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Original Citation

Colley, Helen and James, David (2005) Unbecoming tutors: towards a more dynamic notion of professional participation. In: ESRC TLRP seminar series Changing Teacher Roles, Identities and Professionalism, 16th May 2005, London, Uk. (Unpublished)

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Unbecoming tutors: towards a more dynamic notion of professional participation

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Presented in ESRC TLRP seminar series *Changing Teacher Roles, Identities and Professionalism*, Kings College London, 16 May 2005.

Introduction

This paper presents a strand of our work-in-progress. We review both dominant and alternative academic constructs of what it means to be a professional. We are particularly interested in the way that these, like ‘common sense’ understandings, entail implicit assumptions about the permanence of professional status once it has been attained. This is not to suggest that professionalism is viewed as a static rather than dynamic process; but in exploring metaphors for the dynamism portrayed in different versions of professionalism, we found them inadequate for describing the experiences of the professional FE tutors who participated with us in the project *Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education (TLC)*. We found this to be the case even in the most well-known social theory of situated learning, which posits a largely unidirectional movement of novices from legitimate peripheral participation to full membership in a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

However, our research revealed a number of instances of ‘conduct unbecoming’ on the part of some tutors over the four years of their participation in TLC. In particular, we focus on the career transformations of two tutors whose trajectories sharply challenge the common assumptions we identified. They moved from full membership and belonging in their professional community of practice to a renewed state of peripheral participation and, in one case, de-legitimated practice and eventual exclusion. These experiences suggest not becoming, but ‘unbecoming’. Although they are individual case stories, they help to illuminate a larger picture of high turnover and exodus among FE professionals (Hansard, 2001)¹. We suggest that Bourdieusian theoretical concepts of *habitus* and *field* offer helpful conceptual tools for interpreting the multiplicities of professional identity, the impact of changing contexts on these tutors’ dispositions, and their increasingly marginal or marginalized positions in relation to the overlapping fields of their subject-discipline, the FE sector, and the broader social, economic and political context of their work and lives. Finally, we suggest a need for more dynamic concepts of participation in professional communities of practice. We begin by presenting a brief outline of the project.

¹ This refers to a parliamentary response to a question about staff turnover in FE. No official statistics are kept on this, but a survey by the AOC in 2001 reported that this was running at an annual rate of 10%-11% for lecturing staff.

An outline of the project

The TLC project is a four-year longitudinal study that comes to a close during 2005. It sits within the *Teaching and Learning Research Programme* (TLRP), overseen by the ESRC, and was formed in part to respond to the goals of that wider programme. Whilst a subsequent phase of the TLRP has funded further projects in the area of post-compulsory education, the TLC project remains unique for being the only substantial independent research project to examine learning and teaching in further education colleges in England. The aims of the project may be succinctly expressed as to: (a) deepen understanding of the complexities of learning; (b) identify, implement and evaluate strategies for the improvement of learning opportunities; (c) set in place an enhanced and lasting capacity among practitioners for enquiry into FE practice.

We deliberately adopted a cultural perspective, because we believed teaching and learning, and the relationships between them, to be inherently complex and relational, rather than simple. Thus, our working assumption, now confirmed through data collection and early analysis, was that all of the following dimensions would contribute to learning, and had to be examined in relation to each other:

- The positions, dispositions and actions of the students
- The positions, dispositions and actions of the tutors
- The location and resources of the site, which are not neutral, but enable some approaches and attitudes, and constrain or prevent others
- The syllabus or course specification, the assessment and qualification specifications and requirements
- The time tutors and students spend together, their interrelationships, and the range of other learning sites students are engaged with
- Issues of college management and procedures, together with funding and inspection body procedures and regulations, and government policy
- Wider vocational and academic cultures, of which any course or site is part
- Wider social and cultural values and practices, for example around issues of social class, gender and ethnicity, the nature of employment opportunities, social and family life, and the perceived status of FE as a sector.

