Back to the Chalkface: A professional reawakening through the lens of self-determination

Caroline Elbra-Ramsay
UCET Nov 2025

Outline

Introduction

Key Literature

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Introduction

- Background-Academic Leave

- What are the challenges, opportunities and constants of returning to professional practice?
- How does returning to practice influence professional identity?

Why this project?

- Vosburgh (2022) begins his paper on the 'academic-practitioner gap' with a joke:

  An academic and a practitioner walk into a bar This is a very short joke since it turns out they sit at different ends of the bar and never speak (2022, 1).

- Move 'from being first-order practitioners… school teachers…to being second-order practitioners' i.e. 'where they once worked in the first-order setting of the school, they now work in the second-order setting of HE' (Murray and Male 2005, 126). The practice is similar but ultimately distinct.

- Richter et al. (2021) push / pull analogy -pull towards a perceived increased autonomy, career prospects (Holme et al. 2016) or ability to make a different kind of impact (Guberman et al. 2021). There is also the push away from the routines of the classroom and emotional exhaustion (Shapiro 2010; Richter et al. 2021).

Existing Literature

•Very few studies that examine the transition from teacher educator back to teacher.

•Suggested reasons why this is not a phenomenon include: changing regime, feeling out of touch , confidence and identity

•However, Spiteri (2010) felt that recent school experience would increase her validity as a teacher educator. Jordan (2016) talks of ‘maintaining relevance’ (2016, 238), resisting ‘becoming one of them’ (i.e. a teacher educator) (Jordan et al. 2016, 236).

•There are inevitable challenges. McDonough (2017) found the pace, timetable and curriculum a challenge that highlighted the tension between technician and professional. Buchanan (2012) noted perceived accountability and lack of confidence were significant for returning teachers in general. Scherff found changes to the profession in her time away totally overwhelming (Scherff and Kaplan 2006).

