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

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Abstract

Since 2001 there has been a statutory requirement for teachers in English Further Education (FE) colleges to gain teaching qualifications. However, in marked distinction from other sectors of education, around ninety percent of FE teachers are employed untrained and complete their initial teacher training on a part-time in-service basis. Traditionally, this route has been necessary to attract established vocational practitioners into FE and to enable them to continue earning whilst undertaking their teacher-training. Consequently, staff sustain the dual role of teacher and trainee teacher. This paper explores the dual identities of trainees on in-service FE teacher training courses. It argues that how their two roles interact may cause tensions in their development — shaping and reinforcing a conservative understanding of further education and the role of the FE teacher.

Introduction

The Post-Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector in England provides vocational, academic and work-based education and training for over 4.2 million learners. The sector is made up of a diverse range of providers including sixth-form colleges; tertiary colleges; private and public-sector training organisations; work-based learning providers; and what remains of adult and community education services run by local authorities. However, further education (FE) colleges form by far the largest part of the PCET sector. These institutions provide a vast and diverse range of learning opportunities to individuals, businesses and community groups. Although FE's main remit has always been to provide vocational learning for everyday employment, typically further education colleges offer a great variety of courses ranging from provision for people with profound learning difficulties through to courses of higher education (Ainley and Bailey 1997, p. 8-10).

This paper focuses on FE teachers and, in particular, the experience of those undergoing initial teacher training (ITT). In stark contrast to the situation in schools, ninety percent of FE teachers undertake their ITT on a part-time in-service basis, whilst undertaking paid teaching (UCET 2009, p. 1). Therefore, most trainee FE

teachers experience a 'dual identity': that of being simultaneously a trainee and a paid employee. The purpose of this paper is to critically examine this situation and to consider its symbiosis and tension for both trainees and their employers. After explaining the methodology and policy background for our project, we consider the existing literature that relates to this area and how the trainee teachers' circumstances can be conceptualised. The findings set out in this paper conclude that although most trainees manage the dual roles well and appreciate being able to earn while training, the tensions between being a teacher and trainee can lead to expediency and conservative teaching approaches. This is exacerbated by elision of the administrative elements of the ITT course and of teaching, so that new teachers learn to cope, above all with the bureaucracy, rather than to develop their pedagogic practice.

Research Methodology

This paper draws on data from empirical research undertaken during the first half of 2009. This was a small-scale qualitative project conducted at two FE colleges in the north of England – 'Dale College' and 'Urban College'. The research was based on semi-structured interviews carried out at both colleges. Two managers responsible for human resources (HR), four teacher educators and twenty trainee teachers - ten from each institution - took part in the project. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The aim of this research was to explore the tension and symbiosis deriving the dual roles of teacher trainees. All the trainee teachers were, at the time of the project, undertaking a part-time, in-service Certificate in Education (Cert. Ed.) or Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) course. All the trainees were employed as paid teachers or trainers in the PCET sector. Roughly half were employed on a full-time basis. For those employed on a part-time basis, the amount of teaching undertaken varied significantly between trainees: some taught for only a few hours a week, whilst others were teaching almost full-time. Reflecting the diverse nature of FE, the trainees came from a variety of vocational backgrounds; as is commonplace, many had gained extensive previous work experience before coming into teaching. The trainees taught on a range of courses typically found in colleges. These included health and social care; information

technology; art and design; childcare; performing arts; and uniformed and public services courses. The trainees had been working in PCET for various lengths of time; most had between one and three years teaching experience, although three of those taking part had been involved for considerably longer. One trainee had had twenty-nine years teaching experience, teaching mostly on a casual or part-time basis. An equal number of men and women took part in the research.

The interviews with the trainee teachers covered three broad themes:

- The trainee's journey into teaching – their professional/vocational background; how and why they moved into teaching; and the nature of their current role as a PCET teacher.
- Learning on the Cert. Ed/PGCE - what knowledge and skills had been learnt by the trainee.
- 'Tensions' - the differences between being an employed teacher and a trainee teacher; the tensions and benefits of being both an employed teacher and a trainee teacher; and how these issues are managed, both by their employers and the trainees themselves.

