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**Bathmaker, A.M. and Avis, J. (2005) Is that 'tingling feeling' enough? Constructions of teaching and learning in further education, *Educational Review*, 57, 1, pp.3-20.**

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*Abstract*

This paper is concerned with changing constructions of teaching and learning in the further education (FE) sector in England. It explores how current changes may be affecting the development of lecturers' professional identity, drawing upon a small-scale study of trainees on a full-time FE teacher training programme in the academic year 2001-2002. Our underlying concern is the possibilities for democratic forms of practice within the changing context of lecturers' work. The paper considers how trainees make sense of pedagogic relations, and considers how such work might inform debates about new forms of professionalism and practice in FE.

*Key words*

further education, teacher professionalism, critical pedagogy

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## **Introduction**

This paper is concerned with changing constructions of teaching and learning amongst teachers and lecturers. Our work focuses on the further education (FE) sector in England, where there have been far-reaching changes over the last twenty years, including significant changes to the training of lecturers preparing to teach in FE. Our interest lies in how these changes may be affecting the development of lecturers' professional identity, and our underlying concern is the possibilities for democratic forms of practice within the changing context of lecturers' work. To consider these issues, we draw on evidence from a small-scale study of trainee lecturers, who were on a full-time pre-service FE teacher training programme in the academic year 2001-2002. Whilst the context of the paper is the English further education sector, the issues raised relate to the development of professional identity in education more widely, and therefore contribute to wider debates about the changing nature of pedagogy and teacher identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The paper explores constructions of teaching and learning from three contrasting perspectives; the policy context, the literature on critical pedagogies, and the experience of trainee lecturers. The paper therefore first offers a contextualisation of the changing nature of the further education sector in England, including new requirements for those intending to teach in the sector.

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We then discuss the literature on critical pedagogies and the ideas we draw on when interrogating democratic forms of practice. The paper goes on to consider the experience of trainee lecturers and concludes by examining how these relate to possibilities for critical pedagogies and transformative democratic practices.

### **Re-constructing the further education sector in England: the policy context**

The further education sector in England has never constituted a stable and easily definable sector of the education system. It has traditionally offered a wide range of post-school education, including initial post-compulsory education and training courses, work-based training, higher education, adult and community education, and more recently has included provision for young people aged 14-16 in the last two years of compulsory schooling. It embraces work-based, vocationally-related and academic qualifications and courses, as well as a range of provision aimed at encouraging particular cohorts of the population to return to some form of education, training or employment, and also offers courses which are pursued for leisure.

Such diversity means that teaching and learning in FE are influenced by a wide range of pedagogic cultures and goals (see Zukas and Malcolm, 2002). Clow (2001) argues that there is little agreement about professional identity in FE, and

Hodkinson, Colley and Scaife (2002) have found that lecturers working in different sites of learning within the same college perceive the way they work to be unique and different to other parts of the institution.

At the same time, since the 1980s when colleges became increasingly dependent on central government-funded courses, in particular those aimed at the unemployed, there has been increasing regulation of FE, with fundamental change brought about by the establishment of a redefined FE sector as a result of the 1992 Further and Higher Education Act. The Act on the one hand freed colleges from local authority control and made them independent corporations, while on the other, taking much greater control of provision by specifying the courses and qualifications which would receive funding from the then newly-established Further Education Funding Council (now the Learning and Skills Council).

In the 1990s, FE provision played an increasingly significant role first in the Conservative and then in the New Labour government's lifelong learning agenda, reflected in the Kennedy Report of 1997 (Kennedy, 1997). The report made a concerted attempt to bring the FE sector out of its 'Cinderella' role in education, and to establish FE colleges as central to adult lifelong learning policy strategies as part of a new Learning and Skills sector, established in 2001.

Although Hodkinson et al's (2002) research suggests that a diversity of cultures

in FE have survived these major developments, such cultures must now operate in the context of a highly regulated sector, centrally controlled through audit, monitoring and inspection, which is harnessed to an economic competitiveness agenda, where high skills and a knowledge economy are promoted as the solution to the social and economic problems facing the UK (see for example, DTI, 1998; DTI and DfEE, 2001; SEU, 1999; and for discussion see Avis, 2003).

