

But I don't want to be a teacher: Work based learning in Education Studies

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Abstract

This paper considers the impact of placement experiences on student professional identity formation and its intersection with career identity within the university context of learning. To this end, the paper focuses on undergraduate Education Studies students' conceptualisation of their work-based placement experiences and perceptions of their professional identity formation. Respondents were second year students enrolled in a three-year undergraduate Education Studies course at a University in the south of England. The course did not offer qualified teacher status and was therefore not a teacher training programme. Two distinct groups of students were identified: those intent upon becoming teachers and those who were clear that formal classroom teaching was not their chosen career goal. Participants from both groups were undertaking a core module which included a compulsory placement of one day per week for eight to ten weeks in the Spring term, 2015. The notion of boundary crossing (Engestrom et al., 1995) was used for exploring the complex intersections of university and professional contexts and their impact on student career identity formation. Findings indicated that both sets of students were aware of the boundaries between university and the workplace but more significantly, that these boundaries shift over time. Furthermore, social interaction amongst peers within each group was key to professional identity formation but for those students looking for diverse professional education careers other than teaching, Education Studies courses should be mindful of widening student access to networks of other types of education professionals and work-based learning opportunities.

Introduction

Undergraduate Education Studies programmes in the UK pose an interesting juxtaposition between those undergraduates wishing to follow the traditional career path for students of education - namely entry into the teaching profession - and those who seek professional educational roles other than those directly associated with formal classroom or school-based teaching. These professional roles are many and various. Undergraduate Education Studies programmes do not usually provide qualified teacher status and are therefore not part of formal teacher training. They do however, offer a broader, critical understanding of what is 'education' and therefore appeal to both aspiring teachers and those looking for professional roles within the wider education sector. Many, but not all, of this latter group study a second-degree subject. Whereas the first set appear largely homogenous constituting a discreet peer group with associated career identity (prospective teachers), the latter are less easily identified or classified other than by *what they are not* i.e. non-teaching or non-school. This raises questions about how these students interact with what has, historically, been a school-centric degree programme, and the opportunities afforded by the placement experience in relation to their sense of career and professional identity formation.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) subject benchmark standards for Education Studies (QAA, 2014) recognise the evolution of Education Studies from its roots in teacher education to a subject in its own right and acknowledge the complexity of defining it as both a 'subject' and as a 'discipline'. Developed as a response to significant changes to UK teacher education in the 1980s, Education Studies degrees sought to address a perceived lack of critical study of education contained within the new initial teacher training (ITT) programmes. According to the QAA (2014: 6), Education Studies 'offers intellectually rigorous analysis of educational processes, systems and approaches, and their cultural, societal, political, historical and economic contexts'. The subsequent popularity of Education Studies degrees in the UK, and associated programmes such as Early Childhood Studies, Childhood and Youth Studies and education studies from a number of national and international perspectives, reflects a continued and growing interest in non-qualified teacher status (non-QTS) pathways

for undergraduates in the Higher Education (HE) sector (Palaiologou, 2010). Persistent, robust recruitment figures to Education Studies courses in England, suggest that the more recent changes to English ITT provision, with the expansion of both routes into teaching and a diversity of ITT providers, has not altered this trend.

Significantly, the QAA (2014: 6) acknowledge that 'knowledge, understanding and critical analysis to inform current and future professionals [...] may be achieved through learning in the workplace'. The workplace is not necessarily defined as 'school' and allows for the wider educational experience offered by more informal education settings. Such 'alternative' placements may therefore include education-focussed departments or teams within local authorities such as libraries and museum services; national and local charities and NGOs; supplementary schools; pupil referral units; youth programmes or after-school/out-of-school provision.

Thus, whilst the benefits of classroom experience for teacher training is well charted (Gibaldi and Lozza, 2009; Lamote and Engels, 2010), there are growing numbers of students taking Education Studies degrees who do not wish to seek employment as classroom teachers. The literature on work-based learning (WBL) suggests there are positive links between experiential and WBL, and vocational identity and career decision self-efficacy (Esters and Retallick, 2013). In relation to ITT, this means that students can test their vocational aspirations in terms of school type, key stage and year group. Understanding the benefits of placements for education students seeking alternative professional education career routes is less clear (Gazdula, 2017).

