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## **Coping, Confidence and Alienation: the early experience of trainee teachers in English FE**

### **Abstract**

This article examines what both in-service and pre-service trainee teachers learn from their early experience of teaching in further education (FE) colleges in England. Despite differences between in-service and pre-service trainees, that early experience is often characterised by isolation and lack of control over practice for both groups. Though trainee teachers may develop as a result of this experience of working in FE, a discourse that emphasises their growing confidence obscures how these trainees may not be enhancing their professional practice, but rather learning to cope with difficult circumstances. This article draws on data gathered between 2005 and 2009 from two separate projects, one that focused on pre-service, the other on in-service teacher education in FE colleges. It problematises the effect of this early experience and applies the Marxist concept of alienation to analyse the development of trainee teachers in relation to coping rather than learning to teach. As a partial counterbalance to the paucity of the early experience of many trainee teachers, the article concludes by arguing that teacher education for the FE sector should be directed to increasing the autonomy of teachers and be constructed around a body of professional knowledge rather than the long list of statutory professional standards that shapes current provision.

### **Introduction**

English FE is a diverse sector where the majority of vocational and adult training and education takes place as well as academic study from the age of 16 to 19. Teacher education for this sector has been transformed over the past decade as FE has

assumed a new political importance both as a means to enhance the skills of the workforce and as a route to social justice through widening participation in education (Avis 2009). In 2001 teacher education for FE in England was brought into a legislative framework for the first time with a requirement for all new full-time teachers to achieve a teaching qualification within two years of their employment and since 2007 much of the content and assessment of teacher education for FE has been centrally controlled (see Holloway 2009). Currently, ninety percent of teachers newly entering the sector are initially employed without teaching qualifications and they must then undertake a teacher training course on a part-time in-service basis (UCET, 2009, 1). The other ten percent normally attend a full-time, one-year, university-based course which includes at least 150 hours of teaching practice on placement in an FE college or other similar organisation (ibid, 1).

This article draws on data from two small qualitative research projects: one, *The College Experience: work-based learning and pre-service trainee teachers* funded by the University of Huddersfield gathered data between 2005 and 2008 and focused on pre-service trainee teachers on placement. It gathered data both from trainee teachers who were attending a full-time course at a university in the north of England and from serving teachers in the colleges where the trainees were placed as part of that course. The other, *Dual Identities: enhancing the in-service teacher-trainee experience in further education*, was funded by ESCalate, the Higher Education Academy subject centre for education. This focused on the in-service trainees' experience and gathered data from trainee teachers, teacher educators and senior college managers. *The College Experience* study drew on questionnaires returned

by 245 trainees in two cohorts (2005-2006 and 2006-2007), semi-structured interviews at the beginning and after their placement with 27 trainees placed in four large urban FE colleges in the north of England as well as focus groups of trainee and serving teachers at these and one other college. In addition the researchers made fieldnotes of observations of the trainees, both in class and in their staffrooms. 205 of the pre-service trainees gave their personal details on the questionnaires of whom 44% were aged 18 to 29 and 23% were over 40. Mirroring the national figures for staff in FE (LLUK 2008) 135 of the 205 trainees who responded were female. From within *The College Experience* project this paper draws on a case study of one of the participant colleges to consider both the diversity and similarity of experience within one organisation (referred to as City College), a large institution with a very broad curriculum in a major conurbation. In total nine pre-service trainees and eight serving teachers were observed and interviewed at City College between 2005 and 2008. Their vocational or subject areas reflect the diversity of the FE curriculum: the nine trainees at City College were placed in the art, skills for life, business, sports and early years departments. The serving teachers in the sample had been in post at City College for between four and ten years in the art, special needs, construction, sports and business departments.

*Dual Identities* was based on case studies of in-service teacher education at two FE colleges in the north of England, chosen for their contrasting settings. One (referred to as Urban College) was within a declining industrial conurbation, the other (referred to as Dale College) was in a market town. Both of these colleges deliver teacher education courses written and validated by the same university. Altogether, twenty

in-service trainees, four college-based teacher educators and two personnel managers were each interviewed once between 2008 and 2009. Again the trainees came from a wide age range, one was in his sixties though the largest group was in their twenties, and their teaching areas ranged broadly from equestrian studies to hairdressing and from construction to art.

