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Restrictive Practice: The Work-Based Learning Experience of Trainee Teachers in English Further Education Colleges

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Introduction

This paper focuses on the work-based learning (WBL) experience of teachers in training at further education (FE) colleges in England. These trainee teachers are initially employed by colleges as unqualified practitioners and are then expected to undergo training whilst in work; they generally attend an initial teacher education (ITE) course, usually delivered at their own college, for three hours a week over two years. As discussed more fully below, the significant difference between the experience of school teachers and FE teachers is that the initial training of the great majority of FE teachers is in-service. WBL, as illustrated by the experience of these trainee teachers, covers a spectrum from formally structured provision to relatively informal and unstructured learning (Eraut 2000; Colley et al 2003). The focus of this paper, however, reflects that of both McNally et al. (2008) and of Hoekstra et al. (2008), who studied the informal of teachers working in schools. As with this study Hoekstra et al. (p278) examined “learning that lacks systematic support explicitly organized to foster teacher learning.” Similarly, Coffield’s (2008: 7) definition of learning which “only refers to significant changes in capability, understanding, knowledge, practices, attitudes or values” informed our study, as did his view that not all learning may be considered as worthwhile or good. Using Fuller and Unwin’s (2004; 2006; 2008) work on expansive and restrictive learning environments as a reference point, and drawing on data from a small-scale qualitative research project conducted in two colleges, the paper problematises the position of FE colleges as employers and developers of their teaching staff.

Successive UK governments have promoted the notion that economic prosperity and social well-being rests upon the development of a highly-skilled and knowledgeable workforce and have identified the FE sector as a vehicle to deliver educational policies related to this notion in England (Avis 2007). While there have been many studies of learners on vocational courses within FE colleges (see, for example, Avis 1984; Colley, 2006; Gleeson and Mardle 1980) this paper considers colleges as sites of learning for the teachers in training employed there. Despite the FE sector’s primary role in work-related learning, the WBL experience of many trainee FE teachers is, ironically, impoverished by a workplace culture that often prioritises expedience over the development of professional knowledge and creative practice. The paper highlights how in an increasingly performative environment trainee FE teachers are expected to make excessively rapid transitions to full professional roles – transitions which provide them with limited opportunities to engage in the broader forms of learning and development recommended by Fuller and Unwin as necessary to foster expansive learning. As such, we argue that significant alterations to WBL practices are necessary if FE colleges are to prepare their teachers to meet the challenges of educating and training the current and future workforce.

The first section of the paper provides a brief overview of some of the main features of English FE colleges and the position of teachers within these institutions. The next two sections outline the methods and the theoretical framework used in the research project upon which this paper is based. This is followed by a discussion of the project’s findings in which we draw on interview data gained from the college managers, teacher educators and trainee teachers taking part in the project. These illustrate some of the ways in which the WBL experience of trainee FE teachers may be compromised and limited by narrow and restrictive workplace practices. The paper finishes with a critical appraisal of these findings and makes recommendations for the improvement of WBL for trainee FE teachers. We recognise, however, that workplaces remain sites of inequality and antagonism, and therefore that apparently progressive measures, such as those associated with expansive workplaces, can be reduced to performative exercises or simply

means to increase exploitation. Nevertheless, we argue that our recommendations will help to provide a more expansive and positive WBL experience and will, in turn, allow FE teachers not only to develop their own practice but also equip and enable them to engage their own learners in more critical, reflexive forms of knowledge and skill acquisition.

