Becoming a lecturer in further education in England: the construction of professional identity and the role of communities of practice

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Abstract

Further education colleges in England, which offer a wide range of post-school education and training provision, have undergone major transformations in the past decade, resulting in considerable changes to the work of those involved in teaching in colleges. This paper examines the development of professional identity, as a means of exploring how cultures of learning and teaching are developing and changing in the sector. The paper considers the formation of professional identity amongst a group of trainee lecturers completing a one year full-time teacher training course at a university in the English Midlands. Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on apprenticeship to communities of practice is used to examine the effect of trainees' teaching placement on the development of professional identity. However, rather than identifying effective processes of increasing participation in existing communities of practice, the study highlights a strong sense of marginalisation and alienation amongst trainees. The paper argues that this is detrimental to both trainees and experienced lecturers if they are to actively engage in building new forms of professionalism for the future.

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[1] Introduction

In the UK, as in many other countries, learning has become a central concern of government policy-makers. Learning is seen as the key to economic competitiveness, social stability and active citizenship (see for example DfEE, 1998; DTI and DfEE, 2001; DfES, 2002; Social Exclusion Unit, 1999). Widening participation and raising achievement in all forms of learning, education and training, conceived of as a lifelong endeavour, are seen as imperative to the success and well-being of individuals, communities, industry and the nation.

Interventions by policy-makers to define what learning should involve and how it should be carried out are redefining what it means to be a teacher or lecturer across all sectors of the education and training system. Ball (1999, 2003) graphically describes the impact of current changes on teaching professionals as 'the struggle for the soul of the teacher'. While policy is seen to be driving teachers into an increasingly managerial and performative mode, where measurement of productivity and displays of 'quality' are paramount, there is a growing body of literature from educational researchers, which seeks to identify

opportunities for teachers to maintain and develop critical understandings of their role, based on values of critical democracy and social justice (see for example Avis, 1999; Sachs, 2001; Shain and Gleeson, 1999). Set against this context, the forming and re-forming of professional identity are seen as increasingly significant and contested. The concern here is not simply with teachers' identities in themselves, but with how their identities may contribute fundamentally to the nature of the teaching and learning process.

In this paper, we focus on the formation of professional identity amongst trainee lecturers preparing to teach in the English further education (FE) system. Further education colleges in England offer a wide range of education and training provision. In the past, they formed a post-school tertiary sector separate from university higher education, offering mainly occupational and vocational courses. However, their provision is now much wider than this, and includes additional courses for school pupils in late secondary education, higher education degree programmes, academic qualifications such as GCSEs and A-levels, as well as the occupational and vocational provision with which they are traditionally associated. They are often perceived as offering a second chance route, to those who did not succeed school. Long described as the 'Cinderella' service compared with schools and higher education (Gleeson, 1999), English further education is gaining a more prominent role in the context of new policy imperatives. We are interested in the formation of professional identity, as a

means of exploring how cultures of learning and teaching are developing and changing in this sector.

We explore this issue by examining the experience of a group of trainee lecturers, who were on a one-year teacher training programme intended for people preparing to teach in further education. The programme was a full-time university course, with trainees spending two days a week on placement in an FE college. The study took place in the academic year 1999-2000, and was based in the English Midlands. There are various factors which affect the construction of lecturers' professional identity, and in other papers we have explored lecturers' personal biographies (Bathmaker, Avis and Kendall, 2003) and constructions of the good and bad lecturer (Avis, Bathmaker and Parsons, 2002). Here we focus on the trainees' experience of their teaching placement, which, as wider research into teacher education suggests, plays a major role for students in the process of becoming a teacher (Hauge, 2000).

We use Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on apprenticeship into communities of practice to explore trainees' experience of their placement. The data we have collected provide insights into trainee lecturers' access and entry into what we refer to as the communities of practice in their placement colleges, and also into their perceptions of the cultures of those communities of practice. Our study raises questions about how current conditions in further education appear to affect the cultures of communities of practice in FE, and the implications of this

for the process of professional identity formation of trainee lecturers.

