
A Profession in Crisis: status, culture and identity in the further education college

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ABSTRACT The current crisis in the further education sector has highlighted that professional group's marginality and low status. Though many professional groups would have had difficulty withstanding the kind of pressures that have been brought about by the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), it is argued here that the FE teaching profession was particularly vulnerable. The skills, qualifications and experiences of FE teachers, the nature of their work and the kind of cultures that exist in colleges are examined here in an attempt to show that the professional group lacks closure and is not clearly demarcated. In addition, the many cultures of the FE workplace, reflecting the many different occupations and roles of FE teachers, co-exist uneasily. Such factors, combined with the lack of a requirement for formal teacher training, are helping to prevent the emergence of a clear professional identity for the FE teacher, at a time when one is badly needed. Though some possibilities may exist within certain 'managerialist' initiatives, real change will require major legislative and policy shifts, as well as a full reappraisal of the sector's funding.

Introduction

The further education teaching profession is currently in a state of crisis. After decades of official neglect, the Further and Higher Education Act (1992), the first major legislation to focus directly on Further Education (FE) since the war, has significantly raised the profile of the sector, but it has so far done little to improve the standing of the professional group, as a whole. The Act has precipitated some massive shifts in the FE workplace and its culture, but to many of those working in it, these legislative changes and the unaccustomed attention of the state have been unwelcome. Their professional lives have been radically altered as a result

and many feel that the changes have not been for the better (e.g. see Ainley & Bailey, 1997).

To many outside education, FE teachers appear as an anomalous group, with an ambivalent status and an unclear identity. No doubt many professional groups would have had difficulty withstanding the kinds of pressures that have been brought about by the Act, but it will be argued here that the FE teaching profession may have been particularly vulnerable, not for reasons that have to do with the competence or commitment of its members, but because of its history, its composition and its marginality within the educational system, as a whole.

The fact is that the FE teaching profession has made little progress over the last 100 years towards full professional status. Why should this be so? What particular features of the profession are obstacles to its advancement, to what sociologists would call its 'professional project' (Macdonald, 1995)? In attempting answers to this question, this article will examine such aspects of the profession as the degree of professional closure or exclusivity, the strength of its occupational boundaries and formation processes, and the nature and status of its professional knowledge. An attempt will be made to 'locate' the FE teaching profession in terms of the 'thickness' or 'thinness' of its culture, and to assess the likelihood of change.

Professional identity can be defined as the perception of oneself as a professional and it is closely related to the knowledge and skills one has, the work one does, and the work-related significant others or the reference group (Bucher & Stelling, 1977). The skills, qualifications and experience of the FE teacher work-force, the nature of their work, and the expectations and perceptions that they and others have of their role, and have had at different moments in history will be examined. In this way, it is intended to build up a picture of the FE teacher's professional self, to examine the professional cultures within the college, their variety and their interactions. Of particular significance has been the growth of what is commonly referred to as 'managerialism'; some of the implications of managerialism for the FE teacher's role and identity (and for the profession as a whole) will be discussed, concluding with a brief analysis of future prospects.

Profile of the Work Force

According to the first official report to deal with all kinds of teachers including secondary and technical, in 1938 there were 4000 full-time technical teachers who were widely distributed geographically and taught over 170 professions, trades and occupations (Board of Education, 1944). This report placed emphasis on the need for technical and vocational teachers to remain up to date with their subjects in industrial or commercial settings; though teaching ability was also considered

desirable, and systematic training was recommended (the report, in fact, led to the establishment of the first three centres for full-time teacher training courses in London, Huddersfield and Bolton) any requirement for FE teachers to undertake training would, it was argued, cost too much and harm recruitment to the colleges at a time when new recruits were needed. The neglect of the professional training of FE teachers was again justified on the same pragmatic grounds in 1966, by the Secretary of State in rejecting a key recommendation in the second Russell report (DES, 1966).

By 1979 about 45% of all full-time staff (and fewer part-time staff) in what was by this time a much more diversified 'further education' sector possessed a DES-recognised teaching qualification. By this time, the number of full-time teachers had increased to at least 60,000 (Cantor & Roberts [1986] put the 1980 figure at about 80,000). Though the available figures are not always directly comparable, it seems clear that as Young et al conclude (on the basis of DFE statistics), there was a steady increase in the proportion of qualified staff in colleges from the mid-1970s through the 1980s (Young et al, 1995). By the early 1990s, this trend was in danger of being reversed, however, as colleges sought to increase the number of part-timers recruited mostly in order to cope with funding pressures. Since part-time staff are less likely to be trained than full-timers, the overall proportion of qualified teachers seems set to fall. Though the current estimate is that approximately 60% of full-time teaching staff in the FE sector now possess a recognised teaching qualification (Young et al, 1995), this is accounted for partly by the inclusion in 1993 of the sixth form colleges. The number of full-time opportunities is decreasing with some colleges now employing part-timers to teach as much as 50% of their work (FEFC, 1997a).

The broad picture, therefore, is of a sector which has grown dramatically in numerical terms over the last few decades, but in which it has not seemed possible to implement a consistent policy with regard to the status of its staff. The proportion of part-time staff (with their marginality and their lower rewards) has fluctuated in response to structural and policy change as has the proportion of all staff who are teacher-trained. It now seems likely that a formal teaching qualification will soon become mandatory (as the Dearing report has recommended for the higher education sector in the United Kingdom [DFEE, 1997]), but large questions remain about the nature of this training and the form that it might take, as well as about its consequent status.

