


Singing better songs? A life history study of higher education teacher educators working in the English further education sector

Power and Education
2015, Vol. 7(3) 338–354
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sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1757743815613219
pae.sagepub.com


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Abstract

There has been a growth in the last 10 years of higher education provision in the English further education sector. This article examines the thoughts and feelings of three higher-education-level teachers working in the further education sector. Using Ivor Goodson's life history approach, it identifies a high degree of compliance with the system by the teachers. In order to justify the conflict between organisational and teacher concerns, key strategies were formed. These included celebrating further education as a place which gives people a second chance, a students-first focus and the significance of the human connection made at work. There were also similarities between the underlying motivations of teachers to teach at a higher level than many of their colleagues, which included family, class, control and the significance of dominant others in their lives.

Keywords

Life history, higher education, further education, Ivor Goodson

Introduction

In a pub on a Friday night in Willy Russell's play *Educating Rita* (1982), the main character, a working-class woman, is listening to a singalong when her mother says, 'There must be better songs to sing than this', which becomes Rita's mission. In a pub on a Sunday evening in Birmingham, a college lecturer we can call Josie was bemoaning her Grade 3 rating from

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the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and said: ‘The best feedback I’ve had in terms of teaching has certainly not been in the form of numbers’. At the funeral of a higher education teacher who had been dedicated to partnership working with further education colleagues, a bereaved colleague, Jackie, was moved by the inspirational ways of her former peer: ‘There was justice, too, in the way she gently deflated the pompous, instead quietly raising up those with low self-esteem, the unsure ... she had an intelligent and refreshing irreverence for educational jargon and corporate waffle’.

The insights that Jackie, Josie and Rita’s mother reveal about class, the ‘numericalisation’ of education and a desire to find a greater moral purpose in the workplace are among the findings in this article. These insights came at points of everyday interaction – in a pub and at a funeral. Often, ‘authentic data’ comes at unusual moments when the ‘subject’ is unguarded. It is in the spaces of everyday life that we express how we think and feel about our teaching lives, and can voice the conflict between the needs of the institutions and our pedagogies.

This article tries to access these spaces in order to examine the feelings and thoughts of those teaching higher education in the further education sector. Despite the growth of this sector, there is a ‘small amount of literature on teacher educators in the post-compulsory sector based in universities and further education colleges’ (Boyd et al., 2011: 14), making it an important area to focus on. While higher education in further education teaching can be traced back to the 1950s (Department for Business, 2010), the Dearing Report and the Browne Report resulted in a major expansion of the area (National Committee, 1997; Department for Business, 2010). In 2010, 8% of higher education students were taught in the further education sector, with 224 out of 225 further education colleges involved (Department for Business, 2012). Over a fifth of teachers were also higher-education-trained in further education colleges in 2010 (Department for Business, 2012). Thus, this study is a timely one in an expanding area.

The use of life history as practised by Ivor Goodson offers a further distinction to this work. As part of this research, we met Ivor Goodson on 29 March 2014 and discussed the process and nature of prefigurative practice:

[It is] a moral moment and a social moment, a set of spaces and practices in ongoing existence modelling our life in the way we want the world to be. We all have constructed realities; as we meet we mediate those constructions and discuss alternatives. (Goodson, 2014)

Here, the application of this method tries to access the ‘constructed realities’ of those working in higher education in the further education sector, and how they ‘mediate’ them to fit their ideals. It therefore examines their pedagogies and those of their organisations, and further considers how compromises and negotiations between the two are justified. Goodson provides a

framework for examining the complex and often contradictory process of curriculum differentiation (i.e. the production of differentiated status within academic, utilitarian, and pedagogic traditions) and understanding how this process is forged both historically and discursively in relation to the wider public sphere. (McLaren, 2013, preface to Goodson, 2013)

It was this life history methodology which allowed us to investigate the ‘differentiated status’ between those who teach higher education and their further education environment. In the following two sections, we examine in more detail the context of higher education in further education and the life history methodology.

Teaching higher education in further education environments

The 'system' this article is concerned with is teaching higher education in further education contexts. We want to examine how those who teach in this sector negotiate their positions and pedagogies, particularly in view of the ideological framework of neo-liberalism which dominates social, economic and political thought (see Gordon and Whitty, 1997; Harvey, 2007). Neo-liberalism in education means encouraging a free market and treating education as a commercial service. While UK politics in the last 20 years has been dominated by Labour and Coalition governments, the broader agenda might be seen to be centrist ideals dominated by consumer choice in a free market.

Ways of viewing the neo-liberal system vary from apocalyptic terms (Žižek, 2010) to the idea that it can be an ideal system (Fukuyama, 1992), but the neo-liberal agenda has dominated British politics since the 1980s and has resulted in '*the repositioning of universities as globally competitive marketplace actors capable of profitability by selling their teaching and research knowledge products to suitable paying customers*' (Boden, 2007, cited in Brennan and Shah, 2011: 55). The changes in funding, from governments to educational organisations, to individuals funding their studies through loans might also be seen as a result of this context. This is in line with neo-liberal claims that: 'What is private is necessarily good and what is public is necessarily bad' (Apple, 2000: 59). As Apple (2000: 60) explains: 'In effect, education is seen as simply one more product like bread, cars and television. By turning it over to the market through voucher and choice plans, it will be largely self-regulating. Thus, democracy is turned into consumption practices'.