Teaching in further education

English further education (FE) colleges cater for over 3 million learners (Foster 2005: vi) and, whilst international comparisons are not straightforward, there are some similarities between FE colleges, community colleges in the USA, and the technical and further education institutes in Australia. Sitting somewhat uncomfortably between schools on the one hand and universities on the other, FE provides a diverse range of learning opportunities for individuals, business and community groups. This includes provision for people with learning difficulties, intermediate and advanced vocational training, and courses of higher education. As such, FE colleges have many roles and missions; however, as Ainley and Bailey (1997, pp. 8-10) state, despite its multi-purpose nature, further education has always been mainly concerned with learning for the workplace. Indeed, the origins of many FE colleges can be traced back to the mechanics institutes of the nineteenth century, and traditionally further education concentrated mainly on training apprentices and technicians for the engineering workshops and manufacturing industries that dominated the UK economy. Over recent decades this focus has altered and, mirroring broader social and economic change, the remit of FE colleges has changed significantly. Nowadays education and training for the service sector, whether this is in the care home, hotel, salon or office is FE's staple diet. Whilst FE colleges have always had a close relationship with the labour market, their own role as employers has often been overlooked. In some ways, this lack of interest in their role as employers is surprising as these institutions are a significant source of employment in their own right: almost 270,000 people work in English FE colleges and in many towns and cities the local college is one of the largest employers, providing work not just for teachers but for a range of technical, administrative and other support staff too (LLUK 2010, p. 4). Furthermore, although the primary business of FE colleges lies in education and training for external clients, they are also significant providers of WBL for their own workforce; and although many college employees undertake 'in-house' courses and undergo professional development, non-formal WBL is especially important for teaching staff. The study on which this paper is based sought to address this relatively under-researched area.

In England, as elsewhere in the UK, the vast majority of schoolteachers undertake their initial training on a full-time 'pre-service' basis before they gain employment (Smith and McLay 2007, p. 35). In sharp contrast, ninety per cent of FE teachers begin their teaching careers without a teaching qualification (UCET 2009 p. 1). Part-time 'in-service' teacher training is the norm in FE. Most FE teachers enter teaching directly from business and industry and in some cases they continue to practise their original vocation alongside work in a college. Either way, most FE teachers sustain the dual role of teacher and trainee teacher at the beginning of their teaching careers. There are a number of reasons for the important differences between teacher training for school teachers and teachers in further education; however, they are perhaps best understood as deriving from further education's vocational traditions, its working class roots and its peculiar history on the margins of the education system. In FE, traditionally the emphasis was upon learning a craft or trade from a skilled artisan or practitioner; and often the FE teacher would tend to regard themselves as an engineer, book-keeper or builder who just happened to teach (Venables 1967,

p.220). For much of FE's existence subject knowledge and vocational experience rather than pedagogy was considered the chief determinant of teaching quality (Harkin 2005, p. 166). However, such notions have long been recognised as flawed and teaching qualifications for FE have in fact been in existence for over sixty years. Although for the majority of this time it was not compulsory for FE teachers to undertake such training, eventually this became the norm for the majority of those employed on a full-time basis. Nevertheless, many FE teachers, particularly part-time members of staff, continued to teach on an 'unqualified' basis and it was not until 2001 that there was a statutory requirement for all FE teachers in England to hold teaching qualifications.

The research project

This paper draws on data from a qualitative research project undertaken during 2009 which was based on a comparison of cases studies of two FE colleges in the north of England – 'Dale College' and 'Urban College'. Like most FE colleges the 'core business' of both institutions is in providing vocational education and training for their local communities. These two colleges are unexceptional but were chosen as case studies because their contrasts reflect the diversity of the sector. Dale College is located in a semi-rural market town and, although it has undergone significant growth over recent years, it is still relatively small. Dale College also has a 'softer' and more 'people-centred' enterprise culture rather than the 'crude efficiency' model that has characterised many FE colleges since they were removed from the control of local education authorities in the early 1990s (Alexiadou 2000). In contrast, Urban College, is located in a large conurbation, is much bigger and has had a rather turbulent recent history. In the 1990s it experienced a significant programme of restructuring and redundancies under a 'charismatic' principal and there remains a 'harder' managerial and more performative culture. As such, the two institutions can perhaps be seen as representing two opposite ends of a continuum in relation to workplace cultures in FE.

The aims of the research were:

- To explore the dual role of employed teacher and trainee teacher in order to consider how these roles interact and affect the development of teachers in FE.
- To develop strategies to enhance the teacher-trainee experience and make recommendations to college employers.

