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Pedagogic identities and lifelong learning¹

**Miriam Zukas, University of Leeds, UK and Janice Malcolm,
University of Kent, UK**

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Being a lifelong learning teacher

The idea of lifelong learning, which has been pervasive in Europe since the European Year of Lifelong Learning (1996), has been taken up at national level, to a greater or lesser extent, by policy makers and educators themselves (O’Keeffe, Adams and Pépin, 2003). Although a considerable amount of policy and policy rhetoric surrounds lifelong learning and seeks to construct the nature of lifelong learning (e.g. Commission of the European Communities 2005), the experience of lifelong learning teachers has received little attention.

The majority of teachers within school education, in the UK at least, enter the profession soon after completing their first degrees, but those who work in lifelong learning are characterised rather by the diversity of how they come to be teachers and of by the disciplines within which they teach (professional skills and knowledge, trades, basic skills, leisure pursuits, as well as disciplines in the traditional sense). As we describe below, from a UK perspective, the contexts for lifelong learning and the pathways into lifelong learning teaching are somewhat complex and sometimes haphazard. A lot has been written about policy, and about the take-up of lifelong learning. But we know rather less about lifelong learning teachers, particularly in relation to teachers’ biographies.

Given that lifelong learning teaching is precariously located within the broader landscape of education and training (Edwards, 1997), we have concentrated on exploring the pedagogic identities of lifelong learning teachers, particularly in relation to discipline and institutional context. In the research which contributes to this paper, we have also recognised the significance of individual biography: many lifelong learning teachers have serial (and sometimes parallel) careers which contribute to pedagogic identity. This chapter examines three case studies of pedagogic identity which were selected from a larger study in order to represent some of the range of biographies, disciplines and contexts for lifelong learning teachers.

Lifelong learning complexities

In the UK, lifelong learning occurs in a range of different contexts which do not necessarily parallel those in other parts of Europe. Two of the major locations for lifelong learning are universities, particularly in relation to professional and continuing education (Osborne, 2003), and further education colleges. The latter are complex institutions which offer programmes from basic education level (that is, language, literacy and numeracy for adults) to advanced vocational qualifications which can include higher education level study. Many further education colleges have a commitment to adult education (both vocational and non-vocational) as well as to vocational education for young people. Universities continue to prioritise provision for school leavers, despite the fact that people over the age of twenty-one make up over half of the student population. Thus, researching lifelong learning teachers raises complex questions about the location and purpose of their work. This complexity is also reflected in their biographies and pedagogic careers. There is no standard professional route into teaching in lifelong learning, and although qualifications exist, they were developed very recently and remain highly contested, not least because of the complexity of the location and purpose of the work.

We have written elsewhere (Malcolm and Zukas, forthcoming) about the role of discipline in the development and shaping of pedagogic identity. In higher education, teachers have traditionally conceived of themselves as members of a disciplinary community, and disciplinary research has been a more explicit and more highly-valued element of academic work than pedagogy (Malcolm and Zukas, 2000). Within lifelong learning, in contrast, the knowledge-content of and between disciplines has been routinely problematised and interrogated, precisely because the crucial pedagogic role of adult educators can not be divorced from the content of teaching. Adult educators have had to question the content and purpose of their discipline through their teaching as much as through their research, enabling them to inhabit 'knowledge-practice' communities which are simultaneously (inter-) disciplinary and pedagogic. Within further education, many teachers are appointed because of their professional identity and experience, even if this does not map directly onto a traditional academic discipline. Much of the Anglophone literature on teaching and learning has abstracted pedagogic from disciplinary and professional concerns, thus obscuring the role of teaching as a form of knowledge production and divorcing the social purpose of education from action in the classroom. For this paper, we want to consider the inter-relationship between discipline and profession in lifelong learning pedagogy, given that the pedagogic identities of teachers are situated (Lave and Wenger, 1991), not just in terms of institutional context, but also in terms of individual intellectual, pedagogic and professional biography.

