Teachers’ identities in further education

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Abstract:
The aim of this article is to provide a new understanding of further education (FE) teachers' identities with emphasis on their occupational experiences alongside pedagogic, personal, and societal dimensions based on a small-scale survey. The article defines FE teachers' identities and offers a typology of five spectra of social polarization of: positive and negative aspects; concept and reality; internal and external factors; double life and multi-identities; and on-going iconography. It considers the contributions of the findings in relation to teacher education, qualified teachers' continuous professional development, implementation of policies by teaching institutions and policy makers.

Document type:

Suggested key terms:
Teachers' identities; post-compulsory sector; England

Introduction
The training of teachers in the post compulsory or further education (FE) sector in England over the last decade has been a focus of government with documents ranging from ‘the New Standards’ (Lifelong Learning UK 2007), Foster Report (2005), and Further Education: raising skills, improving life chances (Department for Education and Skills 2006). The call for an improvement in teacher education, implicitly, requires a better understanding of teachers in the sector in order that such improvement may be met. In this article, FE refers to further education or post compulsory education, which is usually associated with the education of people over the age of 16 in England till 2015, after which the age will increase to 18 (Great Britain 2008).

Colley, Wahlberg and James (2007) suggested there had been repeated calls for improvement in teacher education as early as the 1950’s beginning with the Crowther Report (1959). Despite these calls, there were no attempts to define the nature of the perceived effectiveness of teaching and learning, which Coffield explicated as follows:

“In all the plans to put learners first… there is no mention of a theory (or theories) of learning to drive the whole project. It is as though there existed in the UK such a widespread understanding of, and agreement about, the processes of learning and teaching that comment was thought superfluous. The omission is serious and, if not corrected, could prove fatal to the enterprise.”
Coffield (1998 p 4)
This article aims to provide an understanding of the ‘processes of learning and teaching’ from the perspectives of teachers’ identities and pedagogic practices in the social contexts they work in. In order to understand these processes, teachers should also be included in the equation and this involves how they perceive themselves in these pedagogic environments. By understanding them, the processes can then be investigated.

Teacher identities have been a subject of enquiry by writers such as Coldron and Smith (1999), Shain and Gleeson (1999), Moore, Edwards, Halpin and George (2002), Bathmaker and Avis (2005), and Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006). The past contexts of FE teachers often include former occupational experiences in a sector, which has a significant number of vocational-related programmes. Previous investigations of FE teachers by Gleeson (1981), Viskovis and Robson (2001) and Robson, Bailey and Larkin (2004) had not emphasised sufficiently the significant role of FE teachers’ previous industrial/occupational experiences in terms of their sense of identities and impact on pedagogic approaches.

This article focuses on both these areas in the social contexts they work in. In addition, this article is a timely addition to the on-going debate of FE teachers’ identities at the end of this decade and a start of budgetary tightening by the current Con/Lib-Dem coalition government.

Although data on teachers' work/occupational experiences in England is not easily available, however, the Statistical First Release (SFR) (Learning and Skills Council 2005) provides statistics on learners in post-16 education and training in England for the academic year 2004/05. It provides data on three teaching areas of: further education, work based learning, adult, and community learning, showing the most popular areas of learning. They are work-related programmes such as health, social care, information, and communication technology, engineering, technology, manufacturing, visual and performing arts, media, hospitality, sports, leisure, and travel. These work-related courses are in contrast with academic-related qualifications, which are offered mainly by schools, such as General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs), Advanced (A) (consisting of Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and A2) levels. GCSEs are the major qualifications taken by students who are aged 14 to 16 in England. A level qualifications are traditional routes for those aged 17 and above aiming to progress onto higher education. Hence, by implication, FE teachers working on such work-related courses in the FE education sector are more likely to have occupational experiences than their counterparts in schools.

This article has five sections with the first outlining: the contexts for this area of investigation, aims, and structure. The next section provides details of the research project. The third section reviews the relevant literature in the area of identities and social contexts relating to teachers. The fourth section offers a discussion of the project findings in relation to identities, pedagogic approaches and social contexts of the FE teachers who participated in the project. The fifth and final section concludes with a definition of FE teachers’ identities, explicates the relevance of this article for teachers and teaching in FE, and comments on
implications for: teacher training, qualified teachers’ continuous professional development (CPD), teaching institutions, and policy makers.

**Research basis**

This small-scale project consisted of eight teachers with teaching qualifications. These teachers were volunteers from a previous project on teacher knowledge, which was funded by the Work-Based Learning for Education Professionals Centre, based at the Institute of Education, University of London. The participants’ social contexts will be investigated in the Discussion section.

