Teaching knowledge, work-based learning and life experiences


Abstract:
Government policies to improve teacher education programmes and teacher knowledge base have implications for post-compulsory teacher education courses in England. Alongside these imperatives are educationists, including Bernstein (2000), Carlgen (1999), Shulman (1987), and Verloop, Van Driel and Meijer (2001), who have written about teacher knowledge. As yet, there is no consensus about the typology, the nature or the contexts in which such knowledge operate.

This conference paper is an attempt to add to this debate. Teachers in the sector are unlikely to choose teaching as their first career choice and are not unusual to have previous employment experiences before entering teaching. Educationists such as Billett (2004), Evans and Rainbird (2002), and Fuller and Unwin (2004) have written about work-related knowledge. As a corollary of this later career move into teaching, they also have extensive life experiences to refer to in their classroom practice (Merriam and Clark 1993 and Jarvis 2005). The employment experiences together with life experiences are examined in relation to the types of knowledge required for teaching in this education sector.

This paper offers a fresh perspective on teaching knowledge in the sector with some caveats and suggests some areas for further research.
Introduction

This paper is an attempt to add to the debate about teaching knowledge in the post-compulsory sector by investigating knowledge types, knowledge gained from work and life experiences and their impact on teaching.

In the past few years, the post-compulsory/further education (FE) sector landscape in England has seen changes with regard to improving professional teacher development. The Department of Education and Skills (2004) document on initial teacher education set out policies for implementation from September 2007.

Concerted government policies to improve the sector’s professional teacher education programmes and teacher knowledge base have implications for post-compulsory teacher education courses (such as Postgraduate Certificate of Education and Certificate of Education) in England. Alongside this imperative is a growing body of educationists who have written about teacher knowledge. They include Banks, Leach and Moon (1999), Bernstein (2000), Carlgren (1999), Shulman (1987), and Verloop, Van Driel and Meijer (2001). However, there is no common agreement about the typology, the nature or the contexts in which such knowledge operates.

However, from the FE context in relation to teacher knowledge types, Robson commented:

“Research into what teachers know (and might need to know) in the post-school phase is scarce by comparison.”

Robson (2006 p 15).

Teachers in this sector are unlikely to choose teaching as their first career choice (Lucas, Casey, Loo, McDonald, and Giannakaki 2004) and are not unusual to have previous employment experiences before entering teaching. Educationists such as Billet (2008), Evans and Rainbird (2002), and Fuller and Unwin (2004) have written about work-related knowledge. Alongside this later career move into teaching, the teachers also have life experiences to refer to in their teaching. Related writers on this topic include Merriam and Clark (1993) and Jarvis (2005). Employment experiences together with life experiences are examined in relation to knowledge types required
for teaching in this education sector.

The findings of this paper are based on a funded project on teacher knowledge in the sector. This paper offers a fresh perspective on teaching knowledge in the FE sector in terms of the understanding of knowledge base, knowledge from work and life perspectives and the impact the knowledge has on teaching. There are caveats due to the small-scale nature of the project and suggestions for further areas of research.

This paper has five sections. The introduction indicates the aims and provides a brief outline of the area under investigation. The next section gives details of the research project, which this paper is based on. The third section offers a review of relevant literature in the contexts of knowledge types, workplace learning and life experiences. The following section centres on the project findings and related discussion. The final section offers a summary.

**Research project**

This was a one-year project, which was funded by the Work-Based Learning for Education Professionals Centre, based at the Institute of Education, University of London. The aim of the project was to investigate the types of knowledge associated with teacher education in the FE sector.

Eight prospective teachers or recently qualified teachers/participants on the PGCE (Post-compulsory) part-time programme at the Institute of Education, University of London volunteered to complete a questionnaire and take part in a one-to-one semi-structured interview. The small-scale nature of this project may require caution in making any generalisations surrounding the area of this investigation.

