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**From childcare practitioner to FE tutor:
biography, vocational culture and gender in the transition of
professional identities.**

Helen Colley, University of Leeds

Paper presented at BERA Annual Conference 12-14 September 2002 in the
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Biography and Culture in Teachers' Learning and Teaching
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From childcare practitioner to FE tutor: biography, vocational culture and gender in the transition of professional identities.

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Introduction

This paper is based on the first year's research in one of the 15 learning sites in the project *Transforming Learning Cultures in FE* (TLC-FE)¹, a full-time course in nursery nursing. It focuses primarily on the site's tutor and an account of her life history and evolving career, as she moves from being a childcare professional to becoming an FE tutor. It explores how this biography connects with the learning site, in particular through the tutor's own professional identity and her relationship with the student group. Social and cultural practices within the learning site are considered in relation to social spaces that include the college, but also reach far beyond: the broader culture of childcare, and deep-going social structures of class and gender. I draw upon concepts of learning as legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and on feminist analyses of caring work (Gilligan, 1995, Hochschild, 1983, Hughes, 2001), to explore the relationship between biography, vocational culture, learning and identity. These are discussed with particular reference to a central theme that has emerged in the site: the role of emotional labour in childcare. The paper describes how the learning of this role has been both reinforced in some aspects and disrupted in others for the tutor as she makes the transition from being an experienced and senior nursery nurse to becoming a childcare tutor in FE.

In its methodology, this case study illustrates the general approach of the TLC-FE project, as a partnership between researchers based both in universities and FE colleges, which also includes the active participation of the site tutors. These partnerships aim to identify learning cultures and support tutors in introducing positive changes, and the paper describes some initial steps in that process of transformation within this site. The core data is drawn from repeated semi-structured interviews with the tutor and a sample of students, researcher observations, and from the tutor's own reflective journal. Other data that has informed this study derives from interviews with the course leader, a questionnaire survey of all students in the site, and college and national statistical data. The treatment of the data owes much to discussions within the local and national TLC-FE research teams during the analysis of data from each of the 16 individual sites, as well as work-in-progress on themes related to multiple sites.

There already exists a body of literature on teachers' biographies and accounts of their own practice (e.g. Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, Goodson, 1992, Lacey, 1977, Nias, 1989). However, there are a number of gaps within it. The first of these is the simple fact that this literature relates to the experience of schoolteachers, and I have as yet been unable to find any similar work investigating the life histories and identities of FE teachers. In contrast with schools, FE is a severely under-researched sector of education, despite its centrality to the current dominant agenda of lifelong learning, and

¹ For more detail on the project visit its website (www.ex.ac.uk/education/tlc) or see Gleeson, 2001.

there is a contribution to be made by exploring the biographies of FE teachers. Their trajectories into teaching as a career are often very different from those of schoolteachers, especially in vocational subject areas, where tutors' occupations prior to teaching may continue to underpin strongly their identities.

Secondly, recent research in FE (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1997a, 1997b, 2000, Hodkinson & Bloomer, 2000) has clearly demonstrated the important interconnections between personal biography, culture and dispositions to learning in a context far wider than the classroom or college alone. This work, though, was focused on students rather than on teachers, and predominantly on students' motivations to engage with FE rather than on processes of teaching and learning. While a very small number of studies have allowed FE teachers' experiences of the restructuring of FE over the last 10 years to be heard in a way that reflects very clearly the changing social and political context of their work (e.g. Ainley & Bailey, 1996, Shain & Gleeson, 1999), these have not explored the inter-relationship of individuals' life histories and their professional culture, practice and identities. This paper seeks to make a contribution by presenting one tutor's account of her own evolving identities in relation to the learning site, the vocational culture of childcare, and deep-rooted social structures of class and gender.

The learning site and its tutor

Joanne Lowe is the tutor for this learning site, which is the first-year cohort (started in September 2001) on the full-time, 2-year CACHE² Diploma, a Level 3 (or Advanced Level) programme. This is a long-established and universally-recognised course (formerly known as the NNEB³) for training nursery nurses. Half of the course is taught in college, and half consists of a series of work placements for the students in schools and nurseries, where they care for babies and small children up to the age of 7 years. The CACHE teaching team are all female, as are the large majority of students, reflecting the traditional gender stereotyping of childcare work. The students are also predominantly white and working class, and almost all of them are 16-18 year olds.

