

Dealing with change: Teacher Educators in the Lifelong Learning Sector

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Abstract

The transition from teacher to Teacher Educator is not simple, and this paper considers what factors may need to be acknowledged if there is to be appropriate support of this process of change. The variety of possible journeys for Teacher Educators, the rate of policy change in the sector, the breadth of practice areas and levels of qualifications offered are so broad that a single route or process could be restrictive and inappropriate. By looking at key issues this paper hopes to come to some conclusions about where to focus further research, and what factors could appropriately form the basis for Teacher Educator development. At the heart of this is learning, which is also the process and product of change. This paper considers: the term 'Teacher Educator'; whether a recognised route for professional development might be of benefit; and whether a route for professional development would, or could, usefully support these processes.

Key words

Teacher Educators; Professional Practice; Professional Development; Change; Learning; Subject Specialist.

Introduction

Is there something 'different' about Teacher Educators? In short, yes. What is different is that they have other aspects to their professional identity as a teacher – other than those defined by LLUK (2007a) – and that these are recognisable and significant. If practitioners are going to be effective in making the complex transition from teacher to Teacher Educator it is important to acknowledge this difference.

Teacher Educators are already known to be a 'significantly under-researched' professional group, notably in the Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS) (Thurston, 2010: p. 47; Murray, 2005: p. 2). Although there has been enquiry into professional identity for the compulsory education sector or for practices outside of the UK (Russell and Korthagen, 1995; Murray, 2005; Boyd et al, 2007), only recently has interest grown in the LLS (Swennen and Klink, 2008; Thurston, 2010; Boyd et al, 2010). This has been further enhanced by research undertaken and published through the formation of Centres for Excellence in Teacher Training (CETTs) (QIA, 2008). Because of the breadth of this area, this paper will focus on those teaching courses which offer Initial Teacher Training and Education (ITTE) qualifications for the Full teaching role (Diploma to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector - DTLLS), rather than the Preparing to Teach (PTLLS), the Certificate to Teach (CTLLS) for the Associate teaching role, or the specialist diplomas for Skills for Life teachers (LLUK, 2007a).

Those who become teachers in the LLS (LLUK, 2008) have been recognised by the Institute for Learning (IfL) as having two parts to their professional identity – as both subject specialist and teacher (IfL, 2009b) – although the definition of a 'dual' professional identity is not the standard for lecturers in universities, who also deliver the programmes (LLUK, 2010). This language, however, is used for the professional development of students, known as 'trainees' (LLUK, 2007a; University of Plymouth, 2010), working towards current teaching qualifications, such as Certificate in Education (Cert Ed) and Professional/Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE), which also incorporate DTLLS. As a Teacher Educator, dual professional identity may continue to be the expectation, but the significant difference is a shift of emphasis, or of the number of 'parts' (IfL, 2009b: p. 7), within that identity. Or, in other words, parts of a teacher's professional identity may have to change to meet the new, and additional, expectations associated with being a Teacher Educator. One new expectation suggested here is of being an educationalist: of becoming a specialist in education theory, as well as in educational practices. Similarly, if the Teacher Educator is going to be employed to teach in a Higher Education (HE) setting, whether in Further Education (FE) colleges or at university, they may need to add a fourth part: that of researcher - although, as noted by Moon (2010: pp. 16-17) the expectation of having a research profile is not always the case for those in teacher education roles. The research element of professional identity was included in a range of roles identified by Noel (2006: p. 158) through interviews with Teacher Educators working in the post-compulsory, or learning and skills, sector (now LLS). This aspect of the HE practitioner's professional identity is not without its problems, however, as has been witnessed by concerns about the introduction of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) proposals and the suggested lack of support for 'basic research' and increasing bureaucracy in the research assessment processes (UCU, 2009: online). Looking at these considerations, a Teacher Educator may therefore be said to need not two, but four parts to their professional identity. Even if working on generic teacher education programmes, there is an expectation of being: a curricular **subject specialist** (for example, in geography, engineering, beauty therapies, English language); an effective **teacher** in the LLS; a teacher whose explicit subject specialist knowledge and understanding includes **Education**; and also a **researcher**. With further research, it may be that there are more parts which would emerge from a deeper examination of the Teacher Educator's changing professional identity (see Boyd et al, 2010), and this may depend on the context of the practice, but for the purposes of this piece I will keep to the four listed here. It seems that, like Thurston (2010) and Boyd et al (2010) it would be of value to enquire further and try to examine the professional identities of the people who Swennen and van der Klink (2009) have defined as being:

'[...] teachers of teachers, engaged in the induction and professional learning of future teachers through pre-service courses and/or the further development of serving teachers through in-service courses.'

(Swennen and van der Klink, 2009: p. 29)

Helpfully, these authors have also written about the '*...transition from teacher to Teacher Educator*' (Swennen and van der Klink, 2009: p. 99), particularly noting the additionality of the process as being:

'Not just a change in working conditions and acquiring new skills and new knowledge, but also in the way of thinking about one's own teaching and a change, or at least an expansion, of one's identity as teacher into that of Teacher Educator [...].'

(*ibid.*, p. 99)

As a further note on teachers' professional identity, over ten years ago it was noted that challenges and changes to professional identity were afoot:

'In cases where these arguments [sic] are accented towards educational practice they serve both to open up and close off forms of professional identity, for example, the subject specialist set against the learning facilitator. Whilst in the past the subject specialist was dominant this weighting has been reversed – facilitating learning becomes pivotal with subject specialism being secondary.'

(Avis, 1999: pp. 247-248)

Avis goes on to point out that the '*shift in the identities available for teachers*' had resulted in a pedagogical approach that '*accents [...] the enabling of learning over specific disciplinary skills*' (*ibid.*, pp. 247-248). This paper is clearly still relevant regarding the recent changes and 'professionalisation' of the LLS and is visible through the emergence of bodies such as the IfL and the introduction of professional formation (IfL, 2008), registration (IfL, 2009a), and the creation of nationally recognised awards or qualifications (PTLLS, CTLLS, DTLLS). This has been recognised as having a potential and actual impact on teachers and on teacher education and training (Orr, 2008; Ofsted, 2009). Another significant change has been in the language of this area of practice. Previously, core and option modules had titles such as 'Gender and Education', 'Narrative Approaches to Educational Practice', 'Researching Professional Identities and Practice Styles' – all concerned with teacher identity and professional development to a large degree. Currently, at the University of Plymouth for example, 'option' modules have gone, and the core ones have titles based on the '*units of assessment*' (LLUK, 2007a) for the new qualifications: 'Enabling Learning through Assessment' and 'Curriculum Development for Inclusive Practice'. They now lean more towards the effectiveness of the learning, understanding of learners' needs, and practice accountability – areas which had been identified as needing development in the reform of the sector (Leitch, 2006), and specifically, of Initial Teacher Education (DfES, 2008).

But what does a Teacher Educator do?

If learning is about change (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow et al, 1990), then teaching will be about change, too, and this is what defines all teachers. If there is no change, then it can be difficult to make a case to show that learning has occurred, but learning is also the process of change, not just the product (Sotto, 2007).

How, then, does the role of a Teacher Educator differ from that of the regular teacher in this respect? Teachers can provide experiences that facilitate learning, and therefore facilitate change, by offering both scaffolded active engagement and information as content. Teacher Educators, however, are also defined by the fact that they teach in ITTE and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and will, therefore, need to be able to help those they teach to become enablers of learning *and* be sources of knowledge. At present, the framework for this is based on PTLLS, CTLLS and DTLLS courses, which have specific outcomes and criteria, and so the Teacher Educator's practice is also being guided by this structure. The difference here, though, would be that the Teacher Educator needs a reflexive understanding of the programmes – to have a wider view that enables interpretation, translation and contextualisation for effective learning to take place.