Alongside changes to the FE sector itself, there have been major changes to the qualification requirements for staff teaching within the sector. Until 2001, Certificate and Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (Cert Ed/PGCE) programmes for those teaching in further, adult and higher education were offered on a part-time and full-time basis by a number of universities. In addition, the qualifications awarding body City and Guilds offered a teaching certificate for FE lecturers (the 730 series). However, it is only since September 2001 that a teaching qualification has become a mandatory requirement for new lecturers entering the sector. At the same time these qualifications have become more closely regulated through the establishment of a Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO), which has produced occupational standards for teaching and learning in FE, published in January 1999 (FENTO, 1999). All FE teaching qualifications now have to meet these standards, including university-based Cert Ed and PGCE programmes.

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## **Constructions of teacher professionalism: critical pedagogies and transformative democratic practices**

The training requirements as well as the terms and conditions under which those teaching in FE in England now work have therefore changed considerably. There is a growing body of literature which considers the impact of such changes on the nature of teacher professionalism in FE (Ainley and Bailey, 1997; Avis, 1999; Avis et al, 2002a; Bathmaker, 2001; Ecclestone, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2001; Shain and Gleeson, 1999). This work complements an extensive literature on teacher professionalism in schools, which has wider application in debates about teacher professionalism (see, for example, Ball, 1999; Goodson, 2000; Hargreaves, 1994; Hauge, 2000; Helsby, 1999; McCulloch, Helsby and Knight, 2000; Sachs, 2001). Here, as in the wider policy context, there is extensive debate about the transformation of teaching and learning. Within the literature, those who seek opportunities for transformative democratic practices and critical pedagogies distinguish between forms of professional identity which involve compliance with the performative requirements of managerial cultures, and professional identities which are defined as 'authentic' to democratic values and practices.

A contrast is made between 'designer' teachers (Sachs, 2001), who perform and conform (Gewirtz, 1997) and a whole spectrum of others, who include 'democratic' teachers (Sachs, 2001). Democratic teachers may strategically

comply with managerial requirements, but they attempt to maintain their commitment to 'democratic' values (Shain and Gleeson, 1999). The notion of 'democratic' values may appear to be in line with New Labour's apparent commitment to social justice as well as the development of a socially inclusive and cohesive society (see for example, DfES, 2002; 2003). However, a number of researchers (such as Ball, 1999; Clarke and Newman, 1997; Gewirtz, 2000; Ozga, 2000) argue that New Labour seeks adherence to a particular definition of social justice. This definition seeks to tie notions of social justice to rights and responsibilities whereby it is incumbent upon the individual to avail themselves of the opportunities provided by the state. Giddens (2002) defines the above as a shift from what is termed the redistributive state to the social investment state. Here social justice is not concerned with an egalitarian redistribution of income or wealth, rather the state seeks to interrupt the reproduction of disadvantage by providing opportunities for individuals to better themselves. For Giddens (2002) economic and social regeneration are underpinned by a trade-off between redistributive justice and a meritocracy. Charles Clarke, Secretary of State for Education, reflects this orientation in his discussion of elitism:

Government's mission is not to get rid of elites, whose talents we need in so many areas to improve our lives. Our mission is to do what we can to ensure that people from all walks of life get the chances to join these elites and that elites use their knowledge to benefit others... I see one of my greatest responsibilities to be to offer every citizen the chance to be part of an elite judged on merit. (Clarke, 2002, unnumbered<sup>1</sup>)

Democratic practices in a New Labour context appear to involve consensus over the government's values and policy programme, rather than encouraging critical debate and interrogation of the opportunities offered by Labour policies, which might draw attention to the contradictions and problems underlying such policies. In contrast, literature which is concerned with critical pedagogies and transformative democratic practices encourages a critical approach to any current policy settlement, and suggests a more complex and more challenging agenda for 'democratic' educators. Our interest in exploring perceptions of trainee lecturers lies in considering how their constructions of teaching and learning resonate with these differing agendas. We are particularly interested in whether their articulations of teaching and learning offer a basis for the development of critical pedagogies and democratic practices.

