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Dual identities: enhancing the in-service teacher trainee experience in further education

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Final report July 2009

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Executive summary

This project researched the historical and political background to teacher training in the English Further Education (FE) sector. It then considered the experience of HR managers, teacher educators and teacher trainees at two FE colleges in order to better understand the experience of in-service teacher training in FE.

The FE sector of England has traditionally emphasised vocational or subject expertise over pedagogy and until recently staff did not have to be teacher-qualified. Consequently, the sector has lacked a culture that promotes the professional development of teaching knowledge and skills. Since the election of the New Labour government in 1997 FE has been central to economic and social policy and there have been initiatives designed to regulate and professionalise the workforce. These initiatives include the introduction of national standards and the requirement for staff in FE to hold teaching qualifications. In contrast to schools, ninety percent of staff train part-time while in-service and so are expected to perform as teachers while also being trainees. Many have to quickly manage full teaching timetables and so have little time to develop their practice, which favours conservative approaches to pedagogy. This is exacerbated by government reforms that have added to the bureaucratic elements of both teacher education and FE more generally. These tend to reinforce a limited perception of teaching as primarily technical, all of which means that coping is prioritised over developing teaching. The professionalism and pedagogy of FE teaching are thus restricted. To help alleviate this situation, the following recommendations are made to FE employers and teacher educators, while understanding the limits of their influence.

- **Recognise trainees as a defined category of employee.**
- **Increase trainees' workload incrementally.**
- **Formally recognise the key role of teacher educator.**
- **Enhance the status of mentors.**
- **Prioritise the teacher training course.**
- **Prioritise pedagogic elements over administration in teacher training.**
- **Consider how trainees can be supported while maintaining challenge.**
- **Increase the integration and relevance of theory in teacher training.**

Report for ESCalate and Consortium for PCET

Rationale for research project

The Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET)¹ sector in England provides vocational, academic and work-based education and training for over 4.2 million learners (Robson & Bailey 2009: 101). The sector is made up of diverse organisations including sixth-form colleges; private and public-sector training organisations; work-based learning providers; and what remains of adult and community education services. However, Further Education (FE) colleges form much the largest part of the PCET sector with over 3 million learners (Foster 2005) and these institutions provide a vast and varied range of learning opportunities to individuals, businesses and community groups. Although FE's main remit has always been to provide vocational education and training, typically FE colleges offer a great array of courses ranging from provision for people with profound learning difficulties through to courses of higher education (Ainley & Bailey 1997: 8-10). In recent years the sector has been placed at the centre of government plans to enhance the skills of the nation's workforce and consequently there has been a raft of measures to regulate and 'professionalise' FE teaching.

In stark contrast to the situation in schools, ninety percent of FE teachers² are initially employed without a teaching qualification and complete their teacher training on a part-time in-service basis (OFSTED 2003). Therefore trainee teachers have the dual role of employee and learner, which partly reflects the "dual professionalism" (IfL 2009) of FE staff who have an expertise and identity from their original vocation as well as a new identity that derives from their role as teacher. This situation presents symbiosis and tension for both trainees and their employers and has an impact on the development of teachers and of pedagogy in FE. This project sought to:

¹ The sector has been given many names, including the learning and skills sector and the vocational education and training sector. Within this report we use the term PCET to refer to the whole sector and FE to refer to Further Education colleges, the largest part of the sector.

² Many terms are used for practitioners in FE, but *teacher* has been used throughout this report to refer to anyone with a teaching role.

1. To explore the dual role of employed teacher and teacher-trainee in order to consider how the roles interact and affect the training of teachers in FE.
2. To develop strategies to enhance the trainee teacher experience through partnership with college employers.
3. Make recommendations to enhance the initial development of in-service trainees, focusing on improving teaching and learning for all students.

The project was funded by ESCalate with support from the Department of PCET at the University of Huddersfield and the Consortium for PCET. We express our gratitude to all of our funders.

Dissemination

The researchers have produced guides for teacher-educators and FE employers that summarise the project's findings and recommendations. The report findings are being presented at a variety of practitioner and academic conferences and through journal articles. The Consortium for PCET and HUDCETT are also involved in disseminating these findings and recommendations.

Policy context: FE and teacher training

FE has long been considered the 'Cinderella' of the English education system due, at least in part, to its predominantly working-class origins and a history of 'benign neglect' (Lucas 2004: 36-38), which entailed significant under-funding and a lack of strategic direction from central government. Until the 1990s FE was a rather unfashionable, locally-run service on the margins of English education, but this situation has changed radically over recent years. FE has found itself at the centre of government policy since the election of New Labour in 1997 because the sector has been identified by the Government as a vehicle to carry two related policies: creating social justice through widening participation in education; and boosting the economy through enhancing the skills of the nation's workforce. In 2005, Bill Rammell, the then minister of state for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning claimed:

Further Education is the engine room for skills and social justice in this country...FE's moment has come.