The paper starts with a brief consideration of the further education sector in England. We then outline Lave and Wenger's ideas about apprenticeship and communities of practice and their concept of legitimate peripheral participation, which are used to discuss the data from our study. The final section considers the implications of the study, both for the development of professional identity in further education in England, and for the application of Lave and Wenger's concept of legitimate peripheral participation.

[2] Further education in England

Further education colleges form one part of tertiary education and training provision in England. They offer a wide range of courses at all levels, from entry level, where the emphasis is on basic skills, to higher education degree courses. The student body is diverse, and includes full-time students, workers and trainees doing part-time off-the-job learning, mature students returning to learn, people taking night classes, learners following individualised study programmes, as well as groups of students learning in the community.

Since April 2001 FE colleges have become part of a newly-formed Learning and Skills sector. This sector embraces all of the education and training for over 16-year-olds in England, which takes place outside of schools and universities. Here, they sit alongside providers of vocational and occupational education and

training. At the same time, colleges are increasingly expected to work in partnership with schools in the provision of education and training for 14-19 year olds (DfES, 2002; DfES, 2003), and they have for many years operated franchise and partnership arrangements with universities. Their roles and activities are therefore very diverse, and the pedagogic cultures and practices in FE colleges relate to a variety of understandings of teaching and learning.

Traditionally, many lecturers in colleges have been employed for the vocational skills they have in another occupation, rather than for their teaching skills. It is only recently, in September 2001, that a teaching qualification became mandatory for new entrants to the profession (Blackstone, 2000). Although there is a long post-war tradition of teacher training courses for those working in further education, the completion of these courses has not been a requirement to practise.

The reforms taking place in further education are accompanied by cultures of marketisation and managerialism, reflecting trends across the public sector in the UK and elsewhere (see Clarke and Newman (1997) for a discussion of the rise of the managerial state). Competitiveness and efficiency are paramount, and targets and measurement all-pervasive. The effect on lecturers is not just work intensification, but changes to the nature of their work. What they do is increasingly controlled and determined by centrally-devised policy, whilst lecturers themselves are made responsible for 'delivering' the service to pre-

determined standards, and monitoring and assuring for quality and efficiency.

The impact on work cultures and professional identity in FE in England has been

explored by a number of researchers (Ainley and Bailey, 1997; Hodkinson and

Bloomer, 2000; Shain and Gleeson, 1999). Within this literature, a number of

different ways in which lecturers respond to the conditions they now face have

been identified. These range from rejection and resignation to conforming with

the new regime; hope is placed in forms of 'strategic compliance', which Shain

and Gleeson (1999) define as follows:

> innovative strategies for dealing with the pressures of income
> generation, flexibilisation and work intensification while, at the same
> time, continuing their commitments to educational or other
> professional values of student care, support and collegiality. (Shain
> and Gleeson, 1999, p.21)

[2] Communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation

In this paper, we focus on newcomers – on trainee lecturers - and use Lave and

Wenger's concept of apprenticeship into communities of practice to consider the

ways in which current conditions in FE are affecting how trainees learn what it

means to be a lecturer in further education. Lave and Wenger's (1991) work is

based on a social theory of learning, where learning is defined as a socially

situated activity, emphasising the social and cultural processes that shape

learning. As Wenger (1998) explains in his later work, a social theory of learning

encourages an understanding of individual experience in the wider social and

historical context of activity and development.

The central unit of analysis in their work is the community of practice, which is defined as follows:

> A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. (Lave and Wenger, 2002, p.115)

They state that the term community of practice implies:

> participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities. (Lave and Wenger, 2002, p.115)

Lave and Wenger believe that a redefined concept of apprenticeship is useful for understanding how novices learn. They argue that rather than formal instruction or processes of observation and imitation, apprenticeship involves learning as an improvised practice, which unfolds in opportunities for engagement with practice, defined by the social context of learning, rather than determined by the interventions of a 'master' or mentor.

