'Get a backbone … Come on!' The place of emotional intelligence in pre-placement preparation and support for trainee teachers

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Abstract
This action research study seeks to understand and suggest improvements to current preparation for placement processes which can impact on trainees' social and emotional well-being both before and during school based placements in primary schools. The research focus was motivated by a growing number of trainee teachers failing or withdrawing from placement due to factors not aligned to subject knowledge or pedagogy. Semi-structured interviews with student teachers produced narrative data that was analysed using a grounded theory approach. The sample group was drawn from undergraduate student teachers in year three of their four year degree programme. Analysis of transcript data highlighted three main aspects that were identified by trainees as impacting on emotional preparation - an organisational aspect, a support aspect and an anticipatory and anxious emotional aspect. Findings indicate that trainees consider current placement procedures as both inadequate in developing their emotional intelligence often impacting negatively on their physical and emotional preparations.

Key Words
Trainee teacher; emotional intelligence; teacher identity; preparation for placement.

Background
Students on initial teacher education programmes in England are required to undertake a number of school based placements (NCTL, 2013:21) in order to gain work based experiences and demonstrate that they meet the minimum teaching requirements to achieve qualified teacher status (QTS). This paper focuses on how preparation for placement processes and procedures impact on trainee social and emotional well-being, preparedness for placement and ultimately impact on successful placement outcomes in primary schools.

The research question was motivated by a number of factors. The first was based on regular evaluation of placements gained from managing the support and assessment processes provided by university tutors who visit and observe students during placement. Increasingly visiting tutors are reporting that trainees who encounter difficulties on placements are often poorly prepared, lacking in both professionalism and in a professional identity of how they see themselves as teachers (Robinson, Bingle and Howard, 2013). It is recognized that there is an interplay between 'teacher identity' and the practice of teaching (Flores and Day, 2006) such that 'teacher identity' constantly evolves during one's career (Sutherland, Howard and Markauskaite, 2010) and that the personal and situational dimensions in building this identity will impact on how trainees will feel about teaching and their continued engagement in the profession (Sutherland et al., 2010; Day and Kington, 2008). Evidence from discussions with visiting tutors combined with assessment evidence seemed to suggest that personal dimensions such as personal circumstances, health and maturity as well as situational

dimensions like the type, location and ethos of the placement school were to some degree impacting on outcomes.

The second factor influencing this research was informed by a rapidly changing educational landscape in England emerging as a result of the educational white paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010). In relation to Initial Teacher Education (ITE), the move from a set of teachers' standards (DfE, 2012) that had a specific category for trainees working towards QTS, to a single set of standards for both teachers and trainees has appeared to raise the bar in terms of trainee capability expectations. In particular, trainees now find themselves being assessed by experienced teachers using the same set of criteria that they themselves are judged against and evidence from discussions with visiting tutors, school-based mentors and students suggests that many students find it difficult to cope with the pressure of being compared to experienced teachers.

The third and possibly most significant factor in that it has impacted on all levels of the educational spectrum has been the implementation of a more rigorous quality assurance framework both for schools and for teacher education programmes (Ofsted, 2013) combined with a greater emphasis on outcome data related to the direct measurement of children's attainment and progress. Studies on the impact of trainee teachers on achievement in schools (Hurd, 2007) have demonstrated the positive impact that working in partnership with an ITE provider may have in relation to pupil progress and staff development. However, as achieving a positive Ofsted inspection outcome is commonly seen as driving school improvement processes, supporting trainees is often seen as too big a risk to take in terms of carefully measured pupil progress. The focus on conforming to a defined set of skills and competencies has the potential to result in a reductionist model of teacher training in which the 'expert' reproduces understandings in the 'novices' (Mooney Simmie and Moles, 2011) and thus results in trainees who copy existing practices rather than develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Further, the pressure on schools tends to reduce the availability of placements and sometimes means that students only receive details of their placement school at short notice. Trainee teachers are also experiencing a higher level of school expectation around their competence with many schools only wishing to accept trainees on placement if they are good or outstanding to minimize the impact a weaker trainee may have on pupil progress. These pressures at university and school levels combine to pose considerable challenges for the preparation of students for placements. As such, trainees' not only have their own internal worries and emotions to deal with when preparing for a school based placement, they also have the expectations of schools and ITE providers.