If learning is about change then teaching is to enable and make possible that change, as process and product, resulting in praxis (Freire, 1986). Change, or transformation, is not always an easy process, and both teachers, and Teacher Educators, are expected to enable learning in terms of identity, subject areas and specific syllabus content. The transformatory nature of the learning and teaching processes for adult learners, and their pedagogy, are particularly pertinent due to the breadth of settings in the LLS. For example, Sotto states a preference for an approach that focuses on '*helping learners to learn, as distinct to teaching them*' (Sotto, 2007: p. 125) and cites Polyani, asking that the reader note that many of the terms used '*refer to the way the students are feeling*' (Sotto, 2007: pp. 60-61 – emphasis in original). Similarly, Dobrovolny et al worked with notions of learning as 'the essence' of change in their research into supporting adults training to work in the laboratory science community. They agree that change is the process that makes new information '*personally meaningful and relevant*' (Dobrovolny et al, 2007: online). They state that:

'Research indicates that adults learn differently than children or adolescents and that adults consistently use the following six learning strategies: prior experiences; conversations; metacognition; reflection; authentic experiences; and images, pictures, or other types of visuals.'

(Dobrovolny et al, 2007: online)

It would seem, then, that a Teacher Educator might be expected to be able to model the effective practice expected of the student teacher: to facilitate and enable, to recognise and utilise how learners are feeling, and support them through a transformatory process. Teacher Educators will be supporting change; they will be encouraging it, dealing with its consequences, recognising the impact of change, raising awareness of change and, hopefully, guiding it away from harm and towards growth. In short, they will be facilitating the personalisation of knowledge, whether as experience, understanding or content. But is this how Teacher Educators see themselves and their role? Is this the current expectation and definition of the professional role for Teacher Educators? If not, then it is more likely that effectiveness will be reduced, and tensions increased, within teacher education practices.

The term 'educator' is used as an alternative to teacher, but there is, nonetheless, a perceived difference between the two terms. The 'educator' role is distinguishable as being facilitative, rather than didactic, when 'in the context of adult and community education' (Wallace, 2008: p. 88). This would align to the focus for Teacher Educators being on adults, cognisant of the needs of the adult learner who will be 'challenged to examine their previously held values, beliefs and behaviours and will be confronted with ones that they may not want to consider' (Knowles et al, 2005: p. 106). Wallace also notes that the 'educator' is linked to social and economic change, and as being 'more than simply [sic] a transmitter of knowledge or skills' (Wallace, 2008: p. 88). I think that the term 'educator' can be usefully defined as being a **specialist in the theory and practice of education**; and this is the discernable difference: a teacher, any teacher, is intimately involved in change, in learning and teaching, but an educator is involved with this **as a specialist**. For example, what starts as a career teaching post-16 learners in Art and Design may change to that of a Teacher Educator, and then additional specialist knowledge, understanding and skills (LLUK, 2007) are required in education. Both will require knowledge, understanding and skills in the pedagogy of teaching adults, but as an educationalist in the LLS one is also a specialist in the theory and practices of education.

Teacher education could be said to exist for the facilitation of change in adults becoming effective teachers, but it is also about using an appropriate range of strategies to teach Education as a specialist subject. This will mean a shift in emphasis from traditional, didactic methods, towards the modelling of a much wider range of preferred approaches, such as the six learning strategies identified above (Dobrovolny et al, 2007: online). Along with the four parts of a Teacher Educator's professional identity already stated there may be a role in facilitating development of a very wide range of students' specialist areas of practice, ideally in conjunction with experienced subject specialists, too, who would take the role of practice mentors, or subject coaches (Cunningham, 2005: p. 51). If this is so, the next question is: are Teacher Educators being prepared for all of these expectations?

