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Abstract

This paper is about social class and the teaching profession. While class has long and deservedly been a core focus in the Sociology of Education, relatively little attention has been paid to how it is conceived and enacted in the context of the professions, including teaching. While research in the area is increasing, we know relatively little about ‘the daily class work’ of teachers, and student teachers, in schools. Teaching traditionally has been regarded as a middle class profession, and in the context of drives internationally to diversify the teaching profession, attention is needed to the experiences of those from lower socio-economic groups in their upwardly mobile trajectories. This paper draws on a constructivist grounded theory study about the social class identities and experiences of 21 student teachers from working class backgrounds as part of a wider teacher diversity project in Ireland. I present the concept of *class chameleoning* that was constructed from the data, being ‘different people’ in different contexts, a behaviour that was reported by the participants as being very common, and in which the vast majority recounted participating, in their placement schools. This behaviour was motivated by a strong desire to fit in and to not be looked down upon, but resulted in significant bifurcation of the self. The analysis is interrogated using Goffman’s dramaturgical analysis of social life and Bourdieu’s habitus clivé (divided habitus), as well as key findings from research in teacher education. I end by pointing to the ethical implications of diversifying the teaching profession for under-represented groups without concomitant adaptation of the culture of the profession and schools.

1. Introduction

This paper is about social class and the teaching profession. While social class has long and deservedly been a core focus in the Sociology of Education, relatively little attention has been paid to how it is conceived and enacted in the context of the professions, including teaching. As Van Galen (2008, p. 100) argued, “although they are to act as agents of the social mobility of others, we know little about the upward social mobility of the many public school teachers from poor and working-class homes”. Further, Maguire (2005b, p. 428) has pointed out that “very little ... work has explored the ways in which classed practices interpolate the lives and identities of teachers in their daily lives”. Indeed, it has been argued that issues pertaining to social class in teaching have been largely invisible (Reay, 1998; Van Galen, 2008, Hall and

Jones, 2013) in spite of its central importance, given the strong class stratification in society and schooling and the active role that schools play in (re)producing class inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979). In this context, scholars have pointed to the need for a focus on teachers' class positionalities and experiences, including their "daily class work" (Van Galen, 2008, p. 99; Reay, 1998), particularly given that teaching has traditionally been regarded as a predominantly middle class (Lampert et al. 2016) though 'upwardly mobile' profession, including in Ireland (Coolahan, 2003).

A further rationale for the focus on student teachers' class identities and experiences lies in the significant emphasis being placed, on policy and practice levels, on diversifying the teaching profession in recent decades. In Ireland, state-funded initial teacher education (ITE), accredited by the Irish Teaching Council, is provided by six centres for teacher education for both primary and post-primary teaching, with programmes offered at undergraduate (four years) and postgraduate (two years) levels by a range of institutions. ITE is high-status in Ireland (O'Doherty and Harford 2018), and entry is highly competitive. Despite Ireland's significantly diversifying population over the last twenty years, ITE cohorts have remained homogeneous, being in the main comprised of white, middle class and, especially at primary level, female entrants (cf. Keane and Heinz, 2015; Darmody and Smyth 2016; Heinz and Keane, 2018). In terms of social class, *Employers and Managers* (the highest socio-economic group) have been amongst the top two most highly represented groups amongst ITE entrants, and, in terms of ethnicity, between 98-99% are White Irish and of the settled population (Keane and Heinz, 2015; Heinz and Keane, 2018). While in many national contexts, diversifying the profession has focused on supporting the participation of those from migrant and minority ethnic groups (Donlevy et al., 2016; Lander and Sheikh Zaheerali, 2016; Santoro, 2015; Schmidt and Schneider, 2016; Sleeter et al., 2014), in Ireland, further groups have been targeted. Ireland's last two National Access Plans (Higher Education Authority (HEA) 2015; 2022), have identified teacher diversity as a key policy priority, with certain groups, including those from lower socio-economic groups, targeted. A range of teacher diversity projects are currently in operation nationally (Author, 2023), funded under the *Programme for Access to Higher Education, Strand 1: Equity of Access to Initial Teacher Education* (PATH1¹), including one upon which this paper draws. This policy priority has awakened a need to

¹ PATH1 is one of several strands of targeted higher education funding by the Higher Education Authority in Ireland supporting widening participation activities. PATH Strand 1 relates to widening participation in/to initial teacher education, through which €5.4 million has been invested between 2017-2023 in a range of teacher diversity projects led by the Centres for Teacher Education.

examine the experiences of student teachers and teachers from under-represented groups, including in relation to social class.

Drawing on Skeggs (2004), Maguire (2005b, pp. 428-429) observes that “class is a complex amalgam of the material, the cultural, the emotional and the social. Class is structural but it is also struggled over, contested and reconfigured”. My focus in this paper is the way in which this ‘struggle’, ‘contestation’ and ‘reconfiguration’ is enacted by student teachers in the context of their school lives. Thus, this paper aims to excavate ‘the daily class work’ of a group of student teachers in Ireland from working class backgrounds as they navigate entry to the teaching profession. Drawing on a constructivist grounded theory study exploring the social class identities and experiences of 21 ‘working class’ student teachers through a total of 31 in-depth semi-structured interviews, the paper examines the concept of *class chameleoning* that was constructed from the data. For the participants, this involved being ‘different people’ in different contexts, a behaviour that was reported by the participants as being very common and in which the vast majority recounted participating in their placement schools. This behaviour was motivated by a very strong desire to fit in and to not be looked down upon, especially in the context of school placement, but resulted in significant bifurcation of the self.