They propose that learning in apprenticeship is not just about learning overt knowledge and skill, but involves moving toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. It involves absorbing a general idea of what being part of the community involves: how experienced members talk, walk, work, conduct their lives, how outsiders interact with it, how and when and about what old-timers collaborate, and what they enjoy, dislike and respect (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.95).

They therefore describe learning by novices as a process of 'legitimate peripheral participation' (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.29). The term 'legitimate' is used to denote participation in the real and necessary activities of the community of practice, while 'peripheral' means that less demands on time, effort and responsibility are made than for full participants. Peripherality can be empowering as a place in which one moves towards more intensive participation, but can also be disempowering as place in which one is kept from participating more fully (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.36).

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation means that access to a community of practice and to the artefacts and activities of that community, are very important, if newcomers are to learn. This includes access to a range of ongoing activity, to experienced members of the community, and to information, resources, and opportunities for participation.

A further important aspect of communities of practice identified by Lave and Wenger is talk. For Lave and Wenger, talk involves both the language used within a particular community of practice, and the stories told, through which people within the community share knowledge and learn from each other. Lave and Wenger believe that stories and conversations about problems and difficult cases are important in apprenticeship, as a means of becoming integrated into a community of practice. They explain that:

For newcomers then the purpose is not to learn *from* talk as a

substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn *to* talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.109)

Within their work there is a tension between accommodation and agency on the part of novices. On the one hand, they propose that knowledge-in-practice develops from absorbing and being absorbed in the culture of practice over an extended period of time, and state that newcomers who want to become part of the community, will want to align their experience with that of the community.

On the other, they draw attention to the 'conflict between continuity and displacement' (2002, p.123). Here, they argue that newcomers face a dilemma in the need to engage in existing practice, to understand and participate in it and to become members of the community, but they may also bring new views and ideas, and have an interest in changing a community's practice as well as learning to work within it. They propose that the move of learners towards full participation in a community of practice involves a reciprocal relation between persons and practice, where the practice itself is in motion and changing, as are those who are in the process of becoming participants. This tension, we suggest, is not just in relation to the ways that newcomers engage with existing communities of practice, but an underlying tension in Lave and Wenger's theory.

[1] Our study

We use the concept of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of

practice to consider what trainees learn during their teaching placements about what it is to be a further education lecturer in England. In using Lave and Wenger, we do not wish to suggest that the process of professional identity formation occurs only through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, but that their work provides a basis for exploring this aspect of the development of professional identity.

We consider trainees' expectations of their role as a lecturer and their perceptions of the reality of teaching in FE. We consider their experience of engaging with the communities of practice in their FE college placement and their perceptions of those communities of practice.

The study was carried out in the academic year 1999-2000, and involved a cohort of trainee lecturers, who were on a one year full-time further education teacher training programme. The course started in October, and from November trainees spent two days a week in their placement college. All data were collected in February, when the trainees were halfway through their course. All trainees on the programme (approximately 100) were asked if they would participate in the research, and 43 subsequently participated on a voluntary basis.

Personal details provided by the trainees provide a picture of the nature of the cohort. Unlike intending school teachers, the majority of those intending to work in FE do not progress directly through the education system from school to university into teaching. Thus 22 of the 43 trainees in this study were aged 25-35,

eleven were over 35, comprising seven aged between 36 and 45, and four aged

between 46 and 50, and only eight were younger than 25. Women were in the

majority, representing three quarters of the trainees. Three quarters (32) of the

cohort overall defined themselves as white, compared with a total of seven from

minority ethnic backgrounds (see table 1).

ethnic origin (self-reported)	female	male	total
Black (British)	4	0	4
Indian	1	0	1
African	1	0	1
South African Asian	1	0	1
White (English/European)	22	10	32
No response (ethnic origin)	3	1	4
Total overall	32	11	43

Table 1: Total respondents, by gender and ethnic origin.

The trainees completed a questionnaire about their experience, which asked

them why they were training to teach in the further education sector, how they

would describe the role of the further education lecturer, and what they liked

most and least about teaching and working in post-compulsory education and

training.