The aim of the questionnaire was to ascertain the participants' previous teaching, employment and life experiences of student teachers alongside salient data such as age, ethnicity, and gender. The questionnaire was sent to the participants before the start of their interviews, after a pilot study. The participants, though not representative of the FE teaching cohort, have varied backgrounds relating to: formal and informal qualifications; age; cultural diversity; related employments; teaching experiences; and
teaching settings. These diverse backgrounds will be discussed in the 'Findings and discussion' section.

The one-to-one interviews were arranged over the latter half of the academic year. The topic questions, after piloting for quality assurance purpose, in this qualitative methodology were semi-structured in nature. The topic questions were related to past employment and life experiences that influenced the participants' teaching know-how. The participants were also asked about other influences such as teaching institution, types of courses (including assessments) and related colleagues that impacted on their teaching know-how.

The interviews were recorded, with the participants' approval, using a digital camcorder, a cassette recorder and pen and paper. These three forms of recording formed an interesting methodological approach and assisted in triangulating the evidences from the qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches.

**Literature review**

This section may be divided into three parts that deals with knowledge types, knowledge in workplaces and knowledge from life experiences. It is not the intention of this paper to provide a comprehensive review of knowledge-related literature from writers of education and from other disciplines.

**Knowledge types**

The educationist, Shulman (1987), focuses on knowledge types in teacher education with his seven categories. They include: content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, knowledge of learners and their characteristics, knowledge of educational contexts, and knowledge of educational values.

Content knowledge is “the knowledge, understanding, skill, and disposition that are to be learned by school children” (Shulman 1987 pp 8-9). Curriculum knowledge is a teacher’s ‘tools of the trade’ like knowledge of materials, which can be used in class. General pedagogical knowledge refers to strategies and rules around classroom
management and organization. With pedagogical content knowledge, it is a combination of content and pedagogy, which he saw as unique to this profession. The final category of Shulman’s is knowledge of educational values.

What are the criticisms of Shulman’s typology of knowledge? The definitions of some of the knowledge types may need expansion like curriculum knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman used content knowledge as a starting point for a teacher/prospective teacher, which might be too directional. This approach might not be applicable to some prospective teachers where they entered the teacher education courses with past experiences and specialist subject knowledge. There was little explanation of how the seven knowledge types could be linked up or implemented. Finally, the knowledge base by Shulman is focused on compulsory education in the US and not the lifelong learning sector in England.

The next group of writers, Banks, Leach and Moon (1999), follow Shulman’s typological approach to the extent of viewing teachers’ pedagogical knowledge in the forms of ‘school knowledge’, ‘subject knowledge’ (similar to Shulman’s subject content knowledge), ‘pedagogical knowledge’ and ‘personal subject construct’. The main thrust of the authors’ approach is the focus on the teacher (personal subject construct). Her/his past knowledge, experiences of learning and ideas and beliefs of how teaching may be approached are important elements in integrating the other knowledge types. School knowledge refers to ‘knowledge of the school context.’ Pedagogic knowledge relates to the general set of beliefs and practices for teaching and learning.

This approach of Banks, Leach and Moon emphasizes a teacher in a dynamic interaction of her/his teaching knowledge unlike Shulman’s typological approach.

Verloop, Van Driel and Meijer (2001 p 445) defined teacher knowledge base as “all profession-related insights that are potentially relevant to the teacher’s activities.” Verloop et. al. (2001) distinguished teacher knowledge into six types namely: subject matter, students, student learning and comprehension, purposes, curriculum, and instructional techniques. These categories were used as a starting basis for analysing the teachers’ interactive cognitions and were found to consist of three types: subject
matter oriented, student oriented and student learning oriented.

Verloop et. al. (2001) started with a wide definition of teacher knowledge base, which was anchored to research and also codified for the teaching profession. It implied that teachers’ individual past experiences were included like Bernstein’s horizontal knowledge. Perhaps the extent of teacher knowledge in codified format is debatable certainly in England and Sweden (Carlgen 1999) where little has been written about teacher knowledge in the FE sector and in Australia as exemplified by Loughran Mitchell and Mitchell (2003).