The neo-liberal system allowed the further expansion of higher education into further education as the regulations over which institutions were allowed to provide such education were expanded according to free market principles. In order to maintain a level of control over the higher education in further education sector, new layers of bureaucracy were introduced. It is one of the contradictions of neo-liberalism that what started out as a freeing up ended in restrictions; in Harvey's (2005: 37–38) words: 'neoliberalism has turned so authoritarian'. The government research paper 'Understanding higher education in further education colleges' (Department for Business, 2012) uses the word 'control' 28 times, so it is clearly a concern. The concern as to whether further education is capable of delivering higher education courses can be seen in a report commissioned by the Higher Education Academy, which recommends the introduction of an 'Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review' (now 'Review of College Higher Education') for higher education in further education. 'Clarity, Specificity, Validity, Enhancement and Accountability' are the central tenets, along with a need to 'review this group of lecturers' (QAA, 2015), implying that further education's system of quality assurance is not good enough as it is. The teacher of higher education in further education is therefore under a dual pressure to ensure the commercial success of the organisation and fulfil the requirements of the Quality Assurance Agency, Ofsted and other national control bodies (not to mention internal structures).

The results of a neo-liberal approach to education may be supported by those who have been brought up in the same culture, so a certain amount of consent to the nature of a commercial approach to education and the need for controlling mechanisms may be expected from teachers, particularly younger ones. No culture can be all-consuming however, and no matter what the hegemony, there are always dissenters. This is expressed well by

Peter McLaren in the foreword to the third edition of Goodson's *School Subjects and Curriculum Change* :

Hegemony is a process that results in leaks and fissures and blokes such as Goodson sometimes fall through the cracks if they are lucky or if ... their resistance is put into the service of their own empowerment rather than made complicitous with their own oppression. (cited in preface to Goodson, 2013)

Because neo-liberal ideas of commodification and control come with their own contradictions which undermine the system (see Miller, 2014), they need to be negotiated by individuals and organisations. Ideologies are always a struggle and 'in process' (Hall, 1988), so teachers in the sector will be examining their responses in relation to the ideological framework within which they work. In the following section, life history methodology is explained as a way of exploring the negotiations between teachers of higher education in further education and the neo-liberal system within which they operate.

Methodology

We gathered life histories from three teacher educators (TE1, TE2 and TE3) working in two separate further education colleges twice over a six-month period. The six discussions were conducted with both researchers present (with one exception) in a café, bar or the home, with the location chosen by the participants. One researcher took the lead role, while the other was the scribe and remained largely silent throughout the process, unless deliberately brought into the discussion by the participant. Having transcribed the whole of the first set of discussions, the material was reviewed by both researchers. In the second set of interviews, we reminded the participants of some of the stories they had talked about previously and asked them to tell us more about aspects of their life. With food and drink available before and after the interviews, the conversations both started and ended flexibly. In this sense, our data could be said to be discontinuous, but, in the main, we tried to capture everything that was said.

The purpose of life history can be defined as 'locat[ing] ... the teacher's own life story alongside a broader contextual analysis' (Goodson, 1992: 6). In our meeting with Goodson (2014), he stressed that the life history method is not a one-way interview, but a discussion between equals (albeit with agendas). For example, the teachers in this study may have had an agenda to learn more from us about higher education research, while ours was to pursue our own enquiry. Goodson described the process as one which focuses on the self-mission of the teacher to distinguish between her/his motivations for teaching and the working environment. He advised us to focus on 'critical moments' which changed perspectives and knowledge, and to use 'but analysis': to view propositions uttered after the word 'but' as important because they would be more spontaneous than the practised self-story. Goodson (2014) also stated that we are always mediating between who we think we are and what we are meant to be; while working 'at the grass roots' of an institution, we have to negotiate the framework within which we teach.

A benefit of life history is that it maintains a relationship with the participant teachers (Goodson and Marshall, 1995). This was important as the teachers in this study were known to the researchers, who are also originally from a further education background. Indeed, all those in the study were part of a recognised community of practice, having developed and enhanced countless trainee teachers together in a partnership between a university and further education college. It must be acknowledged that this brings differing power relations, as

the researchers were monitoring the further-education-based course from a higher education position. As Smith (2010: p.22) suggests regarding higher education in teacher education partnerships in further education, there are 'structural factors that privilege managerialist, performative and instrumentalising practices'. However, when these 'have been acknowledged, then a primary function for a CoP [community of practice] of critically reflective practitioners is to share and preserve the values and principles of good practice in the longer term' (Smith, 2010: p.22).

