

Teachers seconded to continuing teacher education: professional development and the paradox of reaching proficiency

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Abstract

In Ireland state funded support services provide Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for teachers and school leaders. These services are staffed with teachers seconded from their schools on an annual basis for up to a maximum of five years. This study investigated the learning and experience of teachers seconded to a national cross-sectoral support service, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) and how this influences their post-secondment career. It employed qualitative interviews to explore this from the perspective of teachers previously seconded to the PDST. The theoretical framework was rooted in the field of career dynamics setting out three stages (Entry, Experience, Exit) navigated by teachers from entering the service through to their departure. This article focusses primarily on the study findings for the Experience stage while necessarily providing some key insights from the Entry stage. In the context of a considerably under-researched area both in Irish and international teacher education, the findings bring due attention to the distinct role and identities of teachers seconded as what this study calls "Continuing Teacher Educators" (CTEs). Findings show that the learning acquired by these teachers is extensive while also revealing tensions encountered in managing hybrid identities as teachers/teacher educators. Notably they expose precarious tensions between the catalytic impact of secondment and the uncertain nature of its tenure. For most, this eventuates in a premature departure from the service to other careers, paradoxically having reached proficiency as teacher educators. Recommendations centre on career pathways for teachers seconded to support services and a review of current secondment stipulations within a need to privilege transformative CPD models in the system.

Keywords: teacher educator; continuing professional development; secondment; career transition; professional identity

Introduction

Teacher educators are considered pivotal to education systems globally in impacting the quality of teaching while the connection between student achievement and teacher quality is well established (Darling-Hammond, 2000; OECD, 2014;). Once described as “hidden professionals” (Livingston 2014, 219), a growing corpus of literature gives visibility to who they are and what their work involves (inter-alia Loughran, 2007; Williams, 2014; MacPhail et al., 2018, Dolan, 2019). Studies have been largely confined however to teacher educators working in initial teacher education potentially leading to narrow understandings of who teacher educators are and what they do. In arguing for a more inclusive definition for teacher educators the European Commission highlights that

Teacher educators are **not only** responsible for the initial education of new teachers, but also contribute to the continuing professional development of Europe’s six million serving teachers” (2013, 6-7, emphasis mine)

Teacher educators in the arena of continuing professional development (CPD) work in a variety of contexts such as accredited higher education programmes with the literature also bringing attention to school-based teacher educators whose professional boundaries span both schools and universities (White, 2019). Others work as course facilitators in the further education sector (Exley, 2010, Perry and Booth, 2021) with regional education centres in Ireland for example recruiting teachers to provide evening and summer programmes for local teachers. Nonetheless compared to their pre-service equivalents, teacher educators in the CPD sector remain a significantly under-researched group with regard to their transitioning to the role, their development as professionals and associated identity implications. Distinct from their counterparts at pre-service or induction teacher career stages they engage with established and experienced teachers. Consequently they often encounter audiences with fixed beliefs owing to robust school cultures where change is resisted (Elmore, 2004, Fullan, 2007) adding further complexity to their work. This study adopted the term Continuing Teacher Educators (CTEs) for those teachers who facilitate the professional development of practising teachers in accredited and non-accredited settings. The participants of this study were teachers working as CTEs in an Irish national support service designing and facilitating non-accredited professional learning for teachers in relation to system reform while also having the task of

responding to the self-identified needs of schools and teachers through the provision of bespoke contextualised on-site school support.

Equally lacking profile in the literature are teachers seconded to work as teacher educators. Over twenty years ago Badali and Housego noted that “Few studies specifically recognize seconded teachers for their contributions to teacher education” (2000, 327-328) with Kosnik and Beck remarking that “While such instructors play a crucial role to teacher education, they largely toil in the shadows” (2008,187). The concept of seconding skilled practicing teachers to pre-service teacher education programmes has been commonplace in Canada (Kosnik and Beck, 2008), Scotland (McMichael, Draper and Gatherer,1992) and Australia (Reupert and Wilkinson, 2011). Bringing with them “experiential knowledge, classroom experience and personal philosophies of teaching and learning” (Badali and Housego, 2000, 328), they possess the credibility and human capital required to work in these settings. The few available studies of this group are again mainly located in the pre-service setting. Interestingly, one such study exclusively focusing on teachers seconded to the CPD sector, is situated in the Irish context (Tuohy and Lodge, 2003). No further such research has since been conducted in Ireland despite a significant increase in CPD over the last two decades with seconded teachers occupying almost all of the workforce required for its provision.

Irish policy context and research aim

Irish education policy privileges the recruitment of experienced teachers to national CPD support services claiming that “Secondment can also be an important element of a teacher’s continuing professional development” (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2018, 4). Secondment is principally legitimised by policy’s assumption of “the benefit that will accrue to the employer on return of the secondee” (ibid) thereby claiming that the expertise acquired by these teachers eventually recycles back into their schools and classrooms. Since their inception Irish support service secondments have operated on an annual renewal basis to be approved by both the DES and the teacher’s school. Early policy iterations locate secondment within the “requirement for flexible and innovative approaches to meet short term skills needs” (Government of Ireland,1996, 47) thus facilitating workforce turnover in accordance with shifting national priorities. Policy’s appetite for system fluidity and associated non-committal tenure is reflected in a tightening of contractual conditions now stipulating that “secondment approval shall be subject to a maximum period of five school years” (DES, 2018, 6) and can be terminated by either the DES or the parent school at any time (ibid.).

The broader rationale for this research lay not alone in the aforementioned dearth of studies in relation to teacher educators in the CPD sector but more specifically with respect to those who are also seconded to the role. While this gives the study international relevance, Irish CPD policy's assumptions about secondment's positive impact on teachers' professional development and the subsequent gains for their parent schools, presented a unique opportunity to address this dual gap in the field. Accordingly the study draws attention to teacher educators who essentially belong to two underrepresented groups. The purpose of this research was to discover what these teachers experience and learn while seconded as CTEs to an Irish CPD support service and how it shapes their post-secondment careers.

The PDST

The context for the study was the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST). Established in 2010 as Ireland's first and largest cross-sectoral, multi-disciplinary CPD service, it supported primary and post-primary teachers and school leaders in all curricular, pedagogical and policy priorities up to 2023ⁱ. Unprecedented curriculum/policy reform and associated demands for the profession to be pedagogically and digitally innovative led to a rapidly growing remit over its thirteen-year lifespan. Nonetheless the organisation's evolving vision for CPD eschewed a sole reliance on wholesale transmission of teacher learning which has to date accompanied large-scale reform efforts in Ireland, arguably reflecting a rising fidelity to neoliberal doctrine (Sugrue, 2011; Conway and Murphy, 2013). Rather the service increasingly favoured transformative CPD models such as bespoke on-site school support, communities of practice called PDST 'Collaboratives' (Professional Development Service for Teachers, 2021), in-class modelling of methodologies and lesson study which featured prominently in the PDST's suite of contextualised and sustained offerings in line with effective practice (inter-alia Desmione, 2009; Opher, 2016).

