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Narrative Explorations into the Professional Development of Lecturers teaching Higher Education in English Further Education Colleges

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The diversification of settings in which higher education is delivered has resulted in a growing proportion of lecturers entering teaching from professional backgrounds. This is a challenging transition as lecturers are rarely given the space to consider the implications of this move on their identities and practice styles. Writing is recognised as a powerful methodology through which individuals can make sense of experiences, and conceptualize them in light of historical, theoretical and social perspectives. In this paper we consider the experiences of 10 college lecturers who used writing to explore this transition as part of a professional development initiative to promote their writing skills. They were providing higher education in further education colleges across South-West England. This project ran over two years, involving a yearlong professional development intervention and a subsequent evaluation. Over this time the lecturers produced a number of written pieces. We present the different styles and forms of writing used, and how these engaged with their emergent voices and growing sense of legitimacy. We highlight how writing can provide a reflexive medium and assist in the identification of developmental goals, something particularly valuable during professional transitions. [189 words]

Writing and the academy

Writing is a powerful tool within the academy, integral to the practice of *being* an academic (Grant and Knowles, 2000). It represents the means by which academics publicise their ideas within a community of peers, obtain research funds and demonstrate their expert knowledge (McGrail, Rickard and Jones, 2006). Internationally increased importance has been attached to the writing and publication of academic papers as a measure of the quality of research undertaken by universities (McGrail et al., 2006; Morss & Murray, 2001). Yet despite the significance of writing (and also perhaps because of it) writing is recognised as one of the

most challenging aspects of the academic enterprise (ref). In order to address this, initiatives are being targeted at academics to promote their successful engagement with writing and publication (e.g. Brown, 2009; Murray and MacKay, 1998). Commonly these initiatives involve an element of retreat to remove participants from the pressures that can inhibit writing and involve activities to promote both the production and wider sharing of writing (McGrail et al., 2006; Murray & Newton, 2009). For more experienced academics there is a tendency for the emphasis on creating time and space for writing (e.g. Grant and Knowles, 2000), whereas for newer researchers they tend to follow a developmental trajectory, where individuals are brought together for a period of time and benefit from sharing in experience of senior colleagues (Caffarella and Barnett, 2000). There is growing evidence that the more successful writing development initiatives are those that run over an extended time period (e.g. Boice, 1987; Torrance et al., 1993; Morss & Murray, 2001; Murray & MacKay, 1998; Boud, 1999), as Murray (2002: 230) describes:

> "Accounts of writers' experiences confirm that the route to development is not the one-off workshop, but a process that may take three months or three years."

Given the growing importance of writing initiatives we thought it was timely to report on one targeted at promoting the professional development of a relatively new group of Higher Education (HE) professionals - the HE in Further Education (FE) college lecturer. These are a growing group of academics that have a remit to teaching HE outside of the traditional university-based setting in FE colleges, which are perceived as bringing education to a diverse student body (Parry 2009). This is a group which to date has received limited attention from the academic development community, not only in terms of enhancing their writing skills but more widely in terms of general professional development (Turner & Carpenter, 2012). Therefore we sought to design an intervention that would address some of the professional development needs of the HE in FE lecturers identified in the published literature (e.g. Anderson et al., 2003; Mason et al., 2010). A series of workshops and activities were used to familiarise them with writing for an academic audience. We will demonstrate how this resulted in a space for the development of writing. We also were able to explore the idea of writing as a method of inquiry, where the knowledge and experiences of these lecturers were examined in a critical and exploratory way through writing (Bolton, 2006; Burchell and Dyson, 2000; Richardson, 2001). Therefore in this paper we seek build

upon Murray's (2002) observation of the recognised benefits of sustained writing workshops on individuals writing development, however, we seek to build on this by using the writing group participants' writing to provide an insight into how this was achieved.

