

## Breaking the mould: profiles of six pioneer trainee or beginning teachers

**Margaret McLay**

*University of Huddersfield*

HUDCETT

### Abstract

There has been much recent attention on increasing the diversity of teachers in the Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS) in order to provide a more representative workforce. This is seen as vital not only in engaging learners from minorities but also in increasing the experience of others in working with under-represented groups. There has been less attention on how to support and sustain teachers from minorities once in post. This study profiles six pioneering teachers/trainees, looking at how they came into their chosen profession and subsequently into teaching, and what processes and attitudes help or hinder them in their work.

### Key words

Diversity; Equity; Minority Groups; Social Justice; Teaching Profession.

### Introduction

The work reported here is an extension of previous research examining the profile of trainee teachers on in-service and pre-service courses at the University of East London and the University of Huddersfield (McLay, 2008). That research was concerned with investigating trainees' reasons for choosing a career in teaching, in establishing how far they felt that their expectations of teaching had been met and consequently how comfortable they felt in their newly-chosen role. Attention was given to possible differences in experience by age, gender, ethnicity and disability.

The profile of teachers in the post-compulsory sector has come under increasing scrutiny. In the context of schools, Menter et al (2006) summarise the case for a representative teaching workforce in terms of social justice: equality of opportunity for all groups, providing role models for under-represented students, and increasing the pool from which the teaching-force is drawn. Recent European Employment Directives have attempted to embed these values through legislation to promote equality of opportunity with respect to gender, ethnicity, disability, age, religious belief and sexual orientation.

Turning to the post-compulsory sector, Ofsted (2006) found teacher training courses still wanting in targeting under-represented groups. In 2008 the situation had still not developed significantly:

*'...as reported in 2005/06, the participation and achievement of under-represented groups were not evaluated systematically enough to inform further action to bring about improvements.'*

(Ofsted, 2008: p. 17)

### Rationale

Attracting teachers who break the mould in some way is only the first stage on the way to more lasting representation. In order to retain people from under-represented groups, it is necessary to consider what changes to institutional principles are required, and what level of support all colleagues would need to create and sustain a truly inclusive ethos. The expression 'pioneer' is a useful term to encapsulate the mould-breaking nature of these teachers. As pioneers in some way they will inevitably stand out, attracting greater attention. This attention may be welcome or unwelcome depending upon the ethos of the workplace and the attitude of colleagues and learners. The literature on attitudes to pioneering women in educational management provides a useful basis. The pioneer might be seen as ushering in fresh ideas (Russell, 1998; Cole, 1998). Sometimes it is felt that new ways of working will succeed where others have failed: a respondent in my research with female headteachers (McLay, 2004) observed that governors of independent schools in difficulty will sometimes turn to a woman because they have tried everything else. The pioneer might also be seen as a role model to others, either colleagues or learners, from the same under-represented group (Lumby et al, 2005).

The Commission for Black Staff in Education (2002) notes the importance of positive role models not only for the minority groups but also for the majority if they are to '*function properly within a diverse society and the globalised economy*' (p. 43).

Conversely, the pioneer might be seen as a threat to the existing culture. Davidson's (1995) research with senior female staff in coeducational schools belonging to the HMC uncovered hostile attitudes to females appointed to the senior management posts newly created as schools moved from all-boys' foundations to coeducation. The very appointment of a pioneer might be seen as tokenism:

*'One legged, black lesbians will get the promotion just because they are women.'*

(Davidson, 1995: pp. 2-3)

Such attitudes often derive from fear of the unknown; from a lack of experience of working with under-represented minorities (Maddock and Parkin, 1994). These attitudes may surprise or shock the pioneers who may not categorise themselves according to common stereotypes. Rennie (2008) reports that when 700 trainees in the Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training were asked to describe their identity, the respondents:

*'...chose to describe their identity in terms of words that denoted their personality, skills or social role. Very few trainees chose to describe their identity in terms of the commonly equality monitoring categories of: ethnic origin and race, gender, physical characteristics and disability, religion, sexuality and age.'*

(Rennie, 2008: p. 5)

Other pioneers may foresee difficulties so that those with unseen disabilities may avoid declaring them in order to avoid the threat of adverse stereotyping, wishing to be assessed on the strength of their abilities rather than their disabilities, as Rennie (2008) observes.