Teachers seconded to the PDST held the multifaceted role of advisorⁱⁱ with their work involving the design and facilitation of CPD across a continuum of models (Kennedy, 2014). The PDST's expanding remit demanded substantial investment in the ongoing CPD of its advisors as change agents within a dynamic and changing education landscape. Expected to be at the cutting edge of emerging policy, curricular and pedagogical developments, the advisor role required sophisticated facilitation skills to work in environments where assumptions and habitual practices are typically challenged and disturbed.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework created specifically for the study was rooted in the field of career dynamics defined as the "...variety of factors influencing the nature of a person's career choice, the direction their career takes and the satisfaction they experience over the duration of their working life" (Elliot, 2013, 4). Schein's (1990) theory of career anchors identifies factors influencing career choice and satisfaction such as skills expansion, challenge and autonomy adding that these factors typically come into focus mid-career when individuals often consider a job change aligned with professional and personal needs and values. Like many teachers seconded to Irish CPD support services, the participants of this study embarked on a mid-career change. With regard to the teaching profession, mid-career is broadly considered to occupy the interval of 6-20 years (Huberman,1995; Day et al., 2007). Characterised by dissatisfaction with school routines and/or desires to investigate new career avenues (Huberman,1995), it is considered to be a 'key watershed in teacher professional development' (Day et al.,2007,82). Accordingly Ingersoll and Kralik (2004) warn against allowing good teachers eager for fresh opportunities to stagnate in their current role thus recognising teaching as a relatively flat career lacking diverse opportunities (Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009).

Career transition described as a process unfolding before and after a career change (Ibarra, 2004), finds particular expression within the concept of secondment which involves movement into, through and out of a professional role. Two theories of career transition facilitate an exploration of the career dynamics at play before, during and after a secondment in the context of this study.

Nicholson's model of career transition

Nicholson (1987) illustrated in Figure 1 proposes a career transition cycle spanning four phases from when individuals first consider a career change while still in one job, to reaching proficiency in the next as follows; Preparation, Encounter, Adjustment and Stabilisation. In support of Ibarra (2004), Nicholson argues that career transitioning begins as soon as individuals reconsider their current role. 'Preparation' refers to the phase when individuals question the fit of their present career with their identity and actively seek out other options. Having made the career change, the subsequent phase 'Encounter' marks a realisation of what the new role entails and resulting socio-psychological experiences. 'Adjustment', relates to

efforts made by the transitioner to adapt to the role. Finally, ‘Stabilisation’ signifies settlement and proficiency in the role. Stability reached in one career cycle eventually prompts the onset of another ‘Preparation’ phase towards the next transition.

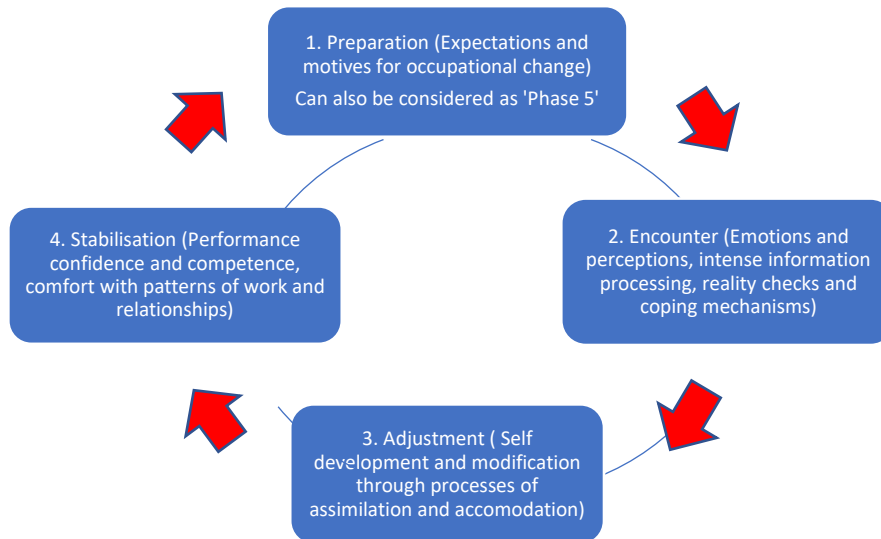


Figure 1. Career Transition Cycle (Adapted from Nicholson,1987)

Kelly’s model of job change

Kelly’s (1980) job change matrix presents four categories of attachment and detachment gains and losses as shown in Table 1. With respect to career transition, attachment gains apply to career satisfiers accrued with the new job while detachment gains pertain to the benefits of shedding dissatisfying aspects of the previous job. Corresponding losses arise when encountering undesirable characteristics of the new job and relinquishing desirable features of the previous job.

Table 1. Kelly’s job change model of attachment/ detachment gains and losses (1980)

	Gains	Losses
Attachment	Positive aspects of new job	Negative aspects of new job
Detachment	Benefits of leaving previous job	Costs of leaving previous job

The study’s theoretical framework (See Figure 2) was constructed according to three pillars created for this study to denote three stages of secondment embarked upon by research participants

- Entry: the period when participants first decided to take the secondment, their induction and initial months in the service
- Experience : the core period of secondment from post-induction to pre-exit.
- Exit: the departure from the service and work commencement in post-secondment destinations.