They all took part in a focus group discussion (the 43 trainees were divided into three focus groups), where they were asked to identify 'burning issues' for them in their placement college, and then to discuss these in more detail. The discussions were tape recorded and detailed notes were taken from the recordings (in all reporting any names have been changed). Following the focus group discussions, all participants were asked to complete a diary sheet, logging what they did on one placement day, during the following week. Of the 43 diary sheets distributed, only 14 were returned, of which 13 were completed, representing a 27% response rate. Although the total number of diaries returned was small, they nevertheless offered a useful snapshot of what a day on placement involved for these trainees.

Although we were interested in trainee lecturers' participation in college communities of practice, the talk we report on here is talk that occurred outside the placement colleges, in the context of the university-based part of their training course. Here their talk was in the context of a different community of practice, that of their university course, where their talk and stories may serve the function of distancing themselves from particular practices elsewhere, and to show belonging to this other community of practice. Such talk can take the form of what Silverman (1993) calls 'atrocity stories'. Atrocity stories, or moral tales, allow the teller to express thoughts which are unvoiced in the situation described, in an attempt to redress real or perceived inequality in the situation.

They encourage the listener to empathise with the teller. Silverman gives as an example stories told by medical patients, where they describe themselves as highly rational patients who behave sensibly, and doctors as insensitive or showing poor judgement (Silverman, 1993, p.200).

In order to validate our interpretation of the responses, we presented the findings to the trainees in May, towards the end of their one year training course. Not only did they recognise and agree with our interpretation of their views, but they suggested that the issues we had identified had become more marked as the year progressed.

[2] Participating in existing communities of practice in further education

The diaries completed by 13 participants offer a snapshot of what a day spent in a placement college looked like. The standard structure of a school day does not apply to colleges; provision can start early in the morning and run through until late at night, and lecturers are required to be flexible in their working day. The trainees' diaries detailed a total of 91 hours spent in placement colleges. The average time spent in college on one day per individual was seven hours, ranging from a minimum of two and a half hours to a maximum of 11 and a half hours, with only one individual recording less than five hours in college, which suggested that most trainees spent a substantial portion of a working day in their placement college. The diaries reported time spent on teaching, preparation,

meeting with colleagues and marking. Table 2 summarises the teaching

activities recorded in the diaries.

Type of class	Total times mentioned	Total hours	Length of time per instance
Whole class teaching	15	36	Min: 30 mins Max: 4 hours
Team teaching	5	9	Min: 1hr 30 Max: 2 hours
Workshop (language, ICT, study support)	5	6	Min: 1 hour Max: 2 hours
Tutorials and 1:1	3	5 hours 15 mins	Min: 1 hour Max: 3 hrs 15
Total	28	56 hours 15 mins	

Table 2: Time spent on teaching during one placement day

The types of class listed indicate something of the range of face-to-face contact

which may be found in FE colleges. Alongside whole class teaching, there are

tutorials and one-to-one provision where students may receive advice, feedback

and counselling related to their work. There are also workshops of various

kinds, which offer less formal, and often drop-in provision. Here students can

develop skills in, for example, information and communication technology (ICT), literacy, English as a Second (or Additional) Language, and study skills.

The occurrence of team teaching listed in the table, may largely relate to the practice of trainees working alongside regular lecturers for part of their training period.

We found that although focus group comments indicated that some trainees had difficulty in obtaining enough teaching hours, for they had to negotiate the hours they taught with their placement college, the diaries showed that those who responded were involved in a range of teaching activities. Their reported teaching suggested that whole class teaching predominated, representing 64 per cent of the total time, while workshops and tutorials represented almost twenty per cent of the total time spent on teaching activities. The latter might be interpreted as a considerable portion of lecturers' time, but in the context of a push towards individualised support for learning in the FE sector, the diaries suggest that such provision is still only a small part of what constitutes teaching in FE.

[2] Access to colleagues

The amount of time spent interacting with other lecturers in the college is summarised in table 3.