The material here is drawn from a larger study which explores the pedagogical biographies of teachers of adults in different lifelong learning contexts. In the original study, we conducted fifteen extended and semi-structured interviews with teachers in lifelong learning, of whom nine worked in the UK and six in Australia, as part of a larger project on pedagogic identity and lifelong learning. We had previously developed a conceptual framework for analysing writings about lifelong learning (Zukas and Malcolm, 2002), in which we identified a number of ‘versions of the educator’ which were analysed across several ‘dimensions of pedagogic identity’ (ways of understanding how the versions related to each other). Whilst this work had been abstract and theoretical, though rooted in our own experience and understandings of practice, our concern when developing the empirical study was to begin to examine how teachers other than ourselves thought about the matters we had been exploring. The theoretical and exploratory work was an essential precursor to any empirical investigation; as Willis (2000) says, ‘... the preparation for and entry to the field is, unrecognised or not, some kind of intervention into debate, an attempt to grapple with a puzzle ... whose temper and pace leads you to want to encounter others who bear moving parts of the puzzle. This brings along with it, implicitly or explicitly, some sort of ‘theoretical confession’, a world view within which the puzzle is meaningful.’ (p. 113)

At this point, we need to clarify what we mean by ‘pedagogic identity’, since this term is provocative. Chappell et al argue that ‘all pedagogical work is always and everywhere identity work of some kind’ (2003: 4, italics in the original). Bernstein (2000) uses pedagogic identity to refer to the impact of pedagogy upon learners; however, we are concerned here with teachers, rather than learners. When we use ‘identity’, we mean that teachers:

will draw on a wide, and often contradictory, range of social and discursive pedagogic practices to construct their sense of what it means to be a teacher. This does not imply that teachers have some kind of coherent, unchanging and essential core, or even a name to attach to this sense of unity between identity and practice.. (Zukas, 2005, p. 467)

Similarly, although Europeans will understand that the term pedagogy connotes an understanding of educational practice broader than the classroom transaction of teaching, in the UK it is often used in a much narrower sense to mean teaching techniques (Malcolm and Zukas, 2003). However, we use it here to mean ‘a situated, multifaceted and complex process, involving multiple relationships with specific and often conflicting purposes, power relations and interests’ (ibid).

Thus, in our empirical study, our interviewees, all adult education teachers working in different institutional contexts and with varying amounts of teaching experience, were encouraged to talk about how they

saw themselves as teachers and the influences on the development of their pedagogic identity. Here we have selected three respondents in order to explore the relations between pedagogic identity, career stage and discipline, and the different institutional locations for lifelong learning. In other words, the paper explores the precise ways in which biography and context (interpreted to take into account discipline, learners and purpose, as well as institution) construct pedagogic identity.

Case studies

We have deliberately selected three respondents at very different stages of their respective careers for our analysis because we became aware, through the process of analysis, of how significant this issue was in understanding pedagogic identity. The three cases are all men whose teaching careers span from two to over thirty years.

James: pedagogic identity on the edge

James is 36 and only began teaching two years ago on a part-time basis, having previously worked in property management as a chartered surveyor and in sports, both as player and coach. He is now teaching sports science, still part-time, at higher education level to young adult students in a further education college.

James is not typical of beginning teachers in that he has, in effect, had two professional careers and has actually completed two bachelor's degrees at various stages in his life. He has never fully committed himself to a specific professional community or form of practice. He has given up his 'straight' career in chartered surveying – a move which he describes as having *'bailed out of the rat-race'* - and is now teaching sports science part-time, having also 'retired' from his substantial amateur sporting career three years ago. However, he does not appear to identify himself as belonging to any particular community in respect of these areas of work. Instead, he sees these different activities as aspects or manifestations of himself. When asked if he sees himself primarily as a teacher now, he responds:

I'm still in that transitional phase ... It is a difficult question. In an informal sense of the word teacher, that's kind of been the role I've found myself in, in my life ... That's something that I feel is almost part of me, whether it's a socialised thing, a learned thing ... my mother's a teacher ... two of my grandparents wanted to be teachers.