Literature Review
Traditionally in initial teacher education, there has been a tension between university-based and school-centred perspectives. Although both contexts are recognized as being essential components of successful teacher education, there is potential for a mismatch between content and approach taken. This conflict can be summarised by a dichotomy between theoretical and practical perspectives with academic discourse that is generalisable, decontextualized and depersonalised on the one hand as opposed to professional dialogue that is situated, drawn directly from first-hand experience and is personalised (Sutherland et al., 2010). Consequently, there is a culture gap that trainee teachers must traverse as they negotiate the transition into the working practices and ecology of schools. The concept of 'teacher identity' is crucial to successfully managing this transition (Timostsuk and Ugaste, 2010; Flores and Day, 2006) yet commonly used placement texts primarily concentrate upon subject and pedagogical knowledge with little or no mention made of the role of emotional intelligence in developing trainees' preparedness for placement (Hayes, 2009; Medwell, 2007; Gower, Phillips and Walters, 2005). When emotional

intelligence or dealing with emotions is approached, it primarily focuses upon using it as a tool in 'negotiating the complexities of school life' (Hayes, 2003a:53), as a skill that will need to be mastered (Robinson et al., 2013) or an aspect of teaching that needs to be considered (Spencer, 2011) without any specific practical advice on how this can be achieved.

The term emotional intelligence is conceptualised as acknowledging emotions and emotional management to be significant components of problem-solving in quotidian situations (Corcoran and Tormey, 2012; Goleman, 2004). Mortiboys suggested that in addition to the two well-known facets of what a teacher can bring to the classroom - subject expertise and methods of learning and teaching, there is a third and often unrecognised component (Figure 1.) and pointed to the important role that emotional intelligence plays in teaching.
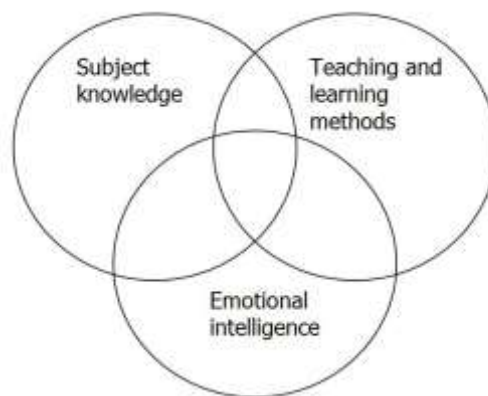

Figure 1. Mortiboys' representation of what a teacher brings to the classroom (Mortiboys, 2005:2).

The importance that Mortiboys (2005) attaches to the role of emotional intelligence in teaching suggests a possible explanation for why an increasing number of trainees were failing or encountering difficulties on placement. Hargreaves (1998:836) commented that 'although teachers are always prone to fall short emotionally, because people expect too much of them – there are also very specific conditions which can magnify this imperfection (or minimise it instead). Recent studies (Yin et al.,, 2013; Corcoran and Tormey, 2012) have indicated that inexperienced teachers typically need to develop high levels of emotional intelligence and point to the necessity of including a focus on emotional competencies as part of teacher education programmes.

Part of the reason why the role of emotional intelligence is not reflected more widely in available placement handbooks and texts may be due to only recent emergence of research on the emotional aspects of teaching (Yin et al., 2013; Sutton and Wheatley, 2003; Hargreaves, 2000) or as a result of the subject being viewed with a certain amount of scepticism and caution (Pugh, 2008).

What is evident in literature review is a lack of any real research linking emotional intelligence and trainee teachers' emotional readiness leading up to and during placement. Hayes (2003b) highlighted what he termed a 'dearth of interest about emotions experienced by trainee (student) teachers on school placement' (Hayes, 2003b:155). Although focused primarily on the emotions experienced by trainee teachers while on placement, Hayes' (2003b) research also illustrated the role that emotions played in the build up to starting a placement and how anticipatory, anxious and fatalistic emotions often 'meant that too much of their mental energy was directed towards concerns of the heart rather than the practical preparation for the job' (Hayes, 2003b:169).