Type of meeting	Total times mentioned	Total hours	Length of time per instance
Work-based assessor or mentor	6	5 hours 15 mins	Min: 30 mins Max: 1 hr 15
Lunch/break	4	3 hours 10 mins	Min: 25 mins Max: 1 hour
Advice/discussion with other staff	4	1 hour 30 mins	Min: 15 mins Max: 30 mins
Chat while working	1	15 mins	15 mins
Total	15	10 hours 10 mins	

Table 3: Time spent meeting colleagues during one placement day

Work-based assessors and mentors, who appear at the top of the table, are lecturing staff who are designated by the college to guide, support and assess trainees during their placement. The reported time spent with colleagues in their placement college suggested that trainees' main contact was with their mentors and work-based assessors, and there was less informal contact with the wide range of colleagues that Lave and Wenger describe in their work. There was no mention of attendance at staff or team meetings, and only four out of the thirteen respondents reported spending time with colleagues during lunch or other breaks. When this was coupled with responses in focus group discussions, which suggested that there was often no desk space in staff rooms which trainees

could use for planning and preparation, a picture began to emerge of trainees who had limited opportunities to interact with their colleagues in their placement college. In focus group discussions only two trainees described themselves as being encouraged to feel part of a team. Far more typical were comments such as the following, which indicated that trainees felt as though they were treated as outsiders:

> Sometimes I feel like I am sneaking around.
>
> Even though I am in smart clothes, I get stared at as if I am not a member of staff. I have to put my staff badge on, then they speak to you.

They talked about their lack of status, and of feeling exploited, expressed by one trainee in the following observation:

> I feel like underpaid slave labour. I get asked to take people's classes for them. The work-based assessor says don't do it, the lecturers just want an hour free.

Lack of access to resources included desk space, car parking and photocopying, so that trainees found that they had to pay for parking spaces where regular staff had parking permits, and had to fund the cost of any photocopying of materials themselves. Rather than experiencing forms of legitimate peripheral participation, the trainees appeared to be marginalized from the communities of practice they encountered in a variety of ways. As we will go on to argue, this marginalisation was significant for trainees in their attempts to make sense of their experience of FE.

[2] Imagined roles and identities

The goals of widening participation and raising achievement have dominated English further education for the past decade. These goals appeared to sit well with the trainees' original intentions in moving into further education teaching. In answer to the question 'why are you training to teach in post-compulsory education?' trainees expressed a commitment to 'providing education to those who have missed out on formal education for one reason or another' (questionnaire response), reflecting also the second chance associations of further education. They anticipated working with students who were motivated to learn, and individual trainees were specific about the sort of students they hoped to teach, such as mature students, young adults, adults with learning difficulties, black students, or young women.

The trainees' image of what teaching in further education should be about emphasised the role of the lecturer as facilitator, someone who would enable and assist students to learn, but would not take a pro-active or directive role in the teaching process. One respondent described the term 'lecturer' as an outdated word. Although the questionnaire responses included references to the importance of subject knowledge and skills in seven out of the 43 returns, a total of 23 questionnaire responses referred to the facilitating and counselling role of lecturers, ten using the term facilitator. Facilitating included identifying learners' needs, enabling students to learn with a degree of autonomy, guiding students

towards their aspirations, realising learners' aims and ambitions, encouraging students to reach their potential, and aiding students' learning 'by allowing them enough space to learn at their own speed, but not take on too much' as one response explained. Five responses described the lecturer as a counsellor, or provider of guidance and advice, and one referred to the lecturer as playing the role of a parent. Additional comments stated that lecturers needed to be supportive, encouraging, accommodating, helpful, positive, adaptable, there for the students, and a friend.

However, their experience on placement threw a different light on the meaning of widening participation and raising achievement, and these goals were seen to create problems rather than opportunities. From the trainees' point of view, widening participation and raising achievement translated into practices in colleges which were governed by funding concerns related to student numbers. All focus groups agreed that recruitment translated into 'bums on seats', which meant that students were accepted onto courses for which they were not suited. In the questionnaires, four respondents referred to trying to get as many people into the college regardless of provision, because, as explained in one questionnaire response, 'MONEY is the only thing that is looked at'. Further comments claimed that students were retained at the cost of teaching and learning, and that completion of course outcomes by any means was more important than fair assessment.