Theorising writing development

The use of writing as a research tool is a relatively recent innovation, treated with caution by some (Peseta, 2007). Written narratives are seen as highly personal, celebrating the individual but having limited value more widely (Peseta, 2007). However, as Bochner (2000) and Richardson & St. Pierre (2000) have recognised, writing can be used as a method of inquiry that allows individuals to examine the self and produce meaning in relation to the context in which they operate. This reflects the fact that the specific social and historical perspectives that shape individuals' actions inform this process of making meaning through writing. Written accounts can provide insights into aspects of the self rarely articulated through other research mediums, revealing knowledge and experiences that may remain beyond the conscious mind (Richardson, 2001). This makes writing an appropriate medium through which to examine professional and, subsequently, identity development – a process that results from the interaction of a range of social, biographical and contextual factors (Stronach et al., 2002). An individual's identity is dynamic, evolving as their career shifts and develops, changing in response to structural and cultural influences (Stronach et al., 2002). Factors such as an individuals knowledge, the skills they posses and experiences they bring with them, and the ways these interact with the professional context in which they operate as well as their perceptions of their role shape identity development (Stronach et al., 2002). The acts of reflection and questioning integral to writing can therefore stimulate on-going development of professional practice and identity, as these factors are considered explicitly through this methodology (Attard and Amour, 2005; Burchell and Dyson, 2000). It can also provide a mechanism through which the anxieties and frustrations associated with identity development can be voiced, used for reflection, analysis and learning.

The professional context of the HE in FE lecturer

HE in FE is an established feature of the landscape of English HE, however, until relatively recently, it represented a minority of provision (Parry, 2009). Since 2000, HE delivered in

FE colleges has been the focus of the expansion in HE in England. This is a consequence of the perceived accessibility of FE colleges to a broad spectrum of society. FE colleges are positioned in local communities and draw students from a range of socio-economic profiles (Edward et al., 2007). They deliver academic, vocational and recreational courses to a student body ranging from school-aged students, to those on work placements and those returning to education (Gleeson et al., 2005). The profile of FE colleges means they are regularly used by policymakers to achieve change, with FE lecturers seen as the "last-link in the policy chain" (Edward et al., 2007: 158). This has resulted in a target driven system, with the achievement of students determining a colleges' funding (Gleeson et al., 2005). This has created in an environment characterised by change, where FE lecturers are expected to adapt to a diverse student population and they are required to reconcile their own professional values with the priorities of the college (Edward et al., 2007). In the context of this study, the Dearing Report placed FE at the forefront of plans to widen participation in English HE, particularly with respect to the aim of engaging 50% of 18-30 year-olds in some form of HE (NCIHE, 1997). This expansion was supported through the introduction of a new qualification, the Foundation Degree. Foundation degrees are a two-year degree-level, sub-degree level qualification designed to bridge the academic-vocational divide that is perceived as spanning universities and colleges (HEFCE, 2000). Included within this is a remit for employer engagement and work-based learning, as well as providing an entry route to a full degree, as following completion of the college-based component students have the opportunity to progress on to university to achieve a full honours degree (Stanton, 2009).

FE colleges now cater for some 11% of HE students (Parry, 2009). This expansion has changed the working practices of college lecturers, many of whom teach a mix of courses, some at vocational pre-degree level, some at degree level right through to masters-level study (Gale et al., 2011). Although acknowledged to a limited extent in the guidance policymakers offered to those delivering and supporting HE in FE (e.g. HEFCE, 2003; 2009), the specific professional development needs of this group has only been recognised in recent years (Turner et al., 2009b; Turner & Carpenter, 2013). The professional shift for those HE in FE lecturers, extending their practice from *further education* (vocational, non-degree work) into *higher education* (degree-level work), can be experienced as challenging (Turner et al., 2009b). Although new to the role of HE in FE, most are not new to teaching. In terms of background and experience, many are highly trained professionals who have been teaching in

an FE setting for a number of years, but are now beginning to occupy a new professional space as HE lecturers.   Both the further and higher education sectors shape this space, creating a new context that requires adjustment in both their professional practice and stimulates, for many, identity development (Turner at al., 2009b).

For many HE staff in universities, research and publication are defining features of their work (Barnett, 1990). HE in FE lecturers may well see these as part of their new role, but may be unclear about how to develop these activities, and nor may they receive wider support to do so (Turner et al., 2009b). This reflects the longstanding perspective that research is not part of the FE sector (Child, 2009; Hillier, 2010). Consequently those wishing to develop research have noted a number of barriers such as the lack of a resources, the absence of a research culture, limited knowledge of the practices of accessing funding and disseminating the outcomes of research, and more widely a general lack of confidence amongst those undertaking research (Anderson et al., 2003; Hillier, 2010; Turner et al., 2009b). Therefore HE in FE lecturers can feel daunted as they take their first steps into research (Mason et al., 2010). As with many professional-educators, their initial research is often low-risk and practice-based, associated with enhancing individual / local knowledge rather than contributing to the community as a whole (Harrison and McKeon, 2010; Murray, 2007).