The study considered how trainee teachers in these colleges perceived their experience of the dual position of trainee and teacher. It also considered how trainee teachers and those with responsibility for teacher education in the colleges perceived the role of the trainee teacher. Due to the timescale of the project, the sample was necessarily small but sufficient to identify themes and issues. The participants in the study were: ten trainee teachers from each institution, chosen at random; the senior manager responsible for human resources (HR) in each of the colleges; and the two longest serving teacher educators in each of the colleges, four in total. This paper draws mainly on data from the trainees, all of whom were employed as teachers and, reflecting the diverse nature of FE, they came from a variety of vocational backgrounds. As is the norm, many had gained extensive work experience before coming into further education. They taught in a range of subject areas, including health and social care; information technology; art and design; childcare; performing arts; and uniformed and public services courses. Most of these

trainee teachers had between one and three years' teaching experience, although three of those taking part had considerably more; one trainee had had twenty-nine years' teaching experience, mostly on a casual or part-time basis. Roughly half were full-time employees. For those employed on a part-time basis, the amount of teaching each person undertook varied significantly: some taught for only a few hours a week, whilst others were teaching on an almost full-time basis. An equal number of men and women took part in the research. Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews carried out by members of the research team. Each participant was interviewed once for between thirty and forty-five minutes.

Eraut (2004, p249) has discussed some of the difficulties of collecting data relating to "informal" learning in the workplace: that the discourse of learning is dominated by the experience of formal education, especially schooling; that respondents may not recognise as learning what is 'absorbed' at work through participation; and that respondents may highlight the unusual in their practice and ignore the mundane. Aware of these problems, interviews with the trainee teachers focused on aspects of practice as well as the perceptions of issues and covered three broad themes:

- The trainee's journey into teaching – their professional/vocational background; how and why they moved into teaching; and nature of their current role as a FE teacher.
- Their teacher training course—what knowledge and skills had been learnt by the trainee from the course and incorporated into their practice.
- The tensions and symbioses of being simultaneously an employed teacher and a trainee teacher; how these issues are managed, both by their employers and the trainees themselves.

All the data were analysed and coded with the aid of qualitative research software to identify recurring themes and common issues. For the trainees the codes related to prior vocational and educational experience; motivations for becoming a teacher; their understanding of their role in the college; their teaching practice; the impact on practice of the teacher education course; and the opportunities for and restrictions to participation and cooperation in the college.

The HR managers and teacher educators were interviewed in order to gain their views on the role of the trainee teachers in the two colleges; to compare their views with those of the trainee teachers; and to help gain an understanding of the organisational culture in which the trainees work. It was recognised that HR managers and teacher educators are influential in shaping the environment in which trainee teachers work and in contributing to the formation as teachers. The interviews with the HR managers and the teacher educators focused mainly on their perceptions of the challenges and opportunities facing trainee teachers undergoing in-service training and the related institutional policy in each of the colleges.

At the time of the project all the trainee teachers were undertaking a part-time, in-service Certificate in Education (Cert. Ed.) or Professional Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) alongside paid employment. In many ways, the two qualifications can be regarded as 'sister' courses: the PGCE being designed for graduates, whilst the Cert. Ed is aimed at those with other vocational qualifications. The curriculum for both courses is similar to the

extent that Cert. Ed. and PGCE trainees are normally taught together as one cohort. Although other qualifications for FE teachers do exist, the Cert. Ed./PGCE is long-established and probably regarded as the leading 'brand' for those wishing to pursue a career in FE. At both institutions the Cert. Ed./PGCE is designed and validated by 'Northern University' – a nearby post-1992 university with a long-standing reputation for providing FE teacher training. Dale College and Urban College are part of a large network of colleges offering Northern University's provision and, whilst the curriculum and support for delivery is provided centrally by the University, on a day-to-day basis the course is taught by each institution's own staff. Therefore, the majority of trainees undertake the course at their own workplace and are taught by other teachers employed on similar terms. Normally the Cert. Ed./PGCE is completed over two academic years with trainees attending formal classes once a week. Trainees undertake a variety of coursework and their teaching practice is assessed in the workplace. Upon completion of this qualification trainees must undertake a period of 'professional formation' to gain Qualified Teacher in Learning and Skills (QTLS) status.