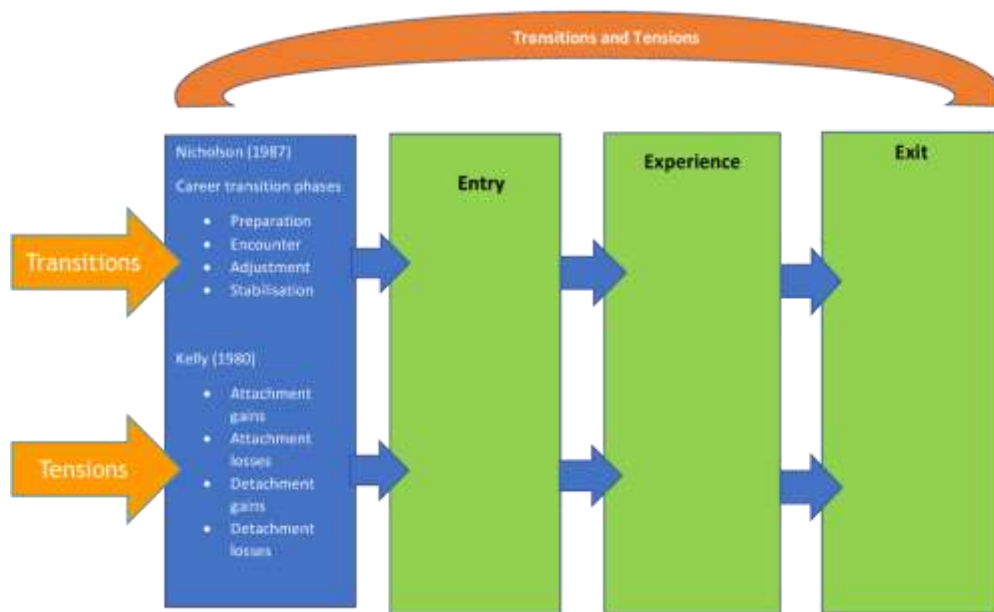


Figure 2. Theoretical Framework (O’ Donnell, 2021, drawing on the work of Nicholson (1987) and Kelly (1980))

The framework was underpinned by both Nicholson’s (1987) and Kelly’s (1980) theories. Nicholson’s cycle afforded a sequential analysis of the seconded teacher’s career transition across the three stages while Kelly’s model served to unearth associated tensions presenting as attachment or detachment gains and losses at each of the three stages. As illustrated in Figure 2 both theories were applied simultaneously across the three stages while representing ‘Transitions and Tensions’ as the framework’s twin tenors.

Methodology

In interpretivist tradition this study honoured “... the person’s view of the world, shaped by the experience one brings to the research process (Grix, 2002, 179). The research design was

underpinned by Structured Thematic Inquiry (STI) (Berkeley, 2014) which embraces a complementarity of deductive and inductive approaches in qualitative research as per contention “...that most research endeavours proceed by an iterative alternation of induction and deduction, and it is important for researchers to recognise and formalise these processes” (Hyde 2000, 83). In line with STI’s principles, the theoretical framework guided deductive lines of inquiry, coding and identification of themes according to Nicholson’s transition phases and Kelly’s four categories. Reflecting the study’s fundamentally interpretivist stance however were inductive processes of inquiry and analysis which yielded fresh themes as well allowing for what Berkeley (2014) calls the ‘contemporizing’ of existing ones.

Participants

The study participants were teachers previously seconded to the PDST who had since either returned to school or taken up other positions in the education system. Ten participants were purposefully selected from a larger sample of ninety-eight teachers who had departed the PDST within one to three years of data collection. Table 2ⁱⁱⁱ details the post-secondment destinations of that larger sample.

Table 2. Post-secondment destinations of staff departing the PDST between one and three years of data collection

Post secondment work destination	Original position as class teacher in base school	Principal /Deputy Principal in base school or in a new school	Universities	Education agencies i.e. Inspectorate Teaching Council, State Exams Commission)	Retired	Other (career break, travel, personal leave etc.)
No. of teachers (Total = 98)	13	22	16	19	11	17

STI privileges the purposive sample of respondents “... to find out more about a set of specified themes or issues experienced by a particular group of individuals” (Berkeley, 2014, 6). To maximise the study’s trustworthiness as well as protecting the anonymity of participants, stratified purposive sampling “...wherein a purposive subsample is chosen within a purposive sample” (Tongco, 2007,152) was employed. A number of specific criteria were therefore identified requiring the sample to comprise

- only those who were currently working in the education system (i.e. not retired or on career break)
- only those who had held PDST advisor positions (i.e. not management positions) for role consistency across the sample.
- representatives from the four post-secondment destinations in Table 2 while proportionally reflecting the sizable number who had not returned to their original school positions.
- primary and post-primary teachers across all four work destination categories in Table 2.
- participants from different PDST teams to represent a range of policy/curriculum priorities.

Ten suitable participants presented as satisfying the required criteria. Factors relating to the pandemic led to two participants withdrawing. All eight who participated (four primary, four post-primary) had between 6-20 years teaching experience thereby occupying teacher mid-career phases (Huberman,1995; Day et.al, 2007).

Data Gathering

Data were gathered using semi-structured interviews which embody STI's quasi-deductive means of exploring and updating predetermined themes while also allowing for the generation of new ones (Berkeley, 2014). Aligned with the three pillars of the theoretical framework (Entry, Experience and Exit), interviews were designed according to three question categories. The twin threads of transitions and the tensions were therefore explored in relation to motivations for career change and commencement of the new role (Entry), learning and working during the secondment (Experience), departing the service and initial work in post secondment destinations (Exit). Accordingly interviews looked to uncover identities and capacities that teachers brought to the role, developed while in the role and harnessed thereafter in post-secondment work.

The advent of the global pandemic Covid -19 resulted in the interviews taking place virtually from the participants homes via asynchronous video connection using the university approved platform Microsoft Teams. All interviews were video recorded with participant

permission and lasted for one hour. Given the potential limitations of retrospective interviewing in qualitative research where recall is prone to the omission of details (Keightley, Pickering and Allett, 2012), the prior provision of questions to participants in advance of the interviews facilitated prior reflection thereby increasing the likelihood of accurate recollection.

Informed consent was secured from all participants via an e-mailed letter detailing the study's purpose, method and significance. The letter specified the voluntary nature of their engagement, freedom to withdraw at any stage of the project and the protection of their anonymity using pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

STI uses deductive coding techniques during data analysis while also enabling the search for new themes using inductive coding until all raw data have been "...categorized in meaningful (thematic identification) ways" (Berkeley, 2014). Within this context 'reflexive thematic data analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2019) was employed given its openness to both essentialist and constructionist paradigms. Consequently both deductive and inductive themes were generated.

The university approved software programme Microsoft Teams was used to transcribe the interviews. A code book was created according to the three pillars of the theoretical framework: Entry, Experience and Exit. Given that "Coding will, to some extent, depend on whether the themes are more 'data-driven' or 'theory-driven' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 88), Nicholson's phases and Kelly's four categories determined deductive codes and themes while other ideas "...not in the data waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher" (Braun and Clarke, 2019, 594), led to inductive coding and themes. For example 'Imposter syndrome' was coded deductively in relation to Nicholson's 'Encounter' transition phase which itself was a deductive theme. Inductive codes such as 'Team tensions' and 'Annual anxiety' reflected internal PDST team dynamics when secondment approval was looming and so informed the inductive theme of 'Organisational Culture'. In typical STI fashion some codes such as 'Learning with like-minded people' spoke to the deductive subtheme 'Attachment Gains' while also helping to generate the inductive themes of 'Organisational Culture' and 'Knowledge Acquisition'.