Increasing diversity is not just a matter of ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief and age. It is often a matter of socio-economic class. Maguire's (1999) case study reports a clash of cultures between a working-class trainee placed on teaching practice in a middle-class school. Socio-economic class appears to be much less of an issue in post-compulsory education, which is altogether more inclusive (Bailey, 2007). This very diversity, however, encompasses cultures which may have few common bonds (Robson, 1998). Some individual cultures can tend to be exclusive, for instance, one East London college had a large Construction provision which was largely white, working-class and male despite the diversity of the student body and the wider community which the college served.

### **Supporting under-represented groups**

Regarding good practice in attracting and supporting under-represented groups in CPCE/T centres, Rennie (2006) found the following effective interventions:

- taster sessions
- provision of role models
- promotion of an inclusive ethos and support for individual trainees.

Turning to the question of how under-represented groups may then be further supported through their careers, the Commission for Black Staff in Education (2002) noted that a significant factor in the career development of people of colour was access to a strong mentor network. Colleges which were making a real difference had in place committed leadership, clear policies, understanding by all stakeholders of their responsibilities, the mainstreaming of the equality agenda, promoting multi-cultural images, data collection and analysis, positive action to meet the needs of minority groups, and regular reviews of processes. Similarly Lumby et al (2005) found content (of policies and curricula), processes, structures, staffing and infrastructure were important factors in sustained support.

Such pointers are clearly only the first step to creating a culture where pioneers of under-represented groups may feel comfortable. Merely monitoring for equal opportunities where responsibility ends at the moment the boxes are ticked does little to embed a culture of inclusion within an organisation (Lumby et al, 2005; Morrison, 2006; Rennie, 2008). Training, formal or informal, also needs to be more profound: one or half-day 'awareness' sessions have little impact on organisational ethos (Morrison, 2006). Organisations which followed a more freestanding approach recognised issues of diversity and inclusion and their likely benefit to the organisation, but were *'less sure about how such activities might be integrated and developed further'* (Morrison, 2006: p. 176). A more profound approach, the capability approach, uses ethical theory to aid understanding of organisational and individual values; importantly, it is about *'equality of capabilities for staff'* (ibid., p. 177). Such an understanding attempts to grasp the issue of attitudinal and behavioural transformation vital if sustained change is to be achieved.

### **Methodology**

Stereotyping people often leads to the danger of seeing only the one identity whereas an individual is made up of many. An approach which recognises the several identities but sees them as part of a layer, one or more of which is dominant at any one time, also fails to recognise that individuals see themselves as having integrated identities (Jameson, 2007). She argues for an approach that:

*'...integrates social elements, accounts for change over time, acknowledges the impact of power and privilege, recognises the role of emotion, and relates identity to communication.'*

(p. 200)

It was important therefore that this research did not attempt to essentialise or over-concentrate on the one aspect of the respondents' identity. Although they had become pioneers, their whole personality and experience would have a bearing on how they arrived at their present situation and how they coped and were received. For this reason the

candidates were interviewed without a pre-conceived schedule. They were encouraged to tell their life stories about how they came into teaching and about their reception by colleagues and learners alike. The narrative was encouraged to run with as little prompting as possible. All these conversations were recorded and transcribed. Anonymity was promised to the respondents as aspects of the conversations would cover sensitive issues. Names and locations of workplaces have also been omitted in order to increase anonymity.

All the respondents were drawn from students on University of Huddersfield courses offered through The Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training. The sample in a study of this kind will never be large because of the scarcity of the people concerned. A representative sample of unrepresentative groups is something of an oxymoron. There is little existing literature on supporting under-represented groups once in post. Morrison (2006) refers to the '*paucity in research-informed practice to develop that engagement among staff and leaders*' (p. 169); it was felt, therefore, that reporting the conditions that helped these six teachers to thrive would be a valuable, even if small, contribution.

Six case studies were identified. Two trainees in the earlier research project agreed to take part in this second phase. The further sample was opportunistic, drawn from a request to all Consortium Centre Managers and the course leader of the pre-service course (PG) Cert Ed course. Four further respondents were identified who were happy to be part of the research.

