

Exploring the professionalisation of further education teachers in England

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Exploring the professionalisation of further education teachers in England

The paper captures the professionalisation of teachers in the further education sector by shining a light on their everyday struggle to uphold their ethical goals in support of their students in a climate of performative and regulatory expectations. It reports on a small scale qualitative study in which the six participants were either on the Postgraduate Certificate in Post Compulsory Education course (PGCE in PCE) or on the Masters degree in Professional Practice and Lifelong Education (MA PPLE). They were therefore either student teachers or experienced teachers with different lengths of experience. Students were asked to rank order a set of cards and clarify their decisions. Semi- structured interviews were then undertaken in which the participants were asked to bring artefacts of their choice (potentially from their course of study). Reflection points included the construction of self as teacher and the tensions and impact of a range of expectations nationally and locally. Participants shared responses to continuous change in the sector, their institutions and within their practices. All expressed a common and sustained mission to make a difference, no matter how small, to their students' lives.

Keywords: professionalism; professionalisation; teacher; identity; lifelong learning

Introduction

Written in 2005 but still very relevant today, Gleeson et al. (2005: p.451) reflected how "FE practitioners encompass change readily in a sector where college mergers, reorganisation and redundancy is now a feature of everyday professional life." More recently we have seen Further Education Area Reviews (2015-17) and the rationalisation of further education organisations with mergers and closures and ongoing austerity measures across all public sector funding. Smith and Duckworth (2018, p. 531) stated that "Despite the ideological dominance of this neoliberal skills discourse in further education policy which reifies it as a key part of a national skills "delivery" mechanism, there has been a reduction in government funding for colleges in

the last decade.” Such austerity measures were also reported in the Review of Post 18 Education and Funding (Augar, 2019).

Something that is of great concern currently across the education sector is our students’ and our teachers’ mental well-being; before as well as during the pandemic (Covid-19). Kyriacou (2001) noted how stress comes in many forms and a striving for perfection is something that teachers often have to manage with the sources of stress not only being unique to an individual, but also related to the complex environments they work within. Prilleltensky et al. (2016) identified a number of sources of teacher stress which can include: structural and administrative organisation, teaching loads, amount of paperwork and a limited sense of teacher autonomy and decision-making power.

Worryingly, the Ofsted Teacher Well-Being Research Report (2019, p.4) stated:

According to the UK’s Health and Safety Executive, teaching staff and education professionals report the highest rates of work-related stress, depression and anxiety in Britain. It came as no surprise, then, that when Ofsted asked teachers to contribute ideas for our research programme, teachers overwhelmingly wanted us to research teacher stress, workload and well-being.

As experienced lecturers in post compulsory education and teacher education, the researchers sought to gain further insight in to the professionalisation of emerging and current further education practitioners. Our intent in conducting the research was aligned to Bennett and Smith’s (2018, p.190) emphasis that: “The communication of experience is important because it keeps alive the values that inform practice even in the most hostile and undermining environments”.

The professionalisation of further education teachers

The three researchers teach on the Postgraduate Certificate in Post Compulsory Education course (PGCE in PCE) at a university. Two of the researchers teach on the

part time MA in Professional Practice and Lifelong Education (MA PPLE) course. The MA PPLE is a progression route from the PGCE in PCE as well as from other teacher education and education professional routes. Further education teacher education is not regulated unlike the schools equivalent but it does operate within spheres of compliance (such as Ofsted, the Department for Education, the Education and Training Foundation; ETF, as the sector's professional body). Evans (2011, p.855) defined professionalism as:

work practice that is consistent with commonly-held consensual delineations of a specific profession or occupation and that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the profession's or occupation's purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service provided by, and expertise prevalent within, the profession or occupation, as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice (Evans, 2008, p. 29).

There are therefore a range of influences (such as external stakeholders, new initiatives) that work to "delineate" (ibid) and boundary the further education teacher education curriculum. One such influence came through the development of the sector's professional standards (ETF, 2014); a set of 20 statements. Those standards are viewed as underpinning further teacher education and informing ongoing professional development (such as the professional recognition of Qualified Teacher Learning and Skills). Lucas and Nasta (2010, p.450) identified teacher standards "as cultural tools that reflect the historical circumstances in which they originated and the very different purposes to which they are put, for example by government officials concerned with regulation and course leaders concerned with teaching and assessment". We return to the influence of those standards later.