Next is Carlgen’s (1999) understanding of teachers’ professional knowledge focuses on the new nature of teachers’ work outside the classroom in Sweden’s ‘ruptures’ teaching climate. She categorized teachers’ work into three elements namely: pre-active, interactive and post-active.

Pre-active work included planning of lessons. Post-active activities include assessment of students’ work. Carlgen (1999) advocated that current Swedish government of ‘goal steering’ and ‘marketization’ of this sector had meant that in the new National Curriculum and related syllabi were written in terms of aims and goals. These required interpretation and development by teachers in order that they could be converted into course syllabi for teaching purposes. Carlgen viewed teachers’ professional knowledge as “what it is, how it is organised, how it can be developed, etc.” (Carlgen 1999 p 43).

Carlgen’s (1999) approach with reference to the Swedish’s ‘ruptures’ teaching climate, the style of the National Curriculum and related syllabi is particularly relevant to the current Standards in England, as they appear to have some strong similarities. Both types of curricula require interpretation and further development by teacher educators in order that they may be used as course syllabi. However, this interesting approach to investigating teachers’ professional knowledge is only one angle and that it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of this area, like in the previous review.

With the next educationist, Bernstein (2000) referred to types of knowledge as
horizontal and vertical. Vertical knowledge forms a curriculum. Vertical knowledge has the following characteristics namely: explicit, coherent and systematically structured with rules of acquisition and transmission and is mediated through recontextualization. Horizontal knowledge is knowledge that is everyday and verbal and has features such as context, tacit nature, and locality.

What can we critique Bernstein’s definitions of the two types of knowledge? If horizontal knowledge is seen as everyday, local, context related and tacit in nature, what if adult trainees entering teacher education course who have already acquired subject specifications such as mathematics knowledge, which is vertical knowledge on a mathematics course, and will that be counted as horizontal knowledge? There are open-ended questions regarding vertical and horizontal knowledge. However, his classification of knowledge may be used to categorize the above ‘typology’ of knowledge types.

Knowledge in workplaces
Evans and Rainbird (2002) explain the importance of workplace learning in the following manner:
“Workplace learning is of central importance and a crucially important site for learning, whatever vision is held of a learning society. At the same time, workplace learning is poorly understood and under-researched, but has moved to centre stage in discourses about the so-called 'knowledge-based economy' and in policies based on that concept.”

Evans and Rainbird (2002 p7)


Billett (2008) proposed a socio-cultural approach to knowledge construction throughout working life. The two outcomes arising from this form of knowledge construction were a change in an individual through learning, and the remaking of 'culturally-derived practices' of work. He suggested that a worker's learning process was mediated by his/her previous social experiences, which shaped the
interpretation and construction of work experiences, which he termed 'the sociogenesis of knowledge'. The worker's cognitive experience and personal ability also affected the construction of the work experiences.

This workplace learning, argues Billett (2008), changes his/her sense of self. The workplace engagement also helped in the 'active remaking and transformation of the culturally-derived practices' of work.

Billett's theory of learning throughout working life offers a broad view of the interdependency of personal and social agency. The theory needs to be supported by empirical research and specific case studies of work.

Evans and Rainbird (2002) view the social learning theories of Lave (1991) and Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) as central to workplace learning. They suggest that conceptual knowledge is formed and understood through use and interaction in social settings in contrast to interactions involving knowledge that are abstract and learnt outside of the social settings such as workplace.

The framework offers 'enhancers' (e.g. awareness, understanding and inspiration) and 'offers' (e.g. guidance, motivation and feedback) for a learner in a workplace environment to engage with. The learner's learning is supported by 'communities of practice' in the context of the workplace.

This framework offers a comprehensive understanding of knowledge acquisition in the workplace. From the context of teachers, formal and informal education to acquire pedagogic knowledge appeared not to be covered in the framework. The framework will also be strengthened by illustrative case studies of differing work-related disciplines such as Education and Accountancy.