Many of these students have not performed well at school or in Intermediate level courses taken at sixth forms or college, and the CACHE Diploma has lower entry requirements than other Level 3 courses in the health and social care department where it is located. A number had original aspirations to study A Levels or the AVCE in Health and Social Care, in order to become teachers or children's nurses, but failed to achieve the necessary entry requirements and have been obliged to study the CACHE Diploma as the only available alternative. This year, students with even lower levels of achievement at GCSE were taken on. This was partly due to new college policies maximising recruitment and increasing class sizes, and partly due to a decision by the course leader to prioritise evidence of vocational experience and commitment in candidates over examination results. Despite the difficulties of such an intake for a Level 3 course, teaching in the learning site

² Council for Awards in Childcare and Education.

³ Nursery Nursing Education Board.

has achieved excellent ratings in inspections, and is held in high regard by the CACHE national examination board and by local employers.

Joanne herself is in her mid-30s. She is a former nursery nurse and nursery manager, and made the transition to become a full-time FE lecturer in 1996, 5 years before this research began. Two years ago she moved to the college in which the research is being conducted. She has a dynamic and extrovert personality, and provides charismatic and authoritative leadership within the site.

What follows next is my reconstruction of Joanne's story about her own life history up to the point where she joined the research project. Italics are used to indicate that this narrative consists of data from our first interview, taped and transcribed verbatim. This interview sought explicitly to explore her life history, and in particular the career trajectory that brought her into FE teaching. However, it was a very free-ranging discussion, with a reverse chronological framing in the interview schedule. The construction of this linear history therefore owes much to my own selection and re-ordering of the data to create a coherent flow. This involved the omission of extraneous material, asides, false starts and colloquialisms, and a small number of minor changes to preserve the contextual sense of what was being said and to observe confidentiality requested by Joanne. It has been done, however, with an ethical concern to remain faithful to Joanne's own *ex tempore* account. In her journal, reflecting on our first interview together, Joanne described this as 'the classic "working class girl made good" tale about my life'.

Joanne's story

In my family, there's me and my sister, who's a year younger than me, and my mum. My mum and dad split up when I was very young, so I don't really remember them being together. So, ever since I can remember, it's been me, our Kelly, and my mum, and my nana. My nana was your traditional, you know, looked after us when mum was at work, single parent working and all the rest. My mum has always worked, I don't remember a time when she hasn't worked.

But we were exceptionally poor. We live in little back-to-backs in whatever area we could get, very what you expect of a lower working class family, that you moved where my nana moved, we were on the next street or the same street, and it was very much she oversaw the family. But we really struggled.

My mum wasn't an educated person, I don't think she even came out of school with anything, but she always had this very strong belief that you should provide for your family. So she's always worked, and I've always had immense respect for my mum because of how hard she tried to look after us and provide for us. Her attitude to our education was always: 'You must get an education, you must go to school.' She was very positive about that, even though life must have been very, very difficult for her. My mum worked in the retail trade, she started off on the tills. She worked her way up through training, and then she did her personnel degree and went into personnel, and now she works at the university and she teaches courses there, equal opps and ethics. She's always been really dedicated to whatever she does

workwise, which is where I think I get it from. She's my inspiration and role model really.

I was pretty bright at school, I was seen as a 'swot', and then when I hit the age of about 15, I got in with a really bad crowd and totally thought, 'No, school's absolutely crap', and the rest of it. So from doing quite well, I got in trouble, then it dawned on me that this isn't the thing you should be doing, and I started applying myself at school, but I'd missed a year – I'd not been truanting or anything like that, but not being interested. So I came out of school with only 3 O Levels, which I was gobsmacked with, 'cause I had a kind of vision that I would get 5 or above, so I was really gutted when I got my results.

I went in to the sixth form to do A Level English and re-sit my Maths, and then just totally hated it. Couldn't stand the A Level thing, failed my Maths re-sit in the November, and knew the A Level thing wasn't for me. It just didn't feel right, and I wasn't comfortable, and whether I just thought 'Who are you kidding? Nobody has any A Levels in our family history, you can't do an A Level', so I just switched off really. So I went to careers, and I always wanted to be a teacher, and they said 'Well, why don't you do nursery nursing?', which they still do, and it's really annoying, you know: 'You're failing at everything else, go be a nursery nurse'. So I applied to college, and that's how I got into nursery nursing.