[2] Us and them

Whilst such conditions were shared by experienced lecturers and trainees alike, the trainees did not find this a basis of affinity with existing communities of practice. Rather, they told stories which attempted to contrast and distance themselves from experienced lecturers.

In both focus group discussions and questionnaires, the trainees presented an overwhelmingly negative image of existing practice. In the focus group discussions they described existing lecturers as unwilling to embrace change:

> Existing lecturers are only interested in going in, getting the grades at the end of the year, meeting targets, where's my cheque.

> There's people where I work, and mention change and they turn to a frazzle. It's too much to think of. A lot of existing staff are stuck with the dinosaurs. They have been there for 20 years and nothing has changed.

> They find ways of not changing. Experienced staff give up their duties to avoid change.

> Lecturers can't be bothered with the paperwork and the changing times, because they've been there 20 years!

> They moan about all the paperwork because they never used to have to do it. You hardly ever see a lesson plan, because we are the only people who do them. They just take something off the shelf and take it into the classroom. When the changes come they won't know what to do. If they do have to do paperwork, such as lesson plans, they leave it to the last minute, and do it all in one go in retrospect.

There were very few comments which expressed empathy with more experienced colleagues. One trainee pointed out:

> They are under tremendous pressure. We're understaffed. What they did before I went there I don't know.

Two others argued that experienced teachers had a wealth of experience and were open to change, and one said: 'It is probably disillusionment over the past few years that makes teachers like that.'

More commonly, trainees distanced themselves from existing teaching practices, and presented themselves as different:

> Where there are a lot of older staff, they are not interested in change. They don't want to go forward. As trainees it is our job to support change.

> They're not interested, they don't want to know. They feel threatened by what we're doing, because they haven't done it.

Descriptions of their own practice suggested that they embraced change, and in effect, saw themselves as training the students they taught to accommodate to the system:

> We need to orientate these students somehow into this sort of culture, managing their own learning, orientate them into study skills, how to write essays.

They saw this task as being made more difficult by existing lecturers, whom they described as practising various forms of collusion with students to survive the changing system:

> I demand that deadlines are kept to, matching the requirements that will be made of them at University or elsewhere, but other members of staff are not so strict. They say "we'll get you to university". I'm seen as being the harsh lecturer. But they will not cope when they get to university.

> They have a set assignment they have been given for the last 12 years. Some of it is in six point italic, you can't even read it. You chivvy them along, if they want to go to the learning centre, you let them. Some of them come in to sign the attendance sheet because they are on a programme. Then they want to go. "Dave always let us go." The onus is put on the students to do the work, if they don't, that's their problem. But if they don't come up with the work, they still pass, so that the college can meet its targets, which gives the students a false sense of their achievements.

They associated their own practices with high standards, as opposed to what they saw as the undermining of standards by their more experienced colleagues:

> Demanding standards and telling the students you will stay here, you will do this work I have set, is not how things work.

> He seems to pass them all. There is such a wide variation.

> Your standards are undermined by other staff.

In addition to distancing themselves from existing lecturers' practice, they further contrasted the way in which they related to students. There was a strong feeling amongst trainees that the relationship between existing college lecturers and their students was poor:

> They don't like the students.

> They describe GNVQ Foundation as having one brain cell between them. Intermediate, two or three.

> The whole GNVQ Intermediate course where I am are called the zoo. They need to be caged up. They may be hard work, but….

> You're expected to treat students like cattle, not as equals.

Their own relationships with students were described quite differently:

> We are caring, we have not got cynical yet, but it gets you into trouble.
>
> I got into trouble for hanging around with the students, associating too much with them, having lunch with them in the refectory. I was told: "You see them in the corridor. You don't sit with them." I got told off by my work-based assessor for being unprofessional.
>
> One of my GNVQ students came up to me at the end of the lesson and said "thanks for all your help today". Another member of staff nearly collapsed on the floor, and in the staffroom said "did you know that a student has just said thank-you to [trainee]."