This kind of participative ethnographic research can lead to many biases, as hierarchical issues, previous behaviours and learned ways to respond can all have a negative influence on the contributions made by the teachers. It can have advantages, however, as we are inside the system with the teachers and, as former workers in the further education system, can thus empathise with certain situations. We sought to gain an 'emic' or insider's perspective, not an 'etic' or outsider's perspective. Freire (1993, cited in Hale et al., 2008: 1421) once wrote that, 'without understanding the soul of the culture, we just invade the culture', and, having been part of the culture and the practices of the teachers, we were well equipped to translate the findings. It was also helpful that both researchers have conducted reflexive educational research with an eye on the critical, reflective and situated (see Kadi-Hanifi, 2010; Keenan and Evans, 2014). Keenan and Evans (2014), for example, conducted autoethnographic research and reported on how getting higher education students to experience estrangement was a powerful means of realising the personal and professional impacts of neo-liberalism on their lives, while Kadi-Hanifi (2010) has argued that educational theory should be formulated from teacher experience.

Ethics is an important consideration, as life histories can deal with sensitive information, such as the experiences of childhood (see Nutbrown, 2011). Thus, the teacher has a 'feeling, moral, sacred inner self' (Denzin, 1989, cited in Goodson, 1992: 236). There is a duty of care towards those who offer us personal stories, some of which stem from highly charged emotional moments, so that we do not leave the participants (who, in our case, were also highly respected colleagues) emotionally 'stranded'. Goodson (2014) advised us, therefore, to return to the participants and run a second set of interviews in order to access more knowledge, whilst also allowing them the opportunity for some form of emotional closure or reification of their self-concept. Our participants read the results and gave us permission to use their words as quoted in this article. They also confirmed our results or, in one case, clarified a point, which was corrected. The discussions about the quotes and results formed part of the aftercare of the study, ensuring that the respondents felt safe and secure that their motives were represented fairly, and that the researchers had shown due respect to their thoughts and feelings.

These thoughts and feelings were presented through narratives. Narratives have been an increasingly popular means of educational research (see Lemberger, 1997; Pinar, 2004), *giving teachers deeper critical insights into their practice* (hooks, 1994; Nee-Benham and Cooper, 1998). Also, in relating their narratives, 'teachers deconstruct their personal histories and stories', and 'may gain cultural insight into (education) systems and structures of power and privilege' (Hale et al., 2008: 1415). There are different ways of presenting narratives (see Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Patton, 2002), but we chose the open-coding approach, where generative themes – 'recurring threads of thought that are woven throughout the dialogues and that signify important issues to the lives of the participants' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, cited in Hale et al., 2008: 1415) – are analysed. When theming, Gabb (2010, cited in Nutbrown, 2011: 243) cautions against 'the tendency to tidy up and sanitise

the “messiness” or everyday experience in order to produce academic knowledge’. We acknowledge that, in sifting through the data, there has been an attempt to make sense of and therefore simplify complex ideas. As Goodson (1992: 236) said: ‘life as told is not the same as the life lived. Instead, life history is a result of collaboration with a researcher, who makes sense of, interprets and contextualises the data’.

The life history method has its drawbacks. Teachers may be protective of their real motivations and life histories, ‘defending [themselves] against the encroachment of others’ (Haug, 1987, cited in Nutbrown, 2011: 234). Also, our memories are often mediated by others, so the respondents may not really understand themselves. There may also be a reluctance on the part of the participants to explain their motivations in line with their past (see Mitchell et al., 2005) – as Goodson (2014) said: ‘Why should they share with me?’ Life history is also prone to misinterpretations by the researcher in the process of interpretation and contextualisation. Another issue is highlighted by Denzin (1997: 5): ‘language and speech do not mirror experience’. Despite these drawbacks, or, rather, acknowledging them, we aim to use the method to investigate the motivations, desires, hopes and negotiations of higher education in teacher educators in further education. The data gathered from these discussions is presented in the following section.

Three life stories

The data is presented by portraits of the teachers and quotes which demonstrate – in ways that summary could not – the thoughts and feelings of the participants about how they negotiate their positions. Following this, the main themes that came out of the discussions are examined.

TE1

TE1 is what we would call an ‘established’ teacher educator. She had been through many changes in her career. These included fighting for sessional contracts to be made permanent and then full-time, not only for herself, but also for other peers, through active union work and meetings with managers to articulate her demands. As she said:

It occurred to me that two-thirds of teachers in my college were full-time and one-third were part-time, and these were given the lower levels to teach, and I thought the lower levels were the ones who needed the help more, including with psychological issues and trauma; so I confronted my manager about this and did something about it through union meetings ... eventually the part-time teachers were converted to full-time.

She was also able to articulate her own career ambitions to those managers who she respected, and ensured that they encouraged her to succeed further, stating, at one point (when talking about meeting with the principal): ‘for me, there has always been an open-door policy, as I would go through that door anyway’. TE1 was very admiring of the principal and other senior managers who had valued her and helped her progress in her career, whilst she was also able to articulate her own empowering pedagogy with her students, as when she stated:

I’m a humanist because I can’t bear to think my students are struggling in any way, so with morals and whether the organisation has rules, I will change those rules to help the students

because I connect with them in a human way. I'm not their friend; they still see me as their lecturer, but I connect with them.