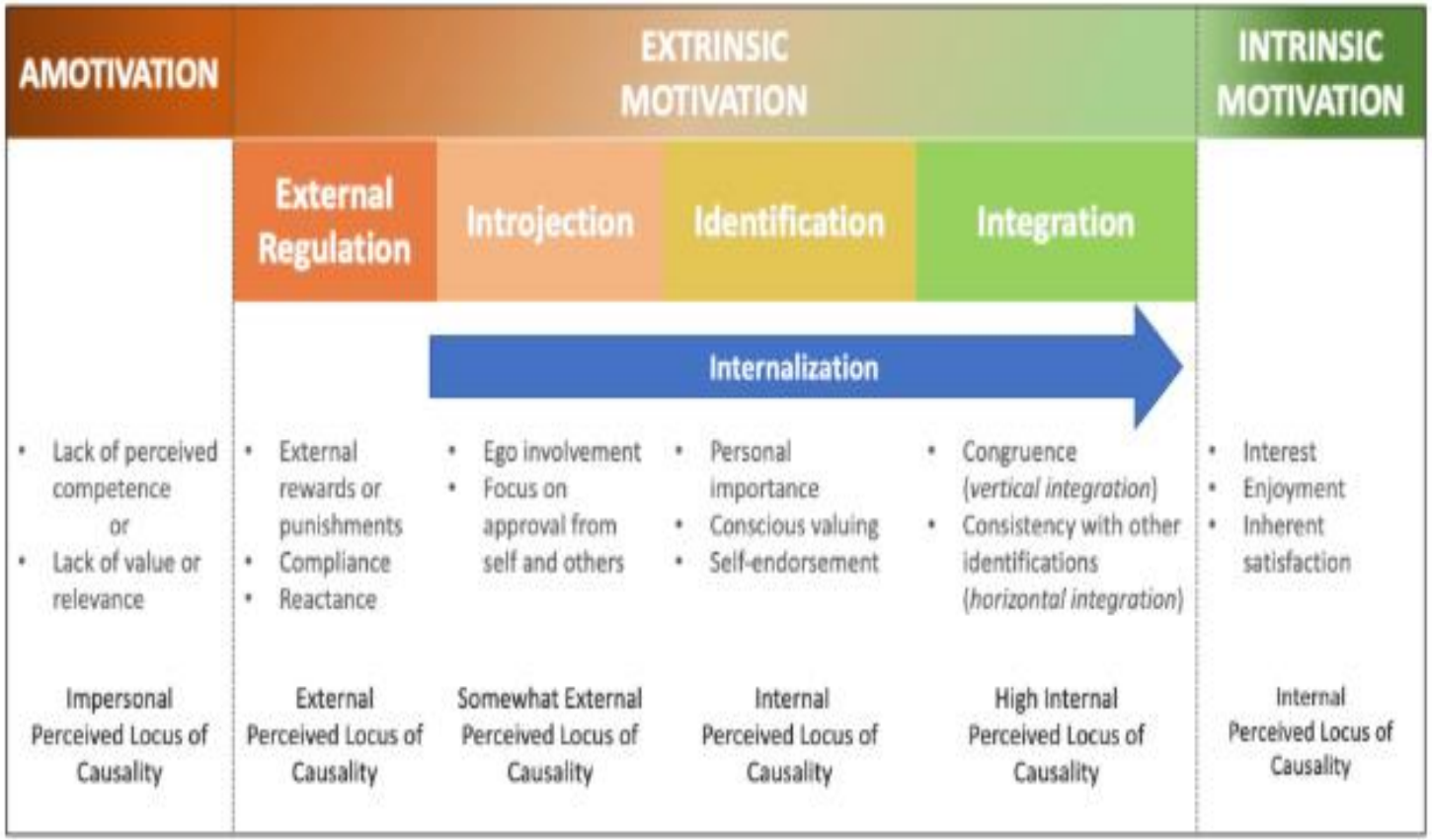
Theoretical Framework

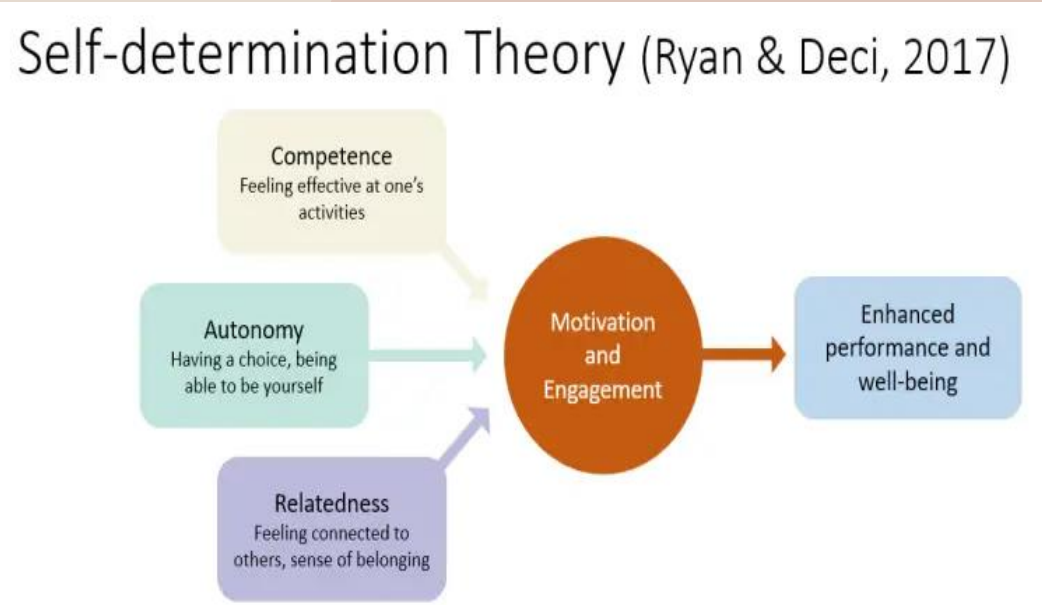
- Self-determination theory has been well used particularly when analysing learner motivation.
- It is less used when exploring teacher or even returning teacher motivation even though it has direct relevance to educational settings (Ryan and Deci 2020).
- Self-determination theory encompasses 'intrinsic motivation, autonomous extrinsic motivation, and psychological wellness' (Ryan and Deci 2020, 1).
- Based upon what is seen as three basic and necessary (Koludrović and Ercegovac 2015) psychological needs: competence, autonomy and relatedness
- Chiu et al. (2024) puts it as, the feeling of having choices, feeling achievable and capable and feeling connected.

The Three Needs

- Competence is not understood as actual ability but rather one's perception of competence (Guay 2022).
- Autonomy refers to 'the perception that one is the origin of one's own behaviour' (Jansen in de Wal et al. 2020, 20) ; one experiences 'a sense of choice, willingness, and volition' (Guay 2022, 80).
- Relatedness is the need for secure bonds with others, feeling connected and a sense of belonging (Jansen in de Wal et al. 2020).

Existing Models





(Ryan et al. 2021, p.99)

Methodology

- autoethnographic study
- sole participant and the researcher
- 5 months teaching Y5 in large primary school – unique curriculum
- reflective diary -key events, thoughts and emotions, any questions that arose, and lessons learned
- periodically analysed reflections identifying emerging themes including: community, confidence, creativity

Ethics

- Informed consent was granted by the headteacher, who acted as the gatekeeper for the research.
- Planned to seek ongoing consent from any ‘passive participants’ whose actions or interactions informed my reflections.
- Anonymity and confidentiality maintained throughout

What did the experience include…?