The relative infancy of HE in FE means that the professional development of the HE in FE lecturer is still not fully recognised or explored (Turner and Carpenter, 2013). Despite this neither the higher or further education sectors have been immune to the widespread policy reforms that have influenced teaching in schools and universities (Ball, 1994; Hillier, 2010). These forces have shaped the backdrop for the professional development of teachers in the tertiary sector leading to a shift away from:

> […] equity oriented professionalised approaches to learning how to teach and towards a renewed focus on teacher-as-technician approaches that define teaching in terms of discrete skills and testable knowledge (Siry and Zawatski, 2011: 345).

Education policy within England, and elsewhere, has emphasised reliance on steps and processes that can frame teaching as a low-skill job, reducing the work of educators to delivering discrete facts that occupy a limited set of meanings that students are expected to

reproduce (Kincheloe, 2008). This is particularly true of the FE sector. These policy pressures have in turn led some to responding by resisting or 'pushing back on reductionist teacher training' (Siry & Zawatski, 2011: 345).

By using writing as both a mode of inquiry, and to stimulate professional development, we intended to encourage a critical rejection of those forces that assume that working as an academic within a HE framework equates exclusively with gaining knowledge at a more sophisticated level. The HE in FE lecturers' experiences of the initiative that we describe here included collaborating to write for a joint publication and to co-construct research on academic writing around a series of extended activities. These activities form the focus of this paper. We posited alternatives to reductionist professional development practices for HE in FE lecturers and the hierarchical structures that seek to stratify FE and HE exclusively in terms of knowledge sophistication (Gale et al., 2011). In doing so the design of this intervention was informed by the ideas of Greene (1995), who sought to support the struggles of educators tired of a 'teacher-as-technician' existence and who wanted to develop their understandings of choice and diversity when exploring their professional roles. She recognised that the search for alternatives can lead to new approaches and outcomes, provide a shift in focus and beliefs to marginalise what we believe are givens and reconstitute them as possibilities or contingencies. Shifts in perspectives provoke thoughts about alternative ways of working, living, choosing, and valuing what we do and what we seek to do (Greene, 1995). We drew parallels with Greene's ideas with the opportunities for professional development and self-examination we created through this writing initiative. As will be demonstrated writing was constructed as a medium through which we (collectively) could explore and develop strategies for re-identification as "HE lecturers in FE colleges" and to seek alternatives to the status quo in their professional lives. Through writing we sought to encourage the HE in FE lecturers to go beyond cooperation, where individual efforts can be characterised as working side-by-side, to include collaboration, where the work of this diverse group of HE in FE lecturers could become focused on combining their efforts to meet a common goal and to complete it together (Ares, 2008).

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The professional development initiative

Writing crafted through a writing initiative was used to examine the professional development of ten lecturers making their transition from FE teachers to research-active HE lecturers teaching degree-level studies (see Turner et al., 2009a). Their professional development was supported through collaboration between the Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), Plymouth University, and the Higher Education Academy's Subject Centre for Education, ESCalate, University of Bristol, UK. This professional development activity was a yearlong writing project designed to promote practices of academic writing with a sub-set of 10 lecturers selected from a larger group of HE in FE lecturers who had previously been awarded individual grants to fund practice-based research projects through HELP CETL. This group had expressed an explicit interest in developing their academic writing skills and to write for publication.

The participants in this writing initiative experienced the challenges of being research active discussed above. The colleges from which these HE in FE lecturers were drawn are all partners of a single validating university that operates over a region of more than 17,000 square kilometres in South West England. HE represented a minority of their colleges' overall provision, and in many cases, the HE in FE lecturers represented the sole subject specialist in their college.

The initiative involved a series of writing workshops and residential activities. This paper examines how the participants shaped their professional practice, integrated themselves into established communities and developed a sense of *becoming and being* academics. As Baruch and Hall (2004) and Greene (1995) suggest, changes in professional settings present teachers with new opportunities to shape and develop professional practice. For the HE in FE lecturer, this offers the credibility that many perceive is lacking (Mason et al., 2010).