Within Lucas and Nasta's (2010, p. 448) paper, they suggested that "Most of the literature [on professionalisation], which predominantly focuses on school teachers, points to teachers facing pressure from imposed professionalism yet pointing out that professionalism is constructed intrinsically by teachers themselves, often within their place of work (Gleeson 2005a, 2005b; Nasta 2007)". We all have our aspirations, models and influences that inform our agency within work as well as our everyday life; we identified a few influences earlier in relation to compliance. There are some ongoing narratives within education that still have degrees of resonance. One such can be seen within an OECD (2016, p.12) report:

Education is sometimes perceived as one of the most conservative social systems and public policy fields. But talking to teachers gives one the opposite idea – that there are too many changes imposed on them without much consultation or the necessary preconditions for successfully implementing change.

In an ongoing University and College Union (UCU) Further Education in England research project: Transforming Lives and Communities, Duckworth and Smith (2018, p.540) wrote:

Our claim is not that all teaching and learning in further education colleges can be described as transformative but rather, that despite hegemonic structures and cultures (broadly underpinned by government policy) that incentivize a triple lock of student objectification, TTL [transformative teaching and learning] is still taking place.

It is interesting to reflect that in Gleeson et al.'s (2005, p.459) study:

the vast majority of lecturers interviewed were strategically compliant in their approach to their work. The main element of this response suggests a

commitment to ensuring that students receive a 'quality' education based on a definition of quality through process, rather than just output measures.

Similarly, in a Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education project, Gleeson and James (2007, p.460) recorded that participants “Though apparently conforming, all found ways of providing learners with experiences that they valued and knew were valuable—beyond the syllabus and the timetable—what Robson et al. (2004) call the ‘value added’ dimension of FE practitioners work”.

Gleeson and Shain (1999) coined the term “strategic compliance” in their narrative research on further education professionals. They connected strategic compliance with those instances in the narrative data where: “the ethos of competition does not preclude cooperation or effective networking with colleagues and other institutions” (p.456). Other associated examples included a stronger identification of self as member of the sector over and above own particular institution and; in the words of one of the case study participants, a sense that “Strategic compliers are, as Debra explains, more likely to take the initiative, bend rules and network better than straight compliers or ‘old timers” (p.457). Such actions seem to align with Evans’ (2011, p.868) suggestion that

The ‘real’ shape of teacher professionalism will be that that teachers forge for themselves, within the confines and limitations of the context set by the government’s demanded professionalism’. Her conceptualisation of the ‘shaping [of] teacher professionalism’ reveals it to be ‘a multi-agentic, constantly evolving process.

This connects well with the practices and dialogue around teacher identity and teacher professionalism that run through our own teacher education courses. Daley et al. (2020, p.652) capture some of that same sense in their depiction of schools as: “complex,

multidimensional ecologies that are constituted by the relations that exist between school leaders, teachers, mentors and all members of the school community”. Schools are described as

relational environments [in which] the conditions affecting professional learning- both formal and informal- are constantly dynamic ...Interactions are also multi-layered – between the school system, individuals, classrooms, the community and the policy environment. (ibid)

The word choices of “shaping”, “constantly evolving”, “forge” (Evans, 2011, p.868), “constantly dynamic”, “multi-layered” (Daley et al., 2020, p.652) and the “making” described by Gleeson et al. (2005) are very resonant with the researchers’ experiences of seeing the transition of student teacher to becoming teachers and working with teachers through professional development activities. Daley et al. (2020, p.652) identified schools as “sites of teachers’ professional learning”. We are all variously agentic within a number of learning ecologies in our personal and professional lives. In a comparison of professional learning through two theoretical perspectives of community of practice and ecological learning systems, Wright et al. (2017, p.103) reflected that; within an ecological learning system, boundaries “are much more permeable and transactional, with agency being achieved as a result of individual actors engaging with context in a multi-layered and bi-directional approach”. Ranieri et al. (2019) described how as a teacher in a classroom we create a space for learning; and therefore a learning ecology, typically by setting learning objectives and sharing (in whatever ways we do so) the content of the lesson. They cited Jackson (2013 in Ranieri et al., 2019, p.1675) whose definition of “a learning ecology is “the process(es) I create in a particular context for a particular purpose that provide me with opportunities, relationships and resources for learning, development and achievement” (p. 14)”.

