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**Developing professional identity of teachers in the FE and skills sector**

**Chapter Introduction**

This chapter aims to define professionalism and explore the concept of professional identity development, particularly in relation to trainee teachers working in the FE and skills sector. Since 2001, there has been systematic criticism of those teaching in this sector and a subsequent drive towards professionalising what was largely unregulated prior to this. Underpinning this has been the introduction of a plethora of professional teaching standards as discussed in chapter one. This chapter also explores the role of the mentor and wider team on the development of the trainee teacher and identifies some of the tensions that exist within this relationship.

This chapter proposes the argument that teacher education programmes should prepare trainee teachers to be able to embody professionalism and develop a professional identity so they are able to meet the challenges of this diverse sector in a flexible and autonomous way.

**Definitions of professionalism**

Professionalism has been discussed and defined in many ways, often attributed to one’s conduct and how we are perceived by ourselves and others, in relation to a professional role. Historically professionalism was improved through reflective practice as an autonomous activity, but since the introduction of the teacher standards, it has become measured against outcomes and set criteria (ETF, 2014b). Rytivaara and Kershner (2012) argue that professional learning is not the superficial acquisition of information, but deep learning that happens when connections are made resulting in transformation, or “seeking meaning through understanding” (p.1000). This can be seen by changes in the individual when they adopt the practices being modelled.

According to Evans (2015), professionalism has become a contested concept which has multiple definitions depending on context and therefore, “trying to reach consensus, then, on what professionalism means in today’s context is probably a hopeless pursuit” (p.2). Professionalism “relates to people’s being in the context of their work; it is simply something that is, not something that ought to be” (Evans, 2015, p.7). She argues that it is the very nature of someone’s professionalism that is the focus of what is being developed, rather than individual criteria. Sachs (2001) also argues that it is critical for teachers to develop professional values and specialised knowledge because they “face complex and unpredictable situations” and they “need the autonomy to make their own judgements... and act with responsibility” (p.150). This is more than a check list of professional standards, but embodiment of what it means to be a professional.

**Professional development of teachers**

The reflective practitioner model of professional development encourages the individual to be autonomous and make decisions about practice based on the expertise that grows from reflection. However, as the competency model of teaching became prevalent and accountability took precedence, the ideas embedded in the discourse about the reflective practitioner, took somewhat of a back seat. The sector witnessed steady “increasing bureaucratic pressures to meet targets, and performance-management regimes” (Pleasance, 2016, p.22). This has led to the underdevelopment of individual professional identity and has been met by strong opposition by those working in the sector.

Currently, teacher training programmes are designed using a performance-based approach, measuring individual competency against the achievement of the professional standards. This methodology was challenged by Combs as early as 1972, when he suggested that effective teacher education programmes should provide opportunities for trainees in personal discovery, through a personalised, humanistic approach. This enabled trainee teachers to develop ‘individual agency’ through social interaction, rather than learning a precise set of skills.

According to Diamond (1991) a deductive approach to teaching and learning is fundamentally flawed as the premise assumes a set of teaching skills which can be taught and will result in effective teachers after training. In reality, teaching is a far more fluid and intuitive act which requires an ability to approach the often dynamic learning environment with the aptitude to choose appropriate (effective) responses, often without support. It could be argued that this is underpinned by a set of pre-established behaviours or teacher characteristics. However, this approach also does not take into account the distinct individualism of teachers, diverse teaching environments and different vocational subject areas.

The delineation of specific behavioural objectives, prior to or early in a teacher-learning sequence, assumes that the teacher as learner is inert and passive, that there is a stable body of knowledge and of skills and that there are fixed approaches to learning. However, from an alternative constructivist position, the teacher is seen as essentially active and world-making. The goal of teacher education may be nothing less than the creation of perspectives of worlds (Diamond, 1991, p.10).

This alternative approach to the development of teachers, prioritised a personalised teacher training programme, within which teachers are developed to be able to create “adequate selves”, and is underpinned by a premise of organic growth as opposed to “mechanistic functioning” (p.11).