In order to examine the relationships between these dimensions, each of which is complex in its own right, we focussed initially on 16 learning sites, divided between four partner FE colleges². The sites were selected through negotiation with the colleges, to illustrate some of the great diversity of FE learning, whilst, of course, not claiming to be representative of it. Changes since the project commenced extended the list to 19 sites in total (see Hodkinson and James, 2003). One tutor in each site worked with us as part of the research team, as a 'participating tutor'. In addition, the team was made up of four college-based research fellows, five university-based research fellows and five Directors (a total of 30 people). Data were collected over a three year period, in a variety of ways: repeated semi-structured interviews with a sample of students and with the tutors; regular site observations and tutor shadowing; a repeated questionnaire survey of all students in each site; and diaries or log books

² We chose the term 'learning site' for two principal reasons. Firstly, our knowledge of the English further Education sector gave us reason to avoid using terms like 'classroom', 'lesson' or 'course' as if they would apply to a cross-section of the diverse work of the sector. Secondly, we wished to avoid any assumption that the spatial and temporal organisation of college provision would always equate with the 'where' of learning. A simple illustration of this might be where a student attends several scheduled classes each week, but still does most of their learning at home.

kept by each participating tutor. We also interviewed college managers, as and when relevant.

Before presenting some of the data from the project, we turn first to look at the ways in which different understandings of professionalism have been constructed, and the dynamics of professional participation which those constructs suggest.

Constructs of professionalism

What is it to be a professional teacher? In the broader literature, we find two main approaches to constructing the notion of professionalism. In the first, professionalism takes the form of a list of defining characteristics, functions or ways of working that set professions apart from other occupations. This generates a kind of 'job description', describing the ethical codes which the professional implements, the modes of knowledge they deploy, typologies of roles they undertake, and their status in the occupational hierarchy as well as in relation to their students. Pels characterises this approach as 'the folk epistemology of professionalism' (1999: 102, cited in Stronach et al, 2002: 111). The approach includes early functionalist models in sociology (e.g. Millerson, 1964) through to recent taxonomies such as that provided by Goodson and Hargreaves (1996), who argue that professionalism consists of seven key elements: the exercise of discretionary judgement, moral engagement, collaboration, heteronymy, care, continuous learning, and managing complexity. Stronach et al (2002) describe these as 'outside-in' stories, since they construct practice as performing to a set of externally determined principles and standards. But where traditional versions of professionalism referred to its virtuoso functions (such as specialist knowledge that pretends to mystical status, invulnerability to public scrutiny, the power to impose expert definitions of client needs), these are generally regarded as defunct, and even demonised, in late- or post-modernity. They have been replaced by more subtle versions, focusing on concepts as such as reflective practice (Schön, 1983), tacit knowledge (Eraut, 1994, 2000), and embodied judgement-making (Beckett and Hager, 2002). Such definitions are reminiscent of the *lipsmackinthirstquenchinacetasting...* Pepsi-Cola advertisements, since they promote a construct of professionalism by appealing to its virtuous functions.

A second, alternative set of constructs are, by contrast, 'inside-out' stories (Stronach et al, 2002): they focus not so much on the virtuous functions as on the virtuous *character* of the professional person. These are not job descriptions but person specifications, not an epistemology but an ontology of professionalism, not like Pepsi-Cola but like Coca-Cola – professionalism as 'The Real Thing'. They are less concerned with what the professional *does* than with who she *is*. Such constructs appeal to more emotive and emotional categories: vocation as intrinsic calling, moral values of public service, commitment to one's students, Aristotelian versions of virtue itself, and in particular, valiant heroism (or, less optimistically, martyrdom) in the face of the de-professionalising effects of bureaucracy, technicism and the audit culture. Although post-modern critiques have challenged the tendency of this literature to construct professionals as 'Collective Individuals' with a universalised identity (Stronach et al, 2002), they counterpose what might be termed 'Individual Collectivities', arguing that professionals' accounts of themselves incorporate 'shards' of uncertain, disparate and even conflicting identities, which cannot and should not be reconciled. (This does, of course, also imply an unacknowledged essentialism of its own.) Stating that 'there is no such thing as teacher' (p.116), they present fragments of professional identity such as recollected pupil, pressured

individual, subject specialist, person-that-I-am, socialized apprentice, coerced innovator; convinced professional, professional critic, sceptical pragmatist.