Teacher education

As teacher educators, the researchers have a crucial role in the development of student teachers and established education professionals. That role includes the continuation of their professional development (within the courses noted earlier) and critical reflection (including against the Education and Training Foundation 2014 Professional Standards). Our courses place practice experience as front and centre and are alert to a number of different influences such as: the culture and context of the student's teaching placement (their "site"; Daley et al., 2020, p.652, on the PGCE in PCE) or their employing organisation (MA PPLE); their own autobiographical context; the influence of the tutors teaching, observing, assessing; the content and the assessment on the course of study they undertake.

According to the Department for Education (Belgutay, 2017):

We want to build a world-class further education and skills system that will give people the opportunity to fulfil their potential and high-quality teachers are crucial to this. Continued professional development will help all teachers improve their knowledge and skills. Further education providers are responsible for making sure their teaching staff can access the training and support they need.

Further education is a dynamic sector and our students are themselves in periods of transition – from student teacher to teacher and as teacher in response to institution and stakeholder drivers, curriculum initiatives, new roles or other changes of contract.

Evans (2008, cited in Lucas and Nasta, 2010, p.448)

sees professionalism imposed from the outside through legislation, which is codified. She sees another 'inner professionalism' developing from inside an occupation through sharing within a community of practice thus making professionalism a fluid dynamic phenomenon that is evolving as it responds to change eluding definition by static external criteria".

Such "codification" in teacher education "refers to policies and programmes to equip prospective teachers with knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills needed to be an effective teacher, not only in the classroom but in the larger social context" (Singh, 2019, p.1). In Burton's (2020, p.339) recent examination of in-service teacher education (where the qualification is taken 'on the job'), he defined 'professionalism' as "the ability on the part of the teacher to enjoy a more holistic view of their pedagogy, using this lens of professionalism to act with personal autonomy and confidence in the undertaking of their craft". For Gibbs (2002), "The task of teacher education... is to recognise that teachers have the cognitive capacities to self-reflect, self-motivate and self-regulate, and to harness self-efficacy so that teachers develop competence in exercising control of their thinking, behaviour and emotions". This is the thinking we propose to our teachers and our student teachers. In the current climate (Covid-19), it will be fascinating to see where, if, to what extent we (as educators across our various sectors and settings) can exercise our agency and re-imagine, re-shape and redefine what education looks like, how it is experienced, how we enact it and how our students experience it.

Avis and Bathmaker's (2009, p.214-215) small scale longitudinal study of six further education teachers shared some of the dissonance that teachers (such as those

coming from teacher education courses with little or no prior experience of teaching) might still occasionally feel on entry to the sector:

Our respondents echoed the surprises faced by Wallace's (2002) students when they entered FE. They found the policy context to be constraining, students were frequently lacking motivation, teaching staff were demoralised and management practices were less than helpful. They all sought to do the best for their students and drew on a notion of an enacted professionalism, a mundane form of professionalism that informed their day-to-day practice and that was used to assess their colleagues. This form of professionalism operated with a weakened notion of collegiality, suggesting that colleagues should forego narrow self-interest and adopt a more holistic view.

The teacher role functions within a "multi layered" (Daley et al., 2020, p.652) system and the role itself is revealed to the developing teacher over a period of time, as expressed by the Johari window model: "we don't know what you don't know" (Luft and Ingham, 1955). As Taubman (2015, p.116 in Daley, Orr and Petrie) noted: "Professional formation and development are not clean linear movements. They can be jerky and untidy." Sachs (2001, p.150) proposes that a teacher develops many identities in their role, depending upon the contexts in which they work. For Dweck (1999) two of the essential attributes new teachers need to develop are inherent grit and resilience.