Becoming an educator of teachers

What turns someone into being an educator? Job descriptions for the role of Teacher Educator, or lecturer in Education, include specific skills and attributes – and specific qualifications. For example, a lecturer in Primary Education would usually be expected to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) (TDA, 2010), but exempted from a PGCE HE qualification even though they will be teachers of adults in an HE setting (Murray, 2005: p. 15). However, the job descriptions in universities or FE colleges, will vary and may be written specifically for the individual post using phrases such as 'should be qualified to Masters Degree or equivalent' in 'an appropriate subject with relevant teaching experience' (TES, 2010: online). This lack of specificity may be due to the patterns of delivery being varied, as cited by Broad:

There is a mixed pattern of delivery across the organisations with some parts [...] being run in-house with students progressing to a HEI provider for the second part of the course. Some of the organisations [...] running the course totally in-house.'

(Broad, 2010: p. 30)

Having managed to identify the role, and its responsibilities, how does one prepare to change, or transform, in order to be able to fulfil it? If a teacher is hopeful of becoming a Teacher Educator, will they simply be recognised as having the expected skills and attributes, and be happened upon, like the teenager with the arresting good looks, spotted by the model agency scout? The proposition here is that a more structured approach would be beneficial for prospective Teacher Educators, their employers and the students. And this may be true whether for new or experienced Teacher Educators who, as Swennen et al identified, are not always able to clearly identify their modelling for the benefit of students, or able to explicitly demonstrate or articulate their own teaching in a way that was open and accessible to their students (Swennen et al, 2008).

A few years ago I attended a meeting with an external examiner where the view was expressed that there was a hope and expectation that those employed as Teacher Educators were well paid (in terms of usual lecturing rates within the organisation) because of what they had to offer for the improvement of practice, and had been drawn from the 'best' teachers in the teaching staff of the organisation. The parts of a teacher's professional identity named in this instance were those of the curricular area subject specialist, and the effective teacher in the LLS - but not those of being a subject specialist in Education, or a researcher.

This makes some interesting assumptions about those employed to teach teachers. Firstly, it implies that their value is in 'teaching' and being effective, 'grade 1' teachers in the LLS. Given that the sector encompasses practice ranging between

non-qualification Adult and Community Education (ACE), Pre-entry Functional Skills (NQF Level pre-Level 1), 14-19 programmes, Access to HE, Foundation Degree, HE and professional qualifications (NQF Level 6/7), it suggests that anyone within this range could be equipped to teach teachers. And this is despite the fact that learners can be from a very wide variety of ages, prior learning and employment experiences, and that the role is generally for teaching mature adults who will be studying at levels upwards of NQF 4. Crucially, it assumes that they will be able to impart this skill to others within the organisation, and be able to translate and support the transmission of their practical expertise to others, who will then be able to make use of it, going through that change in practice with the minimum of difficulty. And finally, it implies that Teacher Educators can only appropriately be derived from staff of this description.

The comments I heard have remained with me because they did not suggest that knowing about Education as a curriculum subject was of particular significance, or that there was any expectation of the Teacher Educator also being a researcher – and these were areas of my identity that I felt were expected of me, and that I expected of myself. They help define me as a Teacher Educator.

Moreover, if the job descriptions are considered in conjunction with the above expectations, it can be seen that there is room for conflict. A ‘good’ FE classroom/work-based learning/ACE evening class/Skills for Life teacher may find a mismatch between their usual practice and teaching on a teacher education programme. If Teacher Educators are derived from the existent teaching staff of an organisation, where does that situate ITTE courses run through a university, college or private training organisation in terms of who teaches on them? Should universities only prepare university lecturers, should FE colleges only train FE lecturers and tutors, and training organisations only deliver training for and by trainers?