TEI's achievements were many, which she was keen to relate, including academic and professional certificates, advanced practitioner status, selection to become a teacher educator, and PhD research and aspirational consultancy work. Despite being open about these achievements, she had what seemed to be the most 'guarded' attitude to her private life. She insisted on how happy she was and how she looked after herself by doing yoga, for example, and going to the theatre and cinema to enrich her mind. She used the words 'guarded', 'private' and 'in control' many times. She often insisted on how happy and stable her personal life was, for instance, in statements such as:

I'm a guarded individual. I don't share my life. My life is great and there is never a day I don't wake up and think how happy and lucky I am and I know I've not got free will but I have a sense of control, and I know we're not free, but as a teacher I feel I have a sense of control and that I can do something.

When we carried out the 'but analysis', it was obvious that she used the word to change the topic with regard to her relational self with her family, although she did give us a positive factual snapshot of their historical and multicultural roots, stating that genetics had something to do with her values of hard work, ambition and drive. She also used 'but' to excuse some statement about them being 'not proud' of her, as, for example, in the following excerpt, after probing from the interviewer, who had already tried a few times to get her to talk about her relational self with her family:

TEI: There's a lady over there. She was a student at the technical centre. She probably recognises me. She was on the literacy course. She's doing really well. She had poor reading and writing skills.

Researcher: And with family do they recognise what you do?

TEI: Oh, very different.

Researcher: Do they impress you or do you impress them?

TEI: No, not at all. They are not related to education, so they are not proud. But you have to be in education to understand what it is about, and family members can't understand what it is in education. I used to try to impress them, but I don't worry about it now.

Researcher: And it seems they are successful anyway?

TEI: Yes, they are successful, but now I am doing my own training with training providers that is self-employed stuff [she switches to something else altogether, at this point, about the value of self-employment in the family].

Her strong self-concept was evident throughout the interview, as in this extract:

TEI: Yes, I think another thing that's kept me going: I have defined principles; I have core values which are quite strong.

Researcher: What would you say they were?

TEI: For me, it's doing right by the learners. Learning first.

Researcher: You seem to feel responsible.

TEI: I do feel this sense of being responsible for my students, looking after them, training the teachers, yeah. A desire to help them move on and succeed.

Researcher: So this gives you personal fulfilment?

TEI: Yes, I love what I do.

Perhaps the best aspect of her story is the following quote, summarising her beliefs and values of privacy, compassion and friendliness, as well as learner-centred learning and teaching:

Researcher: So, you're a yoga teacher?

TE1: Yes, I am a yoga teacher and a big part of that is you make sure a student is comfortable ... yoga teaching is not about demonstrating from the front. You go out and help them as it's from the inside. Yes, it's about harmony, balance from within the self, mental well-being, so maybe some of my values have come from that, too. So, like, at college, I talk to everybody. It doesn't matter who they are ... there was a lady on her knees getting something out of the carpet [*laughs*] ... This goes back to Ofsted and cleaning the carpet [an in-joke about how institutions do a deep clean before an Ofsted visit, as TE1 had discussed her deep suspicion of Ofsted before the interview had started]. So, I had a chat with her and I tried to connect to her. Some people do it, they chat to people, because they want to be liked, but I'm not bothered about that ... Yes, I genuinely want to talk to them, so I'll chat to the security guards and I say to the security guards, 'I haven't seen you in ages'. Sometimes, if I'm in a rush, I just walk past them and say 'Hello', but they will know, 'Oh, she's in a rush'. So, I am very aware of my own time and I do guard my own time and privacy, and I do guard my own well-being, and I don't become their trouble-shooter, their rescuer, and wouldn't get too involved with the students.

TE1 also mentioned her 'escape' from the school system into further education, which she saw as a liberator and enabler. She had attempted to train as a primary school teacher but hated going back to school as a trainee teacher. She then went into teaching in further education almost by accident, when someone offered her a few hours of teaching at first. She made the following statement in relation to her decision to teach in further education:

I went to work in admin at the university for 18 months and then I went back to teaching; I just had to be teaching. It was at this college that I went and talked to someone, and I said I was teacher-trained and he got me in touch with the [centre] ... where I went for years on an admin job and then [the manager from another further education college] ... gave me my own class. That is when I made the decision to leave my job as admin and I got the part-time contract and did the CertEd [Certificate in Education, the initial teacher training qualification for teaching in further education], and then I finally got a full-time contract at this college. And as soon as I stepped into the FE [further education] classroom I just loved it and I really felt like this was what I wanted to do.