The entire analysis process adopted a ‘named and claimed’ approach (Attride-Stirling, 2001) in acknowledging some deductive identification of data patterns as facilitated by STI. In the interests of trustworthiness and fidelity to interpretivism, this was always steered by participant accounts. Trustworthiness was also maximised through member checking (Sanders, 1960) with some participants asked to clarify points post-interview. Peer debriefings also took place with “...knowledgeable colleagues engaging in critical discussion” (Rossman and Rallis, 2003, 69) whose ‘devil’s advocate’ insights brought further rigour to the data analysis.

Findings and discussion

This article focusses primarily on the study findings and discussion for the Experience stage of secondment. Given the sequential nature of the theoretical framework however, a brief account of key findings for the Entry stage is provided first. STI is guided by a study’s theoretical framework and favours the presentation of data in a way that best links new information to existing theories (Berkeley, 2014). Findings and discussion for both stages are therefore presented according to the deductive themes of Nicholson’s career phases within which deductive and inductive elements co-exist as in STI. Codes are used to protect the anonymity of participants with P and PP denoting primary and post-primary teachers respectively.

Entry: Preparation phase

Findings for the Entry stage reflected the Preparation and Encounter phases of Nicholson’s transition cycle. During Preparation participants anticipated detachment gains in leaving school having “outgrown it as the same motivation just wasn’t there” (P1) and needing “some rejuvenation to replenish my well as I felt stale”(PP1). This mirrors previous studies referencing professional stagnation and repetitive school routines as reasons for pursuing a career in teacher education (Badali and Housego, 2000; Wood and Borg, 2010). Redolent of how school contexts can either constrain or enable teachers to develop positive professional identities (Hargreaves, 1994; Opher 2016, Brookfield, 2017), some perceived themselves as “out of synch with the herd mentality” (PP2) within static school cultures while others expressed “disillusionment with school leadership” (P4). Envisaged attachment gains to joining the PDST and adding credence to Schein’s theory of career anchorage, included ‘opportunities to have wider influence in education’ (P3) and “leaving behind a school bell dictating your day”(PP3) signalling an appetite for greater autonomy and extended professional horizons (Tuohy and Lodge, 2003; Reupert and Wilkinson, 2011). The temporary nature of secondment was considered an

attachment gain in providing an opportunity to taste something new while retaining their teaching position as “this was not forever” (PP1) and “you could go back to school at any stage”(P2) thus framing secondment as a safe career option (Tuohy and Lodge; 2003).

Entry: Encounter Phase

Satisfying participant aspirations during the Preparation phase and resonating with previous research (Reupert and Wilkinson, 2011), attachment gains when first joining the PDST manifested as “intellectual stimulation across primary and post-primary teams” (PP3) and “pedagogical enrichment across multiple subject areas” (P1) among “kindred spirits who shared your professional values” (P3). PP4 remarked how “a refreshing culture of knowledge sharing and entrusted autonomy to structure your own working week” co-existed with “expectations that you work hard and contribute to the greater good of the organisation”. Contrasting with reported deficiencies in the induction of teacher educators (Korthagen, Loughran, and Lunenberg, 2005; Kosnik and Beck, 2008), particular attachment gains pertained to PDST induction supports wherein “we couldn’t have asked for a better preparation immersed in literature, policy and curriculum” (P1) with “significant time given to adult learning and facilitation skills” (P3). Incremental approaches to building confidence and independence as teacher educators involved “shadowing experienced people” (P2), “then co- facilitating before going solo”(P1) while “having a mentor for the first six months was incredibly reassuring” (PP3).

As the full reality of the role dawned however, attachment losses reflected the notoriously fraught transition from teacher to teacher educator (Murray and Male, 2005) giving rise to a sense of moving from once valued specialist at school to rank amateur in teacher education where “it was like starting over again”(P2). All participants specifically referenced Imposter Syndrome (Clance,1985) in “waiting to be tapped on the shoulder and told I’ve been found out” (PP1). Specific tensions arose regarding what this study identified as a *‘Trilogy of Identity Shifts’*. Firstly as reported in a host of studies (inter-alia Martinez, 2008; Wood and Borg, 2010), participants discovered that “teaching adults was a shock to the system”(P1) having “assumed it would be relatively straightforward” (P2). Secondly a propensity to show teachers ‘how it’s done’ (Berry, 2008) while believing their credentials to be judged according to the extent to which they could ‘fix things’ for teachers (Bullock, 2007; Williams 2014), reflected “a strong need to provide answers to show that I’m good at this job” (P4). Thirdly they grappled with the fundamental transition from first-order to second-order practitioner (Murray, 2005) the first characterised by a teacher’s subject and pedagogical knowledge while the latter entails additional skills of

‘teaching teachers’. In negotiating this duality participants described ‘masquerading’ (Murray and Male, 2005) and biographical behaviours “trying to lose that rabbit in the headlights look” (P4) while declaring their histories as classroom teachers ensured that “ears pricked up more, there was a kind of respect” (P2). As front-line messengers of reform to seasoned teachers these tensions were amplified in that “you can’t fool experienced professionals” (PP2) and “you face conflict in dealing with irate and hostile audiences” (PP1) thereby heightening the pressure to be all knowing sage while outwardly portraying a credible exterior. These insights exemplify that although first order aptitude as a class teacher is helpful for the role of teacher educator, there cannot be “a common taken for-granted assumption that a good teacher will also make a good teacher educator” (Korthagen, Loughran and Lunenberg, 2005, 110). Not surprisingly given the identity and skills conflict inherent to the shift from teacher to teacher educator, studies conclude that this unique transition takes at least three years (Gatherer and Edwards, 1988; Murray and Male, 2005; Allen, Butler-Mader and Smith, 2010).

The Experience Stage

Data analysis showed this second secondment stage to host the Adjustment and Stabilisation phases of career transition. In line with Nicholson’s philosophy that the end of one transition cycle sets the stage for the next, the findings also clearly indicated a return to the Preparation phase when participants turned their thoughts towards future careers steps marking their initial transition out of the PDST.

Experience: Adjustment phase

The Adjustment phase of career transition is typified by the adoption of new cognitions and behaviours to fit the new job. Accordingly for these participants it was synonymous with navigating the aforementioned *‘Trilogy of identity shifts’* towards gaining a better understanding of the second order’s ‘teaching about teaching’ (Loughran, 2007). They learned to work more effectively with adult audiences by “treating them as professionals who have a lot of expertise”(P4) and “gently moving things on if people became disruptive”(PP4). Resisting the compulsion to provide answers signalled a realisation that effective professional development enables self-construction of knowledge (Mezirow,1991; Whitmore,2017). In breaking free from the ‘trap of telling’ they “facilitated teachers to come around to their own way of solving things” (PP3).