Tickle (2000) also warned against a checklist of professional behaviours and skills and argued more towards “the synthesis of holistic practice” (p.88) which would provide a more inclusive idea of professional teacher development. He strongly recognised the need for this type of approach within the FE sector, because of the substantial change being experienced within the sector at the time. This often resulted in trainees joining established teachers who were in “states of disaffection and cynicism, brought on by changes in identity, created by the nature and direction of the demands and requirements being made on them” (Tickle, 2000, p.89). This can result in an unstable and fluctuating community of practice where appropriate professional conduct may not always be modelled. The altered identities of existing teachers resulted from the overwhelming scrutiny that has ensued along with rapid reform. What he argued for is a greater need to equip trainee teachers with the ability to critically evaluate situations in order to develop their own professional identity within this challenging context.

Unless one has a sense of self-development and the expertise to examine, develop and appropriately deploy professional characteristics and personal qualities, it seems unlikely that the adoption of a critical perspective on teaching and its circumstances will carry very far (Tickle, 2000, p.92).

In 2003, Ball heavily criticised performativity in relation to its cost on the profession. He argued that the performance-driven culture has created an inner conflict for teachers, where “increasingly, we choose and judge our actions and they are judged by others on the basis of their contribution to organisational performance, rendered in terms of measurable outputs” (p.223). This creates a newly constructed idea of what it means to be a teacher and causes feelings of inauthenticity arising from the pressure felt to perform and improve against set targets. This presumes a set criteria of what is seen as good practice and what it means to be an effective teacher, which limits teachers from potentially reflecting on wider aspects of the role. In addition to this is an expectation that teachers in the FE and Skills sector will undertake additional workload, something that causes unnecessary stress.

An important part of professional identity is about how to challenge systems and conventions by being a confident agent of change, contributing to a community of practice, in order for it to move forwards (Lucas and Unwin, 2009). However, this contradicts what is at the heart of the professional standards and is an element of teacher education programmes which happens co-incidentally.

James and Unwin (2016) were commissioned to identify ways to foster high quality vocational teaching in the FE sector. What they found through their research was a tension between what the teachers deemed as professionalism and the expectations of the organisation. Their research also uncovered a stark difference between the way that professionalism was defined within the sector; managers viewed teachers as professional if the job was done “unsupervised, and without complaint” (p.26); whereas, teachers viewed professionalism linked to the notion of identity. This led to tutors feeling undervalued, resulting in conflict and “high staff turnover” (James and Unwin, 2016, p.17). ITE programmes have not previously been designed to prepare trainees for this type of situation, something recognised by Cort, et al (2004).

Training should provide teachers with managerial, organisational, counselling and communication skills; training programmes work best when teachers and trainers take part in identifying their own training needs and designing the training (p.7).

Themes around social, management and personal skills are not included within the learning outcomes for initial teacher education, or included in the professional standards. However, the topic of teacher well-being is currently being considered as relevant and some organisations are including this within the taught element of the programme (Russell, 2020). Education is continually changing and part of the teaching role must be about cultivating resilience. According to Ofsted (2015), teacher education will be judged on “how well prepared they [teachers] are for employment as a result of their training” (p.21). One of the ways that this can be achieved is to ensure that “expert mentors and trainers have consistently high expectations and work collaboratively to ensure training is coherent and highly relevant to the needs of trainees” (p.40). This assumes that the placement context provides access to stability and expertise. However, within this sector this is not always the case.

**Dual Professionalism**

The concept of a dual professional is where a trainee teacher has a body of subject specialist knowledge and pedagogic, or applied theoretical knowledge. This was initially introduced by the IfL and is still firmly rooted within the current professional standards (ETF, 2014a; Table 1.1) and viewed as a way to drive up the professionalism of the sector.