Fuller and Unwin (2006) offers another conceptual framework around workplace learning. Like the Evans and Rainbird (2002) framework, Fuller and Unwin's approach is derived from situated learning theory. This empirically observed study is based on craft apprenticeships in England. The focus of the two authors' approach is on people and learning in the workplace environment in which
features of the workplace are identified for opportunities for, or barriers to, learning. The notion of an expansive-restrictive continuum may be used for analysing an organization's approach to workforce learning and evaluating a worker's quality of learning.

The Fuller and Unwin approach to apprenticeship learning offers a greater understanding of the duality of learning in terms of expansive and restrictive workplace learning environments. Even though this framework, which is empirically observed with detailed case studies, a wider socio-cultural perspectives of an individual learner appears to be missing at socio-historical and metacognitive levels.

Finally, Hoskin and Anderson-Gough (2004) relate knowledge from a professional work context. The two writers focus on the nature of the accountancy profession where knowledge is gained from examinations (via 'qualification-focused learning') and accountancy firms (via 'work-based learning').

From an identified trend of a more integrative approach to learning to be a professional accountant, the authors offered an approach that was based on ideas from Bernstein's (2000) integrated model of knowledge, and Silver's (1998) three innovations in teaching and learning. Hoskin and Anderson-Gough's (2004) model of integrating best practice suggests an approach of understanding the integration of professional content, delivery of content and supporting infrastructure of this profession. This integrated approach relates to formal professional examinations and workplace.

The model also incorporates workplace learning and formal educational input like in other professions. What the model needs are empirical evidence and an evaluation of the model in the context of the profession.

Knowledge from lifelong experiences
There are other ways teachers can learn. One other way is through life experiences. Some of the educators who viewed life experiences as a potential way to acquiring know-how and learning included Dewey. He viewed education as a way to providing opportunities for people to engage in a democratic society (Apple and Teitelbaum
2001). Even though Dewey did not suggest that every life experience was a learning process, he saw the potential value of it.

This conscious connection by Dewey has, perhaps, paved the way for other educators to investigate the relationships between life experience and learning. Kolb (1993) offered a model that was based on experiential learning prefaced on four pillars of experience (such as life experiences), perception (such as observations and reflections), cognition (such as formation of theoretical ideas and generalizations), and behaviour (such as trying out concepts in new contexts).

The educationist who expands on Kolb’s four-stage cyclical model is Jarvis with his existential model of learning (Jarvis 2005). He views a person learning in the following manner:

“.. learning is an existential phenomenon - the combination of processes whereby the whole person, body (generic, physical and biological) and mind (knowledge, skills, attributes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses), is in a social situation and constructs an experience which is then transformed cognitively, emotively or practically (or through any combination) and integrated into the individual’s own biography.”

Jarvis (2005 p 14)

He offered seven types of experiences, which forms a person’s biography, which included lifelong and episodic experience, awareness of the world outside a person, multi-dimensional nature of experience (such as physical and emotional), primary and secondary (which is mediated via a person or object) experience, and acceptance or rejection of experience (where not every human experience has an impact on oneself).

This holistic approach of acknowledging the whole person (body and mind) transforms a person in three possible ways. One is if a person learns from his/her experiences, then he/she may behave more intelligently. Two is there are hidden benefits of learning such as improvement in physical activities may lead to cognitive function and ultimately to a person’s overall health. Three is that mind and body are part of a persona and changes in either part affect the other.

Jarvis’s holistic approach sets the academic pace to engage with this subject.
However, the complexity of a person’s experiences and their relationships with each other is not explained. The manner in which an experience might be transformed and how this transformation might be related to learning and possible discernible outcomes were not explained in detail.

Tough (1993) focused on major personal changes (which related to Jarvis’s transformation of experience) and methods for affecting the changes in his study, using interviews, across countries of the USA, Canada, Ghana and New Zealand with graduate students. The study consisted of interviewees learning eight areas of knowledge and skill and found that the differences between countries were not significant.

The list of 24 personal changes covered physical, mental and emotional areas of people. There were also 22 methods for personal growth.