(LSC 2005: 1)

Shortly afterwards, Tony Blair wrote the foreword to the 2006 government White Paper *Further Education: Raising Skills, Improving Life Choices* where he re-stated New Labour's vision of FE and emphasised the Government's view of its relationship to economic development.

Our economic future depends on our productivity as a nation. That requires a labour force with skills to match the best in the world. [...] The colleges and training providers that make up the Further Education sector are central to achieving that ambition. [...] But at present, Further Education is not achieving its full potential as the powerhouse of a high skills economy.

(DfES 2006:3)

Consequently, in recent years, FE has received greatly increased levels of funding. However, alongside this, the sector has experienced unprecedented levels of state intervention; FE has been subjected to wave after wave of policy initiatives that relate not only to strategic issues but also to operational matters. Virtually all aspects of FE are now highly mediated by the requirements of the state, to the extent that Coffield (2006) describes FE as a sector dominated by diktat and discipline, performativity and managerialism. Keep (2006) argues that PCET in England is now the most highly regulated and centrally directed education system in Europe.

The history of ITT in English FE

Whilst teachers in colleges usually held qualifications in their own field of expertise, it was not unusual for them to be employed without ever gaining teaching qualifications. This situation may have derived partly from FE's marginal position within the English education system, but the predominantly vocational nature of further education was a significant factor, too (Simmons 2008: 367). Many FE colleges have their roots in the mechanics institutes and technical colleges of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries where normally the main focus was upon learning from a skilled artisan or practitioner with significant industrial or commercial experience. An implicit assumption was that subject or vocational proficiency rather than knowledge and skills in education was the chief determinant of the quality of teaching and learning. The need to employ teachers with up-to-date expertise in specialist areas reinforced this trend and, as now, these people could not be expected to stop earning in order to train as a teacher. Nevertheless, there were significant drawbacks to the traditional reliance on technical expertise and subject knowledge, which was at the expense of pedagogy. Staff commonly tended to regard themselves chiefly as engineers, accountants or builders who just happened to teach and it has been argued that there was sometimes an unprofessional approach to educational practice (Venables 1967: 220). Since pedagogy was valued less than subject expertise, FE teachers could be slow to

adopt new educational ideas: teaching was often overly didactic, pedestrian and uninspiring (Bristow 1970).

Although there were significant differences in the nature of FE across the country, student failure and non-completion were commonplace (Carter 1962: 241). There was little expectation or culture of teacher training or professional development in the whole sector, despite the contemporary notion of “dual professionalism” discussed below, and the implications of this historic lack remain apparent today. Many FE colleges still display approaches to workforce development that Fuller and Unwin (2004: 130) identified as “restrictive”. Within the two colleges considered in this study these restrictive features included limited participation in communities of practice; fast rather than gradual transition to full professional role; lack of organisational support or recognition of employees as learners; and little emphasis on innovation of practice. Despite all this, formal teacher training courses for FE have existed for over 60 years in England. Following the McNair Report (Board of Education 1944) the first technical teacher training institutions were established and, initially, one-year full-time Cert. Ed courses were offered. Later, two-year part-time in-service courses became available (Bridge *et al.* 2003) and for those choosing to gain teaching qualifications, this route soon became the norm. However, there was no obligation for teachers to hold teaching qualifications and before New Labour was elected in 1997 ITT in FE was “voluntarist, haphazard and uneven” (Lucas 2007: 18). In 1991, for example, only 55.62% of staff were qualified (Lucas 2004: 75). There was thus an absence of a culture of professional development related to teaching throughout the sector.

In 1999 the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO), a government appointed employer-led sector training organisation, produced its *Standards for Teaching and Supporting Learning in England and Wales*. From 2001 all teaching qualifications had a statutory obligation to incorporate these standards to receive necessary validation, and all new staff in FE had to gain one of these qualifications within a set period of taking up a post. These FENTO standards remained the basis for ITT until September 2007. The volume of these standards

has been described as “staggering” (Nasta 2007:5); their three hundred separate descriptors of knowledge and ability contrast to the single page of broad statements that cover staff in HE or the much simpler statement of values for school teachers (Orr 2008: 103). Even the Lifelong Learning UK standards that replaced them in 2007 are very much longer than equivalents in other sectors. Implicit within these standards is the perception of teaching in FE as primarily a technical activity that can be measured and regulated, which has led to greater control over teachers’ and teacher educators’ practice. Institutions providing ITT for FE have to comply with detailed and extensive specifications relating to, for example, a ‘minimum core’ of literacy and numeracy; the introduction of mentorship; and subject specialist pedagogy. Much of the content of FE teacher training courses is now nationally prescribed and an ‘annual monitoring’ of courses against external standards is a requirement if official ‘endorsement’ by Standards Verification UK is to be maintained (Simmons and Thompson 2007: 176-177). These developments have had far-reaching consequences for the institutions and individuals delivering this provision. Moreover, this emphasis on regulation and performance targets also shapes perceptions of teaching and what it is to be a successful teacher in FE.