If we take the position as it exists - that a range of organisations provide teacher education - we need to consider not only who the Teacher Educators are, and where they have come from. It would be useful to know whether Teacher Educators are actually being drawn from experienced, top grade practitioners within organisations who then offer their expertise through ITTE courses. This is an area that has been considered to some extent, and research has begun into the process of preparation for existent teachers who are moving into becoming Teacher Educators. The question of whether common ground can be found that would be relevant for all those practising in the sector, and the possibility of a model for professional development, is going to be central to these researches (Spencer, 2008; Harkin, 2008; Lawy and Tedder, 2009). Having such a broad range of practice possibilities for Teacher Educators, and noting Harkin’s observation that with *‘the absence of a national view, each course may offer idiosyncratic content and process to teachers’*, the need for *‘greater clarity and consistency’* in terms of the theoretical content of ITTE programmes is clear (Harkin, 2008: p. 16). Although there is research activity in this area, for example, through CETTs, few final reports have been published as yet, and locating relevant material can still be problematic.

Conclusion

So, if Teacher Educators have multiple roles and responsibilities, some different from those understood for teachers in the sector across a wide range of settings, it would suggest that a route for professional formation or development could be beneficial. The role of CPD for prospective, new or experienced Teacher Educators starts to become clear here. Villeneuve-Smith et al (2009), identify the need for teachers, generally, to be able to utilise CPD effectively to manage changes in policy expectations and requirements. As such it is, therefore, a significant aspect of the Teacher Educator’s role and responsibilities to have a clear understanding of CPD, for themselves and their students, if they are going to support professional development effectively:

‘CPD can play a key role in equipping all staff to thrive in a changing environment [...] such as the national programmes sponsored by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service. Such programmes are a valuable resource for FE providers as they try to negotiate the changes in the “policy weather”.’

(Villeneuve-Smith et al, 2009: p. 12)

The summary from this report suggests that:

‘CPD is increasingly seen as an essential driver in raising the standards of teaching and learning in the sector. Requirements and processes have been set in place by LLUK and IJL to ensure that every teacher engages in it – but it should be on [every teacher’s] list of things to actively manage anyway and seen as an opportunity.’

(Villeneuve-Smith et al, 2009: p. 15)

Of the four parts of a Teacher Educator’s professional identity recognised here, the two areas that prospective or new Teacher Educators may need immediate, as well as continuing, professional development for will probably be: as an educationalist, and as a researcher. Both of these may be supported by undertaking a Masters in Education, for example (Swennen et al, 2010: p. 134), and I believe that the pattern of CPD study that a modular degree or taught doctorate can offer is appropriate and has great potential. However, not being able to offer modules on all the curricular subject specialist areas, or work-based modules (Nixon et al, 2006) for the development of effective teaching, may mean that these elements would not be adequately addressed through this route. With changes in LLS teaching and the role of the Teacher Educator towards generic skills (Avis, 1999; LLUK, 2007), and away from an emphasis on instruction in subject specialist areas by subject specialists, curricular subject specialist knowledge, understanding and practice can become outdated and ultimately

non-transferable. As a result of this, once a Teacher Educator has been in practice for a few years it may be difficult for them to return to teach in their original subject area.

One option might be to take a familiar route, and offer a combined taught, work-based and research format. Some modules would be specifically practice-based focusing on subject specific pedagogy, others focused on subject specialist skills and practices, and all in the form of supervised independent study. These could then be added to research modules aimed at projects producing conference papers or articles for publication, and taught modules on the theory and practice of education. In this way, if offered across a range of levels (NQF Levels 4-8), the four key aspects of the Teacher Educator's professional identity could be examined, maintained and developed by most practitioners in the sector. An alternative way of maintaining and improving knowledge, understanding, and skills in subject specialist areas, and in being an effective teacher, might be to keep in closer contact with practices in the sector areas that the students are engaged with. For example, if significant numbers of students are from Business and aged 16-19, perhaps Teacher Educators could be more directly involved in teaching those learners, too, in settings experienced by their students through regular timetabling or secondments.

With further research, it is hoped that an appropriate and developmental approach can be found to improving preparation and CPD for Teacher Educators in the LLS. If a single route is not suitable, then a range of strategies for learning to deal with change might be identified and made available through the existent network of provision.

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