The growing emphasis on WBL in HE and perceptions of its relevance to employability and pre-professional development is evidenced across a wide range of disciplines including the social sciences (*c.f.* DfE, 2016; Paviakoua, 2016; BIS, 2015; Lester and Costley, 2010; Gibaldi and Lozza, 2009; Little, 2006; Leitch, 2006). Whereas school-based learning is seen as integral to teacher education (Busher *et al.*, 2015; DfE, 2010; Buitnk 2009; *c.f.* ten Dam and Blom, 2006) the role of placements within the broader context of Education Studies is less well documented; the benefits often articulated in terms of transferable skills and student attributes (Little, 2006; Little and Harvey, 2006).

Therefore, drawing on literature from the fields of student experience and HE, professional identity formation, and work-based and vocational learning, this paper compares the placement experiences of students in school-based and other professional education settings. It argues that, through the application of boundary crossing (Engestrom et al., 1995) to the placement experience, students are aware of the boundaries between university and the workplace and that these boundaries shift over time. Boundary crossing here is understood as 'a person's transitions and interactions across different sites (Suchman, 1994 cited in Akkerman and Bakker, 2011). Social interactions amongst peers within each group are also key to undergraduate student professional identity formation.

Methodology

The study was carried out in the context of a three-year undergraduate Education Studies degree at a University in the south of England. The programme was not teacher training and did not lead to qualified teacher status (QTS). The study reports the views and experiences of a convenience sample (Cohen et al., 2007: 113) of ten undergraduates in their second year of an Education Studies degree during which they undertook a compulsory placement of one day per week for eight to ten weeks in the Spring term of 2015. Five students (T 1-5) were intending to progress onto a teacher training course at the end of their studies and five (PE 1-5) were looking for other forms of professional education career. All students beginning the second-year placement completed a questionnaire administered by the Careers team aimed at identifying individuals' skills and aptitudes appropriate for the workplace, together with their perceptions of potential personal, professional and career choice or development. This information provided a basis for a semi-structured interview with the ten respondents. This took place during the placement phase. A focus group was then formed with the same students shortly after the placement had concluded. A thematic analysis of responses followed.

Two key research questions guided the study:

1. How do students use the placement experience to navigate the complex boundaries between 'university' and 'work' as sites of learning and professional identity formation?

2. To what extent does the placement experience contribute to student personal, professional and career choice/development?

The study complied with Institutional and British Education Research Association (BERA) ethical guidelines. It was anticipated that the knowledge generated would be 'knowledge for action' (Wallace and Paulson, 2003: 24) such that Education Studies programmes can be better able to meet the learning and professional requirements of all students engaged with such programmes at a time when student satisfaction and employability are key drivers of higher education courses.

Theoretical framework

In relation to placement experience, the ecologies of being a 'student' (the learner as 'critical enquirer'); engaging in professional practice (the learner as 'novice') and publicly aligning with a particular profession (the learner as 'aspirant') create intersections between different types of knowledge, skills and values. Understanding the learning that takes place at the intersections of such boundaries suggests that learning can be a 'horizontal' process across different types of material or symbolic boundaries (Engestrom *et al.*, 1995), but also that boundaries in themselves are not static but can be personally and locally constructed (Akkerman, 2011: 133). In this way, understandings of boundary crossing and boundary learning (*c.f* Illeris, 2015; Mezirow, 1997) informed by socio-cultural activity theory, offer a useful lens.

Similarly, the concept of identity is complex (Lamote and Engels, 2010) where images of self and perceptions of role are often intermingled and not easily separated. It is a concept both socially and personally legitimated and one which is rooted in context. For undergraduate students engaged in placement activities as part of their learning, therefore, the context of 'work' and that of 'university' are different and sometimes in opposition to one another on a number of levels: theoretically, practically and philosophically. Where one asks for adherence to specific workplace standards or professional practices the other takes a more critical stance informed by theory and/ or beliefs and values.

Identity control theory is useful here as it underlines the social nature of identity formation, how individuals control for discrepancies between individual behaviours (understandings of self) and the reactions to that identity from others. The set of

meanings associated with a particular identity are defined as the identity standard - what it means to be a teaching professional, a youth worker or schools' liaison officer. For the student, this set of meanings can be gleaned from a number of sources, personal histories, academic study and association with relevant professionals. In addition, an identity contains *perceptions* of meanings in relevant situations, largely based on feedback from others - how they perceive the individual 'fitting in' to the given situation, for example in the manner of a school-based mentor commenting on a student teacher - a *comparator* that serves to compare perceived meanings with the identity standard, the *error* or *discrepancy* - that signifies the difference between the two, and finally the outcome of that analysis - meaningful behaviour enacted in the situation that conveys meanings about the individual's identity (Burke, 2007).