TE2

TE2 is what we would call a 'departing' teacher educator. At the time of the interviews, she was two months away from full retirement. She had had a turbulent early life that had led to a complex, but nonetheless rewarding, career. She had learned to cope with systems that threatened to destabilise her, and had been made stronger by them, as, for example, by the estrangement from her family for five years during her twenties, as she explained in the following:

TE2: Anyway, that was the worst episode of my life, as after my marriage I didn't see my family for five years, and that made me stronger. It pushed me and pushed me to do what I had to do.

Researcher: And then you did your degree, your teacher training, but those five years must have been very hard.

TE2: They were hard, but I know I am comfortable in myself if I am alone. I have been on my own on several occasions, and my sister used to ring me every night and said, 'Aren't you

scared?' But I said, 'I can manage', and I think I can almost foresee the future and what might happen, and I think, 'What systems have I got in place in my own psyche?' And I think, 'Yes, I can', and I can build on things and make myself stronger because I have seen my mother after my dad died, and she fell apart completely, and if there wasn't myself and my husband around, they so would have manipulated her, and I think I would never be so open to manipulation, and that scares me, and, because it scares me so much, I work to prevent it.

For this teacher, her family was critically important, especially her husband, who had encouraged her to go to university and get a teacher training qualification. Although there was conflict between them, the values of her father and grandfather were cited as the reason why she had become the teacher she became. She showed pride in the ironing of socks and underwear, in her desk being the tidiest, and in her skill at flower arranging (which she had learned from her grandfather and father). Her root motivation to control her environment may also be seen in her fears about not being able to cope, as illustrated in the above quote. Independence may have been nurtured by a desire not to end up like her mother, who 'fell apart' and was 'manipulated'.

Another indication of control was how TE2 was not impressed by what she termed the 'neediness' of some of her colleagues. She talked about an incident when an Ofsted inspector had upset some of her colleagues, while she had been graded as a '2', with elements of 'outstanding', by the same inspector:

The rest of the team are a little immature and needy, and they said about the inspector, 'Was he a bastard with you as well?' In terms of handling, I did that very well and I empathised with them. But it happened again after lunch with another one getting a Grade 3, and then another lecturer came in crying as she also got a Grade 3. We had a group hug. Early childhood staff are needy and emotional. It was a revelation to myself that I handled it very well.

This teacher remained very proud of the way she empowered all of her students, stating, for instance:

Through my teaching on the teacher training course, I aim to take these trainees, who can be vulnerable adults, sometimes without formal qualifications, to become teachers. I facilitate that role – grow new and strong teachers always. I also do that on the other higher education course that I do, and try to get early years students to become good teachers too.

Despite being critical of the school system and her negative experience of it – 'I felt bored and didn't know what to do with myself at school' – TE2's achievements were many: getting qualifications after the critical long break from her family and leaving school dissatisfied; gaining a Master's degree; being recognised and given opportunities to teach higher education in further education across two disciplines (teacher education and early years); and teaching at university. Although she spoke proudly about her many achievements within further education, she added at one point, after using the word 'but', that 'unfortunately they value students' well-being more than staff well-being these days'.

Her Pakistani background, she thought, was one of the reasons for an alienation from the further education system she was generally supportive of. She was the only one of the three teachers who mentioned 'institutional racism' when she narrated how a manager had tried to undermine her for a long time, as in the following extract:

An example of divide and rule was this awful manager who observed me for four hours and did her best to destroy me, and also sent me the wrong subject spec deliberately. I didn't sleep for five

days, but then, when an inspector came, they said: 'You have fantastic subject knowledge'. I then went from a large comfy office to the 'chicken coop'. I am annoying people because I'm cheerful. I don't let their conspiracy decimate me and get to me. I get bruises under my ribs as I squeeze to let others pass in this 'chicken coop' where there is a very large woman. Ten years ago I would have been stressed and upset about this, but now I don't give too much info about me and I take a step back. It's some form of institutional racism that I can't always change. I don't want to create ructions. I feel more stable, more in control.

Stereotypes about her ethnicity, she felt, had resulted in her hard work not always being recognised. This may have led to a new assertiveness in her later teaching career and a more critical perspective of the framework in which further education operates. TE2 was aware of the tensions between higher education and further education, and that the higher education side of her job in further education had to be defended, as she stated below:

Yes, I think the skills I have developed over the years because of my experiences are very much transferable to the system of HE [higher education] in FE because there are occasions when there doesn't seem to be a way out of it, and I think either I can go with the FE system or go with my personal priorities and have an impact on the HE side. So, a good example is having the PAG [Partnership Advisory Group] meetings [with the university], and in the FE sector now I have a lot more impact on the Level 3 courses, and that doesn't free me up for the HE, but the PAG is a good example, as even if I have to teach Level 3, I would say, 'OK, get someone to cover my teaching as I have to attend that meeting'. And I say, 'Part of my role is teaching teachers' and so I have to go. But four years ago I wouldn't have said this.

