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## Defining Professional Self: Teacher Educator Perspectives of the Pre-ECR Journey.

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## **Defining Professional Self: Teacher Educator Perspectives of the Pre-ECR Journey.**

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*Abstract: This paper examines the situations of four teacher educators working within academic contexts, but who do not as yet qualify as early career researchers (ECRs) by definition. Within this paper, we define this group as 'pre-ECRs'; those working and teaching within contexts of academia whilst undertaking a PhD or similar higher education qualification. Critical comparative analysis is used to examine the nexus between what is currently known about becoming an ECR and narrative accounts of the authors' experiences of negotiating Faculty expectations for research output, teaching and postgraduate study. This approach provides rich insight into what happens prior to and during the initial stages of what we define as the pre-ECR journey. Through the examination of our storied experiences within the context of the existing body of knowledge, the implications of not being able to locate ourselves within a distinctive and appropriate professional identity become apparent. This paper offers a unique insight as it is researched from the perspectives of four pre-ECRs working within an Australian University Faculty of Education. This is valuable given that current research around ECRs provides minimal insight into experiences and challenges unique to those working toward ECR status*

### **Introduction**

This paper explores the journey of four teacher educators working towards becoming Early Career Researchers (ECR) within an Australian Faculty of Education context. In doing so, we investigate what happens prior to and during the initial stages of embarking upon the ECR journey. The development of neophyte researcher identity and practice constitutes an emerging field of study “with an identity that is still evolving” (Tight, 2008, p. 596). This paper contributes to this emerging field of study by defining a distinct sub-field reflecting those people who do not as yet qualify as ECRs, but are either in the process of, or contemplating working towards, ECR status by engaging in higher education research.

A range of studies into early career researcher identity and practice have identified and defined the work they engage in. Emerging as significant within these studies is where and how ECRs undertake their work, and various factors that contribute to shaping their construction of productive and healthy research identity and practice post PhD qualification (Akerlind, 2007; Baguley, 2009; Beck & Young, 2005; Berrell, 1998; Harrison & McKeon, 2010; Laudel & Glaser, 2008; Murray & Male, 2005, Tight, 2008). Within these studies, emphasis is usually placed upon what happens post PhD, rather than prior to or during.

Although some insights into the challenges faced by ECRs in the negotiation of professional identity and practice is relevant to those working toward ECR status, essential detail is lacking in regard to what happens prior to qualifying as an ECR. As such, these studies are mentioned within this paper primarily to assist us in demonstrating the specific differences between those who qualify by definition as ECRs, and those who are at the very beginning of the ECR journey; still working towards ECR status.

As four pre-ECRs working toward establishing identities and developing our practices as researchers, we highlight the implications of not being able to locate ourselves within a professional academic identity or category. In doing so, we extrapolate how this inhibited and/or contributed to shaping our emerging professional identity in scholarship and research within an Australian University teacher education context. This research expands upon previous research exploring the development of professional self-efficacy and capacity to embrace shifting professional identity as experienced by early career academics (see Boyd, Harris & Murray, 2011; Jarvis et al., 2012). We offer insight into our perceptions and experiences of working within a culture of expectations to perform at the levels of research output and productivity of ECRs and/or more experienced colleagues.

To further emphasise the exploratory aspects of this emerging area of research, partially explored territories of researcher development have been described as constituting a space within which a “variety of tribes traverse” (Tight, 2008, p. 596). This description indicates the perceived complexity of negotiating the terrain toward becoming an ECR. In light of this metaphoric concept of the ‘territories or tribes’ inherent to developing researcher practice and identity, this paper elicits how and why four teacher educators working towards establishing practices and identities as researchers came to define ourselves as a distinct ‘tribe’ of ‘pre-ECRs’. Within this paper, we present critical discussion of our experiences as neophyte researchers and teacher educators negotiating the challenge of fulfilling expectations for research, whilst making the transition from classroom to a teacher education context. In doing so, we highlight the implications that locating ourselves within the distinct pre-ECR ‘tribe’ had upon our self-efficacy as we renegotiated our professional identity as teachers. The implications of feeling appropriately defined in our positions and situations as neophyte researchers working in our University Faculty of Education context are also made explicit.

## Context

The initial conversation for this paper revealed our shared perception of a lack of access to information and resources that could help guide us as we embarked upon, or considering engaging in research. It is evident that expectations exist for teacher educators to not just be “smart consumers of research,” (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 224); they must also be able to “conduct research in relation to their own professional experiences and programs” (Celik, 2011, p. 82). It is similarly evident that for those teachers transitioning into teacher education contexts, there is often limited opportunity for learning how to conduct research beyond what is essentially learnt ‘on the job’ through trial and error. Murray (2008) suggests that limited guidance and structure for those teachers learning to navigate the expectations and skills inherent to teacher education “raises concerns about the consistency, quality and nature of induction provisions in teacher education” (Murray, 2008, p.117). Further research that details how teacher educators might conduct themselves to meet the expectations of contributing to their respective fields by carrying out and publishing research is therefore essential.

