Pedagogy, Positionality and Adult Education: Missing Links?

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Abstract: Adult educators in the UK are now covered by one of two sets of professional standards. Using our previously developed framework for evaluating pedagogic models, we examine the extent to which perspectives on, and assumptions about positionality are evident and the ways in which diversity is recognised by those standards.

Introduction

The majority of adult education practitioners in Britain are now covered by one of two sets of professional standards. Adult educators working within higher education (HE) institutions are covered by the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT), and those working in the diverse further education (FE) sector (the majority) are expected to meet the requirements of the Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO). These two different bodies (which in turn are separate from the teacher education structure for schools) reflect historical stratification and segmentation within education, despite the current policy rhetoric of lifelong learning and 'widening participation'. Adult educators have worked hard over recent years to open up HE and FE for adults in general and for marginalised social groups in particular, and this has now become a focus of policy. However the consequences of expanding post-compulsory education to include a wider range of students have had little attention within the pedagogic literature of either sector. As adult education researchers and teacher educators, we are concerned about the divorce between policy (e.g. moves to recruit more diverse students into higher and further education) and practice (e.g. the absence of student identity and social diversity from pedagogic writing and from the emerging regulations on teacher education).

Critical adult educators have a history of addressing positionalities of class, race, gender and so on in their theory and their practice (e.g. Luttrell, 1993; hooks, 1994; Tisdell, 1995), and this tradition (imperfect and contested though it may be) is clearly relevant to the widening participation agenda. Our main purpose here is to examine the extent to which the inclusiveness which these policies claim to promote is evident in the new standards applied to adult educators.

Accreditation frameworks

The regulatory and accreditation frameworks for teachers in further and higher education have developed separately, and differ in various crucial respects. The FENTO standards are the product, rather late in the day, of a government initiative which set out to introduce standardised qualification frameworks across a range of occupational areas. The FENTO standards were drawn up following a standard occupational mapping exercise and a consultation process which sought to involve a wide range of interests (for example, voluntary sector organisations and

research associations, as well as employer and union representatives). These standards will eventually have the weight of 'a licence to practise' in FE because teaching qualifications, based on the standards, are to become mandatory.

The origins of the ILT stem from the Dearing Report (NCIHE, 1997) which recommended the establishment of a professional body and a teaching qualification structure for teachers in higher education. For the moment, at least, the ILT appears to be the main route for national accreditation of teachers in HE.

The accreditation framework produced by the ILT is very different from that offered to FE teachers. Following a disastrous early draft which had all the appearance of a prescriptive competence-based framework, the model was rapidly withdrawn and turned into a much looser and apparently flexible framework which, it was hoped, would convince university teachers that they were retaining their professional judgement and autonomy. It would also enable teachers of at least three years' standing to be accredited on the basis of a personal statement and references, rather than having to undergo a training course.

The outcome of these developments is that FE teachers are faced with a mandatory qualifications structure imposed by the government, whilst HE teachers are being courted to join a qualifications structure which has no legal force, which requires payment of a subscription, and the status of which is in dispute. Both frameworks are the end product of a series of compromises between the drive to regulation and scrutiny, and the relative power and autonomy of professional groups. The different cultural and political contexts and processes which produced these compromises are fascinating, but analysis of them will have to wait for another paper. Suffice it to say for the moment that they need to be borne in mind as we explore the pedagogic and professional implications of the two frameworks.

The ILT framework
The ILT membership documents (ILT, 2000a and b) set out two routes for membership: teachers can either complete an accredited course, or apply for the accreditation of experience. The document provides an outline of the accreditation process for courses of teacher preparation, and an application form for experienced teachers. The two routes are closely linked in terms of their focus and of the language and categories used to describe them. Since the brief guidance on course content simply mirrors the categories used for the accreditation of experienced teachers, which are explained in slightly more detail, we will focus here on the latter. The accreditation framework is divided into five sections: teaching and the support of learning; contribution to the design and planning of the learning activities; assessment and giving feedback to students; developing effective learning environments and student learning support activities; and reflective practice and personal development.

Applicants are asked to write a 500 word summary under each heading, providing appropriate evidence of: 'significant experience of teaching and learning support in higher education; an awareness of pedagogical issues, both generally and within your own discipline; the ability to choose, adapt and apply methods and approaches that are relevant to the context in which you work.' (ILT, 2000a) Two professional references are required to corroborate the content of the application.

The FENTO standards

The FENTO document is considerably more lengthy and complex than that of the ILT. The form of the standards means that they can be used to accredit either new or experienced teachers. Three main elements of the teaching role are identified: professional knowledge and understanding; skills and attributes; and key areas of teaching. These elements are then specified in detail. Teaching is divided into eight key areas of activity: assessing learners' needs; planning and preparing teaching and learning programmes for groups and individuals; developing and using a range of teaching and learning techniques; managing the learning process; providing learners with support; assessing the outcomes of learning and learners' achievements; reflecting upon and evaluating one's own performance and planning future practice; meeting professional requirements. Each of these 'areas of activity' is in turn broken down into detailed specifications of the particular tasks involved in that area, and the *critical understanding* and *essential knowledge* which these tasks demand.

