

0293

## Teachers' Identities in Further Education

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### Background

The training of teachers in further education (FE) over the last decade has been a focus of government with documents ranging from 'the New Standards' (Lifelong Learning UK 2007), Foster Report (2005), and Further Education: raising skills, improving life chances (Department for Education and Skills 2006). The call for an improvement in teacher education, implicitly, requires a better understanding of teachers in the sector in order that such improvement may be met.

This paper aims to provide an understanding of teachers in the sector from the perspectives of their sense of identity as well as their roles in social contexts they are working in. Teacher identities have been a subject of enquiry by writers such as Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006), Moore, Edwards, Halpin and George (2002), Zukas and Malcolm (2002), Bathmaker and Avis (2005), Coldron and Smith (1999), and Robson, Bailey and Larkin (2004). The past contexts of FE teachers often include former occupational experiences in a sector, which has a significant number of vocational-related programmes.

### Research Questions

This small-scale project consisted of eight teachers with teaching qualifications. These teachers were volunteers from a previous research on teacher knowledge, which was funded by the Work-Based Learning for Education Professionals Centre, based at the Institute of Education, University of London. The participants were equally represented in both genders. The teaching settings included FE colleges, adult and community settings and an occupational teaching institution. The subject areas included information technology, dental hygiene, mathematics/adult numeracy, media and communications, art and palmistry. The research questions included:

1. What are the professional identities of teacher in the FE sector?
2. Do past experiences (occupational and other relevant ones) contribute to professional identity and if so, how?
3. Are there any current work experiences that inform one's identity, if so, what are these and how do they inform professional identity?

### Methods

Two types of methodologies were used. They included a questionnaire to illicit information on qualifications, teaching and occupation experiences, age, gender and subject areas. Individual participants were followed up with a one-to-one interview using a semi-structured interviewing approach, which were audio recorded and later transcribed together with hand written notes. The data was later analysed based on the four stages of data analysis by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000).

### Frame

The literature review on teacher identities is categorised into areas of social construction, journey of being a teacher, stability of identities, emotional contexts, and compliance and resistance. Some of the sources include: Bathmaker and Avis (2005), Hodges (1998), Zukas and Malcolm (2002), Coldron and Smith (1999), Hull (2002), Robson et al (2004), Day et al (2006), Day and Kington (2008), Bleakley (2002), Ainley and Bailey (1997) and Moore et al (2002).

### Research findings

The findings may be generally typologized into five identity-related forms. These forms of identity are known as 'spectrums of social polarization'. These spectrums create a sense of journey experienced by the participants in this small-scale project from occupational- to teacher-related contexts, and pre- to post-qualification. The findings provide a way of understanding how teachers in FE respond to their social (life and work-related) contexts in their perspectives as professional teachers. These new understandings also can facilitate those coming into the sector (such as prospective teachers on teacher education courses) with a better awareness of social contexts as well as the meanings of professional identities. The paper concludes by providing further areas for research and some implications that may impact on teacher education, teacher development and policy-making.

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