With regard to the vocational and technical qualifications which staff were required to have, here, too, there is little uniformity. As a UNESCO report on technical and vocational teacher education noted, there is a great variety of qualifications accepted or considered appropriate for vocational and technical teachers in all countries (UNESCO, 1973) and in the United Kingdom, these range from university degrees, higher

diplomas, membership of professional or chartered institutes to the appropriate City and Guilds' certificates. According to DFE statistics quoted in Young et al (1995), in 1991 about 48% of full-time FE teachers were graduates. The huge diversity of professional and vocational qualifications which is to be found amongst the staff in any college is symptomatic, of course, of the labyrinthine nature of technical and vocational education itself; the 'jungle' of qualifications that the National Council for Vocational qualifications (NCVQ) was in part set up to rationalise (DES/DOE, 1985) still persists, certainly amongst those old enough to have sufficient industrial or commercial experience to enter further education teaching.

The very diversity of entry routes into FE teaching, however, creates, in sociological terms, a weak professional boundary. According to the Weberian concept of social closure, groups which have an interest to pursue, however those groups have originated, will typically endeavour to achieve monopoly and to close economic and social opportunities to outsiders (Macdonald, 1995). Generally, within one occupational area of the FE curriculum, it would probably be possible to specify quite clearly the level and nature of required entry qualifications for staff, but for the sector as a whole, these are so varied as to make closure very limited. School teachers, on the other hand, must be graduates to enter the profession and, despite increasingly diverse forms of 'graduateness', this professional 'gate' exists, effectively protecting the interests of members and enhancing the profession's status (relative, at least, to further education). This is not an argument for making FE teaching a graduate-only profession; since degrees are not available in many of the vocational subjects offered in FE, this would be wholly inappropriate and quite unworkable. It is simply a further illustration of the profession's fragmentation. There are effectively hundreds of routes in and any number of professional 'boundaries'. The combined effect of a lack of any requirement to be teacher-trained and this enormous diversity in vocational and technical entry routes is to weaken the profession's standing overall quite considerably.

In addition, there is not and never has been any attempt to control centrally the numbers entering FE teaching. In 1944, McNair noted that "in the main, the methods of recruitment of technical teachers have been haphazard and opportunist and as yet nothing systematic is being done to provide for the needs of the future" (Board of Education, 1944, p. 112) and this is still the case. Again, the contrast can be drawn with school teaching where successive governments have attempted (not always successfully) to predict demand and to control supply. With no means of controlling numbers and no means of planning national provision, the FE sector is effectively deprived of a further key strategy for enhancing its status – that of controlling the numbers seeking entry to its teaching profession. Professional exclusivity is indeed low and likely to become even lower,

with the increasing tendency for colleges to blur the distinction between teaching and non-teaching staff (Young et al, 1995).

One further point should be made in relation to FE teachers' backgrounds, and that concerns the way they and others have consistently prioritised their industrial or commercial experiences (over, for instance, a teacher training qualification). The stress by McNair (Board of Education, 1944) and others since on the importance of the technical knowledge and skills, the value of industrial or commercial experience and practice, finds an echo in two later case studies of technical colleges (Venables, 1967; Tipton, 1973). Venables (who also surveyed the attitudes of about 250 teachers across a number of technical colleges) comments that many staff read the technical, but not the educational press:

Status is not won by campaigning: it has to be earned and it will not be achieved for the local techs until their teachers as a body are as much concerned about solving educational problems as they are about the technical ones. (Venables, 1967, p. 139)

Fears about losing touch with one's professional or vocational background are real and understandable (especially amongst full-timers) and it is ironical that despite the importance attached in that report to vocational experience, McNair's recommendation (mentioned above), that regular return to industry should be facilitated so that technical teachers could refresh their knowledge and skills, has never been implemented. Several trainee student teachers whom I 'shadowed' recently during their college placements were extremely concerned about the extent to which they perceived some FE colleagues to be 'out of touch' with their industry and about how, as new teachers, they would be able to prevent the same thing from happening to them. Their credibility (with their students and their staffroom colleagues) was, as far as they were concerned, intimately bound up with their industrial and commercial experiences; this is what they perceived their 'advantage' to be over, as it were, the 'old hands'.

However, there is another point here about the defensive and validating purposes of a discourse that focuses almost entirely on the subject taught and on one's experiences of it in an industrial environment. As Venables implies (above) for the profession to further its status, there needs to be some consensus about a shared body of professional knowledge which is developed, controlled and credentialed in a way that is characteristic of other professional groups (Macdonald, 1995). Scientific and technical knowledge conventionally have had a higher status than so-called 'soft' knowledge (such as educational knowledge) (Becher, 1994) and this may be what is being reflected in the college culture. Nevertheless, the subject-specific knowledges (whether 'hard' or 'soft') will never be shared by all members of the profession, and if the status of the individual groups is tied simply to their own knowledges and their own

experiences, then developing and strengthening a collective professional identity will remain an uphill task.

Nature of the Work

Full-time FE teachers have always been contracted both to teach and to carry out administrative tasks (such as the enrolment of students) though the balance of duties has altered over time and with the seniority of the appointment.