The lecturers who produced the writing on which this study is based, are co-authors of this paper – this reflects the collaborative nature of the writing activities, and the associated inquiry. They all entered teaching based on their professional expertise. They were all

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leading or supporting HE teaching in their college and they had all previously completed a practice-based research project. Using Rowley and McCulloch's (1999) stages of *researcher development* they would be classified as being at the 'apprenticeship' stage, although they were all experienced teaching professionals. Completion of their research had raised issues around dissemination and the academic communities that they sought to affiliate with. The follow-up writing project, facilitated by Authors 1, 2 and 4, ran over the subsequent 12 months and sought to address these issues (see Turner et al., 2009a; 2013 for further details). Through the writing group and subsequent evaluation each lecturer produced three pieces of writing:

i) A short reflective piece themed around their experiences of undertaking research as HE in FE lecturers produced in summer 2008 to gain membership to the writing group.

ii) A 1,000 word reflective narrative in which writers used relevant literature and theory to examine their development as HE in FE lecturers, written over the subsequent academic year. These narratives were brought together in July 2009 in an edited book Turner et al., 2009a, following a collective decision to share their experiences of being research-active HE in FE lectures.

iii) A loosely structured writing activity was used in autumn 2010 to evaluate the writing group. This last piece of writing was produced 12 months after the formal end to the writing group and used to examine how the lecturers had built upon their experience of engaging in research and participating in academic writing.

The temporal element was integral to this research. Writing was captured at the beginning of the professional development activity prior to any support or guidance on their writing practices. When crafting their final narratives the writing group had participated in a range of discussion and peer review activities, as well as drawing upon the writing of other published researchers. As discussed in Turner et al (2013) these activities were used to familiarise the lecturers with the technical, procedural and the emotional aspects of academic writing. To gain an insight into the impact of this intervention on their professional and identity development the analysis would need to capture the writers' changing styles and use of language. This was made possible owing to the longitudinal nature of this data set.

In undertaking this project we were mindful of McCormack (2009) who drew on the stories of supervision produced by doctoral supervisors. McCormack's stories were produced through a professional development activity designed to examine the role of being a PhD supervisor, and subsequently brought together in a research publication. McCormack (2009) advised caution in this process. Writing represents only a snapshot in time that does not define the person who produced the writing. We also have to be mindful that a third person, author 3, joined the project after these writings were crafted.

Methodology

Each piece of writing was analysed using the constant-comparative approach (Silverman, 2005) to identify related concepts and themes that provided an insight into the experience of becoming a research-active HE lecturer in an FE college. Andrew undertook the analysis. Attention was paid to the lecturers' experiences of producing their writing, their writing styles and the language used to describe their experiences and reflect on them. The analysis first sought to identify concepts and themes appearing in the 30 pieces of writing. These were then collapsed into the following categories:

- institutions and their boundaries;
- conflict and possibilities for resolution;
- forms of expression.

Following development of these categories we became particularly interested in the changes in the forms of expression and language used. We felt such changes provided a unique insight into professional development that may not be accessible through other forms of data collection, such as interviews (James, 2007). Whereas interviews are the product of a shared conversation between a researcher and respondent, in their writing each lecturer spent time carefully choosing the words and focal points for their writing, which may have been subject to a number of revisions (James, 2007). In addition, their writings were produced over a prolonged time period, capturing a developmental trajectory, resulting in a longitudinal data set for analysis. Personal growth was a feature of their writing and what was strikingly clear through the analysis was the impact of personal growth on identity transformation, professional robustness and resilience. We subsequently undertook further analysis of their use of metaphor, changes in mood and tone of the language used to gain an insight into their

changing relationship with research and their role. In order to examine these latter factors we analysed tentative descriptions and explanations through the use of phrases associated with hedging. Hedging involves words or phrases such as '*maybe', 'perhaps'* and '*guess'* that are associated with a sense of uncertainty (Reid et al., 2009). In universities researchers with an interest in linguistics have studied their use to explore the development of undergraduate students (Carroll, 2007). At the beginning of study programmes there is a higher incidence of hedges in student narratives, indicating ambivalence with new experiences. Their use suggests a cautious response to tutor expectations, areas of knowledge and calls to expose current expertise. As students gain familiarity with their new surroundings and find their voice, expressions of tentativeness are often replaced by expressions of greater certainty. Students become more explicit and confident in the worldview they express (Carroll, 2007). We thought adopting a similar approach to the could provide valuable insights, and a novel approach, to examining their continuing professional development.