The root of the problem lies in the belief that teaching is in fact somehow divorced from context and that pedagogy can be organised into a specific body of knowledge, rather than a more intuitive and reflexive activity. This is what is described by Schön as the ‘high ground’ of technical knowledge and the ‘swampy lowlands’ of ‘indeterminate practice’ (Schön 2003). Schön argues for an approach which places practical knowledge at the heart of developing professional expertise. This is based on personal activity and developed through reflection-on-action after the event, and through creatively applying knowledge during the activity, through reflection-in-action. It is only through reflection that Schon argues, practitioners are able to articulate and analyse their tacit knowledge about professional practice, which in turn leads to new understanding about unique and often challenging situations. Thus, it is not simply possible to ascertain a professional as someone who claims expertise based upon a body of knowledge, either in their own subject area or a pedagogical knowledge base. This reductionist approach to professionalism does not take into account the breadth of teaching within the diverse FE sector which draws teachers from a rich variety of industries and occupations (Nasta 2007).

Trying to find and define what the essence of teaching is in such a diverse landscape is simply irrelevant. The context is critical in the development of professional identity and cannot and should not be divorced from this. Context includes the demographic of the learners, as well as the inseparable links between subject content and delivery, and the relationship between the learner and the teacher within this unique setting, particular to that time and place.

According to Plowright and Barr (2012), continuing to promote the idea of dual professionalism will only act to reinforce “the tensions in the ‘fractured environment of the FE workplace’, with teachers showing increasing compliance with a market liberal reform that is committed to privatisation and deregulation in highly managerial and competitive contexts” (2012).

The professionalism of the FE teacher… is rooted in the fusion of the subject and its teaching, and not in the IfL’s ‘dual professionalism’ of tandem allegiances (Plowright and Barr, 2012).

**Theory of self and identity development**

Becoming critically aware of one's own ‘composing of reality’ requires acknowledging that one's identity is a part of knowing. Participation in the ‘dialogue toward truth’ hinges on assuming that one has something to contribute. Cultivating a ‘capacity to respond’ requires self-reflection on one's identity and relations with others (Baxter Magolda, 2003, p.231).

A critical aspect of learning for trainee teachers proposed by Gilar et al. (2007) is that they are able to construct their own meaning and knowledge and self-direct their learning. According to Rogers and Scott (2008), teachers should work towards an awareness of their identity and the contexts, relationships, and emotions that shape them, and (re)claim the authority of their own voice (Table 2.1). This calls upon teachers to make a psychological shift in how they think about themselves as teachers. Awareness and voice represent the “contested” place where the normative demands of the external encounter the internal meaning-making and desires of the teacher (p.739).

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| **Identity formation** | **Internal and external aspects** |
| Dependent upon and formed within multiple contexts which bring social, cultural, political, and historical forces to bear upon that formation | External |
| Developed in relationship with others and involves emotions | External and internal |
| Is shifting, unstable, and multiple  | External and internal |
| Involves the construction and reconstruction of meaning through stories over time. | Internal |

Table 2.1: Concepts of identity construction (adapted from Rodgers and Scott, 2008)

New experiences are interpreted in relation to past experiences and in a personal way, leading to “a greater understanding of how we, as individuals, can behave and learn” (Jarvis, 2010, p.7). However, according to Brookfield (1987), this takes a certain degree of critical thinking and creativity to arrive at possible solutions rather than looking for one definitive answer, by using forecasting techniques.

Winch (2006) concurred with the idea that an essential element of decision making rests in the ability to predict possible consequences by making informed and rational judgements. This is made possible by having sufficient information about the subject and a degree of autonomy, which he describes as potentially restricted within the learning context for trainee teachers.

Being autonomous requires knowledge and skill on the part of the autonomous individual. It also requires permission to make and implement reasonable or worthwhile choices. But it further requires appropriate social conditions (p.11).

These social conditions may be limiting to an individual, particularly where there is an inequality of power, or access to resources. The role of the mentor becomes even more critical in enabling trainees to be able to exercise autonomy in decision making, and is dependent upon their stage of development. The trainee teacher must have the opportunity to develop autonomy. However, this process also involves the development of the self, both in terms of knowledge and awareness (Winch, 2006).