*What is meant by critical pedagogies and transformative democratic practices?*

Although critical pedagogies and transformative democratic practices share a number of important underlying ideas, we nevertheless refer to them as *pedagogies* and *practices*, to indicate that there are differing interpretations and understandings of critical pedagogy and what is meant by transformative democratic practice. Critical pedagogies share in common an emphasis on the importance of understanding and addressing power relations in society. Power is conceived of in relation to structural patterns of inequality, for example those of class, race, and gender, which lead to social antagonism. Critical pedagogies

stress the need to understand these wider social conditions and structures in society, whilst at the same time seeking opportunities for human agency, that is, finding spaces for social action. The aim is to enable people to interrogate lived experience, and also to find ways to transform the conditions in which they live, hence the use of the term transformative democratic practices. Clarke (2002, p.67) offers the following definition of critical pedagogy:

Teachers engaged in critical pedagogy are united in a view of education as a practice committed to the reduction, or even elimination, of injustice and oppression.

Democratic and dialogic relations necessarily underpin such practices, for without such a commitment critical pedagogies may become as oppressive as traditional forms of pedagogy. The aspiration is to enable people to develop the 'capacity for social practice' (Ozga, 2000, p.9), which can be defined as embracing:

the capacity to labour; capacities for social interaction, involving culture, identity formation and communication; and the 'capacity for power' - meaning the capacity to engage responsibly in political life. (Smyth et al, 2000, p.24, citing Connell, 1995, p.100)

If this aspiration is successful, it is anticipated that learners will develop collectively skills and understandings that facilitate engagement with the political, social and economic contexts in which they are placed.

Apple (1986, p.188) similarly defines the broad aim of critical pedagogy as 'democratic action', which addresses all aspects of the education system, both inside and outside the immediate teaching and learning environment. Thus, as Smyth (1996, p.42) emphasises, 'teaching is an avowedly political activity', one that cannot free itself from political issues. The curriculum, classroom relations and the socio-economic context in which teaching and learning take place are all intertwined with wider political conditions.

There is an affinity between critical pedagogies that emphasise structures of race, class and gender, and critical theory. Drawing upon neo-Marxist analyses of power and oppression, Giroux (1983) explains that critical theory stresses:

the breaks, discontinuities, and tensions in history, all of which become valuable in that they highlight the centrality of human agency and struggle while simultaneously revealing the gap between society as it presently exists and society as it might be. (Giroux, 1983, p.36)

Following on from this, Smyth suggests that critical pedagogies:

are founded on a view that what is taught and learned is a social, historical, political and economic (as well as a pedagogical) act, and that these are crucial framing and contextual facets of the work of teaching and learning that must be reflected upon and acted upon by teachers themselves. (Smyth, 1996, p.42)

Critical educators are therefore concerned with transforming teaching and learning, not simply by making technical changes to teaching, but by

understanding the wider forces operating to shape and influence their work, and acting upon those understandings, to encourage transformative learning (Clarke, J., 2002).

Whilst critical educators share a common interest in exposing structural power relations, and seeking opportunities for human agency, feminist writers in particular voice concerns about critical pedagogy (see for example, Ellsworth, 1992; Gore, 1992; Luke, 1992; Ryan, 2001; Clarke, J., 2002). They argue that forms of critical pedagogy based on neo-marxist theories which fail to take adequate account of different standpoints such as gender and race, may leave students and teachers feeling disempowered, rather than enabled to develop critical understandings of the world. They believe that this is because much work is built on masculinist concepts of what counts as 'really useful knowledge', which does not acknowledge its roots in a male conceptualisation of the world (Luke, 1992; Clarke, J., 2002). It can of course be argued that these tensions are present not only within neo-marxist approaches, but may also be found in those that take gender or race as their central focus. What the feminist writers cited above discuss, is how to problematise the standpoints adopted and provide spaces in which difference is not only acknowledged but valued.

Positioning teachers and defining their role within this context is not straightforward. Gore (1992) reminds us that discourses of critical pedagogy

tend to set up a distinction between “us” and “them”, that is between those of us with power, who are to give power to others. She draws attention to how:

In the focus on Others there is a danger of forgetting to examine one’s own (or one’s group’s) implication in the conditions one seeks to affect. (Gore, 1992, p.61)

Yet, in a teaching context, Gore points out that:

The pedagogical relation of teacher to students is, at some fundamental level, one in which the teacher is able to exercise power in ways unavailable to students. (Gore, 1992, p.68)

This ‘othering’ of those who are to be empowered, she argues, applies equally to academics, whose work is intended in some way to have an empowering effect on teachers.