Advancing through Adjustment, they continued to enjoy attachment gains of extensive learning (Badali, and Housego, 2000; Tuohy and Lodge, 2003). All participants highlighted PDST’s internal

programme of ongoing professional learning where calendars were punctuated with “relevant ‘just in time’ policy and curricular inputs”(P1) and exposure to current research “when we interrogated academic articles and their implications for our work” (PP4). With reference to timetable flexibility, “scope to reflect on our practice as CPD providers”(P3) and “frequent opportunities to really talk about teaching” (P1) contrasted with the limited time most teachers have for such activities (Costley et al., 2007). The data illustrate how learning transpired across a range of national, regional, and local settings;

We had national meetings with speakers from the Teaching Council and colleges of education, regional gatherings where broad school issues were addressed and chances to discuss contextual problems at more local level (P2).

The fluidity of the PDST’s internal learning communities allowed for cross-pollination and reciprocity of subject and sectoral knowledge;

I frequently drew on the experience of the school leadership and wellbeing teams. In PDST you were standing on the shoulders of your colleagues in many ways (PP1).

Working with PDST primary teams meant that us post-primary advisors could make meaningful curricular links when engaging with teachers (PP4).

Consequently, value-added attachment gains of collaboration, critical dialogue and role diversity presented where “we saw the collective team as a learning resource...working together designing CPD and having dynamic interdisciplinary conversations”(PP2). Individual learning was self-directed and indicative of perceived cultural expectations “to stay ahead, support your own learning and engage in private reading”(PP4). ‘Learning on the job’ was inherent to independent learning and supported by on-site observation where “management gave us professional feedback and encouraged us to use mistakes as learning opportunities” (P3).

Traditionally and respectively considered generalists and subject specialists, primary and post-primary participants accrued distinct attachment gains. The primary CTEs acquired richer subject content knowledge “exploring children’s early misconceptions” (P4) and “modelling lessons for teachers in the specifics of subjects” (P2). Post-primary counterparts referred to enhanced pedagogical content knowledge with one concluding that “I would never teach my subjects the

same way again, it would be exponentially different” (PP1). Exposure to the wider education landscape, expansion of networks and interfacing with a variety of schools provided fresh perspectives on the teaching profession and a taste of life beyond their relatively sheltered classrooms. Attachment gains related to the enhancement of social capital through “gathering several contacts in education...having a chance to influence education on a larger scale”(P3), “awareness of the bigger picture beyond my own school” (P4) and “seeing how the different moving parts of the system work was a huge eye-opener” (PP2).

Notwithstanding these gains and progression in key competences, teacher/teacher educator tensions persisted. Studies report how teacher educators in continually managing a dual role of teacher/teacher educator, are faced with negotiating a third space identity between two sites of practice (Zeichner, 2010; Whitchurch, 2013). This study’s participants spoke of feeling torn between promoting policy ideals as teacher educators on one hand yet on the other being teachers themselves, they appreciated the reality of classroom practice. P1 “felt sorry for teachers trying do all that’s expected”. PP2 “struggled with loyalty to policy because regardless of how you might feel, in this job you can’t publicly disagree with it” while PP1 framed the dilemma as “holding that very awkward in-between space, straddling two horses, mediating unpopular messages to teachers and yet you are one of them too”. Such tensions underscore the unique position of these CTEs as the visible face of policy where a precarious third space lies between publicly advocating the ‘official line’ to established peers and privately questioning it through their internal conversations. Indeed attachment losses were attributed to the burden of ‘being punch bags for the system facing the wrath of policy decisions not of our making’ (PP4). Others spoke of ‘walking into a Viper's nest where teachers are hostile and aggressive’ (P1) and the associated ‘emotionally personal investment which was very draining’ (PP1).

A myopic view of the CTE’s role was evident in teacher audiences’ expectations of ready-made solutions highlighting a prevailing reductionist view of CPD and pressures of system compliance. In this respect an element of job dissatisfaction emerged regarding wholesale CPD ‘roll outs’. PP3 “questioned how effective large-scale events and once off CPD spurts are”. Likewise PP2 “felt restricted in a room of 50 ‘bums on seats’ compared to the intimacy of smaller learning communities when you could facilitate deeper learning”. Contrastingly attachment gains were attributed to “working directly with teachers in schools across the country and getting a real understanding of different contexts” (PP3). Through this expanded view of teacher professional

learning they realised that “CPD is not a one size fits all” (PP2) and “began to see the limitations of top-down seminars”(P3). This shows that holistic approaches to teacher development equally enriches how learning happens for teacher educators as well as imbuing them with an understanding of what constitutes effective CPD.

Experience : Stabilisation phase

According to Nicholson (1987) the final phase of the career transition cycle Stabilisation is synonymous with feeling settled and competent in a role. This study uncovered what Stabilisation looked like for participants when they believed they had reached levels of proficiency. One of the first signs was a newly acquired confidence and self-belief (Van der Klink et al., 2017) described as “not getting really nervous before facilitating”(P3) and “no longer fretting about questions that teachers might raise” (P2). Other indicative milestones involved embracing facilitative approaches to adult learning (Tuohy and Lodge, 2003) and further navigation of teacher/teacher educator binaries. PP3 “soon saw the need to leave my ego behind accepting that I don't know everything” and so “as I got better in the role I turned to the expertise in the room”. This maturity to embrace humility in their work for the benefit of empowering others came with a readiness to cast off the role of perceived expert;

I used to go in there feeling like I had to be an expert, and ironically, as you develop into the role, you need to be less of an expert. I stopped rocking up trying to be everything to all people or trying to impress with all the things that I knew (P3)

Correspondingly some defining moments of teacher/ teacher educator equilibrium indicate a mastery of third space identity tensions thus heralding some peace between two seemingly conflicting roles. Participants continued drawing upon what once concerned them as teachers but applied it constructively to their current role as CTEs, arriving at a certain hybridic identity truce. P1 recounted ‘We used our experience as teachers and asked ourselves how reasonable some policy expectations were for schools’ while PP2 recollected;

There were many times when you actively revisited your teacher identity like at policy briefings you'd say, “well, putting my teacher's hat on, I'd find that part a bit patronising or unrealistic”

In this respect PP1 stressed the need for CTEs to remain rooted in reality;

You can give policy messages but you have to retain your relevance and connection to the classroom. Teachers listen when you talk honestly through the lens of experience not purely from an aspirational document.