The growing body of literature on teacher education in English FE has hitherto focussed mainly on the minority pre-service stream (see inter alia Wallace 2002; Avis and Bathmaker 2009). Lucas and Unwin (2009), however, have successfully illuminated the development of in-service trainee teachers in FE colleges in England by applying Fuller and Unwin's (2004) 'expansive-restrictive' framework to "identify the extent to which colleges can be said to provide appropriate learning environments for trainee teachers" (p423). In findings comparable to Orr and Simmons (2010), who also looked at the in-service experience, that extent was limited. This article examines the experience shared by both in-service and pre-service trainees of teaching in FE and their encounters with the 'host culture' of the FE college. To better comprehend this culture and how it informs trainees' development, it draws upon the verbatim accounts of both trainees and serving teachers in FE colleges and considers these accounts under three headings: isolation; coping and control; and confidence. A Marxist understanding of alienation is then discussed and applied to analyse the experience of FE before some suggestions are made about how teacher education courses may be better constructed as a consequence of these findings.

As indicated above, data for this paper were collected over a total period of four years between 2005 and 2009 during which time, in 2007, the statutory basis that directed teacher education was changed, including the introduction of a new set of standards and centrally stipulated assessment criteria. Before looking at specific findings, it is worth considering, therefore, if there were any change or general development within what the trainees said about their experiences over this time. What is most apparent, however, is how any one of the trainees' accounts could have come from any one of the four years. The only consistent difference was reference to the total number of class contact hours required by the trainees for their completion of the course, which increased from 120 to 150 in 2007. The trainees sought to comply with what was necessary for them to pass the course, which did alter, but perceptions of the course, the college and of teaching practice were not consistently different before and after 2007. Of course, these studies only considered a few trainees and any reform will take time to take effect. Nonetheless, that so little development was evident suggests a significant gap between what central policy may seek to achieve and practice in colleges due, possibly, to the intractability of some of the circumstances this paper describes.

### **Isolation**

Ball (2008, 53) identified how expectations on teachers to 'efficiently' use their time affected their sociability ("more time is spent at the computer with a sandwich for lunch so that time is not 'wasted'") and isolation is a prominent feature in the accounts of the serving teachers at City College. At the time of her interview, Andrea had worked at the college for well over a decade in a variety of roles but had been a special needs teacher for the previous five years. Andrea, "*never*" spoke to

colleagues outside her small section and she vividly described this detachment from the wider organisation:

*I know we're a massive institution but it boils right down to the people you are with and I just care about the students and the colleagues I work with. The rest is that it's almost like we are working within a little bubble within a massive bubble.*

Though she was a well-established member of staff, Andrea felt isolated even inside her own department:

*In terms that I can't share my lesson plans; I can't share my scheme of work with people; I can't get feedback from other people even just to talk about daily problems because [her manager] is just so busy really. She's got a list as long as her arm and it's only by chance really that you might bump into someone in the canteen.*

Mark, a plumbing teacher for four years who worked in a centre away from City College's main site expressed his isolation in similar terms; he had "no real line of reference on what other areas are like [in the college]". He went on to say:

*We hear stories, but I wouldn't like to say too much about that and I do tend to ignore those kind of stories actually. We know certain things and there is a kind of north and south divide, if you like, between us and [the main college site].*

Mark's centre and the main college site are 300 metres apart on the same road.