2. Literature Review

While there has been relatively little research on social class in teaching, work in this area is increasing. In terms of working class student teachers’ motivations and orientations, research has found that they are more likely than their middle class counterparts to view themselves as potential ‘change agents’, particularly with regard to their impact on the education of working class pupils. They are more likely than teachers from more privileged backgrounds to claim social justice-based and altruistic (Author, 2017) motivations, reporting a strong desire to ‘give’ back’, setting high expectations for all, especially for those from lower socio-economic (cf. Maguire 1999, 2001, 2005a; Burn 2001; Van Galen 2008; Lampert et al., 2016). Similarly, research with student teachers from ethnic minoritised backgrounds has emphasised their desire to contribute to positive change and the betterment of society (Price and Valli, 2005; Su, 1997).

Van Galen (2008) argues that class background is key to the formation of working class teachers’ professional identity, including to their constructions of equality, inclusion and social mobility in society. In this context, then, and, given their altruistic motivations for teaching, it is perhaps unsurprising that working class student teachers have also been found to prioritise being a relatable and inclusive teacher in terms of how they construct their professional teacher identity (Author, 2020). This prioritisation is frequently linked to having had negative

experiences of schooling, including being actively discouraged at school from higher education progression and/or thinking about teaching as a possible career (Lampert et al., 2016; Reay, 2018, Author, 2018). Similarly, those from ethnic minoritised backgrounds draw on their own educational experiences of marginalisation and racism in their role as teachers (Santoro, 2015).

Of the research that has been conducted about student teachers or teachers from working class backgrounds, common themes include their concerns about fitting in and belonging, often due to feelings of inferiority in the context of what has traditionally been a white and middle class profession, and about markers of class positioning which may be apparent in the school context (including accents and ways of dressing) (cf. Maguire, 1999, 2001, 2005b; Burn 2001; Raffo and Hall, 2006; Lampert et al., 2016). It has also been reported that they struggle with a sense of having to leave behind their family's class background (Maguire, 1999; 2005a,b; Ingram, 2011). Class markers have also been highlighted by those working in teacher education; in recent research with teacher educators about their experiences supporting student teachers from under-represented groups (Author, 2023), concerns were expressed about negative attitudes towards some student teachers' working class accents by some school Principals. Within schools, working class teachers have been found to be 'pigeon holed' into certain roles and assigned to lower 'ability' classes and 'difficult cases' (Maguire, 2005a,b) and/or may gravitate towards such roles (Lampert et al., 2016). Perceptions of 'not belonging' and other challenging experiences are not limited to student teachers from working class backgrounds. Indeed, teacher diversity research has focused more on the experiences of those from minority ethnic backgrounds than on those of other under-represented groups (cf. Donlevy et al., 2016; Schmidt and Schneider, 2016). Research internationally has found that student teachers from minority ethnic backgrounds typically encounter both covert and overt racism during ITE and school placement (Ladson-Billings, 2016; Warner, 2022), are essentialised and frequently experience racial tokenism in schools, along with high levels of stress, over-burdening and pigeon-holing as a result of their positionality (Santoro, 2015; Pizarro and Kohli, 2020).

Previous research has also explored the experiences of student teachers and teachers in different school contexts, where the student teacher's class positionality either aligns or contrasts with the class context of the school (cf. Maguire, 2005b; Ash et al., 2006; Raffo and Hall, 2006; Hall and Jones, 2013; Lampert et al., 2016; Jones, 2019). For example, Maguire (2005b) considers the case of 'Karen', a working class student teacher in England who reported being made to feel very unwelcome in her first placement school, feeling that she never fitted in and that she encountered prejudice regarding her accent. Karen deliberately sought a

different type of school for her second placement, a ‘failing’ and undersubscribed school that had difficulty keeping staff, claiming she felt she would fit in there. Maguire observes that this apparent choice of a ‘tough’ school may be less a choice and more “a form of risk-reduction ... against working in a school where they feel uncomfortable” (p. 431). Even in this school, however, where she enjoyed working with working class students, Karen reported feeling excluded by some other teachers who regarded her as ‘common’ due to her accent and way of dressing whilst on the other hand being regarded by students as an insider due to her accent. Karen’s case demonstrates the complexities of the impact of class positionality in differential classed school contexts. Van Galen (2008) in her class portraits of differentially positioned teachers, including two teachers from working class backgrounds, reflects on the various class-based tensions they experienced, including ‘Isadora’ who encountered challenges with regard to her professional authority in interactions with upper-middle class parents “...who assume acquiescence from those they consider socially subordinate” (p. 102). Drawing on Skeggs (1997), Van Galen (2008) observes that Isadora had a “... deeply internalized sense — common to the upwardly mobile — that her adequacy is always an open question” (p. 102). In Lampert et al.’s (2016) study in Australia, ‘Salli’, a working class student teacher on a predominantly middle class teacher education programme, who was teaching in low socio-economic communities, became highly aware of her own positionality relative to the various student groups she was teaching and with whom she was studying, and the implications for how she behaved in different contexts. Jones (2019), based on a longitudinal qualitative study in the UK exploring the social class identities of novice teachers on their emerging teacher identities, reported that many recognised that their class identity (and its associated cultural capital) may not be equally valued in all types of school context. Jones argued that some novice teachers may be constrained by their class identities, including in their ‘choice’ of school. How the complexities of class identities play out in ‘the daily class work’ of student teachers from working class backgrounds is the focus of this paper.