I remember going to college, everybody was so proud: 'Wow, Joanne's going to college!', and I was so proud, 'cause I was the first person in our family to ever go to college. At one point I was going to jack it in, and my mum was just mortified, she was like: 'Don't jack it in, this is your chance, and you know you'll really regret it,' and I ended up going back. Now when I look, everybody comes to college, it's part of your culture, but back then, you know, in '85 I went to college, it wasn't. If you came from a working class background in a rough area, everybody went and got a job or went on the dole, you didn't go to college, so it was a major deal. I don't think I've had a year in my history since then that I haven't, either through work or through myself, done something to do with either training or a qualification, and I think I'll always be like that. I've done my Cert.Ed., and now I'm doing my degree part-time at uni. I don't know if it's trying to prove yourself or what, but I've got to keep doing something.

But I totally skived my way through college. I did a minimal amount of work, got pulled into the head's office for minimum amount of attendance and warned, loved it, found it dead easy, and just did what I had to do, really. I was so interested and intuitive about the children that I knew what to write and what I was supposed to do, and passed the course anyway, but didn't have to put much effort into it. My social life took over, and that was more the priority. I was working a lot part-time, and it was important to get money because my mum never could afford to give us any more, and then go out with my best friend, and we were like, you know, together-, I just form these friendships where I'm just totally inseparable, so we went out a lot, and college was just something that I did when I had to do. I loved it, I loved placements. When my students now say: 'Oh, I loved the placement, but I found the college work really hard,' the course has changed. If I'd have done this course then, I probably wouldn't have got through, because the assessment is so much harder. Then, it was only minimal stuff.

Then there was a job on the college notice board for a nanny post in Canada, and I don't know what it was, whether it was a bit of escapism to do something else, and didn't want to just go and work, not quite sure of what I wanted to do, but I applied for it and got it, so I went to Canada for two and a half years, but I came back because I started to really miss home. Family-wise, we've always been very, very close, had a lot of difficulties, but always been exceptionally close.

When I came back from Canada, I got a job in a council-run early years centre. I'd only been there two years when my manager said I should be applying for deputys' posts, and I got the third interview that I went for. And again, it was just such a sense of pride that I'd got there and I had this post and I did it well, and I'd only been there 6 months when I got offered to act up as the manager. But I work harder than everybody else, I think. I would have been a nursery manager by now, and I would have been quite happy doing that. I loved my job, I loved the balance of being able to go into a room and work with the kids and the staff, and having that responsibility, I'm the deputy manager.

It was very much also the council-run early years centre. I have got so much respect for the organisation, the policies, the work, the principles, what they think about looking after children, the team – although when you work with 20 women, it could be quite bitchy at times – but the thing of working as an equal team and all that kind of ethos is just totally, I loved every minute of it, and there's absolutely no way I would have left that career if it wasn't for wanting to go and live with my boyfriend in London. But I had worked up here for the council in an early years centre, which is one of the highest quality provisions they have in the country, so the standards were really high, the service was excellent, and I'm not a big fan of private day-care. London is nearly all private day-care, and though I loved my career then, I absolutely loved it, I didn't want to go and work in a private nursery or do anything less than where I'd got to then.

Then my partner said he knew someone who lectured at a college who was a nursery nurse, and I saw an ad for another FE college saying they wanted a lecturer, and got an interview, but I really thought, 'You don't stand a chance, you've got nothing to do with teaching'. Then they rang me and offered me it, and I was so gobsmacked! I was absolutely amazed, and it just turned out that one of the women who was the programme manager knew about the council provision up here, and knew what the standards were like, and was really impressed by that, that swayed it really. But I didn't even know what I was going to be doing, so that absolutely terrified me then, and I thought, 'Oh my God, you're a total fraud, they're going to find you out that you're not who they thought you were.'

My mum had always said: 'Whatever you want to do, you can do it if you try hard enough'. But I've never ever thought of myself as an academic. So coming from a very working class background, it was just such an immense sense of pride that I'd got there from quite a difficult upbringing, and my mum was so proud of me, and it was just like being able to go round and say to people, 'Oh, I'm moving to London, got a job.' 'What as?' 'A lecturer!' {Joanne makes a noise which suggests hilarity and disbelief in her friends' response.}

Childcare is a subject I'm passionate about anyway. I loved working with kids, I think it's a fantastic job. It's poorly paid, which is a downside of it as a nursery nurse. But I know what the students are going to be doing inside out, because I've done it, and I've done it in lots of different capacities, so I can be enthusiastic with them. The great thing about working here is that myself, Felicity and Carrie, we're the core team, and we're all nursery nurses, we all have the same work ethic, so we feel passionate about making sure that what they're doing is quality. It's great here, the team make the job. We work so well together and socialise together and we are so strong that it's not like coming to work. I share a house with Carrie, and we've had a new person come and join us, Maddie, and she's never out of our house, so the four of us are really, really close.