Embedding Values

Both frameworks require teachers to subscribe to 'professional' values and behaviours. In the FENTO document, this requirement is contained in three different parts of the standards. 'Professional knowledge and understanding' forms one the three foundational elements of the standards, and 22 areas of 'domain wide knowledge and critical understanding' are listed; these include subject knowledge, learning theory, social and cultural diversity, the social and policy context of FE, use of IT, etc. In addition, two of the 'key areas of teaching' contain detailed descriptions of 'generic knowledge and critical understanding'. Section G, *Reflecting upon and evaluating one's own performance and planning future practice*, covers organisational understanding and participation in decision-making, reflection and self-evaluation, and policy knowledge. Section H, *Meeting professional requirements*, is concerned with the application of ethics and the fulfilment of obligations in a professional context, including such issues as inclusivity, the possible impacts of teachers on learners, and the exercise of professional judgement in legal, ethical and organisational terms. The standards are further bolstered by an overarching statement of values, covering: reflective practice and scholarship; collegiality and collaboration; the centrality of learning and learner autonomy; and entitlement, equality and inclusiveness.

The ILT framework devotes one section to 'reflective practice and personal development', focusing principally on self-evaluation and the activities teachers undertake to improve their professional performance, including pedagogic research. As in the other sections, applicants are invited to describe their approach to this in up to 500 words. There is no specific reference to values or professionalism, but an appendix to the document, relating to the accreditation of courses of teacher preparation, contains a statement of core knowledge and values which ILT members will be expected to adhere to. The core knowledge includes: the subject material they will be teaching; appropriate methods of teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme; models of how students learn, both generically and in their subject; the use of learning technologies appropriate to the context in which they teach; methods for monitoring and evaluating their own teaching; and the implications of quality assurance for practice.

The professional values include: a commitment to scholarship in teaching, both generally and within their own discipline; respect for individual learners and for their development and empowerment; a commitment to the development of learning communities, including students, teachers and all those engaged in learning support; a commitment to encouraging participation in higher education and to equality of educational opportunity; and a commitment to continued reflection and evaluation and consequent improvement of their own practice.

There are clearly areas where the approaches adopted in these two documents overlap. For example, both incorporate notions of 'reflective practice' as essential to professionalism, and treat this contested idea as unproblematic and taken-for-granted. However, we find the differences in the underlying assumptions about the nature of pedagogic work more interesting than the apparent similarities. In particular, we wish to explore the different perspectives on, and assumptions about, positionality evident within the standards. To explore these differences, we make use of some of the dimensions of pedagogic identity which we have developed elsewhere (Zukas and Malcolm, 2000) as a framework for evaluating models of the educator.

From moral and social accountability to organisational accountability

Not surprisingly, given the nature of further education in the UK, the FENTO standards are more explicit about organisational accountability than the ILT. For example, conforming to agreed codes of professional practice (Section H) requires that lecturers 'meet professional responsibilities in relation to organisational policies and practices' (H2e); and 'represent the organisation in a professional and appropriate manner' (H2f). ILT makes no such demands on applicants, not least because any attempt to do so would be seen as an attack on academic freedom.

However, the paradox here is that, whilst we have placed FENTO at the 'organisational' end of the spectrum, it also has strong claims to a place at the other end as well. There is an explicit emphasis in the FENTO values on entitlement, equality and inclusiveness 'regardless of ethnic origin, gender, age, sexual orientation, or degree of learning disability and/or difficulty'. The focus on learner autonomy, and on the teacher's role in 'managing the learning process, developing the curriculum and guiding and supporting the learner', suggests that teachers have moral and social responsibilities which are independent of their organisational role. This is reinforced by the lengthy sections on reflection and self-evaluation, and on 'meeting professional requirements', and also by the requirement that FE teachers understand the wider social and policy context in which their work takes place. There is a recognition throughout that the teacher has responsibilities to students and to their own professional standards which are additional to any responsibilities they may have as an employee. The ILT framework, whilst demanding little in the way of organisational accountability, is fairly vague about other forms of accountability. University teachers should have 'respect for individual learners', 'a commitment to encouraging participation in higher education and to equality of opportunity' and, once again, 'a commitment to continued reflection and evaluation ...' (ILT 2000a, *Professional Values*). There is thus an acknowledgement of moral and, to a limited extent, social accountability, but the requirements tread quite softly on academic sensibilities. The one exception to this is the commitment to participation and equality of opportunity; whilst it is couched in general terms, this commitment could be seen as an unwarranted infringement of academics' freedom to adopt a different view.

