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# **Teacher Educators in Higher Education: aspirations, opportunities and challenges**

**Fear and Anxiety v Desire**

**Liz Dixon**

**University of Huddersfield**

**School Research Conference, March 2010**

# Overview

- Narrative autobiography
  - A slice of life – professional journey and transitions
- PCET teacher educators in HE
- Untapped talent and silent voices
- Teaching and research : transitions, tensions and barriers
- The way forward

# Autoethnography

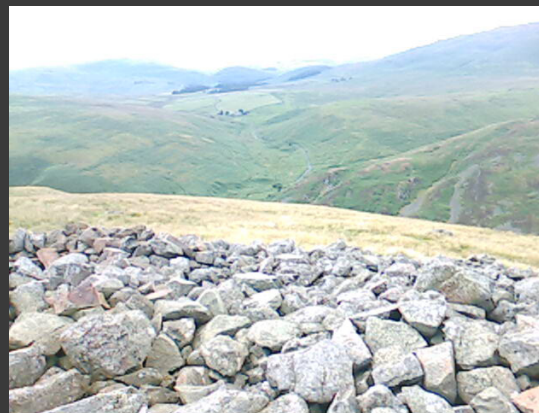
‘ Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations...

As they move backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the cultural and the personal become blurred, sometimes beyond recognition.’

(Ellis and Bochner in Roberts, B. 2007)



## My story in pictures .....





# Insider outsider

























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## CHANGING TIMES : SHIFTING SAND

**aspirations**

**opportunities**

**challenges**

- Contribute to developing innovative and effective teachers

- Find a voice for teaching

- Intellectual curiosity

- Work with and learn from experts in teaching and education

- Experiment and try out new ideas

- Lead on teaching and learning

- Influence a wider audience

- Culture of performativity

- Jill of all trades

- Reactive to events

- The place of theory in educational research and practice

- Competing obligations

# Keeping up with the times

‘The research function of universities has both expanded and significantly changed its character. This I would argue has particular significance for ‘new universities’ and those academics in professional fields formerly not part of the university sector.’

Lee & Boud 2003:189

‘emergent identity as a ‘wanabee [academic] writer’

(Grant,2006)

# My journey

- Nursing
  - (vocational training – pre graduate entry)
- Motherhood / family
- FE teaching – health, early years .....
- Teacher educator in FE
- Teacher educator in HE



# Teacher educators in FE

Noel (2006) Secret lives of teacher educators in FE

- ‘Feminised workforce’

‘the learning and skills workforce is predominantly female, white and ageing. The teacher educator workforce....is more female, more white, yet older.’

- ‘accidental entry’

Simmons and Thompson (2007)

- Gendered division of labour
- ‘...at that time there was a ‘lack of awareness of scholarship as part of the ‘proper’ role of a teacher educator.’

‘Closet’ researcher

# Teacher educator in HE

- **‘New teacher educators are not typical academics. Unlike most new HE academics, teacher educators are likely to have extensive teaching expertise however often enter HE without doctoral qualifications in education, or sustained experience of research and publications processes.’**

(Murray 2006)

## **PCET teacher educators:**

- **Experienced teachers**
- **Specialist expertise in teaching**
- **Likely to value teaching**
- **Varied career trajectories**
- **Older age profile**
- **May not be qualified to Masters / doctoral level**
- **Education may be second specialism**

# Teacher education within a university

- Historically, dislocated and physically separate
- Representative of the an academic / vocational divide?
- Relative status and importance of research and teaching
- As Maguire (2000) points out, teacher education is a contradictory process, concerned with the practical, the non-academic, the vocational and at the same time has a relationship with academic endeavour.