Nevertheless, there is still a degree of continuity with previous practice: many staff continue to combine teaching with work outside the sector and FE teachers normally still come into colleges after pursuing previous careers. Furthermore, there still remains a need to train new staff; the government report *Equipping our Teachers for the Future* (DfES 2004) estimates the need to train 20,000 new teachers for FE each year. The overwhelming majority of these will be trained in service.

Existing literature on FE ITT

Of the limited literature that exists on ITT in FE, much pertains to the ten percent of pre-service trainees on placement during full-time ITT courses, rather than the majority of in-service trainees. James Avis and Anne-Marie Bathmaker have considered the experience of trainee FE teachers on placements and how that has formed both their professional identity (Avis & Bathmaker 2004; Bathmaker & Avis

2005), and their attitudes toward pedagogy (Avis *et al* 2003; Avis & Bathmaker 2004). They found little real integration between existing and trainee teachers, quoting one who said, “[s]ometimes I feel like I am sneaking around” (Bathmaker & Avis 2005: 54-55). Avila de Lima, in a paper entitled *Trained for Isolation* (2003: 215) argued that trainee teachers in schools learned to be marginal. They were “thus socialised into a view of teaching as the production of individualised acts and products for which only the person who plans and performs them is accountable.” This reflects the situation of some trainees in FE. Like Wallace (2002), Avis and Bathmaker (2004) found a discrepancy between the hopes and expectations of trainees and what they actually experienced on their placements, which also signals the importance of their own personal biography in the forming of those hopes and expectations.

Robson (1998) is amongst those to have discussed what has been termed the “dual professionalism” of FE teachers (IfL 2009). Otherwise expressed, most teachers have entered FE having been established professionals in previous careers and many maintain that professional allegiance and even prioritise it. This is because, as Robson *et al* (2004: 187) argue, their previous experience gives them the credibility required for their new teaching role. However, this continuing identity with their former profession may prevent some from considering themselves as professional *teachers*. Indeed, reluctance to identify themselves as teachers may partly explain the government’s imposition of standards that state precisely not just the values that are expected of teachers in FE, but also their practice. Where much of the literature in this area emphasises FE teachers’ individual dispositions and identity, more recently Lucas & Unwin (2009) have focused on the environment of the college as a site of learning and development for teachers, which has been the approach of the researchers on this project.

Work-based learning (WBL) and research methodology

Like Lucas and Unwin (2009), Viskovic and Robson (2001) have drawn upon the rich body of research on work-based learning (WBL) to consider the placement

experience of pre-service FE teacher-trainees. WBL has been described as “informal” by Eraut (2004), but in contrast Billett (2002: 457) has written:

Workplace experiences are not informal. They are the product of the historical-cultural practices and situational factors that constitute the particular work practice, which in turn distributes opportunities for participation to individuals or cohorts of individuals.

FE colleges may appear more relaxed and less rule-bound than schools. However, colleges can be rigidly hierarchical with inflexible structures and conventions, even if these are unwritten. So, the environment that trainees encounter is crucial to understanding what they learn, or what they are able to learn about teaching. Similarly, understanding in-service teacher training as an aspect of WBL allows consideration of learning outside formal classes and the subtle form that such learning may take. As Wenger (1998: 8) argues:

Learning is something we can assume – whether we see it or not, whether we like the way it goes or not, whether what we are learning is to repeat the past or shake it off. Even failing to learn usually involves learning something else instead.

This formulation rightly indicates that learning may be unintentional, but also that what is learnt may not necessarily be positive or helpful.

Doornbos *et al.* (2004: 252) identified a difficulty for anyone researching WBL, which they described as: “the tendency to ground most of the conceptualisations of learning at work in educational theory and terminology”. The cultural vocabulary of learning is school-oriented and that shapes how people think about and express learning. Eraut (2004: 249) identified the problems of researching WBL as follows.

- “[I]nformal learning is largely invisible” and research respondents may not be aware of what they have learnt and so cannot discuss it.
- Knowledge gained in the workplace “is either tacit or regarded as part of a person’s general capability”, not something that has been learned, because learning is something that takes place in institutions.

- “[D]iscourse about learning is dominated by codified, propositional knowledge, so respondents often find it difficult to describe more complex areas of their work and the nature of their expertise.” Thus particular tasks or activities that the worker has had to learn that can be readily recognised and explained may be given undue prominence.

