

Teacher Educators' Academic and Professional Identities: Faculty and Student Perspectives

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Rationale, aims and objectives

Despite the many changes to English pre-service teacher education in the last decade (Furlong et al. 2000, Furlong 2005), teacher educators based in universities still have central roles in the education of most student teachers, influencing the practices, values and attitudes of new entrants to the profession. Analysing the academic and professional identities of these teacher educators is therefore central to full consideration of the nature and quality of teacher education.

Research on teacher education (Furlong et al. 1996, 2000) indicates that past changes in the discourses and practices of the field caused subsequent shifts in the identities of those teaching on the pre-service or Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses. One analysis (Furlong et al. 1996), for example, shows how national policy changed the recruitment and retention criteria for teacher educators; these changes resulted in turn in altered identities. The analysis defined three types of teacher educator working in HE prior to the publication of Circular 3/84¹ (Department for Education and Skills 1984): disciplinary based academics (those involved in applications of the social sciences within education); subject studies specialists; and curriculum methods specialists involved in ITE with necessarily close links to schools and the school curriculum. After the publication of the Circular, the typology became more restricted with only two types of teacher educator identified, subject specialists and curriculum methods specialists. The writers commented that the 'recent and relevant' recruitment and retention criterion in the Circular, together with an increased technical-rational emphasis in teacher education programmes, meant that school experience and curricula were given far greater emphasis within teacher educators' work and identities.

In the last decade there have been a series of changes in ITE, resulting from demographic changes, the impact of the New Labour government's education policies (Furlong 2005), and shifting state requirements for pre-service or Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses in England (Teacher Training Agency²

2002). These have involved teacher educators in struggling to provide courses which are 'demanding, relevant, and practical' (Furlong et al 2000:144), as well as research-led. At the same time, the changing Higher Education (HE) context has meant increased pressures on them to meet academic imperatives, including conforming to the managerialist practices of the sector (Deem and Brehony 2005). For many teacher educators, the production of published outputs meeting the criteria of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)³ of 2007 is an important example of such imperatives.

The cumulative impact of all these changes on the identities of HE-based, teacher educators, working on pre-service courses, has not been fully researched. Subsequently, English teacher educators are an under-researched and poorly understood occupational group (John 1996, Murray 2002). And policies and practices in recruitment, induction and professional development are uninformed by evidence-based studies of how this occupational group perceives its identities and knowledge bases.

The Knowledge and Identity in Teacher Education (KITE) project aimed to redress these omissions in existing research. In the study as whole, we aimed to achieve the following: firstly, to provide an evidence-based study of how teacher educators, their students and the schoolteachers supporting the students' field-based experiences (or teaching practices) as mentors view teacher educators' academic and professional identities and knowledge bases; secondly, to identify if any group saw changes within these things in the last three years; thirdly, to consider how any such changes were perceived to have impacted on academics' working lives and on the perceived quality of the student learning experiences. Particular emphases included exploring the effects of changes in the research/teaching/scholarship /service nexus in the academic life of teacher educators. In this particular paper, we report only on the parts of the study relating to teacher

educators' constructions of their own professional knowledge and identities and to student teachers' constructions of these things.

Perspectives on teacher educator identities

Teacher education is a broad and highly differentiated field, within which individuals undertake varied types of work (Acker 1996, Ducharme 1993, Clifford and Guthrie 1988). Research on aspects of teacher educators' identities is not extensive, but the available studies in anglophone countries (see, for example, Acker 1996, Carter 1984, Ducharme 1993, Hatton 1997) identify some recurring themes including teacher educators' strong senses of commitment to students, teaching as an anchor of professional identity, and varying attitudes to and patterns of engagement in research.

Many of the studies (see, for example, Ducharme 1993) find variations in the types of identities espoused by teacher educators, but offer limited theorising about how and why this occurs. The variations found are attributed to a number of factors including the diversified nature of work within teacher education (Ducharme and Agne 1986), gender factors (Acker 1996, Maguire 1993), differing amounts of time spent in HE (Kremer-Hayon and Zuzovsky 1995), deficient socialisation into the norms and expectations of the HE sector (Lanier and Little 1986, Ducharme 1993), or the effects of the institutional setting on individuals (Reynolds 1995, Hatton 1997). These attributions are briefly summarised below.