3. Methodology

The study upon which this paper draws aimed to explore the social class identities and experiences of 21 student teachers from lower socio-economic groups. The participants were recruited as part of the *Access to Post-primary Teaching* (APT) project (2017-2023), one of the teacher diversity projects in Ireland funded under PATH1. This project aimed to support the recruitment, retention and success of student teachers from lower socio-economic groups into the Professional Master of Education (PME) at the [name of University], a two-year

postgraduate initial teacher education (ITE) programme preparing post-primary teachers. All APT participants had satisfied socio-economic criteria in relation to family income in order to qualify for the project and had entered their undergraduate degree via a pre-entry Access programme or Higher Education Access Route (HEAR²). As such, all would be regarded as coming from lower socio-economic groups, or as being ‘working class’³. All had obtained their PME place through the competitive selection system having met application requirements. Various financial, academic and pastoral supports are provided to APT participants during their ITE programme and they also engage in wider project activities, including research. APT participants are required, where possible, to complete their Year 2 placement in a designated disadvantaged school to allow them to complete practitioner research projects aligned with the wider goals of the APT project, regarding supporting the higher education progression of students from lower socio-economic groups. The project has supported 41 student teachers to date, and this paper draws on interviews with Phase 1 participants (N=21). Of the 21, 18 were female and three were male. 20 were White, Irish and of the settled community; one was an Irish Traveller. This paper draws on data collected as part of one specific strand⁴ of the research which constituted an in-depth exploration of participants’ class identities and their related experiences in the context of becoming a teacher.

Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Charmaz, 2014) was employed as the methodological approach for this strand of the research. Grounded theory was selected due to its focus on conceptualisation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Hallmarks of grounded theory are its development of theory *from* data, an iterative approach to data collection and (early) analysis, and theoretical sampling through which further data are collected to ‘fill’ gaps in the emerging theoretical analysis (Charmaz et al., 2018). Due to the problematic objectivist assumptions underpinning classical grounded theory, a constructivist approach was adopted which provided for critical reflexivity with respect to researcher and participant positionalities, and acknowledged the co-construction of theory with participants (cf. Author, 2015, 2022; Charmaz et al., 2018). As an academic with a ‘class confused’ background (Author, 2009), various strategies were employed to acknowledge and address relative participant and

² The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR) is a scheme through which higher education places are reserved for students from lower socio-economic groups through reduced entry requirements.

³ See Author (2020) for further discussion about their categorisation.

⁴ The other research strand of the APT project focused on participants’ past educational experiences, motivations for becoming a teacher, and PME experiences.

researcher positionalities⁵. In-depth, semi-structured interviews⁶ were conducted with 21 participants over two years, each interview being of 60-90 minutes in duration. The 21 participants were first interviewed over two rounds (10 interviews were conducted in Round 1, and 11 in Round 2), and 10 of the 21 participants agreed to a second interview (Round 3), totalling 31 interviews. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

As part of the CGT approach, data collection and analysis were conducted in an iterative fashion, one informing the next. Data analysis commenced early, employing Charmaz's (2014) line-by-line initial coding, focused coding, and the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965) before provisional categories were developed. Reflective journaling and analytic memoing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Charmaz, 2014; Author, 2022) were conducted throughout. The provisional categories developed following Round 1 interviews were used to inform and revise the interview schedule for Round 2 interviews, following which the same analytic procedures were engaged, resulting in the development of a second set of provisional categories. At this point, further memoing was conducted whilst constructing a composite set of categories and their properties. A document subsequently was written summarising the findings and shared with participants who were invited to send feedback and to conduct a further interview to discuss the findings. This final round (3) of interviews had a dual purpose: a) to share the emerging findings with the participants and to discuss my interpretations with them⁷, and b) via, theoretical sampling, to ask further questions to 'fill' remaining conceptual gaps. The final interviews were analysed using the same procedures previously described and, at the end of this process, five categories, each with a number of properties, had been constructed.

This paper focuses upon a category relating to 'performing class' which was strongly identified in the data from the first round of interviews. Many of the participants reported regularly seeing people, including in their school environments, acting in a particular fashion to present themselves in specific (classed) ways to those around them. Some talked about doing it themselves, explaining that they 'imitated' or 'mirrored' those around them. Bringing this

⁵ For further information about how constructivist principles were enacted in this study, see Author (2022)

⁶ While interviews, like any data collection method, have their limitations (Roulston and Choi, 2018), they are the main data collection method employed in grounded theory studies (Charmaz, 2014). In-depth semi-structured interviews, rather than tightly- or un-structured interviews, were chosen as this approach allowed freedom to participants to share their perspectives and experiences in a natural manner and sequence whilst maintaining some level of structure in terms of the interview schedule.

