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Mason, M

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Practice and Evidence of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Teaching and Research within Further Education Colleges: Chalk and Cheese?

Maureen Mason
Faculty of Health and Social Care
Cornwall College / University of Plymouth Colleges, UK
maureenmason2000@yahoo.co.uk

Janet Bardsley
Faculty of Health and Social Care
Open University, UK
j.r.bardsley@open.ac.uk

Judith Mann
Faculty of Health and Social Care
Cornwall College / University of Plymouth Colleges, UK
judith.mann@cbs.ac.uk

Rebecca Turner[*]
Higher Education Learning Partnerships Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning / University of Plymouth Colleges
University of Plymouth, UK.
rebecca.turner@plymouth.ac.uk

Abstract

The expansion of Higher Education (HE) into Further Education (FE) Colleges has resulted in college lecturers with responsibility for teaching HE courses experiencing considerable changes in their working practices. College lecturers have worked collaboratively with universities to develop HE courses and been presented with opportunities to engage in scholarly activity and research. This paper draws on the experience of a group of college lecturers who undertook research into aspects of their teaching practice through an initiative introduced by the Higher Education Learning Partnerships (HELP) Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL). Through a series of semi-structured interviews, this paper examines the impact of their projects

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[*] Corresponding Author

and experiences as researchers on their practice, and on the learning experiences they provided for their students. The paper explores the context of delivering HE within FE, and the lessons that can be learned from undertaking practitioner-led research in this environment. As the college lecturers demonstrate, their research was found to enhance their practice, and was highlighted as validating their profession identities as HE in FE professionals. They also considered the tensions and challenges present within an FE college where research activities are not necessarily seen a part of the teaching role. Based on the experiences of these college lecturers this paper argues for a more pro-active approach to scholarly activity in an HE in FE context.

Keywords: Higher Education, Further Education, Research and Scholarly Activity, Professional Identity, Practitioner-Researcher

Introduction

In this article we present a small-scale study of college lecturers teaching HE in FE colleges, to contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding the roles of research and teaching within HE.

 A close relationship between teaching and research is an accepted part of the culture of universities but in recent decades this relationship has become increasingly complex (Robertson, 2007). It is no longer sufficient for universities to undertake inquiry-based research and for teaching to be focused upon small groups of students. Increasingly the knowledge produced by university academics is called upon to benefit a nation's economy. At the same time there has been a sustained growth in student numbers (Robertson, 2007). This situation is confounded by the move internationally toward the measurement of lecturers' research output through systems such as the Research Assessment Exercise in the UK (Elton, 2001). This has resulted in many university lecturers viewing research and teaching as competing demands, whereby to maintain their professional status, university academics are expected to concentrate their efforts on research, resulting in teaching being perceived as a secondary activity (Child, 2009). This tension appears to persist despite the recent diversification of the landscape of HE within England.

The expansion in HE that resulted from the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education [NCIHE], 1997) has seen an increasing amount of HE delivered within FE colleges. Although FE colleges are recognised centres of academic and vocational training, research is not an activity commonly associated with the sector (Anderson, Bolton and Wahlberg*,* 2003; Minty, Wheedon, Mors and Cannell*,* 2007), and teachers are expected to maintain a high level of contact hours. Therefore given that many (e.g. Elton, 2001; Healey, 2005) view research or the presence of research, as integral to a student's experience of HE, the authors of this paper were interested in exploring the contribution research, conducted within an FE college, can make to the practice and experience of HE in FE lecturers. They have framed this investigation around the contrasting roles of research and teaching in a university, where research is considered to be of primary importance, to those roles in FE, where the opposite situation may be true (Jephcote, Sailsbury and Rees*,* 2008). It has been accepted that within a traditional university setting, (i.e. the elite institutions known in the UK as the Russell Group) research is pre-eminent in terms of the time and resources committed to the pursuit of knowledge (Light & Cox, 2001). However, as Boyer (1990) indicated, this pre-eminence has come at a price, devaluing the status of teaching, so that it is perceived as the "poor relation".

