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## Reflecting on Teaching the Past: Unpacking the Professional Knowing of Early Career History Teachers

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### Background

The Training and Development Agency for Schools continue to set an official agenda for what constitutes professional knowledge for teachers in England. The Professional Standards for Teachers (TDA, 2007) set out expectations regarding attributes, knowledge and understanding and skills for teachers at different stages in their careers. Such prescriptions have been the subject of critique by the academic community (Furlong, 2001, Phillips, 2002, Ellis, 2007) for their implicit reductionist assumptions about professional knowledge. Indeed the TDA's own recent consultation and subsequent publication of guidance on subject knowledge for teaching suggests acknowledgement that the nature of professional knowledge is more complex than a set of competences. History teacher educators (John, 1991, Husbands et al, 2003) have long recognised the need to focus on what history teachers do know, rather than what they should. However whilst scholarship offers us rich understandings of those considered experts (Turner-Bisset, 1999) or engaged in initial teacher education (Pendry, Husbands, Arthur and Davison, 1998), little is known about the professional knowledge of early career history teachers.

### Research Questions

This paper builds upon recent doctoral research exploring the nature and origins of professional knowledge among early career history teachers working in secondary schools in the South East of England. It compares the findings from different case studies of teachers at the end of their initial teacher education, teachers completing their induction period as Newly Qualified Teachers, teachers experiencing their first two to three years of teaching as well as a small group of more experienced practitioners. The objectives of the study are to identify, analyse and compare different areas of professional knowledge; in particular to identify the range of professional knowledge areas, their inter-relationships and the extent to which these are manifested differently by more or less experienced early career teachers.

Research Questions are:

1. What areas of professional knowledge can be identified among early career history teachers working in secondary schools?
2. How do different areas of professional knowledge relate to each other? How are they connected?
3. Are there differences in professional knowledge between early career history teachers with more or less experience?

### Methods

A case study approach (Yin, 1994) was adopted, with purposive sampling used to identify a group of 12 early career history teachers, representing four specific groups: 3 teachers on the verge of completing their initial teacher education, 3 teachers completing their NQT induction, 3 teachers employed for 2 - 3 years and 3 more experienced teachers who had just taken up departmental leadership. Each teacher was observed teaching a lesson and subsequently interviewed using the lesson observation as an artefact for discussion (Eraut, 2000). Each teacher also provided an educational autobiography which was used as a stimulus to explore the influence of past experiences.

Narrative analysis (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) was used to examine their own accounts of their professional knowledge and significant experiences.

## Frame

Beyond the substantive focus of the study and its associated scholarship, the study draws upon the constructivist interpretation of pedagogical content knowledge by Cochran (1993) which rejects that static nature of knowledge and instead presents knowing as a dynamic entity. The study also draws upon Eraut's (1996, 2007) epistemology of practice, specifically the interplay between context, time and modes of cognition and reflection. In addition the study acknowledges the nature of situated learning and identifies how early career teachers develop within different communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

## Research findings

The findings illustrate how early career history teachers draw upon their knowing of history, pedagogy, resources, learners and context as well as their beliefs and values. Whilst it will be shown that these areas of knowing can be described and illustrated discretely, they work in complex ways with each other and decisions, actions or reflections often necessarily draw upon others. Whether intuitively or deliberately, these other ways of professional knowing are shaped, developed and integrated through reflection in and on action. These findings are integrated to shape a new model of professional knowing which may be of interest to other teacher educators and the history teaching community. Differences are identified between different groups of early career teachers which indicate that both experience and context impact considerably upon professional knowing.

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