Yet at the same time, trainees' own experience suggested that students did not match their preconceptions of learners who were motivated and eager to learn. In questionnaire responses, ten referred to problems associated with discipline, lack of respect, students with attitude, students who were not interested in learning, students who were unable to take responsibility for their own learning, and the need to cope with a very diverse range of ability within groups. The focus group discussions referred to similar issues:

> Students don't meet deadlines. Only two students hand in on time.
>
> There is a marked difference between A level students, who do meet deadlines and GNVQ students, who don't. With GNVQ students you might as well say this assignment is due in next millenium.
>
> There seems to be a general lack of urgency amongst the students. They don't want to take responsibility for their own learning. They want it spoon fed to them constantly. Particularly with mature students. It's an uphill battle getting them to think for themselves.
>
> The students are very slow at skills such as note-taking, which means that all material has to be photocopied for them.
>
> It is difficult to assess what level to teach at, and then to retain the students. Students may come with unrealistic expectations.

[2] Comparisons of current practice with 'the old days'

The trainees' experience presented them with a dilemma. The students did not appear to match their expectations. Yet their own difficulties did not bring them closer to other lecturers. Instead, trainees distanced themselves from existing practices, and presented themselves as different. To cope with this mismatch, they resorted to memories based on personal experience of 'better times', comparing the present with recollections of their own educational experience:

> Standards are now easy. Everything is made too easy.
>
> Students are molly-coddled. There is a battery of support around each student, so they are incapable of working alone.
>
> A-level teaching is a lower standard now compared with my day. Things have to be repeated over and over again for students to understand.
>
> It is now possible to retake any exam as many times as necessary. To maintain standards, you should only be able to take exams a certain number of times. When I did my degree, there were only two chances, unless you had extenuating circumstances.

Their marginal position in their college communities of practice closed off the possibility of exploring the dilemmas they faced with more experienced lecturers.

[1] Discussion

The stories that the trainees told of their experience suggest that the major changes which have taken place in FE over the past decade have left many experienced lecturers demoralised and overstretched, as a result of the

intensification of work, and increased insecurity associated with change, particularly in relation to conditions of service in FE. This is happening at a time when further education in England is gaining increasing prominence, with the introduction of the Learning and Skills sector in April 2001 and government policy commitment to lifelong learning.

In a previous study of further education lecturers, Gleeson and Shain found signs of what they refer to as 'strategic compliance', offering hope for a re-professionalisation of lecturers based on a commitment to student and learning agendas (Gleeson and Shain, 1999; Shain and Gleeson, 1999). This was not how the trainees in this study described their experience of the communities of practice they found in FE. They spoke of something more akin to what Shain and Gleeson term 'unwilling compliance', and the sorts of solutions outlined by Easthope and Easthope (2000) employed by teachers to survive the economic rationalist imperatives of managerialism, which eventually meant disengaging from their work context.

In our study, instead of learning through legitimate peripheral participation, the trainees appeared to be marginalised from the communities of practice that they encountered on their teaching placement. Not only did they face difficulties with access to the communities of practice with whom they expected to engage, but the cultures of the communities of practice which they experienced did not match their own imagined professional identities, and served to alienate them,

rather than encourage them to seek to participate more fully.

Yet their own experience of teaching did not match their hopes and expectations of working in FE, and they were forced to try and reconcile their ideals with the reality of their experience in further education. In response to the conditions they found, the trainees told stories of how they were different to existing lecturers. These stories were not the talk and stories to which Lave and Wenger refer, but the 'atrocity stories' described by Silverman (1993). Their experience perhaps helps to explain why Ainley and Bailey (1997) have found that new staff are more willing to accommodate to new conditions. Feeling peripheral and rejecting existing practice, they may appear to comply with management demands, by challenging what they see as lack of professionalism in the present workforce. Yet by only challenging the symptoms, rather than the causes of the conditions they found in colleges, and reverting to memories of their own experience as learners, they were unable to question and challenge the 'common-sense' assumptions behind their own former learning experience, which may not necessarily serve them well in a learning and skills sector with an agenda of widening participation and raising achievement.