The people that I work with now are excellent, and we do put a lot into our work, but I can't do something half-hearted, you know, I've got to do it totally, even though it might take up a lot of my time, it has to be right. I couldn't go into that classroom and do half a job with the students, because I'd feel I'd be letting them down. If it means I have to take up all my free periods seeing them because they want to talk to me or they don't understand something, I'll do it. People in the office say, 'You know, you shouldn't do that, they've got a tutorial, or they should sort it out themselves'. But if they want me to support them, I'll do it, that's what I see my job as, and I've got no qualms about doing extra than I'm supposed to, because I think you should do that, you know. You're responsible for it, you're in a post, and you should do it to the best of your ability.

The 16-19 year-olds, they're nearly all girls, and we have such a banter in the classroom! My second years, I love every minute teaching with them, and we've got some right characters in there. We get on really well, we do the work, you know, I kept every single one of them that I started with. We've got really good relationships, and it's not difficult to go in and teach them. You know, they're respectful, but we have a laugh as well... I've got a feeling the first-years are going to be the same.

At this point of hiatus, as Joanne rounds off the story of her personal journey to date and looks to engaging with a new group of students, we move on to consider how that story connects with the learning site and the broader cultural and social practices of childcare. Inevitably, our understanding of teaching and learning in the site is still at an early stage (the fieldwork will continue for another two years, following an additional cohort). On the other hand, the data already reveals a great deal of complexity and newly emerging themes which cannot possibly be addressed in detail here. Joanne's teaching of her own specialist units on equal opportunities and child protection, her deep personal commitment to anti-discriminatory and anti-racist education (discussed in a later interview), and the way in which these issues have resonated within the student group, is a theme deserving of a separate paper. There are also many interesting issues to do with the ambiguities of working-class relationships to education, especially for women (for fuller discussions of these issues, see Plummer, 2000, and Reay, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, however, I focus on a central theme that has emerged early in the research: the way that class and gender intersect in nursery nursing as a

caring occupation to create a vocational culture and shape professional identities.

Learning and identity

Lave and Wenger, in their theory of learning as legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, argue that the process of integrating into such communities means becoming a certain kind of person:

[S]ocial communities are in part systems of relations among persons. The person is defined by as well as defines these relations. Learning thus implies *becoming a different person* with respect to the possibilities enabled by these systems of relations. To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that *learning involves the construction of identities*...identity, knowing and social membership entail one another (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 53, emphases added).

However, this is not a deterministic or essentialist process in which novices are simply shaped by the community they enter:

Legitimate peripheral participation refers both to the development of knowledgeable skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice. It concerns the latter insofar as communities of practice consist of and depend on a membership, including its characteristic biographies/trajectories, relationships and practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 55).

In trying to understand how Joanne's biography intersects with the culture of childcare, and with her own role a tutor in facilitating students' participation in that community of practice, there are two key aspects we need to consider: is there a 'different kind of person' that a nursery nurse has to become, and if so, what kind of person is that? Related to this formation of new identity, are there 'characteristic biographies' that provide some people with the disposition and predisposition to construct that identity appropriately for full membership of the childcare community?

Vocational culture and identity in childcare

Childcare and nursery provision have become increasingly high-profile within educational policy and have expanded greatly over the last decade (see Vincent & Ball, 2001, for a full critical review of these developments). This has led to intense debates about quality issues both in Britain and internationally (Cleveland and Hyatt, 2002). However, the ideals seem well-defined and widely accepted:

There is an extraordinary international consensus among child-care researchers and practitioners about what quality child-care is: it is warm, supportive interactions with adults in a safe, healthy, and stimulating environment, where early education and trusting relationships combine to support individual children's physical, social, emotional and intellectual development (Scarr, 1998: 102).

This ideal is enshrined in measures of quality that are widely used in childcare. Among various structural factors, the education of nursery nurses themselves is held to be of major importance (Blau, 1999). One internationally used quality measure, the Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS), focuses on personal attributes that should be developed in the nursery nurse. Ideally these comprise sensitivity, gentleness, enthusiasm, effort, and enjoyment of children, with harshness and detachment taken as contra-indications of quality (cf. Tietze *et al.*, 1996). This establishes a norm for is the kind of person that one has to become to enter the community of childcare practice.