Like the previous investigation, the next investigation by Merriam and Clark (1993) focused on particular life experience, which had significant learning experience for adults. Both these surveys relate to Jarvis’s experience and transformation of experience sections of his existentialist model. Merriam and Clark found that most of life changing experiences are informal of life experience learning such as parenting, travel, balancing work and personal life, death in a family, living abroad, and break-up of a serious relationship. They found that life experience learning was significant in two ways. The first affected the learner, which resulted in an expansion of skills, abilities or self-awareness, or the experience transformed the person. The second finding involved the value placed by the learner, which might created a ‘personal stamp’ on the experience and was viewed as of importance in the learner’s life.

The above educationists’ views of life experiences and teaching know-how vary from Dewey's notion of the potential value of life experience to Kolb's, Jarvis's, Tough's and Merriam and Clark's emphasis on the differing potentials of transformation of life experiences to teaching via a socio-cultural environment.

Findings and discussion
Three points of interest are proposed in this section. The first relates to the nature of teaching knowledge, which changes through time and use into generalised knowledge. The next point relates to a matrix of viewing teaching knowledge gained from workplace. One dimension may be from two disciplinary pathways: teaching and subject specialism. The other may be from three approaches of formal programme, practice and continuous professional update. Lastly, the knowledge related to life experiences might be from past learning experiences, family environment and other significant experiences. The teaching knowledge from these points of interest is not mutually exclusive.

This section has the following parts: the socio-historical contexts of the eight participants, the nature of teaching knowledge, the dimensions of teaching knowledge and work and teaching knowledge, life experiences and practices.

**Socio-historical contexts of the participating teachers**

The socio-historical contexts (Billett 2008, Kolb 1993 and Jarvis 2005) of the eight teacher participants provide a useful perspective of how their contexts relate to knowledge types, life experiences and work environments.

The participants consisted of five females and three males. The age groups of the eight teachers covered the 30’s (2 teachers), 40’s (2) and 50’s (4), which suggest the possible extent of life experiences they bring to the classroom.

In terms of ethnicity, six participating teachers classified themselves as White British, one as Asian British and one as Black British. Of the six White British, one was of Australian origin, another of Greek origin, a third person was born and lived in South Africa for the most part of his life and the fourth teacher had a Spanish mother. These diversities will be highlighted in the final part of this section.

The eight participants had 19 subject areas between them covering the sciences (physics, biology and psychology), mathematics, adult numeracy, health care, dental hygiene, business, information technology, the arts (painting including watercolours, oils and drawing, printmaking, textiles and dance movement), architecture, massage, palmistry, homeopathy, radio production and history. Even though Smeby’s (1996)
five fields classification of disciplines relates to higher education, the participants’
subject areas can be analysed under his approach. However, the relationship between
fields and teaching and learning approaches may not be applicable in the post-
compulsory sector due to differences such as levels of study and knowledge of
learners.

In terms of teaching settings, six teachers had taught in further education colleges,
five in adult and community settings, four in community based further education
colleges, and each teacher in one of the five settings of: private sector training, prison,
English school in Japan, South African rural area and townships, and dental hygiene
institution. Please note that the sample of eight teachers is not discreet and that one
teacher may teach in more than one teaching setting.

Nature of teaching knowledge
The pastoral aspects of teaching in creating a supportive environment in and out of
class (Carlgen 1999) in relation to students’ knowledge (Banks, Leach and Moon
1999, and Verloop et. al. 2001) were emphasised by some of the participating
teachers. Teacher P with a South African experience of teaching in that country’s
deprived rural townships suggested that knowing the learners’ background and living
environment (might it be in South Africa or England) were important. His teaching
experience of rural townships in South Africa and in a further education (FE) college
in London has similarities as many of his learners in FE are refugees and so he felt
that he could relate to them.