### **Findings and discussion**

The sample consisted of six trainee or newly qualified teachers. Although the sample was small, they represented a wide profile:

- two men, four women
- two black African, four white British
- one disabled, five not, or not declared as disabled
- ages ranged from mid-twenties to early fifties
- one pre-service PGCE, three in-service PGCE/Cert Ed, two BA (Education and Training) students
- five in subject/vocational areas unusual for their gender, one not.

The subject/vocational areas where the respondent's gender was under-represented included the female advanced driving-instructor, two female teachers of Construction subjects and two male teachers of Health and Social Care. The two Construction teachers were the only women in that area of the college; likewise the two males in Health and Social Care were the only men in that particular area. One of the Construction teachers was African as was one of the Health and Social Care teachers, therefore also representative of an ethnic minority.

#### *Thumbnail portraits*

AB started as a chef, and was then asked to deliver some training sessions. He went on to teach some hours of Food Technology in a local college from which he "got the bug" for teaching. He undertook the Certificate in Education and is now doing the BA (Education and Training). The first available full-time post was in Health and Social Care. Although this seems some way from catering, his initial teaching work on diet and nutrition was pertinent and his work as a chef in a care home had provided work experience in a relevant environment.

CD arrived in England as a refugee from an African country. There he had been a secondary teacher for twelve years. He had hoped to work in this country in a similar capacity but his qualifications and experience were not recognised. He took up a post in health care as it was the first job he could obtain. He trained as a mental health nurse, then decided to work for a British teaching qualification in Health and Social Care for which his nurse training provided the background.

EF had been unemployed after leaving school. The Job Centre sent her to work on a community programme in painting and decorating. Although she had no previous experience she learned so quickly that she was taken on full-time. After about five years she applied to train unemployed people. She says that being a woman was in her favour at that time because the organisers were looking to take more women on. She was given the post but needed to become officially qualified. She studied the City and Guilds qualifications, eventually taking the Advanced Crafts course, a Level 3 qualification. After several more years working in the trades she then became a lecturer in Construction at a local college when the opportunity arose.

GH came from an African country. There she had intended to study Medicine but did not get the required grades. A combination of a careers seminar and a friend who was a quantity surveyor led her to study Quantity Surveying. She had thought she would start the course and then change to something else, but enjoyed it so much that she continued. Soon after qualifying she started teaching diploma and national certificate students at the university. On coming to England she obtained a post teaching Construction to diploma students.

IJ had been self-employed in catering. She later decided to look for a more stable career and saw an advertisement to train as a driving-instructor. She knew only one female driving-instructor and thought the typical image was of a middle-aged, rather formal-looking man. She felt it was an advantage to be a woman at the time because there were parental concerns about their daughters' safety and many wanted a female instructor. Although there are now more female driving-instructors, there are fewer teaching on advanced driving courses. Most of the people she instructs are male.

KL has cerebral palsy. She had recently graduated with a degree in Psychology. An inspiring teacher at school motivated her to go into teaching. She differed from the other respondents in having a profile more like a pre-service trainee. Indeed, she had applied to do a pre-service course, but could not get a place. Her determined attitude did not allow her to be put off by this experience. She related that her mother had always told her that she would have to work harder to prove herself and this resoluteness came across in interview. She obtained some voluntary part-time work at a college and started on the in-service course. She felt that there were clear pedagogic advantages arising from her disability. When talking about the human brain to learners, she was able to refer to her own condition. She had to show imagination in arranging the teaching space so she could get round it. This meant giving her learners more independent work to do so they were taking more charge of their own learning.

#### *Commonalities*

Apart from being pioneers, what further commonalities were there? Of the five who are in subject areas not representative of their gender, none opted initially for the vocational area they ended up teaching. They may transpire to be atypical of the majority of vocational lecturers who may have chosen their vocation or profession from an early age; this is an aspect to be investigated in future research. Only five of the six respondents had decided to become teachers from the outset, and in this they are more typical of the profession (Spenceley, 2007), nonetheless all showed a commitment to, and enjoyment of, teaching; they felt comfortable in their roles.

