Collaborative Becoming: Engaging in 'Guided Reflexivity' to Develop
Teaching Practices in the Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) Sector

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Abstract
Based on the journeys of transformation towards becoming teaching practitioners in the Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) sector, this paper discusses ways in which interactions between trainee teachers and established teaching community members may be utilised as opportunities for collaboration and development. Beginning with a brief critical reflection on trainees' accounts of their experiences during placement training, which show trainees experiencing marginalization, blocking and unsolicited interventions at the hands of established community members, I discuss the tensions of being situated temporarily and as novice within an established community of practice. I demonstrate that while situated as occupying roles of both learner and tutor simultaneously, trainees' emergent teaching identities are 'pressed' between conflicting demands and expectations. I argue that such negative experiences may be used positively to support development through a model for practice that I introduce as 'guided reflexivity'. Central to guided reflexivity are shared explorations of possibilities for developing teaching practices through collaborative reflections. These are formulated through mutually challenging but, supportive conversations between established teaching staff and trainee teachers. This approach shifts the sole responsibility for supporting trainees becoming members of, and belonging to, specialist teaching communities from designated mentors; it has the potential for crossing institutional boundaries and creating holistic cultures of collaborative professional development.

Keywords: (Reflection, Reflexive Practice, Teacher Education)

Introduction

Increasingly, it has become incumbent on teacher educators in Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET) to support trainees towards developing 'excellent' practices in preparation for employment in the sector. About half of the Initial Teacher Training (ITT) curriculum involves trainees negotiating and engaging in teaching practices in placement communities. Situated throughout the PCET community, placement training is intended to support trainees to develop their own teaching style and to become familiar with community practices. Placement training provides openings beyond the simulated experiences of micro-teaching in teacher education classrooms; it offers trainees work-based experiences. In the context of working teaching and training communities, placement practices provide trainees with opportunities to test the application of skills and theories discussed in ITT classrooms. In this respect, placements provide spaces where theory-practice and practice-theory dualities are mediated, negotiated and may be co-constructed with established teaching community members. To facilitate these work-based development opportunities, teacher educators rely on the communities offering placements to identify staff designated as 'mentor' to provide support and guidance for trainees.

Currently, post-compulsory sector literature relating to ITT placement practices tends to focus on roles, activities and relationships with and between mentors and trainees (Cunningham 2007; Lawy and Tedder 2009; Cullimore and Simmons 2010). While studies such as Lawy and Tedder's (2009), investigated approaches to mentoring and trainee-mentor relationships, roles and activities, less is known about the remainder of placement training experiences; those parts where mentors are not necessarily present and trainees negotiate their own course through placement community practices with other, established community members. In this paper, drawing on some findings of a qualitative study that explored trainees' experiences during placement training (see Jackson 2012), I introduce a conceptual model of 'guided reflexivity'. I argue that interactions between established community members and trainees present development possibilities for both trainees and established placement community members; engaging in guided reflexivity would enhance development opportunities made available through placement interactions.

The term 'established community member' is used to identify placement community members that are not designated mentors. Established community members occupy a range of roles and are not always or necessarily tutors; they can be administrators, support or managerial staff: anyone (other than a mentor) established within the placement community that trainees interact with. The use of this term avoids sexist connotations of the term 'mastery' used by Lave and Wenger (1991 p.94) and broadens its scope of to encompass all placement community staff, irrespective of their seniority within the community, expertise, role or length of service. In my research, established community members were found to be impactive figures responsible, though not necessarily deliberately, for shaping the way trainees negotiated placement practices. For some trainees they provided sole points of contact with the placement community – more so than mentors. They were shown to be sources of information regarding institutional pedagogies, structures and cultures, as well as providing performative directions during teaching delivery and practices.