Rick, a woodwork teacher at the same centre as Mark, also for four years, described feeling "uncomfortable" if he had to visit other parts of the college, while Dave, a sports teacher for two years, travelled regularly between two City College centres but even in passing still only spoke to a total of around eight teachers in a normal week. It was "very, very rare" for Pat, a woodwork teacher based at a different centre to Rick, to meet teachers from other sections of the college, even his own manager:

*You might get a visit from management once every four weeks on average but it's not a meeting as such; it's just something that they want to speak to you about.*

The trainee teachers on placement at City College experienced the isolation identified by these serving teachers even more acutely. One trainee placed in the early years section complained that the staff had not told her when they had come to the end of a course unit; “*very, very frustrating and upsetting is an understatement*”. Sean, placed in sports, had only briefly spoken to three members of staff out of the large sports department after four weeks of his placement. Even apparently positive relationships could be brittle. In her first interview Linda, a trainee skills for life teacher, said:

*[The staff] are always approachable and they are willing to like assist me. I have never found anyone wanting. They talk to me, they listen to me so that's quite important to respond to my needs so I don't see a problem with them at the moment. ... I am really happy.*

Linda dropped out of her placement a month later, citing severe problems relating to staff in her department. The 2003 review of teacher training in FE written by Ofsted, the government agency with responsibility for maintaining quality in this area, highlighted the lack of support given to FE trainee teachers whether on placement or in-service. In response, the government produced *Equipping Our Teachers for the Future* (DfES 2004) which was the basis for the statutory reform of teacher education in FE in 2007, and which included the requirement for all trainee teachers to have mentor support. The most recent Ofsted report on teacher training in FE (2009) found little improvement, however, and was (p3) “critical of ... weak mentoring and support in the workplace.” Echoing the problems that Ofsted found, only three of the



nine trainees at City College considered themselves to be well supported on placement, although these three were notably positive about the relationship they had with their assigned mentor. Many more of the in-service trainees, however, described being well supported in interviews, such as this second year trainee from Dale College:

*the team that I work with within the college are very supportive and I would not have any trouble finding somebody to have a bit of a moan to or to talk to them about anything really.*

Although other in-service trainees described their isolation, this was rarely considered problematic. Moreover, for some the restriction on their integration was a result of being a part-time employee, not necessarily being a trainee teacher:

*I think as a part time teacher ... you always feel a little bit neglected.*

Bathmaker and Avis (2005) used communities of practice conceptualisation in relation to the situation of pre-service trainees on placement in FE colleges to analyse their isolation. In a similar context Lucas and Unwin (2009, 430) also draw on this conceptualisation and describe how “the community of practice of teachers in FE is fragmented and fluid, dissolving and then reforming through the day”. Bathmaker and Avis (2005, 61) call for a wider interpretation of the trainees’ situation, which “would take account of the wider social, economic and political context in which education takes place” and they maintain that communities of practice conceptualisation is a useful “analytical tool”. In the circumstances of FE colleges, however, the conceptualisation seems poorly equipped for the task of wider interpretation because stable communities may not exist, as Lucas and Unwin recognise. Wenger (1998) isolated three identifying elements for a community of

practice: mutual engagement; joint enterprise; and shared “routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions and concepts” (p82). Felstead *et al* (2007, 1) interpreted this third element as collectively carrying out tasks that are discussed during and after completion; and the extent those tasks enhanced a sense of belonging in the workplace. Applying these criteria, communities of practice were seldom apparent in the parts of the colleges studied during either project. To be more precise, a conceptualisation that rests on communities of practice did not contribute greatly to understanding the processes involved in learning from the experience of teaching in FE, except to clarify that coherent communities acting together rarely existed within the samples studied. What trainees learn from this isolation, however, is discussed below.

### **Coping and control**

The serving teachers at City College had restricted control over their work patterns, and many were teaching long hours while also being expected to fulfil management and administrative duties over which they had little influence. In particular, the teacher educators at Urban and Dale colleges were constrained by legislation relating to teacher education in FE. Likewise trainees, both in-service and pre-service, often explicitly identified their own lack of control over what and where they taught. Course files, tracking documents and schemes of work were all highlighted as signifying processes to be followed by trainee and serving teachers alike but which neither group fully controlled. Exacerbating this lack of control, all of the trainees had to follow a centrally validated teacher training course that is required by the government to include, for example, a set number of hours of teaching practice, coverage of a set of national standards as well as subject specialist training. The

need to 'evidence' these elements became a priority for many of the trainees, even where the elements themselves lacked meaning for them. One second-year trainee at Urban College said:

