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Being a Teacher Educator: tensions in the workplace environment of lecturers in teacher education in further education colleges

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Abstract

This study focuses on the workplace experiences of lecturers in teacher education based in further education colleges in the north of England. In one sense it is a study of a subject specific group of higher education in further education lecturers. However these teacher educators have a critical role in the development of teaching quality within the sector. The study uses a socio-cultural framework and semi-structured interviews to consider the agency, professional learning, and identity of the lecturers within their workplace context. The lecturers present strong student-centred values but experience tensions within their practice as they position themselves in relation to college leadership, partnership university departments and the external quality assurance review body. The paper concludes that these teacher educators working in further education college contexts struggle to maintain their professional values and identity because of perceived heavy teaching workloads and powerful accountability agendas of their external review body which are reinforced by institutional leadership. The paper argues that these teacher educators need to be supported to build stronger networks internally with staff development and quality assurance colleagues and externally within the teacher education sector in order to be able to resolve and manage the workplace contradictions that they experience.

Keywords

teacher education; further education; identity; workplace learning; HE in FE

Introduction

This paper considers the workplace environment of a group of teacher educators working in Further Education Colleges in the UK. These lecturers in teacher education are a group of practitioners with a key part to play in the process of training the post-compulsory teacher workforce and helping to enhance the quality of education in the sector. Apart from some introductory courses the teacher education programmes that they provide are accredited at higher education level. These teacher educators are therefore part of the higher education in further education (HE in FE) group of lecturers and their programmes are usually accredited and supported by a partnership with a university Education department. Only a small amount of previous research has investigated the experiences and identities of this important group of teacher educators.

The post-compulsory education and training sector in the UK is mainly based in Further Education Colleges and provides a wide range of programmes at different academic levels. This includes vocational programmes that are delivered in partnership with employers and range from introductory level courses for secondary school age students (14–19 years) to Higher Education foundation degrees for adults. The sector provides a significant proportion of *higher* education programmes in the UK, especially within vocational areas. The same Further Education Colleges also offer traditional academic subjects to pre-degree level and adult literacy and numeracy skills courses. In the UK newcomers to the teaching workforce in the post-compulsory sector are encouraged to gain professional status entitled ‘Qualified Teacher, Learning and Skills’ (QTLS) by completing accredited initial teacher education programmes. Recently this status also qualifies them to teach in secondary schools and this allows them, for example, to be employed directly by a school to teach a vocational subject.

An important characteristic of the work of teacher educators based in Further Education Colleges is that their student teachers may be teaching across a wide range of subjects, with students from a wide range of age phases, who are studying at a wide range of academic levels. The student teachers may be on pre-service programmes and need teaching placements to be arranged as part of the programme. In other cases the student teachers are already in a teaching post and are attending the teacher education programme part-time. A significant proportion of the student teachers are often work-based trainers whose teaching practice is focused on providing vocational training in the workplace. An additional distinctive feature of the work of the teacher educators is that they teach within the institution, the Further Education College that a number of their student teachers also teach in. In this sense their student teachers are also their peers. This is strengthened further for some of these teacher educators because they continue to have some part-time teaching in their original further education subject or vocational area, alongside their peers, in addition to their teacher education work.

This exploratory study asks the question; how do these teacher educators experience and respond to their workplace context? The purpose is to consider how they might be best supported to continue their professional learning. The project is of particular relevance to those concerned with teaching quality in the further education sector. However it is also a study of one subject discipline tribe within the wider group of HE in FE lecturers.

Workplace Learning

The current project uses a socio-cultural theoretical framework to interpret the lecturers’ agency, learning and identity in relation to their workplace context (Wertsch, del Rio and Alvarez 1995). Situated learning theory views workplace learning as participation (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998; Billett 2002; Fuller, Hodkinson, Hodkinson and Unwin 2005) and provides an overarching

framework for analysing the practice and identity of teacher educators based in further education colleges. The teacher educators are in a complex educational workplace context with overlapping networks including their own colleagues within the College, trainers based in partnership employer organisations, and colleagues based in their partnership university department. In addition their context includes professional bodies and government agencies that strongly shape the policy framework, the content of teacher education programmes, the professional standards against which student teachers are assessed, and the external quality review processes.