These critiques of critical pedagogy lead writers such as Gore (1992) and Luke (1992) to propose a feminist critical pedagogy which takes account of the specific historical, cultural and political contexts in which people live, which are in historical relation to other contextual relations and locations. According to Luke, there can be affinities between different understandings and contexts, but she states:

we cannot claim one method, one approach, or one pedagogical strategy for student empowerment or for making students name their identity and location. [...] Nor can we claim to know what the politically correct end points for liberation are for others. (Luke, 1992,

p.48)

Rather than positioning the teacher as authoritative on the patterns of exploitation that exist in society, it is in dialogue with learners that teachers need to make sense of the social relations in which they are all located. All those involved in this dialogue draw upon the resources at their disposal – personal knowledge, skills and lived experience – to make sense of these relations. Instead of expecting such practices to arise at the command of the teacher, they are to be aspired to and struggled towards, whilst at the same time there is a need for the recognition of patterns of social antagonism and power.

These concerns draw attention to the difficulties involved in relating theoretical visions of transformative pedagogies to classroom practice. In the context of chronic intensification of teachers' work (Hargreaves, 1994; Helsby, 1999), and the pressures associated with monitoring, inspection and accountability, the world of practitioners can seem far removed from notions of critical pedagogies and transformative democratic practices. At the same time, there is evidence from other studies (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Smyth et al, 2000) that some teachers use the contradictions and spaces that exist in the controls that confront them 'to pursue a course that they believe is in the long-term interests of the students in their care.' (Smyth et al, 2000, p.51) However, teachers' resistance to external control may be passive as much as active, and involve actions ranging

from ignoring reforms, recasting them, only using certain aspects, or refusing to comply. Such practices may enable teachers to survive but are a long way from models of critical pedagogy. Investigating the perceptions of trainee lecturers offers an insight into the negotiation of professional identities, and allows us to consider transforming practice from the perspective of newcomers to the profession.

### **Constructing teaching and learning: investigating trainee lecturers' perceptions**

In other papers we have examined trainee lecturers' entry into FE communities of practice (Bathmaker and Avis, 2004), and their perceptions and constructions of students and other lecturers (Avis et al, 2002a, 2002b). In this paper we explore the values that new lecturers bring to their work, and how they perceive the reality of teaching in FE, in a context which is far removed from our earlier discussion of critical pedagogy. We do this by examining trainee lecturers' perceptions of their own educational experience, their visions for teaching and learning in FE, and their perceptions of pedagogic practice on placement. We use our data as a basis for discussing, in the conclusion, the opportunities for transformative practices, but in doing so, recognise that our study is small-scale and our data cannot be more than illustrative of our arguments.

The research for the study was undertaken with one year group of full-time students training to teach in further education (totalling 120 students) at a university in England. The study was undertaken during the academic year 2001-2002. Data were collected through focus groups, questionnaires and interviews (see appendices for research instruments used). All students who were present on one day in February 2002 (55 in total), midway through their course, took part in a focus group discussion (students were split into four groups) and they all completed a questionnaire.

In addition, a request was made to all students for volunteers willing to be interviewed individually about their perceptions and experience during their training year, and ten students were subsequently interviewed in May, just before the end of their one year training course (see table 1).

<b>Name *</b>	<b>Subject/vocational area</b>
Brandon	Art and Design
Daljinder	Psychology and basic skills
Noreen	Human resource management
Mike	Psychology
Peter	Tourism management
Naomi	Tourism
Sue	English and Access to HE
Hazel	Dance and performing arts
Barbara	Law

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Carole	English
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**Table 1: trainee teachers interviewed in 2001-2002**

**\*All names are pseudonyms**

In this paper we discuss the data collected from these interviews. The interviews were carried out by three members of the team, two of whom were known to the students. Interviews were transcribed in full. The interviewees ranged in age from early twenties to forties. All but two had graduated sometime during the five years prior to joining the PGCE programme although they had not all completed a degree directly after leaving school. Two were mature students and had taken an Access course to gain entry to higher education.

In the interviews we found that trainee lecturers explained their values and understandings of practice in terms of the inspiration to be gained from studying in their chosen curriculum area, and through reference to the social environment for learning, particularly inter-relationships amongst students and teachers. These two themes predominated in the interviews, running from trainees' discussions of their own educational experience, to their visions of teaching and learning in FE, through to their perceptions of their teaching placement.