Through the emphasis on ‘warmth’, ‘supportive and trusting relationships’ and on the emotional development of the child alongside other aspects, it is clear that the deployment of emotion by the worker herself is central to this view of caring for children. It has been argued that this requirement to perform emotional labour is common to most other caring occupations, especially those dedicated to personal care, which are overwhelmingly female in composition (Gilligan, 1995, Hochschild, 1983). Hughes (2001) also argues that it is an important feature of women’s experiences in other less strictly gendered caring professions, such as adult education. Such feminist authors also note that such caring demands a high level of devotion and self-sacrifice, which in turn bear costs for the carer, and we shall return later to their critiques of this aspect of emotional labour.

In many respects, Joanne’s account of herself, confirmed by much other research evidence, reveals how thoroughly she has engaged with this caring identity and vocational culture. We have seen from her narrative how she is proud of her practitioner background in childcare itself (it is relatively rare for nursery nurses to become childcare tutors in FE), and she frequently shares her own experiences of nursery nursing practice with students in the classroom. This is both an important part of her pedagogy, concretising and validating knowledge which might otherwise appear abstract, as well as a powerful source of her authority within the group. She talks of her strong tendency to develop close personal bonds with others – family, friends, colleagues and students – and how important these are to her. These bonds often seem to have shared experience and identity as their basis. As a ‘working class girl made good’, she believes strongly in the importance of early years education to combat disadvantage, and feels the responsibility of supporting her working class students to ‘make good’ too.

Her enjoyment of and enthusiasm for her work, both in her former career in childcare and now as an FE teacher, are genuinely powerful elements of this narrative. She also talks about her devotion to her work and to the students in her care, and of the moral obligation she feels to support them, whatever it takes on her part. Joanne herself notes how this dedication transcends recognised boundaries, and involves a degree of self-sacrifice.

This story is supported by evidence from other data. Her students like her, greatly appreciate the efforts she makes to support their studies, and find her approachable about personal issues:

She’s great is Joanne. She’ll help you do anything. She’ll sort stuff out for you, she does `owt. [...] I’ll go and ask her if this is right, she goes ‘Yeah, but you could do this to make it better, and you need to put

more of that in, more of this in, describe this more'. It's just how she pushes me along.

Joanne sorted things out for me, which I think is nice, 'cos then it's not the awkward situation of me having to go to the teachers and say 'Please can I?', you know [...] You feel that if you needed to talk to her about anything, she's there, you could talk to her about stuff if you needed to.

In understanding Joanne's caring identity, the major turning point in her career, when she left nursery nursing to become a lecturer in FE, may have particular significance. Despite the apparent consensus noted by Scarr (1998, cited above), there have been sharp debates about the fact that the expansion of childcare provision has been located overwhelmingly in the private sector, and the negative impact this shift to 'edubusiness' (Ball & Vincent, 2000) may have had on its quality (Moss, 1999, Penn, 1997). Joanne refused to risk compromising the public service ethos which informs her core values, even though this meant quitting the job she had loved so much. Moving into FE has been a way for her to maintain that ethos, not only in her own individual practice as a tutor, and as she passes on that ethos to her students, but also because that ethos is shared by her colleagues and supported by their links with the CACHE examining board. However, once again, this returns us to the point about care as self-sacrifice. That ethos may be seen as underpinned by the progressivist ideology that has long dominated primary and early years education. As Walkerdine (1992) has argued, progressivism also plays a role in constructing the identity of the (female) professional as self-denying carer of the child.

Learning to do emotional labour

We can see how Joanne has maintained in her new career as FE lecturer the committed level of caring, the public service ethos, and progressivist ideology developed in her earlier identity as a nursery nurse. We can also look to her account of her own childhood as one of the 'characteristic biographies' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that members might bring to the community of childcare practice. Joanne locates her upbringing in an all-female household with strong matriarchal figures at its head, and in a poorer section of the working class, where she learned from her mother and grandmother the need for self-sacrifice, and witnessed the 'ancient tapestry of female tasks' (Bates, 1991) as they cared for her. She also internalised a profound working class work ethic from them. Combined with her own disposition to enjoy working with children, these deep predispositions of class and gender may have suited her well for the feminised culture of the nursery, and may in turn have been reinforced by her immersion in that culture.