⁷ While core findings presented in this paper emerged in the early stages of data collection, given that these issues were brought back to the participants for in-depth discussion in Round 3 as part of theoretical sampling, thus, more detailed and nuanced quotes from participants were available and are used from Round 3 than previous rounds in some parts of this paper.

provisional category to the participants during Round 2 interviews enabled excavation of its motivation (to fit in or to not be looked down upon) and at this point, most of the participants reported engaging in this behaviour. The category was brought back again to the participants during final theoretical sampling (Round 3) and further explicated through additional questioning and the exchange of interpretations between researcher and participants. Memoing throughout this final data collection and analysis stage included the use of Glaser's (1978) 6Cs⁸ theoretical coding family, which served to raise the conceptual level of the emerging analysis, including the conceptualisation of the behaviour as 'class chameleoing'. This process assisted in defining the core aspects of chameleoing, its motivation (desiring to fit in and/or relate), its directionality (performing 'up' or 'down', or actively or passively), its condition (not being known by the people around oneself), and its consequences (bifurcation of the self), each of which is now examined. Full ethical approval for the study was granted by the institutional Research Ethics Committee. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

4. Findings: *Class Chameleoing to fit in*

Class chameleoing is a context-dependent behaviour involving the assessment of the (classed) characteristics of an environment, including the audience, and reacting accordingly, to perform either 'up' or 'down' to be perceived as being from a certain social class, in alignment with the audience. For most of the participants in this study, class chameleoing involved performing 'up' in their schools and around their teacher colleagues and school management, that is, acting in a way to be perceived as more middle class.

Performing 'Up'

Performing 'up' involved behaving in a particular way to be perceived by others (whom one perceives to be of a higher social positioning) as being of a higher class than one is. The student teacher participants reported seeing this behaviour very frequently and most also admitted to doing it, especially at school. While most felt performing 'up' was deliberate, some reported it was unconscious or even accidental. The specific behaviour involved imitating those around them, through body language, actions, accent or speech, and/or through acquiring and showing off certain possessions (for example, clothes or accessories). Performing 'up' was also conducted through selectively sharing details about particular experiences without providing contextual information:

⁸ Causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions

... clothes or how you speak, experiences, they'd be sharing where they'd been and what they'd done, as opposed to *how* they've been in that place or done such a thing ... just sharing the positive side ... you can be very selective with what you share, and in that way, you can definitely perform a class ... if someone doesn't know you, they don't know where you're from, you can definitely pretend ... (Aine, Round 2).

The participants talked most about deliberately engaging in this type of behaviour around their teacher colleagues. Some reported changing their 'look' or how they spoke in order to not be perceived as "unprofessional" or "not smart" (Martina, Round 3).

When I started teaching, I felt like I nearly needed to pretend to be from a middle or upper class going in ... with regards to the way I dressed and the way I spoke. I felt like if I walked in and I was acting kind of common or using everyday language, like I am now with you, that they would say "hmm maybe she's not great at teaching like, she mightn't be as smart as the others or she mightn't be very professional" ... So I was conscious of that. I definitely acted that way (Martina, Round 3).

The participants underscored their strong desire to fit in in their schools and not be looked down upon as the motivating factor underpinning this behaviour:

... you don't want them to look down on you ... in some staffrooms I've been in, I've definitely kind of performed, or imitated kind of what was around me. When I was in the school on placement in a more of a middle class environment ... I found myself trying to fit in a little bit more ... it is a thing of fitting in ... I definitely have done it (Anna, Round 3).

Ava described deliberately arriving at school early and leaving late so that she was not observed being dropped by a family member (as she did not have her own transport), and deliberately changing how she presented herself in terms of dress and conversation:

... I felt I didn't fit in, I never really felt like I could get to university, become a teacher ... going into the schools I felt that I didn't belong ... then you go into a work environment where they have the cars, the resources, the outfits, the relationships

formed. And you're trying so hard to fit in ... the hair in the bun and you've the blazer and the jewellery. I was wearing a lot of jewellery, I've never worn jewellery ... I spoke differently, maybe slower, different vocabulary sometimes. Conversations, talking about things I hadn't a clue about really ... I didn't have a vehicle, so whoever was dropping me to and from [school] ... to avoid, I was always the first or second teacher there and I was the last to leave, you're trying to pretend you're not relying on family members ... (Ava, Round 3).

Such was her "longing" to be accepted, Ava reported that she would have done anything "to please them" [her teacher colleagues]:

... anything that they would've asked me to do I would've jumped at it ... whatever I could to please them just to try and fit in ... you just want to be accepted, you want to feel like you belong and you've worked so hard to become a teacher ... all you want is someone to say, "sit down beside us Ava, we're having lunch together" ... when you're longing and longing and longing for it, I think you will jump or you try and skip a few steps to get there (Ava, Round 3).

Pretending to be similar to their colleagues also allowed the participants to forge relationships with fellow teachers and school management, which they perceived as vitally important for employment and career reasons:

As for colleagues and peers, I think you pretend to be like them to forge relationships, both professionally and personally. And in this profession, especially teaching, employment is very difficult to gain ... stable employment ... So you will pretend to management to be like them ... show no sense of weakness ... for employment reasons and to fit in (Ava, Round 3).

Performing 'up' could also be more passive; for example, deliberately *not* disclosing information that would reveal oneself. As Aine remarked: "... you're not gonna tell them about how you were working at 16". Anna found herself *not* disclosing information about her own family upon learning that her colleague's family was very well off:

... another teacher, she was the same age as us but she was from a very well off family, her parents were lawyers ... you just knew straight away by interacting with her that she was very middle class ... her accent very, you know, southside Dublin ... she was talking about what her parents did, I kind of found myself *not* talking about my family ... I just felt more comfortable *not* saying it. Not that she you know would've judged me or anything but I think the fear is always there in the back of your mind (Anna, Round 3).