“Knowledge of learners are important – why they do it (learn) and where they want to
take it. Also knowledge of their interests and background are useful. Over time as a
teacher you would somehow get to know them but I suppose it’s just confidence. We
as tutors need to put these down in the Individual Learning Plans (ILPs) but I think
there’s a problem in the sense that we can produce a good ILP without interviewing a
student. On the other hand, ILPs were considered as targets where in fact I know my
students how they’re doing, their strengths and weaknesses and their likes and dislikes
and if they regard religion as important or not.”

Another teacher discussed the notion of general pedagogic knowledge (Shulman
Teacher A, who has worked as an English teacher in Japan and in prisons in London with radio production as her specialist area, explains in the following way:

“I think classes which work are held by a teacher, teacher in control, this is what expected of you, for instance, this is what we’re doing today and this is what we are going to do now. This is what I mean by teacher knowledge – structured, giving clear guidance, don’t sweat over timings because you don’t know until you have taught for a while how long it’s going to take. Enthusiasm will get you through most things. You have to be an actor. You need to be able to protect yourself professionally. You need to be able to motivate them to do what you want. It’s about holding them in that space.”

Teachers mentioned implied past knowledge that was not codified in their discipline (Verloop et. al. 2001) in relation to formalization of curriculum. Teacher S with a postgraduate degree in textiles and a first degree in Art teaches art in adult and community settings. She explains the above relationship in the following way:

“It’s useful to have an exhibition and to let my adult learners be reflective and acknowledged. These exhibitions are being cut back due to funding cuts. This demise of not doing it has parallels with cookery where there is a backlash of people not able to cook. It just proves that if you don’t do it, you will not know how to do it. In education now, they want to put all these skills on a certificate. It was part of life to learn to cook, to wash up, to clean up, to spend hours drawing – now these are focused as skills.”

Institutional structure (Carlgen 1999, and Banks, Leach and Moon 1999) was commented upon by teacher P of South African origin and taught mathematics and sciences.

“I think there is a business culture like in other FE colleges. Since we failed the OFSTED inspection a few years ago, a lot of emphasis has been to improving that now. Unfortunately, there appeared to be a consensus of mistrust between managers and staff. But I do get the impression that this College does have a purpose but I don’t
know what it is but my colleagues and I do feel insecure but I think this is common in other colleges. I think the College does not recognize science as important enough. A few years ago, the emphasis was on information technology and I don’t know where the emphasis is now.”

The knowledge types mentioned above might be new to a teacher at the initial stage of acquisition. However, once the knowledge was understood and applied in different teaching contexts, the nature of it might change to a generalised form. This was the first of the three points indicated at the start of this section. Bernstein’s (2000) ideas of vertical and horizontal knowledge types might be relevant as the nature of his knowledge types was questioned in the Literature Review section. Given that the knowledge, be it relates to Mathematics or Dance, if it is acquired and applied to specific contexts, can the nature (i.e. of vertical knowledge) be changed? Teacher L who is a dance teacher to adults with physical/emotional disabilities offers this explanation:

“My professional, subject etc. knowledge become more generalised in the sense that it becomes images which are wider than principles that guide my behaviour in scenarios. These scenarios could be dealing with learners with different disabilities and there are strategies from these generalised knowledge which are filaments or strands of similarities which can be contextualized to a specific scenario.”

**Dimensions of teaching knowledge and work**

Robson, reiterating Shulman’s (1987) notion of the uniqueness of teachers, explained in the following manner:

“When we come to consider teachers’ professional knowledge, we find that they are in a unique position. Unlike engineers, lawyers or nurses, for example, who all acquire specialist knowledge that is directly related to their field of practice, most teachers in post-compulsory education are faced with first acquiring specialist knowledge of their chosen subject, and then the knowledge of how to teach it. This duality is most marked amongst teachers in the post-school phase.”

Robson (2006 p 14)

This duality requires discussion in work-centred dimensions. Unlike members of
professions where specialist knowledge is acquired and put into practice, teachers in the FE sector usually acquire specialist knowledge first and via teacher education, acquire pedagogic knowledge to teach their specialist subject. This ‘sequential approach’ to knowledge acquisition (of specialist and pedagogic), according to Bernstein (2000), has implications for teacher education programmes (Loo 2007), which is outside the scope of this paper.