### *Memories of own educational careers*

All the trainees had strong images of what they wanted teaching and learning cultures to be like based on their own experience of how they were treated at

school and in post-compulsory education. The nature of the learning environment, and their relationships with teachers, whether positive or negative, appeared to have a profound effect. Those who described their memories of compulsory schooling, tended to have negative perceptions. Carole, who left school part way through the sixth form and went to FE college to continue studying, explained:

I loved primary school but hated secondary. I went to a huge comprehensive. I think there were about 1500 kids there and I found it really anonymous. I mean, I was a real high achiever, I did really well, but I was just incredibly unhappy there, the whole anonymous environment, you know, people don't really know your name, you were a number really. [...] I actually sometimes have nightmares about it, the corridors and assembly rooms, it's just very negative. (Carole)

Another trainee, Sue, spoke of how her experience led her to stop attending her secondary school before she reached the end of compulsory schooling:

From about 13 I didn't go, I went intermittently and the main problem was that I felt that I wasn't in control that I had no control over my life. No one ever asked me why, they asked me the consequences, they asked me what I was doing but no one ever asked me why. (Sue)

It was 20 years before she felt able to return to education to join an access course.

The significance of being treated with dignity was emphasised in the following comment she made about her access course:

It valued me, it valued my experiences and who I was and that's what it gave me. (Sue)

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Carole's perception of studying in FE also contrasted with her memories of school:

I had very supportive lecturers. I had one very supportive lecturer who really encouraged me, noticed I was bright and able, but also encouraged me to go to university, which I wanted to do anyway. [...] And this lecturer in FE, she was just really really fabulous, a great teacher. Perhaps good because she wanted you to do well and get the grades, but also really inspiring, really really skilled and very kind of able to see people's stories, what might be going on and what kind of support they might need. (Carole)

The portrayal of schooling as a place of anonymity (Carole) and lack of control (Sue) contrasted with the language used to describe studying at college. Here lecturers were described as supportive and offering encouragement (Carole), and as valuing students and their experiences (Sue). Both Sue and Carole as well as other trainees defined post-compulsory education, whether they continued from school, or returned to it later, as a different and more positive experience.

Daljinder, who completed her post-16 studies in a sixth form and an FE college, found that:

Both of them were really positive experiences. It wasn't something where I thought 'I just want to go to sixth form college', because both of my experiences had been very, very good, in both my FE institution and sixth form college. (Daljinder)

Brandon who completed a Foundation course in Art and Design at his local art college, said that the teaching inspired him, and he felt encouraged to extend himself partly because of the different teacher-student relations encouraged at

college, which he explained in the following comment:

I particularly remember one occasion, very early on, when I went to the head of foundation, I said 'what do I call you? Do I call you sir, or do I call you Mr [name]?' And he went 'No'. You call me [first name], like everybody else. So it was a very expansive sort of thing. There didn't seem to be any limits to what you could do, and you were encouraged to push it as far as you could. (Brandon)

What these trainees appeared to value, was teachers who showed concern for them as individuals, and who by small actions, such as use of first names, suggested that they treated them with respect.

While this factor was clearly very important, so too was the teacher's interest in their curriculum area. Brandon, for example, described his art teachers in his school sixth form as teachers who 'went beyond what you were supposed to do for the curriculum'. Daljinder, who was inspired by her psychology lecturer at college, explained:

We had 25 people in the class and everyone would just stare at her, while she'd be saying things. I wanted be like that. I wanted to be the teacher who could inspire. (Daljinder)

### *Visions of their own practice*

Their visions of what they wanted their own practice as lecturers to be like drew on this past experience of what made studying a positive or a negative experience. The importance of the social context of learning was explained by Carole, who taught English. She believed that:

It would really be lovely to get them to feel as a group quite safe and quite confident, because often the groups are only like 12 or 14, and I think it's small enough for them to get to know each other and think this is a safe environment. (Carole)

She hoped that what she described as a safe learning environment would help students to become more confident learners.