Tipton's case study of a FE college established in the south of England in 1951 (Tipton, 1973) records that contrary to the researchers' expectations, administration duties did not appear to be resented by staff. There appeared to be no general feeling that the status of the technical teacher was being undermined by the requirement to undertake administration. On the contrary, administration (and especially course development) was, in this college and undoubtedly in many others, high on the list of factors regarded as instrumental in achieving promotion.

Tipton identifies this willingness to see the role as a wider one than just teaching as related to factors such as the non-teaching occupational background, the relative lack of teacher training and the 'non-vocational' attitude towards teaching as a career (Tipton, 1973). In addition, she claims that the act of teaching in a technical college is "often less intrinsically satisfying than it is in many other educational institutions" (p. x) due to the repetitious and fragmented quality of the work (many short-courses, a large student turnover and part-time attendance patterns which affect the development of staff-student relationships). Research was not a viable form of job satisfaction either because of prohibitively heavy teaching loads.

Concerns about the quality of teaching in further education (though never attracting much political interest) have been voiced consistently over many years. The Crowther Report in 1959 (Ministry of Education, 1959) identified success rates for part-time courses in technical colleges which were as low as 6% in some cases and rarely exceeded 50%. Amongst its recommendations was one to the effect that efforts should be made to develop a continuing relationship between the students and staff by means of a tutorial system. High levels of attrition persisted, however, for the next 30 years and were again highlighted in 1993, in a report called 'Unfinished Business' (Audit Commission/OFSTED, 1993). Though reasons for student withdrawal and failure in further education are always complex and variable (Venables sympathetically discusses a range of contributory factors in her case-study college of the 1960s), the fact remains that little was done to address the sector's perceived 'inefficiency' in these terms. Though teaching quality cannot be wholly to blame for such widespread and persistent non-achievement, it is disappointing that no consistent attempts were made to protect the profession from such inferences by, for

example, requiring FE teachers to be trained. In 1992, changes to funding methodology introduced by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) sought to focus on the retention and achievements of college students (FEFC, 1992) and there is (arguably for the first time) a growing emphasis now on the importance of student support and guidance, on induction and on programmes of professional development for staff.

The nature of teaching in FE has always varied enormously and continues to vary within the different curriculum areas. As the sector has expanded its provision, so its character has become more complex and the demands upon teachers have increased. The development of pre-vocational training courses that followed the establishment of the Manpower Services Commission in 1974, and the changing pattern of technician education with the arrival of the Technician Education Council (TEC) and the Business Education Council (BEC), and then the merged BTEC, established in 1983), the expansion of GCE work, the end of traditional apprenticeship training in the early 1980s and, more recently, the advent of GCSEs have all increased demands on FE teachers in relation to such things as assessment and curriculum development.

Of particular significance in terms of the changing character of FE work was the emergence of General Studies as part of the technical curriculum in the early 1960s. The Ministry of Education report 'General Studies in Technical Colleges' (1962) identified its purposes as helping young workers:

to find their way successfully about the world both as consumers and citizens, to form standards of moral values by which they can live in the new world in which they find themselves, to continue and develop the pursuits and activities which they have begun at school, to improve their basic education. (Ministry of Education, 1962, p. 2)

The key point to make is that the growth of General Studies, particularly since it coincided with an increase in the numbers of young people who were voluntarily staying on in education to take O- and A-levels, brought a new kind of teacher into the sector. As Venables notes, these teachers were often from Humanities backgrounds and they found themselves teaching across the college, in craft and technical as well as academic departments. Venables was aware of some inherent dangers (that, if untrained, such staff might simply proselytise or patronise young people, for example) and there is no doubt that, during the 1960s and 1970s, some Social Science graduates did, indeed, approach this work with something akin to a missionary zeal. The composition of the FE work-force was changing and with it, the culture of the college itself.

General Studies' teachers were amongst the most vociferous opponents of another significant curriculum shift, namely that relating to the advent of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) in 1986. Non-academic education for post-16-year-olds has been the fastest

growing sector of English education throughout the post-war period and it was reasonable to expect that the impact of these reforms (which are essentially vocational in their rationale) would be greatest here. Set up to rationalize vocational qualifications by creating a framework based on vocational standards of competence required in employment, self-consciously opposed to the 'educational establishment', the new system changed the relationships that the FE sector had with the three main awarding bodies in the vocational area (City and Guilds, the Royal Society of Arts [RSA] and BTEC) and it also changed relationships amongst the awarding bodies themselves (Wolf, 1995).

During the 1970s, a shift had already taken place from General Studies to Communication Skills and had been fiercely opposed (e.g. Carroll, 1980; Branwood & Boy, 1981). The work of the NCVQ took developments one stage further and continues to have far-reaching implications for nearly all staff in the sector. General Studies teachers, in particular, may now find themselves teaching not General Studies as such, but 'key skills' (which are specified in considerable detail) and many have resented the perceived loss of professional autonomy.

The arguments about competence-based curricula are complex and not all of them are relevant to this discussion. The view that the competence model effectively de-skills professional practice is widespread (e.g. Barnett, 1994; Hyland, 1994; Last & Chown, 1996) and that it has directly impacted upon the work of the FE teacher is indisputable. Many vocational teachers find themselves endlessly checking evidence against lists of performance criteria at the expense (they feel) of their relationships with students and their classroom teaching (Ainley & Bailey, 1997).