The research questions included:
1. What are the professional identities of teacher in the FE sector?
2. Do past experiences (occupational and other relevant ones) contribute to professional identity and if so, how?
3. Are there any current work experiences that inform one's identity, if so, what are these and how do they inform professional identity?

Two types of methodologies were used. They included a questionnaire to illicit information on qualifications, teaching and occupation experiences, age, gender, and subject areas. Individual participants were followed up with a one-to-one interview using a semi-structured interviewing approach, which were audio recorded and later transcribed together with hand written notes. The data was later analysed based on the four stages of data analysis by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000). They included: generating units of meaning, classifying, typologizing and ordering the units of meaning, using narratives for richer descriptions, and interpreting the data. These stages were useful in the data analysis of the transcribed interviews.

As with any small sample investigation, there is a need to be cautious as regards true reflection of the data and its analysis.

**Literature on teacher identities**

The review of teacher identities is underpinned by a social construction approach, which is common in the literature to be surveyed. This social construction refers to the social contexts in this area of teacher identity together with an application of a theoretical framework as propounded by Lave and Wenger (1991). It then reviews the relevant literature under the following headings: social participation; tensions, conflicts and marginalization; pragmatism; and external and internal factors.

**Social participation**

Teachers in FE are more likely to have occupational experiences as well as teaching in institutions where there are interactions with people such as learners and colleagues together with artefacts such as teaching resources and programmes that form part of a wider national curriculum framework. These forms of social participation – with different people, policies, and workplaces – are reflected in Kelly’s (2006) notion of a social-cultural perspective. Kelly (2006) referred to teachers' identities from the perspectives of their learning through interactions and locations. His definition of teachers’ identities includes ways they “see themselves in response to the actions of others towards them” (Kelly 2006 p 513). These perceptions are affected by social dimensions.
Though Kelly’s article was centred on schools and not FE, their teachers are also shaped by their social interactions with colleagues, learners, and other groups. Their identities are changeable depending on social circumstances. From the perspectives of this article, I would argue that the inclusion of their past professional/occupational experiences as they had worked in different work settings (with different organisational approaches to working and perhaps different ethos especially where the workplaces were in the private sector) would also impact on their identities. D. Gleeson (1981), P. Gleeson (1994), Viskovic and Robson (2001), and Robson et al (2004) referred to past occupational experiences of teachers. As this article in the Introduction has stated that occupational experiences of FE teachers had not been adequately reflected in FE teachers’ identities in the literature stated below.

D. Gleeson (1981) investigated occupational experiences of technical teachers in FE three decades ago. Numerous policy changes had occurred since aiming to improve FE teaching. These included the incorporation of colleges - 1992 Further and Higher Education Act – (Great Britain 1992), the two teaching standards (Lifelong Learning UK 2007, and Further Education National Training Organisation 1999), and numerous reports (such as Foster Report 2005). Gleeson’s investigation, though provided a historical perspective, may not be relevant to the current contexts of FE teacher identities.

P. Gleeson (1994) focused on 19th century trade teachers in Australia. Though the article has its interesting aspects, one may suggest that this investigation has its limitations in the discussions of current FE teacher identities.

Viskovic and Robson (2001) gave a more current investigation of vocational teachers’ identities using four ‘pen pictures’, with no empirical basis. The lack of empirical evidence and two of the four ‘pen pictures’ relating to New Zealand teachers might not provide a relevant impression of FE teachers’ identities in England.

Robson et al (2004) focused their investigations on professionalism of vocational teachers in the FE sector in England. They offered four narratives of: 'adding values', 'protecting industry standards', 'sharing expertise', and 'knowing industry practice'.

The above four sources, though provided insights of occupational experiences of post compulsory teacher identities, there were caveats of a combination of: time dimension, country perspectives, empirical evidence and focus on professionals. This article aims to offer a greater insight into FE teacher identities that is relevant in terms of current temporal dimension, country perspective specific to England, empirical evidence of eight participants, and focus on teacher identities.

Coldron and Smith (1999) drew on their study of compulsory teachers’ identities and identified four types namely: craft, scientific, moral, and artistic. With craft tradition, these teachers were defined by their planned actions for pre-determined outcomes in a skilled-based approach. With scientific tradition, teachers were more likely to take a rational approach with a systematic and open enquiry to investigating teaching practices. For teachers with a moral tradition, they viewed teaching practices as requiring moral judgements in areas of evaluation, customs and habits, and exercising of choices. An artistic approach was required due to complexity
surrounding teaching where personal feelings, creation of meanings, and past experiences might guide their future practices.