Simple frequency counts applied to the data were sufficient to show the strong presence of words and phrases that indicated hedging, tentativeness and certainty. We applied this simple measure alongside general readings of each piece of writing to ascertain the contribution that the writing development activities had made to the writers' sense of themselves as research active HE in FE lecturers. Since the data derived from different writing episodes produced over time, it was possible to make temporal comparisons of the use of hedging and explore how writing styles changed over time.

Findings

Moving beyond institutional boundaries

The need for students to develop a range of academic literacies is an accepted part of undergraduate study (Lea & Stierer, 2009). Reading and writing are central to this process. It is through these activities that students are socialised into the practices of the academy. The activity of scholarly reading and writing represents a source of power and acceptance within academic communities (Lea & Street, 1998). Although experienced teachers, the group

participating in this project can be thought of as *'new'* in the sense that their role as HE in FE lecturers was new to them. Until recently, limited attention has been paid to the role of writing and more specifically reading, in supporting research students and professional educators as they develop or modify their professional identities (McAlpine et al., 2010).

Disciplinary communities provide academics with a sense of identity (Henkel, 2000). Recognition and identity are influenced through the contributions made to discussions within these communities. Recognition, identity and status are gained through the publication of journal papers, conference presentations and obtaining research funding, all of which are validated by and shared with the community (Henkel, 2000). As Richardson (2001) discussed, writing is also a vehicle for making connections.

It was through engaging with forms of writing which they associated as accepted for researchers (e.g. funding bids, conference abstracts and journal paper writing), that the HE in FE lecturers who are co-authors of this paper began to perceive themselves as undertaking the breadth of activities associated with being an HE lecturer. Authors 9, 7 and 14 felt they were beginning to develop connections with their chosen academic communities, and were moving beyond their usual roles:

> "I'm professionally more aware of the work of others, and the writing up has forced me to present coherent arguments." Amanda

> "The added value that HELP CETL provided me with was confidence; confidence to become a researching practitioner, confidence to justify my practice, confidence to have a voice, confidence to contribute to other communities, confidence to advance my own studies in research through a doctorate in education." Yvette

> "I presented my findings at a national conference. I didn't feel that my project in itself was brilliant, but the process of carrying it out and presenting it enabled me to develop professional skills and confidence." Maureen

"Exploring the literature during the time allocated for the award helped me to gain an understanding of the finer details of foundation degrees and of current educational theory." Martin

The connections made between reading and writing undertaken as part of their research projects, this professional development initiative and their teaching roles would be anticipated given that their research was centred on their teaching practices. Yet reading, in particular, had an impact beyond this work. It gave them a sense of currency in terms of their teaching practice and the pedagogical theory on which they were drawing upon within this. It also gave them confidence to contribute to the wider discussions taking place in the literature and at conferences – something that prior to undertaking research, they would have not considered. Therefore it was not only the act of writing, but the wider activities of reading, reflection and discussion, that became a feature of their research projects but also became integral to the writing group that stimulated their further development, prompting shifts in their professional identities and connections emerging with wider communities.

Conflict and resolution

Becoming a researcher involves a major shift in both professional practice and also identity (McApline et al., 2010). This can be quite a traumatic process, particularly if undertaken in isolation or without the encouragement of peers or more experienced researchers to support newcomers in developing an awareness of the practice of being research active (Harrison and McKeon, 2010). For the HE in FE lecturer, the environment in which they are working can confound their development as a researcher (Anderson et al., 2003; Mason et al., 2010). There can be relative isolation from a university setting, with interactions concentrating on administrative functions, and limited recognition for the research they are engaging with, even where ultimately it will enhance their practice (Child, 2009; Turner et al., 2009b). Indeed, this sense of conflicting priorities was evident across the lecturers' early writing:

'Differences in systems, styles and attitudes implicit within HE must always ultimately be accommodated within an FE framework. There is often a tension between the two.' Janet

'Meeting the requirements of the Award does take additional time, and it is not always compensated for easily by arranging cover for teaching, but the benefits are worth the extra effort needed.' Judith

These two extracts are indicative of the struggle of trying to undertake research in their colleges. They echo the challenges Stronach et al. (2002) identify as a feature of being a professional within the public sector; whereby careful negotiation is needed between economies of performance, the external standards that relate to the expected actions of a professional, and the individuals' ecologies of practice, the existence of individuals' personal beliefs and values underpinning their practice, all of which have been shaped by their experiences in a professional environment (Stronach et al., 2002). In their writings, there was a sense of these on-going negotiations between these two standpoints.