Despite being influential in trainees journeys towards becoming and belonging to the community of PCET practitioners, the significance of interactions between established community members and trainees passes largely unremarked in ITT curricula. Teacher education and professional standards pay little attention to the importance of such interactions. Yet, as my research has shown, interactions with established community members are pivotal experiences and for some trainees they overshadow placement experiences in an unhelpful way. This is not to say that all engagements with established community members are adverse, nor do I suggest that established community members approach trainee interactions with negative intentions. Rather, my research has shown the outcome of such interactions to be reflected on by trainees in a potentially destructive light. Trainees' reflections indicate that by being unguided in how to respond, reflect and react to seemingly unsupportive, obstructive and demeaning interactions with established community members, opportunities for developing competence are being missed. In this paper, I argue that with some different thinking there are opportunities to utilise trainee and established community member interactions positively. By working collaboratively and reflexively both trainees and established community members have opportunities to create learning and developmental bridges. These bridges serve to support individuals to cross borderlands between being and becoming teaching practitioners, in a mutually beneficial way.

Outline of the research

The research was carried out across four cohorts of trainee teachers undertaking Initial Teacher Training (ITT) in the Post Compulsory Education and Training (PCET). Located in the South West of England, the ITT programme was delivered by a Further Education (FE) college validated by a partner University. Data was generated from information provided by women trainees through their private personal journals and follow-up interviews. Participants were training to teach in a wide range of Lifelong Learning and Skills (LLS) sector practices such as, FE, Higher Education (HE), Adult and Community Education and Work Based Training.

In an effort to reduce the influence of (my) researcher's voice on information collected, a narrative reflective approach that utilised individual personal journals for the primary sources of information was adopted. Private journals offer a means of accessing individual's personal reflections yet, despite the opportunity for rich insights (Chambers 2003; Chase 2005), this was a risky strategy. From the outset, the approach meant that the quantity, nature and quality of information contained within forthcoming journals was unknown; therefore utility and usability of content was not guaranteed. Participating trainees had not received prior guidance regarding journal keeping. This was a deliberate choice on part to reflect feminist methodologies that advocate enabling individuals voices to be heard (see Schutz 1970; Sá 200; Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002; Hesse-Biber and Leckenby 2004; Keating 2005). I was aware of the limitations in adopting such an approach and cognisant that private journals would only provide snapshots of engagements in placement training; that these would relate to specific contexts and would not necessarily provide a full picture (Cohen et al 2000; Punch 2009). Therefore, trends and threads of information from journals were explored further by way of follow-up interviews. This secondary data collection method took place post analysis of journal entries and served to unpick

some of the personal meanings that were being made from experiences recorded and reflected in the private journals.

Participants self-selected from within ITT cohorts after attending an introductory session to introduce the research project. Additional one- to-one meetings with volunteers were undertaken for the purposes of discussing details, gaining consent and addressing emergent ethical issues. This resulted in 18 journals being volunteered for analysis. Post journal analysis, 12 journal volunteers took part in follow-up interviews. Participant names were changed for the purposes of reporting and dissemination.

Situating placement interactions

Within the scope of this paper the terms competence and competencies are used to reflect Wenger's (1998) notion of developing expertise and Rogoff's (1990, 1993; 2008) concept of 'participatory appropriation' (p.65), where, as a result of experiences in practice, individuals transform. Transformations are situated as active processes of change from which, individuals take forward new knowledge, new skills and understanding to future practices. Thus, in this sense, competence reflects a shifting personal position, one that is transient and transforming, emergent through collective actions, negotiation and new understanding: personal skills, knowledge and expertise are developed through practice with others and, as individuals move deeper into practice, so competence develops.