The HR managers and teacher educators were interviewed in order to gain their views of the role of the trainee teachers in the two colleges; to compare these views to those of the trainee teachers; and to help gain an understanding of the organisational culture in which the trainees work. It was recognised that HR managers and teacher educators are influential in shaping the environment in which trainee teachers work and in contributing to the formation of their identity, partly through their expectations of the trainees. The interviews with the HR managers and the teacher educators focused on their perceptions of the challenges and opportunities facing trainee teachers undergoing in-service training.

The Cert. Ed. and PGCE are effectively 'sister' courses: the PGCE being designed for graduates, whilst the Cert. Ed is aimed at those with other vocational

qualifications, although both groups of trainees attend classes together. Other ITT qualifications for PCET teachers do exist, but 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. Both colleges are part of a large network of institutions offering Northern University's Cert. Ed./PGCE and, whilst the curriculum is provided centrally by the University, the course is delivered by each college's own staff. Alongside undertaking coursework and being assessed in the workplace, Cert. Ed./PGCE trainees attend formal classes once a week; normally the course is completed over two academic years. Upon completion of this qualification trainees must undertake a period of 'professional formation' to gain Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills (QTLS) status.

Although the 'core business' of both Dale College and Urban College is centred upon providing vocational education and training for their local communities, the two institutions appear quite different. Dale College has undergone significant growth over recent years, but it is still relatively small. It 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 'crude efficiency' model characteristic of many FE colleges. In contrast, Urban College, which is located in a large conurbation, is much bigger and has had a somewhat turbulent recent history. In the 1990s Urban College experienced restructuring and redundancies under a 'charismatic' principal and there remains a 'harder' managerial culture. Although it cannot be claimed that the findings from this research project are representative of the experience of all trainee FE teachers, the data gained provides an informed insight into the nature of in-service FE teacher training and the type of issues that commonly arise for those undertaking such programmes.

Policy context: FE, teacher training and the role of the state

FE has long been considered the 'Cinderella' of the English education system. This is

partly due to its predominantly working-class origins and its history of 'benign neglect' (Lucas 2004a, p. 36-38). Traditionally, FE has suffered from significant under-funding and a lack of strategic direction; until the 1990s it was essentially a rather unfashionable locally-run service on the margins of English education. However, this situation has changed radically over recent years. Since the election of New Labour in 1997 FE has found itself at the centre of government policy. Against a backdrop of continuing economic neo-liberalism and increasing globalisation, further education has been identified 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 (LSC 2005, p.1). Consequently, in recent years FE has received significantly increased levels of funding. However, it has also been subjected to unprecedented levels of state intervention and series of policy initiatives, relating to both strategic and operational matters. Virtually all aspects of FE are now highly mediated by the state. Keep (2006) argues that PCET in England is now the most highly regulated and centrally directed education system in Europe.

Although it has long been a statutory requirement for school teachers to gain 'qualified teacher status', in FE colleges the situation has traditionally been quite different. Whilst FE teachers usually held qualifications in their own field of expertise, it was not unusual for them to practise without ever gaining teaching qualifications. This situation derived, at least in part, from the predominantly vocationally-orientated nature of further education (Simmons 2008, p. 367). Many colleges have their roots in the mechanics institutes and technical colleges of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries where the main focus was upon learning from a skilled artisan or practitioner. An implicit assumption was that subject expertise rather than knowledge and skills in education would be the chief determinant of the quality of teaching and learning (Harkin, 2005 p. 166). There were, however, significant drawbacks to the traditional reliance on technical expertise and subject knowledge at the expense of pedagogy. Staff commonly tended to regard themselves chiefly as engineers, accountants or builders who just happened to teach. There was sometimes a lack of a professional approach to educational practice (Venables 1967, p. 220). FE teachers could be slow to adopt new educational ideas: teaching was often overly-

didactic, pedestrian and uninspiring (Bristow 1970). There was little culture of professional development in the PCET sector and the implications of this historic lack remain apparent today.