A useful framework through which to consider the workplace of the teacher educators is the expansive-restrictive continuum (Fuller and Unwin 2003, 2006; Evans, Hodkinson, Rainbird and Unwin 2006). The continuum presents a series of empirically derived pedagogical, organizational and cultural characteristics that may be used to evaluate a workplace environment in relation to workforce development. The expansive-restrictive continuum has been applied to teachers in secondary schools and distinct characteristics related to an educational setting were developed through this project (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2005; Evans et al 2006) and are presented in table 1.

The Workplace Learning Environment	
<<<EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE>>>
Close collaborative working with colleagues	Isolated, individualist working
Out of school educational opportunities including time to stand back, reflect and think differently	No out of school educational time to stand back, only narrow, short training programmes
An explicit focus on teacher learning, as a dimension of normal working practices	No explicit focus on teacher learning, except to meet crises or imposed initiatives
Supported opportunities for personal development that goes beyond school or government priorities	Teacher learning dominated by government and school agendas
Colleagues mutually supportive in enhancing teacher learning	Colleagues obstruct or do not support each others' learning
Opportunities to engage with other working groups, inside and outside the school	Work restricted to 'home' departmental teams, within one school
Opportunity to extend professional identity through boundary crossing into other departments, school activities, and schools	The only opportunities for boundary-crossing come with a major change of job
Support for variations in ways of working and learning, for different teachers and departments	Standardised approaches to teaching and teacher learning are prescribed and imposed.
Teachers use a wide range of learning opportunities	Teachers use a narrow range of learning approaches

Table 1. Expansive and restrictive learning environments for teachers (Evans et al 2006: 53)

The characteristics in table 1 relate to two broad categories. Some are related to organisational context and culture including work organisation, job design, control, and distribution of knowledge and skills. Others are related to how individuals learn through engaging in different forms of participation (Evans et al 2006: 42).

The use of the term 'expansive workplace environment' within the continuum to describe characteristics of a workplace is in contrast with Engeström's use of the term 'expansive learning' (Engeström 1987, 2001). Engeström's use of the term describes work by individuals to resolve contradictions in the workplace leading to change across the activity system, this change is defined as 'expansive learning'. However, there is a link between the two concepts because a more expansive workplace learning environment (Fuller and Unwin, 2003; Evans et al 2006) might provide

affordances for individuals to do the challenging work (or ‘knotworking’) required to resolve a contradiction and bring about expansive learning (Engeström 2004).

Workplaces provide a pedagogical framework as well as being designed to maintain continuity of practice (Billett 2002). In contributing to the training of the workforce of a College, the teacher education team may be viewed as part of the institution’s ‘learning architecture’ (Dill 1999). The position of the team may vary in their alignment with institutional strategy, their integration with human resources, quality assurance or educational development units and their engagement in scholarship and adoption of a critical perspective (Blackmore 2009). Engeström’s activity systems theoretical perspective (1999, 2001) proposes that identifying existing contradictions or tensions within a workplace is an effective approach to understanding how the workplace is structured to support practice and learning. An important tension is likely to exist between the needs of the organisation for continuity of the work and the individual worker’s (teacher educator’s) need to realise their personal or vocational goals (Billett 2002). This key tension provides a possible resolution to application of the expansive-restrictive continuum in parallel with the concept of expansive learning as resolution of contradictions and change in the activity system. This combined approach focuses on the identification of contradictions in the fuzzy learning architecture (Boyd 2010) of a complex academic workplace, where formal and informal learning are blurred and overlapping, and both expansive and restrictive characteristics are experienced by workers.

In a small scale discourse analysis study of academics responses to a specific institutional policy document Fanghanel (2007) uses the term ‘positioning’ to refer to the subtle construction of stances adopted by different individuals and this is a useful reminder of the complexity of trying to understand workplace identities. The teacher educators experience their workplace and build positional identities within it related to their ‘position relative to socially identified others, one’s sense of social place, and entitlement.’ (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain 1998). The current study aims to understand positional identities of college based teacher educators and provide some insight into their workplace learning environment and their response to the tensions that they find within it.

