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The politics of care - emotional labour and trainee FE lecturers

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> [critical pedagogy] sometimes becomes a form of what best be called "romantic possibilitarian" rhetoric, in which the language of possibility substitutes for a consistent tactical analysis of what the balance of forces actually is and what is necessary to change it. (Apple, 2001, p63-64)

Further education has become pivotal to English educational policy with the sector being central to strategies that seek to raise educational standards and widen participation. The paper derives from a study of trainee FE teachers on a full-time, post-graduate certificate course in the Midlands. The paper examines the orientations of FE trainee lecturers towards care, seeking to set these orientations within the pedagogic context in which trainees labour/work and to draw upon notions of emotional labour and performativity to make sense of these. Heuristically, trainees' understandings of care are located within and mediated by the pedagogic context in which they labour. Conceptualisations of emotional labour, performativity and the relations between learner and teacher are central to understanding trainees' orientations to care.

The paper draws upon work conducted by Avis, Bathmaker, Kendal and Parsons. Since 1998 we have been exploring the Labour process and experiences of trainee FE Lecturers (Avis *et al*, 2002a,b,c, 2003; Bathmaker, 2003). The paper draws upon trainee accounts derived from focus groups, questionnaires and individual interviews. These are used to reflect on the politics of care and the contradictions arising between an orientations towards care, towards particular learners, as well as the material conditions within which trainees labour.

Elsewhere we have discussed social justice issues and the response of our trainees and have examined the discourses drawn upon to make sense of the pedagogic and institutional relationships in which they are located. We found it useful to examine discourses of the good/bad lecturer and student and to consider the way in which trainees position themselves in such discourses as well as the resulting contradictions (Avis *et al,* 2002a). A related element running through trainees' accounts is a concern with social justice, in the sense of a desire to provide learners access to a valid educational experience.

In this paper we wanted to examine whether the notion of emotional labour could offer any purchase on making sense of trainee responses.

Emotional Labour

Although we do not want to dwell on the work of Hochschild her work has nevertheless been pivotal in thinking about emotional labour. In her discussion of flight attendants she writes:

> [Emotional labour] requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others - in this case, the sense of being cared for in a convivial and safe place. This kind of labor calls for a coordination of mind and feeling, and it sometimes draws on a source of self that we honor as deep and integral to our individuality.
>
> Beneath the difference between physical and emotional labor there lies a similarity in the possible cost of doing the work: the worker can become estranged or alienated from an aspect of self - either body or the margins of the soul that is *used* to do the work. (Hochschild, 1983, p7)

Part of the process she describes concerns the commodification of emotional labour and the way in which this can become alienating, in the sense that emotional labour becomes like any other commodity to be sold on the labour market. This process is thought to encourage the presentation of an inauthentic sense of self leading to alienation; one which arises from the cost of insincerity, of not being able to distinguish real feelings, as well as the loss of genuineness and authenticity.

However, much of the work that has explored emotional labour has concentrated upon service workers, flight attendants, bouncers, bailiffs and so on focusing upon the cost to the self of engaging in such forms of work (see Hochschild, 1983, 2003; Radin, 2001; and see Annals, 1999). There has been a tendency to ignore the rewarding aspects of emotional labour, for example Price's (2001) work on teachers illustrates the satisfaction that can derive from such work.

And so to our trainees FE lecturers:

Our trainees felt that students had an entitlement to a valid educational experience, one that developed their potential to the full. Trainees implicitly recognised structural patterns of social inequality as reflected in school underachievement and urban deprivation. They acknowledged that education should recognise difference and this rested alongside an ethic of care and respect. Our trainees emphasised the need to create pedagogic contexts in which learners felt valued and were thereby empowered to learn. They were critical of practices that marginalized learners and that contributed towards learner underachievement:

> I think that they [lecturers] forget that at the end of the day these students are little human beings.
>
> It is because of their previous experience that they [students] are behaving as they are.
>
> lecturers forget that a lot of these students have come in on the GNVQ, GCSE retakes, and that the school system has failed them.
>
> As far as they [students] are concerned the education system has failed them.
>
> They [students] come in and they don't want to be written off as a number that is part of the [college] retention policy.