However, I do not wish to suggest by this interpretation that there is anything either uniquely personal to Joanne, nor essentially 'natural' to women, about this capacity for caring. A number of feminist authors (e.g. Colley, 2001, Gilligan, 1995, Hochschild, 1983, Hughes, 2001) have argued that the allocation of such caring work overwhelmingly to women is not a division of labour deriving from some innate female ability to express emotion more or better than men, but is part of their oppressed and subordinate

position in patriarchal capitalist society. They suggest, furthermore, that emotional labour is not a straightforward expression of caring, but a complex process that involves the management of feeling and the control of emotions towards others, as well as the shaping and control of others' emotions. In contrast with the idealised version of quality childcare which sees sensitivity as good and detachment as unproblematic opposites (as in the Caregiver Interaction Scale), Hochschild argues that emotional labour combines emotional sensitivity and engagement with detachment, since it 'requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (1983: 7).

We can see how such a definition might apply to the work of childcare, when we consider key learning experiences highlighted by the CACHE students as they enter legitimate peripheral participation in the world of the nursery. From the start of the course Joanne and her colleagues placed a constant emphasis on 'being professional' in their placements as the *sine qua non* of participation in the course. The group tutorial discussion following their first days in placement contained many expressions of delight at being with children, but also revealed less pleasant experiences: taking little boys to the toilet; finding oneself covered in children's 'puke' and 'wee'; and being hit by children. Joanne was at great pains to emphasise the correct behaviour students should display in these situations:

Don't forget, you've got to stay cool and say, [*nonchalant tone*] 'Oh, that's not a very nice thing to do, is it?', and keep your own feelings under control.

By the end of their first year, the management of feeling had become a central theme in most students accounts. Their descriptions of their work often told of the difficulties of dealing with physical injuries, tears, tantrums, aggression, disobedience and provocations.

The morning group [*of children*] are still tired and maungy, and in the afternoon, they're giddy and hyper...I was so tired after a week working at nursery...I don't know if I could do it again.

I asked one girl to go and get a book because we were waiting for story time. Well, she kicked up: 'I'm not getting a book! I'm not getting a book, I'm staying here!' So I took her into the cloakroom and I sat down with her, and by this point she was really, really hysterical, crying because she couldn't stay outside.

This involved working on their own and the children's feelings, and required conscious effort and a degree of self-denial:

Sometimes I shout at the children, but that's just me... `Cause [*the nursery staff*] don't always raise their voice as much as I do. I could probably just tone it down a little bit, still try and realise when I'm speaking loudly, try and quieten it down.

...Children can wind you up! You'd say something to them, and then they're really, really cheeky. They've learned how to answer you back, so they're gonna do it. And they can wind you up, and suppose you've got a short temper? But saying that, I've got a short temper, but I don't let them try it.

As part of this process, the students' affection for small children and enjoyment of play had to be transformed, in order to take on a consciously developmental role:

Well, like, you're taught you can't be all lovey dovey with the children. You've got to be quite stern if they've done something wrong.

That's what I've kind of learned, now... I teach, although I was playing with them [*the children*]...If you went and just played with the kids and just not said `owt, like 'How many bricks are there?', they wouldn't really ever learn, would they? So you've just got to really think about it. Make `em count the bricks, and say how many bricks there are, and also play at the same time.

Asserting this professional role and recounting what the children had learned through their efforts was a real source of pride. It also gave them a sense of new-found maturity. It demanded leaving behind their former identity as a child and childish desires for play, and entailed a complex emotional orientation to their work: they had to engage more intensely with children, but with a purposeful, detached objectivity at the same time. These are stories of learning as 'becoming a different person', and of learning to do emotional labour.

Transforming practice and identity

However, studies of emotional labour also reveal that it may entail painful costs for those in caring occupations. In spite of Joanne's undoubted enthusiasm and dedication to her work, there have been critical incidents during the year which suggest such costs as she 'does extra than I'm supposed to'.

One theme that has frequently arisen in later interviews with Joanne and in her reflective journal has been the difficulty of teaching and supporting these students, who themselves have weak identities as learners:

I seem to be getting frustrated very much this term, I don't know if I need a break, I'm very conscious of the fact that my fuse is shorter at the moment. There are a couple of students that are getting to me. Things that frustrate me are where I've got students that constantly talk in class, or that don't, you know, give you eye contact or seem to be paying attention.

She has struggled with her desire to bond with them and protect them from the harsh realities of studying at this level, alongside the demands of supporting them in their studies and ensure their achievement on the course:

It's trying to get that serious side of it over, whilst still being really friendly and welcoming, and you know, 'Let's get used to this', because you don't want to put them off. You don't want to come down heavy on them, but because the lessons start straight away, they need to quickly get into that kind of pattern of learning, really.