Teacher Educators

A growing body of work examines the academic induction experiences of teacher educators in the UK but this is mainly focused on lecturers appointed to university departments who are training school teachers (Murray and Male 2005; Murray 2008; Boyd and Harris, 2010). This work has identified the boundary-crossing work of teacher educators working in educational partnerships and the way that their previous career as practitioners, as school teachers, influences their identity building within their new academic posts. Work on the professional identity of these teacher educators suggests that sub-identities of teacher educators include ‘school teacher’, ‘teacher educator’, ‘teacher in higher education’ and ‘researcher’ (Swennen, Jones and Volman 2010). The work suggests that university based teacher educators, at least in their first few years in post, tend to be strongly motivated by their contribution to development of new practitioners rather than becoming focused on developing new knowledge in the field through research activity (Boyd and Harris 2010).

In a study in the north of England, Noel (2006) estimated further education college based teacher educators to be more white, female and ageing than the further education teaching workforce as a whole and she argues that this is symptomatic of the sporadic approaches to their recruitment. In the same study it is suggested that teacher educators are recruited from within colleges for being good

teachers in their subject disciplines in an FE context and that they ‘typically remain in their further education colleges, delivering HE within FE’ (Noel 2006: 157). Further Education College based teacher educators have experienced the imposition by government agency of closely prescribed competence based teacher education courses (Maxwell 2009), but in different ways may have maintained sufficient agency to mediate this centralised policy (Lawy and Tedder 2009). Further Education College based teacher educators appear to emphasise reflective practice and debate around educational theory as central to teachers’ initial training and continuing professional development (Harkin 2005). However, a study of further education teachers talking about their students’ learning (Salisbury, Jephcote and Roberts 2009), found that many of them base their identity on experience within their vocational subject. The current study uses interviews, focused on recent changes in practice, and aims to give voice to this group of teacher educators.

Higher Education in Further Education

FE teacher educators are mainly providing higher education programmes within their further education college context. In higher education approaches to teaching may be considered as ‘student-focused’, with the intention of conceptual change, or ‘teacher-focused’ with the intention of transmission of knowledge (Prosser and Trigwell 1999). Research suggests that higher education in further education lecturers’ espoused views of teaching are dominated by student-focused approaches (Burkhill, Rodway-Dyer and Stone 2008; Salisbury et al 2009) and they perceive scholarly activity ‘in terms of how it will enhance their teaching’ (Harwood and Harwood 2004: 163).

At institutional level, evidence from the literature suggests that there are significant challenges concerning the teaching of HE programmes within predominately FE focused workplaces (Harwood and Harwood 2004; Avis, Kendal and Parsons 2003). Young (2002) argues that in further education workplace contexts a divide between further and higher education is characterised by polarised accounts of anxiety associated with understanding the cultural norms of higher education. The partnership of further education based teaching teams with a university department offers some potential for collaborative development of scholarship but may be largely focused on quality assurance (Trim 2001). However the position and power of teacher education departments in further education Colleges is particularly significant because of the place of their contribution towards staff development.

The study

This study used semi-structured interviews with 12 teacher educators based in further education colleges in the north of England. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The interview schedule included a primary question asking the teacher educators about recent changes in their practice and the source of those changes from their perspective. A second question focused on the espoused pedagogy of the teacher educators. The final question asked them to explain their key professional values. The questions and suitable neutral follow-up prompts and checking were used to encourage narrative in order to probe the contextual influences experienced by the teacher educators.

A qualitative thematic analysis (Ritchie and Lewis 2003) was initially used to interpret patterns within the experiences and perspectives of the lecturers as expressed in the interview transcripts. The analysis considered influences on the teacher educators and their positioning within the workplace. The workplace learning environment continuum (table 1) was then used as an analytical framework.