Participants exhibited the self-assuredness of Stabilisation where as second-order practitioners they now made authoritative arguments for the enduring currency of their first-order identities beyond simply publicly proclaiming it in an effort to prove themselves as they had during the Encounter phase. Whereby overplaying one's previous identity can be a barrier during early stages of career transition (Ibarra,1999), developing as teacher educators meant skilfully navigating 'practices and discourses of **both** school teaching **and** teacher education" (Murray and Male, 2005, 2, emphasis mine).

The data analysis indicates that an agentic ability to examine their beliefs grounded in past experience while discerning their compatibility with their identities as teacher educators, positioned these CTEs as vital conduits between schools and policymakers. Ongoing proximity to the nation's schools and teachers rendered them key to garnering teachers' reactions and needs. In having similar access to early iterations of policy thinking and interagency arenas where big decisions are made, they became valuable feedback loops towards influencing policy rather than simply mediating it. Inhabiting this third space cultivated their decisional capital (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012)thus making discretionary judgements as teacher educators. Whereby at Adjustment, participants grappled with loyalty tugs between policy and practice, Stabilisation saw them harnessing their hybrid identities to unpack policy critically without compromising their allegiance to it while also having the opportunity to influence it for the betterment of the system. Further such boundary construction between first and second order selves is considered to be an essential part of the evolving identity and practice of teacher educators (Engestrom, 2004; Zeichner,2010).

While acknowledging the attachment gains evident by the point of Stabilisation, continued time in that phase highlighted the vulnerable nature of secondment as participants became sharply aware that their time as teacher educators was limited. All participants reported reaching proficiency levels as teacher educators towards the end of year two and into year three of secondment thus supporting previous research (Gatherer and Edwards,1988; Murray and Male, 2005). PP3 said "It was year three before I felt I had a proper grasp of most things". PP2 also believed this to present

“definitely by the start of the third year” while P4 in describing it as “quite a defining point...found [her] groove halfway into the third year”. Ironically this progress was linked to tenure issues;

Five years is short...the first three years you're only getting into it. In years four and five you are starting to be your best. I felt I'd only come in the door and the end was coming (P4).

It was mid-way into the third year when I became almost fearless but I was more than half way through my secondment”(PP1).

Strongly suggesting that three years in the role is not long enough (Gatherer and Edwards, 1988; Allen, Butler-Mader and Smith, 2010), these data bring Irish secondment policy into sharp focus. If year three is synonymous with reaching proficiency, there are implications for teachers who are seconded to teacher education on yearly contracts. Firstly, if contracts are terminated before this point they are unlikely to fully reach Stabilisation given that this typically takes three years. Secondly a ceiling of five years means that those still in place in year three have limited time left as teacher educators to fully exploit the learning and skills acquired. Having survived the challenging transition to second order practice, those retained to year three are faced in less than that time with a return to the first-order setting from whence they came.

Furthermore Stabilisation signalled a disconnection from previous school life. PP2 “no longer felt like a school staff member and eventually stopped keeping links” and PP4 “didn't really miss school at all and started thinking ‘jeez, I actually could stay in PDST forever”. PP1’s account indicates that the school had also moved on in her absence;

The first thing I noticed was the code on the door had changed and there was a new secretary. My classroom had completely changed and in the staffroom many had no idea who I was. And then it struck me, I have to come back here someday.

Related tensions were evident during occasional interactions with former school colleagues;

I felt obliged to stay in touch because I still strictly belonged to the school. School friends often asked if was I looking forward to coming back. I'd say I was but truthfully I didn't miss it one bit. (P4).

When meeting people from school, there seemed to be a low-lying anxiety or fear among them that I was going to return with all these big ideas. I laughed it off saying “ Nonsense, I'm still one of ye!”(PP1).

This mental severing of ties with school while conscious that they were still employed and bound to return there, presented an additional hybrid identity issue for these teachers. In this respect Reupert, Wilkinson and Galloway (2010, p.51) depict teachers seconded to teacher education as being “neither fish nor fowl” with these data also exhibiting protective measures to broker a third space by ‘keeping a foot in both camps’ (ibid.,195). Accordingly studies conclude that the uncertainty of secondment contracts disturbs the establishment of teacher educator identities (Badali and Housego, 2000 ; Costley et al., 2007).

Experience : Preparation phase 2

The acquisition of new professional identities and skills prompted the seconded teachers to consider how compatible these would be with life in school and who they once were as teachers thus heralding another Preparation phase towards further career change. PP1 captures the sum of responses here;

I didn't anticipate all I was going to learn and how much I'd change. I developed and diversified in so many ways. I was no longer the same person. You can't put yourself back into the place you came from because it no longer exists.

The following comments show this transformative effect and the aspirations it evoked as unexpected;

I had every intention of going back to teaching but you outgrow that. I didn't plan it but it's like the broader your skills gets, you realise that you want something else (P1).

When I left school it was like, I'm definitely coming back. But it became very clear quickly that this was not going to happen. I simply would not fit there anymore.(PP2).

(PP4) felt “knowing so much more now, it would have been a retro-step to go back to school” while PP2 felt that she “couldn't step back into the same stream”. Other data show the realisation of an identity transformation and a parallel unpalatability of returning to school, as inextricably linked to the ticking clock of secondment and the five-year limit. P1 recalled “I got to mid-year three and I was like “after a year and a half, I'm gone”. PP2 figured “I might not be here for the full five years and it could end it at any time. But I had additional skills under my belt now to start looking elsewhere”. PP4 observed that “After year three, everyone I joined PDST with started looking around” and reasoned “Jeez, I'm not going to leave it until year five”. Several remarks like

the following captured the contagious power of grapevine chatter and a trading of exit strategies which further spread the infection of unsettlement;

Everyone starts looking at permanent options around year three because if you wait until four years, there is a sense of panic so I kept an eye out around year three because roles outside of school in education don't come up very often. (PP2)

There was always talk of people leaving and sharing advertised job, it gets in on you and you start thinking 'hang on a second, should I be looking around ?' Lots of my friends were on edge and they were only in year three (P1).

Anxiety about future secondments was amplified by the stipulation of annual sanctioning. For PP3 "It was always there at the back of your mind every year hanging over you". Likewise P1 remembered "You constantly wondered what was happening next year. There was always that worry that you could be sent or brought back to school". As a result, participants spoke about "constantly thinking about your exit because any year could be your last" (P4). This was further aggravated by the terms of policy allowing the DES or the school to terminate the secondment at any point. Participants spoke of "many masters deciding your fate" (PP3) where "the control of others over your destiny weighed heavily" (PP1). They also voiced their frustration about an employment arrangement which in lacking a career path meant "Your progression within the organisation is compromised even though you had more to give" (P4). P2's "preferred option was to stay in PDST as I had more to offer and ironically I had just cracked the role". Others were equally regretful in their conclusions;

So many good, knowledgeable people were lost because of the five-year rule and uncertainty around annual secondment so people jumped ship before they were pushed (PP4).