Aims and Research Question
The aim of this research was to explore how preparation for placement processes and procedures

impact on the social and emotional well-being of trainees, their preparedness for placement in a primary school and ultimately the impact on successful placement outcomes. In exploring this overall aim the key questions were:

- Are trainee-teachers suitably prepared to deal with the emotional aspect on being on placement?
- Do pre-placement arrangements and processes impact on trainee emotions and preparation for placement?
- What unseen factors impact on trainee emotions?

Research Design

An interpretative phenomenological approach using semi-structured interviews was used to gather qualitative data. A phenomenological approach was selected as it is primarily concerned 'with exploring experiences in its own terms' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009:1).The choice of collecting qualitative data was chosen as a suitable method of data collection given the focus on emotions and feelings from which meaning can be derived (Straus and Corbin 1998). Students were selected as to 'represent a perspective, rather than a population' (Smith et al., 2009:49). Qualitative data in the form of transcripts were then analysed so a theory could be developed that could improve both understanding and placement procedures in the future.

The research was limited by the availability of trainee teachers who were just about to start their school based placements as external circumstances caused a number of respondents to withdraw from the research process. Although only three trainees were interviewed, the use of an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) with its focus on idiographic methodology supported this small sample size as the respondents formed a fairly homogeneous group and thus ensured an appropriate degree of meaning in the research (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). An IPA approach is well-established and credible method of seeking to understand participants' worlds through a focus on their experiences and sample sizes in such studies tend to be small as larger data sets may obscure the detail of meanings and interpretations (Smith et al., 2009).

Methods

The gathering of qualitative research data recorded through individual interview was chosen as this enabled 'respondents to project their own ways of defining the world' and facilitated a personal engagement for clarification and exploration of alternative perspectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:146). From an initial sample of six students from the third year on the four year QTS programme, only three students were available to be interviewed. A semi structured interview process was adopted to avoid interviewing with any preconceived ideas (Gillham, 2000). All of the interviews took place in the week preceding the trainees' third year school based placement and so the interview focus on pre-placement arrangements and preparation was pertinent to the trainees at this time.

Although the sample of interviewees was limited it provided a rich source of qualitative data for analysis. Following transcribing, the qualitative data were analysed using a grounded theory approach with data coded into initial categories or themes which are revisited and refined until no new themes emerge so that a theory 'derived from the data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process' (Strauss and Corbin 1998:12) could be formulated.

Ethical issues were carefully considered and standard university procedures were followed for the design of the study, the participation of respondents, the collection and storage of data and for

ensuring the privacy and anonymity of respondents. The study was clearly explained to participants, informed consent was obtained, and participants were free to withdraw at any stage.

Findings
Initial analysis of the transcripts highlighted eleven main themes or categories which impacted upon the emotional readiness of trainees for placement. On further analysis these eleven themes were further coded into three distinct categories:

- An **Organisational** aspect – *notification of placement; travel time and distance; placement partner*
- A **Support** aspect – *pre-placement tutorial support; expectations for placement; paperwork and documentation*
- An **Anticipatory & Anxious** aspect – *apprehension and anxiety; personality; critical incidents; personal skills; identity as a teacher*

The Organisational Aspect
It is perhaps not surprising in an ITE context that all participants indicated that an early notification of placement impacted positively on emotional preparation. Although no trainee was critical of the placement process the findings suggest that as this element of placement is outside the student's control it can have a large impact on emotional preparation. This suggests that the development of emotional intelligence of trainees could help them to prepare better for placement through self-management and self-preparation.

> *'Placement was organised earlier this year … it has made it a lot easier to get organised ahead of time – I think it is a massive emotional issue'*
>
> (Interviewee A).

> *'A lot of people don't find out their placements until the last minute, if I didn't know I would be really worried.'*

> *'… you just feel more relaxed knowing where you are going. I have been up to the school and I think that if I couldn't do that I would be really stressing about it'*
>
> (Interviewee B).

A second organisational aspect focused upon travel time and distance to placement schools.

> *'I had a road accident on my first placement and then a small road accident on my second placement which sort of made me quite nervous travelling …. I was a bit shaken every day when I arrived which was quite difficult'*
>
> (Interviewee A).