# Establishing new professional identities

- Murray and Male (2005)
- Transition from school to teacher education
  - Takes 2-3 years
  - Requires development of
    - A new body of knowledge
    - Skills
    - Expertise



# Early experiences

- Largely uneventful
- Emphasis on teaching
- Appointment with 'the professor' in the school
- Research – stereotypical world of academia masculinised traits : hierarchical, isolated, private, competitive, high status, something done by 'experts' and 'others'.)
- Teaching – feminised traits : open, collaborative, team work, supportive

# Experience of the research project

- 3 year funded project
- Group:
  - 4 experienced teacher educators - all new to research : 2 male, 2 female
  - 3 supervisors : male – published and ‘research active’
- Aims of the project
  - Explore work based learning (trainee teachers
  - Successful completion of doctoral awards

# Positive aspects of the project

- Collaborative and mutually supportive
- Blend of experience and expertise
- Time
- Open ended
- Freedom to be experimental and creative

# Doubts and anxieties

- The 'generalist' teacher educator
- Language and culture of the research community

**Confrontation**

**Prepare to  
defend your  
position**

**Be prepared  
for a mauling**

**Conferences  
can be brutal**

**Be prepared  
for rejection**



# Embryonic research department

- Individuals research active
- 'Closet researchers' – working in isolation
- Increasing pressure to write and publish
- Polarisation of staff

# Caring and nurturing teacher educators

- Student support valued highly
- Mirrors family life – open ended workload where care and duty dominate
- ‘Domestic landscapes’ (Leathwood, 2000)
- Teacher educators emphasised their ‘caring’ roles and abilities as ‘teachers’ rather than academics.’

Robinson and McMillan (2006)

- Murray (2006) argues that : the model of the caring teacher educator ...whilst validating the existing professionalism of the women, also traps them in the maternal metaphor and their students in dependent and child like positions.’ 26

# Shifting focus and pressures

- Performativity
- Research outputs (RAE)
- Relative status and value of teaching
  - ‘release’ from teaching
  - Reduced teaching ‘load’
  - Intensification of teaching
- Implications for teacher educators
  - Passion for teaching
    - “my head is always full of teaching”.
  - Modelling

## **DUAL IDENTITY OF TEACHER EDUCATORS**

**Teacher educator  
as practitioner:**

**expert and able to  
model and play  
with teaching from  
which others can  
benefit / learn.**

**Priority : walk the  
walk**

**Teacher educator  
as researcher:**

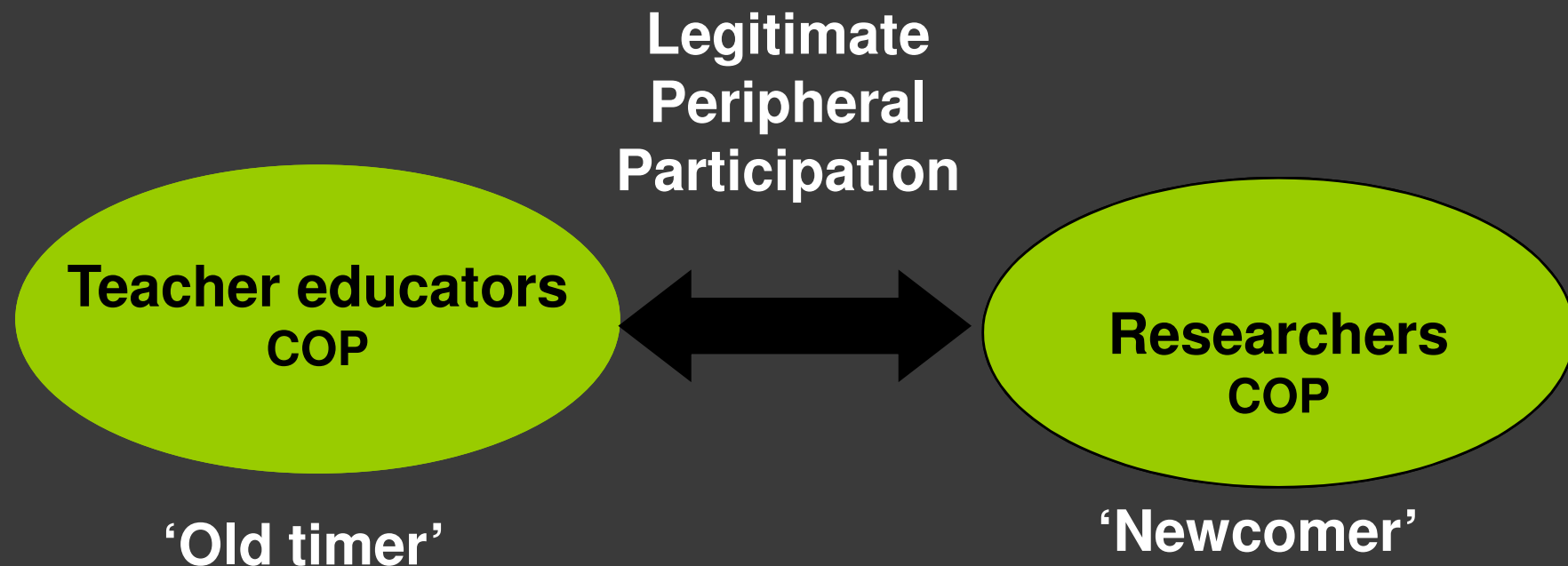
**able to  
conceptualise  
about teaching.**