Coming back to Kelly (2006), he applied Lave and Wenger’s notion of ‘Legitimate Peripheral Participation’ (LPP) as a social framework to understanding teacher identity. Lave and Wenger explain their theory in the following manner:

“That legitimate peripheral participation refers both to the development of knowledgeably skilled identities in practice and to the reproduction and transformation of communities of practice.”


From the perspective of the FE sector, LPP might be used where a novice teacher/’newcomer’, with occupational/vocational experiences, could develop her/his pedagogic skills and identity in a community of practice (CoP). This CoP could relate to people the teacher interact with in a teaching institution with hierarchical structure and with it, power dynamics. Lave and Wenger (1991) linked identity formation with journey in negotiating the LPP from ‘newcomer’ to ‘old timer’.

The above discussions on LPP are on a conceptual basis. The journey of a newcomer to an old timer might not be smooth and that a newcomer might not feel as a legitimate participant in the FE sector. Tensions can arise for some, and in the next part, the corresponding literature is reviewed.

**Tensions, conflicts and marginalization**

This part of the literature review relates to sources, which emphasise tensions, conflicts and Lave and Wenger’s notion of ‘marginalism’. Lave and Wenger (1991) explained peripheral participation as forms of participation on the periphery. They used the term ‘peripherality’ as ways of engagement in a CoP. It, however, excluded the possibility of dis-engagement or exclusion.

Hodges (1998) offered a more nuanced examination of participating as a novice on the periphery of a community. A novice may be “dis-identified” with his/her communities of practice by the rejection of identity associated with that community and at the same time performing activities in that practice. This process of dis-identification for a novice may lead to “marginalization” meaning repeated alienation and isolation (Hodges 1998).

From a marginalized FE teacher’s perspective, he/she may still be teaching in an FE college but feels increasingly alienated and isolated as a teacher from colleagues, management, and/or students. This affects his/her identity and sense of being part of that community of teachers in that FE setting.

Using a social construction approach like in the previous writer, Viskovic and Robson (2001) invoked Lave and Wenger’s notion of peripherality from stand point of trajectories where a novice may travel in a community of practice to become an ‘old timer’ or a fully participating member. They identified five types of trajectories: peripheral; inbound; insider; boundary; and outbound with discussion centred on participation, multi-membership, location and wider context (in particular resources and constraints).
‘Peripheral’ trajectory refers to participation in a community of practice that does not lead to full participation. ‘Inbound’ trajectory relates to participation and may lead to full participation. ‘Insider’ trajectory does not lead to full participation but one is allowed to over several occasions to re-negotiate one’s identity. In ‘boundary’ trajectory, one participates in more than one community of practice and finally with ‘outbound’ trajectory, a participant leaves a community and ceases to be a participant (Viskovic and Robson 2001).

Bathmaker and Avis (2005) investigated 43 trainee teachers in 2000 where they felt marginalised whilst on their teaching placements in terms of access to the communities and their perceived cultures of these communities. As a result, they were “forced to try and reconcile their ideals with the reality of their experience in further education” (Bathmaker and Avis 2005 p 60).

Marginalization occurred in terms of lack of access to staff meetings, desk space for preparation work, photocopying and car parking facilities, and interaction with colleagues in the same teaching institutions. Marginalization also took the form of differences in perceived notions of FE and reality in matters of: unwillingness of lecturers embracing change, poor relationships between existing staff and students, perceived sense of lowering standards by teaching staff, and trainee teachers perception of students as being undisciplined, unmotivated and irresponsible in their learning (Bathmaker and Avis 2005).

The last two sources draw on the same research, ‘Variations in Teachers’ Work, Lives and Effectiveness’ (VITAE) from 300 teachers in 100 primary and secondary schools in England (Day and Kington 2008, Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons 2006). The project focused on professional identity of teachers. The study considered three variables: personal (lives, experiences, and beliefs), professional (lives, experiences and beliefs) and situated (that is culturally embedded). These variables are in turn affected by external factors (e.g. support from home and work).

Day and Kington (2008) offered four scenarios to illustrate teachers’ degree of dominance. In each scenario, positive and negative aspects were defined. Day et al (2006) highlighted the cognitive and emotional aspects of teachers’ identities and at various times, they might feel different degrees of stability or fragmentation depending on personal, work and situational factors. These two sources provide possible approaches of viewing teachers’ identities (though relating to compulsory teachers) in FE where occupational experiences and beliefs may be incorporated in their model of the three variables.