Teaching, in all sectors (from schools to universities) is a profession subject to increased government intervention and regulation. This creates a need for teaching professionals to balance the expectations of the profession, as laid out by professional bodies, with their own values (Ball, 1994). Professional conflict was not unanticipated. However, personal conflicts were also experienced, particularly in relation to their own abilities regarding research. They attributed their concerns to factors such as their lack of familiarity with research, an uncomfortable sense of exposure, and fear as they realised what they had committed themselves to:

'Although I had been searching for a direction to satisfy my questioning mind, I now felt hesitant to leave the safety zone I had developed for myself over a number of years.' Alison

'Actually I now feel constantly in danger and exposed, but at least it is my choice, and makes a change!' Amanda

'I am not sure what I am letting myself in for or what direction it will take me. All I know is that this is an opportunity to do something stimulating and different'. Maureen

These conflicts were present throughout their early writings, which touched on themes such as a lack of institutional recognition and support for their work, their sense of isolation from other researchers and the competing pressures they had to reconcile:

> 'It is not all easy: work now consists of juggling my job role demands with [research project] demands, and although I do really enjoy the challenge, it is hard to find the time to do justice to everything. There is also a price. As a single parent with two school-age children I now have no time for myself, and very little for them.' Amanda

> 'So where does this leave a part time HE teacher wanting to research in an FE institution? Stenhouse (1975) noted that engaging in research was not easy, time constraints, developing research skills and the need for support of researchers and co-workers were issues. These are all still relevant.' Yvette

Whilst anxiety, doubt and hesitancy featured strongly in their early writing, successes and personal satisfaction gained from engaging in research began to mediate these pressures and served to build their confidence, not only in conducting their research but also in dedicating the time needed to complete a robust research project:

> 'I have managed to create a professional space. I think this is mainly due
> to my attitude. I didn't have to read the academic papers that helped
> inform programme developments.' Martin

Indeed as they began to write about the completion of their research, and subsequently disseminating to their peers and implementing their findings, they begin to identify themselves as researchers, recognising the emergence of their expert knowledge and being able to make connections with the role that they perceived university-based lecturers performing, and also gaining enhanced credibility as lecturers:

> '[…] the requirement to disseminate has forced me to present at workshops and conferences, which has gained me some credibility at my own College and outside.' Judith

> 'I became recognised as someone who 'did research' rather than the NVQ cleaning expert, and my opinion about future foundation degree courses was not only asked

for, but put into practice and subsequently my new career as the departmental coordinator of HE began.' Alison

'I have definitely become a 'proper' HE teacher!' Maureen

Rather than discussing the conflicts they experienced when first attempting to become research active, they now accepted themselves as researchers, seeing it as part of the wider remit of being HE lecturers, an aspect of their practice with which they were keen to continue. Indeed many of them went on to inspire their colleagues and students in seeking similar opportunities.

Although the sought after resources of space, time and more widely institutional recognition, remained broadly unchanged, they no longer saw these limitations as barriers to being research-active. Indeed, it appears that the experience of completing a research project and subsequently engaging in activities such as writing and dissemination, had given them a broader conception of the academic enterprise, and most importantly resulted in a knowledge and experience base on which they could draw in the future. Being research active, which initially was viewed as beyond them, was now seen as being within their gift and also a positive influence on their professional identity.

Forms of expression: use of metaphor

Metaphor is commonly used in reflective writing to make sense of experience. It contributes to the state of becoming increasingly self-aware (Causarno, 2011; Lakoff and Johnson, 2003). Metaphor allows individuals to make connections between their own experiences, which initially may seem highly personal, and wider societal or cultural factors (Craig, 2005; Croft, 1993). The development or application of metaphor is a sense-making process, whereby abstract experiences can be captured and explored in a concrete fashion (Craig, 2005). Moving from the abstract to the concrete adds colour, sound and texture to an experience, allowing those removed from an individual's daily life to relate more easily to the circumstances or experiences shaping the other (Simpson *et al.,* cited in Causarano, 2011). Readers external to the FE environment would benefit from the use of metaphoric writing since it provided an additional entry point to understanding and contextualising the peripheral position of those working in an HE in FE context.

