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Comparisons of the early career and beginning teacher educator: the significant pedagogical and research experiences of more established teacher educators.

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Background

Teacher educators in England are appointed to HEIs as lecturers primarily working within initial teacher education. They contribute to the overall development of student teachers making the transition from students to teachers, and often to the continuing professional development of already qualified teachers. Over the three-year period (2006-9) the authors conducted longitudinal case study research with six beginning teacher educators (BTEs) to identify characteristics of their developing pedagogical, research and scholarly practices (authors, 2010 forthcoming; authors, 2010 forthcoming). These papers highlight a blurring of boundaries as these BTEs cope with the varying demands of teaching and research activities.

Findings at the end of their first year of work as BTEs (authors 2008) point to features in the induction period which were influential in supporting professional learning and the development of an academic identity as teacher educator. These included opportunities for: reflective learning conversations; formal experience of personal academic learning and having effective teacher educator role models. Such opportunities facilitated the remaking of practices and construction of emergent identities in the new workplaces (see also, Murray 2008).

Further, these case studies revealed, in developing pedagogical work with student teachers, a general trend in increasing confidence in relation to: being more experimental; planning for student-led learning and undertaking higher order modelling of practice to include discussion of pedagogical reasoning and questioning of practice and theory (Akerlind 2004; Loughran 2006). Over time, all saw research as a route to personal development (see also, Akerlind 2008), with a shift for some towards establishing oneself in the field, and indication of strong institutional and national 'pulls' towards fulfilling academic requirements of the post.

Research Questions

This paper focuses on these same case studies whom we re-label the 'early career teacher educators' (ECTE), now three to four years into their career as teacher educator. At this next professional stage (post-induction and post-probation), we examine perceptions of significant facilitators and barriers to their career development within their several communities of practice (e.g. their HEI, local schools, professional and academic research networks).

Research questions

- What is the early career teacher educator's rationale for their current - pedagogical practices? - research and scholarly activities?
- What is their most significant - pedagogical experience? - research or scholarly activity?
- What sort of 'picture' can they present at this juncture which would represent their own positions within their various communities of practice?

Methods

The case studies are BTEs in their first three to four years in different types of HEIs in England. Four are involved in the secondary phase of ITE, two in the primary phase. Semi-structured interviews with participants have already been undertaken at six-monthly intervals throughout the three-year

longitudinal study, using mainly 'open' questions to elicit extended responses. With a 12-month gap, we have built on this method of gaining rich interview data, with a further question schedule. Ethical approval was gained from all participants (BERA 2004). Interviews are audio-recorded, transcribed, and checked with individuals for accuracy. Content analyses on transcripts allow further development of conceptual categories using inductive analysis and shared judgement to draw conclusions.

Frame

Longitudinal case study research provides for exploration of the empirical reality of how individuals learn in new workplaces, providing for study of situations, such as the relationship between professional learning and shifts in professional identity, when these are closely bound to the contexts for the working practices (Stake 1995; Yin 1994). It allows more to be known about particular stages of learning journeys and a search of individual and contextual factors for stages on a continuum from novice to more experienced teacher educator. Participants' perceptions can provide realistic, confessional, impressionistic views of these early experiences (van Maanen 1988). We draw on Akerlind's work (2004, 2008) across other subject disciplines to develop analytical categories which include the academics' underlying feelings about their work.

The socio-cultural context of professional learning and the conceptual framework of communities of practice (Wenger 1998) provide the theoretical bases for considering workplace learning in which members of a community learn from each other, how identity is shaped through participation in various communities of practice and how identity also shapes participation in those communities.

Research findings

This study permits a comparison of the early career teacher educator in the post-induction period with the beginning teacher educator (during the induction or probation period). It provides insights into: (1) how early career teacher educators negotiate and enact membership of particular groups or communities and (2) key events in early stages of their long journey from novice to expert teacher educators.

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