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Learning through boundary-crossing: further education lecturers learning in both the university and workplace

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This paper reports on a research project that sought to gain a deeper understanding of the contribution that universities make to the professional learning of teachers. The particular case studied was a group of learners who were engaged in an in-service teacher education course for further education (FE) whilst also working as lecturers in FE colleges in Scotland. The paper develops the narrative of learning across boundaries (Saunders 2006) drawing on the work of Engeström (1987, 2001). The claim made is that the learning that takes place across the boundary of the workplace and university has the possibility of helping learners to resolve issues that the workplace alone does not provide them with the resources to resolve.

Cet article fait un compte-rendu sur un projet de recherche dont le but était d'approfondir les connaissances sur la contribution des universités à la formation professionelle des professeurs. Le cas particulier qu'on a étudié était un groupe d'apprenants qui ont suivi un cours de formation d'enseignement professionnelle en travaillent commme professeurs dans des centres d'enseignement profession-nel. L'article se déroule la narration d'apprentissage à travers les frontières (Saunders 2006) et d'après les recherches d'Engstrom (1987, 2001). On prétend que la connaissance qu'on a produit à travers des frontières du lieu de travail et de l'université pourrait aider les étudiants à résoudre des problèmes qu'ils ne pourraient pas résoudre en travaillant seulement.

Este trabajo presenta un proyecto de investigación que ha buscado una comprensión más detallada sobre la contribución aportada por la universidad al aprendizaje profesional del profesorado. El trabajo ha estudiado un grupo de alumnos que participaron en un curso avanzado de educación mientras trabajaban como profesores en institutos de enseñanza en Escocia. El estudio desarrolla la temática del aprendizaje a través de límites (Saunders 2006) inspirándose en el trabajo de Engeström (1987, 2001). La reivindicación hecha es que el aprendizaje que tiene lugar a través del límite del lugar de trabajo y la universidad tiene la posibilidad de ayudar a los alumnos en resolver asuntos en que el lugar de trabajo por si solo no puede proveerles con los recursos para su resolución.

Dieser Artikel berichtet die Resultate eines Forschungsprojektes, dass zu verstehen versuchte, was Universitäten zum professionellen Lernen von Lehrern beitragen. Ein Gruppe von Studenten wurder untersucht, die in Schottland an Berufsschulen unterrichteten und gleichzeitig an einem Weiterbildungskurs fuer Lehrkräfte an der Universität teilnahmen. Der Artikel ist auf der Arbeit von Engeström basiert und konzentriert sich auf Lernen, das über Grenzen hinweg stattfindet (Saunders) (in unserem Fall Arbeitsplatz und Universität). Wir behaupten, dass das solches Lernen grössere Moeglichkeiten bietet, Probleme zu lösen, als Lernen, welches nur am Arbeitsplatz stattfindet.

Keywords: activity theory; expansive learning; identity; professional learning

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Introduction

This paper explores the professional learning that takes place across the boundary of the workplace and the university. It seeks to establish a deeper understanding of the role that universities play in professional learning. Such a deeper understanding is important at a time when professional education, for both initial professional development and for continuing professional development, is increasing in profile in universities. The paper provides a justification, based on a particular approach to learning theory, for a role for universities in professional education. A number of authors have provided constructions of the nature of professional learning conducted in both university and workplace settings (e.g. Schön 1983, 1987; Lave and Wenger 1991; Eraut 1994; Lave 1996; Engeström 1987, 2001; Wenger 1998). The approach adopted in the research that underpins this paper was founded on notions of learning developed by Engeström, who specifically addressed issues of learning across different activity systems.

The particular case used to explore learning across the workplace and university boundary is a group of learners who were undertaking a university-based, in-service, initial teacher education course for further education whilst being simultaneously employed as further education lecturers. Narratives provided by these learners allow claims to be made that they gained access to resources in the university that helped them in their professional roles but which were not available to them in the workplace.

The research study

The source of data used in this paper was a set of 26 assignments produced by students on the final module of a further education teacher education course in a Scottish university. The assignment was designed to be both reflective and prospective. It was reflective in that students were expected to re-address aims and goals for learning that they had set in the first module of the course, and prospective in that course participants were expected to identify future development needs. In the first module the students had reflected on their learning to date, they discussed with the tutors models of reflective learning, and they were briefed on techniques of reflective learning such as keeping a journal, and analysing critical incidents. They were encouraged throughout the course to keep a journal in which they reflected on their experiences both in the workplace and as students. This journal was used as a resource to write the final assignment. All the course participants were practising lecturers, who had between one and eight years of teaching experience. Fourteen were male and 12 were female and they were drawn from a wide range of subject and professional areas taught in FE colleges.