Essentially, individuals bring self-in-situation meanings into alignment with their self-defining meanings held in the identity standard when there is a discrepancy, and they maintain that alignment when there is no discrepancy. (Stets and Burke, 2005: 1)

Anderson and Mounts (2012) summarise the processes involved as identity defence and identity change. They also indicate a third predicted process, identity exploration,

...which is thought to be initiated in response to identity disturbance with the goal of consolidating the identity standard by learning about, trying on, and receiving interpersonal feedback about possible identity standards (*ibid*: 93).

This again emphasises the potential value of placements to pre-professional students suggested earlier, particularly that of the learner centred model of WBL and Kolb's cycle of experiential learning. How far the placement facilitates, frames or constrains the negotiated, fluid and multiple nature of the developmental process of professional identity formation is of significance here.

Understanding work-based learning

Notions of work-based and experiential learning

Theories of work-based and experiential learning are also pertinent here. At its simplest, WBL constitutes learning that is situated in the workplace. The nature and development of that learning resides within a triangle of the workplace setting, the university and the learner. Illeris (2009) describes this as the three dimensions of learning: content, incentive and interaction. As measures of employability continue to influence programmes of study in HE (Speight *et al.*, 2012), Lester and Costley (2010) argue that a greater degree of personal self-management and self-direction is required by individuals for current and future occupational roles, particularly as the landscape of employment changes. This applies to the student learner as 'enquirer' and 'aspirant'. More specifically, the scope of the worker as practitioner (the learner as novice) is broader than that provided by any single employer, such that they may have a much broader sense of their personal commitment to their work and career. This, therefore, suggests a substantial role for HE in workplace learning and development such that the workplace experience is both immediately relevant at a practical level and supportive of the student as a self-managing practitioner and self-directed learner.

Nottingham (2011) posits that WBL is not necessarily located in a specific academic discipline, but rather the workplace itself becomes the context for learning. WBL, thus understood, is a rich field for the generation of knowledge, one that identifies the generic properties of work and professional practice as a site for academic learning. Lester and Costley (2010) consider the most essential component of effective WBL is that which is organised around project-based enquiry and permits the learner to address workplace issues. For students on placement this inevitably means negotiating the complex intersections (boundaries) of applying academic critical engagement to identified issues and understanding the personal and (pre) professional assumptions emerging from the situations encountered. In other words, the workplace brings together student ecologies of enquirer, novice and aspirant and forms the locus in which boundary crossing occurs.

Closely associated with notions of WBL is that of experiential learning - learning that occurs through encounter with a particular setting or type of circumstances. Brookfield (1993) identified two types of experiential learning. First, that which is undertaken by students who are given a chance to acquire and apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting (Smith, 2000, 2010). Second is that type of learning that is gathered through direct participation in life events. Unlike the former, this is not sponsored through formal institutions such as universities and indeed is indicative of the way in which most people learn. Whilst the models so far described indicate a linear process of learning, Kolb's notion of the experiential learning cycle (Kolb and Fry, 1975) adds a further perspective. This constitutes four key elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts, and the testing of these in new situations (Smith, 2000, 2010). The cycle can begin at any of the four points and is conceptualised as a continuous spiral. Of particular note is Kolb's emphasis on concrete experience as a means of testing ideas and the value of feedback in order to change theory and practice. This is fundamental to student placement opportunities.

One criticism of Kolb's theory however, is that insufficient attention is paid to the process of reflection in the learning cycle, an element that has gained greater import in the notion of WBL. Dewey for example advocated experiential learning that nurtured reflection on experience and the systematic testing of ideas (Dyke, 2006:106). Such ideas may equally refer to theory, professional practice or career identity. This has clear significance for the student learner. Dewey's (1933: 118) notion of reflective thought: '[that] active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends,' suggests it is dialogic and interactive in nature (Smith, 1996, 1999). What is key here is where such dialogic and interactive considerations take place.

Implicit in these discussions is a distinction between reflection *on* action and reflection *in* action; two aspects of reflection which are brought together in the work of Donald Schön. Reflection-*in*-action suggests practitioners 'know more than they can say' (Dyke, 2006: 112), in other words having tacit, instinctive professional knowledge; 'teachers thinking on their feet'. Reflection-*on*-action, however, refers to

evaluation of one's own practice, as seen for example in action research paradigms. In this way, Schön's notion of reflective practice has had considerable impact in the field of education and WBL. It is through the process of reflection *on* practice that workplace experience is transformed into learning (Seibert and Walsh, 2013: 168), an approach that emphasises the importance of activity *in* professional practice such that 'skilful practice may reveal a kind of knowing that does not stem from a prior intellectual operation' (Kinsella, 2007: 408) and enables the practitioner to 'examine and evaluate practice in context' (Seibert and Walsh, 2013: 168).