**Pragmatism**

Moore et al (2002) investigated schoolteachers’ identities drawing from interviews with 80 teachers and their findings offered a typology that was based on ‘pragmatism’. They view ‘pragmatism’ as a means by which schoolteachers ascertain how they select their pedagogical identities, which may fall into two types: principled and contingent. These two forms of ‘pragmatism’, one, unconscious adjustment resulting from external factors and the other, conscious adjustment, respectively, have relevance to teachers in the post compulsory sector.
Parallels between post compulsory and compulsory teachers include external factors such as policy requirements on specifications, professional development and teacher education, and teaching institutional factors such as work conditions, and organisational cultures. Though these factors are common but the nature of such factors such as content of specifications may be different in different education sectors. Also, there was no emphasis of the occupational experiences of teachers in this study as expected unlike a stronger presence in FE. A lesser presence of parental interaction may also be argued in FE compare to schools.

Another approach of pragmatism occurred in an earlier study on FE by D. Gleeson (1981). He investigated the conflicting interests of technical teachers training their young apprentices to eventually find work in industry on one hand, and on the other, negotiating their educational status in FE in such matters as “administration, organisation and syllabus design” (Gleeson 1981 p 269). He described this type of pragmatism as “dealing with the conflicting interests associated with 'education' and 'training'” (Gleeson 1981 p 272). Gleeson advocated that due to changing social contexts from industry to FE, a technical teacher would adopt educational approaches to legitimate his/her educational status despite strong initial allegiance to industrial practices.

In a later article by Shain and Gleeson (1999), they investigated FE teachers in five colleges and identified three responses. Teachers were typologized into three types: rejection and resistance (those who were critical of reforms in the sector), compliance (those who were prepared to be flexible and support existing work conditions), and strategic compliance (those who were critical of aspects of educational reforms but willing to engage with teaching aspects and bring in occupational experiences and beliefs into their teaching).

**External and internal factors**

This final part of the section on literature review focuses on external and internal factors. The former may be defined as factors outside the control of the teachers such as government policies and specifications and the latter factor as those that teachers can control. This notion of control might be one of perception where teachers described their identities. As is the argument in this article, may it be the factors; perceptions of teachers or their identities, social contexts provide an important backdrop alongside previous occupational experiences.

P. Gleeson (1994) investigated Australian trade teachers in Victoria state from 1919 and 1920 highlighted three factors namely: cultural symbols, masculine image and segregated location. The first factor referred to their industrial artefacts resulting from their previous occupational background where industrial tools and machinery were located in their teaching environments Gleeson 1994). This internal factor served as a reminder of their previous occupation experiences but also the relevance these artefacts played in pedagogic practices. As regards male identity in the trade teacher communities, this was prominent in their attitudes, subject of communication, ‘girlie’ poster hidden in teacher’s locker door and existence of male toilets only (Gleeson 1994). These features as identified by Gleeson might have relevance to current male-dominated areas in FE such as engineering and motor vehicle. The final factor related to the isolated location of trade departments from mainstream teaching communities due to the nature of teaching which involved noise in learning of such
vocational subjects and accessibility in terms of waste removals resulting in these teachers having a separate communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991).

Robson et al (2004) identified four factors, which were 'adding values', 'protecting industry standards', 'sharing expertise', and 'knowing industry practice'. These factors may be classed as internal as the teachers consciously adopted these approaches to their teaching.

Avis et al (2002) conducted a study on 94 trainee teachers in the FE sector with regard to their perceptions of labour processes of teachers in FE. Trainee teachers in this study identified themselves against the good and bad practice in their teaching institutions and interestingly, defined themselves with bad teaching. They perceived bad teaching as lack of discipline, inappropriate use of language, poor attendance and an emphasis for successful accreditation i.e. outcomes. Trainees perceived teachers in FE as “demoralised, over-worked, and ageing” (Avis et al 2002 p 195). However, the authors made a distinction regarding pedagogic preoccupations of trainees and established teachers. With trainees, they were occupied with student records, lesson plans, and teaching evaluations, which were emphasised in their teacher education programme. The practitioners were concerned with other issues such as funding, management demands, and quality systems, which might have been given lesser emphasis.

The above differences in perceptions of trainees and practitioners as regards administrative roles provide an insightful approach of pedagogical and social contexts in FE, which might have relevance to how teachers in FE perceive themselves.

To sum up this section, social contexts affect how teachers view themselves. The literature reviewed may broadly be classified under four headings of: social participation, sense of conflicts and marginalization, pragmatism, and external and internal factors.

Discussions of the findings
This penultimate section explores the concept of “spectra of social polarization” from the perspectives of social contexts. The participants’ contexts are highlighted, as these would provide better understanding of the discussions. The discussions are considered under the five spectra of: positive and negative aspects; concept/theory and reality/practice; internal and external factors; double life and multi-identities; and on-going iconography. This framework of “spectra of social polarization” is social dependent. Each spectrum represents continuum of viewpoints of a specific aspect, such as positive and negative aspects, from one end to another (hence polarization) in which an FE teacher may at a specific time perceived to be on this continuum. Over time, s/he may identify her/himself along this spectrum or simultaneously with other spectra depending on her/his identification in relation to personal, professional, and social factors. The discussion of the five spectra in this section is treated separately for convenience though in reality an FE teacher may identify with more than one spectrum.