Given these contrasting positions, the terms research and scholarship may be considered as having different connotations (Young, 2002). Research is an accepted activity for university lecturers; in contrast, college lecturers are commonly expected to be involved with *scholarly activity* which according to Higher Education Funding Council for England*,* [HEFCE] (2003) can encompass a number of activities from professional updating, applied research and conference attendance. Therefore, throughout this article, the activities the college lecturers participated in will be referred to as scholarly activity. This is to make the reader aware of the possible implications of the presence of such a distinction on the status of scholarly activities in FE colleges.

The provision of HE in FE Colleges and the place of scholarly activity

Although post compulsory education within England has long been divided into two distinct sectors, there had been considerable blurring of the boundaries between the

higher and further education sectors, prior to the Dearing Report (Scott, 2009). For over 60 years, FE colleges have delivered specialist or niche short cycle, sub-degree courses, mainly in the form of Higher National Diplomas/Certificates, and more recently Foundation Degrees (Parry, 2005). HE in FE has not been a marginal activity, with approximately one in eight HE students studying within an FE college (Parry, 2009). FE colleges are viewed as playing a central role in widening participation and the promotion of lifelong learning due to the accessibility of their provision to local communities and mature learners (Scott, 2009). Therefore even within the current pressures facing HE and the potential reduction in budgets, it is reasonable to suppose that central government will continue to assure this route to accessing higher degrees to maintain the country's economic competitiveness and place in the world's knowledge economy (Department for Education and Skills [DfES], 2003; HEFCE 2009; Mandelson, 2009).

HE in FE colleges differs in significant ways from HE delivered in a traditional university setting. Akin to the relative higher status attached to research over teaching, the perspective of the "poor relation" is one that would be recognised by those delivering HE programmes within FE colleges. Although nationally HE in FE represents a substantial contribution to the overall numbers of students studying HE, within individual colleges HE can represent a minority of an institution's overall provision. Therefore the numbers of HE lecturers in FE colleges may be limited, or restricted in dispersed pockets of a college (Turner, McKenzie and Stone*,* 2009a). Consequently the experience of staff and students in HE in FE colleges is one where there is a struggle to establish equal status and validity vis a vis their university colleagues. The tension was caricatured by Mason (2009) as a colonial relationship. The non-traditional profile of HE in FE students is widely acknowledged, therefore their confidence and educational attainment is likely to be lower; pay and conditions for staff are less favourable in FE, and teaching allocation and student contact time will be greater (Child, 2009; Golding & Griffiths, 2008; Young, 2002). In addition the managerial context and priorities for those working within HE in FE is one that Scaife (2004) described as a *"the culture of the now."* By this he means that priorities for managers centre on the dealing with financial and structural insecurity, and a lack of a culture of valuing staff as a resource. This is a culture that has been widely recognised by researchers (e.g. Shain and Gleeson, 1999; Hodkinson *et al.,* 2007) and has been related to the gradual deprofessionalisation of FE lecturers, as an emphasis is increasingly placed upon them to achieve targets

surrounding the recruitment, retention and attainment of their FE students (Spencerley, 2006). Despite these inauspicious conditions, Turner, McKenzie, McDermott and Stone (2009b) report the emergence of an "HE culture" with FE colleges delivering HE courses and an enthusiasm amongst practitioners for their role.

As mentioned above, the contribution scholarly activity can make to the provision of either FE or HE within a college may be perceived as limited or even irrelevant. This can be attributed to the measures of professionalism associated with the FE sector, which are centred on student attainment and successful Ofsted inspections (Child, 2009). Despite HEFCE (2003; 2009) presenting clear recommendations regarding the need for HE in FE lecturers to be presented with opportunities to engage with scholarly activities, as part of their development as HE lecturers, this situation appears to have changed little in recent years. Harwood and Harwood (2004) in their study of HE provision in five FE colleges in the South West, highlighted the vague if not non-existent policy to support scholarly activity, as understood by college managers. King and Widdowson (2009) describe scholarly activity in FE as being primarily centred upon keeping up with industry practice standards. Although the understanding of what is meant by the term scholarly activity is a source of ongoing discussion (e.g. Nicholls, 2006), within the FE context, King and Widdowson's definition is a long way from the sorts of expansive frameworks posited by Boyer (1990.16), which related to the 'scholarship of teaching' as engaging in original research in such a way as to involve activities, which transformed and extended knowledge, not simply transmitting it (Boyer 1990 cited in Light and Cox 2001:37). He identified four key areas of scholarship: teaching, discovery, application and integration, and proposed the scholarship of teaching as an 'active dialogue' not only with one's students, but with oneself and one's colleagues in a more creative process in its methods (ibid). This concept suggest s a more dynamic process of learning about teaching in which the teacher is not the sole active agent, but reactive and responsive to the learning that is taking place.