In some studies teacher educators are seen as clearly differentiated by the type of academic / professional work they undertake, with those involved in ITE portrayed as a distinct type. In Ducharme and Ducharme (1996), for example, teaching on ITE courses involved longer working hours, less research related activity and restricted career progression. Researchers such as Ducharme and Agne (1989), Ducharme (1993) and Lanier and Little (1986) create a deficit model in which some teacher educators are seen as adapting poorly to the HE context. Ducharme and Agne, for example, state that such teacher educators demonstrate

schizophrenic behaviour with respect to higher education roles, slow adaptation to higher education norms, a preference for practice over theory and a distrust of research (1989, 68)

This type of teacher educator emerges from these analyses as clearly inadequate, as at best only a 'semi-academic'. This *deficit model* for teacher educators (Murray 2002) is linked to continuing to adhere to the norms of schooling within HE settings. In Ducharme (1986), for example, teacher educators are classified as 'school person, scholar, researcher, methodologist, and visitor to a strange planet' (as quoted in Ducharme 1993, 6), according to the degree by which individuals' behaviours are judged to be like those of school teachers or of academics in other university disciplines.

Studies of gender in teacher education offer a number of ways of understanding the differences between men and women's career progression and senses of identity. These include the disadvantages caused by the instantiation of gendered discourses, structures and regimes of teacher education (Maguire and Weiner 1994, Dillabough and Acker 2002, Acker et al. 2005), by women's non-linear career patterns (Acker et al. 2005, Acker and Feuerverger 1996), and by the tendency for women to be working in areas of teacher education such as ITE which, as indicated previously, are associated with more intensive, less prestigious and less well rewarded work (Ducharme and Ducharme 1996, Ducharme and Agne 1986). Women are identified as taking on more of the 'hidden' and

intensive work of teacher education, including 'caring' for students (Acker 1996, Maguire and Weiner 1994). In this aspect of their work they are sometimes caught in a double bind; such 'caring' may be undertaken willingly because it is seen as a part of the sense of self, and/or it may be part of the implicit, social expectations placed upon women educators (Maguire and Weiner 1994, Acker and Feuerverger 1996, Murray, in press).

The work of researchers such as Reynolds (1995), Hatton (1997) and Ducharme and Ducharme (1996) suggest that the structure and status of the employing institution are important factors in determining the academic identities of the teacher educators working within it. In Reynolds' findings, for example, positive orientations to research are linked to the institution; the more prestigious the institution, the more likely tutors were to be research active (see also Ducharme and Ducharme 1996). Following this line of argument then, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), as the settings for teacher education work, are seen as powerful determiners of identity.

Whilst these variations are identified in the literature on teacher educators' identities, they are often addressed in isolation, with limited attempts to consider the inter-relations between individual biography, gender, the institutional settings and the discourses and practices of teacher education at a macro level. With the exception of Maguire (1994), most of these studies do not address questions of how professionalism might be influenced by the involvement of teacher educators in the (re)production of the knowledge and practices of schooling (Atkinson and Delamont 1985). This absence is of particular significance in studies of the identities of teacher educators in pre-service education, given that this group is required to meet the imperatives of both the school and HE sectors in their work.

A previous study of the professional identities of teacher educators working on primary, pre-service programmes (Murray 2002) attempted to address these inter-relationships, drawing on data from a small-scale, qualitative study to develop a typology of teacher educators. This typology included three types of teacher educator, *Novices*, *Defenders* and *Education Academics*. The research argued that professional identities were formed through a complex web of relations between the individual and collective *habitus* (Bourdieu 1998) of the educators, their particular settings in the English university sector, and the macro level of the field of primary ITE at the time of the empirical research. At the centre of this web were different ways of understanding the processes of (re)production involved in primary ITE; these processes were integrally influenced by gendered discourses, practices and principles within both the fields of primary ITE and primary schooling.

No existing theoretical frameworks offered a precise 'fit' for this study. We therefore harnessed a substantial body of research to theorise teacher educators' identities and the effects of any changes on student learning. We also drew on Wenger's (1998) concept of *communities of practice*, Henkel's (2000) study of *academic identities*, and Becher and Trowler (2002) analysis of *academic tribes and territories*. A further source of conceptualisation came from a framework for analysing teacher educators' work as (re)producers of the discourses and practices of both schooling and ITE, and as *second order practitioners*, developed in previous research (Murray 2002, 2004).