This final assignment was seen to be a relevant and valid source of data for this study since it was, in part, designed to address the same issues as this study, namely the experience of a university course of teacher education for further education lecturers and how the course related to their workplace. However, since it was a document not initially produced for an independent researcher, but for a tutor as a course assignment, the possibility was that students could have over-claimed learning benefits of involvement in the university. It is likely that since this was insider research, that the possibility of over-claiming could also have occurred if the data had been generated through alternative methods such as interviews or questionnaire completion. The original assignments were produced by lecturers who completed their courses between 2000 and 2002. The assignment documents

were given to the researcher voluntarily after a request was made to 80 students who had completed the course. The former students were given full information on the purpose of the request and of the way in which their narratives would be analysed.

The analysis of the accounts used categories derived from Yrjö Engeström's contemporary activity theory (Engeström 1987, 2001) which focuses on understanding learning that takes place across boundaries.

Processes of learning across boundaries

Contemporary activity theory forms one strand of the framework within which Engeström develops his theory of expansive learning. He suggests that contemporary approaches to activity theory form a third generation from the original approach in which Vygotsky (1978) formulated his model of the subject-object relationship through mediating artefacts. Vygotsky's pupil and collaborator Alexei Leont'ev (1978, 1981) moved activity theory on a generation when he set the subject, object, mediating artefact nexus into a wider social context. He expanded the unit of analysis to include a wider activity system in which the community, rules and procedures, and the division of labour were considered. Third generation activity theory moves beyond the single activity system and takes as its unit of analysis at least two interacting activity systems. The focus of Engeström on learning across boundaries between activity systems suggested that it might have leverage in examining professional learning across the boundary of workplace and university. Figure 1 illustrates Engeström's model.

The texts produced by the respondents were analysed for units of meaning that corresponded to elements identified in the activity system triangle, i.e. subject; emergent object; tools and concepts; community; division of labour; and rules and procedures. An important feature of the analysis is that the participants on the teacher education course were involved in two relevant activity systems, the
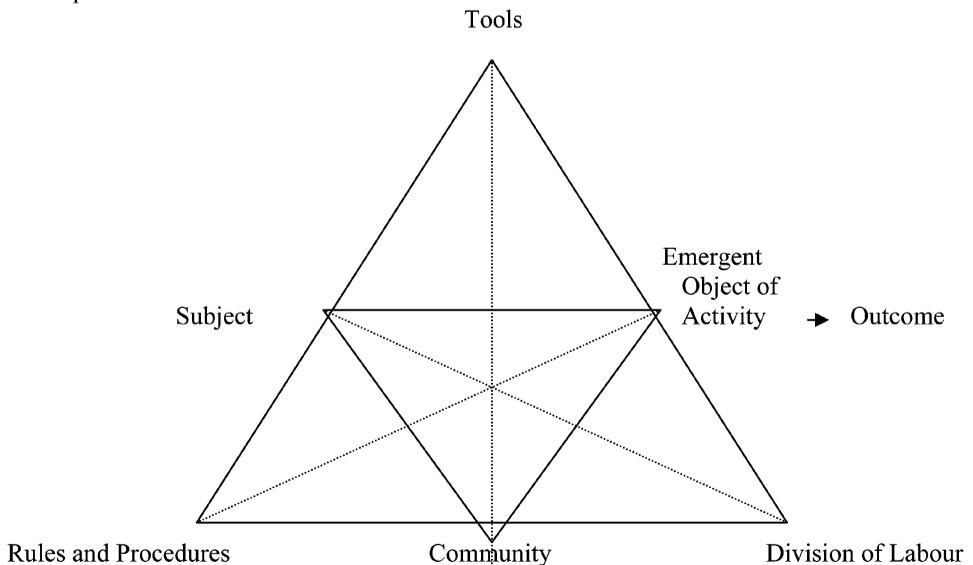

Figure 1. Engeström's activity system diagram

university activity system in which they were students and the workplace activity system in which they were teachers. Their perceptions of the interplay between these two activity systems leads into the second source that contributed to Engeström's model of expansive learning. Bateson's (1972) concept of level III learning that arises out of double bind situations forms a central theme in Engeström's work. Engeström suggests that routes out of the double bind can potentially be found across the boundaries between activity systems. Moving from one activity system to another can provide one with the resources to resolve issues.