From social orientation to psychological orientation

As we have already pointed out, FENTO requires that teachers understand the social and policy context of FE. This includes such issues as social, cultural and linguistic diversity, curriculum and other initiatives at a national and international level, and funding sources. Throughout the framework there are reminders that teaching does not occur in a social vacuum, and this is spelt out quite clearly in the 'collegiality and collaboration' section of the *Values* statement within the standards. Alongside this there is a requirement that teachers understand and use learning theory and teaching methodologies, and tailor their teaching to the needs of individuals and groups. The framework thus spreads its demands across this dimension but, we would argue, with a commendable acknowledgement of the impact of social context upon educational practice.

The ILT framework is much more oriented towards psychological approaches to teaching, i.e. where the focus is on the learning transaction itself, rather than on the wider context in which it occurs. The 'core knowledge' for teachers, apart from their subject knowledge, is focused on methods, models and learning technologies. This is further reinforced in the application document, in which teachers are asked to describe and justify their choice of techniques and approaches to teaching, assessment and so on. There is no requirement that teachers in HE consider the social and cultural context of learning, or the implications of student diversity for pedagogy. Instead, they are asked to respect individual learners and 'their development and empowerment'. Whilst respect for individuals is laudable, in the absence of any social context it is difficult to see what empowerment means, or why it should matter. Similarly, the development of 'learning communities' is a core professional value, but these communities do not seem to extend beyond the institution, and their purpose is unclear.

On this dimension then, FENTO, whilst nodding to psychological orientations in particular teaching contexts, places pedagogic practice in general quite firmly at the social end of the scale. ILT on the other hand separates teaching and learning from the social context; diverse student bodies become collections of individual learners, for whom particular methods and technologies are more or less appropriate. It locates itself firmly at the psychological end of this dimension.

From the educator as a person in the world to the anonymous/invisible educator
From the learner as a person in the world to the anonymous/invisible learner

These two dimensions are treated together, since they are inextricably linked. They were developed partly in response to our reading of the HE pedagogic literature, in which it seemed that the identities of students and teachers often disappeared, to be replaced by collections of learning styles and approaches, and mechanistic techniques of learning facilitation. The tenacity of this approach is confirmed to some extent by the ILT framework. HE teachers should know about 'appropriate methods for teaching and learning ...', 'models of how students learn ...' and 'the use of learning technologies appropriate to the context in which they teach' (ILT 2000a, *Core Knowledge*). Although they should be committed to equality of educational opportunity, there is no requirement that they should understand why this is an issue, or what impact it might have on pedagogic processes or on 'effective learning environments'. The pedagogic relationship between teacher and students is seen as unproblematic, and focused on learning facilitation; there is no recognition anywhere in the document that the social and cultural identities of teachers and

students might impact upon that relationship. Teachers are required to be reflective, but in the absence of context remain anonymous and invisible, whilst students are visible only through their identity as learners, effective or otherwise.

The FENTO approach is very different. Much more is required of teachers in terms of their understanding of the myriad factors which can impact upon and influence the teaching and learning process. They must consider and understand inclusivity, recognise 'social and cultural diversity *and its effect on learning and curriculum development and delivery*', and understand 'the social, cultural and economic background of individual learners *and the implications of this for teaching and learning*' (FENTO, 1999, *Professional knowledge and understanding*) (our emphasis). Perhaps most surprisingly, they are expected to consider 'the potential impact of their own values, beliefs and life experiences on learners and learning', and 'use their own experience of learning to inform their approach to teaching' (H: *Meeting professional requirements*). Teachers, then, are clearly located here as people with identities, values and experiences, and this is seen to have an effect upon their pedagogic relations with their equally real students. Pedagogy is conceived as one aspect of the social realities of human life, and not a separate category altogether. FENTO thus ends up at the opposite end of this dimension from ILT.

Conclusions

As practising teacher educators, we are very concerned about the implications of these new standards for both our own pedagogic practice and that of our teacher-students. We are particularly concerned that the values and standards regulating our work in higher education (through the ILT) appear to be governed by only the most superficial concern with positionality, whilst the standards for the people we teach (teachers covered by FENTO) reflect a more complex and sophisticated understanding of the relationships between pedagogy and diversity. However, the introduction of professional standards and structures for adult educators raises questions for us about the extent to which any regulation impinges upon the social purpose and critical practice of adult education. At present, we are hopeful that the emphasis of the FENTO standards will bear fruit in changing pedagogies within FE; we are less hopeful for HE. We look to our colleagues in other countries who, similarly, are facing new regulatory frameworks in adult education to gain further understanding of the ways in which such professional standards impact upon social purpose and critical adult education.

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