**Teacher development and professional identity**

According to Lortie (1975) the initial vantage point that trainee teachers approach the ITE programme with is based on their idea of what it means to be a teacher. This is formed over years of being a learner and observing at close proximity teachers in action, within a classroom environment and “see teaching as the ‘living out’ of prior conceptions of good teaching” (p.66). The teaching profession is unique in this sense, but although it is common to have had regular opportunity to observe teachers teaching, this does not provide full access to the complete picture of what it is to be a teacher, because it is a procedural knowledge base. This lack of analytical stance, coupled with limited knowledge of pedagogical principles results in an unreliable basis for any kind of evaluation on the challenges and demands of the teaching role. This results in an underestimation about the challenges inherent in the role, while at the same time there is a formation of clear and “definite ideas about the nature of the role” (Lortie, 1975, p.65). Many trainees therefore, enter teacher education with a strong idea about teacher identity, based upon their own observations and experiences as a learner. However, the experience can be in stark contrast to this perception resulting in anxiety which has a negative impact on the trainee teachers development due to the difficulty they have in “making accurate perceptions and thoughtful decisions as they learn on the job” (p.72). This anxiety increases when support is limited, or not actively sought. The trainee teacher often wants to be seen as coping, thus preventing them from expressing a need for help, or advice, often compounding the isolation they feel.

In addition to this, teacher educators can present an idealised and unachievable theory of teaching which can exacerbate the feelings of incompetence in the trainees as they are unable to perform as the theory suggests. This ultimately impacts on the identity being formed by the trainee as they are forced to shift their perceptions about teaching and their ideal of how they wish to be seen (the identity they want to adopt as a teacher) in order to survive in the placement practice. A resulting shift between expectations and the reality can be seen, referred to as ‘practice shock’ (Orr and Simmons, 2011).

A constructivist model of identity development, suggested by Kegan (1994) was adapted by Rodgers and Scott (2008) as a useful theoretical framework to guide the understanding of teacher identity development (Table 2.2). Rodgers and Scott argued that the way the trainee teacher assimilates and ultimately makes sense of their experience is different at different developmental stages of their training and through time their identity constantly evolves, as ‘the teacher self makes sense of his/her experience’ (p. 739).

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|  | **How does the teacher make sense of social, political and historical forces?** | **How do they make sense of their relationship with others?** | **How do they construct and reconstruct meaning through stories? What are the developmental limitations of the stories they tell?**  |
| **Stage 2: The instrumental knower** | They are viewed as external concrete states | Concrete conception of teacher role.Interactions with others are rule bound.No perspectives on oneself in relationship to others. | External, concrete rendering of experiences.Views experiences in black and white; self-reflection eludes them |
| **Stage 3: The socializing knower** | The self is identified with these forces; readily conforms to them – is defined by them.Not yet able to take a perspective on them – threatened by values associated with social/political/historical forces that are not one’s own. | Self is defined through relationships – the opinions and expectations of others.Feels empathy for others; feels responsible for others’ feelings and holds others responsible for their feelings. Because they seeks to stay in the good graces of others, they struggle with conflicting agenda’s or needs.Criticism experienced as an assault to the self. | Able to report on feelings and emotions that surround teaching.Stories bound by relationships – impact that they have on learners, teachers, institution and vice versa. Not yet able to reflect on ways in which their own thinking or teaching is coloured by relationships with learners, their history, and vice versa.Stories likely to be shaped by what they thinks people what to hear.  |
| **Stage 4: The self-authoring knower** | Has a perspective on these forces, and the ways in which they shape the self.Holds a perspective on how they know and is known in the world Able to define for oneself where they stand in relationship to these forces, rather than being defined by them. | Clear sense of self; takes responsibility for own feelings as separate and distinct from others.Integrates others’ perspectives, including criticism according to one’s own internally generated standards and values.Can hold contradictory feelings simultaneously. | Author of one’s experiences; best able to engage in self-reflection.Tells stories according to their own internal standards.They are able to see the ways in which relationships impact upon their teaching.  |

Table 2.2: The last three stages as suggested by Rodgers and Scott that captures ‘differences in how teachers make sense’ (2008, p.740).

The trainee begins with a concrete, yet limited view of the teaching role and the relationships that operate within that. As their identity develops through experience, they are more able to identify with the social and political forces being experienced, but still find it challenging to question these due to their tethered relationships within the placement context. It is only once the trainee reaches the final stages that they are more likely to become defined internally with a clear set of values and are more able to have ownership over their identity as a teacher. The trainee is able to make judgements and evaluate information in order to take a perspective on it. This leads to an ability to be able to “engage in a critique of their teaching according to their own standards rather than by the standards of others” (Rodgers and Scott, 2008, p.742).