The community of teacher educators based in further education colleges in the north of England is reasonably small and so biographical details, from the survey response and the interviews, such as length of experience and subject specialism, are only reported in a generalised way in order to protect anonymity. The project was given clearance through the ethics committee of the University of Cumbria.

Findings

In this section four themes emerging from the analysis of interview transcripts are presented and exemplified through the selection of indicative quotes to give voice to respondents and a level of transparency to the analysis. Secondly the expansive-restrictive workplace learning continuum is represented with summarised characteristics and tensions arising from the analysis of the workplace experiences of the teacher educator respondents.

Teacher Educator Values: Putting Students First

Most of the teacher educators identify one of their core values as putting the needs of learners first, they claim to be student-focused:

I suppose I sound quite cheesy but its that individual learner, going through the course, coming out the other side, feeling its valuable and that its had an impact, and we have people who are on the course because their employer says...and I don't want them to feel that this is just an exercise...and they will feel empowered... TE9

In the case of these teacher educators however their perspective is layered in the sense that their immediate learners are their student teachers but they also feel a responsibility to the students of these student teachers:

So it's...not just them as a student [teacher] that I'm thinking about but also I'm thinking about the impact of that person on their students...I mean ultimately...at the centre of the value base has got to be the welfare and well-being of the students really and what you're doing is you're investing in their future... TE6

This layered nature of teacher education pedagogy emerges throughout the analysis and forms an important element of the complexity of the workplace environment of the teacher educators. In discussing their approach to teacher education the teacher educators identify as a key challenge the wide range of their student teachers' subject disciplines or vocational areas and the wide variation in their workplace settings:

I think the hardest thing is when you've got people [student teachers] who are identified in a training role and they don't have the luxury of having a cohort [of students] who they are going to see each week for a long period of time...[for example] twenty four of them were...Police Trainers...and again it's - even language - they talk about 'timetables' rather than 'schemes of work', and then we have people delivering Yoga and Construction - it is so varied and their roles are so different... TE9

In addition to this complexity some teacher educators raise the issue that some of their student teachers are being prepared for situations where they will be teaching on programmes at different academic levels:

Very different fields and different levels...because if you think about it what are we asking lecturers to do in their teaching? We're asking them to be a school teacher without having the conditions of a school teacher. We're asking them to be a Sixth Form teacher. We're asking them to be a further education teacher with the adults and we're asking them to be a higher education lecturer with that and can you see ...and maybe the teacher training there needs to be more emphasis on that... TE10

The teacher educators recognise the complexity of their student teacher groups and of their own role. To some extent the teacher educators conflate their perspectives of their student teachers and the wider body of further education students:

...lots of people give up education because of their experience, you know, of school and stuff like that, and I don't want anybody I'm training to do that... TE12

This is particularly understandable because the teacher educator is working in the same institution, often the same building, as many of their student teachers and of the wider body of further education students.

In terms of positioning, some of the teacher educators identify differences between their professional values or priorities and those of their college's institutional leadership:

The management aren't going to be listening to this because I think my professional values are more learner based than they are institutional based... TE8

Overall the teacher educators are working in a complex situation and claim to maintain student-focused values in their practice as a key facet of a layered approach – from teacher educator, through student teacher, to students. It is important to note that the further education lecturers experience their workload as heavy and this constrains their activity and forces them to prioritise. The complexity of the teacher educators' work is partly explained by the range of student teachers on their programmes and the contexts, subjects, programmes and students that these student teachers teach.

Institutional Influences

An issue raised by the teacher educators is the academic capacity and in particular the level of literacy skills of their student teachers. This is not merely an issue for recruitment to the teacher education programmes themselves but is closely related to appointment of new lecturers by their College because completion of a teacher training programme is generally a condition of employment / probation.