James attributes both his previous career as a coach and his current teaching to *'a natural propensity ... to identify real detail and ...not to nit-pick but ... it needs that eye for detail'*. His comments suggest that he has

both a deterministic view of teaching (a natural propensity, a socialised thing) and an understanding that teaching is a set of skills: *'I'm keen to develop whatever skills I've got. I want to take my communication skills further, presentation skills ... I'm still experimenting'*. He is attending a course of teacher education, but sees this not so much as an induction into a professional community, as

... expanding my own understanding of the world ... [giving] me a context for it. Without doing the PGCE [teaching qualification] I would be a bit short on the structure of 'this is how society sees a teacher', and I want that. I also want what I see as a teacher, and [to] integrate the two.

Teaching is a manifestation of James:

I don't see it divorced from my life. I don't see it as a vocation in that it's part of me ... Having ... almost sort of bailed out of the rat-race in a way ... [has] made me realise that everything is totally connected, and I find it difficult to separate things out into discrete areas. And it's all just, like, my life ... it's a way I express myself.

Whilst it is understandable that, as a beginning teacher, James might have somewhat unsophisticated conceptions of being a teacher, what is remarkable – to us - about James' approach is the highly individualised understanding he has of human activity, whether it be his previous professional roles or his new role as a novice teacher.

James takes his teaching very seriously and, in common with many other beginning teachers (Pratt, 1998), he conceives of it principally as the nurturing of a relationship with his students. In a sense, his aim in teaching is to induct students into taking a more holistic approach to their own lives, rather than feeling themselves to be labelled or constrained by the type of course they are on. However, James wants teaching to be as pleasurable for himself as for his students:

I want to push the boundaries, want to try things that you have fun [with]. I know what it was like when I was at school ... I try to relate, I try to have a nice time when I'm teaching. I don't want to go in there and not have a nice time, waste an hour of my life [laughter] ... anyway I entertain myself, and stretch myself, at the same time as stretching the students.

In the interview, James separated discipline (in his case sports science) from pedagogy, except in so far as it related to himself:

That's kind of been the role that I've found myself in my life – in a sports team, because [of being] the captain, or – if I wasn't the captain, but within the team, there's people coming up and asking me, what do you think about that?

He did not interrogate the reasons why his students were on the programmes, and assumed that his own educational experience was a

sufficient basis on which to build his understanding of their needs. One reason for this may be his experience as a part-time and therefore peripheral tutor within the teaching team. Like so many lifelong learning teachers, James is very much on the edge of the institution. The only time when he begins to assimilate into a work team is through the process of external course review:

Previously I'd gone in and felt outside the institution to a degree – gone in, done my session, just interacted when I had to. I've had more teaching this week, and more meetings, and I'm kind of more part of it ... this week with the QAA [external quality assurance], it's probably the first time this year ... that I've felt part of a team that just pulled it all together.

Thus, whilst James was appointed because of his professional background and experience, the institutional context in which he works does not support the development of his disciplinary identity.

Neil: pedagogic identity as boundary playing

Neil is in his late forties, and worked for fifteen years as a social worker and social work trainer before becoming a university adult educator ten years ago, at a fairly traditional, research-led university. He continues to teach in the field of child welfare and 'human service' professional development. He has therefore moved from a context where professional practice with clients is the primary focus, through increasing workplace training responsibilities, to one where his purposes combine the initial and continuing education of a range of practitioners with the development of social work as an academic discipline. He does not now practise as a social worker. His long career in social work might be expected to have anchored him quite firmly in a professional/disciplinary community, but this affiliation has apparently been weakened by his move into university adult education:

I still carry a social work identity, so I'd say, probably 30/40% I feel I'm still a social worker and whatever's left, 50/60% I think of myself as an academic ...

He feels that he continues to 'trade' on his social work identity as a means of gaining credibility with some of his students who are mid-career professionals. However, although Neil has become a committed university teacher, he does not feel that he has made a transition into the disciplinary community of social work within the academy:

No, because of being in a specific discipline but within adult education. *It's a professional weakness for me actually, because if I was teaching in social work [in a traditional university department], I'd be going to all the social work conferences ... I overcome that [by doing a lot of] external examining ... and it means I've got a profile*

in social work ... that's my only link in to a community of interest round social work teaching ... a community of externals!