Challenges experienced within the FE and skills sector ultimately shape the identity of the teacher, such as the culture of the team and the overarching placement organisation. Alongside this, ‘Structuring factors’, such as the qualifications system and targets related to achievement and success, impact on the developing professional identity, in a positive or negative way. The constant threat of external inspections combined with other quality measures and a reduction in teaching time allocated to certain subjects, also create additional pressure and concern. Research conducted by Avis and Bathmaker (2004) highlighted the way in which certain restrictions results in trainees developing identities that are different to what they had initially envisaged. However, personal disposition of the trainees, as well as the way their own learners approached learning, also impact on identity development.

Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) define the FE sector as a “deficit model of provision, reacting to new economic and industrial imperatives, broadly to do with bringing about economic growth and social cohesion” (p.967). Increased pressure on teachers to ensure retention and ultimately successful completion of qualifications by learners, can have a detrimental effect on professional identity. They present the argument that professional identity is shaped by the culture of the organisation and the existing colleagues, but that this happens alongside the trainee’s own values. This is often linked directly to the needs of their own learners, even at the expense of alienation from managers, or colleagues. Trainee teachers form and re-form their professional identity in response to the dynamic learning environment, as they interpret and make sense of the interactions between themselves and the learners through “an interpretation of the social processes inside their classrooms” (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009, p.971).

Societal expectations, such as prescribed standards also impact on identity development, particularly if these are different to the value attributed by individual. Schepens et al., (2009) recognised specifically that incidental learning plays a part, but that the trainee teacher needs to be active within this learning experience in order for it to result in “tacitly acquired knowledge” (p.126). Ultimately, this can lead to changing behaviour, competencies and even beliefs. This can result in conflict and anxiety (Beijaard et al., 2003). The placement a trainee teacher is based within can be “very persuasive, very demanding, and in most cases, very restrictive” (Reynolds, cited in Beijaard et al., 2003, p.110). However, this is also influenced by what the trainee allows to have an impact on them.

When confronted with a new situation, Jarvis (2010) suggests that individuals imitate as a way to learn the subculture of the group that they find themselves within. This is then replaced with a more interactive and in turn, intractive learning experience as a specific set of behaviours is learnt associated with that situation. However, this can conflict with the trainee teachers own initial beliefs and idea of the sort of professional identity that they aspire to, causing anxiety. Prior industry experience and former occupational identity also play a part. Trainee teachers can often be seen to draw from this to inspire and engage their own learners and embrace dual professionalism.

**The placement experience, the mentor and the impact on teacher development**

One of the key issues as identified by Dixon et al. (2010) is that undertaking a placement within the FE and Skills sector is a relatively new phenomena which impacts on the quality of the placement, due to the lack of experience. Their research discovered that an experience can differ somewhat, within the same organisation and even the same department, resulting in a major cause for anxiety. A number of trainees in their research felt uncertain about when the placement would start, and found they were expected to teach across a range of subjects and topics, that they might not be qualified in. The trainees felt the placement was disorganised. This experience resulted in the trainees learning how to cope and be flexible within placement. This is seen as central when learning how to teach in what can be termed a ‘messy’ business. However, by learning to cope with dysfunctional practice the trainee teacher can go on to reproduce dysfunctional practice and an assimilation of poor practice (Rodgers and Scott, 2008). In addition, the trainee may suffer with a lack of confidence if they are not supported properly, or subjected to criticism from the mentor, or other teachers at the placement. This could adversely affect a trainee in terms of their mental health, and also their career choice of becoming a teacher.

Dixon et al. (2010) suggest that, “a smooth, problem-free and incrementally introduced placement may be a false preparation for the erratic and hectic environment of FE.” (p.391). They argue that the training programme should equip trainees with the skills, knowledge and ability to judge and ultimately ‘survive’ their individual experiences of placement. Although some trainees have the analytical ability to make judgements about the placement that they experience, this takes time and confidence in order to adapt to what can be a challenging placement experience.