...some of the people we get in are academically not at the level we need to start the programme so really there's no link between HR [human resources] and the team...HR are employing without any, it seems to me, huge thought as to whether they can achieve the qualification they're telling them is a condition of their Contract of Employment. And that's tough. That's tough on them and it's tough on the team because we're under huge pressure to get the staff through. TE5

There is an apparent tension centred on the role of the teacher education team because their work is closely related to management and human resource issues of quality assurance of teaching and learning. In general the teacher educators recognise links but position themselves as distinct and separate teams from the quality assurance and professional development unit within the institution. They generally see their accountability as being to their line managers in terms of simply being another subject discipline team and the College as an institution treats them as such:

What they're [the College] looking for is - is this person on a course, are they attending? And then every September I get asked by HR [Human Resources] who was internal [a member of teaching staff] that completed your programmes? TE9

The quote above illustrates the considerable distance generally apparent between the teacher educator teams and central human resources units.

Session planning and the format of planning documents was an area raised in which there were tensions between the institutional approach to assessment of classroom performance as part of quality assurance and the planning that the teacher education team wished to use:

...it contrasts to the lesson planning models which the University likes us to use so there is sometimes mismatches between, not just about that but many issues, I guess as well, about what the College sees as important in the teacher training role, more in terms of staff development for their own staff, rather than a slightly more global model of people being trained to work across the sector so that throws up an interesting dynamic on the managerial lines that we work TE2

This suggests that institutional management may be trying to position the teacher education team as part of human resources within a quality assurance framework and the teacher education seem unsure about this element of their role.

The analysis suggests that teacher educators are managing tensions between human resource and quality assurance priorities and procedures and their current collective identity as a subject department and teacher education programme team. However a small number of the teacher educators recognised action research as an essential bridge that helps to resolve tensions between quality assurance and a critical scholarship of teaching:

...I think an effective Quality Department is one that does quite a lot of research to inform their judgements...the top line stuff, the survey data doesn't tell you anything but then you start digging deeper...I think, so to me they co-exist really and I think quality is about measurement and it is about understanding and getting some evidence for what's going on and then acting upon that and then trying to change that if it needs [to be] changed so to me the two co-exist. TE6

Where three individual teacher educators also held specific roles or had good informal links to colleagues involved in staff development and quality assurance then they were able to articulate clear links and common agendas as well as the apparent tensions between the two areas of work. But this appeared to remain at individual level rather than as a recognised and essential link between the different teams.

In the interview responses, with one exception, the teacher educators do not foreground scholarly activity as a source of changes in practice or as informing those changes. They feel strongly that their

institutional management team provides no time allowance for scholarship, that it is therefore not valued highly within the institution, and that is very challenging to fit into their heavy workload. However with prompting they do present engagement in formal courses, such as Masters level study as part of their professional development and an influence on their approach to teacher education although these are largely completed in their own time. They generally acknowledge that scholarship should be part of their professional learning because they teach on higher education programmes and in some colleges they report signs of increasing expectations for scholarship. In a few cases, where there is strong supportive partnership with a university department, teacher educators have presented their practitioner research projects at conferences and have been involved in writing for publication.

The influence of the institutional leadership and management on the teacher educators appears to be closely bound up with the influence of the external quality assurance review body (Ofsted).

Review Body (Ofsted) Influences

A policy level tension identified by teacher educators that appears to affect further education provision widely, including their own management of teacher education programmes, is between the learner-centred focus that external quality assurance review bodies (such as Ofsted) require and the funding model that emphasises successful completion of awards within specific time periods. This tension over funding may encourage lecturers to steer students onto courses that they will comfortably succeed on. This seems reasonable but it may be that in terms of student potential a higher level course would challenge and extend them, but perhaps would include some risk of failure or the need for an extended period of study.

...the common inspection framework which is obviously the policy document that [the external quality assurance review body] Ofsted use when they come to look at what we do, is very focused on the student and the outcome for the learner...however we have...a funding body...[that asks]...are we value for money simply based on a statistical data so there's no real issue, there's no real gauge of quality of the experience for example...They're interested in do people pass?...So sometimes the [economic] imperative is to put in place a set of policies without really thinking about the impact of those policies on the learner. TE6

Teacher educators express the need to deal with this tension in their own recruitment practice but also feel they need to teach their student teachers to appreciate this aspect of their policy context. So teacher education teams see the benefit of retaining some measure of independence from their institutional management team and human resources department, not least because of the financial drivers that shape recruitment practice in the further education sector (Smith, 2007). This example helps to illustrate the way that teacher educators are trying to retain some independence from institutional management in order to develop their student teachers as critical thinkers able to understand their role within their workplace setting.