This is not to suggest that research cannot take place within an FE context (Anderson *et al.,* 2003). There are numerous examples of ways in which, with appropriate support, lecturers within FE can develop as researchers and academic writers (Cunningham and Doncaster, 2002; Minty *et al.,* 2007, Turner, Hughes and Brown*,* 2009c). The Award Holder Scheme, supported by the HELP CETL is an example of one such collaborative

program to promote research and scholarly activity within FE colleges.   It was this Scheme that three of the authors participated in and feel they benefitted from.

The HELP CETL Award Holder Scheme

The HELP CETL is part of a national network of 74 CETLs funded for five years by HEFCE to reward and recognise excellent teaching practice, and support further development/dissemination of this practice (HEFCE, 2005). It was established to work alongside University of Plymouth's Partner College network, the faculty within the University responsible for the provision of HE in FE. A key focus of the HELP CETL was to recognise the contributions of lecturing and support staff from across the partner college network, and rewards these individuals through funding to support professional development and engagement with scholarly activities (Turner *et al.,* 2009b). The Award Holder Scheme was introduced to allocate this funding and facilitate these opportunities.   The Scheme has also provided a range of staff development opportunities for participants to support their ongoing development as HE lecturers and researchers. Now its fifth year the Scheme has supported 75 HE in FE lecturing and support staff to participate in range of scholarly activities (e.g. Turner, 2008; Turner 2009).

Unpublished evaluation data from the Scheme and anecdotal evidence from meetings of Award Holders indicated that the process of engaging in scholarly activities produced a transformation in college lecturer's perceptions of themselves as more robust and confident academics. This was an experience shared by three of the authors of this article. However despite a new found confidence as scholars, our primary enthusiasm, as with others working within the FE sector (e.g. Hodkinson *et al.,* 2007), lies most clearly with teaching. It is from this basis, as Award Holders, we undertook to explore in more depth the impact engagement with scholarly activity had on our main priority of teaching; how did carrying out a research project affect our practice as HE in FE lecturers?

Research Design

Since 2005, nine HE in FE lecturers from across the college had received support from the Award Holder Scheme. Three of these lecturers, who are also authors of this paper, had continued to actively engage with the HELP CETL and the partner college network following the completion of their research projects. Involvement in a HELP CETL staff development activity triggered reflections of our experiences of being practitioner-researchers and the contribution this had made to our teaching practice and development as HE professionals. Following this activity, together with the facilitator of the Award Holder Scheme, we undertook an investigation with the Award Holders still working at the college to explore their experiences of being practitioner-researchers in HE in FE. Of the original nine Award Holders, six were still in post; working in the areas of natural sciences, healthcare and business, and their scholarly work related to areas such as blended learning, employability and mentoring.

In autumn 2009 we conducted semi-structured interviews, with the college lecturers from the research team taking responsibility for two interviews each. The interviews explored Award Holders' experiences of carrying out scholarly activity in an FE college, and the contribution their work made to their teaching and professional development. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full. Building on the constant comparative approach of Glaser and Strauss (1967) each member of the research team independently read through the transcripts to identity emergent themes. This approach has been widely used in the early stages of data analysis in studies where researchers want to remain open to the theoretical inferences that may emerge from the data (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Saldaña, 2009). Given the relative paucity of published research on the experiences of college lecturers teaching HE outside of a university setting, the research team felt it was quite important to capture the "voices" of the research participants in their initial analysis. It also enabled the research team to reflect on the contribution their experiences made to the analysis. The research team then came together to discuss the themes emerging from the individual interview transcripts and compare these across the data set. This second analytical stage allowed these themes to be refined in light of Boyer's (1990) scholarship typology, as this enabled the research team to consider the nature of the college lecturers' scholarly endeavours and the contributions they made to their practice. This process of refinement was also

informed by existing literature surrounding the professional status of college lecturers (e.g. Briggs, 2005). We then underwent several further cycles of discussion and reflection to ensure that the coding framework captured the experiences of the participants.