Regarding the issue of how far they saw themselves as role models for others, the female driving-instructor had been motivated to enter the profession in order to raise the profile of women within it. The female teacher of Decorating had become similarly motivated. She was completing a project for her BA degree on gender issues in her area, as was one of the Health and Social Care teachers who was concerned that there were male students on the courses but he found no males working in care settings. The two females in Construction noted that there were more girls coming into this area now. The teacher of diploma courses found that some female students needed a little more initial encouragement but once they started they were "brilliant students". The other teacher said the girls were very willing to come forward. They tended to work more slowly but carefully and got things right whereas the boys saw it all as a race and had to go back and put mistakes right.

Regarding the attitudes of learners there were generally few problems although the Construction diploma lecturer said she had had to be assertive and really demonstrate she had the requisite knowledge to gain respect. The driving-instructor did meet some negative attitudes from men particularly on the speed awareness course where the learners had to be there as part of their court punishment. This attitude might, however, also have been experienced by a male instructor given the reasons for the learners being on the course. Some of the bus drivers too proved difficult but she turned the situation into a learning insight by explaining that their customers would take offence if they treated them as they treated her. The Painting and Decorating lecturer also referred to the use of humour by the female students to cope with banter from the boys. However she did not allow this to become sustained or bullying in tone. There is a balance between diffusing a situation and using humour to change attitudes and passive acceptance of sexist or other denigrating behaviour.

Generally there had been no problems with colleagues either. The driving-instructor referred to a senior colleague for whom she occasionally worked, whose attitudes were clearly sexist. She was relieved that she did not have to deal with him very often. Although she was able to treat him with humour on the few occasions she had to deal with him, she felt she would not have been able to cope with him over a longer period. One Health and Social Care teacher did say he received some "joshing" from some male colleagues but again humour was the method by which he dealt with this.

When asked if they had met negative discrimination they felt they had not. There was reference to supportive college policies on equality and diversity which were followed through consistently. The disabled trainee felt that people were sometimes initially anxious about how to treat her but did not see this as discrimination, rather apprehension about how to deal with her and her needs. She countered this by being very open and stating clearly what help she needed. Nonetheless she did feel she had always had to work hard to prove herself and to overcome initial reactions of others to her disability. This sentiment was echoed by the two Construction lecturers who said they had had to work harder than their male counterparts to prove themselves and to gain respect. Although this

may not have been perceived as discrimination, it is certainly a tacit form, as women applying for leadership positions find it is still necessary to work harder than a man in order to succeed (McLay, 2004; Coleman, 2002).

Decorating and Quantity Surveying could be seen as more suitable Construction areas for women whereas more obviously heavy physical areas such as bricklaying were not. When asked about this, the Decorating teacher reported there were now quite a number of girls doing plumbing and some doing brickwork. She cited another, nearby college that had been particularly successful in getting girls into various areas of Construction. She also noted that these girls were getting employment, in contrast to the male Health and Social Care students of AB who seemed to disappear from the profession once they had qualified.

## Conclusion

The benefits of a more diverse workforce are clear in ensuring that sources of potential are not overlooked, and in providing role models to others with the same profile as well as educating majorities to accept minorities in these roles (The Commission for Black Staff in Education, 2002).

When asked what further support the respondents would like, they agreed on a number of issues:

- more promotion of the profession to under-represented groups. The disabled trainee showed great drive and enthusiasm and a desire to help others with disabilities become teachers. She welcomed the idea of producing a DVD to promote teaching as a career. This conclusion is backed up by Rennie's (2006) finding of the importance of taster sessions to attract under-represented groups
- a more gentle introduction into full-class teaching starting with shadowing an experienced teacher, then team-teaching before taking on a whole class. This, too, has echoes of Rennie's (2006) finding that the promotion of support for individual trainees is an important factor
- more recognition of the demands of home life. One of the married women was divorced and she said this was due to the stress of working and studying as well as trying to cope with the home. Lumby et al (2005) argue for a capabilities approach where such demands would be recognised and respected: '*Work and life are a whole. People should have the freedom to develop their capabilities and to live in dignity the lives they value*' (p. 78)
- good equality and diversity policies which are followed through thoroughly and consistently. It is the manner in which such policies thrive rather than the policies themselves which is important here. In other words the organisational culture is paramount, as The Commission for Black Staff in Education (2002), Lumby et al (2005) and Morrison (2006) find.

