

## Drawing some conclusions: 8 key themes

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Livingston (2014, p.219) recognised that the role of teacher educator is no longer solely university based and called for ‘a better understanding’ of teacher educators ‘working in different locations and educational sectors’. This booklet can be seen as a modest response to Livingston’s request, one which should be seen as part of a wider mosaic of emerging work in this area. There is no claim that these further education based teacher educators are necessarily representative of others working in the sector, though the telling of their stories may contribute to the mapping of further education based teacher educators and their work (Petrie, 2015). Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of these 12 stories offers eight insights into the lives and work of these further education based teacher educators which are outlined below.

## 1. Academic background

Unlike those teacher educators involved in the training of school teachers, for the majority of these FE based teacher educators the route into teaching was generally not the traditional academic path of GCE A Levels followed by a university degree before moving on directly to a full-time teacher training course. Five of them, however, had followed that route. The other seven had undertaken vocational and professional qualifications in areas such as engineering, beauty therapy, secretarial studies, and nursing before entering some form of teacher training after a career within their respective occupational fields. This reflects the vocational nature of the further education curriculum, though perhaps not so strongly as might have been imagined. This may be a consequence of a persistence of some of the subject specialist issues referred to by Noel (2006), as well as the strongly social scientific nature of Education as a discipline.

## 2. Triple professionals

Given the vocational nature of FE it is, perhaps, unsurprising that 10 of the 12 started their employment careers outside teaching. Teachers in further education in England who first enter teaching in this way have sometimes been characterised as ‘dual professionals’ (Robson, 1998, p.603): their first profession being their career before teaching; the second being teaching. For instance, John Aston was a motor vehicle technician, welder, and foreman before he taught; Sally Brown and Lou Mycroft worked in England’s National Health Service. Their moves into the role of further education based teacher educator is then their third professional identity. The regular incidence of this kind of professional profile led Crawley (2014, p.121) to describe further education based teacher educators as ‘triple or multiple professionals’.

### 3. Roads to becoming a teacher

Three of the teacher educators mention having had an early ambition, or their parents having had an ambition, for them to teach from early in their lives - Adam, Gail, and Heather – though they did not enter teaching immediately. Adam trained to be a management accountant:

With forty years of endless spreadsheets looming I heard by chance in 2004 about a course at Bolton Institute of Higher Education (now the University of Bolton) to become a literacy subject specialist and train to teach in further education, a sector with which I was unfamiliar, so I gave up my career and studied a one-year full-time programme.

Gail reflected: 'I first thought about being a teacher as far back as when I was at primary school', though it was sometime later, after running her own business, that she moved into teaching, initially on a part-time basis. Rachel tells us she was 'unsure what to do with my life and feeling that a PGCE [Schools] would at least appear purposeful.' However, she reflexively discusses how she 'was not yet emotionally equipped to deal with the school environment and, after a short spell of fairly disastrous supply teaching, opted out.' She would return to teaching later.

For the majority of these teacher educators teaching was a relatively late career choice, and the move to becoming a teacher educator was frequently one which was determined by an element of 'happenstance' (as indicated below).

#### **4. Being identified as a potential teacher educator by another teacher educator**

...one becomes a teacher educator by being a good teacher...  
(Russell and Korthagen, 1995, p.190).

Seven of these teacher educators' stories indicate that they were invited to join the teacher education team by an established teacher educator within their college. In that respect, the transition was not initiated by a proactive choice on their part. As such, this is what Loo (2020, p.48) calls an unintended pathway to becoming a teacher educator. This 'making of an unsolicited approach' by a senior teacher educator seems to have been an established practice in the recruitment of future further education based teacher educators (Noel, 2006). For instance, John Matthews reflected: 'Probably the greatest influence in becoming a teacher educator was when a colleague, who I had a lot of respect for and who himself was influential in the college, suggested I seek some work with the adult training team.' Corrine had a similar experience: 'I was asked to join a small team at HTC [her college] to develop and deliver the City and Guilds (C&G) 7307 to a cohort of trainee teachers specialising in childcare and early years.' Kim's journey started with a request for her to be a mentor:

I was invited to be a mentor for a PGCE student and this was the initial introduction to working as a teacher educator...In 2010, I started teaching PTLLS, a level 3 ITE award [at that time], and carried out observations of CertEd and PGCE students.

#### **5. Being inspired to become a teacher educator by another teacher educator**

For five of these teacher educators the teacher educators who taught them as they were doing their own initial teacher education provided the motivation for them to become teacher educators themselves. Loo (2020, p.49) calls this an ‘intended pathway’ to becoming a teacher educator. Sally identified Linda Hallwood, a teacher educator at Wakefield College as ‘inspirational’, adding: ‘she was passionate about the role of an FE teacher, and at my final tutorial asked me what I hoped to do at the end of the course. My answer was I would love your job, and to inspire other teachers in the same way you inspired me!’ Gail singles out Rebecca Clare as her inspiration: ‘She was passionate about education and a font of knowledge; I felt very privileged to have been taught by her and she certainly motivated me...’, though it would take a suggestion from her line manager that teacher education might be her ‘next step’ for that to happen.