- All lessons but PE inc P4C
- Working in a group of 3 for team planning – rotated around the group
- Class assemblies
- Assessment / record keeping etc.
- Two class trips
- Playground duty



- Covering other classes
- Staff /Trust meetings
- Parents' evening
- PTA events
- Staff socials
- A lot of colds
- Returned for 2 residentials

Results /Analysis

‘My identity as a teacher will be tested and this is a huge part of who I am. What if I find out I can no longer do it? What if I find out I no longer like it? What is my purpose / identity then?’

Competence: Incompetence to invincible

The first week has been exhausting. I had forgotten the energy levels required in the classroom. The dynamic of the day, the number of interactions, the clockwatching and continual reading of the room requires huge mental and physical reserves. Week 1

'I find myself consumed with thinking about what I can change and adapt in future lessons' Week 2

On my first day's teaching I felt like I was almost on placement again although I had awareness of what wasn't right rather than an unconscious incompetence. Week 1

Competence: Incompetence to invincible

'I have loved this week. It feels like something has changed…I [can]… feel it coming back. It's like something had taken hold of me. … I am … becoming more confident about reflecting in action and I feel my teaching is becoming more responsive and therefore successful.' Week 3

'The children's writing has been brilliant this week and I really feel that every one of them made progress. Given that I was responsible for planning this unit I was nervous that this would happen … I actually felt emotional when I read the work of one child – maybe it was a mixture of relief and pride … [A school] leader also visited the parallel class and was very complimentary about the lesson and … resources I had prepared; it's interesting how I really need this validation!' Week 3

Competence: Incompetence to invincible

‘I feel my identity as a teacher stronger than ever. I can teach and I want to teach…’ Week 14

“It is a strange feeling … almost like an out of body experience. I find myself listening to myself and noting areas to improve in the moment. It is as if I am both student and mentor.’

Autonomy: Compliance to active decision maker

'There are times when I feel impotent in making in lesson decisions because I am unsure if this is the done thing… ' The lack of autonomy was frustrating – I like being control and making my own decisions.' Week 8

'I am beginning to understand teaching as an enquiry which is equally motivating and exhausting. Each day I embark on an adventure of problems to solve, questions to ask, evidence to spot and react to. It is active and ongoing. I feel at my most productive when engaged in this process whether it be planning a lesson, solving a learning difficulty or resolving a behaviour issue. The activeness is intrinsically motivating and addictive... I have hit my stride in planning and am really enjoying the creative thinking involved.'

Autonomy: Compliance to active decision maker

'Once again, planning has been a process of huge motivation… I have dreamt about ideas and spent far too long researching ideas … As each piece falls into place that sense of satisfaction is motivating. I have the innate desire to come up with innovate solutions. … I need to feel my stamp on [curriculum planning]; to see how my ideas land in the classroom…and when they work well the sense of pride is immeasurable... I need to own the classroom and what is happening in it.' Week 7

Autonomy: Compliance to active decision maker

'It seems to me that reflection in action is the form of reflection most necessary for effective teaching and also a sign of an effective teacher. Having confidence in own actions and judgements increases the sense of autonomy and thereby competency. Only a flexible, creative approach to the curriculum allows for this.' Week 11

'I feel fully …in my role now. I know what I am doing and am able to make on the spot changes about behaviour, teaching, organisation. Having confidence to remain fluid and enquire is a positive thing for my identity … As a teacher you are able to identify …possible improvements but not to action these seems shackling.' Week 11

Relatedness: Spectator to community

'I am really enjoying getting to know the class – I hadn't really anticipated this. The thrill of a child getting something, staying focused, responding to a joke or bringing in something from home is really motivating (Week 2).

My relationships with the school staff are evolving in the same way as the children…. (Week 3)