Janet used metaphor to express her fears about engaging in research. Metaphor illuminated the sense of physical, mental and emotional exposure that she experienced when faced with writing a research report:

> 'But this had costs. I had to write and say on paper what I had learnt. This was getting a bit more risky. They might find out how thin I am, how little my body is, (intellectually not corporally.) But then I reasoned, they were very nice, and Rebecca was always so complementary and encouraging. She knew a lot about bodies (of knowledge) she didn't know a lot about my body. So it was a bit like standing in your underskirt. A bit strange and silly, but tolerable.'

Janet's use of metaphor acknowledged many of the emotions commonly referred to in studies relating to academic writing. Readers can relate easily to their fears and developmental needs, without knowing the specifics of her research and the context in which she was undertaking it. Towards the end of the writing period, Janet commented on her use of metaphor. She discussed the concerns faced both by her co-authors, and academic writers in general, but she was also able to talk about the distance she had travelled over the course of the writing group. Metaphor was a useful form of expression for individual writers like Janet and a stimulus for discussion within the group, allowing wider connections to be made to the challenges faced by newer researchers – moving the group discussion beyond the HE in FE context in which the groups' experiences were grounded.

Liz used metaphor to reflect holistically on the experience of undertaking research in an FE college – giving voice to the peripheral position occupied by HE, research and knowledge generation in the FE environment. In each of her pieces of writing Liz used metaphor to describe her initial hesitation in starting research, and her later experiences of overcoming challenges and celebrating her successes allowing her to finally contemplate the future goals she wanted to set herself. Each piece of writing was framed around the story of climbing a hill – which integrated her experience of taking a physical walk during the residential workshop, with her mental preoccupations whilst walking, including her emotional responses to the academic challenge of becoming a researcher and writer working in an FE college:

> "As I spoke there were doubts in my head, I wasn't sure how far it was, whether there was a route I could manage or if there would be time."

This extract relates to her early concerns following a successful application for funding; Liz became aware of the implications of what this meant in terms of the responsibility of conducting a research project alongside a full-time teaching schedule, of what the funding body expected and the need to manage these expectations alongside the college's expectations. Liz then demonstrates how completing the research project demonstrated what they could achieve:

> "[…] so maybe it was not too far, perhaps I could make it up there."

This extracts demonstrates that she realised she could meet the challenges facing her. Being buoyed up by her early writing successes helped her complete her doctorate.

> "I have now written up my thesis and submitted it, so I'm just about at the top of the hill, just the viva to go but, I will get there, then I can set off along the further path, winding away into the future, there are some landmarks I can see along the way, but what's in the distance?"

In her final piece of writing Liz described how she has exceeded her own expectations. She has completed several funded research projects and submitted her doctorate thesis – a daunting experience for many new researchers.

In these two examples, the use of metaphor not only gave voice to personal experiences but also addressed the limited knowledge beyond HE in FE of the realities of working and engaging with research within this sector of HE. HE in FE is becoming recognised as a highly complex professional space. Complexities include the institutional boundaries it crosses, the conditions of service and range of competing demands it experiences (Scott, 2009; Turner et al., 2009b). These complexities found voice within the work of these two writers.

Tentativeness, certainty and hedging

The use of tentative expressions can have significant impact on the way individuals are perceived by external parties – with the use of tentative speech, particularly by women, conveying an image of being unintelligent and incompetent, less likely to influence change and succeed (Lakoff, 1973). Given the position of these HE in FE teachers as expert professionals but novice researchers with a remit for teaching HE on the peripheries of their institutions' provision, such external perceptions could undermine their confidence, professional credibility and their ability to shape and influence the opinions of others, some of whom will be gatekeepers to resources and practices that they wish to access. In addition, as the author list demonstrates, this writing group was composed mainly of women. Whilst gender did not emerge as a strong feature of the data, we believe that issues of gender continue to play a significant role in the workplace.