> *'In my first year I had both my placements an hour and a half away … that worried me – getting there'*
>
> (Interviewee B).

A third and perhaps more surprising aspect in relation to the organisational aspects of placements concerned the fact that for their beginning (first year) and developing placements (second/third year) trainees are paired in the same class on placement. Depending on the trainee viewpoint and past experience this has either a negative or positive emotional impact on individual trainees and therefore the development of students' emotional intelligence would facilitate their preparation for placement.

> *'…in Year 1, I was paired with a student from my group …. And … we don't really see eye to eye on a lot of things. I think that if there is anything I was concerned about this placement that would be it'*
>
> (Interviewee A).

> *…'it does worry me slightly that this is going to be my first placement on my own'*
>
> (Interviewee B).

> *'I have been lucky in that it has been good students that I have been placed with before, it is really nice to have somebody else who is a student in the school'*
>
> (Interviewee C).

Discussion with students and their mentors suggests that many students find it difficult to deal with the complexities of working as a pair within the same class and that they would appreciate help to develop inter-personal skills that are useful in facilitating close working relationships in the primary school.

Trainees also expressed concerns that in most cases they were unaware of whom they would be paired with and this did have an impact on their preparation.

> *'On the first day, it was someone that I had never met before'*
>
> (Interviewee C).

> *'Literally her name was on the email and we found each other on facebook'*
>
> (Interviewee B).

The Support Aspect
The aspect of the level of support leading up to school based placements from university lecturers and personal tutors was viewed by all of the trainees as an aspect that they think could be improved.

> *'I don't think that tutors here have had the time to be able to give students enough sort of 1 on 1 support'*
>
> (Interviewee A).

> *'We get tutorials for targets but then I don't really think that is enough, we only get ten minutes with the tutor and that is not one to one'*
>
> (Interviewee B).

Although all of the trainees spoke positively about a pre-placement module and the impact that had on their confidence leading up to placement, there was still a level of confusion expressed by all of the trainees around the detail of what they were actually expected to do in school as this often depended upon individual school contexts. Placement supporting documentation was universally seen as helpful but was sometimes considered not to have been explained properly leading to mixed messages. To a large extent, this is rooted in the perceived divide between generalised theory at university and situated practices in individual schools and a focus on emotional intelligence as part of preparation could help trainees to develop the flexibility required in adapting to variable local contexts.

'What they could do better is being clearer about what they expect us to do on placement'

'…we have been getting more and more things added to the list of things we have got to do'

(Interviewee C).

'I think the documentation we get is good but then actually informing you of what you need to do with it. Everyone always gets a different message'

(Interviewee B).

'Paperwork and supporting documentation they do well – I feel like there is enough support there'

(Interviewee A).

The Anticipatory & Anxious Aspect
It is perhaps unsurprising that all of the trainees expressed apprehensions and emotional anxiety before starting their placements but also tinged with a feeling of excitement. This anxiety was in some cases aligned to negative experiences on previous placements or due to work and family commitments such as those expressed by interviewee A.

'I work outside of uni as well that has a big impact on my time management … in previous placements I have found it very difficult to cope and I haven't felt prepared going into placement'

(Interviewee A).

Interviewee B also brought a personal dimension to her preparation procedures.

'I am a worrier! I get worried that I don't have the right information'

(Interviewee B).

Worries about coping on placement are very common amongst trainees and signpost the need for developing the emotional intelligence of trainees as part of the process of assisting students to cope with the pressures of placement.

As part of the interview trainees were asked to recount or reflect upon a situation or critical incident that they had encountered while on placement that had impacted on their emotional well-being or confidence. It is interesting to note that all of the trainees chose incidents and interactions involving adults, either school staff or parents as opposed to interactions with children.

Interviewee B felt that the schools expectations around planning did not take into account her level of training and experience.

'…she took all our planning and wasn't very appreciative of the fact that we were students and that we wanted to learn… it was upsetting me and I was thinking I cannot do this, I am not doing it right'

(Interviewee B)

Interviewee A was reflective about a difficult lesson that was disrupted by children being removed by other staff for a school performance but acknowledges that at the time it had an emotional impact.