The factor underlines the importance of the long-established notion that teachers provide role models (see 7. below).

## 6. Undertaking educational research

Lunenberg et al. (2014) identifies researcher as one of the roles of the teacher educator. Maintaining current knowledge of academic debates and emerging knowledge is fundamental to effective teacher education. All the teacher educators featured here were active in regularly attending professional development events and contributing to the surrounding scholarly debates, three of these FE based teacher educators had chosen to formalise their research activity by currently undertaking, or had completed, professional doctorates: Sally, Rachel, and Lou.

## 7. The importance of role modelling, and of peer and team support in the transition into the role of teacher educator

The transition from teacher to teacher educator was not straightforward. New identities were grappled with, and the constantly evolving knowledge requirements of teaching the teacher education curriculum presented some challenges. This can be a solitary and lonely experience for some teacher educators (Ritter, 2011), in which support can be an ‘unmet expectation’ (Yamin-Ali (2018, p.76). Seven of these teacher educators identified colleagues who had acted as role models and supported them in their new role. For example, Brenda wrote:

Joe Whittaker, who taught me on the PGCE, was a strong advocate for inclusive learning. I gained an immense wealth of knowledge from him that I would go on to apply to my teaching years after qualifying... The Teacher Education team at The Manchester College, along with two members that have now left, Libby Mooney and Titilola Olukoga, have inspired my creative teaching. As a team we share ideas and plan lessons together to ensure that our trainees have the best experience.

Rajiv identifies the contribution of Maire Daley, who was his mentor, and Mick Smith, his former manager, to his development as a teacher educator:

Maire’s drive, enthusiasm, passion, and intelligence was incredible. I learnt so much from working with Maire and this has provided me with many of the skills and qualities that I possess as a teacher today... Mick... was also a great inspiration and his support and encouragement led me to complete a MA

in Advanced Educational Practice and complete training as an Additional Inspector for Ofsted.

Heather identifies two teacher educators who helped her develop her knowledge and her practice:

...the then Cert Ed/PGCE course leader, Glenys Richardson, pointed me in the right direction in terms of content to be delivered and interpretation of assessment criteria, and helped me assess work...Another key person in my development [was]...my colleague, Jane Brooke. Together we have not only shared ideas and good practice but have also undertaken research projects into ways to support our often 'fragile learners'.

Interestingly, Heather adds that some of her trainees (student teachers), who worked in prison education, and another colleague, Ellen Schofield, helped her develop and broaden her 'understanding of teaching' in the sector.

Adam names Ela Owen, his former manager, as someone who supported him as he became a teacher educator: 'she showed me that teacher education should be much more than a script or an assignment, as well as the importance of reflection and conversations with trainee teachers to bring out the best in their practice.'

To conclude, Corrine's story provides a reminder of how significant the transition into the role of teacher educators can be and of the key roles that colleagues and a wider network can play in supporting new teacher educators: 'I was initially quite overwhelmed teaching on these courses, especially year 2, but the support within my

college and through the monthly network meetings at the University were invaluable in helping me through this transition.'

## 8. Feelings of vulnerability in the role

It is only natural that problems related to self-confidence would emerge in interviews with novice teacher educators. It is rather surprising, however, that the experienced teacher educators did not mention this topic at all. (Kremer-Hayon and Zuzovsky, 1995, pp.161-162)

Four of the teacher educators mentioned their feeling anxious or experiencing a sense of impostership at some stage early in their role. Corrine reflected that 'I was quite intimidated by teaching trainee teachers in a field I was not an 'expert' in.' This, however, did not last long for her as she realised that she was teaching her trainees how to teach and how to be a teacher. Rachel feels 'a deeper sense of fraudulence still lurks somewhere beneath. Becoming a teacher educator implies that you once became a teacher' and her story suggests this was far from straight-forward. Rachel employed Moore's (2004, p.141) notion of the 'reflexive turn' to make sense of her previous experiences as a teacher in the 'hope' of finding 'long-term professional happiness'. Kim felt that, in spite of support from colleagues, she 'experienced the often-reported imposter syndrome and reckoned it was probably just a matter of time before I would I be found out.' Whilst Heather's line manager assured her that she was a good teacher, she 'did feel rather a fraud. How could I train teachers when I sometimes had bad teaching sessions myself?', she asked herself.

Kremer-Hayon and Zuzovsky (1995, p.162) suggested that a lack of confidence in a teacher educator could have two possible



consequences: it could create feelings of 'frustration' or it could provide a stimulus for professional development as a means to address any feelings of inadequacy.