These dilemmas have been heightened in the learning site given the specific changes to student recruitment this year, and the burden of student support they entailed. However, tensions were sharp even with her second year group:

I have tried so hard to support the 'weak' group, and it doesn't seem to bother them that they are so behind with their assessed work. It is just a third of the group, but they are such a drain on my resources. Sheena, in particular, seems to take no responsibility for her own learning. She is happy to blame everyone else. I had a disciplinary meeting with her, which she requested, so I could give her exact deadlines! As I thought about it, I realised I was making a rod for my own back! I support her more, spell everything out to her, so she has to take even less responsibility?! [...] I was feeling so frustrated with them that we weren't having fun any more (Journal entry, November 2001).

Hochschild (1983) argues that those who put their 'heart and soul' into their job, as Joanne certainly does, risk stress and burn-out, and this possibility is certainly suggested by the evidence above. Gilligan (1995) and Hughes (2001) also suggest that women in caring roles, including teaching, often assume too much responsibility for those in their charge. This responsibility, expressed through self-sacrifice, then becomes 'despotic' and actually undermines the possibility of genuinely close relationships sought by the carer with the cared-for and with others. Such a scenario seemed to be unfolding for Joanne in the first term of the year. Not only were some students failing to get on with their academic work, but this was undermining her relationship with the whole group, and creating an untenable level of stress for herself. Even the value of research project seemed to be in doubt at times:

I have been incredibly stressed lately about work and did question whether the project itself was making me question my role too much? [...] It's good to get it down on paper actually. As for the question of whether the research makes it worse – I don't care. If I can change the challenging parts of my role/personality, then it's all for the good (Journal entries, November 2001).

Joanne came to recognise that the situation had become an anathema to her professional principles and identity, as well as creating an impossible workload. It was unsustainable on a personal level, and by the end of the year, she had also developed the view that the practice she had established was pedagogically weak:

The students don't develop those skills for themselves, because they know I'll do it. They know they can sit back and, I mean what has traditionally happened in the past, if they're struggling they'll sit back, they'll ignore it, because they know I'll deal with it in the end. [...] So it is a lot better for them.

Through discussions with her close colleague and friend, Carrie, and with her line manager, as well as through the research process, she had begun to develop and implement a new strategy which she outlined in our third interview in July 2002:

HC: So any thoughts about changes for the coming year?

I think, still developing this thing of making the students take more responsibility for what they're doing than me, and I think that has really changed this year and I want to carry on with that, not just for me, but for them, it makes them think about what they're doing so much more. [...] It has been a really big thing for me, and it's been great, and I think it has come about from doing the research that I am stepping back from my students, and I hope I can develop in that professional way through next year as well. [...] I will have my moments 'cause I get on overload, but at the end of the day I can go and have a walk and a breather, and come back and think: 'I can't do anything about it'. So I've certainly relaxed in that way.

Her evolving responses to the critical situation that had arisen provides insights into the complexity of Joanne's professional identity, and gives us some sense of a transition which she continues to work through. In this third interview, her voice seems to have become far more that of a teacher. Although she continues to identify herself with pride as a nursery-nurse-who-has-become-an-FE-tutor, and has brought to that role many of the attributes central to her identity as a nursery nurse, something seemed to have been left behind in the initial years of her transition to teaching. Her early biographical narrative of herself as FE tutor focused solely on those attributes related to sensitivity and engagement with others. In that narrative, we have seen how bonding with her students, emphasising her shared experiences with them, and offering them unstinting support is represented as professional good, and detachment as its opposite. This stance was reinforced by the added pressures of college and course policies to take on greater numbers of students, including those with low levels of academic achievement. It mirrored the idealised representation of the vocational culture enshrined in childcare quality measures. It also may have mirrored what Joanne learning in her family during her own early years, about social expectations of female caring.

Yet, as the students themselves have discovered, a certain element of detachment is required in the reality of learning to be a nursery nurse. Joanne's later narratives suggest that she has (re)discovered that detachment – 'stepping back' – is also required in the reality of learning to be an FE tutor. The work of FE teaching requires dealing with students who can, just like small children, be 'tired', 'maungy' or 'cheeky'. It thus requires of the tutor the

complex emotional tasks of suppressing her own immediate reactions of rescue or retribution, evoking a different set of feelings, and managing the motivation and responses of the students. Joanne's return to this non-idealised form of emotional labour is welcomed by her as a protection for herself. Yet Hochschild (1983) warns that such self-protective moves in emotional labour may still entail their own costs. One danger is that the tutor may feel she is not doing her job 'to the best of her ability' – something that is clearly very important to Joanne – and may suffer low self-esteem for holding back from fuller engagement with her students. The other is the risk of eventual cynicism and guilt through the deliberate separation of personal and professional identities.