His detachment from social work as an academic discipline is, however, strongly informed by a pedagogical student focus which may come from his location within and identification with adult education:

I really value teaching ... you get loads of status from saying 'I got a £200,000 research grant', and not much status from saying 'I just taught a good class to thirty people'. I think students sometimes get a bad deal, you know they come because they've heard of [distinguished professor] or whoever, and then he's 100% bought out on research, and I really think that's a bad deal.

Neil has been teaching for several years now and has a number of clear principles which inform his pedagogy. Some of these derive from his own analysis of what might be termed strongly didactic educational experiences, and strongly participative experiences within social work practice:

... [if] it's all input, you just don't take it in at all, you're bored, you're tired, you're probably falling asleep at the end. Equally, I've been to some social-worky things that are almost all process, where you get there and it's 'divide into groups and share your experiences' and at the end of the day you think, well I haven't learnt anything. So I've really internalised that. So almost in every session ... I think, right the students now need some solid content, so they've learnt A, B and C by the end of it, but they need some participation as well, they need to engage with a problem, or a case study, or a debate, or something, so just about every session I do I would have a balance between content and participation, inputs and participation.

The line that Neil treads between his academic and professional identities gives rise to a number of situated understandings of his pedagogic practice. Thus his analysis of what matters in teaching varies according to whether he is working with professional social workers or younger, more traditional students:

... the most difficult audience is a professional audience ... so for example ... if I was doing some training with a group of professionals, around – well around any issue actually, I'd have to be really aware of, that literally one word could lose me credibility with that group. So for example, if I – I mean I wouldn't say this, but say you said 'coloured' instead of 'black' for example, then you would lose all your credibility with that group in one word. So you have to be really sort of on your mettle, very sort of on top of your game really.

But at the same time, and perhaps in contradiction to this statement:

I mean there's a sort of social-worky word which I do use a lot, which is empathy, when I, I literally do this, I think 'I am the student in this session, what am I going to get out of this session, is it going to keep me engaged, is it going to keep me interested?' So, I ... will think, well I've got a mixed audience here, will the older ones

still be as interested as the younger ones. ... I do use that empathy test quite a lot actually, I imagine I'm sat in the class, and how am I coming across, what style, you know, content, processes – I'd say that was key – a key idea actually.

Neil veers between imagining what he would want as a student (empathising), and trying to preserve professional credibility. Yet there are aspects of everyday professional social work thinking which he finds difficult to accept precisely because he has taken on an academic identity within the discipline of social work:

Yeah I am detached, yeah, for various political reasons ... there's an awful phrase in social work that I'm trying to resist, which is 'anti-discriminatory practice', and it's been reduced to ADP, which I've really tried to resist, cause it just makes it a throwaway, 'oh, I do ADP', as if it's the easiest thing in the world, ... I'm trying to distance myself from that, 'cause I think it's reductionist and simplistic.

Neil's pedagogic identity is complex: he is simultaneously a peripheral member of social work as a profession, and the academic community of social work as a discipline. His pedagogy draws heavily on adult education, but he does not situate himself academically within adult education as a field of study.

Peter: integrating discipline, pedagogy and institution

Peter is in his fifties and a sociologist by training. He now works within the education faculty of a traditional university. In addition to teaching sociology he has worked in research consultancy and taught on access programmes and in teacher education; he has now been teaching for over thirty years. Recently he has developed a specialism in cultural studies, which he combines with his work on teacher education programmes. Peter has had a long and varied teaching career which has involved working in diverse institutional contexts and across different disciplinary areas. Despite this, he seems to have a strong disciplinary commitment to his 'home' discipline of sociology as a way of structuring the world intellectually, which has in part been shaped by his experience of teaching. The first class he had to teach, in a further education college, was on the family, which he had never studied:

...I also found that a useful approach was the significance of theory because I realised that – even though I had never read anything about the family - - I knew what I was going to read about the family from a Marxist perspective or from a structuralist perspective or whatever, so I felt it wasn't as challenging once I grasped that. I also thought it gave me an insight into how I would go about teaching. Because I wouldn't teach content – I wouldn't teach facts – I would teach a way of thinking.