*I didn't realise [the course] would be so prescriptive. I thought there would be a lot more freedom. So that was different to what I expected. It was very, very precise and you had to deliver [to] the exact prescribed criteria.*

The situation of these trainees illustrates how policy can have an impact even when it is not well understood or recognised. Although the trainees in both samples poorly understood the reforms relating to FE teacher training, these reforms demanded conformity and so tightly constrain trainees' autonomy, which shaped the trainees' notions of professionalism. What was required of them was compliance, not criticality or agency, so they ticked the boxes, literally and metaphorically. To succeed on the course they had to conform to the bureaucracy related to assignments and personal development plans, which, furthermore, melded with a perception of the bureaucracy of teaching more widely. Trainees and teachers alike habitually referred to this as "paperwork" as exemplified by a trainee engineering teacher at Dale College:

*I think it's just the paperwork that goes with it which is the biggest issue that I've got. There's too much paperwork, which I really don't know that much about and people are ringing me up and saying: 'where's that form?' and I don't even know what that form is.*

Some of the trainees, like the serving teachers, became inured to such performativity, which Ball (2008, 50) defined as:

a technology and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as measures of productivity or output or value of individuals and individuals.

Although the trainee teachers on placement generally had least control over their practice and its situation, the control of employed staff, both in training or established, was curtailed as suggested above. So, arguably, the experience of teacher training with its procedures, pressures and restrictions is comparable to the experience of established college staff. The ability to cope with this experience may develop and such development is what marked established staff out from most of the trainees: they had learnt to handle the demands and the lack of control. This raises the central question about whether teacher education, or at least the experiential learning element, is primarily about learning to cope, or learning to teach.

Billett (2001, 209) found that trainees given the greatest opportunity to participate in the workplace were those who made most progress, especially if they were guided directly or indirectly by co-workers, which echoes Lucas and Unwin's (2009, 424) understanding of the 'expansive' workplace in FE. Billett makes an implicit assumption, however, that this environment where trainees are well supported promotes learning that is valuable, yet trainees learn something from not participating and not being guided. They may learn to cope with isolation. This exposes an important value judgement because learning to cope might be sufficient or even desirable, though coping might also imply a restricted understanding of teaching practice. If the object of a teacher education course is coping with workload, the quality of teaching is less important than if the object is creating circumstances conducive to engaging students. This distinction may also help to explain discrepancies in the perception of what constitutes a successful placement. A pre-service trainee like Danny, placed in a busy sports and leisure department,

ostensibly had an appalling experience of teaching on placement; his students were disaffected and occasionally aggressive and he had little or no support. Sometimes he felt like he had “*been eaten alive*”, but he still described his placement as “*fantastic*.” This is testament to Danny’s resilience, but learning to manage such challenging students was what had made his placement positive. Danny learned to cope. Yet, by his own description, his approach to teaching moved from interaction to the traditional transmission of his own grammar school education; the range of techniques he applied and his pedagogical practice narrowed. This is not to say, however, that all Danny or any of the other trainee teachers learnt was solely to withstand being a trainee because, as already suggested, many of the characteristics of trainees’ experiences are analogous to being an established teacher. They were not just learning to cope with being a trainee; they were learning to cope with FE.

For the trainee teachers, though, there is a further troubling element, which is that as learners themselves they had limited control over what they had to learn, which was occasionally seen as separate to their practice. A teacher educator at Dale College clearly recognised this divide:

*I think, in [some] circumstances, trainee teachers operate two systems: they operate systems for us when we come in to watch them and they might revert to custom and practice in their area because it gives them less resistance from other colleagues.*

Several of the pre-service trainees expressed exasperation at more abstract aspects of the teacher education course suggesting that a stronger emphasis on “*what works*” would be more beneficial. Many of the trainees, in-service and pre-service,

made only perfunctory allusions to theory, most frequently to describe practice, rarely to analyse it. Expressing this, one trainee teacher at Dale College said:

*We've looked at learning models and learning styles so far and a lot of the things that are there I've already been doing; I just didn't know I was doing them.*