**Priority : talk the  
talk**

**NEED TO BE ABLE TO DO BOTH**



# Lave and Wenger Multiple Communities of Practice



*'Legitimate peripherality can be a position at the articulation of related communities.'* (1991, p36)

# Teacher educator as researcher

## The 'so what' factor

- That ideas or practice is worthy of consideration by a wider audience
- Will it make a significant contribution?
- The authors behind the research
  - Elevated status
  - Seeing them at conferences
  - Requires a degree of confidence / arrogance

# ‘The mysteries of theory’

- Social science as another specialism
  - ‘ESoL’
- Teach yourself sociology / psychology
- Intellectual hairspray and Celebrity theorists
  - Describing some of the key ideas of Bourdieu, Reay (2004b) writes, ‘Although in common with cultural capital, there is an increasing tendency for habitus to be sprayed throughout academic texts like, ‘intellectual hairspray’ (Hey,2003), bestowing gravitas without doing any theoretical work.’

# Theory and research

(Biesta et al 2010)

- Consequence of over or under theorised educational research
- Education using theory borrowed from other disciplines (sociology, psychology, philosophy, history)
- Theory – abstract, complex, decontextualised
- Trend towards evidence based research
  - Priority of the empirical over the theoretical
- Anti-intellectual tendencies
- Case for Education having its own theory?
- Theory as a prison for thinking, arguing for greater creativity and adhocery (Thomas 2007)



# Tensions and paradoxes (researcher)

- Desire and drive to engage with academic research
- Publication and sharing research
  - ‘Inking the thinking.... taking an idea for a walk’  
Chris Watkins in Carnell et al (2008: 207)
- Need for confidence, resilience and a degree of arrogance - vulnerability, inadequacy
- Time – competing demands and priorities
- Convention – creativity and risk taking
- Performativity - compliance and resistance

# Current Personal Challenges

- **Intellectual**
  - generalised expertise and knowledge
  - theoretical limitations
  - can't talk the talk
- **Practical**
  - Time (Bryson,V 2008))
  - environment
  - competing and conflicting demands
- **Psychological**
  - confidence / vulnerability in working environment
  - resilience
  - motivation
  - expectations
  - 'threat' to teaching
- **Social**
  - Isolation
  - Age / other commitments and responsibilities

# The way forward

- ✓ Develop knowledge, skills and experience Murray and Male (2005)
- ✓ **Re-establish professional confidence**
- ✓ **Build 'resilience' through Learning communities**  
Rosie le Cornu (2009)  
(Based on Jordan (2006) model of relational resilience)

## 3 building blocks:

- ✓ **Mutuality** : reciprocity. Learning from one another.
- ✓ **Empowerment** : encourage risk taking through non judgemental peer and mentor support network
- ✓ **Development of courage** : the capacity to move into situations when we feel fear or hesitation.

# Writing retreat





# POSSIBLE STRATEGIES :

- Writing groups
- Sharing and feedback sessions
- Collaborative projects, shared expertise, playing to strengths
- Challenge the culture of combative language and isolation
- Strong role models and mentor network
- Celebrate both teaching and research within education

‘The new virile, macho culture in academia is not a comfortable space for female academics. Most of us neither aspire to be virile or macho nor want to be on the receiving end of others’ virile, macho behaviour. ....Some of us really want to collaborate in equal terms rather than serve out our time in rigid hierarchies with only the prospect of moving from a position of subservience to one in which we dominate others.’

(Rehay 2004;p36)







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Continued reticence of the  
academic voice

Different ways of working

The sports hall.....

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