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Being a Teacher Educator: pedagogy, scholarship and identity of lecturers in teacher education in further education workplace contexts

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Background

In the UK government policy aims to improve the quality of teaching in the further education sector through improved training and qualifications for teachers (DfES, 2007). Teacher educators, lecturers in teacher education within the sector, are a group of practitioners with a key part to play in this process. These lecturers are training their colleagues as teachers. The programmes are accredited at higher education level but are normally taught in further education colleges. Only a small amount of work has investigated the experiences and practices of this important group of teacher educators. This paper presents findings from a developmental research project with lecturers in teacher education working in further education colleges in the north-west of England. As teacher educators these lecturers are distinctive, because many of them continue to teach in their original further education subject as well as in teacher training. The project is of relevance to those concerned with the development of teacher education in the further education sector.

Research Questions

In a study in the north of England, Noel (2006) estimated this group of lecturers as being more white, female and ageing than the further education workforce as a whole. She argues that their frequently informal recruitment pathways into teacher education are significant. She also suggests that current patterns of informal professional development do not provide adequate support. The lecturers have experienced the imposition of an outcome based approach to assessment of teachers but in different ways may have maintained sufficient agency to mediate this policy (Lawy & Tedder, 2009). The current project aims to build on this work through a focus on the espoused pedagogy of lecturers in teacher education and its relation to scholarship and identity. It asks the question; how do these teacher educators experience their work and see themselves in terms of pedagogy, scholarship and identity? The project combines its research aims with collaborative developmental work in providing a workshop, web-based resources and networking to support professional learning.

Methods

An initial developmental research workshop was used to build on and extend existing networks and to inform the design of an online survey. The survey collected biographical data but also included open questions that helped to inform the development of an interview schedule. Semi-structured interviews with a smaller sample of lecturers were then completed. A qualitative thematic analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) was used to interpret patterns within the experiences and perspectives of the lecturers as expressed in the workshop, survey and interview responses. In an attempt to make the interview discussion more grounded in practice (Eraut, 2000), lecturers were asked to bring a teaching resource or session plan from a recent teacher education session as a focus for discussion. The interviewer encouraged narrative through the use of neutral prompts and checking understanding but also introduced prepared prompts where this was required to cover the research agenda. The lecturers were also asked to construct and discuss a simple map of their key professional contacts and networks.

Frame

A growing body of work examines the experiences and identities of teacher educators in the UK and is mainly focused on lecturers working in higher education institutions who are training school teachers (Murray, 2008, Boyd & Harris, 2010). This study extends this work to consider the

experiences of teacher educators in a different situation. The study is also informed by work on the professional identities of lecturers teaching higher education programmes in further education contexts (Turner, Mckenzie & Stone, 2009).

The current project uses a socio-cultural theoretical framework to interpret the lecturers' experiences and perspectives in relation to their workplace context. In particular the research design and analytical framework is influenced by Wenger's work (1998) on the link between practice and identity in the workplace. The data collection and analysis focuses on the espoused pedagogy of the lecturers in order to gain insight into their professional learning and identity.

Research findings

The data collection and analysis is in progress and the paper will present findings on the characteristics of the lecturers' experiences and the key influences on their pedagogy, scholarship and identity within their workplace contexts. It will propose strategies for the support and continuing professional development of this important group of teacher educators whose distinctive situation provides particular challenges and opportunities for their workplace learning.

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