However, as Wolf observes:

the trend towards formal, centralised and regulated assessment meshes with the self-interest of a large professional group: teachers and in particular teachers of students at and after compulsory leaving age.
(Wolf, 1995, p. 37)

As she makes clear, competence awards are characterised by a pre-occupation with access and equality of opportunity, by attempts to make the criteria for success completely explicit, and by a rejection of the traditional authority of professional groups and assessors. There may therefore be a case for arguing that the FE teacher stands to gain in the long run from this development, to escape from the loss of autonomy implicit in the traditional examination system (Venables, 1967) and to escape, too, from the power wielded for so long by examining bodies, such as City and Guilds. In any event, claims about sudden and recent losses of autonomy consequent upon the activities of NCVQ do seem overstated.

There may be gains, too, in the very detail of the NVQ awards. The transparency and descriptiveness of the competence-based awards for FE

teaching (e.g. City and Guilds 7306), whilst increasing professional accountability, effectively delineate professional boundaries and attempt to describe professional knowledge. The difficulty is, of course, that they tend to reduce that knowledge to observable behaviour and describe it too mechanistically.

There is another significant curriculum shift currently underway which is worth mentioning here for it has clear implications for the FE teacher's role and relationships. This is the development of a variety of forms of flexible learning, such as the use of distance materials, drop-in workshops, computer-mediated communication and so on. The need for colleges to become cost-effective (even before incorporation) was leading to the development of more open and adaptable systems of learning and to an emphasis on access (Stanton, 1988). With incorporation and new funding imperatives, these trends have been accelerated.

Students enrolled in flexible programmes of various kinds need to take more responsibility for their own learning and teachers need strategies for ensuring that their students acquire sufficient confidence and autonomy (Ware, 1996). Though such skills have always been required of FE lecturers, the stakes are higher now for the colleges, and managers are increasingly seeking to develop and reward professional flexibility and innovation.

Overall, a picture is emerging here in which the FE teacher's work appears to be extremely variable and highly susceptible to change. Now, of course, not even the employment contracts are uniform, with some staff fighting to retain the conditions of service that were negotiated with the local education authorities (and known as The Silver Book agreement) and others taking on new contracts which typically require considerably more hours of work. Furthermore, from the advent of General Studies and the growth of GCE provision, to the arrival of NVQs and GNVQs, and the development of flexible learning, it is clear that the motor for change is nearly always external to the college; enormous shifts have occurred, in the curriculum, in the kinds of staff employed, in the way they spend their time, the kinds of relationships they have with others, the value they attach to their activity. Sometimes it has been government policy or legislation that has precipitated the change; sometimes it has been the way policy has been implemented by the central agencies; sometimes the shifts have been precipitated by broader economic or social adjustments, or changes in awareness and priorities. Seldom has the change seemed to come from the sector itself; seldom has there been a successful attempt by the FE professionals themselves to define and demarcate the boundaries of their work.

Viewed from the outside, the lack of coherence and consensus about the nature of the FE teacher's professional work is particularly obvious and the degree of overlap with other professional roles (such as librarian or counsellor) is increasing. The pushes and pulls that the sector has been

subject to have impacted here most significantly of all, and have certainly contributed to a further weakening of professional boundaries (such as they exist at all) and to continuing low levels of professional autonomy. The profession is not clearly demarcated and has not achieved a specialised or protected title. It has been reduced to trying to fend off draconian increases in hours and weeks, to what is effectively a proletarian struggle, when the real battle for professional status lies elsewhere (and simply describing the new contracts as 'professional' [see Foot, 1997] will not, of course, make them so).

Cultures in the College

In the 1930s, the geographical location of a particular college and the character of its local industry gave the institution a strong bias (Richardson, 1939) and though the locality may be less influential today than it was, it is nevertheless the case that colleges have a relationship with and respond to their environments in a way that is not true of most universities, for example. The range of occupational groups represented in any one college is not necessarily the same as that in another college and across the sector as a whole, as already noted, the diversity is very great.

Not surprisingly, this diversity in the backgrounds of FE teachers and in the nature of the work they undertake leads to the development of a number of quite distinctive cultures, often within one college. Other professions have their sub-groups, too, such as nursing, for example (which divides into psychiatric, geriatric, paediatric and so on), and members of these sub-groups or 'segments' (Bucher & Stelling, 1977) share a specific professional identity, an understanding about their role and about the nature of their discipline, as well as its relationships to other fields. In the further education college, however, the divisions between segments are more marked than they appear to be within the field of, say, nursing; there is little common purpose amongst the groups of staff in FE and (as already noted) no shared mandatory training which might, arguably, help to bind the professional group together as a whole.

Becher's discussion of the cultural beliefs held by and associated with members of different disciplinary groups within academia is instructive (Becher, 1989). Not only do members of specific academic 'tribes' subscribe to particular understandings about the nature of knowledge, use distinctive linguistic forms and registers, and attach value to entirely different features of academic work, but they also transmit specific customs and practices, beliefs, morals and rules of conduct. In addition, a variety of mechanisms operate to ensure the exclusion of 'illegal immigrants' as the academic tribes define their own identities and defend their own intellectual ground.