These obstacles were heightened by the frenetic nature of FE colleges in which this research was carried out so the risk of respondents simply not noticing what they considered normal in their practice or situation is clear. In other words, there is a risk of participants ignoring the important complex mundane that they have ‘picked up’ at work and emphasising less significant but easily explained elements of formal learning. This risk is heightened when trainees are also attending classes, as were the in-service teacher trainees. We therefore chose to conceptualise the development of the trainees in terms of changing identity rather than increasing knowledge or skills.

The work of Lave and Wenger (1991: 53) has been seminal in comprehending the relationship between the individual and the collective in WBL.

Social 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.

We chose not to adopt a community of practice theorisation in this research because by Wenger’s (1998) criteria it is arguable that communities of practice did not exist within the parts of the colleges we considered. Nonetheless, Lave and Wenger’s notion of ‘becoming’ enabled a conception of identity, whether as a trainee or as a teacher, as existing within a social space by relating to others (literally *identifying* with them or not). Furthermore, the dialogic explanation from Holland *et al* (1998: 4) has shaped our understanding of identity in relation to the teacher trainees: “identities are improvised—in the flow of activity within specific social situations—from the cultural resources at hand.” Identity is a response to cultural circumstances.

They add (p18) that identity is one's "history in person" which "is the sediment from past experiences upon which one improvises, using the cultural resources available, in response to the subject positions afforded one in the present." This recognises the constraining and enabling effects of past experience as well as current agency. Therefore, identity is not fixed and relates to how the teachers/trainees improvised within their current situations. Since in-service trainees have two distinct identities and roles, as trainee and teacher, this informed our understanding of how learning, identity and practice connect and conflict.

Data collection

Considering in-service ITT as a relationship between individuals and the environment in which they are working and learning led us to adopt a qualitative approach. The empirical research this report is based on took place between December 2008 and May 2009 and was conducted at two FE colleges in the north of England – 'Dale College' and 'Urban College'.

Although both Dale College and Urban College mainly provide vocational education and training for their local communities, these two colleges were selected to represent quite different situations. Like many FE institutions, Dale College has undergone significant growth over recent years, but it is still a relatively small and stable institution. The main site is located in a market town and serves a predominantly rural area. Drawing upon Alexiadou's (2000) classification of managerialism in FE, Dale College ostensibly has a 'softer' and more 'people-centred' enterprise culture rather than the harsh 'crude efficiency' model characteristic of many FE colleges. In contrast, Urban College is a much bigger institution located in a large conurbation. It has had a somewhat turbulent recent history: in the 1990s Urban College experienced a programme of restructuring and redundancies under a 'charismatic' principal and there remains a 'harder' managerial culture.

At both colleges face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with teacher educators and college managers, and with trainee teachers by telephone. At the time of the project all the trainee teachers were undertaking a part-time, in-service Certificate in Education (Cert. Ed.) or Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. The Cert. Ed. and PGCE are effectively 'sister' courses; the PGCE is designed for graduates. However, Cert. Ed and PGCE trainees normally study and work alongside each other and cover similar course content, as they did at both Dale and Urban College. Although there are other ITT qualifications for PCET teachers, such as those offered by City and Guilds, the Cert. Ed./PGCE is long-established and is generally regarded as the 'market leader' for those wishing to teach in FE (Simmons and Thompson 2007). At both institutions the Cert. Ed./PGCE is designed and validated by 'Northern University' – a nearby post-1992 university with a long-standing reputation for providing PCET teacher training. Dale College and Urban College are part of a large network of institutions offering Northern University's Cert. Ed./PGCE and the course is actually delivered by each college's own staff, whilst the curriculum is provided centrally by the University.

Alongside coursework and teaching observations in their workplace, Cert. Ed./PGCE trainees attend formal classes of around three hours once a week and typically the course is completed over two academic years. Upon completion of any FE ITT course trainees must undertake a period of 'professional formation' to gain Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills (QTLS) status, which is their licence to practice. All the trainees taking part in this research project effectively had a dual role: while studying for a Cert. Ed./PGCE they were also employed – on either a full-time or part-time basis – as teachers in various PCET institutions, the majority at the college where they were also studying. In total, twenty trainees from both years of the course were interviewed, ten from each college. They were teaching on a wide range of courses including social care; agriculture; leisure and tourism; business studies; aviation; art; drama; hairdressing; and public services. Most had joined the course on taking up a post and consequently had been teaching for only a short time, though some had had longer experience either in FE or elsewhere.

Four teacher educators were interviewed. They had been involved in teacher education for between five and twenty four years with extensive previous experience of FE. In her study of a large network of colleges delivering ITT for FE, Noel (2006: 158) found that almost two thirds of staff in this role were female. Reflecting this finding, three of the four teacher educators were female. Moreover, their routes into teacher education mirror what Noel (2006) found in that three had been informally selected for the role by other teacher educators; only one had formally applied for a post in teacher education. All had Master's level qualifications and all regularly attended events at the University and so were well integrated within the University's organisation.