It was our discussion and sharing of the challenges inherent to our experiences of approaching research that sparked the idea for this exploratory paper. Within this paper, we detail our individual and shared processes of how we came to define ourselves as pre-ECRs

whilst working as teacher educators within an Australian University Faculty of Education. This offers a unique perspective of *becoming* an ECR, as previous research around ECRs provides less focus upon experiences and challenges unique to those working *toward* ECR status, and has been conducted by either early career or established researchers (Harrison & McKeon, 2010; Laudel & Glaser, 2008; Murray & Male, 2005). We each represent different education specialisations, have previously taught in schools and are at varying stages of the pre-ECR journey; Abbey specialises in Visual Arts Education and is in the final year of her PhD; Vaughan works within a Health and Physical Education context and has recently commenced a PhD, and Robyn has just passed the first year point of PhD candidature, specialising in creativity and resilience in teacher education. Vaughan and Robyn currently hold positions as lecturers, whilst Abbey tutors sessionally. During the course of writing this paper, Fiona was contemplating PhD enrolment, but decided to return to teaching dance within a secondary school context, and to increase focus upon her own creative dance practice. It is worth noting as part of the research context that six people from within our Faculty of Education context were initially approached to contribute. The six people fit within the pre-ECR profile of not having completed a PhD, but who were expected to teach, engage in research and at some point, obtain the necessary pre-requisites to enrol in a PhD. One of the two who declined explained that she was unable to contribute due to work commitments and lack of time; the other did not reply to the invitation and has since left the Faculty, returning to work as a secondary classroom teacher.

All four of us have been employed on short term 'teaching intensive' contracts, between six months and three years that consist of 60 per cent time allocation for teaching, 20 per cent for administration, and 20 per cent for research. Within these teaching intensive contracts, it is relevant to note that there was not an explicit target for how much or what kind of research we were expected to produce; however, we were all encouraged to engage in research, with emphasis being placed upon our working towards the completion of Doctoral research. This correlates with much of the research that highlights implicit expectations for neophyte teacher educators to contribute to scholarship and research towards the development of teachers and teaching (Boyd, Harris & Murray, 2007; Murray & Male, 2005; Swennen, Shagrir & Cooper, 2008). Each of us noted implicit expectations and being encouraged to contribute towards and produce research, whether this was collaboratively with other established researchers or our own pursuit of scholarship, such as enrolling in Research Higher Degrees as part of our individual professional development as teacher educators. We each had performance managers who were people of established research and teaching positions working within the Faculty. These performance managers sought to ensure that we each had goals in place that reflected the University's intention of developing "highly performing staff, a highly performing University and the creation of an environment in which the potential of employees can be maximised" (University of Tasmania, 2010, p. 33). With our performance managers, we each negotiated targets for research output and our performance in this area was an integral part of our annual performance reviews, which in turn informed ongoing contract negotiation and renewal.

Interestingly, our review of literature failed to uncover any research about becoming an ECR that was specifically undertaken by and representative of the perspectives of those currently in the process of becoming ECRs. Hence, this paper offers a unique contribution to the field of expanding ECR research as it is experienced, perceived and in turn presented, by pre-ECRs working towards ECR status. Our storied experiences of deciding to [or not to] embark upon the ECR journey and; once committed, how we approached the challenge of negotiating indistinct professional identity amidst expectations of research and teaching, provide rich insights into what happens during the preliminary stages of becoming an ECR.

## Theoretical Background

Many classroom teachers transition into teacher education contexts with little or very limited experience in research (Swennen et al., 2008), let alone being within the first five to seven years post Doctorate qualification, that is expected of ECRs (Australian Research Council, 2007; Bazeley, 2003). The scenario of classroom teachers transitioning into teacher education with limited experience in research practice emerges from multiple studies, including studies from the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden and Australia (Arremen, 2005; Baguley, 2009; Harrison & McKeon, 2010; Murray & Male, 2005; Sikes, 2006; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Swennen et al., 2008). These studies each highlight either an implicit or explicit expectation for neophyte teacher educators to contribute to research regardless of their propensity or existing capacity to do so. Livingston et al., (2008) emphasise that “a research-oriented investigative approach should become a way of working for all teacher educators” (p. 193). Such expectations - for teacher educators to be producers of teaching and education scholarship and research - further highlights a distinct difference between teacher education and classroom teaching professional contexts (Robinson & McMillan, 2006).

Murray (2008) defines teacher educators as “teachers of teachers, engaged in the induction and professional learning of future teachers through pre-service courses and/or the further development of serving teachers” (p. 29). The further development of teacher education and practice is, as Livingston et al., (2008) note, often informed by research conducted in tertiary teacher education and academic contexts. This can be problematic for neophyte teacher educators who rarely enter into teacher education teaching contexts with experience in research. Existing research on teachers who move into teacher education has shown that this transition is often experienced as stressful as they grapple with establishing new professional identities as teachers of teachers, develop new areas of expertise and fulfil expectations to engage in and produce research (Gourlay, 2011; Jarvis et al., 2012; Murray & Male, 2005; Swennen et al., 2008).