An additional tension arises in the experience of the teacher educators in relation to observation of their students' teaching. Observation of teaching is seen by teacher educators as an essential element of teacher training and is generally used in a formative assessment approach to support reflection and development of practice. Co-observation of student teachers, alongside experienced subject specialist mentors, is seen as a useful professional development activity for all concerned and as helpful in focusing on subject specific pedagogy and in assessing the curriculum subject knowledge of student teachers. Co-observation has been introduced in some teacher education programmes partly in response to the external quality assurance review body's (Ofsted) influence and this may be seen as

a positive outcome of the review body's influence on practice. However, examples of institutional influence in this area has included co-observation with curriculum managers, the student teachers' line manager, rather than simply observation by a more experienced colleague. This reflects the institution's aim to align observations within the teacher education programme to observation as part of quality assurance processes across the institution. In this way the intention of the teacher educators, to provide formative assessment and feedback, is to some extent modified at institutional level in response to priorities to audit teaching practice.

The idea of grading every observation appears to have arisen largely due to pressure from the external quality assurance review body (Ofsted) but this was mediated by the teacher education partnership:

...it was a National debate because we like to be seen as a supportive mechanism and our observations are supportive and in this Institution they differ from the [audit] observations and you know we had this notion of performativity, people will not take a risk if they know they're going to be graded. People will be very mechanistic in their practice if they feel there's a chance that their grade will come down so we had all that discussion. TE1

The teacher educators position themselves, in this case in relation to observation of teaching, as supportive of the development of their student teachers rather than as part of the quality assurance audit grading process. The partnership of FE Colleges working with the university department reached a compromise and this went some way towards the requirement for grading coming from Ofsted but attempted to maintain a formative approach to assessment of teaching observation within the programmes. The partnership work helped to mediate the impact on student teachers of the downward policy pressure from the review body. The tension and interaction with institutional audit and priorities also becomes apparent because Ofsted do not merely have a role in review of teacher education but also of the quality of provision across the Colleges programmes:

...[the programme's teaching observation proforma was] designed with those [Ofsted criteria] in mind and there is a link and part of that was feeling a responsibility to our Trainee Teachers that when they finish with us and the initial teacher training finishes and they're cast out into the Institution that Ofsted type observations by audit teams, internal quality teams, isn't then a shock and we're not grading them in 1's and 2's and then the audit team come crashing in and say 'well actually you're inadequate'. TE?

This example illustrates the way that teacher educators are positioning themselves and managing the contextual influences of the external review body (Ofsted), their institutional management team, and their University partnership department to develop their practice. They are finding compromises for their practice that enable them to retain their identity as teacher educators.

University Department Partnership Influences

Teacher educators identify colleagues in their team, in nearby colleges, and in some cases in their partnership university department as important sources of support for development of their practice and programmes. They also value their own completion of formal short courses or longer programmes as part of their own professional development although they complain that the study needed for these is within their own leisure time.

At its best some of the teacher educators experience their partnership with a university department as a very positive support not merely for programme development but also as offering opportunities for

scholarship and research activity. They position their relationship with the university department as partnership and feel valued within that and, for example, feel able to influence key curriculum development decisions. In these cases the university offers them opportunities to attend workshops or seminars, to collaborate with higher education based teacher educators, to present at conferences, and to write for publication.

Although many respondents were positive about their partnership university department there were some tensions raised, for example in feeling that the university dominated decisions on curriculum development:

...in a sense, there's an inevitability about the fact that if somebody is not working in the FE sector that they will misunderstand some kind of interpretations of what is happening in that sector. TE2

A significant proportion of teacher educators appear to have a much more distanced relationship with their partnership university department that seemed to be much more about quality assurance than collaborative development. In relation to programme and teaching strategy development the teacher educators particularly valued informal collaboration with colleagues in their own team and with teacher educators in other nearby colleges.