At a deeper level, the inability to perceive the benefit in any kind of conceptualisation of learning and the dogged pursuit of practical, 'hands on' teaching tips and techniques exposes the limits of some trainees' aspirations for their professional practice. More generally, it suggests a division between the teacher education course and the trainees' perception of what is useful. In the words of Lave and McDermott (2002, 43), "Estranged learning is estranged because it is always done for others who use it for their own purposes." Lave and Wenger (1991, 112) identify this in terms of use and exchange values which anticipates the later discussion of alienation:

The commoditization of learning engenders a fundamental contradiction between the use and exchange values of the outcome of learning, which manifests itself in conflicts between learning to know and learning to display knowledge for evaluation... Test taking then becomes a new parasitic practice, the goal of which is to increase the exchange value of learning independently of its use value.

To quote a trainee hairdressing teacher at Urban College, *"It was a case of either I got this qualification or I wouldn't be allowed to teach."* This discrepancy between the exchange value of learning (that which needs to be demonstrated in order to obtain a certificate) and its use value is apparent, moreover, in how trainees describe the teacher education course. Lesson plans and the tally of hours taught, for example, gained their own significance separate from what they were meant to represent or

measure; being seen to have completed a record of the experience appeared more important than the experience itself. So although “*we can know more than we can tell*” (Polanyi 1983, 4; original italics), markers of knowledge, however spurious, take precedence over actually knowing. Fulfilling the course requirements, much of which derive from the government’s centralised standards, again represents the strong performative aspects of teacher training separate from the practice of teaching. This characterisation, however accurate, does not mean the respondents were beleaguered. On the contrary, despite what may on occasion be considered as objectively difficult circumstances, the great majority of trainees, in-service and pre-service, expressed their enjoyment of the teacher education course, which they also found to be useful in developing their practice. None of the respondents expressed regret about training to be or being a teacher and many expressed what may be termed a moral commitment to teaching, which they found sustaining. Nevertheless, many of the trainees conveyed a perception of being a teacher in FE that partly entailed coping efficiently with the bureaucracy which then shaped a notion of professional practice characterised by expedience and technicality rather than autonomy and judgement. Pat explained how he had changed since working at City College:

*the biggest difference between me being a joiner to me being a teacher is the organisation part of it, you have to be probably 10 times more organised..., ILPs [Independent Learning Plans], everything you take into account as a teacher. The organisational aspect of it is massive.*

Although the performativity suggested in this response partly shaped their identities as teachers (Ball 2008, 52), the great majority of the participants, including the HR managers, were not wholly converted to the perception of education implied by the

concept of performativity. Though Ball stresses the malign impact of performativity on education, he (67-68) too sees “small acts of resistance”, fragile spaces to be defended, and “occasional opportunities to reassert different priorities.” Hoyle and Wallace (2005, viii) recognised schoolteachers’ scepticism to government policy that they termed “a stance of principled infidelity”, which could similarly be applied to some of the participants here. More recently Hoyle and Wallace (2010, 437; italics in original) described a section of teachers they refer to as “*ironists* who use the metaphors of management but always tongue-in-cheek”. This ability to speak fluently the language of performativity whilst valuing and, where possible, practising education based on different values was particularly apparent in the responses of some of the serving teachers. This is redolent of what Gleeson and Shain (1999: 482) described as ‘strategic compliance’: “a form of artful pragmatism which reconciles professional and managerial interests”, which they identified amongst lower level FE managers and teachers in FE. Strategic compliers retained a commitment to traditional professional and educational values but at least partially agreed to changes in line with senior college management in order to create space for manoeuvre and hence defend what they valued in their practice. Strategic compliers “did not comply for the ‘sake of their own skins”” (p460) but made decisions to conform or not based upon the needs of their learners. FE teachers have, arguably, rather less freedom than they had when Gleeson and Shain were writing (see Avis 2009), and in any case what they described may more accurately be termed ‘tactical compliance’ since it is inherently opportunistic. Nevertheless, when the teachers and trainees in the case studies spoke, for example, of their ambitions for students it was apparent that very few were careworn by the



performative demands placed on them. Some maintained a sense of education as having not just a moral purpose but even an emancipatory one and many described the strong relationship they had with their learners. Though Pat, the wodge teacher quoted above, highlighted the organisation required to be a teacher, he also emphasised sympathy in teaching: *“Sympathetic, yeh. I would put that high up.”*