Two managers were interviewed. They were each in charge of human resources at one of the colleges and so had responsibility to ensure their staff held appropriate qualifications. In neither case did they directly line manage the teacher education team.

All the interviews were transcribed and analysed with the aid of Atlas.ti software.

Findings

[O]n the one hand you are a trainee-teacher and it's understood and recognised that you don't actually really know the job that well and you're still learning it but, on the other hand, you are a teacher and you're doing the job of a teacher and you're paid as a teacher and you have the responsibilities of a teacher.

This comment from a second-year trainee at Dale College expresses the central contradiction of the in-service trainee who is experiencing the conflicting expectations of the organisation and colleagues. Though this research was limited to two colleges, the diversity of experience of the trainees even within those institutions was striking. Their individual access to support and their control over workload as well as their expectations and capacity to cope were contingent upon often highly localised factors interacting with their own lived biography (Dixon *et al.* 2008) all of which defy easy generalisation. The findings of our research have here been divided under three broad and overlapping headings: the ITT course and the role of the

teacher-trainer; the experience and expectations of the college; and what the trainees learnt about being a teacher and teaching.

a) The ITT course and the role of the teacher-trainer

Trainees' responses relating to the ITT course were overwhelmingly positive at both colleges:

I've learnt a lot on the course and I think it's enabled me to be a better teacher within my role.

I'm full of praise for this programme.

However, one dissenting voice from the second year had "*not [learnt] a lot that has been of any use to me on a day-to-day basis.*" This irritation partly derived from frustration at being paid as a trainer and therefore less for doing the work of a teacher. Complaints relating to the bureaucratic elements of the course ("*very confusing documents*") were common and some expressed surprise at the rigidity of the course

I didn't realise [it] 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.

This may reflect the constraints of very specific national criteria for the content and standards of ITT in FE, but it reinforces perceptions of teaching more generally, as explored below.

Despite the range of backgrounds and teaching areas among the sample of trainees, many interviewees had particularly enjoyed mixing within the diverse group of their Cert. Ed/PGCE class.

I'm working with three nurses; a couple of joiners; a plasterer and somebody who is teaching forestry; somebody who is teaching human resources training. So it's all these different professions working in there and it's interesting to look at the different methods that people adopt in their teaching.

The social aspect of these groups was important, which allowed the sharing and discussion of the process of learning to be a teacher in PCET. The Cert. Ed./PGCE class was the only place where most of the sample had the freedom or opportunity to self-consciously identify themselves as novices developing their practice and therefore admitting mistakes and disappointment. Elsewhere, their identity as beginner or trainee was usually hidden because to expose them was to expose weakness, which is symptomatic of conventions in FE more generally. As described above there is no tradition of ongoing professional development as in the schools sector or the health service in England, so there is not yet a culture of existing staff developing new staff in a purposeful and incremental manner. In stretched departments new staff, trained or not, are apparently often expected to perform at the same rate as existing colleagues. As one second-year student at Urban College put it, *“I don’t think, for the most part, I’m conceived as a trainee teacher in terms of the responsibilities that I’ve been given....”*

Many trainees distinguished between the quality assurance observations carried out by the college and those carried out for the ITT course.

I mean we’ve got the ones from college which are the quality control type observations and somebody just pops in and they’re all right; and the ones from the teacher trainers are great because you get loads of feedback and that is really what you need.

[T]he observations have been - and I don’t mean the college observations - I mean the course observation where our tutor has come out to observe us as part of the Cert Ed training. I think that has been very good.

However, the evidence also suggests that the everyday practice of trainee teachers and the demands of the teacher training course can be perceived to be separate and to exist in parallel. For one trainee the ITT teaching observation was, *“a slightly artificial experience in terms of how you would normally deliver it and the time you would spend on particular issues to get points over.”* This reflected a disconnection between their teacher education course and what the trainees experienced back in their departments as explained by this participant from Dale College.

I know there is a link [between the ITT course and normal teaching], but I don't really link the two things together. I've already had my first observation in the work place; I've had one of the tutors come out to watch me give a training session at work and that was a very positive experience. I enjoyed it and the feedback that I got was quite positive but realistically that's the only time that I see there being a real link. ... As far as the rest of it is concerned I find it completely separate.

Another expressed the gap in different terms:

on the PGCE course we're kind of being taught best practice and it's quite easy to be sometimes in the work mode where best practice can get overlooked so there is a bit of a tension for me there as someone who has only been teaching for a year

One teacher educator explicitly 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.