Research aims

The aim of the research was to investigate the growing professionalisation of teachers through the perceptions of Postgraduate Certificate in Post Compulsory Education (PGCE PCE) and MA in Professional Practice and Lifelong Education (MA PPLE) students. The research questions were as follows:

1. What does it mean to be a teacher?
2. How are you learning to be a teacher?
3. What are the various influences on the ways in which you enact the role of teacher?
4. In what ways do you perceive your ongoing learning and development as teacher?

By asking both groups, we accessed a diverse range of experiences and insights (i.e. PGCE PCE with no prior teaching experience, MA PPLE with 1-3 years teaching experience, MA PPLE with more than 3 years teaching experience). Three students from each course volunteered to take part:

MA Professional Practice and Lifelong Education

Individual A: 1 freelance tutor with over 3 years teaching experience (9 years)

Individual B: 1 teacher educator with over 3 years teaching experience (14 years)

Individual C: 1 lecturer with 3 years teaching experience (3 years)

PGCE in Post Compulsory Education

Individual 1: no previous teaching experience

Individual 2: no previous teaching experience

Individual 3: no previous teaching experience

Ethical considerations

The researchers have variously known each participant for at least one year and for half the sample, for more than 2 years. The level of autobiographical detail and the familiarity (secure professional relationships) we had with each participant meant that it was particularly important to return to the BERA guidance (2018, p.8) as to ‘the most relevant and useful ways ...of informing participants about the outcomes of the research

in which they were or are involved'. We thought about the level of involvement participants would be able to engage in; recognising the demands of their work, the course of study and their busy lives. This is in line with BERA (2018, p.19): "Ethical research design and execution aim to both put participants at their ease and avoid making excessive demands on them". In the consent form and information sheet, we set out clear guidance such as: access to summary notes from the first data collection stage (a card sort) before the second stage (individual semi-structured interview) would take place, access to semi-structured interview recordings (each individual's own) via summary notes but also the possibility of requesting the full transcript. Participants supplied voluntary consent and we gave them all the option to withdraw at any time at which point their data would be destroyed. Later on we opened up an opportunity to contribute to the writing process. Two participants did so and are named in this paper.

Approach to data collection

Card sort

Our choice to develop a card sort was based on the desire to generate a range of individual responses to the first Research Question:

1. What does it mean to be a teacher?

Forty statements were compiled with attention to the discourse of the sector. As Gee notes (1990, p.4), "It is sometimes helpful to say that it is not individuals who speak and act, but rather that historically and socially defined Discourses speak to each other through individuals". One such influence was the Education and Training Foundation Professional Standards (2014). The researchers sought to recognise the "Discourse space" (Gee, 2000, p.111) through which our participants and ourselves continue to

travel. We knew that all of our participants “[had], through time, in a certain order, had specific experiences within specific Discourses” (ibid); in this case in the culture and jargon of further education, in the culture and jargon of their university courses and their placement (PGCE PCE) or employing organisation (MA PPLE) settings.

Having worked in further education ourselves for a long time, the researchers drew on our professional experiences and insights as well as current engagement in relevant research in order to create cards that would prompt discussions around the role and duties of the further education teacher. Labels associated with the teacher role such as ‘facilitator’, ‘manager’ and the policy priorities of the further education sector were also therefore reflected within the pack. Combes et al (2004, cited in Brown, 2016, p.10-11) suggest that such an approach “investigates the complexity of different participants’ positions on a given subject where differences of opinion are expected”. As researchers we were particularly interested to see if and where there would be differences of opinion based on different individual contexts and length of teaching experience.

The cards were rank ordered by each participant and then shared within a small group (PGCE or MA). We prompted participants to explain particularly high and low rankings, their perceptions of the activity, similarities and differences, and invited any further comments (statements they would have added or statements they were confused by). In Brown’s paper (2016, p.10), she applies the term “positions” rather than “perspectives” or “attitudes” ... to convey the idea of taking up a stance on something”. It was that sense of taking a stance that we wished to support and to be witness to.

Semi-structured interview

The interviews were conducted with a view to getting greater insight in to individual “positions” (Brown, 2016). One interview took place in Semester One 2019-2020. One

participant (Individual B) wrote a narrative (replacing the 1-1 interview) in Semester One 2019-2020 which was then analysed by a researcher. Four interviews took place in Semester Two 2019-2020.