Perhaps because issues of pedagogy and professional autonomy have almost always been marginalised as an absent presence in FE (Goodrham and Hodkinson, 2004), the academic literature on professionalism in this sector is dominated by such 'inside-out' stories, which often acknowledge fragmentation and diversity (Gleeson and Mardle, 1980, Shain and Gleeson, 1999, Gleeson and Shain, 1999, Ainley and Bailey, 1997, Bathmaker, 2001, Avis, 1996, Ashcroft and James, 1999). A recurrent theme within this paradigm is that the essence of professionalism – the Real Thing – consists in creative responses of strategic or subversive compliance that mitigate the most damaging effects of audit measures, and redeem the tutor-student relationship based on educational rather than managerial values.

We do not wish to suggest by such an analysis that these two ways of understanding professionalism are counterposed. Many accounts of professionalism draw on both, and we separate them here only for heuristic purposes. We move on now to our primary interest in this paper, by exploring the less visible assumptions about the dynamics of professional participation which underpin these different constructs.

The dynamics of professionalism

The two paradigms we have considered offer alternative metaphors for the dynamics of professionalism, by which we mean movement towards or away from shared or analytic categories. Some functional accounts can appear as mostly static, since they refer to the meeting of externalised criteria. Here, however, we suggest that they do entail a dynamic, and that this dynamic could be expressed through a rather celestial metaphor of 'arrival', of 'having been assumed' into the professional body. While this attainment of Assumption and belonging may represent a form of stasis, it is held in tension by the virtual (and infernal) possibilities of fall and expulsion that are threatened by breaches of the heteronymic ideal. Professionalism stands not only in elevated opposition to non-professional status, but is maintained in enlightened opposition to the ever-present but rarely-experienced risk of being cast out into the unprofessional darkness.

On the other hand, the dynamic of most accounts which focus on the identity rather than functions of professionals can best be described through a metaphor of 'shuttling'. These predominantly focus on the movement between deprofessionalisation and reprofessionalisation (Apple and Jungck, 1991; Lawn and Ozga, 1988; Whitty, 2000), between the taking and the making of professionalism (Gleeson et al, in press), or between 'economies of performance' and 'ecologies of practice' (Stronach et al, 2002). Additionally, in FE such accounts have also focused on shuttlings between vocational tutors' identities from their profession of origin (engineer, nursery nurse, hairdresser etc.) and their identities as professional – if accidental – pedagogues (Gleeson et al, in press, Colley, 2002). Here, the dynamics of professionalism are portrayed not as a state of arrival, but as an eternal wandering between desert and oasis, beset by trials of the spirit and by political sandstorms that threaten erasure of known features, and possibly extinction.

There is, however, a more fundamental stasis that underlies both approaches: they still convey a strong sense of 'once a professional, always a professional'. We continue, then, by pointing to some research evidence that challenges the permanence of absolute arrival.

The dynamics of participation in a community of practice

The TLC project, along with others in the TLRP, has made considerable use of the conceptual framework offered by a theory of learning as a social and situated activity (Lave and Wenger, 1991). This theory has focused predominantly on the way that novices learn alongside experienced colleagues, and treats entry into a profession as a process of moving from legitimate peripheral participation to full participation in a community of practice. In particular, we have found it useful in allowing us to focus *both* on 'doing' – the social practices of teaching and learning – *and* on 'being' and 'becoming' – the transformation of identity through the development of membership in a vocational culture and community. In analysing young people's experiences in vocational courses in FE, for example, these concepts helped us to identify the significance of immersion in authentic workplace settings as a crucial element of effective learning – although we also problematised aspects of this effectiveness, such as gender-stereotyping (Colley et al, 2003). This offers a baptismal metaphor for arrival in/conversion to the community of practice.

In addition, our analysis along these lines also revealed some students' resistance to and/or exclusion from the community of practice. These are not just issues about the extent of legitimate peripheral participation, but about certain identities and practices which were deemed to be illegitimate, and which therefore precluded movement from peripheral to fuller participation. So, too, have Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004) and Roberts (2005) addressed such disruptions of the arrival metaphor in their studies of schoolteachers, where some found difficulty participating in, or even finding, a community of practice. Such analyses go beyond both 'arrival' and 'shuttling' metaphors, since they expose social contestation and struggle over participation, *non*-arrival and exclusion – the operation of power through social relations of practice, to which Lave and Wenger (1991) refer but which they do not centrally address.