From the beginning of his career in sociology, Peter seems to have found teaching adults an attractive activity:

... in my first year of teaching, I was teaching my full-time job and two part-time jobs and I did that specifically because I enjoyed doing it.

The growth of the sociology of education as a disciplinary focus in the 1970s had a direct impact on Peter's interest in education as an area of study, as he began to apply these ideas – both practically and through his own research – to the university adult education context in which he was now working. His academic biography shows the conjunction of his disciplinary, pedagogic and institutional interests in quite a remarkable way. Peter contributed to the development of the sociology of adult education in Britain because he was working in a university department of adult education, teaching sociology and researching adult education from a sociological perspective. Even when his work takes him first outside the academy, and then back into it in a teacher education role, his sociological understanding of both the activity of teaching and the changing subject matter permeates his discourse.

... I do teach across disciplines but I do like to think that I teach sociologically, whatever I teach – *so I teach from a particular discipline unless I'm consciously taking an interdisciplinary approach – trying to give a balanced view and become more philosophical.* But the contrast at the moment is teaching a more vocational course and teaching if you like a course for personal development and personal awareness. In both cases I teach things which are very close to their experience – *it's never remote* – so I teach things like watching the television – how to watch television, how to interpret films – *so they're things they would do anyway.*

At the same time he displays a preoccupation with what his students are thinking and experiencing which is in stark contrast to James' solipsism, and is more pronounced than Neil's 'empathy':

... in some ways it will be thinking about who they are and what *they're likely to be there for ... I've realised this year when there's a group of five or six, you can begin to think about – especially when you find out something about them – we started off with sessions on their educational biographies so you find quite a lot about them – I just think that you can now shape the reading. I mean I've got to give advice to them tonight on what to read and there's a long list of reading but I thought about who they were and what they might like to read and direct their reading accordingly and give them advice on it.*

Analysis

One obvious difference between these three teachers is the length of time they have been teaching and the route through which they entered teaching. Peter went to university and became a teacher whilst he was doing his doctorate. Neil had, in essence, transitioned into teaching from his career as a senior professional, albeit with some professional training

experience. James, like many younger teachers, has pursued a complicated 'portfolio' career, which does not give him a clear affinity with any particular discipline or occupational specialism.

Another clear distinction between the three is the extent to which they are affiliated with particular academic disciplines. Peter maintains his disciplinary identity regardless of the institutional context or of the nature of the programmes on which he teaches. His discipline permeates every aspect of his work. Neil has multiple identities: he identifies with social work practice even though he is not a social worker; he accepts social work as his home academic discipline even though he does not feel himself to be a full member; and he subscribes to adult education pedagogy. In contrast, James has, as yet, to develop any clear identity: he does not yet participate sufficiently to appropriate (Rogoff, 1995) a disciplinary or pedagogic identity for himself.

The three cases are illustrative of different stages of work socialisation in educational institutions. As Billett points out, 'workplace experiences are ... not informal, they are a product of the historical-cultural practices and situational factors that constitute the work practice and its enactment. They also shape individuals' engagement in that practice and how individuals construe and learn from what is afforded by the workplace' (Billett, 2001). The experience of many lifelong learning teachers is increasingly fragmented and individualised because of part-time teaching, weighty and bureaucratic management structures and the loss of the 'course team' ethos in a context where both content and processes in teaching are subject to more and more external determination.

For James, the teaching workplace within a further education college is offering a specific and perhaps increasingly common 'workplace pedagogy' in which he is construed as an individual performer of certain specified professional tasks – tasks which are now officially broken down into a series of compulsory teaching competences. Although he professes a 'holistic' ontology in which everything is connected and it is impossible to disconnect teaching from other aspects of life, this view of the world is inextricably bound up with his individualised conception of self:

I would say that ultimately I see myself as an individual, and that I'm doing something for me and these skills will go with me, wherever I am, and ultimately it's going to be 'James', and not teaching as a profession, that will identify me ... This is my life and I will – I will be happy.