Academics' perceptions of colleagues in other disciplinary groups contain no surprises; engineers, for example, are seen as practical, but

also as dull, conservative and mercenary. Some of these caricatures find echoes in the further education context, where views about colleagues may be similarly rigid. Gleeson & Mardle (1980) refer to the 'two cultures' in further education (by which they mean the 'practical' and the 'academic'), and in their ethnographic description of a selected college, they found evidence of a split between technical teachers and those who were then called Liberal Studies teachers. As noted earlier, the growth of Liberal & General Studies had brought a new kind of teacher into the sector and the technical teachers (who came from similar backgrounds to their students and shared similar experiences of industry and training) were often sceptical of their university-educated colleagues.

Tipton (1973) also reports such conflicts and identifies college structure as an exacerbating factor. The low incidence of teacher training meant that the college itself became the main agent of socialisation into the sector but this particular college (which is typical of many) gave the staff a very fragmented experience:

they were divided by the layout of buildings, by their organisation into separate departments, by their timetables and by the variation in the intrinsic qualities of their work – craftsmen taught students who were to become craftsmen, graduates taught students who hoped to go to university, and so on. The formal structure of the college therefore invited staff to feel different from one another rather than alike. (Tipton, 1973, p. x)

Gleeson & Mardle (1980) also note that departmental insularity in their case study college directly influenced social relationships.

It would be wrong, however, to characterise the typical college as consisting simply of two cultures since there are many cultures within any one institution, as many, in fact, as there are occupational or subject groups. Some cultures overlap with others, and there are numerous affinities and polarities, and any number of observable distinctions in practices and beliefs. Any visitor to any college will notice that classroom layout, wall displays and disciplinary procedures all vary enormously from department to department. Two student teachers, who participated recently in a study of the professional socialisation of new FE staff (see Robson, 1998), both came from different previous professional backgrounds, but they found themselves needing to seek advice from colleagues about the same problem, namely student lateness. The business studies teacher was advised to be more assertive with latecomers, to stress the value to the students of arriving on time, the importance to the group of a good start and so on; the quantity surveyor was advised simply to lock his classroom door at 9 a.m.

One might think, Tipton observes, that such differences among staff would have no real meaning for the college, that they would be overlaid by strong common bonds, that there might be a planned policy of orientation

or even unplanned common experiences to bring some consensus to the organisation, but the evidence she found all pointed to the contrary; there was no sense of unity. There is less shared purpose in a typical further education college, that is, than in a traditional university context where, it might be argued, there are (or have been until relatively recently) shared assumptions about such things as the value of abstract knowledge, of academic freedom, of collegial life. Such common academic culture as there has been in universities is clearly now breaking down (Barnett, 1994), but the point is that in further education colleges, it has never existed.

In moving from one occupational area (in industry or commerce) to another (education and training), most further education teachers retain strong allegiances to their first occupational identity. As noted above, this identity is what gives them credibility (as well as knowledge and skill) and it is therefore understandable that much value attaches to it. They have experienced initial occupational or professional socialisation in one context, and are in the college precisely because this process has been successful and in order to socialise others (the students or trainees) to the same norms and practices. Gleeson & Mardle (1980) write of their case study college that:

the nature of technical socialisation predominates, and is highly significant both to the ways in which technical teachers perceive the job to be done, and to the forms of training which are associated with it. The attitude of technical teachers towards the job of teaching, therefore, is to be understood against such patterns of socialisation. Hence classroom authority may be seen to be founded upon the fact that most teachers are recruits from industry, who have been through the system, and who are therefore well placed to pass on the know-how to those who also want their 'ticket'. One effect of such instrumentality is that the process of training is presented as both neutral and inevitable, so that the authority structure of both work and college is accepted as beyond question or natural. (Gleeson & Mardle, 1980, p. 28)

It is still the case, therefore, that, as Venables (1967) observes, the technical teacher appears to see him or herself chiefly as the engineer, the secretary, the welder, the fashion designer or the surveyor who happens to be teaching. The staff in such departments do not (either collectively or individually) consistently see themselves as educators:

Among the teachers interviewed there was no corporate view of what constituted 'professional' behaviour and very little consideration had been given to their responsibilities – either actual or potential – as teachers. The result was that the mutual trust needed for increased autonomy was to some extent lacking. (Venables, 1967, p. 222)

In making this transition from one workplace to another, the mature but novice FE teacher can experience stress of various kinds and more is

involved than the simple acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Existing occupational identities may be threatened by such changes (Mealyea, 1989), and existing cultural practices and discourses may be inappropriate for the new professional context. Resistance may take a variety of forms, including humour (Gleeson, 1994), and the transition is unlikely to be successful without opportunities for reflection and for the transformation of existing perspectives (James, 1995). Furthermore, it appears that the group is particularly important in assisting people to make such changes and to become 'empowered', informed and confident in new social environments (Mezirow, 1991). Teacher training might, of course, offer such opportunities (see James, 1995), but without it, the more likely outcome is the persistence of the first occupational identity within the new vocational environment – exactly as we see it in most FE departments.

This is the key to the culture of the FE college – the success of a first occupational socialisation process (without which the teacher would not obtain the FE job) combined with the lack of opportunity and incentive to develop another vocational identity (that of the professional teacher) alongside the first, as well as the potential for conflict between the two. As indicated, this creates further obstacles to the FE professional project, as well as disunity and disagreement (about such things as organisational goals, for example) within the wider professional group.