These resources are available in the second activity system because it utilises different tools and concepts, different rules and procedures, has a different division of labour, and provides different community relationships. Having access to these different resources provides the opportunity for expansive learning. This expansive learning of Engeström's is similar to what Freire (1996) and Mezirow (1991) call transformative learning and what Rogers (1969) refers to as significant learning. Engeström's particular contribution is in pointing out the importance of boundary crossing to expansive, transformative, or significant learning.

Consideration of certain aspects of the activity systems such as the rules and procedures, the division of labour, and aspects of the community are reported upon in much less detail than the categories of subject, emergent object, and tools and concepts. This is the result of drawing on the reports of the participants the main source of data. This research is looking at constructed accounts of the experience of learners. The learners did not make a great deal of rules and procedures, division of labour, or community in their accounts.

Who am I? – Identity of the participants

The narratives provided by the participants were interrogated to identify how they represent themselves as subjects in the two activity systems of the university and workplace (and very occasionally in other activity systems they refer to as being important, e,g, family, or sporting activities).

The following elements were identified from the narratives:

1. subject or discipline taught by the participant;
2. name of college or workplace;
3. time spent in teaching;
4. job role or special responsibilities (e.g. course director or senior lecturer);
5. contractual status (part-time or full-time);
6. qualifications held;
7. job security;
8. membership of other significant activity systems;
   a. prior careers sometimes related to change in identity;
   b. roles outside the workplace:

      - family
      - other work

9. attitudes or feelings at the start of the course;
10. change of role on starting the course:

    - teacher – student.

The following accounts are typical of the way in which descriptions that included the above elements were framed.

> My name is [name] and I am currently employed as a lecturer in Mechanical Engineering and Mathematics at [name of college]. At the time of entering employment as a lecturer, mechanical engineering was a subject in its own right. After restructuring the Mathematics, Science and Automobile departments were added to Engineering to make the present department. I have worked in lecturing for the past seven years. (From R1's[1] account)

Even in this short, factual account of self, elements of the wider activity system in which R1 works, creep in. Engeström asserts that individual learning can only be understood in the social and historical contexts within which it takes place. This is illustrated in this first account. R1 had started as a lecturer in mechanical engineering in a mechanical engineering department. As the department had expanded so had R1's teaching remit. In a later extract R1 states:

> My aims are … to ensure employment for the future until I decide that it is time to move on to pastures new. To facilitate this I am trying to develop the engineering and mathematics in [college] to the next level. The existing courses need restructured and developed to make them more interesting and viable. The [teacher education course] has in some ways helped in my view of this and has given me some ideas of how improvements can be accomplished.

Taken together, these two short extracts help us to see R1 as a person in a social and historical context. In Engeström's terms aspects of the individual, the activity system and history are all illustrated as is expansive learning through moving between the workplace and the university with gaining ideas from the latter to help in development work in the former.

R2 was a participant employed in an organization which reviewing the scale of its operations. This clearly affected her position and her view of her work.

> In 1995 I graduated from [university] with a Bachelor of Arts in Applied Social Studies with Behavioural Sciences and undertook employment as a residential childcare officer. I am currently employed as a 'Course Co-ordinator' within the charitable training organization. My role is to develop and teach Personal Social Development and Job Seeking Skills to a variety of disaffected, disengaged and disadvantaged groups, depending on contracts, which are obtained. Presently I am working with students who are taking part in the mandatory 13 week 'New Deal 25+ Intensive Action Period' (IAP) for the long term unemployed. The course is part of a governmental pilot programme, which [the organization] successfully bid to deliver. The organization is presently going through a number of changes stemming from a dramatic reduction in core funding that will be received for the next financial year. This has had a grave impact on my employment security. One month ago I received a six-month contract, however further political developments have raised serious questions on the security of this contract. Therefore I am currently seeking new employment.

This situation of working within an organisation under some financial threat and which relied on insecure funding and student retention clearly affected R2's experiences. She recalls two critical incidents from her practice in which she claims to be *'someone who in difficult circumstances is unable to accept that someone else may have a different outlook'*.