Ideas relating to best practice existed in the rarefied confines of the teacher training course, not in the harsher reality of everyday classroom sessions where trainees struggled to teach on very full timetables. Moreover, they had to fit in with colleagues' practice. Arguably, though, a worthwhile function of the Cert. Ed./PGCE course is to encourage trainees to look further than current practice to what methods or activities are possible, so the gap or tension between the two is necessary. Nevertheless, this disconnection questions the extent of the influence of the ITT course on practice, relative to other factors such as the pre-existing norms within the college department, previously held perceptions of FE teaching and the trainee's own experience of education or training. There was, however, very wide agreement between the trainees about their positive relationships with their teacher educator:

I think the person who is leading the programme at the moment has excellent communications skills and experience and it's very much a mentor and tutoring role and it's very practical and realistic.

I regard [the course] as very highly professional in the way it's done and I've got a lot of admiration for what [the teacher educators] are doing and the way that they are doing it.

Though there was less unanimity about the precise role of the educator, (“mentoring”; “keeping me on track”; “developing learning and providing that knowledge”; “a facilitator rather than a traditional teacher”) many trainees mentioned what they had learnt from the practice modelled by the teacher educator. The relationship with the ITT tutor was often constructed around the broad support the tutor provided, which went well beyond the demands of the course, as exemplified by this narrative from Dale College:

And [the teaching] started getting on top of me and getting me down because of all of the work from the PGCE as well and I just felt that I had a huge mountain to climb. And then I bumped into one of my PGCE tutors one day and had a quick word with them and it turned into a kind of two minute power meeting, which I walked away from feeling loads better. I had an instant action plan, which I put into place.

Although in this instance the support given was practical as well as moral, what might be termed the therapeutic aspect of the trainee/tutor relationship was often emphasised by trainees, and also by the tutors. Each of the tutors interviewed was certain of the “central” or “pivotal” role they performed within the college to ensure the quality of provision across the organisation by fostering new teachers, or even recommending teachers to colleagues for posts in the college. However, the HR manager at Urban College did not support this view:

Their role is primarily as any other lecturer; it's just that they teach a different subject. ... So they will get people asking them more questions, if you like but, to all intent and purposes, they will be the same as any other lecturer.

Their role in enhancing college provision was minimal. The personnel manager at Dale College did not share this jarring perception:

[The teacher educator's] is a very crucial role to us because they're actually developing future teachers and the expertise will reflect on, hopefully, good success rates with our students.

Although the language was different, there were no significant differences between the colleges in the treatment or conditions of the teacher educators.

Apparent from the interviews is that the Cert. Ed/PGCE course and the tutor in particular provide the trainee with a 'safe' space and a firm support within the college, which can appear chaotic and disconcerting for new staff. Nevertheless, the emphasis on nurturing, however necessary to mitigate the frenetic experience of new teachers, may dissuade teacher-educators from challenging trainees to experiment or expand their current practice. This lack of challenge may result in validating or bolstering a conservative understanding and application of pedagogic practice.

b) The experience and expectations of the organisation

The range of the trainees' perceptions of their workplace indicated the multiplicity of contingencies that affect their experience and their practice. Their individual exposure was limited to their own section and team and so they were unaware of practice elsewhere even in their own organisation, except for what they heard in the Cert. Ed./PGCE classes. The attitude of their individual line manager was particularly significant in their perception of college. Like Bathmaker and Avis' (2005) pre-service trainees, some of these in-service trainees described their isolation although this was not necessarily considered problematic. Moreover, for some it was being a part-time employee that restricted their integration rather than being a trainee. Some trainees explicitly described how much they learned from the colleagues in their department (*"the people that I work with are really understanding and really supportive"*), though this was not common.

The HR managers in both colleges recognised the problems faced by trainee teachers:

the first two years are very difficult because studying while you are working full-time is difficult enough but I think it's widely acknowledged that the teaching role can take one to three years to get used to.

The concurrent time demand of the ITT course alongside teaching was the most frequently raised problem. Yet, Dale College gave no remission of teaching for their own staff on ITT courses. Urban College did centrally grant remission to their staff,

but there was a wide discrepancy between the fifty hours stated by the personnel manager; the thirty hours stated by the ITT tutor and the amount of remission that the trainees working at the college actually said they received, which was usually less than either figure. Clearly, trainees were there to teach, essentially like any other member of staff. Along with the sparse evidence of the purposeful, engaged development of trainees by their colleagues, this overt expectation that teacher-trainees will cope with the workload of existing staff is again symptomatic of the culture in FE. This culture of coping sidelines professional development, but it was accepted by most of the trainees who similarly expected to manage the teaching they had been assigned.

c) Being a teacher and teaching

Some of the trainees had entered FE teaching almost by accident and others had chosen to escape from other jobs, but for all those interviewed FE teaching was at least a second career. Happily, despite the pressures of the course and of teaching more generally, none expressed regret about the move they had made. Moreover, with only one exception they all considered themselves to be managing, often describing having come through difficulties and frequently identifying help from the ITT course and trainer. This notion of coping was raised in various ways, but it may also reflect a limited comprehension of the practice of teaching. The trainees' description of what they had learnt about teaching was usually restricted to technical skills such as *"producing schemes of work," "creating accessible and navigable ... Word documents or PowerPoint documents"* or *"classroom management and that sort of thing - tricks of the trade you might say"*. Although many responses were positive about the theoretical element of the course and its academic challenge, what was described within this area was often propositional knowledge such as *"cognitive and psychomotor and ... Gestalt"* or more commonly and uncritically, learning styles. Some responses also referred to how these conceptualisations had simply endorsed their previous practice.