There's no doubt in my mind that my leaving was premature. I found it particularly difficult because it wasn't my decision to go back to school. Doing something I had worked hard to master ended so abruptly (PP3).

This cocktail of uncertainty, angst and urgency prompted a need to take back control and dictate their own future as PP2 explained "So I just took the decision, started going for interviews and thought, 'Okay, this is my fourth year anyway'". Likewise, PP1 reasoned;

There came a tipping point and this was going to end in two years' time anyway. It's obvious what drove my exit. I was extremely happy but I needed to protect myself because I wasn't holding any cards at all.

In anticipating the inevitable termination of a job they obviously liked, data show that motivations for leaving the PDST lay solely in avoiding a return to school with all interview participants expressing a preference to stay if the role was permanent;

I didn't want to leave the PDST at all. It was the best job in the world. The only reason I left was because I didn't want to go back to school”(PP4)

Going back to school was an interruption into this new career so you are forced into a situation where you're left with no options but to find something similar that was also permanent” (P2)

Indeed, for P4, the only pull factor of an alternative career route was permanence, noting that “If PDST was permanent, it would have been the dream job for me. No question about it”. Previous studies of teachers seconded to teacher education similarly show that exposure to the broader education landscape, an expanded skillset and increased confidence, spawns a curiosity about alternative career options that do not involve a return to teaching (Tuohy and Lodge, 2003; Kosnik and Beck, 2008). Potential clashes with school culture which for some had informed their departure in the first-place, positioned school as an antithetical home for their newly acquired identities and ‘professional capital’ (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) with the proverbial ‘going back to school’ having overtones of regression. The catalytic nature of secondment supports McMichael, Draper and Gatherer’s assertion that secondment “creates appetites which cannot be sustained when the work is finished”(1992,37). All participants expressed a preference to stay in the PDST but such appetites could not be satiated in a setting of such unstable tenure. Furthermore any related misgivings about returning to school were compounded by concerns that time was running out.

Other studies report unsettlement among secondees as contract termination approaches and/or uncertainty about its annual renewal (Tuohy and Lodge, 2003; Kosnik and Beck, 2008). This is arguably heightened in Ireland in that secondees remain at the behest of their school boards and the DES, the latter notoriously capricious in confirming annual secondments (Tuohy and Lodge, 2003; Sugrue, 2011). Participants of this study were further subject to a restriction of five years increasing the urgency to secure an alternative career position they believed to be more suitable to their

transformed selves. According to Nicholson (1987, 207), citing Langer (1983), “People are likely to err in the direction of self-attribution for control over favoured choices”. The data here indicate a tangible grieving for a job that participants loved and that despite leaving the PDST electively, they still considered their departures to be imposed. It is also probable that surviving the intense career transition to teacher educator rendered them more resilient and adaptive. Consequently, these teachers joined the ranks of those in previous studies (McMichael, Draper and Gatherer, 1992; Tuohy and Lodge, 2003; Reupert and Wilkinson, 2011), who, weary of the tenterhooks of secondment approval, took stock of their newly acquired professional capital and resolutely refused to be pawns of fate. If self-propulsion enhances one’s sense of direction and efficacy for the future (Jones, 1986) and if system propulsion has the opposite effect of powerlessness (Kanungo, 1982), then individuals will orientate towards agency described by Pulkkinen and Aaltonen (2003, 146) as “intentional aiming at self-protection, self-expansion and mastery of social reality”. In recognising their worth and having time to prepare for the next career transition, these teachers believed there was more to gain than to lose from exercising agency and seizing control themselves.

The paradox of reaching proficiency

Stabilisation as the final phase of Nicholson’s career transition cycle is characterised by having settled in a job while confidently executing what it requires. Accordingly these data associate Stabilisation with a grasp of teacher educator competencies and a necessary rejection of teacher/teacher educator binaries. Sentiments expressed however show that what ought to be a self-assured career phase became one of unease and earnest speculation of detachment losses (prematurely leaving PDST) and (re)attachment losses (returning to school). Indeed Stabilisation therefore presented as paradoxically problematic for these teachers owing to their contractual conditions. The transformative effect of secondment created a cultural disconnection from their school while also synonymous with becoming proficient as teacher educators. As Tuohy and Lodge (2003) also found, such teachers in seeing no place for their transformed selves at school and ever conscious of time limits, de facto embrace permanent education positions elsewhere. Indeed it appeared that the attachment gain of enhanced professional capital converged with the attachment loss of tenure instability, essentially ushering these teachers into another Preparation phase. In this case however Preparation did not observe its customary function of allowing one to enjoy the safe shore of proficiency in one job while pondering next career steps. Rather a new career cycle was levied by a looming termination mobilising an urgency to jump overboard before being pushed. Nicholson (1987) contends that propulsion into a new career cycle originates in either the self or externally, and that between both extremes there is a fusion of motives and causal events. Here that fusion

occurred between external contractual pressure (causal) and self-protective choice (motive), the latter being prompted by the former. Participant's jump from PDST's ship was driven not by the seduction of undiscovered lands, but rather by an avoidance of returning to the place of origin accelerated by an uncertain future on board. Ironically the professional capital acquired on secondment gave them the confidence to dive into waters new.

Returning to Schein's (1990) career anchors, the findings show that working with the PDST satisfied many of these; skills expansion, greater influence, challenge and autonomy. However the crucial anchor of stability was missing. The unique boundary challenge met by seconded teachers who struggle with fully belonging to either school or seconding body further underscores this paradox. One side of the boundary although providing most sought-after anchors, was sullied by its contractual conditions. The other side provided few of these favoured anchors but it promised the stability that eluded its opponent. The solution it seems lay in daring to carve out an alternative 'third space' career destination providing all coveted anchors while transcending the losses associated with both a return to school and the precarious position of secondment.