TE3

This teacher educator (the youngest among the three we interviewed) had also had many achievements, moving up to management-level positions, including teacher education leadership and teaching. This was despite a poor school experience, where she left at the age of 15 to work in a travel agency. She had a strong industry background, accompanied by an equally strong awareness of the importance of the further education vocational curriculum and 'hands-on' knowledge of it. Indeed, she considered this vital for effective higher education teacher education in further education. Despite early problems in her life, she had managed to move away from family constraints and achieve high-level qualifications, and was currently completing a Doctor of Education (EdD) qualification. She talked about how her father did not work much, while her mother maintained many jobs to feed the family. TE3 escaped from her family constraints at the age of 17, when her sister got pregnant and she could no longer share a bedroom with her. Her personal core values were centred around hard work, drive, ambition and resilience. At the same time, she was very committed to the further education system as it was the system that she had experienced positively as a student.

TE3 was very proud of the institutional achievements and successes of her college, as well as being aware of the lack of academic research on the importance and uniqueness of the further education sector, as, for example, when she stated:

There is a gap in the literature in higher education. There is a lot done in academies but very little in FE. They have forgotten about the sector or the Cinderella sector. I mean, we have just won an award for community college. We do serve the local community and, because of funding cuts,

they need to go down this route because they want to bring money into the college. But the research that I am doing about FE teachers, they tend to do other careers before teaching, so I have always been intrigued by the stages they have been through and their journey. I mean, like, our principal used to be a butcher . . . he is very passionate about FE and he has a really good story. It makes sense, cos the students think, 'If you can do it, I can do it', and you believe in him. I suppose he is really good, wants staff to develop. It's a nice environment to be in. There is not many would release you to do a doctorate.

The 'but analysis' for the above passage reveals a balancing act between what the teacher believed was the mission of further education (seen through her EdD research on the professional duality of the experience of further education teachers and her principal's humble beginnings, which he modelled to staff and students) and the reality of how funding cuts were driving down this noble cause. One could surmise that she may well have been accepting of the neo-liberal framework for pragmatic reasons, whilst still holding on to what she saw as the 'real values' of further education – supporting those who have not succeeded in the compulsory system. In a way, she might be seen as compliant with a further education system that she considered to be downtrodden. This compliance went as far as being accepting of a few bullying incidents towards less competent teaching staff by one manager, who was excused by TE3 on the basis of an improved learning and teaching experience for students.

TE3 is also a teacher who had had recognition for her hard work in cross-college roles such as managing the Career Academy (a key strategic area for enrichment activities for younger learners) and being validated by Ofsted, both of which had led her to be proactive and seek progression. As she commented:

We got a Grade 1, yes. My area was Outstanding. Every area I have worked for was Outstanding [TE3 worked across eight curriculum areas during her time as leader of the Career Academy], but the Career Academy won an award and was recognised nationally, and it was the first and only time they won that award. Obviously, I was annoyed the Career Academy wasn't in the curriculum as such and it wasn't going to let me move up, and that is what I decided I wanted to do – move up the ladder.

TE3 revealed that there was tension between the desire to serve students and the unrelenting workload. She took steps to learn what would maximise her progression into more curriculum-based areas of the college, and added:

Because I decided that I wanted to move up, having spoken to someone in the college, they told me I had to have curriculum development knowledge and it came at the right time. I have always kept in touch with [another further education college in which TE3 had taught and been appreciated] . . . and she said you should apply for this job at this college, and so I told my manager and they said, 'We don't want you to go'. So, when the job came up [the higher education in teacher education job in further education], they gave it to me, basically.

This is a teacher who also believed in the transferability of skills and promoted the strategy of learning from prior experiences, which is key to further education teaching:

Because I came in in 2009, I had 10 years in industry before that, and because I have industry experience, I bring it into the classroom and bring people in and share their own experience and develop the experience. A lot of lecturers in FE have come from a different career path, whereas a lot of school teachers have gone straight into teaching, whereas a lot of leaders worked in

industry then decided to teach. [One colleague] ... was an accountant; [another colleague] ... in curriculum development was a solicitor first.

TE3 also saw her pedagogy in teacher education and in further education as having been directly inspired by how she was empowered and nurtured in her own training to become a teacher in further education:

I mean, when I was doing my CertEd, I was still working in industry, but I had a really good experience on my CertEd, and she made me want to go into teacher training eventually, and she was fantastic, and I remember saying, 'If I can teach half as good as you'. She would inspire me and get us to do things, and I had such a good experience there, I decided this is what I want to go into, and I thought I would like to do this for students like me, and when I did my teacher training, that put the nail in, and then I thought I would do it eventually. It was those key lecturers really, but it was the FE, I think. If I had done it at university, I wouldn't have had the same experience, and I think in FE it was more personal. Not many in HE care about the students in massive classes, whereas in FE [they do] cos the classes are more important. When I enrolled to do the CertEd, I was with teachers who had been doing it for a long time, so I felt a bit insecure really, and she kind of let me develop cos she knew I was doing it from scratch. I try to model myself on those people like the lecturer I had when I did travel and tourism teaching. I tried to be like her; she was always professional, but she cared. She would ask you how you were doing, she would chat to you about herself, but there was always the professional line, and you felt that she cared, and if you did well in an assignment, so, she said you did well or you missed out. So, I tried to be like her as a teacher and, when I did teacher training, I was trying to be like her. I find out what the trainees need. Because I have had good experience in FE, it makes me want to be good in FE for my students.