The way that individual ‘agents’ perform within practice in order to make meaningful contributions was defined by Bourdieu (1998) as ‘habitus’. Bourdieu argued that deep rooted assumptions, both individually and collectively inherited, are both physical and mental and “that society comprises people, classes and groups who occupy positions relative to each other and to society as a whole” (p.141). Bourdieu believed that a high degree of competition and struggle occurs between different groups as they compete for validation and recognition within their field.

An additional cause of anxiety and disjuncture for trainee teachers is when they have been placed in a habitus which is unfamiliar. This is compounded by a lack of shared language, or what Bourdieu (1998) termed as ‘informational capital’. Although, trainees might possess an assumed information capital based on prior knowledge of education (Lortie, 1975), this is limited to experiences of observing from the side lines, rather than emersion within the culture. This reflects a wider political agenda within which the education sector is located and the challenge of reconciliation that exists between social class and social mobility and the struggle that this can generate in terms of habitus. Bourdieu’s symbolic power relations and symbolic violence that ensues from this imbalance of power is evident within a placement provision as mentors naturally hold more power within the trainee teacher/mentor relationship because of the capital they possess. In addition, the amount of further investment that they carry out leads to an even greater ‘debt’ leading to an asymmetry of power relations (Bourdieu, 1998).

Winch (2006) suggests that in addition to being qualified, the mentor should be competent to assess the abilities of the trainee and that they possess a “settled disposition of character” (p.39). However, in reality, placements in the FE sector are often agreed upon in more of an ad hoc manner. Although in the best examples mentors are selected based on their competency, this is not always the case. Orr and Simmons (2011) argue for significant changes to the work-based experiences that trainee teachers are subjected to within the context of FE colleges. However, this still remains an area that has been under-researched and a challenging aspect of the programme. The constant changes and relatively recent de-regulation of teaching qualifications in 2014, and decreased levels of funding have left a mark on teaching teams within the FE and skills sector. The sector is made up of a mixture of qualified and non-qualified teachers and differing levels of professionalism, making access to quality placement provision a challenge.

Seidel and Stürmer (2014) argues that pre-service teachers do not have the ability to effectively direct attention to the relevant areas of pedagogical practice within the learning environment in order to make informed decisions about their practice. They relate this directly to the challenges facing new teachers in a complex, dynamic learning environment, particularly when trying to apply theory to practice. They defined professional vision as “the ability to notice and interpret relevant features of classroom situations” (Seidel and Stürmer, 2014, p.741). They argue that pre-service teachers “lack the elaborated and integrated knowledge structures that would allow them to link observed situations with knowledge about teaching and learning” (p.746). This reiterates the critical nature of the mentor to provide guidance for the trainee in terms of what to notice, and subsequently reflect upon. However, this is dependent on the experience and knowledge of the mentor as well as the professional relationship that they have with the trainee.

**The impact of the wider team**

Research carried out by Lave and Wenger (2008) presented the concept of Communities of Practice and subsequent sociocultural transformation that takes place between the newcomers and the existing team, particularly in terms of the developing relationships and “the construction of identities” (p.53). This includes access to all aspects of that community, including “a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources and opportunities for trainees” (p.101). This includes gradual access and participation in the flow of information through conversations and within a context where this can be applied. The resulting improved skills-base, developed over time and under supervision, enables the trainee to begin to develop an increased sense of identity “as a master practitioner” (Lave and Wenger, 2008, p.111). In order to get to this stage it is necessary to also understand the whole context of the profession and the wider sector.

This transformative model, both individual transformation and transformation of the community of practice by social reproduction, leads ultimately to change and potential conflict, due to competing views of practice and when differences in identity are experienced.

Newcomers are caught in a dilemma. On the one hand, they need to engage in the existing practice, which has developed over time to understand it, to participate in it, and to become full members of the community in which it exists. On the other hand, they have a stake in its development as they begin to establish their own identity in its future (Lave and Wenger, 2008, p.115).