Critical incident

> James became verbally abusive to myself. I sat down and tried to defuse the situation by calmly speaking to James. He then began to throw furniture around the room in a

threatening and aggressive manner. Further unsuccessful verbal attempts were made to de-escalate the situation. I requested support from my senior to assist me in removing James. My superior informed me that James would not be leaving and questioned my decision to issue such a request in front of James.

By the end of the incident I was upset, not by the incident itself, but by the way I was treated by my superior. I felt humiliated and unsupported.

Extract from reflective log 'stress diary'

I was worried that the team leader had not chosen to inform me of the clients alcohol induced state. I phoned him and asked if he had been aware that the client had been drinking and he admitted that the client had told him he had one drink. I stated that I believed it would be helpful if a committee meeting was held, where the group rules including ones ruling out alcohol consumption (which the clients had devised themselves) would be reiterated. He ordered that this would not take place, and that I should take no further action.

I was very distressed and broke down in front of a colleague. I was taken to the pub to go over the situation, did not get home until 8pm, spoke briefly to my husband then went for a sleepless and tearful night.

These incidents illustrate a further feature of Engeström's expansive learning model. This is that it is difficult, conflictual or paradoxical situations that offer the most potential for learning. When tensions need to be resolved significant steps can be taken in knowing more or knowing better. In other parts of her account R2 uses concepts and frameworks from modules in stress management and transactional analysis to help her to make sense of the situations described above. Thus she gained access to resources in the university that were not available to her in the work activity system. Being 'taken to the pub' did not resolve the tensions or provide a framework for understanding.

In the two accounts already cited, job security or insecurity was a key element in framing identity. The following accounts cite other significant activity systems in which the participants are involved, or have been involved, as being important to their identity or in Engeström's terms to them as a subject. Other activity systems cited include previous career and roles outside the teaching workplace such as family or concurrent jobs other than lecturing.

The influence of previous career on his development as a teacher introduced R10's account.

After several years working as a design engineer, I have come into teaching late in my working life. Designing civil engineering projects was very satisfying, but the recession in the construction industry of the early 1990s led to redundancy from two jobs in the space of 12 months. My early efforts at teaching were rather unsuccessful as I tended to go at the speed of industry, and I soon discovered that students needed to be taken through the subject matter more slowly. It also became apparent that what interested me was not always what was in the module descriptor and enthusiasm for the subject had to be tempered by disciplined approach to what the students needed to know.

In the extract above we see a tension between R10's history as a design engineer and the new social context or activity system in which he finds himself as a teacher. He learns to operate in the new context by modifying his practice. He is expanding by having a wider repertory range from which to draw in his practice as a teacher.

R18 also came in lecturing from another career. This is very common for further education lecturers. In the following extract from her account she locates her current self as subject in an extended history that covers previous jobs, family and education. Her final comments illustrate the transformative or expansive effect that undertaking the course has had on her. Although in this section Engeström's category of subject is being explored, R18's account relates her changing identity as emergent object.

> In my younger years I was more interested in working rather than furthering my qualifications, I had obtained the appropriate qualifications for the position, which I wanted to pursue. I then left employment to bring up my two children in the most important years of their lives, their foundation years. However, when my children became of an age that I felt was a suitable time for me to go back to employment I felt that I needed to expand my qualifications, this then led me to go to college and obtain a SNC, HNC and HND in computing. I really enjoyed the feeling of motivation, which came from the studies. At this time I still did not envisage myself as a lecturer, I had always thought my position in life was a secretary. Therefore when I finished my studies I went back to work as a secretary but I was then approached by the college to take up lecturing duties. This was very much on a part-time basis three hours per week, which progressed steadily as I have mentioned earlier. I am now a part-time permanent member of staff, however I am hoping that in the future this will be increased to full-time permanent.

In this extract current teaching job, previous career, family, and education are all brought into a brief but rich narrative account of expansive learning. A woman who thought her 'position in life was a secretary' through education and opportunity became a lecturer and someone interested in continuing with her education. Six other participants offered similar accounts of work, education as a mature student, and entry to lecturing.

For some of the participants there was a tension between their role as a lecturer and either their previous career role or other current career roles that they have. R14 was one of two social work lecturers who perceived of a tension in the way he saw his identity.