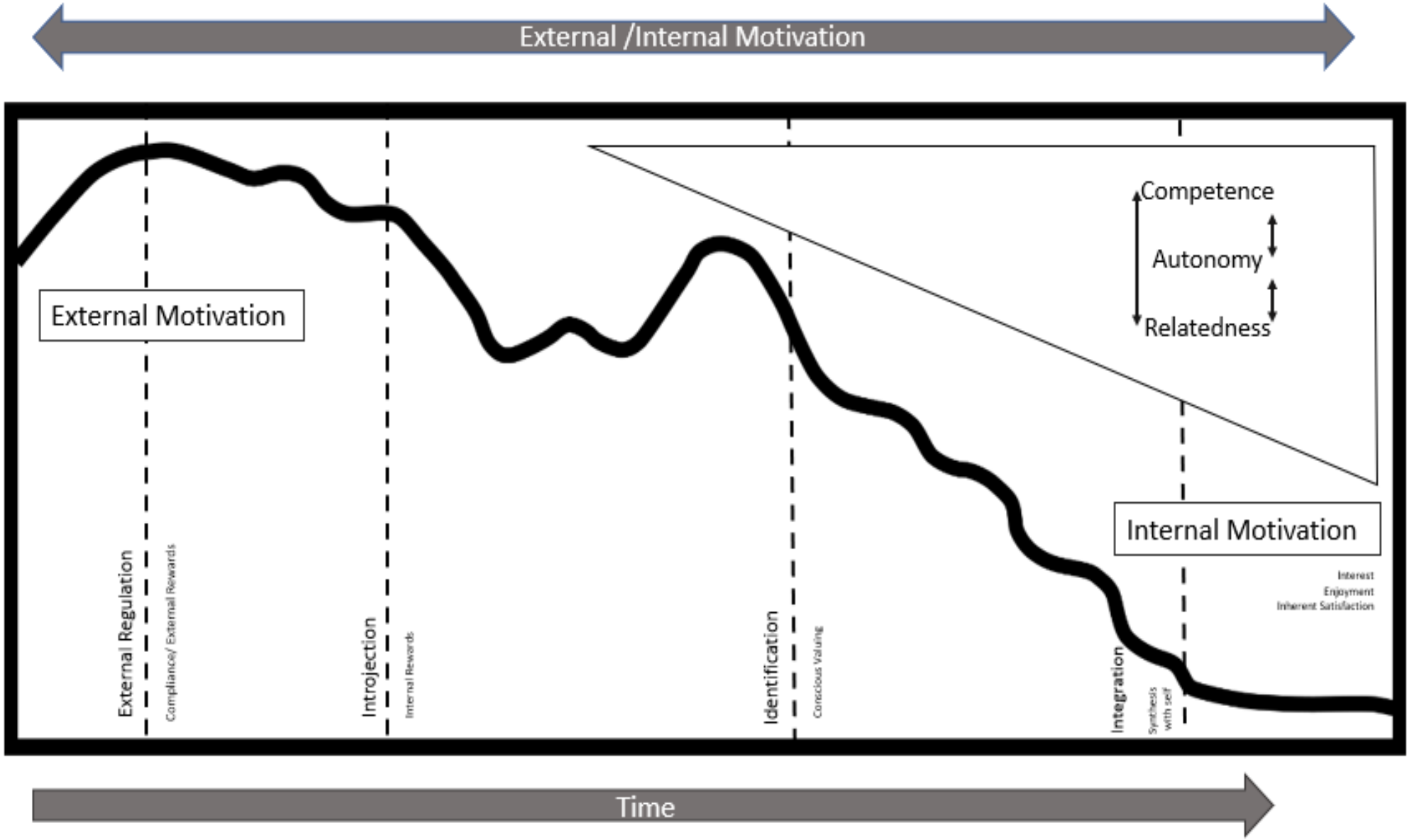
'My relationships with the class are an important part of why I am enjoying this experience. I find myself delighted when … they wave to me across the playground. The little things confirm the connection between us. I increasingly have their personalities in mind when I plan activities… I feed off their motivation / enthusiasm.' (Week 9)

Relatedness: Spectator to community

'I feel like a different person – brighter, positive, complete'. (Week 11)

''I feel relaxed, in control and confident in my abilities…[with] the levels of confidence I had when I left the classroom. ….I honestly feel like my previous identity has been reawakened …. Teaching in a primary school is a habit I am not sure I will be able to give up.' (Week 17)

'I really do feel part of the team now and do not want to leave them. … I feel my identity as a teacher stronger than ever. I can teach and I want to teach … I love being treated as a teacher by the school community… I feel wanted, liked and respected'. (Weeks 13/14)


External /Internal Motivation
External Motivation
Competence
Autonomy
Relatedness
Internal Motivation
External Regulation
Compliance/ External Rewards
Introjection
Internal Rewards
Identification
Conscious Valuing
Integration
Synthesis with self
Interest
Enjoyment
Inherent Satisfaction
Time

Conclusions

- The specific environment prized professional autonomy, rather than fidelity to curricular schemes.
- Increasingly there is seen to be a reduction in teacher autonomy in the English school system' (Hashim et al. 2023).
- In self-determination terms, this will impact on intrinsic motivation, job satisfaction and desire to stay in the profession (National Foundation for Educational Research 2020) as well as a general de-professionalisation (Frostenson 2015).
- Inhabiting the role of a successful and motivated teacher requires autonomy, agency and active decision making, the consequence of which breeds an internally motivated workforce.
- How do teacher educators ensure that their student teachers have their innate need for autonomy, relatedness and competence met whilst still meeting the regulatory demands in English ITE?

Conclusions

- We need to be encouraging student teachers to have choices, feel capable and feel connected (Chiu et al. 2024).
- One way may be for teacher educators themselves to return to the classroom more regularly to reengage with not only the lived experience of teaching but also remember once again what it feels like to be a real novice on the tricky journey to success

Questions

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