The participants continually emphasised the importance of the specific context in influencing their performing behaviour. Michelle reported that she “change[d] depending on the situation I'm in” and Robert noted that he “speak[s] differently depending on who I'm talking to”:

... just go with what's happening in the room ... I change depending on the situation I'm in ... the first time I went for dinner with the staff, I remember sitting there and being uncomfortable at the time, thinking 'I don't fit in here' ... I changed to fit in the setting of the room and what we were doing and where we were going, what we were talking about (Michelle, Round 3).

... When I'm talking to people from back home I do speak with a stronger accent ... than when I was talking to friends from university or if I was speaking to anyone who are perhaps middle class, or more educated, I wouldn't talk that way at all ... so I notice that I do speak differently depending on who I'm talking to ... I'd say perhaps belonging would be an element to it ... (Robert, Round 3).

Indeed, some of the participants explained that they disclosed some aspects of their 'true' classed selves to their (lower socio-economic group) students in an attempt to relate to and encourage them, but chose *not* to disclose such information about themselves, or deliberately performed 'up', around their teacher colleagues, the vast majority of whom were from middle class backgrounds. In this regard, Ava talked about being “two different people” reporting that while she had initially performed 'up' around both students and colleagues, over time, upon realising that her students became more engaged when they felt “a bit of a connection”, she allowed herself to “resonate with them”.

... you're nearly two different people, you're one in the classroom and you're someone else in the staffroom ... initially, when I started off, I pretended that way to the students.

Then I found it was just better to try and resonate with them, because they seemed to be more engaged when they felt there was a bit of a connection ... (Ava, Round 3).

Further, when an opportunity arose to share more about herself to encourage a student who was at risk of dropping out of school, she took it:

I had a student who wanted to leave school and I was the first teacher that she told ... I spoke to her and I told her, 'look I was in the same situation when I was in junior cert, and when I was in transition year I left for a while and I came back and it was the best thing I ever did'. So sometimes when you're one on one, then you may delve in a little bit further (Ava, Round 3).

Generally, however, the participants did not chameleon *within* school contexts, choosing only to perform 'up', perhaps because performing 'up' (with colleagues) and being oneself (with students) was too challenging within the one context. Indeed, a *condition* of performing class, particularly performing 'up', was not being known by those around oneself. The participants were clear that performing a different class was not possible around people who really knew you, as they would "bring you down a peg very quick" (Jane) to "remind you of where you came from" (Martina). The conflict around 'who knows what' was evidenced in Anna's experience; she recounted feeling uncomfortable about sharing information about her entry route to higher education with students due to the presence of another teacher (to whom she had not disclosed this information):

I think the conflict is there depending on how much you have disclosed, or not disclosed to the staff ... I was down to cover a class and the guidance counsellor was actually giving a talk about HEAR⁹ and I was just standing beside the door ... I remember thinking, right, this would be absolutely a key moment for me ... I remember, in the moment, a little bit of me didn't want to because the teacher was there. I remember thinking if there was no staff in there I would've felt more comfortable doing it ... I remember kind of not necessarily wanting to do it because she was there ... (Anna, Round 3).

⁹ See footnote 1

Anna claimed that she would hope that if a good opportunity arose that it would “trump” her relationships with the staff, but she was unsure:

... if a good opportunity came up with the students, I probably, I think that would trump, you know, my relationship with the staff, hopefully, where I wouldn't necessarily mind, or care if they knew that. But again, it depends on the staff and who it is (Anna, Round 3).

Chameleoning, and especially performing ‘up’, was viewed by the participants as tiring and draining; pretending to be something one is not, “you’re not yourself” (Brigid), requires extra psychic energy.

Tired. You're not yourself. Like I notice when I act myself and it's brilliant, because you're not tired, you get through the content, you're showing them that this is who you are, and you don't have to put on airs and graces. Yet, when I go to a different situation like that [staffroom], I still put it on, which is ridiculous (Brigid, Round 2).

As can be seen in Ava’s comment about being “nearly two different people” in the classroom vs. the staffroom, and in the participants’ experiences more generally, a consequence of chameleoning is a sort of bifurcation, separation, or splitting of the self. The participants talked about *not wanting* to be two different people:

... I want to try and remain true to myself but it is difficult balancing it ...because you're trying to please your colleagues and you're trying to get employment and you're trying to get that security ... Whereas at the same time you're ... [wanting] to keep that connection with the children. You know you're nearly two different people, you're one in the classroom and you're someone else in the staffroom. You don't want to be that way, but it's easy to fall into the trap (Ava, Round 3).

The participants felt it could potentially lead to a sense of loss of self-respect, potentially reinforcing a sense of inferiority as the sense is that it is not good enough to just be oneself. For Esther, the desire to fit in was so strong that it trumped the negative feeling of “not being true to yourself”:

But I do think there is a desire to fit in and kind of like a vulnerability in that way too ... you will find a way to make sure that you fit in with a certain group, even if it's at the expense of ... even if it's at the expense of not being true to yourself I think (Esther, Round 3).

Performing 'down'

The participants also described performing 'down', or minimising the self, that is, behaving in a certain way in order to avoid being perceived by others – particularly family and old friends - as getting 'above their station'. The participants expressed the same desire to fit in and not be judged which underpinned performing 'up', but here it was from a position which the participants worried would be perceived by others as being superior. They described minimising their achievements as they did not want to make loved ones feel "lesser than" (Jane) or "to hurt them" (Michelle), or be regarded as someone who had left behind their former community:

... meet a friend that I know is struggling, or hasn't got a job, didn't go to college ... and I almost play down how well I'm doing to make them feel more included ... consciously tone down anything I'm doing ... it's something I definitely actively do. I wouldn't like to put someone in a position where they'd feel lesser than (Jane, Round 3).