### **Confidence**

Common amongst the responses from trainee teachers was the description of their increased confidence as a result of the experience of teaching, either on placement or in-service. This was also a feature of the discourse of serving teachers at City College in describing their own professional development. Gaining confidence, though, does not necessarily imply socialisation into a group or community of practice. Rather, it may simply imply exposure to situations that were at first unpredictable because they were unknown and which then became familiar. Once the trainee teachers better knew the conditions of the college, those conditions became more predictable and, for some, more controllable. These trainee teachers could at least make some sense of the uncertainty. Along with this growing familiarity with the circumstances of teaching, trainees were able to practise approaches and sometimes to discuss these with other practitioners. Moreover, the trainees' confidence grew as they gained credibility in the role of teacher and this growing sense of confidence is closely connected to the trainees' evolving self-identification as a teacher. Confidence, in this understanding, is subjective and dependent on situation and providing the opportunity for the trainees to enhance their confidence by learning to be confident may be one of the most useful functions of teacher

training (Norman and Hyland 2003). Yet, confidence can be considered as primarily about perception of self, not necessarily about enhancing the quality or range of professional practice. If it is arguable that good teachers are confident, it does not follow that all confident teachers are good. Indeed, increased confidence may have allowed some of the trainee teachers in the samples to rationalise a reversion to traditional, perhaps more limited teaching approaches, as in the case of Danny. So, a perception of learning that emphasises growing confidence may obscure the limitations of that learning. Colleges as they are currently organised may be a good place to become confident in withstanding the vagaries of the FE sector, but they may not be good places to learn to teach. This is because an important aspect of the trainee's formative experience related to alienation, which may also go some way to explaining the limited impact of government reform on improving practice in FE.

### **Alienation**

Williamson and Cullingford (1997, 263) wrote, "To the social scientist or educationalist, alienation is at once familiar and mysterious" and they draw attention to the difficulties in defining and so applying the concept. Nonetheless, they conclude (pp 273-4) that "it is too powerful an aspect of human socio-political and social-psychological experience to be bypassed." Brookfield (2005) considered alienation in relation to adult learning and teaching and his definition (p 50) of this is essentially psychological:

When we are unable to realize our innate creativity in the workplace, and when the work we do leaves us too tired to explore that creativity outside work, then we are in a state of alienation that stands against our freedom.

This definition is inadequate because it comprehends alienation as a state of weariness or anxiety and while this may describe how many experience alienation, this perception is far from universal. Despite being often overworked, despondency and fatigue do not characterise the responses of the participants in either of the studies considered in this paper, which belies Brookfield's individualised and emotional definition of alienation. By contrast, a Marxist understanding of alienation, as Allman (2001, 66) pointed out sees alienation as "a fairly normal feature of human consciousness" not "a pathology of individual origin and maladaptation." Nor is it necessarily a matter of conflicting linguistic registers to be analysed at the level of discourse. Alienation may be better understood as a set of circumstances or relationships, which no amount of thinking differently will overcome. It is rooted in the economic exchanges of capitalism, which distort human relationships and human agency. This foundation in the circumstances in which lives are lived rather than emotional responses to those circumstances is what allows the concept of alienation to illuminate the experience of teachers in FE. There are many different interpretations of Marxist alienation (see, for example, Mészáros 1975 and Ollman 1976), so it may be useful to return to Marx's original early writings on the subject. According to Marx, human consciousness is adaptive because it is determined by the material situation of existence, but he argued that humans' fundamental nature lies in the ability to consciously shape nature through labour. Marx (1976, 284) memorably wrote that:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee would put many an architect to shame in the construction of its honeycomb cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax. At the end of every labour process, a result emerges which had already been

conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existing ideally.