Taking forward these notions of competence I propose critical reflections and reflexivity as ways of utilising participatory experiences to support identity transformations towards becoming community members. Engaging reflexively, as Bolton (2005) argues, offers a way of supporting personal transformation (of teaching identities) through the appropriation of experiences by examining those experiences from different perspectives. Bolton describes reflexivity as, 'making aspects of the self strange' (2005 p.10). This approach (to reflection) goes some way towards overcoming current technical rational methodologies that have hi-jacked for their own ends practices of reflecting-in, –on and -for actions, as advocated by Schön (1987). The assimilation of reflective practices into standardized protocols to be monitored, measured and assessed was not unanticipated. Parker (1997) noted that through acts of legerdemain, dominant discourses would swallow reflective practices, which would serve to render reflective practices as critical conversations 'mute' (p.30). In 2014, these warnings from Parker concerning the mediocritisation of reflective practices have been realised. The formalisation and thus reduction of reflective practice to simple statements describing one's experiences are evident in the requirements of current ITT curricula, performative standards (ET Foundation 2014) and Ofsted inspections (Ofsted 2014). Therefore, the benefits of critical reflections that were identified by Boud et al (1985) and Schön (1987; 1991; 2002) and that have been developed by others (such as Brookfield 1995; Loughran 1996; Bleakley 1999; Larrivee 2000) have been reduced to a set of performative actions. Thus, opportunities for using reflexive practices, such as those described by Bolton (2005; 2010) are not being utilised effectively in teacher education.

Yet, employing reflexive practices in a guided way could support trainees and established community members in negotiating interactions. My research (Jackson 2012), identified two kinds of experience, knowledge, skills and understanding at work in the trainee-established community member relationship. Both parties have expertise albeit differently situated. Trainees have currency in their teaching subject specialism, which may be derived from experiences within practices outside of the academy. They also have subject knowledge, which affords them a degree of competence in the specialist subject; sometimes this is new knowledge from recent studies both relating to the subject specialism and in teaching, sometimes it is work-based and sometimes it is a combination of recent study and work-practice experiences. Established placement community members on the other hand, have contemporary experiences linked to working within the institution; most have current experiences of teaching within that community but, some have experiences that reflect the administration, management and resourcing of teaching community practices. In addition, both parties have levels of qualifications that afford eligibility to teach their subject. Therefore, between both parties there are points of difference in individual's competence. These reflect competences relating to knowing about and practising the subject and competences developed from knowing about (sometimes practising) and teaching the subject.

Albeit at different levels of expertise and practice, this means that both trainees and established community members have opportunities for developing competence through their activities and interactions in practice with one another. However, as my research showed, such opportunities are not being recognised or acted on. Therefore, I propose 'guided reflexivity' as a means of identifying, acting within and reflecting on trainee and established community member practices. Guided reflexivity works conceptually and practically to develop competence through collaborative reflexions between trainees and established community members.

Making a case for Guided Reflexivity

The research findings showed trainees in different sectors shared similar experiences that centred on interactions with established community members. Rather than positive experiences through 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Wenger 1998 p.100; also Lave and Wenger 1991) trainees' inclusions in community practices were marginal and dependent on relationships and interactions with established community members. Regardless of personal aims and expectations, trainees were unable to traverse 'inbound trajectories' as Wenger (1998 p. 154) describes. Despite being assigned a mentor from within the placement community and being afforded access to the community's practices, trainees' experiences of practice were marginal rather than peripheral. Although trainees' identities as becoming teaching practitioners were transforming as a result of their experiences of placement practices, without the prospect of becoming full members of the place community, one that would eventually engage fully in the (placement) community practices, trainees were marginalized. Opportunities for establishing inbound trajectories were blocked. For example,

November
I feel a bit stupid because I don't have a key to the classroom I'm using so I have to hang around in the corridor until someone comes down with it. I can't go to the staffroom to get it because I haven't got a key to get in there either.
(Trisha)

January
I have asked for, on numerous occasions, the female staff toilet key… After the weekend I went to see my mentor. I asked him if I could have a key to the female toilets & he said, "you only have to ask & someone will open the door for you". Find a male member of staff with a key and tell them that I need the toilet? I will not lower myself to that!
(Sarah)