A New Culture of Managerialism

In the 1990s, the disparate and fragmented cultures of the sector have had to contend with a new challenge. Though a shift towards marketisation was already underway in further education, and such things as performance indicators had been features of its culture since the mid 1980s (Elliott, 1996a), the Further & Higher Education Act (1992) has consolidated and underlined the changes and formally required colleges to plan and organise themselves in ways similar to those which are common in industry and business. The intention and effect of incorporation and the related innovations have been to force colleges to increase levels of student participation and to improve quality in a market situation in which they compete for students. This was clearly in line with government ideology and thinking with regard to all social services and was based on the belief that in the past the FE sector had been less efficient and effective than it could have been. It was also designed to create a new culture and philosophy in FE colleges (Robson & Bailey, 1996).

The changes to impact most directly upon the teachers themselves were those associated with what was now referred to as 'human resource management' (as an alternative to staff planning, appraisal and development) and they included the establishment of the College Employers' Forum (CEF); (now merged with and known as the Association

of Colleges) which, acting on behalf of college managers, drew up new terms and conditions of service to replace the Silver Book agreement which had been negotiated between the main college lecturers' union (NATFHE) and their employers, the local education authorities. The ensuing dispute between NATFHE and the new employers now ranks as one of the most bitter and prolonged in education anywhere. With numbers of staff eventually signing the new contract (often with no real option) and others still refusing to do so, as noted above, the climate in many colleges has been one of disillusionment and division. Other significant changes, also externally imposed, were the introduction of quality assurance arrangements in colleges and increasingly sophisticated college performance indicators. A framework for lecturer appraisal had actually been drawn up earlier, in the 1991 salary settlement arrived at in the National Joint Council for FE (Betts, 1996).

Avis (1996, quoting Pollitt, [1993]) identifies the key themes of managerialism as a stress on increased productivity which is economically defined and to be achieved with ever more sophisticated technologies and a 'disciplined' labour force. Management is seen as a separate and distinct organisational function; the role of managers is to plan, implement and measure the necessary improvements in productivity. These managerial themes have impacted on post-compulsory education, writes Avis, and are reflected in the concerns with efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and accountability that were noted above. Some particular aspects of recent initiatives will be singled out here because they appear to embody some tensions, principally tensions between the requirements of managerialism and those of professionalism.

In 1995, the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), newly created from a merger of the Further Education Unit (FEU) and the Staff College, assumed responsibility (on behalf of the Department for Education and Employment) for managing a project which was to produce an occupational and functional map of the FE sector. The exercise was designed to inform discussions about whether there should be an Industry Lead Body for FE and so it differs from most similar studies previously undertaken.

The final report is about 150 pages long and contains some detailed and valuable information about staff in the sector. Through an analysis of FE job advertisements and job descriptions, for example, a list of current job titles is arrived at (p. 50) and there are 12 such titles for people who lecture or teach in the sector. There are 22 ways to describe the role of managing learning and no fewer than 34 titles for those who support teaching and learning in Fe. There are further data relating to FE staff qualifications and employment status.

The functional map seeks to re-interpret the 'raw' occupational data in terms of expectations, to describe the contributions which people are expected to make both now and in the future. It is expressed in

'outcomes', is designed to be exhaustive and specific and to be used as a basis for developing national occupational standards for FE staff. There are four 'domains' in the functional map:

Domain A: development strategies for enabling individuals, groups and organisations within the community to meet their changing learning needs and achieve their potential;

Domain B: deliver and continuously improve the quality of education, training and development opportunities to enable individuals, groups and organisations to learn;

Domain C: co-ordinate, evaluate and improve the quality of learning provision;

Domain D: obtain, deploy, maintain and develop resources and facilities to promote and support learning.

The influence of managerialism is clear in, for example, the insistence on the continuous (if not the endless) improvement of quality, in the sense of detachment from wider political and social structures, and in the underlying accountability that is implied by the very terms of the exercise itself. There is, however, as Avis (1996) notes, more similarity between managerialism and professionalism than is commonly acknowledged and this exercise may be seen as an illustration of the tensions between the two:

In spite of all its faults, there is a paradoxical way in which managerialism carries with it a democratising impulse by raising questions of accountability. These also force reflection upon the conditions and framework in which managers and welfare state professionals operate. (Avis, 1996, p. 113)

By identifying the complexity of the FE teacher's role, the plethora and ambiguity of the title/s available for such work, and then by attempting to define the boundaries of the work that should be undertaken by the FE professional, the mapping project arguably offers the profession an opportunity. The weakness of professional boundaries, the lack of coherence and professional closure as well as the conflicting occupational identities of those who work in FE have been described above and it has been argued that these are all features which contribute to the low status of the professional group as whole. The difficulty with any 'appropriation' of the mapping exercise, however, is that once again the motivation and the imperative come from outside the sector, from the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (notwithstanding FEDA's involvement), and this has clearly influenced the way the roles have been described and the nature of the boundaries proposed. As a result, many will be more inclined to see the 'map' as a deskilling device, designed to control and regulate, than as an opportunity for professional enhancement though, ironically, it may be both.