Within the professional context of Australian teacher education, those people who are considering becoming a teacher educator have often worked previously within education and school contexts. In making the transition from primary or secondary school to Australian teacher education contexts, engagement in and production of research that informs and is informed by teacher education and/or teaching practice becomes an expectation, whether it be implicit or explicit (Akerlind, 2007). This Australian scenario of expectations to engage in research is comparable to Arremen’s (2005, p. 230) study, where she explored the beginning teacher educator experience of practitioners working within Sweden and found that beginning teacher educators often feel pressured to engage in research as “a means of providing theoretical underpinnings for their professional development and practice”.

Many new University staff are appointed on short term or probationary contracts of two or three years, and negotiate clear performance targets during this time. Murray and Male (2005) state that many staff struggle with these targets as they spend the majority of this time trying to understand and/or establish their new professional identities. Postmodern perspectives of identity construction recognise fragmentation, fluidity and the transitory (Henkel, 2005; Hickman, 2010) as being integral parts of the identity negotiation and development experience. Within this perspective of identity construction, working towards a rigid or fixed identity is avoided in order to remain open and receptive to change and development. Being able to maintain subjectivity whilst re-constructing aspects of identity is noted by O’Sullivan (2002) as significant to negotiating change implementation, such as experienced by those teachers transitioning from classroom to teacher educator professional contexts. Baguley’s (2009) study into the evolution of her own professional identity as a researcher highlights how “identity is about having a sense of belonging and knowing what you have in common with some people and what separates you from others” (p.1). This

reinforces the point that knowing where you fit within your own professional ‘landscape’ is an important part of successfully coming to terms with new positions and transitions. Social constructivist views of identity construction also embrace the notion that identity is fluid and contextually constructed, whether consciously or not (Graham & Phelps, 2003; Webb, 2005). Harrison and McKeon (2010) note that school teachers who are appointed as University lecturers are expected to be effective teachers and facilitators of learning for pre-service teachers, as well as furthering the knowledge base of their field through engagement in various forms and levels of research. What this implies is that teacher educators are required to deal with the complex role of not only teaching student teachers, but also practicing what they preach through engagement with and production of knowledge (Celik, 2011; Ducharme, 1993). This dual expectation constitutes a particularly complex challenge for those making the transition from school classroom to teacher education contexts whilst negotiating expectations to engage in and perform as researchers.

Interestingly, within a teacher education context those who are learning to teach are often identified as ‘pre-service teachers’, denoting the fact that they are undergoing a process of learning. What this recognises is that pre-service teachers have the opportunity to “put values and beliefs into practice...to make real decisions about how to teach based on [evolving] professional knowledge” (Churchill et al., 2011, p. 15). With the ‘pre-service’ tag comes an acknowledgement and understanding that the teacher is still learning and testing the solidity of their evolving professional knowledge. It is quite the paradox that within a tertiary teacher education context, teachers who are negotiating this transition in teaching context whilst establishing researcher identity and practice, may not be granted such a liberty as they themselves learn how to become researchers.

Of particular significance to this study is the ways in which might conceptualise or ‘map’ the journey to becoming a researcher. The 2007 study conducted by Laudel and Glaser (2008) provided a framework through which we can see four clear stages of progression from novice to accomplished researcher. These stages are:

1. An apprentice, who learns to conduct research while working under the direction of others;
2. A colleague, who conducts independent research and contributes to the knowledge of their community;
3. A master, who is a colleague who additionally acts as a mentor for apprentices; and
4. A member of the elite who shapes the direction of the knowledge production of their community.

In this exploratory paper, the first stage is applicable as none of the participants have as yet completed their PhD ‘apprenticeship’. Akerlind (2007) states that this ‘apprenticeship’ period occurs during the early stages of a research career such as when doing a PhD, and involves academics developing confidence as researchers. This development may involve gaining a clear idea of what research direction to follow in the future as well as acquiring the skills required to do research successfully. These skills include learning how best to choose a research topic, writing journal articles and preparing conference presentations. Development in this period involves both the advancement of these skills and also an increased confidence in research choices. We recognise our own situations and positions as fitting within this ‘apprenticeship’ period, however we felt to identify ourselves as such was contradictory to the professional expectations of teacher educators. Although ‘apprentice’ appropriately reflects our novice status as researchers, teacher educators are expected to “provide leadership at the local, state, national, and international levels in developing, implementing, and evaluating theory and practice for high-quality education” (Celik, 2011, p. 84).