Methods

This was an interpretive study, drawing on established qualitative research methods for case study (Yin 2002) and conducted along ethical guidelines, provided by the British

Educational Research Association (BERA).

The institutional sample of three universities enables us to take some account of the diverse HE settings for teacher education in England, both in terms of institutional differentiations between pre- and post-1992 universities and of differing geographical locations.

All under-graduate (UG) and post-graduate (PGCE) students⁶ – an intended sample group of approximately 1 500 – at the three universities received a non-coercive request to participate in the research by completing a questionnaire. Three follow-up focus group interviews in each university, with a representative sample of students, were also planned to explore resulting issues in more depth. These interviews were semi-structured in format.

All HE-based teacher educators working on the relevant ITE courses were asked to complete questionnaires. The designated sample group was originally intended to be 75 members of academic staff across the three institutions.

Three follow-up focus group interviews in each university, with a representative sample of staff, were also devised to explore resulting issues in more depth. These interviews were semi-structured in format. Questions in both questionnaires and interviews were structured to ensure that all objectives were covered fully.

Data analysis used a systematic coding system, developed in a previous study of teacher educators (Murray 2002) with emergent codes used by independent raters to obtain measures of inter-rater reliability.

Perceptions of teacher educators' knowledge and identities

Students' perceptions

Our findings show both some strong commonalities in the ways in which students construct the identities and knowledge bases of teacher educators, and also some distinct differences. In terms of the commonalities found, the data show many students assigning to teacher educators' identities as 'expert teachers' or 'more than teachers'. Students construct teacher educators as having both knowledge of schooling (what in previous work has been referred to as *first order knowledge*, Murray 2002) and knowledge of teaching ITE courses (referred to in the same study as *second order knowledge*).

Definitions of first order knowledge found in the KITE study include: expert knowledge of how to teach the relevant curriculum subject or area in school; overview knowledge of schooling across different contexts, including knowledge of school pupils' learning patterns and up to date knowledge of recent developments in education. Second order knowledge is defined as including: knowledge of student teachers' learning patterns; having the pedagogical skills to structure good quality adult learning experiences; and being able to 'see and develop potential' in students.

Many students stress experiential knowledge of school teaching as the central source of teacher educators' expertise and professional credibility, with breadth and contemporaneity of experience given particular emphases. Second order knowledge of ITE teaching is also seen as mainly experiential in origin. These findings reflect the strong value given to experiential knowledge in all aspects of English teacher education, and in particular, the continuing use of school experience as an essential recruitment criterion for teacher educators (Furlong et al. 1996).

Students also see good communication skills and a range of positive interpersonal qualities as very important for teacher educators. Students' constructions identify that it is the intertwining of many aspects of professional knowledge and

understanding with interpersonal skills that creates effective pedagogy for their learning.

Differentiations in the ways in which various student groups see teacher educators are mainly related to the length of ITE course the students had followed (either UG or PGCE), their curriculum subject specialism, and/or the age phase of their courses, with particular differences found between students on courses for intending primary (Elementary) and secondary (Junior High and High) school teaching. For example, students on UG courses were more likely to attribute strong pastoral roles to teacher educators, variously defining their roles as 'supporter' or 'advocate' of learners. Primary students on UG courses were particularly likely to construct such roles for women teacher educators. These findings echo previous research into the gendered discourses and practices of teacher education (Acker and Feuerverger 1997), the on-going construction of women teacher educators as nurturing and 'caring' (Maguire 2000), and the congruence between primary schooling and primary ITE.

There was considerable division of opinion about ascribing identities as 'academic' or 'researcher' to teacher educators. Some students, particularly on secondary PGCE courses, see teacher educators as meeting and exceeding the norms for academic work, as 'more than academics'. For many of this group of students, knowledge of and engagement in research are integral parts of how teacher educators gained their overview knowledge of schooling.

Other students reject the idea of teacher educators having identities as academics. Such constructions often seem to be based around dichotomies of teaching and research, as for the student who stated 'they are researchers but this is not relevant to the role they play as a teacher educator, that's practical teaching'. The majority of students have no clear sense of how research and teaching might be inter-related and symbiotic as activities in the work of teacher educators. Rather ITE is constructed as a practical, professional enterprise, dichotomous with research engagement which is seen as a stereotypically academic activity. These findings may relate to on-going contestations in defining the teaching/research/scholarship nexus in teacher educators' work and in English ITE (Maguire 2000, Furlong et al. 2000, Murray 2002).