Another innovation which is interesting in this context is the recent decision by the FEFC to require FE colleges to take more responsibility for their own quality assurance. In circular 97/12 (FEFC, 1997b) called *Validating Self Assessment*, colleges are advised that future arrangements for inspection will involve a greater emphasis upon college self-assessment:

The Council is aware that colleges have devoted considerable resources to the development of quality assurance mechanisms and that future inspections can therefore adopt a more selective approach based upon each college's self-assessment. (FEFC, 1997b, p. 4)

No doubt there are also resource considerations underlying this shift, but it is noteworthy as an explicit attempt to assign responsibility to institutions which are used to dependent relationships, whose activities are for the most part externally controlled. Unlike HE institutions, FE colleges do not have control of their own course validation and evaluation procedures. Awarding bodies like BTEC and the A-level examination boards have held colleges accountable to them, as has the NCVQ, and this has led to less mature quality assurance systems and less emphasis upon evaluation research (Elliott, 1996b). It has also (arguably) led to a less developed sense of responsibility amongst FE teachers. I recall listening to a conversation between a student teacher and her mentor recently and he was explaining why he allowed his City and Guilds students to re-submit their coursework as often as they needed to. "My view is, it's not our job to fail them", he said. It is his job, of course, and I was prompted to reflect that possibly, as a culture, FE has yet to engage seriously with its responsibilities in this regard. It is symptomatic, of course, that once again, with the requirement to self-assess, the motor for change is coming from the margins, from an external agency, in this instance, the funding body itself, rather than from within the sector, but it may possibly, in the long term, encourage the growth of autonomy and responsibility in a profession that is not used to either.

The third trend which exhibits some of these tensions between managerialism and professionalism is the increase in individual 'performance management' and surveillance through a variety of strategies including appraisal (or staff review), the observation of classroom teaching, the monitoring of administrative duties through the collection of data relating to things such as student retention and achievement, and so on. An interviewee in a recent study of FE teachers' responses to incorporation (Ainley & Bailey, 1997) speaks of feeling 'invaded' by management who cannot, it seems to her, trust her now to do the simplest thing well. She (and others in the study) feel 'de-professionalised' by this loss of autonomy. In this college, the over-riding management imperative (to meet imposed targets, to secure funding) is leading to a feeling amongst staff that they have been

disenfranchised. So, for example, subject specialists' views about suitable entry criteria for students seeking places on particular vocational or academic courses might now be set aside in the interests of reaching a target; in such ways, some of the professional and academic sub-cultures within the FE college (with their specific values and practices) are being challenged and undermined.

Appraisal is now a key strategy by which the performance of staff in the college is monitored and managed. Avis (1996) argues that appraisal, though an apparently benign process, is in effect the means by which those in higher positions in an organisation police those below them. Clearly, the emphasis on the individual in appraisal schemes is consistent with the managerialist agenda, though it is worth noting that the appraisal framework agreed by the National Joint Council for FE (just prior to the FHE Act) insisted that appraisal should be broader and that institutional and departmental review should provide the context for individual appraisal. This agreement also states that appraisal should be used positively to promote equality of opportunity (Betts, 1996).

To the extent, however, that appraisal may be used to separate individuals from their working environments and constraints, to control their rewards and to elide their personal development needs with those of the organisation, it may work against the interests of the professional group. It may be the process by which 'professionals' are turned into 'managers', in fact, and collective activity on behalf of the profession (as opposed to the organisation) may be impeded. Again, however, as implied by the national guidelines (with their reference to equality of opportunity and to the wider contexts of institution and department), a paradox exists in the stress on increased accountability. Most professional groups have internal 'systems' of some kind (e.g. codes of practice) designed to control the activities of members and it is clearly in their interests to do this. Public credibility is important to any profession's standing and can easily be jeopardised by the activities of a few. The interests of stakeholders (which in this case include students, of course) must be protected. Arguably, therefore, there is here, too, in the concept and the practice of appraisal a 'democratising impulse' that could facilitate professionalisation.

In a number of ways therefore, FE is now having to struggle with new cultural pressures arising from managerialism. It would appear that few teachers actively subscribe to the new culture and a number actively resist it. Members of the various sub-cultures described above may now be less concerned with defending their own values and practices than with fighting a common enemy. The tensions that now exist between lecturers and managers are discussed by Elliott (1996a) in his report of a recent case study. He found that lecturers and managers placed a differential emphasis upon business and educational values:

Lecturers felt that, for the college managers, business methods had become an end in themselves, sustaining a 'control' ethos and a managerialist culture. A common complaint was that senior college managers seemed to have lost sight of the core business of student learning and achievement – they no longer saw students as students, but as units of funding. On the other hand the lecturers in this group prioritised learning and teaching processes. (Elliott, 1996a, p. 16)

However, Elliott also reports here and elsewhere (Elliott & Crossley, 1997) that there was a degree of commonality amongst managers and lecturers on a range of issues, such as the need for effective external and internal evaluation of practice. Though there were deep divisions about how quality could and should be defined, for example, there was an understanding of the need for change and of the position the college managers were now in. There may be, in other words, areas of common interest which if explored may benefit the professional group as a whole and there may be initiatives within managerialism that can be harnessed to this end.

Conclusion: the professional FE teacher?

Browning (1997) notes that to link the words 'professional' and 'teacher' in the current political climate could be interpreted as a subversive act and to add 'FE' in this context offers, she says, a bold challenge to many people's perceptions. This article has attempted to account (at least in part) for these perceptions of the FE teacher and to explore some of the factors underlying the current crisis. It has been argued that the teaching profession in FE is, indeed, fragmented and on the defensive, and that the reasons for this relate to its history and to its structure, to its marginal status in the education system as a whole and to official and political neglect.