Neophyte teacher educators’ feelings of insecurity and uncertainty around their perceived capacity to fulfil the research expectations placed upon them are evident in much research (Acker, 1996; Ducharme, 1993; Hatt, 1997; Murray & Male, 2005; Nicol, 1997; Sinkinson, 1997). This appears to be in part due to working within expectations and standards

of performance that appear neither clear nor appropriate for neophyte researchers. A participant in Murray and Male's (2005) study speaks of his perceptions of [research] inadequacy, where despite his extensive practical knowledge of schools he states, "I don't have any kind of research record, so to some I'm just a waste of space" (Murray & Male, 2005, p.133). The participant's perceptions are indicative of Day et al., (2006) research into identity construction, where they describe identity as being only certain in its' uncertainty, where "at particular times during life, career and organisational phases, it may be discontinuous, fragmented and subject to turbulence and change in the continuing struggle to construct and sustain stability" (p. 613). Lee and Boud's (2003, p. 188) study of researcher development as practice also highlighted how participant teacher educator identity was both formed and informed or "forged, rehearsed and remade" as school teachers made the transition from classroom teaching to teacher educator and researcher.

Aside from some niche aspects of Laudel and Glaser's (2008) research, we could not find any literature that attempts to define the identity and inherent behaviours and practice unique to those in the very early stages of embarking upon the ECR journey, nor does any of the research denote that it has been conducted *by* those within the actual situations [the apprentices]. As this research is being conducted by pre-ECRs either in or contemplating the 'apprenticeship', we offer rich, raw and immediate insights into experiences that might better resonate with and assist those within similar situations. The notion of the 'apprentice' (those enrolled in a PhD or conducting similar research under guidance) most closely aligns with our own four stories and situations as pre-ECRs. It should be noted that the term 'pre-ECR' best resonated with the four researchers due to the parallels we could draw [or wished to draw] between our own situation of learning to research, and the pre-service teachers we were teaching.

## Methodology

This paper is both constructed from and representative of the experiences and motivations of four pre-ECRs working within the context of education academia whilst still engaged in, or considering embarking upon the 'apprenticeship' (Akerlind, 2007; Laudel & Glaser, 2008) of a PhD. In this sense, this paper is reflective of our experiences of and perceptions as both the investigators and the investigated. It was an important decision methodologically to choose an approach that would best allow our experience (or inexperience) to emerge and become transparent. The small sample size our four perspectives constitute is not without its purpose. Other studies constituting an equally small sample size of participants have been used to collaboratively explore specific aspects of the development of professional identity for early academics. Such small sample sizes are purported as allowing for greater depth of and increased access to insights through the intimacy of a close community (Jarvis et al., 2012). Given our intention to generate insights into the unfolding journey toward ECR status, this exploratory paper provides a foundation upon which further substantial research into the intellectual and practical supports identified as required within our pre-ECR context can be pursued. We used a critical event narrative analysis approach (Carillo & Baguley, 2011; Webster & Mertova, 2007; Woods, 1993) to realise this.

Through the examination of our critical events, we explored our unique experiences as pre-ECRs, and the transformative experiences that shaped how we came to perceive ourselves as embracing this distinct identity within our Faculty of Education context. Within the context of narrative investigation, Woods (1993) describes a critical event as having the "right mix of ingredients at the right time and in the right context" (p. 102) to profoundly impact upon the person behind the story. In doing so, we highlight the critical motivations, challenges, fears and accomplishments inherent to our unique and entwined experiences of being pre-ECRs. Critical event analysis provided an appropriate theoretical underpinning

through which we could interrogate our experiences, as it allowed us to retrospectively identify and elucidate significant moments and incidents that occurred for us as we evolved our professional research identities and practices.

This decision to examine our own experiences as pre-ECRs is reflective of what Bochner and Ellis (2002) describe as “deploying our own experiences to bend back on the self and look more deeply at self-other interactions”(p. 740). The ways in which we, the authors of this paper, constituted both researcher and researched through the collaborative crafting, sharing and critical analyses of our narratives is highly appropriate for examining people’s lives and the issues therein holistically (Daite & Lightfoot 2004). In the case of this paper, our narratives, which were constructed in response to five guiding questions, constituted these life texts. Discussion of our critical events were unfolded within a framework of research questions that underpinned this paper. These questions included:

- What has led you to here and now? (being an ‘academic’ in the Faculty of Education)
- What are some of the struggles/challenges/barriers you are finding thus far on your research journey?
- What successes/positive experiences have you had within your research/postgraduate research journey thus far?
- What is fuelling your motivation to do research?
- What are your attitudes/perceptions towards research and expectations associated with research?

These questions were appropriated in light of comparable research conducted by Murray and Male (2005) and Harrison and McKeon (2010), where similar questions were used to elicit and explore the experiences of ECRs. These questions provided a framework for our narratives, from which we then identified the events we deemed to be critical to shaping our becoming and being pre-ECRs in our Faculty of Education context.