> Whilst I have been immersed in Further Education for some six years now, up until recently I retained a very parochial attitude in two ways. Firstly I remained a Social Worker that gave lectures, rather than a lecturer in social work. There are some benefits to this way of thinking, but it ignored the reality of my position and role in the overall picture. This precluded me from involvement in certain areas through my ignorance and/or prejudice and therefore had a detrimental effect on the quality of service that I offered. Secondly, when forced into the educationalist role, I saw no further than [my own college]. This restrictive viewpoint albeit unwittingly and unintentional, precluded me from taking a full and active role in the provision of services to the students.

R14 in this extract clearly recognizes his unexpanded self both in terms of being captured within restricted perspectives of a particular job role and a particular college. Getting out of the activity system in which he practiced expanded his outlook. He reports the freeing up of his perspective on his identity that resulted from undertaking the course in the University.

Feelings of insecurity, lack of self-esteem, or self-doubt were expressed by a significant minority of the participants. R7, for example, writes of feelings of a severe lack of confidence in her self as a teacher and of self-doubt and feeling overwhelmed. R11 writes of being self-critical and of focusing on her own weaknesses. R2 writes of a lack of self-confidence and frustration at her own lack of perfection. R24 discusses both her perceived strengths and weaknesses. The former she lists as enthusiasm for

her subject, a high level of motivation, and a wealth of practical experience on which to draw. Yet in spite of these positive attributes she also confesses to a lack of self-confidence and a need to develop further planning and teaching skills. R15 wrote that she was uncomfortable with technical aids to teaching and that she had a lack of assertiveness. R4 reported feeling *'looked down upon'* as an unqualified part-time lecturer and R16 was *'apprehensive at the start of the course'*. Reports of negative feelings represent just over a quarter of the accounts.

In summary, the participants then described themselves in a variety of ways. Their subject or discipline, time in teaching, the name of their college, their qualifications and job roles were most commonly mentioned. However, other elements such as other significant activity systems, attitudes and feelings, job security, and becoming a student were discussed in interesting ways. Overall a picture emerges of a diverse group with a rich range of backgrounds, people whose prior experience of higher education was often as mature students, and people who occasionally offered us a glimpse of their lives beyond work. It has not been possible in this section to stick to a discussion of participants as subjects without relating this category to other categories such as emergent object, community and tools and concepts. The next section will discuss emergent object in more detail.

Emergent objects – Participants' intentions and outcomes

In the previous section the wide range of prior experiences, subject areas, job roles, and roles outside work of the respondents were discussed. As might be expected from a group of people with such a diverse range of previous experience, the outcomes of the course were expressed in a variety of different terms. Engeström writes of the emergent object of an historical activity, clearly identifying that in processes involving people there is usually a divergence between the planned goal and the actual outcome. This was the case for those respondents who discussed both their goals at the start of the course and the outcome of the course for them.

A number of broad categories of outcomes emerged from the narratives provided by the respondents. These were:

- assisting in a process of personal transformation and change of identity;
- providing ideas or strategies that could be used in the work setting;
- building self confidence and self esteem;
- having practice confirmed or validated;
- making sense of their work and workplace relationships;
- achieving formal professional recognition.

The first two of the above relate to carrying learning or knowledge across the boundaries between activity systems or communities of practice in different ways. The respondents who reported that they experienced personal transformation, change of identity, or improved self-confidence claimed that they were able, as result of these changes, to act differently in their workplaces. In the case of the second bullet-point, the reported changes as teachers followed a more traditional conception of learning new techniques in one setting and applying them in another setting. This transfer sometimes involved reinterpretation and adaptation of what was presented to them or modelled on the course but the actual processes of reinterpretation and

adaptation, although prevalent in the literature on professional development (see for example Eraut 1994), were not mentioned by respondents.

R1, R2, R3, R7, R9, R12 and R14 all wrote of personal transformations experienced through the course. R1 for example wrote of the importance of learning, study and development to a sense of self. R2 commented on the value of course-based exercises to the construction of a positive self and of the role of the course in helping her to examine personal and professional values and the conflicts between them. R3 reported an enhanced perception of self-efficacy. R7 indicated that she experienced a significant change of perspective and R9 wrote that he had assumed a new identity. R12 also suggested that a particular module on the course had helped her in a change of identity. Both R9 and R12 had recently moved from other professions into education. R14 change in self-perception from social worker to lecturer was cited above. These respondents clearly perceive of themselves as having been transformed by aspects of the university course. Moving out of their base activity system or community of practice into the activity system of the university course helped them to experience transformation or, in Engeström's terms, expansive learning.