> *'… it felt like a shambles because it had collapsed. I am glad it happened in some ways because now it has sort of made me see the benefit of thinking about how to react to situations'*
>
> (Interviewee A).

Similarly, interviewee C reflected on a difficult situation when she felt she had been undermined by a supply teacher and an experienced teaching assistant.

> *'I was really, really annoyed but I didn't know what I could do about that …. I was mad with myself because I knew I should have done something but I didn't and it made it harder for me to concentrate and get on with the lesson'*
>
> (Interviewee C).

In each case, trainees felt that they did not have the necessary skills, training or strength of identity as a teacher to deal with the situation and as a result reacted professionally but also emotionally. When prompted to say how they felt the university could have prepared them better to deal with these types of situations, some trainees felt reluctant to discuss them as it was felt that the reply may be:

> *'…they would probably have said "get a backbone – come on!"*
>
> (Interviewee B).

> *'A lot of the tutors seem to have a sort of grin and bear it attitude'*
> (Interviewee A).

Thus there is an acceptance from the trainees in this sample that they needed help to develop the strategies and skills needed to cope with challenges in school but it is evident that many trainees felt they were inadequately prepared during the course and there was a reluctance to seek help from tutors and mentors.

Analysis & Discussion
The three aspects that were identified in this study; organisation, support
and anticipatory and anxious emotions are interlinked and related. It could be argued that a core aspect of support could encompass organisational and emotional support as they all have the same aims of providing trainees with a secure emotional basis to undertake school based learning. Whilst there appears to be no empirical research linking emotional intelligence and emotional well-being to pre-placement arrangement and organisation, Goleman (2004) suggests that success in life is directly related to levels of emotional intelligence and that developing social and emotional skills can impact on the capacity to learn and improve academic performance and this provides a case for ensuring trainee teachers have a focus on developing emotional competencies within their programmes and networks of support (Yin et al., 2013; Timostsuk and Ugaste, 2010). Discussions with mentors and trainees support the evidence presented in this study that many students find it challenging to deal with the emotional pressures of school placements in primary schools.

Recent changes in initial teacher education in England challenge the humanistic model of education as assisting the personal, social and professional development of trainees in favour of an apprenticeship model whereby mentors act as role models to pass on an accepted body of knowledge and skills or a competency model of systematic training in pre-defined competencies

(Mooney Simmie and Moles, 2011). There is a challenge between an approach that empowers teachers to develop as learners and one that assists novices to replicate existing 'best practice' that is essentially a choice between short-term measurable competencies and long-term intangible attributes and there is a fine line that needs to be walked between what can reasonably be expected by trainees in relation to levels of support from tutors and trainees becoming reflective practitioners who are able to stand on their own two feet (Robinson et al., 2013). It could be argued that the development of emotional intelligence is beyond the scope of training that aims for students to meet pre-defined competencies but this study suggests that further research on the benefits of considering the development of emotional intelligence in teacher training courses may be useful. Trainees mid-way through their training were realistic about the pressures and expectations placed on teachers at all levels but none of the trainees were specifically aware of the concept or impact of emotional intelligence as a framework in the build up to placements. This may in part be due to the trainees still developing their own self-awareness but may also be a as a result of neglect of emotional intelligence as a field of study within teacher training despite the centrality of the concept to developing the ability of trainees to cope with the pressures and challenges of learning to teach (Hawkey, 2006).

In spite of the importance of preparation for the emotional challenges of teaching (Yin et al., 2013; Timostsuk and Ugaste, 2010; Hawkey, 2006) trainees in this study typically believed that university personal tutor support was inadequate for fully preparing them for the rigours of school based placements. Although they understood that this was often outside the capacity of personal tutors and spoke highly of pre-placement modules in general terms, trainees felt they had received little practical support for developing the skills and attitudes that they would need to cope with the emotional stresses of teaching. The personal and emotional aspects of actually being on placement were not seen by any of the interviewees as adequately covered in pre-placement procedures or existing modules. Although they appreciated that often you cannot plan for the unforeseen, trainees felt that the emotional impact of dealing with staff and parents in a school context was not adequately dealt with and was often seen as a post placement discussion rather than a pre–placement preparation. Trainees raised the issue of mixed messages and not being fully aware of placements requirements and this suggests a lack of preparedness for the variability of school situations. The (short term) desire for absolute certainty and predictability in the workplace contrasts with the (long term) need for flexibility and adaptability and reflects Mooney Simmie and Moles' (2011) disparity between the mentor as an expert who reproduces understandings and the mentor as a liberator who facilitates new understandings.