The interview sought to address the remaining research questions:

2. How are you learning to be a teacher?
3. What are the various influences on the ways in which you enact the role of teacher?
4. In what ways do you perceive your ongoing learning and development as teacher?

To maximise the depth of response as well as support participants in understanding the nature of the interview, we invited them to bring in artefacts as appropriate. None of the artefacts were collated as part of the data collection. As researchers, we had agreed to privilege the story told at that moment rather than adding another layer to it understanding identity “not as a fixed property, but as part of the lived complexity of a person’s project” (Clegg, 2008, p.329).

Insights from the data

Card discussion: 1. What does it mean to be a teacher?

Foucault drew attention to the historical contingency of our knowledge (the order of knowledge within which we enact our “ontology of ourselves” (2008, p.21). As already indicated, all of the participants were well versed in the Education and Training Foundation Professional Standards (2014) and the practices associated with further education. That shared discourse between the participants and the researchers facilitated the co- construction of an “order of knowledge” (ibid). There was for instance a shared understanding between the groups (PGCE and MA) that becoming a teacher is synonymous with ongoing learning. Individual A’s reflection that ‘as a teacher you’ve always got to be continuously wanting to learn’ is naturally applicable here. Our

professional standards refer (as one example) to upskilling in own subject area. For individual 1, teachers were not always subject specialists and might never be in some subjects because, 'it's ever changing, can't get comfortable'.

Peim (1993, p.37) in describing how "A discourse might be characterized as being a specific kind of language, or 'language game' explained that 'this construction always takes place within specific social contexts within specific cultural practices'" (ibid, p.44). "Specific cultural practices" (ibid) were highlighted throughout the discussions such as the embedding of English, Maths and ICT which is present in our practices and "codified" (Evans, 2008 cited in Lucas and Nasta, 2010, p.448) within our professional standards. Individual C identified the importance of promoting current British Values and Prevent agendas. For individual B, some of those practices meant they felt 'pulled in too many different directions': examples being the promotion (explicit teaching) of British Values and Prevent, the administrative burden and the ever-changing dynamics of being a teacher in the sector.

As Smith (2013, p.19) noted: "Subjective voice is multiple, reflecting the many selves within each human identity, and offers a way to explore the social and cultural constructions of identity". All six participants expressed an ongoing passion for teaching. For Individual A, the influence of the students on their professionalisation as teacher was clear:

'my students that's most important they're at the heart of what I do and no matter how clichéd that is that's why I wanted to be a teacher and why I think it's important as a teacher to be passionate about what you do'.

This has some connection too with Gee's (2004, p.70) assertion that "people learn best when their learning is part of a highly motivated engagement with social practices which they value". Individual 1 reflected (with Individuals 2 and 3): 'I think all of us

have got the same ‘strongly disagreed’ with the one where teachers teach cos they didn’t get their preferred job. All of us have got the same one for that’. For Individual B: ‘teaching is about being in a relationship in which learning takes place’. There was an expression of “inner professionalism” (Evans, 2008 cited in Lucas and Nasta, 2010, p.448) therefore alongside a perhaps inevitable recognition of areas of compliance and tension.

Bennett and Smith (2018, p.11) suggested that “The key quality of the FE subject-as-teacher is not to get noticed....To have performance measured is inevitable, what must be avoided is additional scrutiny”. One such illustration came through Individual C’s stark comment that ‘you’re not going to network with people who you are in competition with’. This highlights some of the tensions within the sector; an example being the measurement of teachers against performance indicators (such as the data gathering in relation to student achievement in your class and on your course). There is some resonance here too with Gleeson et al.’s (1999) description of strategic compliers.

Semi- structured interviews

Responses to research questions:

2. How are you learning to be a teacher?
3. What are the various influences on the ways in which you enact the role of teacher?
4. In what ways do you perceive your ongoing learning and development as teacher?