These seven respondents reported the clearest personal transformations; changes in who they were. Other respondents reported transformations in what they did; changes in their practice, their routine activities.

R1 for example reported that using theory helped in the delivery of lessons. Both R3 and R4 wrote of the application of concepts and ideas into practice. R6 claimed direct use of activities modelled on the programme and also applied ideas from guided reading. R7 and R8 wrote that they applied techniques and theories into practice. R10 gave examples of several ways in which his teaching practice changed including using objective tests, making use of group work in teaching, being prepared to be flexible and improved questioning of students. R13 wrote that the course 'equipped' him with 'more teaching approaches'. R19 wrote that the course helped him to develop effective teaching strategies and to improve lesson delivery. R26 wrote of examples of direct application of techniques and strategies.

The remaining categories of outcomes or emergent objects sometimes supported one or other of these major categories. For example improved confidence or self-esteem sometimes supported a transformed identity but other times provided the confidence to try a new approach.

Improved self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-esteem or enthusiasm were mentioned directly by nine respondents. In addition to those listed above R1 stated that a particular module *'rekindled [his] enthusiasm for the lecturing/teaching post that [he] holds'*. R3 reported on the positive effects of being able to deal with critical incidents as a result of work done on the course. She wrote that this enhanced her *'perception of self-efficacy as a teacher'*. R4 reflected that what he learned on the course gave him *'confidence and instilled a new enthusiasm'*. In one of the reports that related improved self-confidence to the tutorial practice visits, R7 claimed that the reports and comments given by the visiting tutor had been reassuring and had *'combated feelings of self-doubt and low esteem'*. These reported statements illustrate once again the role of the university in transforming the students in their practice. In two cases the respondents reported negative relationships with managers that were transformed by having self-esteem built on the course.

Sometimes improved self-confidence was mentioned in connection with confirmation or validation received of current practice. R22 had his confidence boosted by a tutorial visit that confirmed his practice. He reported that the visit left him *'oozing with confidence and feeling that [he] was going to enjoy the course. Any doubts about [himself] were dispelled after this visit'*. R1 had his practice confirmed not by a tutorial visit but by being introduced to texts that allowed him to provide an underpinning justification for practice. It could be argued that transformative learning has not taken place if existing practice has simply been confirmed. For example R18 wrote that she did not feel that the course had changed her teaching strategies but that the tutorial visits had reassured her that she was competent in her employment. However, it is argued here that learning is not simply in changes in the actions taken but also in attitudes and feelings towards those actions. The reports cited here clearly point to transformed attitudes towards personal, professional practice.

The overlap between categories identified is illustrated in this extract from R26's text in which she reports on the use of theory, not to confirm practice, but to make sense of her practice. She wrote:

> I found the readings and the research into the various theories of teaching and learning quite fascinating. I was able to identify that I tend to follow the Constructivist Theory… I feel this has a significant bearing on the way I teach… The word 'justification' was dominant throughout [this module] and I now find that I question constantly with students and peers alike.

There is clear overlap in this extract with the category of tools and resources but it is sometimes difficult to separate outcomes or emergent objects from the tools or concepts through which these objects are gained. R20 reported a more mundane understanding in that the course helped him to have a better understanding of college systems and procedures for guidance and support of students.

The last category of emergent object is improved professional recognition. Two respondents mentioned the attraction of becoming a member of the General Teaching Council for Scotland. One respondent who is currently part-time reported that he feels *'looked down'* upon as a result of this status and felt that having a teaching qualification would alleviate this. Since completing the course this respondent now has a full-time, permanent post and in a private communication with the researcher partially attributed his success in gaining this new post to having a teaching qualification.

So far Engeström's categories of subject and emergent object have been considered. The subjects achieve the objects through tools and concepts within a social setting. The tools and concepts and social setting can be seen as resources that help the subjects achieve their object. The next two sections illustrate resources mentioned by respondents. The first gives examples of statements outlining tools and conceptual frameworks and the second gives examples of community resources. The latter includes aspects of the division of labour and organisational rules and procedures.