Positioning of teacher education

Overall, the analysis reveals an apparent dilemma within the further education workplace in relation to teacher education. The teacher educators appear to prefer maintaining their position as a distinct subject department team because, with some support from their partnership network and university department, they feel able to remain close to their student-focused values and their identity as further education teachers. With some exceptions (Crosland, 2009) they do not seem to be tempted by the possibility of becoming more integrated with institutional leadership, quality assurance and staff development. This position appears to have been accepted by institutional leadership, this study has not gathered their perspectives but we might speculate that simply dealing with teacher education as just 'one more subject departmental team' is perhaps convenient in relation to their priorities. The dilemma around the position of teacher education within further education is in some ways comparable to the positioning of academic development teams within higher education (Land, 2004).

Tensions in the workplace

The findings of the analysis are related in table 2 to the expansive-restrictive continuum. In this case, in addition to identifying characteristics of the workplace environment, the tensions identified within the workplace experiences of the teacher educators are emphasised.

The Workplace Learning Environment	
<<<EXPANSIVE	RESTRICTIVE>>>
Close collaborative working with colleagues	Isolated, individualist working
<i>Teacher education teams are usually small but appear to be experienced as supportive and collaborative. However workload is experienced as being so heavy that it tends to exclude time for collaboration.</i>	
Out of college educational opportunities including time to stand back, reflect and think differently	No out of college educational time to stand back, only narrow, short training programmes
<i>Some teacher educators do participate in taught programmes at Masters level. However college leaders may view Masters level study as individual endeavour and partner university departments vary widely in the support they offer for scholarship.</i>	
An explicit focus on teacher educator learning, as a dimension of normal working practices	No explicit focus on teacher educator learning, except to meet crises or imposed initiatives
<i>Teacher educators are focused on development of their programme and aim to model good practice. However heavy workload is seen as severely constraining their engagement in scholarship.</i>	
Supported opportunities for personal development that goes beyond school or government priorities	Teacher educator learning dominated by government and school agendas
<i>Influence of the external review body (Ofsted) is mediated to some extent by teacher educators. However the influence of Ofsted is felt to be generally reinforced uncritically by college leadership.</i>	
Colleagues mutually supportive in enhancing teacher learning	Colleagues obstruct or do not support each others' learning
<i>Teacher educators generally value the support of colleagues in their team. However the generally small size of teams means that networking with external colleagues is important for professional development.</i>	
Opportunities to engage with other working groups, inside and outside the college	Work restricted to 'home' departmental teams, within one college
<i>Teacher educators engage with workplace mentors and to some extent with partnership colleagues. However they often have very limited links to human resource, quality assurance and professional development teams.</i>	
Opportunity to extend professional identity through boundary crossing into other departments, college activities, and colleges	The only opportunities for boundary-crossing come with a major change of job
<i>Teacher educators generally value links with mentors and partnership network. However they find opportunities to interact are limited by workload and time constraints.</i>	
Support for variations in ways of working and learning, for different teachers and departments	Standardised approaches to teaching and teacher learning are prescribed and imposed.
<i>There is a wide range of student teacher subject areas and teaching contexts. However the external review body (Ofsted) and institutional influence strongly shape agreed conceptions of 'good practice'.</i>	
Teacher educators use a wide range of learning opportunities	Teacher educators use a narrow range of learning approaches
<i>Teacher educators aim to demonstrate effective teaching including a variety of strategies. However the variety within student teacher groups and institutional notions of 'good practice' constrain this.</i>	
The collective professional values of teacher educators are respected and validated	Professional values are prescribed by college agendas
<i>Teacher educators express strong values of being student (teacher) centred. However this may conflict with institutional approaches to observation of teaching and to aspects of student recruitment.</i>	

Table 2: Workplace tensions experienced by teacher educators in this study compared to the expansive-restrictive continuum by Evans et al 2006: 53

