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## **Cultures and Colleges: the creation and transmission of ideas about teaching in Further Education**

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### **Background**

In the past decade initial teacher training (ITT) for Further Education (FE) has experienced much greater political scrutiny and direction and all FE teachers must now hold or obtain a teaching qualification, which is itself subject to close statutory control. This paper analyses the college placement element of pre-service ITT in the English FE sector and the impact of the placement on ideas about teaching within the wider array of influences on teachers and their practice. This placement experience is examined within the broad context of work-based learning (WBL).

### **Research Questions**

This paper considers the impact of the placement experience in relation to ideas about teaching in FE held in general society by defining cultures and distinguishing their relative influence on ideas about teaching. In examining how notions of FE teaching are created and disseminated it addresses these questions:

- How distinctive are the college cultures that FE trainee teachers participate in during their placement in a college?
- How does participation in these cultures during placement form their approach to teaching in the FE sector?

### **Methods**

The growing body of research into the training of teachers in FE can be categorised under three broad headings: managerialism and performativity (see for example Avis 2002 and Lucas 2007); identity and professionalism (see for example Avis & Bathmaker 2005a and Robson 1998); and professional practice (see for example Wallace 2002 and Bathmaker & Avis 2005b). This paper builds on this research and derives from a study of serving and trainee teachers in a large urban FE college in the north of England between 2005 and 2008. Since cultures can be subtle and experienced differently by different people, especially at the micro-level of a college department, this study employed a variety of methods to gather data as described below. These data were transcribed where appropriate and then coded to produce a complex picture of the influences on teachers in FE that allowed a variety of perspectives.

- Questionnaires completed by two cohorts of trainee teachers prior to their work-based experience.
- Detailed and repeated semi-structured interviews with nine trainee teachers during and after their work-based experience between September 2005 and February 2008.
- Field notes based on observations of these trainee teachers.
- Participant diaries kept by trainee teachers.
- Detailed semi-structured interviews with eight serving teachers carried out between September 2005 and June 2007.
- Field notes based on observations of these teachers.
- An extended activity-based focus group with five trainee teachers.

### **References**

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## **Frame**

The study that this paper is based on sought not only to investigate what trainees did alongside others on placement (participation) but also what they learnt from that (transformation). The study applied and critiqued three theorisations commonly adopted within research into WBL: communities of practice; Cultural Historical Activity Theory; and Bourdieu's concepts of field and habitus. This paper concludes that the Marxist concept of alienation more adequately describes the situation of trainees and teachers in FE and the formation of their ideas and practice.

## **Research findings**

The experience of both serving and trainee teachers was extremely restricted, even within the college. Trainee teachers' placements were characterised by messiness and diversity, but the small groups that the trainees worked within could only rarely be defined as self-sustaining cultures. Ideas about teaching in FE held in wider society were often most influential on the development of trainees' practice, even where trainees were placed within distinctive college cultures. These wider cultural ideas were often shaped by the experiences and expectations of schooling and reflect both society's inequalities and encroachments on the autonomy of serving and trainee teachers in FE.