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.

Techniques and approaches were unchanged, but were given a name and thus reinforced. This suggests that teacher trainees join the course with well-formed ideas of what it is to be a teacher and to teach in FE (Dixon *et al* 2008). These ideas may be based upon prior experience of education whether in school or college, and maintain a strong influence over trainees as they learn to manage their workload.

Following recent reforms mentors ostensibly have a significant role in ITT, particularly in the development of subject specialist pedagogy. However, there was unevenness in the trainees' experience of the selection and support of their mentors across both colleges, and several trainees received help from an 'informal' mentor rather than their named one. This and other evidence suggests that mentoring as it is now organised is an unstable foundation on which to build the professional development of teachers. Nevertheless, there was praise for those mentors who had engaged with trainees to help them reflect on and enhance their practice. These limited responses in relation to pedagogy may arise from the difficulty of articulating learning except in terms of formal education, as described above. Moreover, as Polanyi (1983, 4; original italics) argued, "*we can know more than we can tell.*" However, just as the attitude of the ITT tutor and the early experience of teachers in FE may lead to prioritising coping over developing practice, teaching is conservatively understood as pragmatism described in technical jargon.

Related to this is what was habitually referred to as "*the paperwork*" involved in the course: the forms relating to reflections, observations and assignments. While this aspect of the ITT course was often to the fore in responses, so too was the bureaucracy involved in their teaching role:

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.

Thus the course and teaching were described and perceived at least partly in terms of the administration they involved: the lesson plan as an artifact was emphasised

over planning; written reflections over thinking about teaching. In this way a limited understanding of teaching practice is constructed for the in-service trainee, which the course, paradoxically, may reinforce as the dual identities of trainee and teacher meet and integrate over a need to manage and perform.

Discussion

This research was based upon a small sample so any generalisation needs to be treated with caution, but some wider points can be made. Overwhelmingly, the trainees were positive about the course and their course tutor suggesting that the tutor is in a very important position to influence trainees' practice, though that was not necessarily recognised or promoted by HR managers. Moreover, the teacher educators themselves were committed to their trainees to whom they devoted much time and care. Yet, the great diversity of circumstances for the trainees within the two colleges reveals the wide range of factors that influence the trainees' development. Despite the differences between the colleges, the various accounts of the trainees from both organisations could have been interchangeable. The contingencies of, for example, the attitude of their mentor or having a supportive manager along with their own approach and ability to manage are all beyond the scope of the ITT course, but are significant in shaping the professionals they become. Likewise, the perception held of the FE teacher was, in many cases, apparently formed well before taking up a post in the sector, and remained potent.

The heavy workload of new teachers greatly restricts opportunities for innovation or experimentation due to the need to quickly cope; there is little space for mistakes, which favours conservative teaching practice. This tendency to conservative practice may be exacerbated by the attitude of teacher educators who are sensitive to the new teachers' anxiety and so wish to support them. Thus they may validate trainees' teaching, rather than constructively challenge it. Moreover, the bureaucratic demands of FE teaching such as recording students' retention, achievement and additional support meld with the centrally prescribed criteria of the Cert. Ed./PGCE to reinforce a restricted perception of teaching as a partly performative exercise involving "paperwork". The professional identity of a teacher becomes someone who

can handle the workload, not someone who is developing their practice. In a similar way, educational theory exists for many trainees as a series of iconic names (for example, Skinner and Bruner) or 'isms' (for example, behaviourism and cognitivism), which may at best be used to describe practice, but not to analyse it. For some trainees the pressure to cope led to a separation between their ITT course, considered as dealing with ideals and everyday teaching, considered as real and overwhelming. This separation is aggravated through trainee teachers only seeing themselves or being seen as trainees during Cert. Ed./PGCE classes; elsewhere unequivocally they are teachers because that role and identity have precedence.

Many of these problems derive from the culture of FE, which has not historically promoted development as an integral part of being a teacher. A teacher's vocational expertise was seen as necessary and sufficient, while pedagogic proficiency was optional. Recent reforms affecting the FE teaching workforce such as national standards and statutory requirements to hold teaching qualifications are an effort to professionalise the workforce in response to this situation. However, these reforms have added to the demands on trainee teachers and their unintended impact has been to reinforce a perception of teaching as, in part, a bureaucratic exercise. This coincides with the perception that learning to teach in FE is about learning to get by in difficult circumstances, which to their credit is what the trainees in this study were doing. However, while there is a culture where expediency is emphasised over exploring practice, the pedagogy and profession of FE teaching cannot develop.