Overall the analysis suggests that despite some characteristics of an expansive workplace learning environment the teacher educators experience several tensions that are felt by them to restrict their professional development. The expansive – restrictive framework (Evans et al. 2006) is an

empirically based set of workplace environmental characteristics and so it is not surprising that differences were identified when applying it to a different set of workers in a different workplace. In table 2 the differences are reflected in the statements set out against each characteristic. They are also picked out by the identification of the apparent workplace tensions. The application of the framework to the HE in FE teacher educator data raised some analytical problems for the research team because of the way that the original framework tends to appear as a dichotomy with transparent value loading. For example, in relation to the first characteristic, collaborative working may often be productive but sometimes individual autonomy might be a positive and creative opportunity within a workplace. In addition the ‘expansive’ characteristic of collaborative working appears to potentially clash with the ‘expansive’ characteristic of ‘support for variation in ways of working and learning, for different teachers and departments’.

Implications

This is a small-scale study and the workplace context and perspectives of teacher educators’ varies widely even across a relatively small number of institutions. Larger scale studies that engage with teacher educators but also with student teachers, institutional management, professional and review body colleagues and University partnership departments would be helpful in considering different stances on the progress and purpose of teacher education in the post compulsory sector. Despite this limitation the current study has shown that the workplace context of further education colleges powerfully shapes the pedagogy, practice and identity of teacher educators. In particular the accountability agendas of the external review body (Ofsted) and institutional management are dominant influences whilst support from a strong partnership with a university department and other College teacher education teams may help to mediate these influences and promote scholarly development. In attempting to apply the expansive-restrictive continuum to a particular workplace situation the study has also sought to identify tensions within the workplace. The tensions identified suggest that in educational workplace settings the characteristics of an expansive environment may be more complex and contested and less dichotomous than those presented in the continuum.

In particular the paper concludes that these teacher educators working in Further Education College contexts struggle to maintain their professional values and identity because of perceived heavy teaching workloads and powerful accountability agendas of their external review body (Ofsted) which are reinforced by institutional leadership. The position of the teacher educators, and their role as a team within their workplace, appears to be contested and uncertain especially with regard to staff recruitment, teaching quality assurance and enhancement. This workplace context appears to constrain the teacher educators’ ambition, through their use of a ‘layered’ pedagogy for teacher education, to develop student teachers as critical thinkers who are well prepared to contribute to development of their profession and to the enhancement of the further education learning experience for students.

One implication of the study is the apparent need to build stronger relationships between teacher education teams in further education Colleges and their institutional leadership and central development units. This step would help to clarify and strengthen the positional identities of the teacher educators (Holland et al 1998), and help to strengthen the learning architecture and pedagogical framework of the workplace (Dill 1999; Billet 2002). For example more involvement of teacher educator teams in institutional policy development in relation to teaching and learning might help to build shared understanding with management, quality and staff development colleagues.

A second implication of the study is the need for support from institutional management so that teacher educators are able to fully engage with their partnership university department in order to gain support for scholarship and research activity rather than simply quality assurance (Trim 2001; Jones 2006; Avis et al 2003). This recognises the significance of the partnership in creating a more expansive workplace learning environment for the teacher educators and places a significant responsibility on those university departments to make a full contribution to the partnership. It includes the important informal networks for supporting professional learning but also opportunities to engage in relevant formal Masters level programmes.

A third implication of the study is the need for the sector to further investigate and resolve the apparent contradiction that appears to be experienced by FE lecturers, including teacher educators, in their recruitment of students onto programmes. In line with their principles as educators they want to recruit students onto programmes at a level that will provide challenge and progression, but the financial incentives for their institution appear to encourage them to guide students onto programmes that are well within their capability, even perhaps at a lower level than is educationally appropriate. Teacher educators in this study experience this tension themselves in relation to their own programmes but also through trying to help their student teachers to deal with the issue.

Overall this study suggests that teacher educators in further education colleges in England are committed to their student teachers and to their students in turn. They work hard to develop new teachers who are critical thinkers and confident practitioners. With appropriate leadership in clarifying their purpose they might increase their influence on teaching quality across the sector.

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