Conclusion and policy implications

The experiences of study participants reflect distinct phases of career transition located within one of three stages of secondment with each presenting unique career gains and losses. This article has chiefly focussed on the second stage Experience comprising transition phases Adjustment, Stabilisation and Preparation for another career cycle. Following the tensions associated with initial transitioning to teacher educator at Entry, the Experience stage was characterised by further tensions in adapting to the role, professional challenge and the negotiation of identity boundaries. This focus on professional learning for teacher educators presents a distinct set of "signature pedagogies" (Shulman, 2005) for those who 'teach other teachers'. The PDST's internal knowledge building mechanisms across interdisciplinary and sectoral teams, expectations to contribute to the collective capital, systems of professional feedback and collaboration with other education partners, appear instrumental in becoming proficient as a CTE. Further, proximity as second order practitioners to first order school environments considered critical for teacher educator development (Hinman, He and Bagwell, 2021), locates these CTEs as key players in policy construction thus legitimising their existence as hybrid professionals. The paradox of reaching proficiency in the role is evident as Exit approached when new tensions emerged between the transformational effects of secondment and its uncertain contractual conditions. For most this mobilised career change to

alternative destinations offering permanence and seductive career anchors deemed to be under threat if they returned to the classroom. For all study participants the greatest detachment loss of the secondment experience was a premature and imposed departure driven by a contractual ticking clock and speculative angst rather than by the lure of brighter fields. Teased by a door opened and then shut to them, there is palpable disappointment about departures that lacked closure and a waste of peak potential while on the cusp of what arguably would have been their best work as CTEs. And so in the absence of suitable career pathways to harness their professional capital and satisfy heightened career expectations, these seconded teachers simply paved their own.

This study joins previous others in highlighting significant issues with applying rigid tenure conditions to the recruitment of teacher educators. More specifically in Ireland's case, a stipulation of annual contracts further shackled by a five-year renewal limit is at odds with the complexities of transitioning from teacher to teacher educator shown to take three years. The policy is also flawed in blindsiding the impact of secondment on identity and in erroneously assuming that teachers will return to school to recycle their newly developed expertise with Table 2 of this article mirroring similar trends internationally (McMichael, Draper and Gatherer, 1992; Costley et al., 2007). During the PDST's first five years, 53 teachers exited the organisation for reasons of natural attrition. However since the imposition of the five-year ceiling, the subsequent five years saw 147 teachers depart the PDST with 65% attrition within three/four years of secondment and 85% of that cohort leaving before or at the third year^{iv}, again signposting year three as the proverbial career 'turning point'. This positioned the PDST itself as a casualty of secondment policy in haemorrhaging expertise and institutional memory while its internal heartbeat was continually derhythmised by contagious apprehension surrounding contract renewal and a resulting slew of ongoing, unplanned departures. The rules of secondment reduced the organisation to a safe experimental ground for those seeking a job digression or a stepping stone en route to other roles envisaged to feed undernourished career anchors at school. Equally by stealth, the PDST served as a breeding ground for other agencies who benefitted from the pool of expertise it created and on which it depended to fulfil its ambitious remit. Indeed PDST's continual investment in its teacher educators was analogous to the Sisyphean task of pushing uphill a growing boulder of staff learning while a pervasive policy tipped them back down the other side.

Finding greater meaning for their work and development in transformative contextualised CPD environments accentuates the role of these CTEs beyond mediation of finite 'deliverables'. Moreover it signals a rethink of current consumable attitudes towards CPD and the equally consumable treatment of teachers seconded as CTEs. This research shows a link between a conveyor belt of transient national imperatives and secondment policy's revolving door of staff to deliver on them rather akin to a business model of "hunting for talented individuals, working them hard, and moving them on" (Hargreaves, 2013, 293). Consequently it shows how such a policy compromises their identity and the value of their work both in its outdated view of teacher professional learning and in its equally outdated tenure conditions. A hegemonic model of contracting tenure conditions statically co-exists with an expanding reform agenda, a rapidly changing profession and associated needs for sustained forms of CPD. The potent combination of human, social and decisional capital accrued by these teachers comprises a professional capital "essential for most challenging educational circumstances" (Hargreaves, 2013, 305) and clearly takes significant practice to refine. The time and investment required to develop personnel accordingly demands their longer retention within structures that optimise such investment. The amalgamation of the PDST with three other support services to form Oide^v proffers an opportune platform to review secondment policy towards creating sustainable career pathways both within the new service and for teachers returning to school. As the shedding of newly acquired skills and identities is a concern regarding the latter, leadership duties that fully harness these at school are distinct possibilities within more formalised and scaffolded arrangements for the 're-entry' to school.

The study's examination of secondment to teacher education unearths the transformational impact of what is intended as a temporary career route and its far-reaching effects on career aspirations and agency. In extending the narrative into teacher career cycles and job satisfaction, it highlights what teachers find motivating and fulfilling in their work and how experiencing more of this during secondment than heretofore at school, colours their perspectives of their former classroom roles and future career ambitions. In relation to mid-career specifically, it calls for greater attention to "teachers in the middle"(Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012) and the need to boost their professional capital through professional stretch. With many studies linking stunted professional growth with teacher mid-career stagnation (Day et al., 2007; Katzenmeyer and Moller, 2009), it has been argued that secondments refresh teachers and prevent them from leaving the profession (Robinson, Munn and MacDonald, 1992). Conversely this study and others (Tuohy and Lodge, 2003; Costley et al.,

2007), show that secondments in fact lead teachers away from teaching having tasted the career anchors that it lacks. The broader contribution of the study also finds expression in its attention to a much-neglected area of scholarship not alone in Irish education, but internationally with regard to the role and identity of teacher educators working in the CPD sector. Its unique focus on secondment extends its significance to all teacher educators across the teacher educator continuum who operate under similar tenure conditions thus posing important questions about policies governing secondment and impacting a great number of professionals in Ireland and elsewhere.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought and approved by the research ethics committee at Maynooth University . Informed consent was sought and received from all participants of this study

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on Contributors

Dr. Ciara O'Donnell has worked with Irish Continuing Professional Development support services since 2005 and held the role of PDST's National Director for nine years . Ciara now works as an independent consultant in teacher education, curriculum and school leadership as well as a part-time lecturer with Maynooth University. Her doctoral research explored the experiences of teacher seconded to work as teacher educators in the CPD sector, their professional learning, identities and career pathways.

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Notes

ⁱ In September 2023 the PDST amalgamated with Junior Cycle for Teachers , National Induction Programme for Teachers and the Centre for School Leadership to form a new service called Oide

ⁱⁱ An advisor was a full-time member of the PDST team who worked directly with teachers and school leaders in the provision of professional development. Advisors belonged to different PDST teams according to specific system priorities and report to a team leader.

ⁱⁱⁱ Source : PDST HR records and annual reports

^{iv} Source : PDST HR records and annual reports

^v In September 2023 the PDST amalgamated with Junior Cycle for Teachers , National Induction Programme for Teachers and the Centre for School Leadership to form a new service called Oide.