Tools and conceptual frameworks

The respondents reported a wide range of resources to help in their development as teachers in post-school education that were provided as part of their course at the

university. They also reported resources that were available to them outside the university, for example in their workplaces. Resources available through the university included conceptual resources such as theoretical frameworks, models of reflection, and guided reading in journals or books. These conceptual resources were sometimes supported by tools such as learning journals or assignments. These resources correspond to tools and concepts in Engeström's framework. Other resources correspond to the community category in the activity theory framework. Examples of such resources that were mentioned frequently by respondents were tutors and fellow students in the university and colleagues and students in the workplace.

The reflective or learning log that course participants were asked to keep was seen by some respondents to be a concrete resource that assisted them to make sense of their professional development. R2 cites the importance of her reflective log.

> I was aware that keeping a reflective log was believed by the tutors to be a useful tool, but did not understand why. However, after changing employment to another town, I found myself avidly scribbling whilst travelling to and from work. What was initially intended to allow me to evaluate my professional and educational development became an integral part of my ongoing personal as well as professional development. I found it to be a crucial stress-minimizing and relieving tool as well as an excellent method of planning for, and preventing, potentially difficult situations.

In the case cited above after initially viewing the reflective log as something that course tutors thought might help, this course participant ended up using her log as a means of personal coping and transformation.

> R3 reported that 'Keeping a record of reflection [in a log] not only helps articulate the meaning of complex experiences and helps in their analysis, but also aids in the linking of theory to practical application.' In this excerpt both sensemaking of experiences and applying theory to practice are seen to be assisted by the process of keeping a journal.

Not all the participants reported experiences as positive as those referred to above. R6 sets out his justification for keeping a log and then, with a candour that underpins the authenticity of his report, he confesses to being lax in maintaining the journal as comprehensively as he would have wished. He ends his discussion of the log by writing that it did not have much utility in his practice but did help him to complete the assignment. This is an example of using resources provided on the course simply towards the certification process in an instrumentalist manner.

In the extracts referred to above a range of the different ways of using the reflective log as a tool are discussed, from the role in the process of personal transformation and identity creation, through its use in helping the theory to practice link, finally to its use as a resource for assignment completion.

Conceptual frameworks such as theoretical models were also cited by course participants as being useful. One module that received a great deal of praise from students was the Transactional Analysis optional module. In the following excerpt R7 describes how she found the concepts beneficial to understanding situations at work.

> What has become increasingly evident from the process of reflection is the inclination of some students to blame either others, or myself for their own mistakes. This is a behaviour, which is, admittedly, difficult to understand, but one, which has greatly influenced the new teaching and learning approaches now adopted. Of paramount importance in the change has been my acquired knowledge of Berne's model of Transactional Analysis supported from evidence of an analysis of group participative

patterns by using a version of Quinn's sociograms. What has, however, been the most important lesson from the study of TA has been that it is OK for me to say NO.

This extract illustrates neatly the ways that theories in the public domain are perceived to be *'acquired knowledge'* which can then be used to understand aspects of practice. This improved understanding of practice in turn leads to changes in practice (saying No). R11 also found ideas which she had read about on the course to be able to be used in her practice.

> I had read David Jacques (1994) Learning in Groups where he discusses groups operating on two levels:
>
> • the task dimension
> • the social dimension
>
> I used this as a basis for this tutorial visit and it worked very well, and I have introduced it into many of my class situations since, I feel it enhances the learning experience for the students. This course has taught me that many different modes can be used to enhance the lecturer's performance.

R11 claims some stability in the changes she made in working with groups in that she worked differently in *'many of [her] class situations since'*. Other uses of theory or concepts reported by participants were to gain an understanding of their own behaviour, to gain an understanding of the behaviour of others such as students or managers, to assist them to change their own behaviour and to gain a more positive self-image through such understandings.

Learning across and within communities

Unsurprisingly the main resource mentioned by participants coming from the communities or activity systems in which they work is other people. Other people help in several ways; they act as sounding boards or discussants when issues need to be talked through, they act as both positive and negative role models (both of which can be sources of learning), and they can provide positive reinforcement of practice. Other people can also have a destructive effect on people's attempts to develop in their practice by failing to support colleagues or by offering criticism in ways that are hurtful and unhelpful. All of these were illustrated in the narratives submitted.

A further aspect of communities is their rules and procedures. Once again these can have both positive and negative effects on development. The strong economically driven, managerialist cultures of contemporary further education colleges were seen by some participants to be a barrier to development. Some of these issues are illustrated below in extracts from the narratives.