Our thinking about situated learning has been further extended when we have turned our attention to the experiences of the tutors who participated in the TLC project. James and Diment (2003) explored what they termed 'underground' learning and working, as their data revealed that one tutor's professionalism occupied a secret terrain not recognised or validated in the identifiable community of practice to which she belonged. Gwen was an NVQ assessor in workplaces outside the college. However, she saw her role not just as deploying her expert judgement to conduct assessments, but far more broadly as generating opportunities for learning and facilitating learning for her students (though officially, they were merely 'candidates'). In doing this she drew on a professional *habitus* developed, it is argued, in accord with earlier *field* conditions. At first glance, Gwen is simply an especially dedicated professional going the extra mile to do what she terms a proper job for her students. On closer analysis, she was doing something that was not just unofficial and underground, but also unsustainable, given that it was so heavily personally resourced by her and also explicitly beyond the college remit. She doesn't do it any more, and we could argue that the main dynamic here is that the community of practice had moved on to new ground, and by continuing to 'be herself', Gwen became increasingly distant from its central practices. As this example suggests, one of the theoretical developments of the project is around the conjunction of Lave and Wenger's *situated learning* and Bourdieu's *habitus* and *field*. The latter concepts have been used from the start of the project because they are helpful in taking a cultural approach to learning without becoming trapped into overly subjectivist or objectivist readings. Whilst Lave and Wenger acknowledge that the social structure,

power relations, and conditions for legitimacy 'define possibilities for learning' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 88), we have begun to argue that this side of situated learning is underdeveloped in their work, and that the concept of *field* can help (see Biesta et al, 2004, Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004, and also Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, Grenfell and Janes, 1998).

There has in fact been rather a lot of 'movement' amongst the FE professionals with whom we have worked. Of the 24 FE tutors who participated in the project, only one third remain in teaching roles in the sector. Two left FE to move into sixth form provision, two have become full-time managers and are no longer teaching, five have either quit or been made redundant from FE, and five give accounts of themselves as marginalised and are hoping to leave FE (some have already reduced their hours to part-time). Those who left the sector had not been 'cast out' through any breach of professional principle, nor could they easily be seen as at one apex of a 'shuttling' within the terrain.

How can we understand such stories? Firstly, we agree with Goodrham and Hodkinson (2004) that there is a lacuna in both dominant and alternative academic constructs of professionalism, which it would be helpful to overcome: the dynamics of professionalism might be better understood if grounded in the data of particular case studies, rather than in typical generalisations, whether as Collective Individuals or Individual Collectivities. Secondly, while concurring that professional identities have to be understood as multiple and complex, we suggest that such attempts might usefully go beyond the still-narrow postmodern multiplicities evoked by Stronach et al (2002), to consider professionals also as human beings living wider lives, and to explore the possibility that their knowledge and practices are produced and reproduced with reference to a wider set of influences. In other words, not to allow ourselves be trapped by established institutional, sectoral, political *or* academic stories of professionalism. We continue by illustrating these suggestions through the case stories of two FE tutors in the TLC project.

The case of Ruth Merchant (adapted in part from case study accounts prepared by Kim Diment)

One of our participating tutors, Ruth Merchant, works in a large FE college in a provincial city. Her field is English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). The period of her association with the project has been of particular interest in terms of movement her professional identity and her changing relationship to the college, and both of these things have also been strongly framed by a shifting political context.

When we first met Ruth, she appeared low in confidence and in any sense of professional autonomy, and seemed somewhat marginal to the decision-making processes linked to her teaching. Neither was she particularly well integrated with the staff team working in the same area of work. Three years later, she had moved her physical and organisational location in the college and was much more central to a team. Furthermore, she frequently praised her colleagues for their support, and was increasingly engaging in national events for ESOL teachers. She was also more secure and certain of her own professional role and its purposes, was more politicised and relied less on the college for a professional identity. She attributes some of the confidence, reflexivity and criticality implied in these shifts to her participation in the TLC research project. Here, though, we are not so much concerned with the mechanisms of her professional learning, but with the dynamic and shifting position she occupies in relation to a community of practice.