This highlights some challenges and responsibilities – practical, theoretical and ethical – for the research team as a whole in supporting such efforts for change. While Joanne has already had considerable success in transforming the learning culture in the learning site from one of dependence to increased autonomy for her students, the influence of vocational culture is likely to be far more pervasive and far less susceptible to change. As researchers in partnership with FE tutors in the *Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education* project, we need to acknowledge the disciplinary dangers of encouraging self-criticism, and help tutors focus on the potential of reflective journals and research interviews for reconstructing professional identity and practice in positive ways (cf. Gore, 1993).

Conclusion

There are two key points to make in conclusion. The first point is specific, and concerns the nature of Joanne's evolving career, and particularly of her transition from nursery nurse to FE tutor. The second is more general, and concerns need for a critical approach to teachers' biographies.

Evidence of the career transitions and learning careers of young people (Bloomer and Hodkinson, 2000, Hodkinson et al, 1996) reveal the fallacy that such trajectories are straightforward and linear, and demonstrate that they are more typically interrupted, multi-directional and unpredictable, shaped by the interactions of agency, structure and happenstance. Joanne's career suggest that this is as true for her as an FE tutor, as she learns to become a teacher, distinguishes her own entry into a new community of practice and becomes a 'different kind of person' again.

One question we could pose about her story highlights the problematic nature of conventional understandings of learning and of career development. Clearly, Joanne has changed careers from being a nursery nurse to being an FE tutor teaching childcare – but where can we locate that transition? Was it at the point when she quit her job in a nursery and took the job in the college in London? (At that point, she found it hard to believe that she, the A Level failure, could be that academic teacher.) Was it when she did her Cert.Ed. to become a qualified teacher? (Yet she drew her authority as a teacher not from that training, but from her continued identity as an experienced childcare practitioner.) Was it when she found herself at a crisis point, over-engaging with her students, and (as she put it) losing her balance? (Although here she draws on deeply-rooted family, gender and class identity linked to an idealised identity of female caring.) Or was when she came to reassess her level of personal and emotional commitment to her students through the prism of

pedagogical concerns for their autonomy? (Though this signals a return to the less idealised lessons of emotional labour and detachment.) These suggestions, and the objections counterposed to each, indicate that learning to become an FE tutor has not been just one transition for Joanne, but a series of turning points. Those turning points do not constitute a neat linear progression, but a process of shuttling between different identities, and a re-balancing of elements of different identities at each point. Moreover, those turning points have taken place in a much wider context that has also played its part, which brings me to the second and final point of this conclusion.

It has been argued that the recent vogue for collecting teachers' stories entails certain seductive dangers, particularly in a context of managerial restructuring of educational systems, institutions, and professional practice (which certainly pertains to the FE sector):

A voice and a story which celebrate only practice create a valuable covering noise, an apparently quite emancipatory noise, while that very practice is narrowed and technicized (Goodson, 1995: 56).

All too often, a naïve focus on the personal and practical can result in disembedding teachers' stories from the wider context in which they are constructed and enacted. Similarly, in their own discussion of learning as located in systems of social relations, Lave and Wenger (1991) note that the question of unequal relations of power require more attention.

The analysis and interpretation of Joanne's story offered here is one that has been concerned with the interconnections of personal and professional identities with the cultural, social and political conditions in which those identities are formed and continue to evolve. It suggests that this process of career transition and identity (re)formation is not a purely individual one, although choice and agency are certainly part of Joanne's story. Institutional factors and social structures also play their part, and one way in which these are expressed is through the vocational culture that dominates, in both official and unofficial discourses, a particular community of practice. I have therefore tried to locate Joanne's narrative of her evolving personal and professional identities within the vocational culture of childcare.

Its feminised construction of caring, and its expectation of emotional labour, constitute the *doxa* of childcare – the taken-for-granted relations of order which link the real world and the thought world, and so must be observed (Bourdieu, 1986: 471). That *doxa* underpins the vocational culture and, in turn, the learning site through general structuring and integrating principles that work to homogenise the norms, values and meanings developed within it. It is therefore both difficult to discern in its taken-for-grantedness, and difficult to transform. Any consideration of improving teaching and learning in FE through transforming learning cultures may need to take the weight of such vocational cultures into account.

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