R3 discusses the importance of talking things through with colleagues.*'Critical incidents were also recorded, but my usual practice is to talk these out with colleagues for reassurance and advice, which is often forgotten'.* This is a good example of situated learning, of discussing work-related incidents, at work, with work colleagues to try to gain ideas for progress. This same general process was reported by R4:

> I have learned this by talking to colleagues and looking for tips and advice as to how they do it. It is a more professional approach and also means that classes in the new block are well prepared as time is freed.

A colleague I have used as a sounding board for certain incidents and situations once informed me that he thought I was learning how to 'manage a class'. I was interested in this phrase and what it means. The mention of management in education suggests hierarchies and little to do with teaching. In this context it is more to do with being well-prepared, being in control in the class, evaluating, and then repeating the process – being a reflective practitioner.

Support from tutors on the course was also cited as contributing to professional development. For example the following comment by R5 indicates help from a university tutor.

One point raised was the intervention of the tutor. At times I have difficulty standing back and until [the tutor] pointed this out to me I was unaware of it.

I have learned to help students reflect and analyse their experiences, set achievable goals rather than me identifying where they might need to improve. I find that this motivates students and brings intrinsic rewards of building self-esteem.

Both positive and negative modelling of teaching were cited by participants as contributing to their development. R2 recalls how being a student again provided a different lens through which to view teaching.

The expression 'when the shoe is on the other foot' holds very true, and I am now aware once again how it feels being the student as opposed to the educator. The negative and positive aspects of differing teaching practices and methods appeared magnified. The importance of variety and breaks were emphasised. The frustration caused by long complex lectures or seemingly pointless information effected [*sic*] every member of the class. I now continuously correct my practices and methods in an attempt to provide more effective and humane lessons.

The changed division of labour as R2 moved from her work activity system, where she was a teacher, to the university activity system, where she is a student, is clear in this excerpt as are the transformational or expansive learning opportunities that this boundary crossing presents. R15 put a more positive spin on the same issue:

Module 1 was an example of a critical incident for me because of the change of role from teacher to learner made me reflect on the experience of being a student and has helped me to empathise more with my own students.

R25 also praises the modelling of the tutors and the effects this had on his development.

One of the most impressive parts of the Certificate of Education Course was the range of learning styles and teaching strategies. If we look at the course as a whole, we had a different lecturer for most subjects, but they all used a range of teaching strategies. By using a variety of strategies this encouraged me to address my three domains, cognitive, affective, psychomotor.

Rules and procedures were often cited as hampering development as in this example from R1:

The first entry in my reflective log is about the time allocated by the centre that employs me. The course, for the first time was attended on a day-release basis. This meant that in between classroom work the learners went back to their places of employment to carry on with their duties for four working days. In our case no allowance was given for attendance at [university] and no time allowed for study. In some cases I did not even have preparation time for classes. The outcome of this was that all of the ongoing work for my job and [the course] had to be done at home or not at all. This resulted in poorly planned classes, stressed lecturer, and resentment at not being given the same conditions as previous members of staff who attended the course.

This extract illustrates not just workplace rules and procedures but also the way that changes in university rules and procedures when combined with workplace rules and procedures affect the experience of the student. This is an example of some real tensions.

Conclusion

Engeström (2001) represents expansive learning as taking place between activity systems. He is particularly concerned with groups of professionals from different professions who work together to solve problems that are relevant to all of them. Their expansive learning takes place in 'boundary clinics' in which these professionals meet. An example of such boundary clinics would be case conferences to discuss the treatment or care plan for a particular set of clinical or social work cases. The process involved in this research is rather different. The subjects of the learning move out of one activity system into another. There is minimal involvement of other members of their work place activity system in the University (teacher education) activity system. However constructions of expansive learning are still represented in the narrative accounts provided by the respondents.

The analysis reported in this paper suggests that in moving from the workplace activity system to the university system provides course participants with a range of resources that help them to learn expansively. These resources include tools and concepts in the form of the reflective journal, public propositional theory, ideas, and strategies for teaching, a community of teachers and fellow students from whom they can learn, and a set of rules and procedures conducive to development. These resources are represented by participants as being used in a variety of ways – to change identity, to acquire new strategies for teaching, for making sense of both their practice and their workplace, and for helping them to develop self-esteem. They represent real value-added that universities can give to teacher education.

Note

1. The identifiers R1 to R26 were given to the texts in the order that they were submitted to the researcher. These are used to maintain confidentiality in this account.

Notes on contributor

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