

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Worcester		
Unit of Assessment: 23 Education		
Title of case study: Enhancing educational policy, practice and performance by increasing understanding of teacher identity and development at all career stages		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2013-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Alison Kington Dr Carla Solvason	Professor of Education Senior Lecturer in Children & Families	September 2012-present January 2008-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2016-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>A programme of research exploring teacher identity and development across all career stages has influenced policy on trainee teacher quality at national level; it has helped shape educational strategy at regional level; it has led to new professional development programmes for Early Career teachers and for school leaders which seek to enhance teacher retention across the career pathway; and it has enhanced performance of schools and school leaders at all levels and improved pupil progress in a large local authority.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The underpinning research has focused on the experiences, relationships and perceptions of educational practitioners. The three projects, described below, form a sustained research programme, developed in response to the needs of UK Government. They have provided new insights into the complexity of professional identity and development across the career phases of educational practitioners, from those at the beginning of their career, who are most at risk of leaving the profession, through to more experienced teachers, to school leaders. The research has set out to improve professional practice, to improve teaching quality and to have positive benefits for pupil learning.</p>		
(a) <i>Inspirational and effective teachers</i>		
<p>In 2012, the Education Development Trust (formerly CfBT) commissioned the Inspirational and Effective Teachers project which ran from September 2012 to December 2013. The research, led at Worcester by Kington, followed up on significant findings generated by a previously ESRC-funded project on Effective Classroom Practice. This mixed methods study of 17 primary and secondary schools serving different socio-economic communities across England identified that inspirational and effective teachers:</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • show a high degree of engagement with their students. They are effective, organized and knowledgeable practitioners who exhibit a continued passion for teaching and for promoting the well-being of students. • are highly professional, confident and reflective practitioners. • genuinely like students and enjoy teaching, show resilience in the stressful and fast changing educational environment, and despite external challenges, want to continue in their teaching careers. 		

- make learning enjoyable and engaging, activating students' own motivation and classroom experiences in a varied, imaginative and 'fun' way.
- value the support they receive from leaders and colleagues. They are keen to work with and support colleagues, often through their particular leadership roles in their schools.

Overall, participating teachers across all career phases were found to be committed professionals who continue to learn and improve their own practice and seek out opportunities and networks for professional development aligned to their needs and interests (Reference 1 and 2).

(b) Primary school teachers' professional identity at later career stages

Two studies examined how teacher identity was shaped and developed beyond the first 4 years. The first, *Tales from the Watershed*, explored mid-career primary teachers' professional identity and development (Reference 3); the second, *Flying Below the Radar*, examined the experiences of primary school teachers who had been teaching for between four and seven years (Reference 4)

These studies identified important characteristics of teachers, which formed part of the subsequent offer, including:

- key critical professional, situated and personal events that impact on primary teachers' identity over time and the coping and managing strategies needed to adapt to these events.
- the importance of senior leaders affording teachers opportunities to share the emotional, professional and practical implications of being a teacher in order to maintain a positive sense of identity and self-efficacy.
- that teacher-pupil relationships are paramount in terms of positive teacher identity and self-efficacy, and serve as a key mechanism in being accepted within a new school culture.

(c) Collaborative practice among school leaders

In 2015, the University of Worcester's School Improvement Team worked with 12 cohorts (55 schools) in a local authority where collaborative practice has become one of the main mechanisms for improving pupil outcomes at Key Stage 2. The ongoing development activity involved schools following a research-informed programme with a focus on facilitation and self-sufficiency to build capacity within school-to-school networks. Solvason led on the evaluation of this School Leadership Development Programme (funded by the local authority) which brought together academic researchers and practitioners in the co-production of research. The evaluation (References 5 and 6) identified:

- the emotional connection established between leaders and teachers was crucial.
- whereas the admission of feelings and sensitivity would previously have been stigmatised, emotion, fallibility and a willingness to learn from others were very much at the forefront of discussions, and this arose from trusting relationships that were carefully nurtured.
- the importance of strong, collaborative relationships based on openness.

A further study, *Teaching Without Peers*, exploring the identity and development of 30 teachers while teaching remotely during the first national lockdown (Mar-Jun 2020), has identified some of the ways in which teachers struggled without the physical support and interaction of colleagues during lockdown, and the impact this had on their views of the teaching profession.