This study can offer only a glimpse into the careers of pioneers of under-represented groups. A longitudinal study is needed to assess the effectiveness of approaches in achieving profound and lasting attitudinal and behavioural change, in recognising the capabilities of all and in promoting the positive benefits of a diverse teaching workforce.

## References

- Bailey, B. (2007) 'The Establishment of Centres for the Training of Teachers in Technical and Further Education in England, 1933-1950', *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education* Vol. 59, No. 3, pp. 279-294. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13636820701520260>
- Cole, P. (1998) *Men, Women And The Management Of Further Education: The Perceptions Of Senior Managers Regarding Gender Issues*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Belfast, August.
- Coleman, M. (2002) *Women As Headteachers: Striking The Balance*. Stoke on Trent: Trentham.
- Commission for Black Staff in Further Education (2002) *Challenging Racism: Further Education Leading The Way*. London: Association of Colleges.
- Davidson, D. (1995) *The Role Of The Senior Mistress In Head Masters Conference Co-Educational Schools*. Unpublished MEd dissertation, Cambridge: University of Cambridge.
- Jameson, D. (2007) 'Reconceptualizing Cultural Identity and its Role in Intercultural Business Communication', *Journal of Business Communication* Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 199-235. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0021943607301346>
- Lumby, J. et al (2005) *Leadership, Development And Diversity In The Learning And Skills Sector*. London: Learning and Skills Research Centre. Accessible online at [www.LSRC.ac.uk](http://www.LSRC.ac.uk).
- McLay, M. (2004) *The Preparation And Training Of Women For Senior Management In UK Independent Secondary Schools*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Manchester: University of Manchester.
- McLay (2008) *The Profile Of Trainee Teachers In The Lifelong Learning Sector*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Edinburgh, September.
- Maddock, S., Parkin, D. (1994) 'Gender Cultures: How They Affect Men And Women At Work' in Davidson, M.J., Burke, R.J. (eds) *Women In Management: Current Research Issues*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Maguire, M. (1999) "'A Touch Of Class': Inclusion and Exclusion In Initial Teacher Education", *International Journal of Inclusive Education* Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 13-26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/136031199285156>
- Menter, I. et al (2006) 'Widening Access to the Teaching Profession: Perspectives from Scotland', *European Journal of Teacher Education* Vol. 29, No. 3, pp. 271-285. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02619760600795049>
- Morrison, M (2006) 'Constructions of Diversity: Research Among Staff Leaders in the Learning and Skills Sector', *Journal of Further and Higher Education* Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 169-180. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03098770600617661>
- Ofsted (2006) *The Initial Training Of Further Education Teachers: Findings From 2004/05 Inspections Of Courses Leading To National Awarding Body Qualifications*. London: Ofsted.

- Ofsted (2008) *The Initial Training Of Further Education Teachers: Findings From 2006/07 Inspections Of Courses Leading To National Awarding Body Qualifications*. London: Ofsted.
- Rennie, S. (2006) *Promoting Equality and Diversity in Consortium for PCET Teacher Training courses*. Huddersfield: Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training, University of Huddersfield.
- Rennie, S. (2008) *Equality Monitoring At Consortium For PCET Centres - Learning From The Experience Of People With Disabilities – A Research Discussion Paper*. Huddersfield: The Consortium for Post-Compulsory Education and Training, University of Huddersfield. Available online at <http://consortium.hud.ac.uk/contribute/equalityanddiversity.php?p=35>.
- Robson, J. (1998) 'A Profession in Crisis: Status, Culture and Identity in the Further Education College', *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* Vol. 50, No. 4, pp. 585-607.
- Russell, R. J. (1998) *Women Leaders And Downsizing As Seen Through The Lens Of Organizational Socialization Theory*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego (CA), April.
- Spenceley, L. (2007) "Walking into a Dark Room" - the Initial Impressions of Learner-Educators in Further Education and Training', *Journal of Further and Higher Education* Vol, 31, Part 2, pp 87-96. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03098770701267515>