They also placed a premium on a notion of care

> At the moment us lot go in and we're caring and we haven't got to that cynical stage.,

> Caring is something you have. Empathy is something you should have. It's professional to have empathy for your students. If you lose that empathy then you just become an unprofessional teacher.

Robert reflecting on his past experience as a learner in FE

> He's wrecking our education, he's not teaching us, he is disappearing, we're coming in for our lessons and he's in Europe somewhere making a television commercial, he's not here an' we've had enough now and we want to be taught properly by people who want to teach... but the tutor that took over from him, to just get us through the rest of this course, was such a great guy. *He got emotional when we were working on a big production because something went wrong and he was upset for us because he felt he had let us down and I suddenly thought, that's the kind of guy I would like to be like, I'd like to feel I could care about people and what they do with their lives to the point that if I feel it's not going right I'm letting them down.*

Similarly other students were worried by their encounters with lecturers

> It was a shock to the system, because *I always thought you had respect for the students, and it was mutual respect*. When I overheard what some of the teachers were saying to the students it was virtually 'you're stupid'.

> The unprofessional people who are allowed to teach is absolutely diabolical. *They don't care about the students, they don't care about their colleagues, they don't care about their work*, they just want the holidays, I think its diabolical. *I care about the kids, that is the only thing that keeps me going.*

Trainees emphasised empathy and caring relations with students and criticised colleagues who failed to live up to their exacting standards. Although a number of our trainees recognised the existence of good lecturers as well as the pressure facing them, lecturers were often seen as 'going through the motions' or as 'not caring'.

> Some are supportive and encouraging whereas other are just going through the motions. The other lecturers are not willing to listen or to change.

Central to these trainees understanding of lecturing was a notion of care and of empathy with students. Caring appeared to be pivotal to their construction of a preferred identity as a lecturer. This is far more than the surface care of Hochschild's (1983) flight attendants and incorporates a much deeper notion of authentic care. Robert's earlier comment is appropriate here:

> and I suddenly thought, that's the kind of guy I would like to be like, I'd like to feel I could care about people and what they do with their lives to the point that if I feel it's not going right I'm letting them down

These comments provide an indication of a preferred professional identity and provides a stringent critique of the practice of many lecturers. Trainees' experience in their placement colleges presented them with contrasting images of a preferred teaching and learning culture on the one hand and one that they perceived negatively.

Positive	Negative
LECTURERS' DISPOSITIONS	

Enthusiastic friendly having a good laugh hub of activity	sapped enthusiasm cynicism and demoralisation
bond between staff supportive	lack of trust lack of support ghetto mentality intimidating
RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS	
valuing individual students	No regard for students feeling of anonymity
responsive to students	does not address students' needs
equality and lack of hierarchy giving students choice and control	lack of control
Motivating students enabling students to enjoy learning inspiring students opening up students' imagination creating a safe environment to develop confidence	Stale uncaring complacent

CURRICULUM	
a curriculum which allows for growth	a restrictive curriculum geared only to the exam
helping students to become critical	a system of 'watch the board'

Table 2: Teaching and learning cultures. Positive and negative factors identified by trainee lecturers'

Source: Bathmaker, Avis, Kendall, 2003

Whilst the above illustrates trainees' preferred identity and learning relations on a number of occasions their encounters with students contradicted this preferred Identity. A number of students seemed to lack any interest in their studies.

> I mean my students come in and they sit on top of the desks for an hour and talk about last night.

> It's keeping them there really.. "can we go now 'cos Bob lets us go?"

Getting in late and leaving early

> I've had people telling me to F off

> A lot of the students... don't want to know, want to go to uni but they're not going to do the work.