Its culture is 'thin'; uncertain of the nature or value of a shared body of professional knowledge, unable to require all entrants to qualify formally as teachers (and therefore to acquire such knowledge), compelled to accept recruits into its ranks from hugely diverse backgrounds and entry routes, with no means of controlling their numbers, the professional group lacks closure and is struggling to develop any sense of its collective status or identity. With the nature of their work influenced and controlled to such a large extent from the margins, by central agencies and by external forces, with the erosion and weakening of such professional boundaries as have existed (as between 'teacher' and 'librarians', for example) and with growing financial constraints and pressures (resulting in, for instance, increased numbers of part-time employees), the low status of the profession is unarguable. In addition, the diverse cultures within the FE college have few strong common bonds and

a real need to retain previous occupational allegiances (to ensure credibility as vocational teachers). The structure and organisation of most colleges does little to create opportunity or incentive for developing another identity (that of the FE teacher) and there is often disunity and disagreement (about organisational goals, for instance) within the wider professional group. The existence of dual professional identities amongst many of its staff should be a source of strength, both for the individual and for the sector as a whole, but the official failure to support the development of a full professional identity for the FE teacher, the prioritising (both officially and unofficially) of the first occupational identity, at the expense of the second, has resulted in anomaly and confusion. Add to this, the growth of a new culture of managerialism, with its emphasis on the individual, on 'performance management', on accountability within hierarchies, and the likelihood is that the profession will find it difficult to act collectively, that its professional project will continue to be undermined and that change will be slow to come.

What possibilities exist for the future? The further education sector currently occupies a marginal position within the UK education system as a whole, and this marginality is becoming more obvious as political and public attention turns first to school teaching and then, more recently, to university teaching. With numbers of FE colleges involved in links with local schools, others offering HE courses, and increasing numbers entering into various kinds of franchise arrangements with universities, the boundaries between the sectors are in practice becoming more blurred. Though recent policy has tended to reinforce the separation, some comparisons are inevitable and it will be difficult for policy-makers to sustain an argument, for example, for requiring school teachers and university lecturers to undertake formal training and not FE staff.

A closer alignment of further and higher education (such as suggested by Parry [1997]), given that the higher education sector is already much more diverse than it used to be, might allow the pursuit of a shared professional enterprise, in terms of life-long learning, for example, and might also influence the nature of professionalism in both sectors. Whilst most universities are likely to provide their own teacher training programmes for their own staff (and the programmes are likely to be academic or research-based in nature and to be accredited by the new Institute for Learning & Teaching proposed by Dearing [DFEE, 1997]), FE colleges are currently only able to offer in their own right standards-based awards such as the City and Guilds 7306. At the time of writing, there is still no official proposal for a national body that would accredit training programmes for FE staff (such as that suggested for HE) and it is not clear either whether FE would be fully included within the new proposed General Teaching Council. A fusion of the FE and HE sectors might mean that the professional interests of FE staff are better addressed and their prospects enhanced by association with a more prestigious, confident and

prominent sector. However, the split (mentioned earlier) between the 'practical' and the 'academic' which is so endemic to thinking about education in the UK may prevail, instead, and may result in a mandatory training for FE teachers that is purely competence-based and quite different in character from that which most HE staff (and school teachers) will be required to undertake. Vigorous arguments can and should be put to challenge the classification of FE as a purely vocational sector (especially since it now includes sixth form colleges) and to challenge any assumption that vocational and technical teachers need a less reflective or academic training. Ways must be found to secure the sector's funding and to encourage the growth of autonomy and responsibility within the professional group. I have argued above that there may be opportunities currently within or alongside various managerialist initiatives for the development of a stronger professional identity, based on increased accountability and new concerns about effectiveness. However, the sector is currently in such difficulties financially and is currently so ambiguously sited within the system as a whole that it is likely to require a full scale inquiry (such as Dearing has just completed for HE), and a full reappraisal of the sector's resourcing, before the status of the professional group can be significantly improved. Legislation will also be needed (such as that which brought in Qualified Teacher Status for schools, for example) to 'credentialise' the profession, to establish firmer professional boundaries and occupational closure. Furthermore, a less competitive environment would clearly help reduce the tensions, foster greater unity of professional purpose and allow for more development of a collective sense of responsibility and autonomy.

Just as the sector has been neglected by policy-makers, so it has been neglected by academics, too; further research is needed, for example, into the current values, the status and experiences of FE teachers and the nature of their work, into the formation of occupational identities in this context, the nature of the transition from one occupation to another, into such things as the processes of entry, resistance and accommodation that new recruits may experience, and into the impact of recent changes on the staff themselves. An increased understanding of these things is needed to counter any emphasis on a narrow or technicist concept of professionalism, or one which might stress outcomes and performance, for example, at the expense of pedagogy and a shared professional knowledge. It is time to attach a proper value to the FE teacher's professional role, *as teacher*, and to address the future of a sector which has yet to receive the kind of support or attention it deserves.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Gareth Parry for tutorial advice and encouragement with an earlier version of this paper which was submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Masters degree in Higher & Professional Education at the University of London, Institute of Education.

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