The social contexts of the eight participants should also be indicated as their social contexts informed their identities. The participants were equally represented in
both genders and they ranged between the ages of late 30’s and mid-50’s. The teaching settings included FE colleges, adult and community settings, and an occupational teaching institution with teaching experiences ranging from four to 17 years with five of the participants having 7 years or less. The subject areas included information technology, dental hygiene, mathematics/adult numeracy, media and communications, art, palmistry, dance, and health and social care.

1. Positive and negative aspects

This spectrum focuses on the positive and negative aspects in relation to FE teachers and their teaching practices. Some examples of positive aspects included: motivational force to teach, ability to link occupational experiences and teaching, balancing state of mind, ability to use creativity from professional/occupation activities for teaching work and research, development as human being and learning, professional updating, confidence in teaching from occupational practices, ability to engage with learners and their social contexts and educational experiences.

Day and Kington (2008) gave a listing of the positive and negative aspects of teachers’ identities in their VITAE project and there was an overlap with the findings of this project in terms of professional updating. This overlap is not surprising, as the sectors require continuous professional updating. The others, listed above, appeared to be specific to FE in areas such as ability to link occupational experiences and teaching, ability to use creativity from professional/occupational activities, confidence in teaching from occupational practices and ability to engage with learners and their social contexts. The explanation might be found in the FE teachers’ occupational experiences (which were unlikely with compulsory sector teachers). There appeared to be a strong relationship between occupation experiences and pedagogic practices that these FE teachers could identify with. The other positive aspects that were not easily associated with occupational experiences were balancing state of mind, and developing as humans and learning. Day et al (2006) and Day and Kington (2008) offered a three variable approach of personal, work and situational factors and if applied to FE teachers, having outside professional teaching lives of personal, and past/current occupational ones might have afforded a life-work balance in terms of mental states and attitudes to learning as people.

Some negative aspects included: bureaucracy, amount of paperwork, constraint of regulations and management targets on teaching practices, perception of not trusted or valued as teachers, education as a business, teaching activities outside of employment contract, and lack of collegiate team working.

Referring to negative aspects that came out of the findings, there were more commonalities with Day and Kington (2008) findings with regulatory constraints, increase workload, lack of collegiate working. Specific to the FE sector were changes of “funding, deregulation and managerialism” (Shain and Gleeson 1999 p 454). These situational changes have an impact on teachers’ identities in terms of how they perceived themselves and how they felt they were perceived. These perceptions were reflected in the findings such as ‘not valued/trusted, education as a business, and constrained by management targets’. These may be perceived as forms of marginalization as defined by Hodges (1998 p 285) as “repetitions of alienation and isolation”.

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One needs to caveat that the negative aspects may not necessarily lead to negative pedagogic practices. One of the eight participants, a dance teacher in adult and community settings had negative learning experiences in her primary school (in mathematics) and higher education (in dance). Despite these experiences, she put them to positive use in her dance classes with elderly and disabled learners by engaging with them based on their individual needs and building from that. This example from the project findings illustrates that past negative education experiences could have their positive uses as a means of defining themselves as teachers (Avis et al 2002).

The quotation below came from a female teacher (with work experiences of private and public sectors in the UK and Japan) specialising in media and communications at an FE college:

“Hard to think of myself as a professional in an institution that treats you as a ‘call centre’ with huge autonomy in class but hierarchical and regressive”

This combination of negative and positive aspects illustrates the complexity of this teacher’s identity. She identified her private sector experiences with her FE college’s business centred approach to education (Shain and Gleeson 1999) in which she compared it to a modern equivalence of a call centre where those at the front line were highly managed to achieve the company’s targets and time controlled down to the level of duration and frequency of comfort breaks. At the same time, she positively enjoyed having the freedom to be creative in the classroom. This quotation provides a flavour of the identity pull of this spectrum of positive and negative aspects

2. Concept/theory and reality/practice

This spectrum consists of two approaches namely: concept of reflective practice in teaching and reality of bureaucracy and paperwork in practice; and application of teachers’ life and occupational/professional experiences to engage with conceptual frameworks and situated pedagogic contexts.

