>Sharing my practice</th>
<th>Challenging and shaping organisational structure and culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing shortcomings in my own practice</td>
<td>Being part of a professional community</td>
<td>Getting good test or examination results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building the school community</td>
<td>Cultivating a positive environment for learning</td>
<td>Being an excellent classroom teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing policy</td>
<td>Leading learning</td>
<td>Contributing to current and future society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting effective learning</td>
<td>Helping colleagues to improve their practice</td>
<td>Caring for children's wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making links with the local community</td>
<td>Keeping order in my classroom</td>
<td>Being an effective learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making learning interesting, enjoyable and fun</td>
<td>Evaluating learning and teaching</td>
<td>Meeting school performance targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testing research in my own classroom and school context</td>
<td>Meeting my individual professional targets</td>
<td>Contributing to school improvement planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving my practice</td>
<td>Supporting the head in realising her / his vision</td>
<td>Belonging to a learning community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping up to date with subject knowledge</td>
<td>Investigating my practice</td>
<td>Applying findings of educational research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on my practice</td>
<td>Contributing to knowledge of learning and teaching</td>
<td>Taking a leadership role in relation to the curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a role model for pupils</td>
<td>Taking a pastoral leadership role</td>
<td>Supporting development of children’s self-esteem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rank: 1 = central to my practice; 2 = part of my practice; 3 = not part of my practice
Appendix 2

Professional values tool: teaching as it is now and as I would like it to be

‘Write any words or phrases that come to mind…..’

![Diagram with circles labeled "teaching as it is now" and "teaching as I would like it to be".]