Trainees also talked of seeking to enthuse students for their subject. Carole, who taught English, wanted to open up students' imaginations, and to help them see things 'a bit more holistically'. She said that when she was preparing, she asked herself 'how do I actually leave this group knowing more?' Daljinder, who taught psychology, spoke of wanting students to develop a passion for her subject. She wanted to inspire students as her own psychology teacher had done, by passing on her own enthusiasm to others. She described this as:

I've got a tingling feeling, to be carried on through my teaching.  
(Daljinder)

Her vision for psychology was what she had valued in her own studies:

Our teacher never said to us, "right, here's the study, here's a theory, and here's the criticism". She'd actually say, "here's the theory, here's the study, let's talk about it. What do you think? How can we criticise and think about what you've learned, think about what you know?" And then we'd sit there, and we'd criticise it. And that's what I wanted. (Daljinder)

Brandon, who taught Art and Design, also stressed the importance of students becoming critical:

If you're teaching Art and Design it's the same as being an artist, because it's all about being critical. Not only critical of your own work, but critical of others. (Brandon)

While the emphasis in their comments was on developing an enthusiasm for the subject, what they said also hinted at the notion of developing an active engagement with the curriculum, through 'being critical'.

### *Experience on teaching placement*

The past experience and visions that trainees brought to the teaching placement context acted as a yardstick against which their placement experience could be measured. Their experience of teaching and learning on placement in FE varied. Six of the trainees described what they saw as a positive teaching and learning culture in the department where they were placed (Carole, Hazel, Brandon, Naomi, Sue, Peter) and a further two (Barbara, Daljinder) contrasted positive experiences in one department with negative experiences in another.

Their perceptions of a positive culture focused on the learning environment. It meant teachers who were friendly and supportive, where there was a bond between the staff. Daljinder and Barbara contrasted between staff who were responsive to students and concerned about them in one department, with lecturers who appeared to have no regard for students in the other.

Two trainees (Mike and Noreen) described negative cultures in their placement

department. Lecturers were described as cynical and demoralised, there was a lack of trust, and what Mike referred to a 'ghetto mentality', and both Mike and Noreen felt that there was little support for themselves as trainees. They felt that such an environment felt intimidating and as Mike explained, it 'sapped your enthusiasm'.

When asked whether they could teach in the ways they had envisaged, six of the trainees (Barbara, Carole, Hazel, Brandon, Daljinder, Sue) explained how they felt constrained by the qualifications and assessment system, which they felt detracted from, rather than enhanced, the students' learning experience.

Daljinder contrasted her experience in the two departments in which she worked, psychology and basic skills. Teaching psychology had been her main goal originally, but had proved a major disappointment. For Daljinder, the psychology curriculum was 'just horrendous', and students were given information, without gaining from it. She felt that the modular curriculum and the assessment requirements got in the way of developing skills of critical analysis, and helping students to think for themselves, and she felt that time constraints did not allow students to develop a passion for their subject. In contrast, what made working in basic skills 'fantastic', as she described it, was that the curriculum was flexible, and she was expected to respond to the needs of the learners as they arose, rather than being constrained by the requirements of a set curriculum.

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Sue's comments in relation to teaching English concurred with Daljinder's perceptions of teaching psychology. She believed that the curriculum and assessment were so restrictive, that 'only the brightest students are allowed to get the beauty, all that beauty of the literature.' She felt that the impact on students was that they became 'materialistic and wanting this end product all the time', having gone through a system of 'watch the board.'

Yet trainees felt obliged to work within the requirements of the qualifications system, for, as Barbara explained 'It's all exam driven.' She added:

I felt I would be wasting their time, filling their heads with things that wouldn't be relevant to them in the exam. (Barbara)

And Hazel, who taught dance, found that when students were involved in other activities such as practical work, they soon became demotivated when it did not count towards assessment:

The first years had performed a devised piece and they had to critically analyse a piece after in the written work, which was then marked. And they didn't get good marks really, but the practical piece that they didn't get marked on was very good. The students were very disheartened and there were a lot of comments that they might not take the subject next year. (Hazel)

The trainees' perceptions of their placement experience presented contrasting images of a preferred teaching and learning culture on the one hand, and one they perceived as negative on the other. While they did not talk in the language

of critical pedagogy, their understandings did seem to offer a basis for constructive debate about transformative democratic practices. However, the context for such debate needs to be considered as well, for it frames and constrains such possibilities.