With the first approach, the concept of reflective practice has been evident in the training of FE teachers and related writers included Hillier 2005, Schon 1991, and Mezirow 1991. This concept of reflective approach requires time and mental space to reflect on one’s teaching practices in the related social contexts as advocated. This preferred approach, as indicated by the participants on the project, might be hampered by the realities of bureaucracy and paperwork in the targets and funding-driven teaching institutions in FE. These features of increasing bureaucracy and paperwork existed also in the compulsory sectors as indicated by Moore et al (2002). This identity pull of the concept/theory and reality/practice spectrum exists also with the next approach.

FE teachers with occupational backgrounds entering teaching with occupational experiences would want to impart to their learners concepts of professional knowledge and values over and above course specifications. Robson et al (2004) used the terms ‘adding value’ to stress the extra professional content beyond course specifications, and ‘knowing why’ to impart the importance of professional knowledge and theory in workplace. These professional/occupational knowledge and values may be viewed as concepts/theories that FE teachers would want to include in
their pedagogic practices. In addition to these, via their pedagogic training, there might also be pedagogic concepts such as learning theories that might be included in classroom practices. There might be certain occupational disciplines such as car maintenance where specific skills were required to achieve a pre-determined outcome. This ‘craft tradition’ of teaching (Coldron and Smith 1999) might sit nearer with a behaviourist (e.g. Skinner 1968) learning theory than perhaps a humanist theory of learning (e.g. Rogers 1961). Tensions might arise for those FE teachers being pulled by one preferred learning theory in contrast to their occupational experiences. An additional tension can exist in the situated pedagogic contexts that an FE teacher finds him/herself such as unmotivated learners, lack of appropriate equipment, and an overly generous timescale for completing activities. Such realities/practices could intensify teachers’ sense of their identities in this social polarization spectrum.

A quotation that exemplifies this spectrum is by an IT teacher in an FE college with global occupational experiences in this area as well as in publishing, art, palmistry and homeopathy. He refers to the teaching of IT to unmotivated but IT savvy learners as follows:

‘My approach to teaching is not to use a big stick and not dumb down to primary and secondary levels but work on delivery and start from learners’ world.”

The above participant viewed himself as a facilitator by engaging with his learners and enabling them to take responsibility for their learning by initially getting to understand where they came from in terms of educational experiences and knowledge, and assessing where they were (Avis et al 2002). The implicit theoretical approach might be closest to the social constructivist theory of learning (e.g. Vygotsky 1978) where learners construct their own knowledge, as they understand their life experiences and create their own meanings. This learning occurs in a socially enacted environment where a learner engages with his/her own learning.

3. Internal and external factors

In this spectrum of social polarization, the identity tension is between internal factors may be defined as those within the control of oneself and external as outside the control of oneself. Examples of internal factors include: core values/vision, knowledge and experiences from professional/occupational and life, and relationships with colleagues and learners. Examples of external factors include: set targets (pedagogic and financial), teaching standards, course specifications and peoples’ perceptions such as colleagues, learners and employers.

Bourdieu (1984) termed ‘judgement of taste’ as a way of distinguishing those from what they did not wish to be and from the FE perspective, teachers could choose their core values or vision based on their professional, personal and situated/social experiences. This ability to choose must also be viewed in the context of external factors such as teaching standards, teacher education, and institutional demands. The two factors of internal and external may be viewed either as a negative or positive interaction (as viewed as a continuum) depending on a teacher’s perspective. A positive one may result in complementary approaches of internal and external factors such as core values are informed by teaching standards and requirement to undergo continuous professional development (DfES 2006). Alternatively, tension may arise with oppositional perspectives of these specific factors. A teacher might view targets setting, part of the external factor and business approach arising from incorporation
and marketization of FE institutions (Shain and Gleeson 1999), as a tension with his/her vision and internal factor to imbue learners with a love for learning and not merely to achieve the desired outcome.

Day et al (2006) used the structures of macro (e.g. social factors and government policies), meso (e.g. teaching and teacher education institutions), micro (e.g. learners and colleagues), and personal biographies (e.g. values and beliefs) to classify them in a hierarchical order. This approach can be applied to the listing of internal and external factors from the project where all of the four structures are represented.

Robson et al (2004) four factors of adding value, protecting standards, sharing expertise, and knowing why appeared to situate well with the findings of the project as internal factors. However, tensions could arise where a teacher’s allegiances with his/her occupational experiences could be in conflict with pedagogic practices. This shifting of allegiances (D. Gleeson 1981) could come about for various reasons. One might be time and space dimensions of his/her occupation experiences and current pedagogic experiences resulting from greater pedagogic knowledge and expertise, disillusionment of current occupational developments (in comparison to his/her occupational period of involvement), and greater relevance of occupation-related courses. Another dimension might be the difference in performing a role in the occupational workplace (doing) and teaching to learners in a teaching environment (teaching). These are different processes and they require different knowledge and skills and approaches. The notion of learning how to work and using knowledge in work is beyond the remit of this article.