There are several key contextual issues that help us to understand Ruth's story. Firstly, there was a merger of two different parts of the college that had both offered ESOL programmes in rather different ways – one within a Humanities faculty, the other in a Learner Services Faculty – to form a new Faculty called 'Skills for Life'. Secondly, her unsuccessful application for a post of greater responsibility in her original location, which soon afterwards, led her to move to another campus site within the college and to work with a new group of colleagues. Thirdly, a period of rapid and quite radical shifts in policy – in the ESOL and Basic Skills curriculum, and in the rules governing UK immigration - directly affected many of the students.

Ruth talks of a recent turning point or pivotal moment in her life. A chance remark from an influential colleague had worried her greatly – the colleague had suggested that there were two kinds of ESOL teachers. The first became personally involved with the students, whilst the second was 'more professional', keeping a distance and concentrating on doing a very good job. For a time, this remark confirmed for Ruth that she was not a true professional. However (and partly through being required by the TLC project to reflect on the nature of high quality learning in different parts of the college) she ended up completely rejecting the colleague's view. For Ruth, high quality learning experiences are those that make a real and positive impact on the lives of her students, and furthermore, this matters to her far more than examination results or student retention. Ruth's own shifting notions of professionalism – her professional participation – depended on external viewpoints, i.e. beyond the immediate reference group, drawing on influences from a wider 'community of practice' that, in the conventionally isolated pockets of a college of FE, are not normally available. In terms of professional learning, this is perhaps a reminder of the power and original richness of the idea of 'double loop learning' and its associated, damning critique of technical rationalism (e.g. Schon, 1983).

Ruth had discovered her own kind of 'distance' – and it is distance from the micro- (and to some extent, macro-) politics of the college, so that these things actually defined her less than they once did. She avoided becoming involved in a bitter dispute about terms and conditions that was occupying the energies of many of her colleagues, instead putting her energies into challenging the categorisations and re-categorisations applied to the asylum-seekers and refugees amongst her students. The introduction of new 'eligibility rules' had caused some students to be taken off courses they had already begun, which led to distress for both students and staff. Ruth was pivotal in keeping in touch with these individuals until a way could be found of offering them some provision, and felt that the difficulties faced had helped to produce a stronger staff team. Ruth's 'distance' included operating by her own values, with reference to her responsibility as a fellow human being, rather than following a job specification or operationalising the government's new rules as they applied to the college's work. Her own sense of professionalism, then, transcends the immediate, ostensible conditions. This may also be understood as a variant of 'underground working', insofar as it survives by 'going underground' (see James and Diment, 2003).

A further manifestation of 'distance' is Ruth's ESOL training work and her involvement in '*Reflect ESOL*'³. This, she claims, is 'a lot more exciting than my job

³ *Reflect ESOL* is based on principles derived from the work of Paolo Freire. Perhaps the most central of these is that no educational action is neutral – it is either oppressive or liberatory. *Reflect ESOL* advocates an approach to literacy that refuses narrower, technicist notions of skills and purpose. For a concise introduction, see both

at college'. She has begun speaking at conferences and running events for other ESOL teachers. This gives her a place in which to develop and promote her view of the core purposes of working with the particular client group. She wonders whether it could become part of the work of the college, though given that it does not conform easily to conventional targets, she suspects it would 'give college auditors a heart attack'.

As our direct contact with the ESOL learning site was drawing to a close, we noted a series of changes in group size, staffing and organisation, all of which reflected a tightened financial situation. We also learnt that there was a major funding deficit in the faculty that now housed ESOL work, and that this put all such work in the college into jeopardy. However, whilst she is concerned and does what she can to fight this situation, Ruth is not simply crushed by it, as she may once have been.