This infers that the trainee has a vested interest in the placement and an interest in its development. Even though a trainee might only be temporarily in placement, some still demonstrate the desire to impact on change and exert their own identity, as this develops. This is particularly true when a trainee observes practice which differs to their own ideals and professional identity. Learning within social groups can create a dilemma as consequent actions are heavily influenced by social conventions and cultural norms. In order for transformation to happen, certain aspects have to be in place; close collaboration and structured reflection, are essential as a way to enable individuals to move beyond their current ability (Harford and MacRuairc, 2008).

The way an individual learns new, specific behaviours associated within a new position, or social group, results in dynamic identity development. Learning is not purely imitation, but about interaction and ultimately intraction, where the individual becomes an agent of change, through the development of a sense of criticality. This resonates with a more informal and incidental process of learning, but should still be guided by experienced colleagues and based on the individual needs of the trainee (Velzan et al., 2012; Jarvis, 2010; Consuegra et al., 2014).

The incidental learning that can take place within each community of practice is an area of particular interest, particularly as a model of professional identity development. A dual relationship exists between the identities and the different landscapes of practice. It is the constant shift and struggle between this that shapes the experience, transforms the community and enables transformation of the individual, unbound by measurable objectives. It is an ongoing and continually changing experience as specific interactions and activities take place over a series of events and not as isolated occurrences. Negotiation and learning within an often diverse and complex community of practice, continually creates new and shared histories, even when there are no serious conflicts. As the trainee moves through the stages of development, they begin to specialise and develop new ways of doing things; exert authority, comply with processes or challenge conventions. This can create a tension as established practice comes under question.

Boud and Middleton (2003) argue that informal learning undertaken in the workplace can be considered to be more valuable than formal learning experiences. This is due to three areas that they considered to be particularly significant within this context; mastery of organisational processes; negotiating the political and dealing with the atypical. This denotes qualities of incidental learning. Discussed within the research is the importance of the informal relationships which are utilised, particularly when negotiating the “less tangible, political aspects of a job” (p.199). These more loosely based paired relationships, or groupings exist which enable learning to happen through shared practice. Sideways learning, in particular to atypical problems can be seen in their research as individuals address such problems through informal interactions with peers, often resulting in the crossing of boundaries or work groups, and what they deem as overlapping of informal networks.

Communities of practice as originally defined by Wenger (1998) could be regarded as a rather straight-jacketed notion and that the reality are far more fluid, naturally occurring relationships. Boud and Middleton (2003) argued that the idea of communities of practice may even limit the recognition of the learning that is more likely to be taking place in a far more complex manner, particularly within a sector that is typically in a constant state of flux.

**Conclusion**

Williamson (2020) presents the view that “Further education is vital is we want our country to grow economically and our productivity to improve.” FE is seen as the vehicle to help drive the country out of the looming recession brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition and as a way to recruit more new teachers into the sector, the government propose the ‘Taking Teaching Further’ programme. This offers fully funded places to industry experts to undertake a Level 5 Diploma in Education & Training (DET) over two years. The programme is classroom-based with practical support, including team teaching and work shadowing. This is predominantly to help support the new T level qualifications which commenced in September 2020.

There is a vital need to bring the very best industry talent into the sector, so they can pass on their expertise and experience to both learners and fellow teachers and trainers. This is alongside the urgency to deepen the links between employers and further education. The [Taking Teaching Further] programme is proving popular because it brings both needs together and we are confident it will make a real long-term difference (Russell, 2019).

However, in order for this to happen teacher education, and professional teacher identity is something that needs to be explored further so that new teachers coming into the sector receive the support they expect and need.

Concerns around the role and relationship with the mentor and the culture of the team are often raised by trainees. Further challenges that some trainees can experience are when they recognise poor practice, but are powerless to make changes within their placement organisation, due to their trainee status. However, in order for trainee and early career teachers to be empowered, teacher education, and professional teacher identity is something that needs to be explored further. I argue that the ideas and concepts presented in this chapter can provide the basis for further discussions around teacher identity development.

The next chapter reviews and examines alternative theories of learning, in particular incidental learning as an additional learning opportunity within teacher development.

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