Despite all this, ITT courses for FE have existed for over 60 years. 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. However, due to the need to employ teachers with relevant, up-to-date knowledge and skills, the majority were not expected to stop earning in order to train as a teacher. Following the 1963 Robbins Report, two-year part-time in-service courses became available and, for those choosing to gain teaching qualifications, this in-service route soon became the norm (Bridge et al., 2003). Most trained on a part-time basis whilst in employment. Over time, the majority of full-time staff came to hold teaching qualifications. Nevertheless, as recently as 1999, fewer than 60% of FE teachers held a Certificate in Education or equivalent teaching qualification (cited in Clow 2001, p. 409).

Part of New Labour's strategy to improve the performance of further education has been an increased emphasis upon teacher training. The Fryer Report (1997) and Kennedy Report (1997) both identified the need for coherent, nationally recognised FE teacher training. In 2001 the statutory requirement for all FE teachers to gain teaching qualifications was introduced. This was updated by the Further Education Workforce Reforms in 2007 and is integral to a policy thrust intended both to improve teaching and learning and to 'professionalise' the PCET workforce. The quality and content of FE teacher training has become closely regulated by the state. Much of the content of FE teacher training is now prescribed by government agencies. ITT providers are now beset by detailed and extensive specifications with which their courses must comply. An 'annual monitoring' of courses against external standards is required if 'endorsement' by Standards Verification UK is to be maintained (for further discussion of recent policy developments related to FE teacher training see Lucas (2004b) and Nasta (2007)). Nevertheless, there is still a degree of continuity with previous practice. FE teachers normally still come into colleges after pursuing

previous careers; many continue to combine teaching with work outside the sector; and most learning is still vocational and work-related.

FE teacher training as work-based learning

ITT in FE is an area in which there has been limited academic research. There is, however, a body of work on the experience of pre-service teacher-trainees alongside some literature on teacher training in FE more generally (see, for example, Harkin et al. 2005; Noel 2006; Simmons and Thompson 2007; Thompson and Robinson 2008). Robson (1998) found that FE teachers prioritised their former professional identity over that of being a teacher, because, as Robson et al. (2004, p. 187) argued, that previous experience provides the credibility required for their new teaching role. This emphasis on their former vocation, or 'dual professionalism' as it has been termed, affects their perception of their role as a teacher and how they relate to the teacher training they will have to undertake. However, whilst the influence of FE teachers' former occupation upon both their identity and their practice is recognised, this research focuses on their experiences whilst undertaking ITT. That is, it focuses on the dual identity that derives from being simultaneously a trainee and a paid employee. This article examines the social, organisational and situational influences related to this position of duality and how this shapes the trainees' conceptions of pedagogy.

Avila de Lima (2003, p. 215) argued that trainee teachers on placement learn to be marginal and are socialised into a view of teaching as an individualised rather than a collective process. Avis and Bathmaker considered the experience of pre-service trainee FE teachers on placements and how this helped to shape their professional identity and attitudes toward pedagogy (Avis et al, 2003; Avis and Bathmaker, 2004; Bathmaker and Avis, 2005). They highlighted the importance of the trainees' own biographies and found that there was little meaningful integration with existing teachers. As is discussed later in the paper, the marginalisation experienced by many of the in-service teachers in this paper has similarities with this aspect of Avis and Bathmaker's work with pre-service trainees. Wallace (2002) also found a discrepancy between the hopes and expectations of pre-service trainees and their

experience on placement. Viskovic and Robson (2001) considered the placement experience of pre-service FE teacher-trainees as an element of work-based learning (WBL), which provides a rich vein of literature relating to both methodology and findings. WBL has been described as “informal” by Eraut (2004), but in contrast Billett (2002, p. 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.

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. However, Doornbos et al. (2004, p. 252) identified “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 shapes how people think about and express learning. Eraut (2004, p. 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 danger of ignoring the mundane.

Similarly, Rainbird et al. (2004, p.3) expressed reservations about individual accounts of WBL because of the significance of power relationships:

Whilst the accounts of individuals can shed light on how people learn at work and can help make sense of diverse situations, they can also mask the ways in which opportunities are structured and unevenly distributed across organisations and groups.

These considerations and warnings informed our methodology and led us to consider the use of identity.