Theoretical framework

FE teacher training is an area in which there has been limited academic research. In some ways this is understandable: FE has long been regarded as the 'Cinderella' of the English education system and, historically, teacher training was not seen as a priority. However, over recent years, the position of the sector has changed radically. It now has a much higher political profile than was the case during its era of 'benign neglect' in the three decades following the end of World War Two (Lucas 2004). Set against a backdrop of increasing globalisation and an intensifying neo-liberal polity, successive UK governments have identified FE as a vehicle to carry two related policies: creating social justice through widening participation in education; and boosting the economy through enhancing the skills of the nation (LSC 2005, p.1). Consequently, whilst FE has received significantly increased levels of funding in recent years, it has also been the recipient of an almost endless stream of policy initiatives and unprecedented levels of governmental direction and control. Nowadays, the further education sector is highly mediated by the requirements of the state (Keep 2006).

Part of New Labour's strategy to direct and control FE was an increased emphasis upon teacher training. The Fryer Report (1997) Kennedy Report (1997) both highlighted the need to create a coherent, nationally recognised system of FE teacher training. In 2001 the statutory requirement for all FE teachers to gain teaching qualifications was introduced. This was updated by the Further Education Workforce Reforms in 2007. A new emphasis on teacher training was presented not only as an attempt intended both to improve teaching and learning, but also to help 'professionalise' the FE workforce. Consequently, the quality and content of FE teacher training has become closely regulated by the state and much of its content is now prescribed by government agencies and providers have detailed and extensive specifications with which their courses must comply. An 'annual monitoring' against external standards is required if 'endorsement' by Standards Verification UK is to be maintained. Nevertheless, despite such changes, there is a degree of continuity with previous practice. The career trajectory of FE teachers continues to be quite different to that of most schoolteachers. Colleges still require staff with up-to-date vocational skills and knowledge and, generally, FE teachers still come into

colleges after pursuing previous careers; and most learning in the sector is still work-related (Orr and Simmons 2010, pp.78-79).

There is now a body of work on the experience of pre-service trainee teachers alongside some literature on teacher training in FE more generally (see, for example, Harkin 2005; Noel 2006; Simmons and Thompson 2007; Thompson and Robinson 2008). More recently, Lucas and Unwin (2009) have focused on the WBL experience of in-service trainees and argue that there is a significant gap between the discourse surrounding FE teaching training and the reality experienced by many trainees. In their research Lucas and Unwin found little organisational support for the trainee teachers and a lack of recognition of their dual role as teacher *and* trainee. Indeed, excessively heavy workloads and highly pressured circumstances were found to be the norm for many. Lucas and Unwin go on to argue that, whilst there has been a great deal of attention paid to the skills, competencies and content of the teacher training curriculum, there is a need reconsider the learning experience of trainee FE teachers more broadly. They believe there is a need to conceptualise workforce learning as central to employment practices, and for college managers and policymakers to promote the workplace environment and conditions conducive to 'expansive learning'. This paper revisits some of these themes through the consideration of FE teacher training as an aspect of WBL. As recognised by Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2005, p112 cited in Hoekstra et al 2008, p277) in relation to the training of school teachers, "there is an extensive literature on teacher development, which is paralleled by a long-established literature on workplace learning, but there has been very limited connection between the two." This discrepancy is also apparent in the more limited literature on FE teacher development so we are seeking to expand knowledge and understanding in this area by considering the workplace learning of FE teachers in training and we offer some tangible strategies for both employers and policymakers.

Fuller and Unwin's (2004) expansive and restrictive framework of approaches to workforce development provides a conceptual tool with which to analyse WBL for trainee FE teachers; both what is overt as well as what is implicit. The framework, moreover, allows WBL to be examined within its broader socio-economic context and relates to the tension of the employer/employee relationship (Evans et al 2006: 3). Billett (2002: 457) argues:

Workplace experiences ... are the product of the historical-cultural practices and situational factors that constitute the particular work practice.