We allowed ourselves six weeks to respond to these questions during the latter part of our second semester, between teaching, marking and studying. This process saw us identifying the events we deemed to be critical whilst we were immersed in the context (Hatch, 2002). Upon the conclusion of this six week writing period, we collated our individual responses into a single document for group sharing, where we familiarised ourselves with the stories of our critical events. During this time, we considered and made notes regarding our perceptions of attitudes, perspectives and experiences therein. This saw us engage in a process of identifying and considering themes emergent within our critical events. The significance of themes was determined in consideration of the prevalence and noteworthy impact they had upon our reading of the stories (Bohl, 1995; Carillo & Baguley, 2011). This process allowed us to identify several overarching prevalent themes pertinent to our shared ‘how and why’ (Polkinghorne, 1995; Saldana, 2009) of both choosing to become, and our experiences of embarking upon the journey towards ECR status. For this first paper, we have refined our collective identified themes down to what we determined to be the most appropriate for introducing our unpacking of what we describe as pre-ECR identity.

Once we had agreed upon the four themes for discussion, we began shaping our paper, sharing the tasks of writing, reading and redrafting between, where we could add to, validate and strengthen analysis of and between our stories and critical review of literature. The four themes that emerged as critical within our narratives provided the basis of our analysis, where we drew comparisons between what was already known, and what our experiences and perceptions further revealed about the existing body of knowledge. The four themes that emerged as critical during this formative stage of our research into pre-ECR identity and practice were identity, transition, challenge and time. As pre-ECRs, this research initiative allowed us to identify and strengthen links between our individual and shared specialisations, situations, experiences and motivations. In looking for and exploring the criticality of events that shaped our journeys to becoming and being pre-ECRs, critical event



analysis provided an appropriate lens through which we were able to identify significant insights emerging from the re-living and re-telling of our shared and unique experiences.

### **Analysis and Discussion- Perspectives of Becoming an ECR**

Our critical events indicated that we all came to work within our Faculty of Education for similar reasons. These reasons revolved primarily around our desire for a new challenge, and we each perceived the opportunity to teach adults and help pre-service teachers learn how to teach as being both appropriately challenging and appealing. Our narratives elicit insight into the motives, perceptions and experiences that drove us towards becoming ECRs, and the challenges we faced in doing so. As such, we acknowledge that our critical events and our perceptions of what counts as research are unique to our own situational contexts, and as such we do not attest to speak for the experiences of others (Unrath & Kerridge, 2009). The discussion we offer provides a place where collective perspectives can converge, within which we have the capacity to construct multiple and divergent interpretations (Barone & Eisner, 2012). In this way, we acknowledge how “the self does not exist in isolation” (Griffin, 1999, p. 51), and that knowing the self requires us to enter into social processes where we can explore becoming through the shaping and sharing of our stories.

Contextual extracts from our critical event narratives are interwoven into our discussion to facilitate personal connection with the insights we present. We differentiate our narrative extracts from the main body of text with *italics*.

### **Identity**

Issues pertaining to our embracing of a particular professional academic identity arose as a significant shared theme. We experienced both conflict and uncertainty in trying to realise identities as ECRs, and our perceptions of learned skills, philosophies, and beliefs of and as teachers were challenged. Uncertainty around where we ‘fit’ in beginning the ECR journey within our professional academic landscape was the cause of angst and had implications for both our professional and personal self-efficacy. Abbey stated that she did not feel like or consider herself in any way an academic. She described feeling awkward and in genuine when people around her said “*oh, so you’re an academic now*”, because she was aware that she did not by definition qualify as an ECR, and she perceived this researcher identity as an integral part of being an academic. Robyn went further in saying she *often felt like a fraud* [in becoming an academic], and subsequently felt she *didn’t belong in the academic environment at all*. We collectively agreed that the challenge of meeting expectations of being ECRs in our Faculty had critical implications in regard to our attitudes towards academic identity. Our collective experiences reflect confusion in regard to how we perceived our new professional identities as teacher educators, and that this confusion was critical to contributing to a conflicted sense of professional self. The angst and uncertainty that came with feeling we did not fit into an ECR identity within our academic landscape affected both our personal and professional self-efficacy, especially our existing teacher identities and our evolving researcher identities. As such, our experiences indicate the uncertainty we experienced in transitioning from the classroom to our academic landscape was critical in leading us to be confused and doubt our identities, as well as leaving us feeling generally inadequate (Sikes, 2006). We agreed that our transitioning from the classroom to a teacher education context, and navigating the expectations inherent to this transition, posed a critical challenge for us in regard to how we perceived ourselves as academics.

## Transition

Our experiences of transitioning from the classroom to our Faculty of Education context, and the subsequent renegotiation of the performance expectations inherent to this transition was something that we found particularly challenging, especially the requirement for us to become active contributors to and producers of research. The limited experience in research practice that classroom teachers bring with them into teacher education contexts has been extensively reported (see Arremen, 2005; Baguley, 2009; Harrison & McKeon, 2010; Murray & Male, 2005; Sikes, 2006; Robinson & McMillan, 2006; Swennen et al., 2008). Although the transition from classroom to teacher educator context has been acknowledged as a stressful experience (Gourlay, 2011; Jarvis et al., 2012; Murray & Male, 2005; Swennen et al., 2008), what is lacking in these studies is the specific implications this research inexperience has in regard to classroom teachers' capacity to successfully enact transition of professional identity and practice.

