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Title An investigation into student teacher mothers' perceptions of their experiences during the Secondary PGCE year and implications for ITE providers
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The study explores the perceptions and experiences of student teachers who are mothers, and who are following the Secondary PGCE course at two UK institutions. The Secondary Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) is the main teaching qualification in the UK. The PGCE programme attracts applicants from a range of backgrounds and of ages that can vary from 22 to early 60s. As well as younger students who have recently graduated, each cohort typically includes more mature career changers and women who have taken career breaks to start and/or raise a family and now wish to become qualified teachers. These we refer to here as 'student teacher mothers'.

The PGCE year is challenging for most students. It comprises approximately 60 days spent in University-based, taught sessions and private study, and approximately 120 days on placement in schools. In a relatively short space of time student teachers have to learn to address complex and demanding aspects of classroom practice. Moreover, in order to succeed on the PGCE programme, student teachers need to develop a capacity for reflective practice, which requires that they are able and willing to position themselves as learners in order to become reflexive, effective teachers (Stevens *et al*, 2006).

Thus the PGCE year, and the transition to the relentlessly busy life of a schoolteacher, can be a steep climb for many students, as the demands made on them are considerably different from the expectations of them during their undergraduate studies. The heavy workload associated with teaching has been identified as one of the factors that can demotivate new teachers and lead them to leave the profession within the first few years (Tracey *et al*, 2009; Kyriacou *et al*, 2007). Coping with the heavy workload is likely to be even more difficult for women who care for children of their own.

Research on the mutual impact of motherhood and career (Smith 2011; Thomson and Kehily, 2011; Sipes and Lynne, 2010; Stinchfield and Trepal, 2010; Lynch, 2008; Smith, 2007; McRae, 2003; Aveling, 2002; Coleman, 2002; Kim and Ling, 2001) indicates that, despite discourses of equality, women continue to assume primary responsibility for childcare, and make career choices within the constraints of their lives and responsibilities. However, little if any work focuses on the experiences of mothers who become student teachers. UK equality of opportunity monitoring systems, with their broader focus on gender, ethnicity and disability discrimination, also fail to consider the specific needs and experiences of women with children. This is a significant gap, and, given the reported teacher and headteacher shortage, may be worthy of consideration if we are to attract able teachers into the profession, and ultimately, headship.

The proposed study will seek insights into the particular challenges faced by mothers who undertake the PGCE, as well as into their motivation to teach, their developing identities as teachers and their reflections on their lives and career trajectories, past, present and future. Narrative interviews will be undertaken at three points during the PGCE year. Data will be thematically coded. Consideration will be given to the implications of the findings for Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers, with regard to ways in which student teacher mothers can be more effectively supported, both during the ITE year and during their subsequent careers. This also offers potential benefits to the profession in terms of improved recruitment to teaching and retention of new teachers, many of whom leave the profession within the first 1-3 years.

An investigation into the particular experiences, perceptions and perspectives of student teacher mothers offers a range of potential benefits. Insights can be gained into the ways in which Universities and schools might work to better support this group of women. By effecting positive improvements in the support offered to student mothers, ITE providers might be enabled to become more proactive in recruiting mothers who, with appropriate support, would consider teaching as a career option, and who might otherwise be discouraged. Finally, there may be lasting benefits in terms of teacher retention.

Issue to be addressed and research questions

The study seeks to gain insights into the experiences, perceptions and experiences of student teacher mothers during their ITE year at the University of Leicester, with a view to making recommendations for institutional improvements in terms of infrastructure and programme-specific support services, design of the PGCE programme and arrangements for school placements.

The research questions are:

- What motivates women with children to undertake initial teacher education?
- How do they describe their experiences of the ITE year?
- What are the particular challenges for student teacher mothers?
- How do they see their future career trajectories?
- What are the implications for ITE, Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and University infrastructure support services to better enable student teacher mothers to access ITE opportunities?
- How can the PGCE programme be better adapted to meet the needs of student teacher mothers?