... when I'm home ... where a lot of people don't really go to uni ... They ask me how I'm doing and I'm saying 'oh yeah it's grand' ... when I moved away like I made a conscious decision that I was going to keep in touch because the people around me would be like "look at her she moved away and she never looked back" ... Play down the achievements would be a big thing. I don't want to hurt them, I don't want them thinking that I'm judging them and I don't want them to judge me for doing something (Michelle, Round 3).

Not Performing

There were two participants, Rita and Sarah, who reported that while they observed others performing 'up' in terms of class, they refused to engage in the behaviour themselves, insisting instead that they had "no problem" being honest about themselves. In this respect, they were not engaged in chameleoning in any direction.

... the area that I'm from, classically disadvantaged ... some people don't want to be seen as lower class, and they might try and hide it ... I'd have no problem in going out and telling anyone that I come from a poor family, and we live in a poor disadvantaged area. That is no problem to me, but like I know my next door neighbour might not be as free-willing to say that ... (Rita, Round 3).

Similarly, while Sarah took care about her appearance as a teacher in school, she was “not ashamed of what I am” and refused to “act as though I’m above what I am”:

... teachers are expected to like dress smartly ... you have your teacher clothes and you have your everyday clothes ... I think it’s just the status ... so I think you do play up to that to a certain extent but you can’t play up to it in a sense that you are living beyond your means ... I don’t think I would ever act as though I'm above what I am because I'm not ashamed of what I am ... I do see it definitely ... I don’t have any debts, whereas I think a lot of people are unsure of themselves and not comfortable in their own person ... (Sarah, Round 3).

Both Rita and Sarah were clear that they shared their ‘real’ classed selves with *both* staff and students in her school.

... some of my cooperating teachers were asking me like where did the project come from ... I just explained to them that basically we got the scholarship because we came through the HEAR route and they then asked what that is ... they just said ‘how do you find working through college?’, like they all knew I had the part-time job at the weekends as well ... (Sarah, Round 3).

... I have no problem in telling them. I'm proud of everything I've achieved. And I don't think I have any reason to hide where I came from ... there was one boy and he wanted to go on and go to college and he was like "Oh I can't ... my family are poor," it was the school that I went to. I just said to him, ‘Do you know who I am? ... Tell me what you think is so great about my family, and yet, I'm here teaching you’ ... you could see it in his head, like, you know, if I could do it, how come he couldn't? ... it was inspirational to him that he could see in me having gone from a similar kind of background ... (Rita, Round 2).

For Sarah, sharing information about herself with her students was part of being the relatable teacher that she desired to be, and part of what was necessary to remove “the divide” so that students would feel comfortable going to her with problems. She felt that sharing herself with her students resulted in them relating to her more and coming to her for advice and she explained that she did not mind sharing this information with her students when it was of benefit to them:

... some teachers can be very standoffish ... Whereas I think, if you get rid of the divide ... I want my students to feel like they can come and talk to me ... they really related more to me ... I really didn't mind sharing my story as long as I knew it was to benefit others (Sarah, Round 3).

5. Discussion

This paper has reported working class student teachers' perspectives on a behaviour that they identified as being very common and in which the vast majority recounted participating themselves, that of being a class chameleon, being ‘different people’ in different contexts, which was motivated by a very strong desire to fit in and to not be looked down upon, especially in the context of school placement. That class can be performative has a long history. For Charles H. Cooley, pretending to be “a little better than we are” as a result of the “impulse to show the world a better or idealized aspect of ourselves”, assisted in social mobility terms, and he believed that different professions – including teaching – had a particular “cant or pose” that people take on, mostly unconsciously, and that acts as “a conspiracy” in terms of other people’s perceptions (1922, p. 352) (see also Shulman’s (2005) signature pedagogies in the professions). Erving Goffman (1956), in his dramaturgical analysis of social life, argued that individuals try to control how others perceive them by expressing themselves, or behaving, in specific ways, including by presenting an ‘idealised’ impression or ‘front’ (pp. 22-23). He argued that the “presentation of idealized performances” (p. 23) is commonly observed in work on social mobility, noting that for those aspiring to be upwardly mobile (or to avoid being downwardly mobile), the presentation of a “proper performance” (p. 23) is needed which involves the use of certain “sign-equipment” (p. 24) which “can be used to embellish and illumine one’s daily performances with a favourable social style” (p. 24). For Goffman, the most important ‘sign-equipment’ associated with social class was “status symbols through which material wealth is expressed” (p. 24). In the current study, the classed sign-equipment utilised by the participants

included their physical appearance in terms of dress and accessories, and their accent and ways of speaking. Goffman (p. 44) argued that those performing need to “enliven their performances with appropriate expressions, exclude from their performances expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered” and thus need to hide information or activities which are “incompatible with an idealized version of himself” (p. 30). This was observed in the current study where the participants ‘passively performed’ – or chose not to disclose information about themselves to other teachers which would give away their ‘true’ social background.