February
I asked Kerry [*established staff member*] about getting some photocopying done to hand out to the group. Kerry said that I would need a code and that she could not give me that code because the department was already massively over budget = the result I had to pay to get all the photocopying done myself…
(Michelle)

The journal examples (above) illustrate some of the kinds of blockages trainees experienced. These experiences highlight some of the murky pathways that criss-cross trainees' journeys towards becoming PCET teaching practitioners. From a developmental perspective, such examples show that becoming a teaching practitioner and experiencing teaching practices requires more than being enabled to attend the physical space of a community of practice; trainees need full-access to the community. This means gaining entry into the physical space, community resources and structures, and to placement community cultures and ways of working. Findings from my research show that even with mentors, trainees were not treated as peripheral participants in the way Wenger (1998; also Lave and Wenger 1991) describe. For example,

December
Went into college but no one was there. It turns out they had all gone on a field trip – even my mentor! I wonder she didn't invite me?

Later entry
I asked Polly [*mentor*] why she hadn't told me about the trip and she said it was because she didn't think I would be interested!! I can't understand why she would think that. I am worried I might be giving off a wrong impression.
(Rose)

As the excerpt (above) shows and later interviews establish, trainee Rose did not pursue the incident further either reflexively on her own or collaboratively with either her mentor or ITT tutor. Yet, the experience and subsequent interaction presented an opportunity for discussion and critical reflection on events and the meanings made for both parties. Working together reflectively at first and then more critically and reflexively, both mentor and their trainee was in a position to guide one another towards developing personal competence. The division of experiences, knowledge

and expertise between parties is not evenly or neatly divided but, that does not mean that neither could benefit from working together to guide one another towards deeper understanding of practice. Participating in collaborative reflecting and understanding is what guided reflexivity calls for; where through reflections on their (inter)actions both parties are enabled to work reflexively towards making new meanings and developing individual practices.

Journal entries showed examples of opportunities for engaging in guided reflexivity during practices relating to teaching delivery. For example, a recurrent theme emergent from the data reflected instances of unsolicited intervention during trainees teaching practices by established community members.

October
The nightmare group again, only this time Babs [*established tutor*] is sitting in. Double nightmare. While I was trying to get them to discuss different kinds of play she suggested I write up their ideas on the board. When I did, she told me my writing was too small. I hate doing this because my spelling isn't brilliant and once I start, I end up writing everything on the board and they just copy it down. I tried to talk to Babs about this afterwards but she just said I didn't do enough different activities and they got bored. I've only got an hour! I'm worried about my observation now, not sure what to do.
(Amy)

December
I was aware that I made some mistakes during the lesson due to the type of preparation that I used. The usual teacher corrected me and suggested as there was a lot on the syllabus not to concentrate on the bones as the students could take responsibility for themselves. He did this in front of the students and I felt undermined and nervous.
(Beth)

In both examples, trainees experience unsolicited interventions from established community members during classroom teaching practice with students. The reasons established community members had for making the interventions are not clear to trainees, nor do journals (or follow up interviews) example any follow-up discussions with between established community member and trainee. Yet, at the time, interactions were of significant importance to trainees to be recorded in their private personal journals. These are reported as negative experiences in journals and I argue if guided reflexivity were introduced as a way of working in PCET communities, this need not be the case. Rather than a negative interaction, such experiences could be utilised to serve both parties beneficially. For trainees such interactions could serve to develop their teaching skills and practices; understanding reasons for such interactions through critical, supported discussions with established community members would provide rational for the interventions. Similarly, given opportunities to discuss their own approach to teaching could provide established community members with insights into alternative ways for thinking about teaching delivery and together both parties could negotiate new ways of teaching.