Such an understanding of the relationship between individual agency and socio-economic context is informed by a recognition that agency and structure mutually shape and curtail. Fuller and Unwin's framework provides a taxonomy of approaches to workforce development which describe either end of a continuum from the expansive, which enhance opportunities for learning; to the restrictive, which limit workforce development. It contains two broad categories (Evans et al. 2006: 41-42):

1. "Those which arise from understandings about the organisational context and culture (for example, work organization, job design, control, and distribution of knowledge and skills)."
2. "[T]hose which relate to understandings of how employees learn (through engaging in different forms of participation)."

For Fuller and Unwin (2004, p. 130) an expansive learning environment requires an organisational culture of recognition and support for employees as learners. As such, management need to support and promote workplace learning and see its promotion as a significant responsibility. Specific features of such an environment would include:

- A clear commitment to and understanding of the dual identity of learner and worker experienced trainees
- Planned time off for professional development, reflection and knowledge-based courses
- The provision of time and 'space' for employees to work and learn 'across boundaries' and to share knowledge and skills with colleagues across the organisation

In contrast, a restrictive learning environment is characterised by a lack of organisational recognition and support for employees as learners. Typically, its features would include:

- The requirement for trainees to make a rapid transition to 'full worker' status
- Training delivered virtually all-on-job with limited opportunities for reflection or access to learning outside the organisation
- Jobs designed allowing little discretion, autonomy or opportunity to work or learn outside the employees immediate environment

Fuller and Unwin (2004: 131) argue that expansive approaches are more likely "to promote synergies between personal and organisational development". Nevertheless, we remain aware of Avis's (forthcoming: 17) warning that workplaces reflect the unequal structures of society and so remain sites of antagonism, even those that may be considered 'expansive'.

Whilst for many workers [expansive learning environments] may offer more fulfilling work and greater levels of autonomy, [they] may also contribute to increased self-surveillance whereby we are enjoined to continually re-invent ourselves to fit the demands of the productive system.

An analogous situation can be discerned in how Schön's (1991) conceptualisation of reflective practice, which was a reaction to the shortcomings of technical rationalism, has become an element of management doxa in many FE colleges and has been transformed into a technicism used to control teachers' practice. Again within the context of English FE colleges, Orr (2009) has argued that the transformative possibilities for teachers of continuing professional development have in some cases been reduced to a performative exercise designed to meet centralised targets. Likewise, expansive approaches to WBL can be colonized so the language of democratic control and empowerment in the workplace can be harnessed to camouflage or heighten exploitation.

Findings

We recognise that the findings from this project are unlikely to be representative of all FE colleges – there are after all around 350 of these institutions in England. Nevertheless, the data gained from these two case studies does provide an informed insight into the nature of in-service FE teacher training and highlights issues commonly arising for those undertaking such programmes. As discussed below, the data indicated considerable

inconsistency between the experiences of individual trainees even within the same college. Nevertheless, when the position of FE teachers is examined, some aspects of their training and workplace experience can be interpreted in a positive light. Some trainees described positive, developmental relationships with mentors and other colleagues. That the trainee teachers were able to earn while training was often mentioned and appreciated. Moreover, access to a university qualification, such as a Cert. Ed or PGCE - a training course intended to not only to improve technical skills and classroom practice, but also to promote critical thought and a broad-based knowledge of educational issues – could be seen as evidence of an expansive learning environment. Yet our findings point to a number of problematic circumstances at the institutional level, which may serve to compromise trainees' development. This is suggested most strongly by the status given to the course by the HR managers who were ultimately in charge of the trainee teachers in their institution. As perhaps might be expected given the differing workplace cultures at the two institutions, Dale College appeared more committed to teacher training and staff development more generally. However, whilst in at least partial recognition of the commitment involved, Urban College provided staff undertaking teacher training with thirty hours remission from teaching duties, Dale College had no such policy. Budgetary constraints and organisational exigencies were thought to be prohibitive of a more expansive approach to WBL, as described by a teacher educator at Dale College:

if you had the resources – you would let them drop in here and there and actually build up their teaching so, initially, they are on quite a tight teaching role – maybe three or four hours – so enough time to reflect and enough time to do the teacher training and, maybe as part of that, to pay them to go and watch somebody else teach. I mean mentoring is all well and good if the person has time to think and reflect and I think with many trainees – and this is very much the nature of the sector because it's needs must – if somebody shows an ounce of ability they move from four hours to fourteen and then to twenty-four and a Cert Ed and everything else. And I think that can be quite damaging for somebody... The right thing to do is the youth squad stuff: gradually expose them once they are at the stage where they've developed their capability.