The trainees in this study appeared acutely aware of the constraints of the qualifications system, and its negative impact on students, and they spoke in detail about the requirements of their own curriculum area. Whilst this may be read as a sign that new lecturers have not simply acquiesced to external prescription, there is also cause for concern as trainees' visions become shaped by the wider constraints that they face (see Avis et al, 2002c). Indeed in the interviews, trainees did not appear to make a connection between the curriculum constraints they themselves identified, and the impact of such constraints on the teaching and learning cultures which they encountered on their placement.

Yet the negative cultures described by some trainees appeared to be closely related to conditions in FE, where restructuring, shortages of staff, and fear of redundancy, had a considerable impact on teaching and learning, and which trainees experienced directly. Noreen, for example, explained that although her placement officially finished in May, she was going to continue teaching at her college until the students had taken their exams in June, because:

there's nobody else to teach marketing to the Travel and Tourism students - that's why they asked PGCE [trainees]. So they are up the creek without a paddle. (Noreen)

The college where Mike was placed had merged with another college and had undergone a great deal of change in the previous two years. The cynicism and demotivation he found amongst staff may well have related to the process of being taken over by another college, and all that such change involved.

Barbara, who contrasted between the A-level and the GNVQ departments in which she worked, explained that the A-level staff feared redundancy:

The staff said that they weren't in vogue any more, "We're the forgotten bunch", and actually they've been disbanded now and the A-level department won't exist any more. The A-level students are joining in with the vocational, so there'll still be the A-level psychology teachers going to the Health and Social Care sector, but there's not going to be a group any more of just these A-level teachers. They felt like the forgotten qualifications, the forgotten few sitting there, and they were all quite negative. (Barbara)

All these instances highlight the importance of understanding pedagogic practices in their wider context, and the problem of working for change only at the level of student-teacher interactions. They point up how forms of critical pedagogy committed to democratic transformation need to operate with an expansive notion of practice that extends interactively from the classroom to the wider society.

**Conclusion: A basis for developing critical pedagogies?**

The reforms taking place in FE in England, as well as in education systems more widely, involve a struggle over what it means to be a teacher, or as Ball (1999) graphically puts it, a struggle over the soul of the teacher. We found that the trainees in this study measured their present situation against their own past experience of education. Their own educational careers were influential in their reasons for moving into teaching in further education and offered insights into the values they brought to teaching and learning. Their talk focused on critical engagement with the curriculum as well as concern about relationships between teachers and students. At the same time, there appeared to be a lack of recognition of the implications of the broader context in which teaching and learning was taking place, and the impact of intensification on the sites in which they were working.

Whilst the evidence of this study suggests that there is some common ground on which to construct new forms of professionalism, it also suggests that good practice, whether that defined by national standards, or as envisaged by academics in favour of critical pedagogies and democratic practices, cannot be achieved without engaging with practitioners and trainees about the wider context in which they work. Otherwise the individual visions they hold may be slowly drained from them to be replaced by cynicism and demoralisation in the day-to-day practice of teaching and learning, and all too quickly, that 'tingling feeling', as Daljinder put it, will evaporate into a dream.

The day-to-day reality for teachers, which involves compromise and accommodation, and which may not appear to challenge the prescriptive curriculum and pedagogic requirements placed on teachers and students, means that it is all too easy for a gulf to build up between themselves and visions of democratic practice put forward by academics. Bathmaker (2001) has drawn attention to the danger that practitioners may become cast as dupes or devils, being seen by managers and policy-makers as failing to comply, and thus undermining a system of rationally-structured education and training, whilst at the same time being seen by academics as conforming with externally-set requirements. Such labelling can rebound on academics through suggestions that they are ideologically driven and have no understanding of classroom practice. To move beyond divisions between theoretical debate and practice, it is useful to interrogate the positions or vantage points taken by these different groups to educational and pedagogic relations, and to consider the progressive possibilities and the limitations that they reveal.

Gaining a deeper insight into the possible basis for practitioners, academic researchers and students to work with one another requires shared understandings. Part of that process involves developing a better understanding of lecturers' values and perceptions of their work, which can provide a basis for exploring the contradictory nature of pedagogic practices and their progressive possibilities. For example, teachers may relate their classroom practices to

students' lived experience, so that students develop understandings of society including patterns of exploitation and oppression. Yet at the same time, such apparently progressive practice may run alongside the reproduction and occupational formation of a section of the middle class, for students may be on a trajectory towards privileged positions. Contradictions such as these call for an understanding of lecturers' positionality as well as the stakes and investments made in particular identities, which in turn can be used to inform an understanding of the relationship of practice to theory.