Our findings also indicate that, from student perspectives, the 'academic tribe' (Becher and Trowler 2002) of pre-service teacher educators is far from homogeneous, but consists of individual or small groups, working within the micro communities of practice (Wenger 2000) created by different types of pre-service courses.

UG students were asked to identify any changes they perceived that there had been in the academic or professional identities of their teacher educators over the time of their courses, and what effects they felt any changes had had on their learning⁷. In one of the case study universities, in particular, the majority of student responses identify increases in the levels of some teacher educators' research activity. Many students see these increases as leading to a decline in the quality of their learning experiences. The increasingly research-active teacher educators are constructed as having less time to devote to their students and to activities in partnership schools, to be less accessible to students in need, and to be moving away from what more than one respondent described as their 'real jobs – teaching teachers'. Our findings indicate that, from the perspectives of students at this university, institutional pressures for teacher educators to become more research active in order to meet the criteria of the RAE in 2007, are changing the nature of teacher education courses and impacting adversely on student learning experiences.

Teacher educators' perceptions

Our initial analysis of the findings shows some complex patterns, and an emerging typology of pre-service teacher educators. Outlines of the major 'types' are given below, but we would wish to stress that the data analysis process is still in the early stages.

One type of teacher educators with less than four years experience of HE is likely to claim dual professional identities as teachers in both schools and HE, to stress the importance of having 'recent and relevant' experiential knowledge of schooling, and to see on-going contributions to the school sector as a strong element of their professional identities. One teacher educator, for example, comments, 'I still see my identity as a schoolteacher, but now working in Higher Ed. teaching students not children'. Another individual states, 'I could walk back into a school and teach there tomorrow.... knowing that is very important to me... (to) my professional credibility and my sense of identity.'

This type rejects claims to any academic identities; grounds for this rejection include: not being an 'active researcher', 'never seeing myself as an academic', 'not being in an ivory tower' or claims to 'practical' or 'professional' expertise only. These findings echo earlier studies in the ways in which some teacher educators position themselves in relation to active engagement in research (see, for example, Ducharme 1993, Maguire 1994, 2000). As indicated earlier, they also reflect, in part, the importance placed on 'recent and relevant' experiential knowledge as a recruitment criterion in English ITE. Few members of this first type of teacher educator identify any recent changes in their identities; this is perhaps a reflection of the brief amount of time they had spent in HE.

Another type of more experienced teacher educators emphasise their professional identities as 'teacher of teachers'. They claim on-going knowledge of schooling (*first order knowledge*), but see school teaching as 'what I was, not what I am now'. Nevertheless, the first order knowledge claimed by this group includes expert knowledge of how to teach the relevant curriculum subject or area in school; overview knowledge of schooling across different contexts, including knowledge of school pupils' learning patterns and up to date knowledge of recent developments in education. These claims did not rest on recent experiential knowledge of schooling alone, but also on understandings gained from scholarship and research.

As important for the professional credibility of this type is knowledge of teaching ITE courses (*second order knowledge*, or knowing how to teach teachers). The definitions of their second order knowledge include knowledge of working with adult learners; understanding of student teachers' learning patterns and developmental needs; having the pedagogical skills to structure adult learning in school and university settings; modelling good teaching for and with their students; and working in partnership with mentors in school (what Guile and Lucas 1999, 212 have referred to as 'adopting a pedagogy of guidance').

These teacher educators also see themselves as having strong pastoral identities, identifying themselves variously as 'student advocate', or 'the students' voice'. One teacher educator, for example, typically states, 'I try to be there for my students.... to support them when they need it..... I'd see that as a major part of my work'. These patterns of self-identification are found in the responses of many female teacher educators, echoing previous research into how historical and contemporary discourses and practices of ITE continue to position the often female teacher educator's work as undertaking the extended and diffuse work of supporting and monitoring the development of her individual students (Murray, in press;

Maguire and Weiner 1993, Acker and Feuerwerker 1997).

In one of the universities, this type of teacher educator identifies significant pressures to become what one individual termed 'more academic, churning out more research being less of the teacher... less of the teacher trainer'. These pressures had changed the nature of their work by placing more value on research and less on traditional HE teaching activities. These changes were seen as having negative effects on the quality of student learning experiences, as well as on the working lives of the teacher educators.