Recommendations

"The most effective way to improve learning in FE is to change learning cultures, by increasing positive synergies and reducing dysfunctional tensions."

Hodkinson (2005: 1)

Any recommendations relating to the initial training of teachers in FE must be made with cognisance of the sector's broader context and complexity. There is much over which employers and teacher educators have little control, not least the pertaining regulatory regime. Moreover, the situation of institutions and departments is diverse

and so requires development that is sensitive to local influences. Furthermore, placing any more demands on organisations and teachers may add to the “dysfunctional tendencies” identified by Hodkinson, which divert attention to performance indicators and away from teaching and learning. With those caveats, however, we make the following recommendations. These are partly intended to create more opportunities for new teachers to identify themselves and to be identified as trainees to allow them to expand their practice. More generally, they are intended to contribute to a culture of pedagogical development in colleges.

Recommendations

- **Recognise trainees as a defined category of employee.**

Just as schools have procedures and expectations for newly-qualified teachers, so should FE organisations. New teachers should be encouraged to see themselves as trainees and so have the licence to experiment and to learn from mistakes. Therefore, induction would involve pedagogical development alongside familiarisation with the institution and its systems. It would involve the teacher education tutors and the trainee’s manager as well as the HR department.

Observations of teaching carried out as part of quality assurance should explicitly consider teachers who are in training differently from their colleagues. We found some new teachers who had had their confidence dented by insensitive and inappropriate feedback from observers.

- **Increase trainees’ workload incrementally.**

Teachers in training should initially have reduced workloads that can gradually be increased. This would allow trainees to observe colleagues, to research and plan lessons carefully, and to think about how they might develop their practice informed by discussion and their own experience. Such a change would help shift the emphasis from learning to cope with classes to the development of pedagogy. To allow this we recommend that

full-time and fractional teachers are timetabled to teach for approximately two-thirds of their scheduled class contact time during the first term of their ITT course and for three-quarters of their scheduled class contact time for the remainder of their course. We also recommend that part-time hourly paid teachers be provided with similar levels of remission from class contact.

- **Formally recognise the key role of teacher educators**

This research highlighted the crucial role that teacher educators play in developing and supporting trainee teachers. However, teacher educators need to have the time to be able to challenge and stretch trainees as well as support them. Therefore, we recommend that teacher educators be timetabled to teach for approximately three-quarters of normal class contact time for teaching staff.

- **Enhance the status of mentors**

Mentors are central to the government's reform of ITT in FE, for the general support of trainees and above all for subject specialist pedagogy. A good mentor can greatly enhance the development of new teachers, and yet the procedure to become a mentor and what the role involves are uneven and random. Ideally, mentors should be volunteers; they should have the opportunity to train and to have remission of teaching to enable them to spend time with the new teacher. We recommend that each mentor be allowed one hour per week remission for each trainee under his or her mentorship. This would help to enhance the role of the mentor and strengthen a culture of professional development.

- **Prioritise the teacher training course.**

Trainees were sometimes instructed by line managers not to attend Cert. Ed./PGCE classes so as to cover for absent staff. This reinforces a perception of teacher training as extra, not integral. Senior managers need to set the tone: they should explicitly and consistently prioritise the ITT

course and ensure that trainees and their line managers are aware of its importance – both for individual and organisational development.

- **Prioritise pedagogic elements over administration in teacher training.**

Teacher educators have limited control over many elements of initial teacher training courses and how trainees are assessed, but they can actively prioritise pedagogy over fulfilling the bureaucratic requirements of the course. Expedience should not be at the expense of developing practice. Issues of teaching and learning need to be at the centre of trainees' experience, not completing forms.

- **Consider how trainees can be supported while maintaining challenge.**

Sympathetically supporting trainees who are struggling with the pressures of teaching is important. However, it can lead teacher educators to unduly praise trainees' existing practice. The consequence of this may be to endorse and sustain conservative pedagogical practice. Teacher educators should consider how they can support and challenge trainees at the same time by introducing new and alternative forms of practice.

- **Increase the integration and relevance of theory in teacher training.**

We found little antipathy to theory, but rarely was theory used to analyse or develop trainees' practice and often it was only used to validate existing practice by giving it a technical name. Symptomatic of this are vague and entirely uncritical allusions to learning styles. Teacher educators should consider both what theory they cover and how they present it to enhance the relevance of theory to trainees. That may entail a move towards, for example, theories of situational and social learning. Trainees need to be able to analyse and critique theory as well as using theory to analyse and critique their own work.

These recommendations have also been produced in the form of two guides, one for employers and one for teacher educators.

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