Situation, practice and identity

[T]he ways of 'being ordinary' available to us in our society, are just as much socio-historical constructions as our ways of being a scientist, or a lover. In other words, not only do we constitute (make) ourselves and reconstitute (remake) our own social worlds, but we are also made and remade by them in the process.
(Shotter 1993, p. 13)

This relationship between the social and the individual chimes with learning as an alteration in identity or 'becoming'. The isolation of trainees undermines communities of practice conceptualisation, which we therefore eschewed, but nevertheless we have drawn on Lave and Wenger to comprehend the relationship between identity and learning. They wrote (1991, p. 53) wrote that learning "implies becoming a different person ...To ignore this aspect of learning is to overlook the fact that learning involves the construction of identities." The notion of identity, whether as a trainee or as a teacher, is only meaningful within a social space through relating to others (literally *identifying* with them or not). The dialogic explanation from Holland et al (1998, p. 18) is helpful.

[Identity] 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.

We chose this conception of identity because it recognises the constraining and enabling effects of past experience as well as current agency, or the capacity to act upon the world in a purposeful if restricted way according to circumstances. Therefore, identity is not fixed and relates to agency, which exists in how the teachers/trainees improvised with what they had in the present. This conceptualisation recognises their two distinct identities and roles, as trainee and teacher, and it informed our understanding of how learning, identity and practice connect and conflict.

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 quote from a trainee at Dale College epitomises the contradiction of the in-service trainee and the conflicting expectations that the organisation and colleagues have of them. How that contradiction was experienced differed widely, and though this research was limited to two colleges, the diversity of experience of the trainees even within those institutions was striking. Though many of the trainees appreciated being able to earn a salary while training, their individual access to support and their control over workload as well as their expectations and capacity to cope were contingent upon highly localised factors. These interacted with their own biographies, all of which defy generalisation (Dixon et al., 2008). The findings of our research have here been divided under three broad and overlapping headings: the 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 course and the role of the teacher educator

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.

There was, however, an occasional dissenting voice; one had “*not [learnt] a lot that has been of any use to me on a day-to-day basis.*” There were frequent complaints relating to the bureaucratic elements of the Cert. Ed./PGCE 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.

The trainees at both colleges were of diverse ages and vocational and academic backgrounds, but many interviewees had particularly enjoyed mixing within this diverse group.

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 learning to be a teacher in FE was important. For many participants, the ITT class was the only place where they had the freedom or opportunity to self-consciously identify themselves as novices developing their practice and therefore admitting mistakes and frustrations. Elsewhere, their identity as beginner or trainee was hidden because to expose it was to expose weakness. This is indicative of the peculiar history and tradition of FE as described above.

Many interviewees distinguished between the quality assurance observations carried out by the college and those carried out for the ITT course. The latter were considered more developmental and constructive.

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.

However, this aspect of the evidence also points to the separation between everyday practice and the demands of the teacher training course, as if the two elements existed 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.

One teacher educator stated:

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.

Best practice existed in the rarefied confines of the teacher training course, not in the harsher “real life” of the trainees’ everyday sessions with their own students. Arguably, a worthwhile function of the course is to encourage trainees to see beyond current practice to what methods or activities are possible, meaning the gap or tensions are necessary. Nevertheless, this disconnection raises questions about the influence of the ITT course on practice relative to other factors such as the pre-existing norms within the college, previously held perceptions of teaching and the trainee’s own experience of education or training. There was, however, wide agreement between the trainees about their positive relationships with their teacher educators. This was summed up by a trainee from Dale College:

I regard [the ITT 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 teacher educator’s precise role, (“mentoring”; “keeping me on track”; “developing learning and providing that knowledge”; “a facilitator rather than a traditional teacher”) many mentioned what they had learnt from the practice modelled by their ITT tutor. The relationship with this tutor often centred upon the broad support they provided, well beyond the demands of the course as this instance illustrates:

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.

In this instance the support was practical and motivational, but what might be termed the therapeutic aspect of the relationship was often emphasised. This aspect was similarly stressed by most of the ITT tutors interviewed:

I see [the role of teacher training] as helping.

