

FE teacher identities: what are they, why do we care, and how do we use this knowledge?

**Sai Loo, Institute of Education, University of
London
s.loo@ioe.ac.uk**

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STRUCTURE OF PRESENTATION

1. Background
2. Research questions and methods
3. Literature review
4. Findings and discussion
5. Conclusions and implications

1. BACKGROUND

There had been repeated calls for improvement in teacher education as early as the 1950's (Colley, Wahlberg & James 2007). Despite these calls, there were no attempts to define the nature of the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

This presentation aims to provide an understanding of teachers' processes of teaching and learning from the perspectives of identities and roles of FE vocational teachers in the social contexts they work in.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

This small-scale project consisted of eight teachers with teaching qualifications. The participants were equally represented in both genders and from various teaching settings. The subject areas included information technology, dental hygiene, mathematics/adult numeracy, media and communications, art, palmistry, dance and health and social care.

The questions are:

- * What are the professional identities of teachers in the FE sector?
- * Do past experiences (occupational and other relevant ones) contribute to professional identity and if so, how?
- * Are there any current work experiences that inform one's identity, if so, what are these and how they inform professional identity?

Questionnaire and one-to-one interview were used.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Social participation

Kelly (2006) , Coldron and Smith (1999), Lave and Wenger (1991)

b. Tensions, conflicts and marginalization

Hodges (1998) , Viskovic and Robson (2001), Bathmaker and Avis (2005), Day, Kington, Stobart and Sammons (2006)

c. Pragmatism

Moore, Edwards, Halpin and George (2002), Shain and D. Gleeson (1999)

d. External and internal factors

P. Gleeson (1994), Robson, Bailey and Larkin (2004), Avis, Bathmaker and Parsons (2002)

DEFINITION OF FE TEACHER IDENTITIES

Complex, shifting and inter-relationships of professional (pedagogic and occupational), personal (self, emotional and cognitive), and social-related influences (human- and non-human related). 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.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Social contexts of participants

'Spectra of social polarization'

- a. Positive and negative aspects
- b. Concept/theory and reality/practice
- c. Internal and external factors
- d. Double life and multi-identities
- e. On-going iconography: learner driver and advance teacher practitioner

A. 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.

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.

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

B. 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.

“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.”

C. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

In the spectrum, internal factors may be defined as those within the control of oneself and external as outside the control of oneself.

Examples of internal factors which were mentioned in the investigation included: core values/vision, knowledge and experiences from professional/occupational and life, and relationships with colleagues and learners.

Examples of external factors included: set targets (pedagogic and financial), teaching standards, course specifications and peoples' perceptions such as colleagues, learners and employers.

D. 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.

'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.

'Multi-identities' refer to multiple jobs within teaching practice and outside of teaching institutions.

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

E. ON-GOING ICONOGRAPHY

This final spectrum has four approaches to viewing identities on an on-going process. Like in the linguistic contexts, some participants in this project found this approach useful in engaging 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.

“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.”

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The five 'spectra of social polarization' indicate complex inter-relationships of occupational FE teachers' identities from a small sample of eight.

These 'spectra' provide a way of understanding how teachers respond to social contexts in their professional (and personal) lives.

These new understandings have implications for new teaching recruits to the sector e.g. teacher education, and/or existing teachers e.g. teacher development (CPD), institutional management, and policy-making.

FINISH!

Thank you for your attention.

Questions, comments, suggestions, and ideas?