TE3 narrated how her boyfriend had encouraged her to go back into education and be successful, including with her current doctoral studies: 'I don't think I would have been going to uni if he hadn't pushed me'. She also admitted to having

found it hard to say 'no', as I volunteer for things and then I think, 'Why did I do that?' ... but I don't want to let the students down, so for me that's my priority, if the students need something.

She talked about how she had helped a trainee teacher who did not have formal academic qualifications and supported him to succeed in getting onto a programme – 'there is one who is not academic; not from that background, but with my support, he is now doing a degree' – whilst, throughout the interviews, she linked her success to her proficiency in 'holding her emotions', something she had learned from a very young age, as when she said: 'I think because of the struggle with mum and dad, I'm not sure I would have done nothing. I certainly learnt to hold my emotions back and just keep on going and work hard'.

Some emerging themes

The quotes and commentary above help to explain the motivations and negotiations of teachers of higher education in further education. While each negotiated the system differently, for differing reasons, we found common themes emerging. The main themes that these teachers had in common are presented here: control; achievement; dominant persons; attitudes to school and respect for further education; compliance; family; working-class values; and students first.

Control

TE2 revealed her sense of control through organisation. TE1's sense of control came through in her yoga and the emotional restraint she showed. This emotional control was common to TE2 and TE1, with the former also noting the emotional 'neediness' of her colleagues and valuing the way she 'handled' situations. For TE3, her sense of control came from how she had learned to hold in her emotions and had kept on going and succeeding.

Achievement

Perhaps unsurprisingly for those who were working in a 'higher' sector than those around them, there was a common theme of valuing external recognition. For TE2 and TE3, this was through Ofsted grades, with both repeating their pride in achieving high grades. TE1, on the other hand, mentioned her advanced practitioner status, showing pride in a rank that was not defined by an Ofsted grade. She, unlike the other two, was anti-inspection. At the same time, all three teachers felt valued by the further education sector, which had rewarded them with promotion and roles in higher education departments, culminating in teacher education leadership.

Dominant persons

All three teachers focused repeatedly on dominant people in their lives as a reason for their career success, including teaching higher education in further education. For TE2, it was her husband. Similarly, TE3 cited her partner as a driving force, while for TE1 it was college managers. These dominant persons were mainly male, although TE3 cited her female further education college tutor as the person who had faith in her, inspired her and gave her a first break in teaching.

Attitudes to school and respect for further education

None of the teachers had enjoyed school. Their emotional push seemed to be both to prove themselves, having been underachievers, and to rescue their students from a similar feeling and fate. Further education was seen as the place where they gained their self-esteem, and all three were advocates of its abilities to transform lives. The further education sector was highly valued as the place where they gained their sense of worth and purpose. This carried on in their work, with the teachers viewing further education as a 'second-chance sector' which empowers learners who have been unsuccessful in compulsory education.

Compliance

Another common theme was that there was compliance with authority to differing degrees. In the case of TE1 and TE3, there was also a feeling that management could be moderated by their presence. TE2 believed that she could not antagonise people or create 'ructions', but did assert herself in order to be allowed time to attend teacher education meetings. TE1 and TE3 were valued by and close to their managers. While TE3 could see that others were being bullied in the department, she justified this on the grounds of 'students first'.

For TE1, however, it was not acceptable, but there was the belief that unionised action could change things. Both TE1 and TE3 believed in direct action and approaching senior managers to solve issues. All three teachers had tried to gain their position within the establishment and found their promotions through hard work and a pragmatic attitude to compliance, with, at times, difficult moments being experienced during changes or negotiations in their roles.

Family

Inevitably in life history, family was a factor. This was particularly so in the case of TE3, as her motivation to succeed came from a mother whom she admired for her work ethic and a father whose periods of unemployment she did not value. Furthermore, her sister's teenage pregnancy gave her a further impetus to gain advancement in her employment. TE2 was shunned by her family for marriage and cultural reasons, and this, she said, provided a motivation to be successful – perhaps to prove something or gain self-esteem (though this was not explored fully). TE1 was reluctant to reveal her family situation, though there were many inferences that her family was at the heart of her desire to be successful and that she had a family who was 'not interested in my career'.

Working-class values

In demographic terms, all three teachers are women, but there were no specific references to gender as a major determinant of their professional lives. All three teachers are of differing ethnic origins, but it was not seen as a key issue, except for TE2's Pakistani background. However, their shared 'working-class' background was a common thread which linked the narratives and seemed to them to make sense of their professional lives. *They had pride in their socio-economic background and believed that it made their achievements seem even more distinctive* *They had pride in their socio-economic background and believed that it made their achievements seem even more distinctive?* TE1 foregrounded a moral work ethic, which she saw as intrinsic to her class. For TE2 and TE3, their socio-economic background was something to escape from – a trap almost. While they had all achieved upward social mobility in their own lives, they each had a commitment to those who were in their former situation, as helping them to improve their social position seemed to be a common aim, and there was faith in the capacity of the further education sector to do this.