Other students were unable to meet deadlines or be prepared to take any responsibility for their own learning.

> I've got people who have never written an essay in their life

> If you say to them an assignment in two weeks you will get two in out of a class of 16... in my A level everyone hands in their assignment.

> They can't take responsibility for their own learning, they haven't really got the ability to do it

> I'm fed up with going over the same thing again - why should I bother

Another trainee found the learners he encountered to be just 'vile', to hold attitudes and respond to tutors in ways he considered to be totally unacceptable.

> The staff in my college are wonderful, it's just the kids I'd like to get rid of. [Describes the college as the one where students go if they can't get in anywhere else.] - a particularly nasty college ... The students are vile generally, but the staff are the nicest people, considering what they have to deal with, they've got such a good attitude. They're so positive and upbeat. It would get me down. I'm not sure I could work there and stay sane, and not become really miserable and fed up. It's a constant battle with the students, telling them off.

> What I am saying is that the majority of the students who come there couldn't get into the other colleges or had been kicked out of them. So they come to this college. You could imagine that the staff would treat them like the dregs, but they don't. They are very positive and upbeat. They treat the kids well and have got time for the students.

> But half the time you get stuck with a load of toe rags, who couldn't care less what day of the week it was, whether you're in the room or not. And it's very hard then when they can't respect you, for you to respect them. Where's the cut-off point?

Trainees desire for committed and hard working students was often compromised through their experiences of students following low-level courses. The reason why they had chosen to teach in

further education was to engage with interested students but this was confounded by these experiences.

> I have found that it would have probably been better or the same to have taught at school as it is to teach GNVQ intermediate. I don't enjoy it at all. I don't feel there is any reason for me to be there really, they'd be just as happy with an empty room and someone to sign their EMA [education maintenance allowance] papers at the end of the day, and actually it turns you into being quite demoralised really.

> I teach both the intermediate and foundation in one group and the advanced in another. I did my degree two years ago. It is very difficult to come down so many levels because you are so used to learning the subject to a high level and coming right down is very difficult, but on top of which you really can tell the difference between the advanced and the intermediate and foundation. The difference is incredible. The intermediate, is like McGregor's X and Y theory, you have one set of students who will do the minimum and those are the foundation/ intermediate .... Then you have the other side of the coin which is the AVCE, where the students would do the maximum to achieve and they want to continue their learning. They really do, they are so enthusiastic.

In a number of respects trainees are drawing upon accounts that are not so different from those they associate with the bad lecturer and that seem to run counter to their preferred identity (see Avis, *et al*, 2002a).

We can understand these negative responses in a number of ways. In our earlier work we have drawn upon discursive constructions of the good and bad lecturer to examine these negative responses. In this paper we want to discuss these firstly in relation to the process of occupational socialisation, and secondly and relatedly, as a reflection of trainees lived experiences. The process of occupational socialisation and trainees lived experiences of working in the sector seems to carry the necessity to build a critical distance between themselves and their students. This critical distance arises in response to the cost of emotional labour, one which derives from being too close to students and the resulting psychic risks that can threaten self and identity as a lecturer. This process has been reflected in Colley's (2002) work which explored the emotional labour of a new FE teacher and the way in which this teacher became increasingly detached from her students partly as a response to the emotional costs of her earlier high levels of involvement. We could think about these responses quite straightforwardly as part of a process of occupational socialisation - the development of a survival strategy - whereby the lecturer distances themselves from students to sustain long term survival and emotional well being (Woods, 1983).

Secondly, and relatedly, trainees' negative responses learners may in part reflect their lived experiences of working in the sector. Two points need to be made. Firstly, many trainees thought students would be committed and involved in their studies, that they would want to learn. Trainees found themselves involved with students who were very different from what they imagined. There is a contradiction here between trainees' ideal of empathetic engagement with students and lived experience of working with learners who lacked commitment to their studies. This contradiction derives from the different orientations that learners and trainee lecturers bring to FE, as well as the context in which both labour (see for example, Bloomer and Hodkinson, 1997,1999; Williams, 2002).