My study’s findings about performance having a chameleonic nature depending on the specific context is also supported in the theoretical literature. Goffman (1956, p. 31) points to William James’ (n.d., p. 128) famous quote about people having “as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares. He generally shows a different side of himself to each of these different groups”. Goffman thus conceived of the self as differently generated in different situations. In the context of social class identities specifically, while for Bourdieu (1977) one’s habitus – an individual’s dispositions, ways of seeing, acting and thinking, that arise from one’s primary socialisation, particularly in terms of one’s social class background – was relatively durable, he also recognised that class is produced through everyday social actions, “not as something given but as something to be done” (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 12). In LeCourt’s (2006) study of students’ academic writing in higher education, Charlie, a student from a working class background, explained that he wrote and talked differently in different contexts, noting that “if I was around my friends ... I just like to present myself in a different way ... I think in a way everyone acts different when they’re around their close friends than around society” (p. 44). Charlie’s observations are strongly reminiscent of the narratives of the participants in the current study.

In this context, LeCourt argues for a more performative theory of class, with “classed positions [being] continually iterated in response to specific social spaces ... continually determined by the local situations in which we encode experience” (2006, p. 37) and “always under construction [and] being negotiated” (p. 45). The issue of this study’s participants performing different classed selves in different contexts is interesting in the sense that ‘choice’ is generally regarded as a particularly middle class orientation. For Skeggs (2004, p. 139), choice is not universal, it is rather “a resource, to which some lack access ...”. In this vein, it is likely more reasonable to consider the study participants’ performance of different classed selves not as an active choice but as something they felt they had to do to successfully negotiate their differentially classed school environment. This was not a behaviour they enjoyed; they reported it as being effortful, tiring, uncomfortable. This is also supported in the literature; for

example, ‘Benedict’ (Savage et al., 2015), an upper middle class man who was recounting interacting with builders renovating his home, reported that he enjoyed talking to them about “ordinary stuff” (p. 379), but later observed that it really involved “just performing” in which he had to “power down” (p. 380), requiring “quite a lot of effort”. Indeed, it could be argued that the participants’ experiences of class chameleoning produced habitus clivé. Bourdieu (1999) argued that an individual experiences habitus clivé, or cleft (divided) habitus, when their life conditions change significantly over time such that their dispositions lose coherency resulting in a habitus “divided against itself” (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 511). While for Bourdieu (1977), the dispositions of habitus were generally long-lasting and remained unified, Friedman (2015) identified habitus clivé in a significant minority of his sample of upwardly mobile individuals. In the context of this study’s participants’ upwardly mobile life trajectories, moving from working class origins to become teachers (generally considered a middle class profession), it would appear that some of them were experiencing habitus clivé, sensing decreasing coherency in their core dispositions of habitus. Indeed, several pointed to the psychic challenges posed by having to “be two people” (cf. Ava’s comments) in different contexts, such as in and out of school, or with students versus teacher colleagues. Similarly, in other research with working class students in higher education, the “feeling of a bifurcated selfhood” (Bufton, 2003, p. 232) has been reported, with them reporting being “a Jeekyll and Hyde character ... like two completely different people” (Tina, in Bufton, p. 224) navigating very different home and university lives. ‘Compartmentalisation’, and presenting different ‘fronts’ of oneself in different contexts, are understood to be strategies used to manage tension between personal and university lives by students from under-represented groups (c.f. Bufton, 2003; Goodwin, 2002; Author, 2011) due to the bifurcation that they perceive. Interestingly, Abrahams and Ingram (2013) suggest the possibility of individuals being able to adapt (simultaneously) to contradictory fields. Their ‘local’ working class exhibited a ‘chameleon habitus’ in adapting to *both* university and local/home fields that assisted them in overcoming internal tension, involving modifications to their speech and behaviour, although they still experienced significant stress. The conflicts and tensions experienced by this study’s participants in their upwardly mobile journeys while simultaneously trying to remain faithful to their roots was evident in their narratives, demonstrating the “suffering” that Bourdieu (2000, p. 160) argued such “contradiction and internal division” would produce. Hanley (2016) observes having to “make gargantuan efforts if you are not to lose touch completely with the people and habits of your old life” (p. x) and views the effect of changing class as “psychologically disruptive, sometimes extremely so” (p. x). In this regard, she and Friedman

(2015, p. 130) critique assumptions about social mobility being “an unequivocally benevolent force” with Friedman emphasising the challenges encountered by the upwardly mobile in their desired world, but also “the significant emotional labour required to reconcile such contradictory sources of identity” (Friedman, 2015, p. 143; see also, Abrahams and Ingram, 2013).