[The trainees] see teacher trainers as people of experience who are developmental and supporting rather than judgemental in the quality assurance sense. And I try very much to make it very clear that we are there to help support them and that there are no right ways of doing things but there are many correct ways of doing them but there are very clearly, in my opinion, incorrect ways.

Each of the tutors understood their own position to be “*central*” or “*pivotal*” in ensuring the quality of provision across the organisation through fostering new teachers, or even recommending teachers for posts. However, this was not recognised by the HR manager at Urban College who stressed that teacher educators were simply main-grade lecturers like any other, and that their responsibility for enhancing college provision was minimal. The ITT course - and the teacher educator in particular - provide the trainee with a ‘safe’ space and a firm support within the college, which can be chaotic and disconcerting for new staff. However, the emphasis on nurturing may militate against challenging trainees to experiment or expand their practice. Several of the trainees in the sample mentioned how they had felt reassured that what they were already doing with their students had been deemed correct by their tutor who was “*non-judgemental*”.

b) The experience and expectations of the college

The multiplicity of the trainees’ perceptions of their workplace indicated the wide range of contingencies that affect their experience and their practice. The attitude of their line manager was found to be particularly significant:

My boss is quite helpful and we get together every month and have a chat and he will give me quite a few pointers.

Though in an echo of Bathmaker and Avis's (2005) pre-service trainees, some in-service trainees spoke of their isolation, this was not necessarily considered problematic. Moreover, for several at each college it was being employed on a part-time basis that restricted their integration rather than their status as a trainee. Some trainees described how much they learned from the colleagues in their department but this was not common. HR managers in both colleges recognised the problems faced by teachers at the beginning of their career:

[T]he 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.

For all the respondents, the concurrent demands of undertaking training alongside teaching were the most frequently raised problem. Yet in spite of this, Dale College gave no remission of workload for those on ITT courses. Although Urban College officially did grant remission centrally, there was a wide discrepancy between the fifty hours stated by the HR manager; the thirty hours stated by the ITT tutor and the amount of remission that trainees working at the college actually received – which was usually less. Moreover, there was sparse evidence of teachers purposefully engaging with trainees in order to develop their practice: one of the sample described being made to feel “awkward” and another “stupid” when they asked questions of existing colleagues, and several used the expression “thrown in at the deep end” to explain the lack of support they were given. This indicates an assumption that teacher trainees have to cope with the workload of existing staff, which is again symptomatic of the lack of a training culture in FE. The trainees were primarily identified as teachers, not as novices, as suggested by this extract from a trainee at Urban College:

I don't think, for the most part, I'm conceived as a trainee teacher in terms of responsibilities that I've been given and there have been other things that people have tried to give me since. The volume of work that I have to do is causing me some stress but that's really how I prefer it to be.

The trainees often explained the work of a teacher in terms of administration, habitually referred to as “*the paperwork*”, rather than classroom practice, as an engineering teacher at Dale College describes:

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.

The expectation that the trainees would manage the duties of established teachers was transmitted and understood in bureaucratic terms: most often in the administrative forms that had to be completed. This shaped a perception of a successful teacher as someone able to deal expediently with the demands, above all the demands of administration. There was no apparent expectation of pedagogy.

c) Being a teacher and teaching

FE teaching was at least a second career for all of the trainees interviewed; some had entered almost by ‘accident’; others had used it to escape from other jobs. Yet, despite the pressures of the course and of teaching more generally, none expressed regret about the move they had made. Several described having come through difficulties and frequently identified help from the ITT course and tutor. With only one exception they considered themselves to be managing their role. This one teacher was irritated by his intermediate status, but not that of trainee/teacher; his job description had been changed from technician to technician/trainer.

As a technician/trainer I have to teach 600 hours per year. I have to do everything a full time lecturer has to do. There are however two big differences. A full time lecturer teaches 900 hours per year and the rest of their time is spent doing the ancillary bits such as schemes of work lesson plans etc. I have to do all the same but I effectively have another full time job, that being the technician's role. For which I get paid £6000 per year less than the lowest grade lecturer, which is the other difference.

This suggests that the identity of the teacher implies more than taking classes; it entails status and related salary, neither of which this trainee had. He did not identify himself as a trainee or a teacher, but rather that he was “*being taken for a mug*” by

being required to teach without adequate training or pay.