The second point to be made is that trainee responses will in part be influenced by the material context within which they are located. A context in which they confront a demoralised profession and all the resulting performative baggage that surrounds working in further education - the impact of managerialism as well as the concern of the state to tighten up and define what it is to be a lecturer in the sector (Avis, 2003; DFES, 2002; FENTO, 1999). This context is reflected in the interest of the

state and its agents to closely regulate and assess lecturer performance against predetermined outcomes and targets which are embodied in the language of performativity and performance management. A number of writers have discussed these processes - utilising the language of proletarianisation, re-professionalisation and so on (see for example, Avis, 1999; Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Randle and Brady, 1997a,b). Radin (1996) offers a slightly different take on these issues. In her discussion of the commodification of caring labour she argues that the managerial interest in the deepening of control and regulation unintentionally leads to increased levels of alienation and disengagement amongst the workforce. In the following Radin draws a distinction between labourers who epitomise alienated labour and workers whose work is not fully commodified (see also Hochschild, 1983, 2003).

> Laborers are sellers: fully motivated by money, exhausting the value of their activity in the measure of its exchange value. Laborers experience their labor as separate from their real lives and selves. **Workers take money but are also at the same time givers. Money does not fully motivate them to work, nor does it exhaust the value of their activity. Work is understood not as separate from life and self, but rather as part of the worker and indeed constitutive of her.** Nor is work understood as separate from relations with other people. (Radin, 1996, p105 my emphasis)

The commodification of caring labour, reducing it to the performance of targets that have been determined by managerial and state interests, instrumentalises care, rendering it inauthentic. Care becomes alienated from worker values and is subject to what Himmelweit describes as 'inappropriate forms of market rationality', which have been imposed via managerial fiat.

> Much of the quality of our lives would be lost if the imposition of inappropriate forms of market rationality turned such work into mere labor. (Himmelweit, 1999, p36)

This type of analysis is consistent with the now commonplace description of a demoralised and overworked teaching profession. Stephen Ball (2003) analyses the performative context in which education is placed, his discussion resonates with Moore's *et al* (2002) and points towards the development of unprincipled and de-politicised forms of pragmatism that have arisen in response to performativity.

> Like the performative institution, the 'reformed teacher' is conceived of as simply responsive to external requirements and specified targets; and to paraphrase Bernstein (1996: 73), one can ask; 'if the identity produced by [performativity] is socially "empty" how does the actor recognise him/herself and others? (Ball, 2003, p222)

For Ball and other writers performativity carries a heavy psychic and emotional burden for teachers, some of whom feel that their practice has become inauthentic and that their professionalism has been challenged and undermined.

However waged labour cannot be fully commodified and as Himmelweit reminds us there is always a space for care.

> Caring occupations should be seen as part of a whole class of occupations that are not fully commodified, in which workers have motivations that are not purely monetary and also care about the results of their work. (Himmelweit, 1999, p27)

And secondly, as Hollinshead (2003) points out in her work on lecturers in HE, the way in which we construct our professional identities contributes in part to our own exploitation. Through such

constructions we become complicit in our own exploitation and oppression. Yet at the same time such constructions hold the possibility of hanging-on to relations of care as well as the development of progressive alternatives to hegemonic educational practices that individualise and pathologies learners.