Although we were initially attracted to and excited by the notion of research inherent to our new work as teacher educators, we found limited support was available to help us get started 'on the path' to doing research. Critical to our transitioning to becoming researchers was an absence of expectations that appropriately acknowledged and catered for our inexperience as researchers. Abbey and Robyn both spoke of being *very interested and excited by the possibilities* of engaging in research that came with being teacher educators, however we agreed that *knowing how to do research and where to start* posed a critical challenge for us. We felt that our capacity to meet this challenge was exacerbated by the distraction of negotiating the transition from classroom teaching to teacher education, which required significant shifts in our own approaches to pedagogy and understanding of the requirements of our new teaching context. The attention required to effectively facilitate this assimilation subsequently impacted upon our capacity to manage other important performance demands that came with working in our teacher education context.

Vaughan found it *challenging to transition from teaching in a school*, where he was at the same level as most of his former teacher colleagues, to University where most of his colleagues were at a more senior level than him, particularly in terms of research practice and identity. In our new roles as teacher educators, we were disheartened by the indifference our achievements as classroom teachers received, and that our capacity to deliver quality teaching was not as valuable as the research output we could deliver. Although we were all employed primarily to teach, the perception that our research output was of more value to the decision of whether we were offered further contracts added considerable stress to our lives.

Critical to our becoming teacher educators and embracing identities as researchers was the perception that we were transitioning toward identities and practices we did not qualify for. We did not meet the five to seven year post PhD requirements that define early career researchers (Australian Research Council, 2007; Bazeley, 2003), and we experienced difficulty working to the standard of research performance that came with having completed the PhD research 'apprenticeship' that defines early career research (Akerlind, 2007; Laudel & Glaser, 2008). We determined that the difficulty of managing pressures to perform beyond our capabilities as neophyte researchers to be of critical influence to how successfully we negotiated the transition to working within our teacher education context. Further to this, our experiences indicate that not being able to locate ourselves within a particular professional identity inhibited our ability to establish any sense of professional belonging. The uncertainty we experienced around perceptions of belonging (or not belonging) is characteristic of what Henkel (2005) and Hickman (2010) describe as identity fragmentation, and we found this to negatively impact upon our capacity to develop professional identities and practices as researchers and teacher educators. Vaughan found that *not knowing things and not wanting to ask questions for fear of appearing stupid, especially when everyone else was so busy* did

little to cultivate his professional self-efficacy. Abbey also commented on the frustration of feeling at times *inadequate, useless and so unprepared*. We agreed that our shared perceptions of self-doubt, which varied from moderate through to extreme, posed a critical obstacle to our successful transitioning into the professional academic context of our Faculty of Education. We each agreed with Vaughan's sentiments that feelings of *being squeezed to fit within the category of ECR, and struggling to meet the expectations and practices inherent to being an ECR* undoubtedly contributed to this.

It is evident that our awareness of not yet qualifying as ECRs constituted a primary source of our confusion and displacement, and the pressure we felt to perform as such adversely influenced our ability to develop positive professional identity. Exploration of our critical events allowed us to extrapolate the implications of what Swennen et al., (2008) describe as the limited experience in research that classroom teachers typically bring to the teacher education context. What our experiences indicate is the criticality that disparity between expectations of and capacity to engage in and produce research had in regard to how we enacted the transition from classroom to teacher educator identity and practice. If, as suggested by Livingston et al., (2008), research-oriented investigative approaches are to become a way of working for all teacher educators, our experiences emphasise the criticality of our being appropriately supported to develop skills in and through research whilst transitioning into our Faculty of Education context.

## Challenge

Challenge was deemed critical in how we perceived the journey to becoming ECRs, and had both positive and negative implications for how we approached and engaged in research. Vaughan commented that he found it challenging to simultaneously do both teaching and research, and that this was a challenge of negative implications. He described the difficulty of *moving from a headspace of preparing, teaching and marking to one of study and research, often on the same day and with different topics* as critically impacting how he perceived his performance as a researcher and teacher educator in a negative light. Abbey and Robyn experienced similar difficulties and described the challenges of *finding the 'right' headspace* that was conducive to approaching research. In this way, our experiences reflect what Murray and Male (2005) describe as the importance of a free mind, time and space in order to think more deeply and purposefully about research. The challenges teacher educators face in managing time, or lack thereof, is already recognised as "a perennial and internationally recognised problem" (Swabey, Castleton & Penney, 2010, p. 31), and we observed within our Faculty that this challenge did not discriminate between depth of experience and individual capability to produce research. For us, an obvious challenge was realising the unlikelihood of opportunities for freedom of mind, time and space to present themselves, which led us to realising what Abbey described as *no short cut or easy ride to becoming a researcher*. As such, we agreed that our attitudes towards how we perceived and approached challenges as pre-ECRs became critical to our success in overcoming them.