A third type of teacher educators construct both academic and professional identities, seeing themselves as academics, conforming to the norms of the university particularly in relation to research activities, and as professionals, responsible for inducting students into teaching. One teacher educator, for example, states, 'I don't see academic and professional identities as at odds ... my research means I can claim (to be) an academic but it's my research which makes me a good teacher too.'

This type identifies the same pressures and changes within their universities as type two. But the changes are seen as largely beneficial to the individuals, offering increased opportunities for academic enrichment and career progression. Opinions diverge considerably, however, as to how these changes impacted on the quality of student learning. Some individuals, for example, see increased levels of research as detrimental to the quality of their teaching and leading to a negative impact on student learning; others see their increased research activity as resulting in stronger, research-led models of teaching which enhanced student learning experiences.

Our findings indicate that from teacher educators' perspectives, as from students', the 'academic tribe' (Becher and Trowler 2002) of pre-service teacher educators is far from homogeneous (Ducharme 1993). Although the teacher educators in our sample group share some common understandings of what it means to be *second order practitioners* (Murray 2002), they also construct differing shades of academic and professional identities for themselves. In this study these differences are attributed initially to a number of inter-related factors including: the number of years of experience in HE; the mission of the university in which individuals worked; and differing patterns of engagement in the research/scholarship/teaching/service nexus of academic life. But these inter-relationships are complex, and we have yet to explore and theorise them fully.

Conclusions

The study has given voice to student teachers' understandings of teacher educators' work, offering important elaboration of how such students see the academic and professional identities and knowledge bases of teacher educators. It has also led to a greater elaboration of knowledge of how teacher educators themselves see their own identities and knowledge bases. The research also offers a small-scale, but evidence-based study, of how changes in the national and institutional contexts within which ITE occurs are understood and experienced by teacher educators and how they are perceived to impact on student teachers, within one university.

The findings reflect some specific aspects of English teacher education, particularly the on-going effects of the prioritising of experiential knowledge of schooling on teacher educators' identities (Furlong et al. 1996, Murray 2002) and the growing impact of preparations for the RAE of 2007 on some education departments and individuals within them (Whitelaw et al 2005).

The study also makes a strong contribution to the growing

international literature on teacher educators (Korthagen et al 2005). In particular, it contributes to the emerging body of research which indicates that it is the micro communities of practice within different types of pre-service courses which shape teacher educators' identities, discourses and practices (Murray 2005; Boyd et al 2005; Whitelaw et al 2005). A further finding is that the 'academic tribe' of pre-service teacher educators is heterogeneous, with differentiations based around varying levels of engagement in the teaching / research / scholarship / service nexus.

The study provides a valuable springboard for further study of teacher educators and their changing academic identities, with particular reference to integrated involvement in the research / teaching / service nexus. It has also contributed to the development of knowledge and a language of practice for exploring common aspects of academic practice in teacher education. Because teacher educators share many characteristics with other professional educators in HE (for example, nurse and social work educators), the project has long term potential for informing further research on academic practice in these areas, as well as in teacher education.

Notes

1. One of the requirements within this government circular was that all teacher educators, working on ITE courses, should have 'recent and relevant' knowledge of school teaching. This requirement is widely seen as having radical effects on the staffing bases of teacher education departments from the mid 1980s onwards (Fish 1995, Furlong et al. 2000).
2. The Teacher Training (now Development) Agency is the government body responsible for monitoring ITE.
3. The Research Assessment Exercise is an audit of the quality and quantity of research activity within disciplines and institutions in British Higher Education. The audits take place approximately every five years (Bassey 2004).
4. Parallels may be drawn between the analysis of these teacher educators as semi-academics and Etzioni's (1969) analysis of teachers and other highly feminised occupational groups as semi-professionals.
5. Pre-1992 or 'old' universities in the UK HE sector were established by charter prior to 1992 and tend to be more research-intensive. Post-1992 or 'new' universities were established by statute in or after 1992. Many were previously polytechnics, with traditions of concentrating professional and vocational courses.
6. Under-graduate (UG) students in England follow degree courses in education of three or four years in length; post-graduate (PGCE) students follow teacher education courses of one year in length, after completing their degrees.
7. This question was not given to post-graduate students on the Post Graduate Certificate of Education whose course lasts only for one year

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