Following on from the above, teaching knowledge, in its most generic sense, may be acquired and developed in three possible ways from: formal programmes, practice and continuous professional development (CPD). This discussion relates to the second point of interest as indicated at the start of the section. These three ways may be divided into two pathways: teaching and subject specialism. On the teaching pathway, knowledge acquisition might in the form of in-service teacher education programme (e.g. Certificate of Education) or pre-service course (e.g. Postgraduate Certificate of Education), teaching practice from public sector institutions (e.g. FE colleges), and private sector (e.g. training in commercial organizations), and CPD from higher degree programmes and CPD-related courses. On the subject specialism pathway, knowledge acquisition might be from degree or professional programmes and vocational training, practice from discipline-related employment and/or professional organizations (e.g. accountancy firms for accountants), and CPD from secondment to industry or CPD-related short courses as part of professional requirement such as in dentistry, accountancy and medicine.

Referring to the above matrix of knowledge acquisition, participating teachers felt that their confidence in the classrooms (practice on the teaching pathway) is increased if they keep up with their disciplinary practice in such areas as the Arts (painting and drawing), Dental Hygiene, Homeopathy and Palmistry. Hoskin and Anderson-Gough (2004) advocate an integrative approach to professional education, which has implications for the disciplines identified in this paper such as Dental Hygiene, Palmistry, Dance, and Health Care where elements from different disciplines are found.

Tensions were found when some of the participating teachers discussed institutional cultures (Shulman 1987, Banks, Leach and Moon 1999, and Fuller and Unwin 2004).
Teacher A has work experiences in the private sector in Japan and England and public sectors (teaching in prisons and working in the Civil Service). In the following passage, teacher A describes how the experiences help her to cope with teaching:

“It’s my experience of working in an office doing menial work as a secretary and having to deal with quite late middle-age ladies who were effectively deskilled by that environment and unemployable any where else made me realise that this environment worked for them but not me. The eye-opening thing was you’re not the norm necessarily – I think it was a growing up thing for me and not wanting to work. I think the one thing that helped me in my teaching was I haven’t always been in public sector and I’m not being negative about the public sector employee but unless you’ve experienced, especially in the private sector in Japan where it was rather extreme, working in a hotel and experiencing capitalism at its most cut-throat form, it really wakes you up. Having done lots of different jobs (in both sectors) and learning how people can hold themselves back – self sabotage – was illuminating to me and how people take responsibility and don’t avoid working.”

Along the expansive and restrictive continuum of institutional culture (Fuller and Unwin 2004), Teacher P from South Africa expands on this area in the following manner:

“There are set times in the College to cover the syllabus and we then have to move on. Again it’s an irony, the ethos is learner centred at this College but they (the management) don’t pay tribute to it in the sense that they are more concerned with achieving the set targets than addressing the learners’ needs, which are very deep.”

Teaching knowledge, life experiences and practices
The final point of interest relates to past learning experiences, significant life experiences (Merriam and Clark 1993 and Tough 1993) and home environment, which can be reasons for wanting to teach and impact on how one approaches teaching. Two teachers on the project, one with positive and the other with negative past learning experiences wanted to teach as they felt they could use their experiences to understand and engage with their learners. Teacher S with Art and Textile qualifications teaches art to adults in a community setting has a sister with Down’s
syndrome. Here she explains her significant learning experiences and attitude to teaching:

“I loved all my teachers at school – it was a very positive impact on me. I had the same teacher at primary school for three years. She turned up one day at my home whilst my parents were separating and took us to the Geffrye Museum in London. She was an ‘old style teacher’ – caring for kids and moving away from the strict teacher thing and at the same time very professional. Now this would be very different with issues of health and safety.

My teaching strategies are formed by my life/work experiences. It’s hard to separate from my role models of teachers (at primary school) and informal ones (like the South African lady who ran a dance class) and because of my sister who had Down’s syndrome and my mother being very pioneering in her time.