As tutors and lecturers within our Faculty of Education context, the expectation to be effective teachers and facilitators of learning for pre-service teachers, as well as furthering the knowledge base of our field through engagement in various forms and levels of research posed a complex challenge. However, our situational experiences are echoed in other examples of research where Celik (2011) and Ducharme (1993) describe teacher educators as being expected to deal with the complex role of not only teaching student teachers, but also 'practicing what they preach' through the production of knowledge. As pre-ECRs, we found this dual expectation as especially problematic whilst attending to transitioning our professional practices as teachers, and the confusion of navigating an ambiguous and uncertain professional identity. In this way, our experiences in negotiating the challenges of

becoming researchers in our Faculty of Education context emerged as critical to how we approached the journey to becoming ECRs. In writing this paper, we were able to collaboratively explore and then document ways in which we negotiated challenges associated with our transitioning to teacher education, identity ambiguity, professional belonging and becoming researchers.

Vaughan described the collaborative opportunities that writing this paper provided as being especially valuable in helping him realise he was *not the only person struggling*, and that *there was real power in just knowing he was not isolated in this situation*. Although the fruition of this paper posed an added challenge concurrent to the other demands of our positions, we agreed that the exercise reflected a meaningful research endeavour. We agreed that our preparedness to be proactive and explore the implications of our inexperience allowed us to share, support and help each other make greater sense of our unique and shared experiences as pre-ECRs. As pre-ECRs, we determined our capacity to take responsibility for our own learning as critical to helping us realise the ways in which we could better understand our positions of inexperience. In doing so, we were also able to identify and take advantage of a unique opportunity to contribute to an emerging body of research. As such, the challenge of developing this paper created an opportunity for us to explore and ‘flesh out’ our identity as pre-ECRs, whilst also allowing us to expand our confidence as neophyte researchers and deliver a collaborative research output.

## Time

Lack of time for academics to satisfactorily attend to the diverse expectations inherent to their work has been widely explored (Covey, 2004; Harrison & McKeon, 2010; Murray & Male, 2005; Sikes, 2006; Swabey, Castleton & Penney, 2010), and our experiences affirm time management and availability as being a critical theme. Further to acknowledging the challenges lack of time posed to our capacity to fulfil the requirements of our work, we perceived our success as weighing heavily upon our preparedness to think creatively in how to make best use of our time.

Fiona and Robyn both described struggling to find time to think about research due to the high teaching loads they had been allocated, as well as the demands of other administrative roles. While officially having a 60 per cent teaching allocations in 2013, our Faculty workload calculators revealed our teaching was actually closer to 65 and 70 per cent. The remainder of our workloads consisted of a 20 per cent allocation for research and a 20 per cent allocation for administrative tasks. We each agreed that our 20 per cent allocation for research time rarely eventuated due to our inability to overlook less important, but more urgent administrative tasks having to be prioritised over our less urgent, but more important research (Covey, 2004). The situational dilemmas we experienced in regard to our workload allocations reflect what Sikes (2006) describes as research time being regularly ‘swallowed up’ by the realities of other tasks, such as teaching, administration and student support. Although we agreed such difficulties seemed inherent to our situations within teacher education, we were not prepared to accept this as a reason to resist or avoid doing research. As such, our attitudinal beliefs became critical to positioning us to take responsibility for making best use of what Abbey described as *the time we did have, rather than the time we did not have*. However, as pre-ECRs, we were as yet to have acquired the research skills inherent to the PhD ‘apprenticeship’ (Akerlind, 2007; Laudel & Glaser, 2008), which might have allowed us to make best use of our research time, and this posed a critical problem for each of us. Our inexperience in research meant that much of our time in the beginning was devoted to what Robyn and Fiona described as *reading around aimlessly without clear purpose* in an attempt to both learn how to do research, or to be seen doing what we thought constituted research.

Robyn found herself struggling with expectations *to achieve a certain level of research output while also juggling the other time hungry requirements* of her position. Vaughan similarly commented on the challenge of *finding the time to learn about how to become research active amidst planning, teaching, marking and studying*. He struggled to reduce his teaching preparation time, as he was intent on his classes being *relevant and valuable* for his students; something that he did not always experience as a pre-service teacher. While the pressure to be research active was always present, the pressure to perform well on student evaluations of teaching and learning exacerbated this challenge as our scores in these evaluations were discussed at annual performance reviews.

Abbey indicated that she took *much longer to settle into negotiating research whilst teaching* than she anticipated, but she rapidly came to the understanding that *lack of time and inexperience weren't acceptable excuses to not do research; pleading for more time was pointless*. Harrison and McKeon (2010) note the essentiality for new staff to quickly understand the requirements of their new occupations and come up to speed, and our experiences in transitioning into teacher education similarly reflect this. As such, we agreed that learning and knowing how to best utilise time within the situational and structural limitations of our teacher education context would have been hugely beneficial to helping us overcome this challenge. We believe that greater recognition of the challenges inherent to our research inexperience, and increased support to helping us 'to come up to speed' with the expectations and practices inherent to our new positions as teacher educators could have long term benefits in helping us to become more active contributors to Faculty performance expectations, more quickly.