A partial resolution of these difficulties comes from a re-thinking of critical pedagogies. Conventionally critical pedagogies have been models contrasted against teacher practice, which seek to assess classroom relations against any number of elements: how is difference made sense of? are learners given a voice? does the teacher recognise their power? how are antagonism and conflict addressed? A re-thinking would emphasise critical pedagogies as an aspiration and would refuse an essentialist reading, it would recognise the complexity, contradictions and messiness of classroom practice. In this re-thinking transformative practices are to be struggled towards with all the unevenness and contradictions that this entails. Such a struggle is akin to the model of radical democracy propounded by Mouffe (Zournazi, 2002/2003) which becomes a process towards which we continually work. Mouffe argues that once a pluralist and consensual democracy has been attained it becomes its antithesis, a

totalitarianism that brooks no opposition, and to this extent radical democracy can never be anything other than an aspiration.

The notion of critical pedagogies, in the same way as radical democracy, is an empty signifier. Once it is claimed that it has been attained, new vistas of exploitation, oppression, antagonism and contradiction are opened up (Zournazi, M. (2002/2003). Embracing such tensions involves working with uncertainties rather than certainties, and as a practitioner it may well seem easier to follow a set formula for doing things right, rather than to constantly question whether such formulas amount to doing the right thing. The common ground suggested by the admittedly small-scale study reported here opens up spaces for dialogue and critique about curriculum and pedagogy between academics, trainees and practising lecturers. We suggest that this might be approached through some form of critical pragmatism (Skrtic, 1991), which recognises that critical pedagogies are an aspiration to strive towards, but that they are full of contradictions and tensions, and will always be uneven and fractured.

The research team who contributed to the fieldwork for this study comprised Ann-Marie Bathmaker of the University of Sheffield, and James Avis, Alex Kendall and John Parsons of the University of Wolverhampton.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Charles Clarke's strictures on elitism have a strong resonance not only with functionalist theories of social stratification (Davis and Moore, 1967), but also with meritocratic arguments forwarded by social democratic politicians in the 1950s and 60s. In his 1956 *The Future of Socialism* Crossland wrote: "The essential thing is that every citizen should have an equal chance - that is his basic democratic right; but provided the start is fair, let there be the maximum scope for individual self-advancement. There would then be nothing improper in either a high continuous status ladder... or even a distinct class stratification, since opportunities for attaining the highest status or the topmost stratum would be genuinely equal." (Crossland, 1956, pp.150-1, cited in Parkin, 1973, p.122)

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

(Used with volunteers)

- 1 *How did you come to be training to teach in further education?*
  - teaching?
  - educational experience?
  - life story?
- 2 *Experience of placement college*
  - staff
  - students
- 3 *Curricular experiences*
  - what is offered
  - what you have been involved with
- 4 *Factors which affect practice*
  - curriculum
  - conditions in FE
- 5 *Elements of your ideal teaching session*  
(preferred construction of being a teacher)
- 6 *What gets in the way (of your ideal teaching session)?*
- 7 *How do you see yourself as a practitioner?*
  - in relation to subject
  - in relation to students
  - in relation to constructions of professional

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## Appendix 2

### QUESTIONNAIRE

(Given to all students)

- 1 How would you describe your route into teaching?  
*Please tick one or more*
  - a) could not do anything else
  - b) I drifted into it
  - c) I've always wanted to teach
  - d) Teaching is my vocation*Please expand in your own words*
- 2 Why did you choose to train to teach in the post-compulsory sector?
- 3 How would you describe the role of the further education lecturer?
- 4 What do you like MOST about teaching and working in post-compulsory education and training?
- 5 What do you like LEAST about teaching and working in post-compulsory education and training?
- 6 Starting to work in post compulsory education, what is the main thing that:  
excites you?  
worries you?

## Appendix 3

### FOCUS GROUP

(Carried out with all students present on one teaching day)

*Structure of focus group*

Group asked to brainstorm key issues in relation to the prompt: What are the hot issues about teaching and working in FE?

Group asked to prioritise their issues

Amplification, comments and clarification sought around the issues identified via directed group discussion

Focus groups were tape-recorded, and detailed notes were taken from the recordings.