3. References to the research

1. Sammons, P., Lindorff-Vijayendran, A., Kington, A. and Ortega, L. (2016). 'Inspiring teaching: Learning from exemplary practitioners.', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*. 1(2), 124-144. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCCC-09-2015-0005>

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2. Sammons, P., Kington, A., Lindorff, A. and Ortega, L (2018) "It ain't (only) what you do, it's the way that you do it": A mixed method approach to the study of inspiring teachers.', *Review of Education*. 6(3), 303-356. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3141>
3. Bingle, B., Kington, A., Howard, C. and Robinson, C. (2017). 'Tales from the Watershed: Using repertory grids in the study of teachers' mid-career identity.' In: DA. Winter, P. Cummins, H. Procter and N. Reed (Eds) *Personal Construct Psychology in the 21st Century*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.
4. Townsend, A. and Kington, A. (2020). 'Teachers' Professional Identity and Self-efficacy: A study of teachers with 4-7 years of experience.' In: A. Kington and K. Blackmore (Eds) *Social and Learning Relationships in Primary Schools*. London: Bloomsbury.
5. Solvason, C. and Kington, A. (2019). 'Collaborations: providing emotional support to senior leaders.', *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 5(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-05-2019-0010>
6. Solvason, C. and Kington, A. (2020). 'How subject leader collaborations across schools can act as a source of personal and curriculum development.'. In: *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 2. American Association for Teaching and Curriculum, Charlotte, NC.

Outputs 1, 2, and 4 have been included in the unit's output submission for REF 2021. Outputs 3 and 6 can be provided on request. All outputs were identified as of at least 2* quality through the processes for output selection set out in the University's REF 2021 Code of Practice.

4. Details of the impact

The research has:

- Influenced policy and strategy at national and regional level
- Improved performance for schools and for pupils
- Informed professional development programmes for teachers and school leaders

(a) Impact on policy and strategy

Findings from the Inspirational and Effective Teachers study were presented at a Cabinet Office Open Innovation Team (OIT) workshop in October 2018, as part of a project commissioned by the Department of Education (DfE) Teacher Services Team to investigate whether and how the quality of teaching applicants can be measured, and to help create a set of metrics for doing so. Following the workshop, the Senior Policy Advisor at OIT stated: 'Colleagues at the Department of Education reported that they found the workshop to be very insightful and that it opened up a world of academic expertise in the context of thinking about quality trainees. Your contribution will feature in an internal workshop summary and set of recommendations from our team that will inform the department on how they better understand the quality of teaching applicants...I would like to emphasise how your thoughts have shifted the discussions around teacher quality and are likely to lead to further work in this area' (Source A). The subsequent OIT project report set out an approach for developing a set of teacher quality measures which DfE is now following (Source B).

Findings from the evaluation of the Leadership Development Programme were presented to Worcestershire County Council's Education and Skills Strategic Education Board (Source C). This was designed to enable educational leaders in Worcestershire to shape a strategy for education across the county and explicitly informed the new Worcestershire Education and Skills Strategy 2019-2024 (Source D).

(b) Impact on school performance

The evaluation of the School Leadership Development programme (Source E):

- Provides good evidence that the programme created a strong and stable leadership across the local authority and that this was a significant factor in ensuring maintained and improved performance. This was most clear in Ofsted inspections with participating

schools moving from “requires improvement” to “good” or at least maintaining “good” in the period following the implementation of the programme.

- Shows that head teachers were confident that the programme has impacted positively on pupil progress.
- Demonstrates more effective leadership at subject level feeding into positive impacts on curriculum.

(c) Impact on the professional development and practice of teachers and school leaders

The research has contributed to professional development and practice as follows:

- The Inspirational and Effective Teachers project has informed the Education Development Trust’s own professional development offer. Their Head of Research has outlined how the project’s findings have directly shaped its courses for teachers and have supported improvement activities within their family of schools, specifically within the Trust’s [Schools Partnership Programme](#) and CST (Source F).
- The research on teacher identity has underpinned a pilot Early Career Teachers programme for recent University of Worcester graduates, launched in 2018/19 and now in its third year. The programme reflected the collaborative ethos promoted through the well-established Leadership Development Programme delivered nationally to school leaders and includes sessions on curriculum areas alongside workshops on issues such as wellbeing and professional identity.
- The school leadership research was the basis of CPD provided for the Worcestershire Teaching Schools Alliance (WTSA) and for senior leaders at Worcestershire Children First Service in 2020. Further, it informed the development of an Early Years Leaders’ Network, providing a context to explore aspects of school improvement and subject leadership and the opportunity to consider new research and next practice. The value of this network is highlighted by testimony from teachers who are part of the network who emphasise its role in sharing and highlighting good practice (Source G).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Letter from Senior Policy Advisor, Open Innovation Team, Cabinet Office, Department for Education, October 2018
- B. Open Innovation Team Blog: <https://openinnovation.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/214/2020/08/Working-with-OIT.pdf>
- C. Agenda for meeting of WCC’s Education and Skills Strategic Education Board (December 2018)
- D. Worcestershire Education and Skills Strategy 2019-24: <https://worcestershire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s22939/Cab%2020190926%20Educ-Skills%20Strat-app1.pdf>
- E. Evaluation of the Leadership Development Programme
- F. Head of Research, Educational Development Trust
- G. Testimony from teachers on the value of the Early Years Network