Students first

All three teachers believed in their mission to empower students and place them first and foremost. As teacher educators, they also believed that their trainees had to be made to think critically, and they were proud of those whom they had managed to transform. For example, TE3 talked about how she gave a student a chance to get onto the programme even though he did not fulfil all the entry requirements. She 'knew' that this student would succeed and was proud of her ability to spot talent (as she herself had been spotted within further education). All three teachers were clearly centred around what their students' needs were and how to support them as best they could. They all championed their students and wanted them to achieve beyond expectations.

Conclusions

This article has examined the nature of higher education in teacher educators in further education. Through life history and analysis, we have found some underlying motivations which connected the teacher educators. All three teachers made known their views with regard to the frameworks in which they operated. There was among all of them faith in the further education sector as being a 'second-chance', morally justified and overall well-managed system. This was a system in which rewards could be gained for working hard and for being noticed when achieving the targets set by the institution. However, there was also, particularly with TE1 and TE2, resistance to certain managerialist behaviours that tried to undermine their professionalism (or demean them) and were felt to go against their core values. The 'students-first' approach which governed them meant that managerialist behaviours could be supported if the students benefited.

TE1 was probably the most outspoken against the system of measures and league tables, as well as the negative impact that grading by external evaluators such as Ofsted inspectors had on teachers in further education. Outside of the transcribed interviews, she spoke about the political agendas behind the 'heavy-handedness' of Ofsted and was very critical of how inspectors were quick to reward those colleges that had better intakes of learners. She was aware of the complexity of her student profiles, many of whom were from deprived inner-city communities. TE2 was most outspoken about some managerial inequality of treatment, especially racial discrimination, as she had been on the receiving end of it. She was also clear about how both higher education and further education were in pursuit of money, and thus valued the student experience at the expense of that of the staff. TE3 was aware that institutional targets were informed by funding and that cuts in budgets from central government justified their realignment. In this sense, TE3 was probably the most accepting of the system in which she was operating, blaming wider national funding cuts and taking a pragmatic view of compliance. She was, however, critical of how the further education sector had been deemed the 'Cinderella' of education.

What was most interesting was that all three teachers utterly believed in developing strong teachers of the future, and that this was their moral duty as effective pedagogues. It was also apparent that they all felt that stress levels among further education staff were high, but they also felt that they could negotiate better conditions for themselves and for others (in the case of TE1). Finally, they all recognised that their awareness of frameworks – institutional or national – had been heightened by their experience of higher education in teacher education in further education. This, they felt, would not have been the case if they had remained teachers within a strictly vocational further education curriculum only. Because they had been hand-picked to play these more responsible higher education roles in further education, they remained 'loyal' to the further education sector in which they had flourished. In summary, one could say that the neo-liberal framework seemed to be negotiated through localised resistance to bad instances of managerialism, a critique of government agendas towards further education and a belief in the values of student-centred, empowering pedagogies.

To an extent, our research has confirmed Goodson's argument about the ways the system has become 'second nature'. The younger teachers – TE3, in particular – were liable to be in support of the current system: 'subjectivity is so easily structured in those spaces as we are seeing with new generations' (Goodson, 2013, cited in Downs, 2013: 124). TE1 and TE3, unlike TE2, are from the post-further-education-incorporation generation,

and perhaps not aware of the historical shift after 1993, witnessed by some of the more experienced teachers in further education, who saw the Silver Book conditions changed and teachers being asked to teach for up to 35 hours a week in some colleges, while the academic year was also changed from 38 weeks to 43 (Beckett, 2008). This, arguably, contributed to a loss of status for further education due to reduced government funding and perceived faults with the design of 'learning and teaching' in further education in general (Coffield, 2008).

This is not to say that the teacher educators in the system are victims of it. They, and we, do not treat this construction of the neoliberal self as a monolithic Weltanschauung or cultural iron cage or industrial-scale brainwashing. Many people are sufficiently reflexive that they can and do catch glimpses of worlds outside the neoliberal ambit; they often indulge in bricolage to refurbish neoliberal materials into something else entirely. (Mirowski, 2013: 92)

Indeed, TE1 and TE3 in our sample, through having started doctoral research, were beginning to indulge in such 'bricolage', whilst TE2, as a retiring teacher, was at a very reflexive stage and able to think of alternatives or 'worlds outside'.

These findings require further exploration in the future with a larger sample and one perhaps involving more mixed gendering across a variety of institutions. This is merely a beginning to an approach which should help us articulate what lies behind the motivations of higher education educators in further education. It may have powerful implications for educational research itself and develop more pathways through which the researched, in collaboration with the researchers, go on to prefigure new realities that are more ethical and egalitarian than the ones we have at the moment. We believe it may help us, in the words of Brennan and Shah (2011: p.22), to keep 'researching the "end times"'.

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