The gender divide as identified by P. Gleeson (1994) did not arise in the findings, as the disciplines covered did not include the traditional male-oriented disciplines of automotive practices, sheet metal, woodwork, fitting and machining and electrical practices.

4. Double life and multi-identities

This penultimate spectrum relating to teachers’ identities are hybrid, double life and multi-identities. ‘Hybrid’ may be termed as a combination of elements of learning as teachers and from the perspective of their learners such as interacting and motivating learners. This sense of identity is muddled with the notion of lifelong learning (e.g. EU Commission 2000 and OECD 1996) where teachers are encouraged to learn throughout their working lives and the DfES Report on Further Education (2006) made continuous professional development mandatory for qualified FE teachers. The notions of teacher and learner become one integrated with the added dimension of their learners. This hybrid nature creates an identity pull.

‘Double life’ refers to the need to juggle teaching and occupational workloads for financial reasons. This approach is pertinent in the light of financial tightening by the current coalition government. Some of the participants on this project works as teachers and professionals in their occupational disciplines, which can be advantageous as on-going occupational experiences could boost the teaching confidence. However, this combination could work the opposite in the current climate of budgetary tightening imposed by the Con/Lib-Dem government (Reuben 2010). One participant juggling professional work as an architect in private industry, teaching art in adult and community settings, and practising artist had to consider
giving up teaching as it did not financially reward though it satisfied his emotional and creative needs. Likewise, he had to curtail his artistic activities for the same reason. Such external event of budgetary tightening as defined for the purpose of this article impacts on this teacher’s actions (financially, emotionally and psychologically) and his sense of identity. The budgetary tightening is an illustrative situation of Bauman’s ‘liquid modernity’ (2007). He viewed liquid modernity as situations where social structures and institutions could not maintain their shapes long enough to solidify and be of terms of reference for people. Due to this age of uncertainty where structures and policies are changing rapidly, people have to be flexible and adaptable and established values and commitments are abandoned.

‘Multi-identities’ refer to multiple jobs within teaching practice and outside of teaching institutions. Remarks of participants included increasing workloads as indicated in the first spectrum. The need to juggle various jobs for non-financial reasons can also affect a teacher’s sense of identity. This might include taking on various teaching roles (e.g. tutor to several groups, teacher in several disciplines, mentor to trainee teachers, manager of a department and trade union representative for the institution). These roles require different activities and capacities in relation to colleagues, learners, and management and with these, conflicting identities.

The quotation below came from a participant who taught dental hygiene and psychology to adult learners on a professionally accredited programme and practised as a dental hygienist alongside:

“We never felt like parents – felt like that when I first taught and had taken a while to grow into that.”

Here she was referring to her multi-identities - the time in her new role as a parent in the ‘liquid modernity’ of personal life where societal structures were changing rapidly to allow a new parent to learn to be a parent. As with being a teacher, the increasing demands of teaching (as mentioned in the Introduction section) as evident in the last few years had meant she had taken perhaps a longer period than anticipated to identify herself as a teacher. This multi-identities spectrum affects a teacher’s life in terms of the personal, professional and social factors.

5. On-going iconography: learner driver and advance teacher practitioner

This final spectrum has four approaches to viewing identities in an on-going process. Like in the linguistic contexts, some participants in this project found this approach useful in engageing with their identities in forms of symbolic representations as FE teachers and professionals in their disciplines. These symbolic representations may occur in one of four forms namely: more than one journey in teaching, professional life and pedagogic experiences that inform one’s teaching identity, from learner driver to teacher practitioner to advanced teacher practitioner, and trajectory of multi-layered social polarization.

Direction and journey were evoked in this final spectrum of social polarization. This on-going iconography has resonances with Day et al (2006) three variables approach of personal, professional and situational in which the five structures are represented (as discussed in the third spectrum). The term ‘iconography’ is used as a symbolic representation of how teachers might feel at any one time and as a means of analysis and making sense of themselves.
The final three quotations provide a snapshot of some of the participants’ sense of identity at a specific point in their lives. The first quotation came from a mathematics and adult numeracy teacher who held a high level teaching post in the provision of teacher education in mathematics for teachers in South African townships. He held a teaching qualification in South Africa (which was not recognised in the UK) before immigrated to the UK. In the UK, he taught mathematics and physics in an FE college in a large English city whilst enrolled on a teaching course. This an example of a ‘more than one journey in teaching’ iconography:

“In South Africa, I became a professional in 1996 having been given responsibility for training teachers. It had taken me 16 years to recognise a good/bad lesson, strengths and weaknesses in my teaching and in others. I had a teaching qualification and a higher degree. In 2002, I came to England and was back to square one. After qualifying again in 2006, I was a professional again.”