By way of Conclusion

The previous analysis underlines the contradictions of working as a lecturer within further education. It serves to raise questions about the pedagogic and policy contexts in which our trainees worked. They sought an empathetic engagement with students and valued relations based upon care and respect. Yet their aspirations were often thwarted by their experience of students. Such encounters not only raise questions concerning the nature of the curriculum and its appropriateness for the learners our trainees encountered, but also points towards the way in which trainees and students understood pedagogic relations. In both there is a tendency to individualise relations. Trainee responses to learners are individualised, as are their understandings. Such responses rest easily with the emphasis upon individualisation characteristic of late modernity as well as the successes of neo-liberalism and the pervasiveness of market relations. Olssen writes:

> In the shift from classical liberalism to neo-liberalism, then there is a new element added, for such a shift involved a change in subject position from 'homo economicus', who naturally behaves out of self interest and is relatively detached from the state, to 'manipulatable man', who is created by the state and who is continually encouraged to be 'perpetually responsive'. It is not that the conception of the self-interested subject is replaced or done away with by the new ideals of 'neo-liberalism', but that in an age of universal welfare the perceived possibilities of slothful indolence create necessities for new forms of vigilance, surveillance, performance appraisal and of forms of control generally. In this new model, the state has taken it upon itself to keep all up to the mark. (2003, p199-200)

There is a progressive politics of care prefigured in our trainees orientations. However, if this potential is to be realised trainees need to move beyond the individualisation of pedagogic relations. Whilst valuing the individual learner they need to be able to locate both themselves and the learner in the wider structural context. By recognising such a context they will be able to ameliorate some of the costs of the emotional labour in which they are involved. They will be able to ward off some of the threats to their identity that derive from learner resistance and will similarly be able to avoid pathologising resistant learners. Through a recognition of the structural they will be able to sustain a politics of care that seeks to value and empathise with their students. Leonardo reminds us that for this to arise we need to move beyond individualised forms of reflection to those that recognise the structural.

> Domination is not only waged at the level of policies and initiatives. It is the hum in the background noise of teachers' everyday discussions and negotiations, from the back room to the front office. Hegemony lives and functions in symbolic interactions as much as it does in commonly acknowledged political arenas ...
>
> Fostering individual self-questioning and a laissez-faire ethos are the hidden goals of the move toward an unqualified, reflective policy. As long as teachers and educators are 'busy reflecting' on their own practice, social relations of domination remain unquestioned and, consequently, unthreatened. If teacher reflection is going to be empowering, then it must extend beyond its sloganeer status and move towards ideological self-critique, a moment tied to larger social forces. Otherwise reflection becomes the opiate of the masses of teachers. A non-reductive version of ideology

> critique provides the discourse that begins this reflection, a form of
> reflection, which holds dear the ethical right and the political good.
> (Leonardo, 2003, p213).

The tendency towards individualisation embedded in current education policy generates its own set of contradictions which can only be overcome by moving beyond hegemonic understandings of pedagogy. Our trainees' orientations towards care could prefigure the development of a critical pedagogy. However, their current individualised orientations hold both possibilities and limitations and face in a number of directions simultaneously - one turns towards cynicism whereas another to the recovery of a politicised critical pedagogy. Such a pedagogy is heralded within the residue of an earlier educational discourse. Some years ago 'the strange fate of progressive education' examined the way in which the language and discourse of progressive education had been appropriated by the new right (Avis, 1991). There will be traces of that earlier progressive discourse in the way in which educational relations are currently understood - the interest in relevance and learner centeredness being examples. Simultaneously the current contradictions facing the individualisation of pedagogy herald an emergent discourse that will prefigure a progressive educational practice (see Williams, 1977). The limits of our trainees' individualised pedagogy carries the need for a recognition of the social structure and is indicative of these contradictions. These possibilities and struggles are not part of a "romantic possibilitarian rhetoric" (Apple, 2001) but rather derive from the material conditions in which learners and teachers work. Zukas and Malcom remind us:

> Pedagogy is more than teaching and learning. We assume that it incorporates
> a critical understanding of the social, policy and institutional context, as well
> as a critical approach to the content and process of the educational/training
> transaction. (2002, p215)

This is the struggle to be joined and there is a need for educators and trainees to jointly confront these issues, for otherwise we will all be complicit with capitalist schooling.

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