Dual identities: enhancing the in-service teacher-trainee experience in further education (Project leader: Kevin Orr)

## Interim Report on Project

# General Progress

In October and November Robin and I:

* organised part-time teachers to cover some of our teaching observations during the academic year to allow us time to work on the project;
* recruited a research assistant to carry out the telephone interviews;
* arranged for transcription of all of the interviews;
* decided upon a set of questions for both the interviews Robin and I would carry out, as well as the interviews carried out by our assistant, following careful consideration of our aims and the selection of our participants

Our plan was to investigate case studies of teacher-trainees in two situations and so we sought co-operation from several further education (FE) colleges. After a number of attempts, a large institution in an urban area, and a considerably smaller one in a market town agreed and those involved signed the necessary consent letters. This was a longer process than we had hoped, and consequently our interviews began later than we had expected. Nevertheless, we had accounted for this possibility in our timetable and subsequently we have been able to catch up.

Thus far we have carried out in-depth face-to-face interviews with two Human Resources (HR) managers and one teacher-trainer, as well as ten briefer telephone interviews with trainees. We have further face-to-face interviews planned with a teacher-trainer and a HR manager inFebruary, and plan to have a further ten telephone interviews completed by mid-March. This will meet our planned schedule.

The process of transcription is under way and in March we will begin coding the transcripts using Atlas-ti software, which we have obtained for the project.

# Literature Review

As was clear from the brief review we carried out while making our bid, there is little published material on the in-service training of FE teachers, which reinforced the need for the kind of research we are involved in. The large body of work on school-teaching placement as well as the smaller number of studies of FE pre-service trainees has helped to focus us on the particular and distinct tensions inherent in the role our participants have. Since these trainees are employed teachers, studies into work-based learning (WBL) have been fruitful, especially when considering the interplay of the individual teacher-trainee and the college environment. The work of Stephen Billet, Michael Eraut, Helen Colley, Anne Edwards, Paul Hager, Alison Fuller and Lorna Unwin has all been useful in this regard. Having looked at vocational education and training in FE Colley *et al* (2003: 493) urge researchers:

to think about learning more broadly than official accounts suggest. We need to consider its social, cultural and emotional aspects, its unwritten and hidden curricula, and go beyond explanations related to prescribed curricula, and the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge.

This is what we have sought to do. Apart from academic study, we have reviewed the documentation relating to initial teacher-training in FE produced by government departments and agencies which describe, and circumscribe, what teacher-trainers must do. The number of agencies and organisations involved in the FE teacher training, and their overlapping responsibilities is itself an issue for trainees and employers alike, and will be a feature of the final report. This will also be pertinent for the good practice guide for employers we will produce.

# Initial Analysis

Though we have been cautious about producing findings before completing our data collection and analysis, some themes are becoming apparent.

* Trainees appreciate being able to train while earning a salary
* Trainees learn a lot from their colleagues, though this may at times be a form of compliance.
* Some trainees describe their anxiety at being immediately considered and treated as a teacher and want more guidance early on.
* The support given by mentors is varied and inconsistent, but can be excellent.
* College quality procedures may conflict with the developmental needs of in-service trainees.
* Teacher-trainers are perceived as offering “neutral” support, since they are not considered part of the college management.
* In-service trainees have recognised and appreciated where a college has attempted to alleviate the tensions they experience in their dual role.

In addition to these themes, there are examples of good practice that other institutions may be able to apply, for example having a light touch management observation regime and appraisal during teacher-training.

Over all we have found a rich seam of data, and we are only able to mine a small part of this for our project. Though we anticipated tensions in the dual identity of trainees, we have also found many benefits for all involved. However, the contingencies of who the trainee’s manager is; how they are paired with a mentor; and the regime of their section in the college mean there is great unevenness in the trainees’ experiences. Clearly, the area of in-service training is one that will require further research.

Kevin Orr & Robin Simmons

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# Reference

Colley, H.; James, D.; Tedder, M. & Diment, K. (2003) Learning as Becoming in Vocational Education and Training: class, gender and the role of the habitus. *Journal of Vocation Education and Training,* 55, 4, 471-497.