**As an autistic person, can I hope to become a successful teacher?**

*“True hope is swift, and flies with swallow's wings”*

[William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, V:ii]

Some members of school communities are autistic, including pupils, parents, teachers, headteachers and governors. However, many of the adults in these communities may only have understood this identity in adulthood (Wood, 2020), and may ‘mask’ - hide their autism and seek to present as neuro-typical (Lai et al., 2017). Reasons for this include fear of discrimination (Lawrence, 2019) and distress at the way that they see autistic pupils being treated and discussed (Wood and Happé, 2021). This masking presents teacher-educators with a challenge: how much should we support the trainees to ‘fit the mould’ for their own well-being and to meet the requirements of the course, and how much should we encourage, value and celebrate the trainees’ autistic differences?

This Poster-and-Pitch presentation articulates research undertaken by an autistic teacher-researcher working with an autistic student who had been on a course to train to become a teacher. During placement, the student was unmasked as autistic (without his permission), received minimal adjustment for his autism needs and subsequently ‘failed’ his PGCE. The presentation explores issues of disclosure, of ignorance regarding necessary adjustments and legal protections, and of rejection within our own profession of difference. It opens for discussion the question, ‘How can we support our trainee teachers to better meet the needs of autistic pupils if we as teacher-educators do not ourselves deeply understand inclusion?’

The research that underpins this discussion used creative methodologies, including poetry (Koelsch, 2015) and visual images (Kara, 2020), to support the researcher to process the distress of the participant and his data. The researcher used the metaphor of Swifts – *Apus apus*– to explore the autistic trainee’s experience of teacher education. An exploration of ways to adapt learning to better support autistic students – of whatever age and education level – is an intrinsic element of this presentation and discussion.

*References*

Kara, H. (2020). *Creative research methods: A practical guide*. Policy Press.

Koelsch, L. E. (2015). I poems: Evoking self. *Qualitative Psychology*, *2*(1), 96.

Lai, M. C., Lombardo, M. V., Ruigrok, A. N., Chakrabarti, B., Auyeung, B., Szatmari, P., ... & MRC AIMS Consortium. (2017). Quantifying and exploring camouflaging in men and women with autism. *Autism*, *21*(6), 690-702.

Lawrence, C. (2019). “I can be a role model for autistic pupils”: investigating the voice of the autistic teacher. *Teacher Education Advancement Network Journal*, *11*(2), 50-58.

Wood, R. (2020). Pilot Survey of Autistic School Staff Who Work or Have Worked in an Education Role in Schools in the UK: Initial Summary Report.

Wood, R., & Happé, F. (2021). What are the views and experiences of autistic teachers? Findings from an online survey in the UK. *Disability & Society*, 1-26.