This consciousness of labour allows humans to have a history that can inform practice, by building on successes or avoiding previous failures. Marx (1976) also describes, however, the fundamental economic relationship in capitalist society where workers must sell their labour in order to earn a living and so do not own or control the product of their labour. Labour and its product become the property of another, and thus labour becomes *alienated* from the worker. The primary sense or meaning of labour exists in that it provides income, not in the product of the labour itself. In this materialist definition, therefore, alienation above all entails a loss of control, specifically a loss of control over labour, which is fundamental to what defines human nature. Of course, any developed understanding of society, and therefore of alienation, must look beyond these bare economic determinants, but as Mészáros (1975, 289) wrote, “the crucial issue for any established society is the successful reproduction of such individuals whose ‘own ends’ do not negate the potentialities of the prevailing system of production.” Even those who do not have a direct relationship to the means of production, such as FE teachers, are still shaped by society’s fundamental economic relations. In his early writings Marx (1975, 326-328) identified four inter-related aspects in the alienation of humans:

- a. People are alienated from the world because they are alienated from the product of their labour, which they do not control.
- b. People are alienated from themselves through not controlling the process of their own labour. Their primary relationship to what they do is that it earns a living.

- c. People are alienated from their “*species-being*”, that is from their essential humanity. This is a consequence of the first two, as Marx argues that purposeful labour is central to what defines humanity.
- d. People are alienated from each other because the economic processes dominant in society distort all human relations through the division of labour and its concordant differences in social status, and through the commodification of every aspect of life.

The fundamental lack of control inherent in these elements is apparent in the accounts of the serving and training teachers in the samples, however well they managed that situation. This understanding of alienation is not directed at illuminating the despondency of the participants; in any case none were despondent. Rather, alienation provides a means to understand the limitation on what teachers may learn because it allows insight into how relationships and opportunities to participate, or the lack of these, shape teachers' learn. Learning to cope with loss of control, or becoming inured to performativity as expressed above, may be understood as managing or accepting alienation. The intensification of centralised control over FE teaching and teacher education that the participants described means idiosyncrasies are less tolerated as practice becomes more closely prescribed within a system that is experienced as pre-existing, and functioning independently. Learning to cope with this situation may lead to increased resilience and confidence, but it also may explain why the teachers and trainees in the two studies often felt able to do little more than efficiently apply even poorly conceived standards and procedures without critique and without considering the adoption of

new ones. As the logic of a system with circumscribed control was internalised, the limits of aspiration were defined. Teachers and trainees confined themselves to contemplating how their part of education was organised, but rarely engaged in analysing or altering that organisation even, paradoxically, when that was an aim of government policy as in the 2007 reforms. The isolation apparent in the data from trainee and serving teachers alike is a further component of alienation and added to this is the trainees' 'estrangement' from their learning. Yet, some of the trainee teachers perceived education in general and FE in particular as means of escaping or alleviating society's social failings by widening opportunities and expanding aspirations while some others wished to move on from dull or unrewarding jobs. So trainee FE teachers can find themselves in a double bind of alienation where they may seek to escape or alleviate society's perceived ills and nevertheless they find themselves subject to exactly the pressures they had sought to escape or assuage.

This conceptualisation of alienation based on situation rather than perception, furthermore, helps to enlighten the circumstances of FE teachers and how they react to those circumstances and to each other. The relationship between the objective conditions of alienation and the subjective experience of those conditions can also help to explain why trainees react differently to the apparently similar situations of placements. Danny enjoyed and benefited from his placement despite its intense pressures, for example. Marx's concept of alienation also identifies the means to resist because the very circumstances of alienation contain the possibility of emancipation. As Daniels and Warmington (2007, 381) write, "within the labour process, the human is simultaneously marginal and central...simultaneously actor

and labour-power resource.” The capacity to create value through labour by running services or producing commodities cannot be separated from humans and humans can refuse consent. Taubman (2000, 82-83 cited in Huddleston and Unwin, 2002, 6) noted that following the incorporation of colleges in 1992 “further education had more days lost to strike action than any other section of the British economy” as teachers in the FE sector resisted a deterioration of their conditions of service. Resistance to the effects of alienation can, however, take other much less conspicuous forms. Within both studies, the continuing commitment of both trainee and serving teachers to their students in the face of demands to be more business-minded (“*you’ve got to become a manager rather than a teacher*” as one manager in the arts department of City College enthusiastically expressed it) may be considered as evidence of resistance to aspects of alienation. Moreover, the occasional embattled, subversive and black-humoured camaraderie of Andrea and her colleagues in the special needs department at City College can be understood as a collective response to their alienation.