Although this was a small-scale study, we feel the research is of value in contributing to the growing debate around the role of scholarly activity and research in FE colleges (e.g. Anderson *et al.,* 2003; Harwood & Harwood, 2004; King & Widdowson, 2009), particularly for those with an increasing proportion of HE provision.   Equally we feel it is important for readers to be aware that this research was undertaken by participants in, and a facilitator of, the Award Holder Scheme. As with similar studies where the researchers are immersed in the environment in which they are researching (e.g. Gerwirtz, Shapiro, Maguire, Mahony and Cribb*,* 2009; Postholm, 2009) there is the possibility for bias within the reporting of the research findings. Similar to the views of Gerwirtz *et al.* (2009) we feel our professional, emotional and social involvement with the research enhanced our interpretation of the data, as we were aware of the conditions, support and experience the college lecturers had of being practitioner-researchers within the FE environment.

Findings

Analysis of the interview data highlighted four main categories in terms of lecturers' experiences of been practitioner-researchers, and the contribution their research and scholarly activities made to their practice/college:

- Impact on teaching practices;
- Discovery of New Networks/Opportunities
- Impact of the scholarly activities on the practitioners' professional identity;
- Tensions of engaging with scholarly activity in an FE college.

Impact on teaching practices

Given the grassroots nature of the Award Holder Scheme, in that the research and scholarly activities that were funded originated from applicants own practice, the college

lecturers' experiences of being practitioner-researchers echo those of similar initiatives to promote practitioner led research in schools and colleges (e.g. Cunningham and Doncaster, 2002; Gerwirtz *et al.,* 2009). Unsurprisingly they all identified ways in which their projects had positively impacted on and subsequently been integrated into their teaching. They highlighted numerous examples where they had been able to directly use data gathered through their scholarly activities within their teaching:

> "I used this research and the photos and things like that that I took at various institutions as part of my teaching resources." (Practitioner 6)

Practitioner 1 referred directly to their research when teaching to make theoretical concepts relevant and accessible to students:

> "What I've done is use the experience of the project to illustrate aspects [that] I'm teaching about." (Practitioner 1)

Practitioner 5 stressed that the research findings

> "..became embedded in my teaching." (Practitioner 5)

Practitioners considered that sharing their work with students led to improved research awareness amongst students. Three of the practitioners presented their work directly to their students, communicating not only their findings, but the nature of the research process itself. The college lecturers felt that this was a particularly important outcome of their research, particularly given the limited level of scholarly activity that takes place generally within FE colleges. In line with the views of Healey (2005) and Jenkins, Healey and Zetter, (2007) the lecturers indicated that this was an important opportunity for their students as they were gaining access to current research, and also by learning about the process of research from realistic examples, demonstrating the relevance of research to everyday life:

> "They [the students] were interested in the actual outcomes, the content of my research, but also how I did the research... I had really good feedback because it made it real, it was lively....It wasn't just reading research methods from a book, you know, it was somebody who had actually done it...they said it made it real and it wasn't something quite abstract." (Practitioner 5)

Practitioner 1 involved students directly in their project, providing them with a valuable learning opportunity, given them key transferable skills in interviewing, empathising, and collating material that they may draw upon throughout their academic studies and future careers. Reflecting on the impact this had made on students, Practitioner 1 commented:

> "I feel even more convinced that it is a useful and interesting way of working with students at that stage. It does give them some fundamentals in terms of their ability to listen and understand people [....] A couple of them have done small pieces of research [....] and attended a conference with me". (Practitioner 1)

The scholarly activities of the lecturer/award holders were able to have a direct impact on their practice, enabling them to enhance teaching methods and the curriculum of their programmes. Two lecturers were developing Foundation degrees, which, at the time of their awards were still relatively new. Therefore their scholarly activities allowed critical reflection, and consequently, both lecturers made significant changes to the structure of the programmes as a result of their research:

> "I think by actually doing [research in] the first year of HELP CETL and going to conferences, and looking at professional development planning in relation to work based learning, it made me rethink the whole delivery [of the foundation degree]." (Practitioner 2)

These changes had not been anticipated by the college lecturers and in at least one case, this came as a surprise. As a result of this research Practitioner 2 explored what at this time was considered as a novel innovation in work based module, which led to the whole department revising their provision of work based learning and strengthening relationships with local employers. Assessments were also re-examined, and made more relevant to the workplace, including, in one instance, team work tasks along the lines of the television series *The Apprentice*. A lecturer who focused on blended learning found that students preferred in-class tutorials and personal contact, which had important implications for a new programme. Another practitioner made minor changes to the programme they were managing when they discovered how significant networking was for their students in terms of identifying, and even creating, employment opportunities. This practitioner introduced this element into the professional development module, focusing on the skills required and resources in the area. They also provided opportunities for students to attend meetings with various organisations.