Working collaboratively with established community members is not restricted to classroom performances though. Journal entries showed the range of opportunities for mutual development is wide and varied, which means all interactions between established community members and trainees offer possibilities for further development. For example,

September
First night working with Bev [*established community member*] at LIL. She is frantically trying to set up computers and I am conscious of several people milling around waiting for LIL to set up shop. I try to help but I am unsure where everything goes…I feel sympathetic towards Bev but ultimately she has left herself with too little time to set up…The upshot of this chaos is that many people were left stranded waiting around the centre looking uncomfortable and nervous. I feel awful, like I'm wasting people's time.
(Michelle)

As the excerpts above shows, when working with established community members, trainees can find themselves in the middle of things. The example highlights how tensions between trainees' previous experiences and/or expertise and their current role as student manifest. The journal entry, and later interviews confirmed that Michelle had prior experience of organizing training events (she previously worked in Human Resources), yet her prior competences as an experienced manager and provider of training were set aside during interactions with established community members. Although there were further accounts retelling similar disordered experiences, there was nothing in Michelle's, or indeed other journals showing opportunities being taken by trainees or established community members to discuss and reflect critically on recent practice episodes. I argue these are wasted opportunities because collaborative reflections following joint activities would serve to enhance both participants, trainees and established community members (future) practices. Both participants have something to offer the other in terms of guiding the development of their practice.

Therefore, guided reflexivity is not a one-sided proposition. Rather, my aim is that both established community members and trainees would benefit from mutual, collaborative reflections to co-construct future practices. Each participant would contribute and take away different things from working together reflexively and through their interactions each would be guided by the other party's inputs to develop their own (future) practices. This situates guided reflexivity as an active process where individuals work together collaboratively to understand and develop practice. I argue that by working together to reflect critically on performative actions, both trainees and established community members might identify ways of developing their own teaching practices. These practices take forward contemporary ideas about mentoring trainee teachers (Lawy and Tedder 2009; Cullimore and Simmons 2010) and propose a shift from trainee's development being anchored to a nominated mentor to encompassing and involving the entire placement community. In this sense, guided reflexivity calls for whole placement community engagement with trainees to be acknowledged as a possible site of development for all. Receiving a trainee tutor into a placement community should not be situated as a one-sided interaction between expert and novice. Rather, both parties stand to develop their professional practices as a result of their encounters. This calls for rethinking the way that professional development and teacher education are practised.

To establish a guided reflexive approach would require some forethought and groundwork. Ultimately a cultural change in the way trainees are integrated into placement communities and the ways that all members of placement communities interact with trainees is being advocated. Such thinking challenges current practices and the present business model focus. Initially, both placement and teacher education communities would need training in effective reflective and reflexive practices, which is both necessary and problematic. It is necessary because to be effective, critical reflections and reflexivity require practice; such activities, as Bolton (2005; 2010) argues, means moving beyond a merely descriptive process of reflecting on a mirrored remembering of events and engaging reflexively. This, as Bolton explains, requires developing and embracing an active, questioning approach to reflection. She argues, 'reflective practice lays open to question our own and others' daily actions and those of the organisations in which we work' (p.34) and I argue, based on my research findings, that if trainees and established community members were to adopt a similar approach collaboratively then more meaningful insights could be negotiated: training opportunities for both trainees and established community members would be realised.

However, such an approach is problematic because developing effective reflexive skills takes time and practise. Current business models, particularly for FE where teaching contact hours range around 750 -800 hours per annum (Jackson 2012), do not allow much space for thinking time. The opportunities for developing practice conceptually and in-between spaces as Solomon et al (2006; 2008 also Boud et al 2009) define, is substantially reduced and often not possible in some PCET contexts. Therefore, to implement guided reflexivity as practice ontology would require rethinking current practice norms. As Coffield (2008; 2009) argues, [re]turning education away from business models to thinking just about teaching and learning is a particular but, necessary challenge. In this paper I add my voice to the debate and, somewhat ironically, my proposals for [re]thinking current approaches to teacher education in a way that sees continuous professional development opportunities linked to trainee teachers development (during placement practices), could be cost effective in the long term.