His reference to ‘back to square one’ meant that he could not understand the apparent lack of motivation in the UK learners in contrast to motivated but deprived learners in South Africa. It was a journey of discovery for those years, 2002 to 2006, to acquire a recognised teaching qualification in the UK alongside learning to understand the social contexts of where his UK learners were coming from. Unlike others interviewed where there were relational impact of occupational and life experiences to teaching, this example of his cultural background had an opposite effect to understanding his FE learners. He had to travel two teaching journeys to have a sense of his professional identity.

The quotation below is an example of a reflective insight into the second example of this on-going iconographic spectrum. The teacher is an arts teaching to adult learners in adult and community settings in which he brings his life and professional experiences into the classroom as a practising artist, practising architect and with his life experiences:

“This on-going iconography is a sense of therapy such as dealing with loved ones, living on my own and the impact on how I view the world..on-going psychological state as artist where one uses Freud's notion of dreams to feed my art and how these experiences feed into my teaching.”

The above teacher viewed his personal life (relationships with loved ones, solitary living and perceptions of life) as a fluid and ever changing mental state (Bauman 2007) that affected his approach to his art and teaching. His mention of interpretation of dreams is beyond the focus of this article but his willingness to be open to his ‘psychical forces’ (Freud 1999) to possibly resolve conflicts of some sort from personal, professional or societal-related issues indicates his openness to sources for potential applications to his teaching and artistic endeavours. He also perceived a strong linkage of his professional and personal experiences to his pedagogic practices, which he called ‘labour of love’. The mix of personal, professional and societal factors illustrates the complexity of this teacher’s identity.

This last quotation refers to the last of the four approaches. The social contexts of this participant, a dental hygienist, were mentioned in the previous spectrum. Here she explains her multi-layered social sense of identity in the following manner:
“Identity grows with you. One is given a label as a professional (dental hygienist) and one acts this out. I don't consider myself clever and now as a teacher, whom I consider as clever, and so I grow into it”

She identified her professional role of a dental hygienist as of a lower professional status to that of a teacher from the perception of ‘cleverness’. For her, there were social expectations of how a dental hygienist should be and were coerced into playing the expected role. The taking on of the role of a teacher (alongside her practising as a dental hygienist) meant to her that she was more able and her identity changed to reflect the social expectation. There are different directions and journeys in this illustration of multi-layered social polarization spectrum involving professional roles and their perceived social hierarchies.

Relevance and implications for teaching

The previous section investigated vocational-related FE teachers’ identities under the five spectra of social polarization of: positive and negative aspects; concept and reality; internal and external factors; double life and multi-identities; and on-going iconography. These spectra though investigated separately may be related as already indicated above e.g. internal and external factors and positive and negative aspects spectra. Teachers may relate their identities with more than one spectra and on specific points on these individual spectra at certain times in their lives depending on personal, professional and societal factors.

A definition of FE teachers’ identities resulting from the literature survey and discussions may be viewed as complex, shifting and inter-relationships of professional (occupational and pedagogic), personal (self, emotional and cognitive), and social-related influences (human e.g. work colleagues, learners and people in management and non-human related e.g. government reports, management styles and technology). The identities may be typologized as five spectra of social polarization, which should be viewed as non-discrete and fluid and that teachers’ identification with them may change over time depending on professional, personal and societal dimensions. These dimensions and thus identities affect pedagogic practices.

Generalisations from the findings based on eight participants in this small-scale project should be taken with care due to the scale of this empirical study. However, the typology of five spectra of social polarization provides a new understanding of how teachers with occupational experiences could have a major impact on how they viewed themselves as teachers alongside their life, teaching and societal dimensions.

This new understanding has implications for training of teachers, teachers’ continuing professional development (CPD), implementation of policies by teaching institutions and policy makers. Prospective teachers by having a better awareness of the related dimensions affecting their identities might be more able to reflect and take action of their identity pulls. Practising teachers in their yearly mandatory CPD requirement might be informed of such identity pulls and use this new knowledge to further their professional development e.g. by carrying out action-research to enable them to move onto a new professional level. Managers in teaching institutions might use this new knowledge of teachers' identities to reflect on managerial actions such as targets setting, CPD training and institutional ethos in order to create a smoother working relationship with their staff. Policy makers by understanding the possible
conflicts of teachers' identities might factor into their decision-making process in order to create a more integrated and harmonious approach.

This article concludes by suggesting areas for further research in terms of a larger number of teachers and types of teaching institutions. A vertical research approach might be useful to include teacher educators, learners and institutional managers.

References


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