The college lecturers' scholarly activities clearly had multiple benefits to their practice. Adopting a scholarly approach to their teaching provided them with much-needed time for reflection and innovation (Healey, 2000). It enabled them to both deepen their own understanding of pedagogy and to enhance their provision for students. Equally, unlike research they may have traditionally associated with universities (i.e. centred on blue skies research/knowledge generation), they were responsible for undertaking scholarly activity that had applicability to the situation in which they were working (Boyer, 1990; Neumann, 1994).

Discovery of New Networks/Opportunities

A common criticism of research centred on the scholarship of teaching and learning is that it is highly situational, with researchers often not considering the transferability to other contexts or disseminating their work to wider academic/professional communities (Strierer and Antoniou, 2004). However, the Award Holder Scheme actively encouraged dissemination, and as a consequence, participants highlighted a number of valuable networking opportunities that had arisen through attendance and presentations at conferences (Turner, 2009). One lecturer was able to make use of links established with European practitioners to bring an international perspective to a college initiative. Links established at a conference enabled another participant to affiliate their programme to a prestigious professional group, thereby enhancing teaching resources. For another lecturer, the recognition of the importance of networking as a route to employment led to the establishment of a monthly networking meeting for those working in the sector. This facility was (and still is) available to current students, and also to those who have graduated. However, the value of presenting at conferences lay not only in the specific links made, but in the experience of joining and gaining respect within the academic community – the difference between being a 'consumer' of knowledge and a 'contributor'.

Significant in this transition from being consumers to contributors of knowledge was the emergence of a regionally based research community linked to the Award Holder Scheme. Over the past five years the number of college lecturers supported to develop their scholarly profiles grew considerably, and the authors of this paper were all active members. Therefore the experiences of the college lecturers who participated in this

study have been mirrored elsewhere across the partner college network. Members of the Award Holder community represent a diverse range of disciplines and scholarly interests. However, they have been brought together through their shared interest in developing their teaching practice through engagement in scholarship. They are now recognised as an established research community within the University partnership which has wider benefit to the network as a whole. Members of this research community have become involved in a number of initiatives and events to raise the profile of HE in FE nationally (e.g. Turner *et al.,* 2009c) and contribute to the growing body of knowledge surrounding key aspects of foundation degrees (e.g. work based learning / employer engagement). Through this community the Award Holders have been able to maintain momentum in developing their scholarly practices, taking advantage of future funding, developmental and dissemination opportunities.

Impact of the scholarly activities on the lecturers' professional identity

In line with the anecdotal evidence regarding the impact of the Award Holder Scheme on individuals' self perceptions referred to earlier in this article, the lecturers cited, and a number had subsequently written about (e.g. Turner *et al.,* 2009c), the transformational effects and empowerment that resulted from their scholarly activities. This was particularly noticeable with those college lecturers who had been educated to Masters level. They reported feeling more confident academically, combined with a sense of breaking through to another level:

> "...it's given me a sort of confidence about engaging in [...] that area of research and knowledge and scholarly activity in academia now because I've had something that was mine [...] I was contributing rather than just observing and taking part." (Practitioner 1)

> "I remember the feeling of opening it [a professional journal reporting current research] and just reading the articles in a different way [...] reading them as a colleague rather than as a consumer." (Practitioner 3)

Those who held PhDs talked more in terms of maintaining and developing academic credibility, rather than an increase in confidence:

> "Research is not really part of the agenda here, so I feel I've had to struggle to maintain my academic credibility, and CETL money has helped me to do that." (Practitioner 5)

"It's helped with degree validations that we've done. For example, you're offering these new degrees, but you're also able to say that you were a CETL fellow and you've done some research on this. It adds credence." (Practitioner 4)