PGCE PCE participants (with no prior teaching experience)

As becoming teachers, their professionalisation is supported by the development of ongoing critical reflection related to their enactment of self as teacher, as teacher within their placement setting, with the sector overall and on their teaching practices. They are enabled to critically reflect on their early and ongoing transition/s throughout the course through a range of lenses (i.e. their own, their students, peers, placement mentor, university tutor, research perspectives etc.). They are also prompted to discover and examine their unbiased and biased assumptions by observing more experienced colleagues and mentors. Such “resources for learning” (Jackson, 2013 cited in Ranieri et al., 2019, p.1675) will move variously between “codified” ((Evans, 2008 cited in Lucas and Nasta, 2010, p.448) and “specific cultural practices” as well as being influenced through choices made by the individuals themselves. Our aim (on the course) is in tune with Burton’s (2020, p.339) definition of “professionalism” as “the ability on the part of the teacher to enjoy a more holistic view of their pedagogy, using this lens of professionalism to act with personal autonomy and confidence in the undertaking of their craft”.

A number of significant influences on their professionalisation emerged. All agreed that there was a lot more to being a teacher than they had first assumed when they started the course. One example related to the degree of pastoral care sitting within the teacher’s role. All participants identified the pastoral and mental health support of their students as challenging with Individual 1 reflecting that pastoral care for students was a bigger undertaking than they had expected. Individual 1 also reflected that ‘I didn’t realise you had to encompass someone who was all knowing about social-care issues and economic issues. I didn’t realise I had to learn that aspect as well as my subject’.

The early sense that ‘being a teacher was being on a pedestal you can just jump on but now I know you can also fall off!’ was very telling. Being a professional does not mean that we are always perfect but rather that we continue to strive towards what is best for our individual students. For one student, their vision of a teacher ‘has changed very much’ and ‘If anything, (what a teacher should be) has become more blurry’. As researchers who have individually taught for over 20 years, this is still a sentiment that resonates powerfully for ourselves. Some of these questions around what it means to be a teacher or educator and what might be possible within that role are ongoing questions and ones perhaps which Covid-19 and the impact of lockdown and online learning has brought to the fore.

The students all described their sense of their professionalisation during the course in a positive light. They recognised the positive impact of their mentors (in their placement settings) and their own students on their developing teacher identity e.g. ‘I have a set way of thinking how things are going to go and when they don’t go that way, I think it’s gone badI can’t see the standard yet. But she (my mentor) has had a very big influence on me, she is very good at keeping me up’ (Individual 1). ‘My students have influenced me. I am not always in their class and they see me around campus and say ‘where were you? We needed your help in lesson’ ...that’s the biggest thing for me, realising that what I do is enough, sometimes more than enough and that is appreciated, not by everyone, but it is appreciated by the people that matter the most (the students).’ (Individual 2)

At the end of the course, and having spent a considerable time in placement, there was a really powerful reflection that: ‘When I think of a teacher I think of this power at the front and I’m not that power at the front. It’s a shared climate (of learning) and I have come to terms with that’.

MA Professional Practice and Lifelong Education (with a range of teaching experience)

In the interview, Individual A referred to having retained the same core values and inhabiting a stable identity that didn't change when teaching different subjects. Their vocational identity was their overriding passion. Changing work contexts had been a trigger for change. Bandura (2001, p.2) describes a desire or decision to "intentionally make things happen by one's actions". The influence of the private sector was a particularly fruitful reflection in which the participant expressed a sense of self as someone with more professional responsibility, who was more trusted, more directly involved in decision making and more autonomous. Some of that 'freedom' also centred on the relationships with the students- that in the private sector the students want to be there and therefore (potentially) gain more from it. Positive and authentic relationship building was at the heart of their sense of self as teacher. In the future, they see themselves running short courses within a private training organisation. Such a move would return them to their vocational identity as well as to their aspirations for more professional freedom.

Individual B shared how in the early years 'saying 'I am a teacher' carried ideas of delivering a subject, passing exams'..'tensions and pressure'. In a performative culture, teachers were 'applying formula or applying methods, evidence based practice just for the purpose of achievement'. They described a pivotal moment (advising a student on HE progression) in their newly acquired role as personal tutor. During that time, 'becoming a teacher meant being committed to developing learning relationships that allowed students choices and supporting their moments of decision making, just being able to do things for themselves and come to understand themselves so much more'. A further change to teacher educator led to increased awareness of the complexities of the teacher role within institutional and policy context drivers and

dynamics. That insider knowledge could be advantageous i.e. ‘When you realise that you can take risks because no one really cares what you do in the classroom as long as you get results and no one complains. Then you get smart about documenting what you need to show’ (again there are echoes here with Gleeson and Shain, 2019, “strategic compliance”). Now being a teacher ‘is a way of being ...that starts to affect how you conduct learning relationships...it’s about having learning dialogues ...listening to students and colleagues and asking far more questions’. They were looking forward to using arts based methods in order to support FE colleagues ‘to uncover where tensions live and how they can claim their teaching as a craft, doing it in a way where they get to discover that ethical sense or sensibility, that critical poise that comes when you are able to use care of the self in the way that Foucault talks about’.