If you give people confidence as a teacher in what they do, they are going to succeed. Of course some succeed against all odds. But most people aren’t like this. They need a positive environment and to know when to push sensitively as I am dealing with people in community education where some may have nervous breakdowns etc. It has to be handled very thoughtfully.”

Teacher L who teaches dance movements to adults with debilitating conditions (physical and/or mental) with a significant negative learning experience discussing the same issue:

“Based on my experience on dance training and due to the incompetence of the teachers there and as a learner in both primary and secondary schools, I have an observational capacity to analyse and I am interested in social dynamics.

My pedagogic approach is one of facilitation and providing conditions for learning. Accounting for the learner’s pastoral needs come from knowing how difficult it is in the learning sense. On a pastoral level, going back to dance training, my personal experience of being frustrated etc. and being told by a dance teacher that I was lazy and stupid - that’s callous. Perhaps, I go too far to the other way – they think
especially the younger people that I’m a walkover. I think now with the younger age group, I would be more prescriptive perhaps it’s more appropriate with the age group.”

Significant life experiences such as death and parenting (Merriam and Clark 1993 and Tough 1993) can influence one’s approach to teaching. The advocacy of some therapy was also mentioned, which has resonance with Carl Rogers’ (1969) approach. Teacher A, with teaching experiences in private and public sectors expands on the above:

“My mother passed away when I was quite young and I was working in Japan and had brief counselling. It was very helpful to see the importance of parenting and how much that affects you in the parenting role, as you have to do in FE. I was lucky on the whole to have a positive experience of parenting role and so I don’t really mind too much to be a parent. Some of my colleagues, I think, are resistant to that side of things and they don’t try and create that caring aspect. If the learners are not getting the nurturing at home and not at FE, where will they get it? And I also think having counselling myself, I am aware that some of my colleagues need that. They have some psychological blind spots in their interaction with students and how they cope with the emotions demanded of them as teachers. The more I think, I believe that teachers should have some therapy before they teach. They should have some help as part of staff development to make them more aware of themselves in order to deal with students in a caring manner (not as a social worker) but largely the students need to know the teachers are largely on their side.”

Practical life examples (Kolb 1993) might be used in teaching as exemplified by teacher F who trained as a dental hygienist with the Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRENS) and still practices in a dental clinic as well as teaches in a dental hygiene institution:

“A lot of work goes into educating patients about plaque and its accumulation and teaching students to encourage patients to address this accumulation. My colleague paralleled this with weeds in the garden. You can go round and pull all the weeds out but they will grow again. You got to get people to dig all the roots out. Like the
teacups – you brush the inside of your teeth first before the outside. Patients tend to brush the outside well and not the inside. You have to get the students to tell the patients to change the sequence of the brushing. Of course nowadays, the patients have dishwashers!"

The three interest points of the changing nature of knowledge in relation to teaching, multi-dimensional aspects of work and knowledge in terms of teaching and subject specialism, and life experiences (past learning, family and significant life experiences) and teaching knowledge and practice were discussed in this section.

**Summary**

This paper reports on teacher knowledge in the post-compulsory sector from the perspectives of knowledge types, work-based dimensions and life experiences that impact on teaching. This approach to investigating teacher knowledge reflects the socio-cultural dimensions. It is hoped that this diverse approach to viewing teacher knowledge may be debated more widely in the future.

There may be implications for a wider inclusion of the aforementioned knowledge dimensions in areas like CPD developments and the need for appropriate courses/modules in the teaching and subject specialism pathways to be made available. For those disciplines, which may not require such CPD updates, a consideration of short-term industrial-update could be a way forward.

The exploratory nature of the research project, which the findings were based, should be remembered and any generalisations arising from this paper ought to be considered cautiously. Some areas for further research might include: a larger sample of teachers, which reflected the diversity of the post-compulsory education sector, a deeper investigation of the impact of teaching knowledge on the act of teaching, and the relationship between teacher knowledge and being a teacher.

**References**


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