However, even those who were more certain in their role most often described what they had learnt about teaching in a discourse limited to technicism; for example, *“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 ”*. When this is positioned alongside the dominant “paperwork” aspect of teaching what is apparent is a highly restricted perception of teaching and the identity of the teacher.

Although many responses were positive about the theoretical element of the course and the academic challenge this involved, what was described within this area was often propositional knowledge such as *“cognitive and psychomotor and ... Gestalt”* or more commonly and uncritically, learning styles. To some degree, these findings reflect those of Harkin et al (2003) in their study of the ITT experience of two-hundred-and-forty FE teachers in London and the south-east of England. Their research revealed variable attitudes towards theory but there was often a minimal level of engagement and sometimes a dismissive attitude towards its usefulness. Furthermore, it was also found that even where these teachers did engage with theory this tended to focus on canonical work and propositional knowledge. Bloom, Maslow and Skinner were most frequently mentioned (Harkin 2005, p. 168)

Some responses also referred to how these conceptualisations had simply validated their previous practice, giving it a name and thus reinforcing it.

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.

These responses that suggest a limited comprehension of or engagement with pedagogy may arise from the difficulty of articulating learning except in terms of formal education. Moreover, as Polanyi (1983, p. 4; original italics) put it, *“we can know more than we can tell.”* Nevertheless, teaching is conservatively understood as pragmatism described in technical jargon. Related to this is what the trainees

habitually referred to as “*the paperwork*” involved in the ITT course: the forms relating to reflections, observations and assignments. While this aspect of the course was often to the fore in responses, so too was the bureaucracy involved in their teaching role, as suggested above. All of these factors militate towards a limited understanding of teaching practice 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.

Conclusion

From this small sample any generalisation needs to be treated with caution, though there are wider points that can be made. The great diversity of circumstances for the trainees reveals the wide range of factors that influence their development. Though the colleges are quite different, the various accounts of the trainees from both organisations could have been interchangeable. The contingencies of, for example, having a supportive manager and colleagues along with their own attitude and ability to manage are all beyond the scope of the ITT course but are significant in shaping the professionals they become. Moreover, the perception of the FE teacher and what it is to be one were, in many cases, apparently formed well before taking up a post in the sector. However, overwhelmingly, the trainees were positive about the course and their teacher educator though for many trainees educational theory existed as a series of iconic names or ‘isms’, which may be used to describe practice, but not to analyse it. For some trainees there was a separation between their ITT course, involving the ideal, and everyday teaching, considered as real and overwhelming. This separation is aggravated through trainee teachers often only seeing themselves or being seen as trainees during Cert. Ed./PGCE classes. The teacher educators in the study expressed commitment to their trainees to whom they devoted much time and care, although this support may lead to validation of the trainees’ practice, rather than constructive challenge.

Above all, it was found that in-service trainees were considered “of” the college and expected to perform like any other teacher before they had been able to reflect on or form their own practice. This meant quickly integrating and learning to comply with

existing practice, but the great majority of the sample trainees were managing the pressures of teaching and training well. Yet, the identity of trainee was eclipsed by that of teacher because there was often little time or opportunity for trainees to develop their practice as they had to quickly sustain heavy workloads. Moreover, the administrative aspects of the ITT course, such as completing professional development plans, melded with the administrative aspects of teaching, such as completing student retention forms. All of this helped to shape a limited conception of professional practice where teachers were not identified with pedagogy, but were identified as coping, above all coping with the bureaucracy of the role. So, not only was the identity of teacher stronger than that of trainee for our sample, but their developing identity as teachers was primarily shaped by expediency.

Many of these tensions derive from the pertaining culture of FE which has not historically promoted development as an integral part of being a teacher. A teacher's vocational expertise was sufficient and pedagogic expertise was optional. Recent reforms to ITT in FE have added to the demands on trainee teachers, the impact has been to reinforce a perception of teaching as, to some extent, a bureaucratic exercise. This, in turn, reinforces the perception that learning to teach in FE is about learning to get by in difficult circumstances. However, while expediency is emphasised over flair, the pedagogy and profession of FE teaching cannot develop.

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