Individual C’s experience of working in the privatised sector ‘opened my eyes to the lack of professionalism and regard there was for qualified teachers’. The naming of teachers as ‘tutor’ and later as ‘coach’ was felt to ‘slowly take away the identity of the teachers’. They expressed how: ‘At the time I was “unconscious of the genealogy of ideas, expressions, turns of thought that inform what we are” (Peim, 2018, p.55). But reflecting on this within the MAPPLE course identified the lack of autonomy I had within this sector. Privatised sectors are a business, and making money, with “targets, indicators and evaluations rather than beliefs” (Smith & O’Leary, 2013, p.247). They described how in one work environment they felt they had more autonomy in the curriculum design and teaching and learning, but then a change in role triggered a shift to a more constrained and structured teaching environment which restricted creativity. It was within an independent school setting that they were seen as having the most currency (having acquired the PGCE). They described this as ‘a big change, but straight away I was lead of curriculum and I had a lot of input into my learners which was great,

I felt I was making a difference, my boss listened to me'. However, the intensity of responsibility proved difficult to manage and the individual found teaching one subject (preferred subject) in a college on a part-time basis suited their value system better. They reflected that: 'I comply now a lot' but retained their sense of self in asserting 'I'm still there and I'm still trying to make a difference'. As with all other participants, Individual C prioritised the students: 'They say 'would you be upset if I left' and I say no, I'm happy because I've done my job then. So that's a celebration every time one gets out the door, a bitter sweet, but going off and flying the nest, I always say I want you to fly my nest.'

In summary

MA alumni described significant influences such as change of job role and change of setting as disorienting and re-framing experiences as to what it meant to them to be a teacher. They all shared a sense of disquiet as to the necessities, challenges and perceived limitations of policy changes (or institutions' responses to policy change). All participants, including the PGCE PCE students, clearly expressed their desire to do their best by their students and themselves.

Conclusion

In no sense was this research designed to reach towards "an ethic of improvement or to an ethic of redemption" (Peim, 2018, p. 262). In line with Bolton's (2014, p. 8) concept of reflexivity, the participants have "point[ed] out inconsistencies (e.g. between espoused and values-in-action) in political, social or cultural structures". What is agreed across all participants is that "no actions a teacher takes can ever be experienced as universally and uniformly positive" (Brookfield, 1995, p.17). As Bolton (2014, p.8) says: "it requires bravery in staying with uncertainty". That "bravery" (ibid) and

“flexion from change” (Wise, 2018, p. 48, in Bennett and Smith, 2018) is illustrated through the participants’ voices. It is that sustained intention/ practice that we hope supports them through their professional lives and which will always enrich the experiences of the students they teach.

Suggestions

There are suggestions that, despite/ in spite of the small scale nature of this study, we would still like to propose. These suggestions connect well with the participants’ own stories and reflections, the researchers’ own ongoing insights in to the FE sector, but also resonate with the work of the sector and a number of high profile professional colleagues in advancing and creating informal opportunities for FE colleagues to come together (through social networking such as via Twitter). The suggestion is quite simply this: that within all of our organisations (across the education sector) we continue to advocate for sustained investment in teachers’ professional development in recognition of the following:

- the impact of multiple changes, i.e. to role descriptors, to subject identity (not just updating but also supporting transitions to teaching in other subject areas), and in moves from one setting to another
- the importance of facilitating shared reflection as a way of tuning (back) in to own values and practices allocating dedicated time on teaching workloads in order to do so
- the value of an ongoing dialogue that actively nurtures teacher as agentic in both the classroom and the institution, supported by the creation of research and learning communities within further education institutions as an incredibly valuable mode of professional learning

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