The role of the lecturer in FE is supposed to be undergoing fundamental changes, reflected in proposals that lecturers should be renamed 'learning professionals' (Guile and Lucas, 1999). We suggest that what we have found is problematic both for the trainees' entry into FE teaching and for the transformation of

teaching and learning cultures. For their experience is part of the process of re-shaping communities of practice, and the resulting teaching and learning cultures in further education.

Conclusions

Lave and Wenger's work on learning in apprenticeship as a form of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice has proved helpful to raise issues about professional identity formation in the context of current conditions in further education in England. However, their conceptualisation of learning does not allow for the impact of the new work order on existing communities of practice. This study, rather than demonstrating how trainees learn to become part of experienced communities of practice in FE, has drawn attention to what happens when newcomers are marginalized rather than encouraged to participate more fully. Their marginalisation appears to be related to the impact of current changes in FE. Poor workplace conditions, lack of resources, perceived lack of management support, all impact on communities of practice within further education and lead to communities which can be characterised as having low morale, being burnt out, and having lost their commitment to students. We are not claiming that all of FE in England is like this, but that this is certainly one of the ways in which current changes are playing out in FE at the present time. The trainees' experience in this study draws attention to the negative or vicious spiral that this creates for experienced practitioners and novices alike. Both

groups resorted to pathologising the student and to rejecting the present system in different ways, but their responses did not appear to offer a basis for engaging in the development of new forms of professionalism for the future. In a society which claims to be committed to lifelong learning, we believe this gives cause for concern, both for the reproduction and the transformation of teaching and learning cultures.

Our conclusions do not mean that we reject the opportunities that participation in communities of practice may offer. As an analytical tool here they have drawn attention to the disjuncture between official rhetoric about lifelong learning, and the lived experience of those working and studying in English further education, and highlighted how this affects newcomers' engagement with particular communities of practice. Yet the very contradictions that arise, could be the basis for interrogating official discourses and creating opportunities to develop alternative understandings and ways forward. Not only would such understandings need to take account of the wider social, economic and political context in which education takes place, but they would need to recognise the complexity, contradictions and messiness of educational practice. This would entail moving beyond individual reflection on personal practice, designed to diagnose and cure faults. It would mean instead a broader, shared reflexivity about the work of learning in the 21st century, which would allow for critical and uncertain accounts. The contradictions faced by experienced lecturers and

novices alike, which are uncovered in this study, may also be used as the basis

for developing such reflexivity. It is here that we place cautious hope for the

future.

NOTE: The research team who contributed to the fieldwork for this study
comprised James Avis and John Parsons of the University of Wolverhampton,
and Ann-Marie Bathmaker of the University of Sheffield.

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TABLES

ethnic origin (self-reported)	female	male	total
Black (British)	4	0	4
Indian	1	0	1
African	1	0	1
South African Asian	1	0	1
White (English/European)	22	10	32
No response (ethnic origin)	3	1	4
Total overall	32	11	43

Table 3: Total respondents, by gender and ethnic origin.

Type of class	Total times mentioned	Total hours	Length of time per instance
Whole class teaching	15	36	Min: 30 mins Max: 4 hours
Team teaching	5	9	Min: 1hr 30 Max: 2 hours
Workshop (language, ICT, study support)	5	6	Min: 1 hour Max: 2 hours
Tutorials and 1:1	3	5 hours 15 mins	Min: 1 hour Max: 3 hrs 15
Total	28	56 hours 15 mins	

Table 4: Time spent on teaching during one placement day

Type of meeting	Total times mentioned	Total hours	Length of time per instance
Work-based assessor or mentor	6	5 hours 15 mins	Min: 30 mins Max: 1 hr 15
Lunch/break	4	3 hours 10 mins	Min: 25 mins Max: 1 hour
Advice/discussion with other staff	4	1 hour 30 mins	Min: 15 mins Max: 30 mins
Chat while working	1	15 mins	15 mins
Total	15	10 hours 10 mins	

Table 3: Time spent meeting colleagues during one placement day