In line with the preconceived notion of *being* a university academic which is debated by many researchers including Clegg (2008) and Barnett (1990), three lecturers emphasised that they considered scholarship an essential component of their role as a teacher of HE. All participants felt that involvement in scholarly activities gave them more credibility as teachers of HE with their students, particularly for those who had progressed internally from FE to HE. They related this need for credibility to the expectations of their learners:

"I think it's important for students to see you as an academic rather than as an FE teacher in those situations where you've got HE teaching. We've now got a part time [honours degree] here, so there needs to be scholarly activity taking place. I think from the student point of view, it indicates that their lecturers are still in the field, carrying out decent research, and I think that's important." (Practitioner 6)

"Once I'd had my abstract accepted at the [name of conference] research conference, I kind of felt I was giving the students a better service [....] they were being taught by somebody who can go to a national conference and mix with other researchers on the same kind of level." (Practitioner 3)

"They [the students] like to know that you're doing these things." (Practitioner 1)

A common theme reported from college lecturers was of feeling invigorated and refreshed in terms of their teaching:

"I enjoyed my work better because a percentage of my work wasn't about teaching and looking after people, there was a percentage for me [....] I can remember the year before just feeling busy in a bored sort of way, so [with the CETL Award] I got a bit more variety and the students that year got a more revitalised me." (Practitioner 3)

In a similar fashion to university lecturers, whereby research is central to lecturers' professional development (Child, 2009), the college lecturers experienced professional advancement both within the college and to external institutions. These included being promoted to curriculum managers, developing programme management responsibilities for honours degree programmes, and being appointed to a post with a university. They

also developed their roles through becoming an external examiner, developing a Masters level programme and in house conferencing.

Tensions of engaging with scholarly activity in an FE college

Despite their positive experiences of operating as practitioner-researchers, all lecturers commented on the difficulties of doing research in a college. They experienced similar challenges to engagement with scholarly activity as highlighted by Anderson *et al.* (2003) e.g. a lack of time or limited recognition of the work they had carried out:

> "Generally speaking, I think the organisation has other priorities." (Practitioner 2)

> "....it doesn't seem as though there is any encouragement for scholarly activity now, and that's not to say there is discouragement, but there is such an emphasis on the actual contact hours [....] the reality is unless you've got a CETL project, and there is a way you can ring fence time for yourself, there is no way you can do it." (Practitioner 3)

Award holders were responsible for identifying teaching cover if they wanted protected time. Two were unable to find suitable cover, and therefore had to find time to do their work along with a full teaching load. As with similar studies relating to research taking place within the FE sector (e.g. Cunningham and Doncaster, 2002; Minty *et al.,* 2007), all the practitioners commented that they would not have been able to do the work without external support. Therefore rather then viewing research as a secondary activity, a mindset which the comment below indicates was associated with scholarly activity prior to the Award Holder Scheme; it became a priority which should be given adequate time and resource:

> "I wanted to carry out that research but [previously] it was the sort of thing I could only do at weekends." (Practitioner 5)

Discussion

The relationship between research and teaching, from the perspective of universities and colleges, has been constructed to indicate that they are two separate, and even 'hostile,' practices (Gottlieb and Keith, 1997). Although the positive effects on the

student learning experience have been widely acknowledged, the preconception remains that engagement in research creates distance between the teacher and student (Jenkins *et al.,* 2007; Lindsay, Breem and Jenkins*,* 2002). This apparent false divide may have negative consequences for the promotion of research within FE colleges. The authors acknowledge the student-centred nature of their practice, and the way in which FE colleges are viewed as providing a supportive environment for students to develop (Hodkinson *et al.,* 2007). However, in contrast to a university setting, we do not feel the relationship between teaching and research is so separate. The lecturers we interviewed evidenced numerous examples of how they had participated in scholarship in their subject disciplines (scholarship *in* teaching) and their teaching (scholarship *of* teaching). There was also evidence of their work as practitioner- researchers contributing to their professional development in terms understood by the college. Rather than being a distraction from the main business of teaching, it became integral to aspects of their task and associated with ongoing development within the organisation (Cunningham & Doncaster, 2002).