*But I think it’s a good thing to moan ... because you need other people’s perspective on what you should do or what you could do. It’s just to comfort them really.... And then we do have a little bit of a laugh sometimes. We do have a laugh.*

In such responses the glimmer of potential emancipation from alienation through collectively resisting alienation might be perceived. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that the lasting impression in the two studies was not of people ground down by a situation of powerlessness. Rather, to varying degrees, the lasting impression is of individuals managing to assert their own humanity despite the difficulties they encountered. As Marx and Engels (1968, 96) understood, humans make their own

history, but not in circumstances they have created or chosen for themselves. What the trainees did and how they developed as teachers was shaped by alienation.

### **Conclusion**

There remains the question, however, of whether this understanding of alienation can inform FE teacher education, especially given the inherent limitations of government reform. Teacher education in FE is currently not well served by the 190 statements of the “skills, knowledge and attributes” (LLUK 2006, ii), which constitute the professional standards for FE and which underpin teacher education in the sector (Lucas 2007). This taxonomy of professional behaviour suggests what Avis (2003, 315) termed “a truncated model of trust” in FE teachers and has been part of a policy of centralised control over FE teachers’ practice.

The understanding of alienation employed in this article helps to highlight the importance of control and agency in teachers’ development. An emphasis in ITE for FE on identifying and increasing teachers’ independent agency may serve to address the circumstances of alienation and encourage trainee teachers to see beyond simply coping. De Ste Croix (1981, 27) may provide some direction for the teacher educator:

In every situation in which one is making a judgement there are some factors which cannot be changed and others which can only partly be modified, and the better one understands the situation the less forced and unfree the situation becomes. In this sense, ‘freedom is the understanding of necessity’.

It is on that basis of “understanding necessity” that teacher education in FE could be better organised. Teacher educators should direct trainee teachers more purposefully to what can be influenced and controlled in their teaching, rather than



what alienates them, such as the administrative element of the course (“the paperwork”), which many of the participants in the case studies perceived as paramount. Similarly, while confidence is a valid and important element in the development of teachers, it needs to be associated with an evaluation of their practice. Otherwise, confidence may mean little more than the ability to manage a challenging situation or, worse, confidence may provide licence for poor practice.

Finally, the studies that this article is based on, along with many others (see *inter alia* Wallace 2002 and Avis and Bathmaker 2006) indicate that many trainee teachers in FE colleges, pre-service or in-service, encounter isolation, poor support and little guidance, however well they manage these conditions. What trainees learn from this early experience of teaching in FE is limited, because their experience, even at best, is limited. Lucas (2007) and Maxwell (2010) have argued for a knowledge-based approach to teacher education in FE because of the failings of the current standards-led approach. This case for teacher education in English FE to be based around a relatively coherent body of professional knowledge is strengthened by the paucity of trainee teachers’ early experiential learning, which is evident in the two studies considered in this article; such a knowledge-based approach may act as a counterbalance to the limitations of this early experience and the circumstances of alienation. As Young (2008, 82) argues more generally “...because the world is not as we experience it, curriculum knowledge must be discontinuous, not continuous with everyday experience”, which is particularly pertinent in the alienating circumstances of FE. The content of that body of knowledge for teacher education in FE would be disputed and would evolve. Nevertheless, deciding on this body of

knowledge and ensuring it shapes courses should be a more significant part of teacher education because there is a pressing need for trainees in FE to be *educated* as teachers. Otherwise, they may just learn to cope.

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