Although there was a stipulated amount of remission at Urban College, in practice, many trainees did not receive this. Often it was swallowed up in covering for absent colleagues or other expediencies. The following comments, the first from a trainee at Urban College and second from one at Dale College illustrate some of difficulties of sustaining the dual role of trainee and employee:

Well the main one is time. I feel I can't do either to my best abilities. I've always been strongly motivated in my own work to succeed and I do feel that I've not got the time to get a handle on both really. I'm not happy at the moment with the situation and I would like more time.

[O]n the one hand you are a trainee-teacher and it's understood and recognised that you don't actually really know the job that well and you're still learning it but, on the other hand, you are a teacher and you're doing the job of a teacher and you're paid as a teacher and you have the responsibilities of a teacher.

We found there were inconsistencies, even within the same college, of support for teacher training. Although trainees almost unanimously considered their training course to be useful and even enjoyable, access to mentors, time off for study and the attitudes of managers were reliant upon localised, often random factors. Such inconsistencies suggest a “[l]ack of organisational recognition of and support for employees as learners” (Fuller & Unwin 2004: 130). Data indicate little coherence in how trainees were developed by either organisation. We found there was much reliance upon the variable goodwill and capacity of trainees’ colleagues. Furthermore, staff at both institutions were regarded primarily as teachers, not novices and many were given extensive administrative responsibilities whilst they were still trainees. As one trainee at Urban College described:

I don't think, for the most part, I'm conceived as a trainee teacher in terms of responsibilities that I've been given...The volume of work that I am having to do is causing me some stress...

Summarising the multiple stresses experienced by many new staff, a trainee at Dale College commented:

[B]eing thrown into the teaching role without the background of the training was a bit mind blowing to be quite honest. The first couple of terms I didn't know what had hit me...

Related to this, in both organisations, there was a strong organisational expectation that the trainee teacher make a rapid transition to a full employee status. Illustrating this, one trainee at Urban College said: “*you are a teacher and you're doing the job of a teacher and you're paid as a teacher*”. For the majority, the only space where they were regarded as trainees was in the weekly Cert. Ed./PGCE class. This rapid transition left little time to reflect on their development and, for some, training became perfunctory. One trainee at Dale College who had only tolerated the weekly sessions “*by thinking that it's all going to be over in two hours and I've only got two months to go now.*” There was sparse evidence of any reification of the workplace curriculum in either college. The exception to this was “paperwork”; for some of the trainees learning to cope with bureaucracy such as student attendance registers, mark sheets and progress returns appeared to take precedence over pedagogy. There is also strong evidence from this study that trainees have highly restricted access to communities of practice beyond their own immediate environment; there was very little “boundary crossing” (Fuller & Unwin 2004: 130) between different curriculum areas or different parts of the college. Even within the trainees’ own immediate group of colleagues, the high staff turnover, the extensive use of part-time and temporary teachers, alongside heavy workloads resulted in a restricted culture of support and development. Moreover, there was little evidence of experienced colleagues engaging purposely with trainees or actively helping to develop their practice. One trainee described being made to feel ‘awkward’ and another ‘stupid’ when they attempted to engage with other members of the teaching staff.