Expressions of tentativeness were present throughout the early writing of each lecturer. Many occurrences related to writers questioning their emergent practice. Temporal shifts were evident, showing trajectories from expressions of tentativeness and towards certainty. More confident forms of expression, showing increased security, confidence and the attainment of ambitions and goals, gradually replace indications of fearfulness and anxiety:

> 'I was sure that the submission would not be worthy of the £10,000 Award […] I concluded that universities must be after a highly academic piece of work, which would be beyond my skill level.' Julie

> 'As a result of the HELP CETL I have been involved in many other activities. I have been successful in bidding for £10,000 from the AimHigher Funds to produce a marketing pack for disabled learners in HE.' Julie

> 'I was now interested in this research business, and developed my work with a Continuity Award. I wanted to explore new ideas. It gave me confidence I was able to offer more to the students. The downside is, the more you think you have found out, the bigger the responsibility to tell others.' Janet

> 'In the two years since completing this project, the impact of it is still being felt both personally and professionally [...] the numbers of learners recruited to HE programmes in the subject area has more than doubled and local employers […] have

become an integral part of both the formation and delivery of courses that will benefit their business.' Alison

Although tentativeness remains in some of the above extracts as they consider their future ambitions (e.g. Janet's), the language used to frame these new goals maintains this sense of confidence gained from prior success. Personal satisfaction, confidence and self-recognition emerge as a result of completing their research and instigating changes in their professional practice. This greater confidence and recognition of enhanced standing is self-identified rather than the result of changes in position or status in their college. In most cases roles remained unchanged throughout the duration of this study. Rather it represents success in managing professional shifts and developing positive self-perceptions in relation to their newly acquired roles as researchers and writers. The writers describe being motivated to take decisions and actions in the future: they see themselves developing their research profiles, making funding bids, writing articles and making presentations at conferences. There is a sense that undertaking research has contributed to a greater legitimacy as HE professionals. The strength of this transformation in their professional selves was evident through analysis of the changes in language used in the different writing activities and through study of the forms of expression used when reflecting on their professional development.

Conclusion

This paper has presented data from a longitudinal study of a group of HE in FE lecturers who embarked on a series of professional development activities to support their emerging research practices. The need to prepare all members of the academic community to undertake their roles in the increasingly diverse environment of HE has become the focus of academic developers and policymakers alike (Boud, 1999; Brew, 2010). Preparation requires more than providing academics with support to develop teaching. The role of an academic is broader than this. It includes expertise in research, writing, teaching, service and administration (Boud, 1999; McAlpine et al., 2010). Studies of the traditional recipients of academic development support in universities (e.g. research students, post-doctoral researchers and those taking up their first academic position), have shown that issues of confidence, recognition, productivity and sophistication of practice are integral to individuals' perceptions of themselves as legitimate practitioners in their chosen discipline

(Henkel, 2000). Therefore there is a clear need to consider these issues for those entering HE teaching from the more traditional research route. Indeed these are all issues touched upon by each of the HE in FE lecturers who participated in the writing group.

The peripheral position of research means that many HE in FE teachers experience barriers and conflict when beginning to engage with research. As evidenced above, these barriers are well documented by the participants of the writing group, particularly with respect to the conflicts they experienced. These barriers and conflicts echoed those recorded within the published literature (e.g. Anderson et al., 2003; Child, 2009; Mason, et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2009b). Although no real resolution has been found to realistically overcome these for the community as a whole, at an individual level it seems that the self-identified benefits reported by the writing group participants of engaging with these activities outweighs the personal costs, particularly with respect to the enhanced confidence and sense of contributing to an academic community. This was important in a sense of resolution being gained and the participants of the writing group taking ownership of their on-going professional development.

Professional development can unleash strong forces of empowerment as individuals and writing groups explore research identities. Using writing as a focus can extend the reciprocal relationship between practice-based research and teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2004) through an examination of teachers' development as researchers. Using writing as a vehicle also supports professional development. In this project it has provided an insight into the development of research-active HE in FE lecturers, which was previously a small part of their professional role. Exploring literature allowed connections with similar researchers to be examined and a sense of contributing to the community emerged. The transformations over time in their writing styles captured through their uses of metaphor, changes in tone and forms of expression, illustrated their growing in confidence. It enabled them to identify the distance they have travelled professionally and recognise the professional transformation they have undergone in their development as HE lecturers. Additionally being encouraged to use writing about academic roles and shifts in practice offered important opportunities for learning about role development. It stimulated awareness of the processes of becoming that might not be accessed so easily through other academic development routes. Engaging in

various writing activities and sharing their written outputs allowed this group of HE in FE teachers to hold a 'conversation with themselves [where] they could examine choices, conflicts and values' that underpinned their professional selves (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 748). Facilitating writing in a structured and supportive environment resulted in insights into meanings and experiences of being professional indicating that sustained professional development activities centred on writing have the potential to be powerful tools for professional development and identity formation.

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