Ruth's story implies that we should beware of the potential for (a) unidirectionality and (b) oversimplicity, in the application of the notion of a 'community of practice' to professional existence. Put crudely, the segment we see of Ruth's career as a teacher in FE, whilst only a relatively short period, suggests her position was quite marginal at the start, despite her several years of successful teaching experience. It was *external* reference points and critical spaces (the TLC project, the *Reflect ESOL* movement) have permitted her to generate new security and confidence. Furthermore, these external reference points and critical spaces were not in harmony with her regular professional structures: they are themselves marginal to the college. We can say with some confidence that Ruth's professional identity was developed and consolidated by her discovery of new communities of practice, and her transcending of the immediate conditions.

The case of Florence Denning

Another of our participating tutors, Florence Denning, worked in a different FE college, also in a large, provincial city. She had an exceptionally long connection with the college. It was there that she had studied A Levels, done her teacher training placement, and taught A Level French as her main subject for 20 years. Florence's case is of particular interest here, since initially her situation reflected strongly both the tensions and the potential of 'shuttling' between, on the one hand, her personal and professional values, and on the other, the demands of the audit culture. Within four terms, however, this accommodation had collapsed, as the college not only underwent restructuring and changes in management personnel, but encountered a severe financial crisis. 70 teaching posts were to be lost, and Florence – a passionate and committed tutor – decided to take voluntary redundancy. How did this come to happen?

When we first interviewed Florence, she expressed two central and interlinked stories about her own identity. She was a person with strong and radical political beliefs, who had spent much of her life as an activist both inside and outside the college. At the same time, she loved teaching passionately, and committed a great deal to her work and to her students. Let us look at how these two strands of identity shaped her practice as a professional.

<http://www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=568> and
<http://www.nrdc.org.uk/content.asp?CategoryID=569>

Florence had been a political activist around the socialist, feminist and anti-racist movements from her early teenage years. She began teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Africa, and then to Asian women in her home community, and her commitment to its emancipatory ethos and pedagogy was reinforced by a supervisor on the PGCE course she subsequently took.

As an FE teacher, Florence was active in the local trade union branch, and fought for resistance to the imposition of local (and worsened) conditions for teaching staff after colleges' incorporation in 1992. Although resistance to new contracts eventually collapsed – amid bitter recriminations – Florence and a handful of other tutors at that college insisted on remaining on 'the Silver Book' (national terms and conditions under former LEA provision). This created isolation for Florence, with feelings of 'bad blood' among colleagues, including the local union leadership. By the time she was studying for an MA in Education 10 years later, radical movements had also ebbed in society at large. Studying the political context of lifelong learning, she realised that this too contributed to a more isolated individualised view of the sector and of her practice within it.

This personal and political isolation also combined with the marginal position of her teaching within the college. Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) form part of the general academic programme on which the college prides itself. However, it occupied a backwater within this provision. Florence and her team had no direct line manager, student numbers were small, and an OFSTED inspection had not even bothered to observe their work. Many of the reasons for this can be linked to broader social and political factors. MFL are marginal subjects within the entire UK education system. They are no longer a required element of the National Curriculum for schools, and less than 11% of young people continued to study them post-16 even when MFL were compulsory in school. The economic dominance of the US has made English the global language of business, and British culture is particularly insular, generating indifference to the acquisition of foreign languages.

This marginal position in the college was an ambiguous one for Florence. Although it brought frustrations, it also offered a form of protection. She talked about being in a fragmented group of teachers who formed 'a kind of plankton', 'below the radar'⁴. Out of the gaze of management, the margins offered a space in which she enjoyed relative autonomy to teach according to her own professional principles, and to undertake the sort of engaged pastoral work with students that Ruth also practised. This sense of protection was strengthened by her long-standing and excellent reputation as a teacher among college managers. Often an outspoken critic of management, she felt this reputation lent her protests credibility, and prevented encroachments on her autonomous professional space. Although her participation in the college's community of practice had shifted back to peripherality, she still enjoyed legitimacy for her own practice within that community⁵.

⁴ This sense of being 'below the radar' figured in several of the learning sites at different times, and it speaks not only of the scale of operations but also of the impossibility of the sheer diversity of practices and definitions of 'learning work' in FE colleges being represented with validity in quality, audit and assessment regimes.