On another level, the position of the teacher educators in both colleges is perhaps illustrative of the position of teacher training and WBL within FE in general. Each of the teacher educators themselves described their own role as significant both in the development of individual new teachers and, consequently, in the development of teaching and learning across the whole college. Yet, whilst the HR managers recognised that teacher educators are subject to demands over and above those of many of their colleagues, there was a lack of organisational support and no commitment of additional

resources to help them in their work. The HR manager at Dale College was sympathetic and acknowledged that trainee teachers were often working under pressured circumstances but there was no formal recognition of this. Both HR managers indicated that, due to the nature of their work, teacher educators are expected to demonstrate particularly high standards and to act as role models. It was also recognised that the teacher educators often supported trainees outside scheduled class times and that they would have more informal duties than other members of teaching staff. Despite this, the teacher educators were not regarded as senior members of staff at either institution; all were employed as main grade teachers with no remission or other formal recognition of the additional demands placed upon them. Illustrating this tension, the HR manager at Urban College stated:

Their role is primarily as any other teacher, it's just that they teach a different subject. They wouldn't be treated differently in respect to terms and conditions or anything like that but what there probably is a little bit more of is that they act as more of a support to people because of the nature of their subject area. So they will get people asking them more questions, if you like but, to all intent and purposes, they will be the same as any other lecturer.

Discussion

In his investigations of learning at work Billett (2001, p209) has found:

learners afforded the richest opportunities for participation reported the strongest development, and that workplace readiness was central to the quality of experiences.

As seen, the availability of 'affordances' and the readiness of the workplace to accept or welcome the trainee teacher depend on the structure of the college at institutional and sectional levels. This chimes with the work of Jurasite-Harbison (2009) whose study of workplace learning in three schools in the United States and Lithuania found that (p318) "informal learning contexts appeared to be culturally bound and contextually specific." The impact of FE's culture with its traditionally weak emphasis on pedagogy, as described above, is apparent. Critically, though, for the English FE trainee teachers, and in contrast to school teachers, informal WBL is by far the major component in their initial teacher education as measured by time and may therefore be even more significant than for school teachers. Billett (2001, p209) found that the key contributors to successful learning for the trainee in a workplace were "engagement in everyday tasks"; "direct or close guidance of co-workers" and "indirect guidance provided by the workplace itself and others in the workplace". While there was some evidence of these factors for individual trainees, there was no coherent implementation of policies to enhance workplace learning or promote what might be termed an expansive WBL environment. This incoherence may help to explain the lack of development of new teachers' practice and of pedagogy in FE more generally identified by Coffield (2008), but calls for reforms to address this situation need to be made cautiously. The cascade of initiatives in FE has been discussed above and reacting to the great number of initiatives in the same sector of English education, Coffield (2010: 6; original emphasis) has suggested that the government:

introduce a lengthy period of **radical non-intervention** and to reflect on Martya Sen's comment: 'The power to do good goes almost always with the possibility to do the opposite' (2001:xxiii).

As a consequence of these concerns, the recommendations informed by our study and relating to Fuller and Unwin's framework are limited and specific and aim to create a space to encourage what Stronach *et al* (2004: 109) termed "ecologies of practice". This refers "to the sorts of individual and collective experiences, beliefs and practices that professionals accumulate in learning and performing their roles" which are in tension with the "economy of performance" characterised by the pervasive managerialism in English FE. In order to support the development of new teachers in the workplace we recommend that FE employers:

- Recognise trainee teachers as a defined category of employee; new teachers should be encouraged to see themselves as trainees with the licence to experiment and therefore to make and learn from mistakes. Teaching observations of trainee teachers carried out by colleges would have, for example, different criteria than those of fully-qualified staff.
- Set and implement policies that prioritise the pedagogical development of teachers over both administrative systems and operational expedience. This would mean, for example, trainees could not be pulled out of class to cover for absent colleagues or be over-burdened with administrative responsibilities.
- Increase trainee teachers' workloads incrementally to allow them time for observation of colleagues and to reflect on their own developing practice as they transform and develop into the role of teacher.
- Reduce the workload of teacher trainers in recognition of their key workplace role in supporting and developing new teachers.

These strategies can only be effective, however, as part of an overall policy thrust within which FE employers are permitted to eschew the pursuit of performance targets for their own sake and recognise teaching and learning as the highest priority for the teachers they employ.

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