Rather than engaging reflexively in isolation, guided reflexivity argues for a collaborative approach, where both established community members and trainees reflect informally and formatively together. All parties engaged in a period of collective action undertake meaningful, critical conversations to question mutual actions with an eye to exploring and understanding why decisions were made and actions were taken in those circumstances and in that context. Both established and trainee practitioners work together to understand their (own) ways of working. Working together reflexively facilitates insights into how current ways of working impacts on, influences and are experienced by others.

By working with together both parties are enabled to develop new and shared meanings and to take mutually negotiated ideas for different ways of working forward into future actions. Therefore, I envisage guided reflexivity taking place between trainees and placement community members as a collaborative and negotiated activity. Reflecting critically on performances with established community members would serve to support trainees and established community members in their continuing journeys towards becoming practitioners and belonging to the PCET

community. It is anticipated that emergent from mutual engagement in critical conversations between trainees and established community members there ensues collaborative becoming involving reflection and forward thinking. In this respect, the journey of becoming takes place across different layers and at multiple levels. Both trainee and established community member are at different places and stages of their becoming and belonging to a specific community of practice. Therefore both parties are situated as providing guidance for each other. Established ways of working become enmeshed with newer, up-to-date teaching pedagogies; both and all parties stand to benefit from the process.

Concluding thoughts

When trainees join a placement community they are immersed in a period of transformation and, as my research shows, this is a period of challenges. Trainees undergo an array of emotional responses such as excitement, fulfilment and hope contrasted with anxiety, depression, self-doubt and anger. These experiences are an integral part of trainees crossing the borderlands between being outside the community of education practitioners, where their status as 'student' situates them subordinate to tutors, to becoming practitioners, where their subordinate position shifts from (in some cases) one-time student to current colleague (in training) and (eventual) colleague and peer. This is a difficult period of both trainee and established community members because the established boundary between tutor and student is blurred. The division between tutor and student is redrawn as a fluid boundary that facilitates both sides to come together as one but, that expects a degree of separation between the two to remain. As my research indicates, some established community members are either unsure how, or are unable to accommodate and work with the modification in their own positioning that receiving a trainee creates. The temporal, impermanent nature of their own identify as an established community member is highlighted when (un-waged) trainees enter the community and engage with its practices.

In some PCET contexts, where security of tenure is uncertain, the acceptance of a trainee on placement, places established community members in a tenuous position; the instability of their own position is foregrounded. The arrival of a trainee serves as a reminder of what established community members are not. As Wenger (1998) noted, identities are defined as much by practices engaged in as those not undertaken. In the context of placement trainees, they can represent something of what established community members have perhaps not engaged with for some time, which is training – teaching practice training. Therefore, the currency of trainees training can create an awareness in established community members of what they are not, which is current in teaching strategies, methods and methodologies. Thus, on some occasions, interactions between established placement community members and trainees are not positive experiences because established community members are working to protect their own position rather than to support the development of a newcomer.

It is recognised that this would not always be practical, certainly during fleeting and passing interactions. Further, I acknowledge that the shifts in placement practices I call for will require additional time to be effective; something that established community members may have little of. Yet, this should not create a barrier to mutual engagement in guided reflexivity. I acknowledge that in recommending the

borderlands between becoming a teaching practitioner and belonging to a community of teaching practitioners should be traversed as a mutual endeavour, a shift in organisational culture is needed. My proposals to rethink the way that established community members receive and work with trainees would require commitment from senior management, perhaps even the State through shifts in policy and curriculum. However, the focus of this paper is on transformation, which could begin at a local level. I am advocating changes to the way that placement provision is viewed, enacted and experienced as a route towards becoming and belonging teaching practitioners. This would require cultural change along with shifts in the ways that resources such as time within institutions is organised. A guided reflexive approach proposes the need for some difficult conversations; it is not certain that current PCET practices are ready yet to traverse borderlands for thinking about teacher education and development quite so differently.

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