⁵ We are aware that there are at least two meanings of 'community of practice' here. In one, the community is the more abstract community of FE professionals (rather like the phrase 'the teaching profession' or 'modern languages teachers in FE'), in which this tutor has moved from periphery to centre. In the other, her immediate college is a community of practice, but one that is part of a larger web of connections. This latter meaning is closer to *field* and it draws attention to positionality, movement, inclusion, exclusion and so forth.

There was, however, a further aspect of isolation among her immediate colleagues, related to her professional commitment to emancipatory pedagogy. Ever since teaching EFL, Florence had been firmly convinced of the importance of teaching in the ‘target language’ – conducting lessons entirely in French - as a *socially inclusive* strategy. Few of her students in FE had families who could afford to take them on regular holidays to France, or fund school-trips and exchanges. Target language teaching provided these less advantaged students with some experience of immersion in French, which could help them prepare for the challenging oral tests within their terminal exams.

Such methods are, however, extremely labour-intensive for the tutor. Each section of the lesson must be carefully staged for students to follow. The learning culture must be expertly managed to create a safe and supportive context for students to speak a foreign language without fear of humiliation. Moreover, the method had to be adapted (introducing it more gradually) as one-year AS Levels attracted a broader ability-range of students than two-year A Levels had done. While target language teaching has gone in and out of popularity with policy-makers in rapid succession, and despite her efforts to debate it in the languages team, Florence’s colleagues never adopted it. This caused particular frictions with one tutor who shared the teaching for some of her groups.

At the end of Florence’s first year with the TLC project, her college was plunged into a deep financial crisis. Changes to the methods of auditing college activity resulted in a £4 million funding ‘clawback’ demanding substantial cuts in staffing. This followed swiftly after major changes to the college’s senior and middle management (including the principal), and a restructure around new policies to maximise class sizes, increase tutors’ total contact hours, and cut courses that did not ‘pay for themselves’. Florence was told that teaching hours and resources for AS and A2 French would be cut, and that A2 would only be offered the following year for 3 hours per week as an evening course. Her protests fell on deaf ears: there was no longer any manager with a language specialism, nor any that knew her particularly well as a teacher. From legitimate but peripheralised participation, changes in the field of FE and in the community of the college meant that Florence’s professional practice was now de-legitimated.

To be unable to practice an approach to teaching and learning which cohered with her sense of social justice posed a threat to her whole identity, as a teacher and as a person. Consequently, she chose to take the redundancy option and remove herself from the field of FE altogether. The decision was extremely painful – in both research interviews where she discussed it, including one six months later, she broke down in tears. Unlike Ruth, she has not found an alternative location in which she could continue her radical professional practice with collective support. Today, she combines school supply teaching with casual work at the local university. She is trying to get a full-time job in a secondary school or sixth form college, but has so far been unsuccessful. The research team has, however, wondered how difficult Florence might find it to adapt to the more disciplinary ethos of either kind of institution.

Some concluding thoughts

At one level, the stories we have told are very different – Ruth’s finding of new sources of sustenance for a professional identity, albeit in unlikely places, compared to Florence’s rapid *exclusion* despite her history of being respected as a full, even excellent, member of her profession.

Yet these cases, and also that of Gwen mentioned earlier, have a strong common thread in what they say about trying to understand professional participation. Firstly, they underline the need to avoid both oversimplification and uni-directionality in our understanding of professional identity, which can be about becoming, but also 'unbecoming'. Secondly, they suggest that a more dynamic understanding of professional participation might take into account:

- the formation of professional habitus in accordance with a set of conditions and circumstances and its dependence upon made and re-made social relations. This means seeing professional habitus along the lines of vocational habitus (see Colley et al, 2003), but does not imply determinism (alluding to the earlier metaphors, it is inside-out, outside-in *and more*, all at once);
- the idea that fields are not themselves static. As has been argued in relation to educational research itself (Grenfell and James, 2004), changes in the *field* in turn change the meaning and significance of extant professional identities and practices, even quite radically and rapidly (the original community of practice may, after a time, be of little significance).

Finally, while we concur with Stronach et al (2002) about the need to acknowledge a multiplicity of identities, we suggest that professional identities and trajectories are inseparable from personal and political identities and trajectories. There is certainly no such thing as 'FE tutor' separate from the complex, wider lives that Florence Denning and Ruth Merchant have lived and are living.

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