Although the college lecturers identified concrete examples of the links between their scholarly activities and teaching, this relationship was not necessarily explicit (Lindsay, Breem & Jenkins*,* 2002). As Bennett (1998) discusses, there is not a linear relationship between teaching and research; rather in the varied landscape of HE in England they needs to be greater consideration of an intersubjective model *.* Within this model, as a teacher begins to engage with research, and become more focused on the synergies between research and teaching, the mutually beneficial nature of these activities becomes apparent (Jenkins *et al.,* 2007; Lindsay *et al.,* 2002). Indeed, Elton (2008) advocates greater engagement with the scholarship of teaching and learning for university lecturers to enhance their professional development and teaching practice.

 Whilst acknowledging the limitations of this study, in terms of the size of the sample population, the authors feel the experiences of these practitioner-researchers demonstrates the value of college lecturers being provided with opportunities to engage with scholarly activities. Although students and their experiences of their practitioners' research were not the focus of this investigation, all the college lecturers were able to highlight qualitative changes in their classroom teaching and students' learning experiences. The improved research awareness, and involvement amongst students,

reinforces the contribution research can make to the student experience. The learning was networked to a wider community and a dynamic developed between the research ideas and the delivery to the students, resulting in active changes to the modes and styles of teaching.

Although the challenges of establishing the contribution made to undergraduates learning experience of studying within a research environment have been widely acknowledged (e.g. Jenkins *et al.,* 2007), the authors feel it may be timely, given the growth in scholarly activities taking place across the University partnership, to explore these issues further in future work.

The complexity of the personal changes college lecturers experienced resonated with the work of Turner *et al.* (2009c), in which the transformational impact of research on the self perception of practitioner-researchers was highlighted, enabling them to perceive themselves as robust and confident HE in FE professionals. Key to this sense of *being* an HE in FE professional was their commitment to teaching and research (Turner *et al.,* 2009c). Interestingly, this appears to be in contrast to the identities university academics develop, where, there is a focus on research over teaching. This position contrasts with the HE in FE environment, where the expectations and cultures lead to an academic identity associated with teaching rather than research (Briggs, 2005; Hodkinson *et al.,* 2007). Operating as practitioner-researchers enabled them to broaden their perception of themselves and this influenced their practice as teachers. They began to feel as though they were making a valuable contribution to the broader academic enterprise. Light and Cox (2001:39) characterise the distinction as one of moving from an individualistic perception of your work and the task of *"being an academic"*, to the wider more fluid and relational perception of self as an *"academic being"*. The college lecturers noted that they felt they had credibility, and that were able to engage with the wider academic community. They saw themselves as contributors to, rather than spectators or consumers of the creation of knowledge. This change in self perception and identity appears also to be the source of inspiration and reinvigoration for the individuals. They noted that they were enthusiastic and more confident about themselves and their place in the interconnected world of teaching, learning and scholarship (Nicholl, 2006). The evidence suggests this change did not come from within institutional environment in which they worked, rather their engagement with research and scholarship.

Conclusion

This study indicates the value to lecturers in FE colleges of carrying out scholarly activities, both in terms of enhancing their practice, with consequent likely benefits to students, and also in terms of their professional identities. It contributes to the concept of an overlap between teaching and research, rather than a divide, and one where research gives authority to, but is secondary to, teaching.

It also highlights the difficulties of doing such work in the FE environment. The HELP CETL award holder scheme, with its developmental framework, financial support and networking opportunities, played a central role in promoting and supporting these activities. The model to support the development of scholarly practices adopted by the HELP CETL highlights the importance of a strong university-college partnership to promote high quality HE in FE provision.

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Appendix A: Questions: Impact for Award Holders of HELP CETL

1. What are your qualifications and role within the College? How long have you been involved in teaching?
2. What was your project about?
3. How did the project impact on your work?
4. What did you learn from your project? Can you think of specific changes you made as a result of your involvement in the project?
5. How do you think this has impacted on the student experience?
6. Can you identify any less direct benefits to your professional development from your involvement in the HELP CETL?
7. How have these impacted on the student experience?
8. How easy was it for you to implement the changes you wanted within the organisation?
9. Where do you think your involvement has led you? (Prompt: a new job, further research etc.)
10. Is there anything we have left out that might be relevant to your award? (Prompt: impact on third parties, employers, service users, etc.)
11. Is there anything else that has had a negative/positive impact on you?