Previous research on social class and teaching has not directly reported such performative class behaviour, though there are hints in some studies. In Jones’ (2019) study of how novice teachers’ classed identities impacted upon their choice of placement school, while some avoided ‘crossing’ class boundaries and sought out schools with a familiar class context, one of the middle class teachers working in a working class school felt the need to construct a less “troublesome” (p. 607), identity, which could be construed as a type of ‘performing down’, like in the present study. Interestingly, Goffman (1956) argues that the ‘performer’ in a social space will always aim for an audience “that will give a minimum trouble in terms of the show the performer wants to put on and the show he does not want to have to put on” (p. 139). Indeed, drawing on Becker (1952), Goffman suggests that teachers generally prefer to work in middle class (versus ‘lower class’ or ‘upper class’) schools “because both groups may make it difficult to maintain in the classroom the kind of definition of the situation which affirms the professional teacher role” (p. 139). There is an inherent assumption here that the teacher is, themselves, middle class, and wanting “minimum trouble” with regard to their performance, will therefore seek out a middle class environment. Evidently, this study’s participants were *not* middle class and were on placement in mostly disadvantaged schools in year 2 of their programme, as per project requirements. That most felt such a strong need to perform ‘up’ in such a context speaks to their perception of the generally middle class environment of the school and of the teaching profession irrespective of the demographics of the student population. Findings of other studies also resonate: ‘Karen’ (Maguire, 2005b), a working class teacher, reported feeling discriminated against in both a privileged school and a working class school, especially by other teachers who regarded her as ‘common’ due to her accent and dress. While Karen was clear that she would not change who she was, she was critical of other teachers of working class origins who had adopted middle class ways of speaking to ‘pass’ as middle class. For Maguire, this act of ‘class passing’, however, could be considered “a tactic for coping with some of the feelings of discomfort that can occur for socially mobile teachers ... a subtle and subversive part of the way in which the textures of class are played out in the micro-dramas of class actions” (2005b, p. 436). There are some similarities in the case of ‘Salli’, a working class student teacher (Lampert et al. 2016), who, while resistant to “the

embodied markers of the middle-class” (p. 40), became aware that she needed to acquire a different and “*proper*” (p. 40) habitus to attend university and become a teacher. Lampert et al. (2016) argue that “like other working-class educators, she sought to self-invent herself, to “look the part, sound the part and, moreover, to [make herself over] to conform to this middle-class aesthetic” (p. 37) arguing that working class teachers and must ‘transform’ themselves “into someone more desirable if they want to succeed ... which means acting outside of their identity” (p. 39). While all student teachers are in the process of *becoming* teachers, which necessarily involves developing new (professional) identities and the taking on of new attitudes and behaviours as part of an enculturation process (cf. Smith, 2017), the ‘transformation’ required of those from working class backgrounds is not neutral; it is highly classed and fundamentally disempowering.

6. Conclusion

This paper has shed light on what acting outside of one’s (working class) identity looks like, for those from working class backgrounds who are becoming teachers. It has demonstrated what working class student teachers may do to cope with the discontinuities they experience upon encountering the middle class habitus of schools and the teaching profession. While previous research has hinted at related behaviours, this paper has taken an in-depth approach to its explication as a concept, based on 31 in-depth interviews with student teachers. While a limitation of the research is that it was conducted with (mostly female) participants from just one postgraduate teacher education context, in one higher education institution, it nonetheless offers a novel and useful way of understanding how working class positionality may shape the student teacher experience, particularly in terms of student teachers’ interactions and relationships. Conceptualising the behaviour as *class chameleoning*, the paper has explored its motivation (to fit in, be accepted and not be looked down upon), and has defined specific aspects of its enaction in practice, including performing ‘up’ and ‘down’, actively and passively. It has also identified the main condition under which it is enacted (not being known by those around whom one is performing) and related contextual complexities (being constrained in performing differently to different audiences within one context), and its consequences (bifurcation of the self, or a ‘split’ identity, with its accompanying existential implications). While the general ‘imitating’ or ‘mirroring’ behaviour reported has some similarities with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) legitimate peripheral participation in a Community of Practice, it can be distinguished from it as a result of its classed genesis. My participants were imitating behaviour and ways of being primarily due to a sense of class inferiority and a

related (often desperate) desire to belong, rather than as part of learning to be/come a professional teacher *per se*.

Class chameleoning can be understood as an understandable coping mechanism which working class teachers may feel they need to deploy upon encountering the predominantly middle class habitus of schools and the teaching profession in which they strongly desire to feel a sense of belonging. Only two of the 21 student teachers in the study reported that did not chameleon in any way and were content to present their ‘true’ classed selves to all. It is important to note that this behaviour, or reaction, is completely understandable given the context within which they were studying and working. It is only problematic in that *the participants viewed it as being so*; they were clear that they *did not wish to* engage in class chameleoning, as it fostered a sense of inauthenticity and bifurcated selfhood. Nonetheless, they felt compelled to do it in order to fit in as a result of their working class positionality.

The findings raise important questions for teaching and teacher education. As efforts to diversify the teaching profession continue internationally (Schmidt and Schneider, 2016) including in Ireland (Author, 2023), critical questions must be asked about the implications for those from under-represented groups where the institutional habitus of the profession and schools, largely based upon middle class and majority ethnic culture, has not changed. Indeed, Lampert et al. (2016, p. 36) have argued that “... the teaching profession constitutes a prime site that reflects the middle-class ideologies that potentially perpetuate the institutional bias entrenched in mass schooling”. In this context, it is understandable that a teacher from an under-represented group may feel uncomfortable, like “a fish out of water” (Bourdieu, 1979), and thus cannot be “authentically present” (Author, 2023, p. 216). Questions need to be asked about how ethical it is to seek to diversify the profession without concomitant adaptation of the culture of the profession itself. While part of the rationale to diversify the teaching profession has been premised on equity of access grounds for those from under-represented groups, it is pertinent to ask to what extent simplistic approaches, that is, those that do not include systemic change, serve to reproduce inequalities and, indeed, to “create sites for the denigration of working-class subjectivities” (LeCourt, 2006, p. 50). Further research is needed to track the experiences of student/teachers from working class and other under-represented groups in and through the profession and to examine how more inclusive school cultures can develop such that *all* teachers may feel valued and that they belong.

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