As pre-ECRs, our experiences indicate that although we were perplexed by the challenge of finding time to learn how to produce research and generate output, we were not prepared to accept this challenge as a reason for giving up on our ambitions. We agreed that being given more time for research was not the answer to our dilemma, nor was it a likelihood given the abysmal current climate for funding in the tertiary sector (Waples & Friedrich, 2011). Rather than entering into our positions with expectations for research output, we believe a short period of time upon our entry into teacher education where we could prioritise establishment of approaches to conducting and engaging in research could have increased our capacity to become better contributors to research in a shorter period of time. In acknowledging our identity and subsequent needs as being distinct to ECRs, and catering for our unique needs as such, we believe pre-ECRs can be educated to assimilate to and better navigate the time poor conditions typical of teacher education (Swabey, Castleton & Penney, 2010), and approach the challenges inherent to time constraint much more proactively from the very beginning of their entering into an academic career.

## Conclusion

Through the examination of events critical to our becoming researchers in a teacher education context, the implications of not being able to locate ourselves within a distinctive and appropriate professional identity emerge as significant. Our individual and collective experiences of working to meet research output expectations of ECRs and other more experienced colleagues, reveals much about our perceived uncertainty and inadequacy to do so successfully. Despite being mentored as part of our Faculty performance management procedures, our experiences of negotiating the dual challenges of transitioning from classroom to teacher educator, and teaching whilst negotiating implicit and explicit expectations to perform as researchers illustrate the adverse impacts this had upon our evolution of positive professional identity. Our experiences of negotiating expectations to develop teacher educator and researcher identity and scholarship indicates a very fine line

where challenge can work to extend or constrict professional development and identity formation.

In collaboratively exploring our perceptions and experiences of working to become ECRs, we opened ourselves up to recognising and burrowing into (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) the specificities of the difficulties and struggles we encountered. In doing so, we acknowledge that the experiential insights we offer into becoming what we define as pre-ECRs, represents one picture amongst many possibilities. Therefore, the more ‘pictures’ we can generate of how pre-ECRs operate and come to define themselves in the professional landscape, the better positioned we will be to support those teachers transitioning into teacher education and academic contexts.

Our narratives and experiences in collaboratively constructing this paper indicate a sense of security, demonstrated by our preparedness to discuss and explore our difficulties more liberally with other pre-ECRS as opposed to our performance management mentors or other more established colleagues. We propose that this infers pre-ECRs have the capacity to self mentor and negotiate the challenges of becoming researchers individually and with each other, thereby removing the pressure for more experienced researchers to provide mentoring and professional learning. We believe that rather than having to deal with increased pressure of carrying their inexperienced peers, ECRs and more established researchers should be maximising their time contributing to, for example, Faculty research outputs in the form of A1 publications and the securing of grants, as these are products pre-ECRs are less likely to achieve due to their inexperience. We suggest that for pre-ECRs to be able to effectively engage in and take responsibility for their development, a short period of opportunity free of expectations for external research output is needed at the beginning of their transition into teacher education.

Our experiences indicate that if pre-ECRs have sufficient opportunity to establish approaches to research, we will be better positioned to contribute to and generate extrinsic research output sooner. Part of this opportunity might be reflected in ensuring pre-ECRs enrol in formal learning opportunities such as research higher degrees at the beginning of their tenure in teacher education, and are allowed sufficient opportunity to immerse themselves in professional learning and development without the added expectation of other external research outputs. Rather than expecting pre-ECRs to achieve the research output of their more experienced peers, pre-ECRs research contribution to their Faculty could revolve around contributing to the enrichment of researcher community, identity and practice. Pre-ECRs could contribute to furthering the development of research practice in their Faculties through regular reporting on the progress and findings of the higher degree research through workshops, conversation and collaborations with other pre-ECRs to create a rigorous and evolving foundation of understanding in and through research.

During our initial formative discussions toward producing this paper, the comment was made that *it's much easier to see ourselves as being "acadumbics" as opposed to academics*, particularly whilst attending to research performance expectations, and developing the confidence necessary to successfully perform as researchers. Collaborating upon this paper allowed us to locate our sense of professional self within what we came to define as pre-ECRs. In doing so, we were able to deepen understanding of our unique and shared situations as a group of pre-ECRs whilst contributing to the evolving body of knowledge in teacher educator-researcher development. In further conceptualising the unique identity, qualities and challenges inherent to pre-ECRs, we propose the professional and personal transformations neophyte teacher educators and researchers undergo can be elucidated. We attest that such insights could aid the reimagining of performance management policy and procedures for neophyte teacher educators, and also contribute to informing approaches to recruitment and induction of classroom teachers into teacher education contexts. This has the potential to make negotiating and establishing research practice and identity smoother and less troublesome, and if facilitated effectively, has the

capacity to help pre-ECRs consolidate their research skills and practice, enabling them to fulfil expectations for research performance sooner. We propose that such an outcome would constitute a win-win scenario for both pre-ECR and their respective academic institutions.

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