It is ironic that the first glimmerings of a community identity which James is able to discern should come through the onerous process of external quality assurance – a process which has been widely criticised for its negative impact on both the quality of education and on professional autonomy and trust. The reason that James' team has had to pull together is because the institution is so heavily dependent on having its teaching

graded 'good' under the specific criteria currently in use – not because the process is good for teachers or for students. He is working within a context where established communities of pedagogic practice have been disrupted and transformed by the imposition of understandings and practices rooted outside pedagogy (Armstrong 2002). Since the institutional culture will shape him as much as the learning or doing of teaching, this will doubtless have implications for his developing pedagogic identity.

For Neil, there is a clear awareness of the existence of certain communities of practice. In his case they are social work as a professional practice, social work as an academic disciplinary practice and adult education as a pedagogic practice. The workplace in which he finds himself has a collective understanding of itself as an adult education community (rather than as a discipline-based department), and his previous professional career occurred in a consciously principled, bounded and service-oriented community of practice. Although he says that he does not feel himself now to be a full member of any of these communities, but a fairly peripheral member of each, it is evident that his location within university adult education has influenced his view of social work, and he identifies himself quite strongly with certain adult education values such as participation. At the same time, his social work background informs his approach to teaching. There has been, in effect, a merging of the values of different communities of practice in the development of Neil's pedagogic identity, but this is experienced by him (and, we would contend, by many other teachers) as a loss.

Neither James nor Neil has a clear or exclusive affiliation with either a disciplinary or pedagogic community, but the reasons for their peripherality or detachment are highly complex. Neil retains an affinity with discipline, and it has informed the way in which he has developed; but institutional culture has forced him to detach from that discipline. James has never been affiliated with a discipline. He has taken elements of disciplines to build up a portfolio of interests. Working within further education, he has fewer opportunities to further develop his disciplinary identity and is unlikely to be encouraged to do so, given current pedagogical practices in the sector.

Peter is a rare example of a lifelong learning teacher whose disciplinary and pedagogic identity is well-developed and integrated in his institutional context. He is able to cope with changes in the institutional context because of his long experience and the security of these identities. Peter is particularly fortunate that much of his intellectual development took place at a time when the sociology of education and the field of adult education practice were blossoming and thriving. A young lifelong learning teacher embarking on a similar career now would be hard-pressed, however, to find such a positive conjunction of discipline, institution and professional identity.

Conclusions

These three cases are neither intended to represent the range of pedagogic identities available to lifelong learning teachers, nor to be the basis for generalisation. Instead, we set out to open out the relationships between biography, institutional contexts and pedagogic and disciplinary identities by considering three contrasting individuals. Nevertheless, we can make some general observations about lifelong learning teachers and pedagogic identity to inform future research. First, individuals' biographies are highly significant in shaping pedagogic identity, not just in terms of what those individuals bring to their teaching but also in terms of their ongoing understandings of and commitments to the discipline: James's precarious identity, based on an individualised conception of self, owes much to his history as a skilled sportsman and coach; Neil's ambivalent identity arises from his sense of losing a social work practitioner identity; Peter's integrated pedagogic and disciplinary identity is tied up with his history of becoming a sociology teacher early in his life – at a propitious moment in the discipline's history - and a continuous engagement with the subject.

Second, although institutional contexts are highly significant in shaping pedagogic identities, many lifelong learning teachers are somewhat peripheral in terms of discipline (adult education) and/or in terms of employment status (part-time). Thus, despite the rhetoric about the central importance of lifelong learning, many lifelong learning teachers see themselves (and their students) as being on the edge.

Third, the learners themselves figure largely in these accounts (particularly in Neil's and Peter's stories). In the same way as we have put teachers' biographies first in our analysis, so too do lifelong learning teachers put their learners' biographies and experiences at the heart of their pedagogic thinking and interventions. This concern with the 'recipients' of lifelong learning seems to us to distinguish lifelong learning teachers' pedagogic identities from those of others (Zukas and Malcolm, 2002).

For many lifelong learning teachers, pedagogic and disciplinary identities are partial and fragmentary. But if we are seriously to address the policy desires for lifelong learning, we need to understand better the significance and inter-relationship of biography, context and discipline within their professional experience and practice.

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