Summary & Conclusions
The transition from student to teacher is a complex one entailing the sophisticated knowledge, understanding and skills required to be a teacher combined with the creation and development of a viable self-image as a teacher (Sutherland et al., 2010). This is a growth model based upon rigorous reflection, yet systematic reflection is difficult for many trainees and mentors have a crucial role to play in facilitating reflection and helping trainees in the transition towards the holistic, learner-centred critical reflection required for being a successful teacher (Mooney Simmie and Moles, 2011; Sutherland et al., 2010).

Central to this process is the concept of teacher identity and the overall aim of preservice teacher education can be envisaged as the development of professional identity alongside the development of competencies necessary to serve as a teacher (Van Huizen, van Oers and Wibbels, 2005). Teachers must know themselves and what they stand for that goes beyond externally directed professional competencies and thus a focus on self-development should be a central component of teacher education (Timostsuk and Ugaste, 2010). Emotional preparation for placement has many inter-related and interconnecting factors encompassing – notification, travel, personal constraints and whether it is a shared experience. Trainees in this study do not feel that pre-placement arrangements in an

organisational, support or emotional context fully support positive outcomes and thus it is reasonable for the providers of teacher training to consider if changes should be made that would facilitate better emotional preparation for the demands of placement. Hayes (2003a) highlighted practical steps that could be used to offset or moderate the impact of 'heightened emotions at the start of placement' (Hayes, 2003a:17) and many of these practical steps correlate to the concerns expressed by the trainees within this study.

It is suggested that for participants in this study, emotional intelligence links to the development of self-identification as a teacher. Becoming a teacher is a complex process of survival and discovery (Kyriacou and Kunc, 2007) that begins with the preservice education of teachers (Sutherland et al., 2010). In this process of growing to become a teacher there is an interplay between teacher identity and teaching practice such that learning to become a teacher is an ongoing and dynamic process where interpreting and reinterpreting one's values and experiences requires skill in negotiating and shifting perspectives at an inter- and intra-personal level (Flores and Day, 2006). Teaching is a highly complex and skilled profession where teacher identity provides a means of constructing, interpreting and understanding the interactions between person and context that is so important in an individual being able to successfully assimilate into the professional environment of schools and teaching (Sutherland et al., 2010). Preservice education of teachers is one of the major socializing agents in enabling students to adapt to ecology of the classroom as it holds a formative position between the personal biography of trainees and the practices and beliefs of teachers, yet it appears that many initial teacher education courses have a weak influence on the shaping of new teachers' identities (Flores and Day, 2006).

Given the relatively small sample size and the focus on one undergraduate year group, this study is clearly unable to answer the many questions that could still be explored relating to aspects of incorporating emotional intelligence development in preservice teacher education programmes such as the stage of training or the programme/route undertaken. Future research may focus on a much wider qualitative data collection process using a larger sample of trainees or employ quantitative data in attempts to provide indications of how the development of emotional intelligence may impact on trainee competence and progress (Corcoran and Tormey, 2012). What is evident from this study is that existing trainees reveal the need and desire for help in developing personal emotional competencies necessary for dealing with the challenges and pressures of teaching on placement. As Hayes suggests: 'the development and honing of trainee teachers' emotional literacy is an essential element of their preparation for teaching and too important to be left to chance' (Hayes, 2003a:17). Goleman (2004) views emotional intelligence as directly related to success in life and importantly as something that can be learned. Consequently, this study supports the call of Flores and Day (2006) for providers of preservice teacher education to consider the potential of targeted development of emotional intelligence based upon guided personal reflection and consideration of the cultural contexts of schools in order to focus more explicitly on the development of teacher identity amongst trainee teachers.

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