A useful addition to this simple reflection-*on* / reflection-*in* binary, particularly with regard to both the role of the learner and that of the university in WBL, is the notion of reflection-*for*-action. This 'anticipatory reflection' (Loughran, 1996, cited in Raelin, 2011) allows for consideration prior to the placement experience of how the learner might approach a given situation. Reflection-in-action then permits the reframing of unanticipated responses, challenging preconceived or underlying/institutional assumptions allowing for the generation of new approaches. Reflection-on-action continues this iterative process. Such views challenge the assumption of linear approaches to learning and knowledge production and raises questions about the nature of knowledge to which reflective practice is directed and, thereby, the role of the University tutor and work-based mentor in supporting or developing this learning.

Work-based learning and knowledge production

Raelin (2011) argues that practice can be seen as an educational event where learning is part of a participative social process and where practice provides the opportunity to promote new learning. That learning is generally categorised as learning in or for professional practice: knowing the 'what', 'why' and 'how' (*c.f.* Lester and Costley, 2010; Nottingham, 2011; Mezirow, 1981). However, drawing on Engeström's notion of 'boundary crossing', and Lave and Wenger's 'communities of practice', Guile and Griffiths (2001) call for new curriculum frameworks that allow for work experience to provide a basis for the development of knowledge, skills and identity. Here, the context in which learning takes place is key. In constructing a five-fold typology of work experience models, (traditional, experimental, generic, work-process and connective) Guile and Griffiths argue for the benefits of the connective model of work experience which moves beyond initiation into the world of work, the

testing of vocation, assessment of skills and attributes or improving employability, to a deeper understanding of the workplace as a series of interconnected activity systems and communities of practice that take into account both the vertical and horizontal development of the learner. This 'horizontal' development of the learner, arising from recent developments in socio-cultural activity theory, is characterised as 'the process of change and development which occurs within an individual as s/he moves from one context (e.g., school [university]) to another (e.g., a workplace)' (*ibid*: 114). Furthermore,

[I]t could refer to the changes in an individual's sense of identity as a result of the experience of working in a school, factory or community centre. At another level, it could refer to the capacity to develop new mediating concepts to cope with the demands of working effectively in different organisational settings (Engeström et al., 1995).

Hence, the workplace becomes more than just a setting where students can learn *about* work and professional practice but *through which* learning and personal development take place. This makes demands on the student, placement and university such that learners are equipped with opportunities to 'learn to negotiate how to learn' (*ibid*: 126). In other words, contributors to WBL can provide opportunities for the development of personal, social and behavioural skills that support organisational and personal learning. It is the manner and extent to which work experience placements contribute to professional identity formation for the pre-service student that is the focus of the following discussion.

[Professional] Identity Formation

One of the benefits of WBL mentioned earlier is the opportunity it provides students for testing out vocation and skills. In this way WBL is significant in its contribution to professional or occupational career identity. Anderson and Mounts (2012) point out that although career exploration is a life-long endeavour beginning in early childhood, most adolescents and emerging adults do not explore well their options and possibilities. Accordingly, Anderson and Mounts point to American research that suggests most university graduates are working in occupations not related to their field of study five years following graduation; it is family and financial considerations

rather than career satisfaction that settle those in their late 20s into careers; and 64% of workers would choose another career if they were able to start again. However, it is those in the 18-21 age group, including university students, who are likely to be the most active explorers of occupational identity. In this regard, the role of both the university and the placement are significant in their contributions to student career identity formation.

That identity formation is understood as a developmental process rests in part on the work of Erikson (1968) who conceptualised identity formation as exploring, identifying, and integrating seemingly disparate aspects of the self to arrive at a sense of personal continuity across time and context (Faircloth, 2012). However, although later work such as that by Marcia (1980) or McAdam (1996) emphasises the individual psychological nature of this process, it is theories such as Bronfenbrenner's (1989) ecological systems theory and later socio-historical activity theory that underline the complex situated nature of identity and identity formation. Faircloth for example draws attention to the notion of *identities -in-practice* where:

...[u]se of the term identities-in-practice rather than identities highlights the important contrast between..., a conception of identity as a set of choices and practices co-constructed between an individual and a specific community, and, ..., an achieved, relatively uniform sense of self (Faircloth, 2012: 187).

In other words, identity is to be understood as something negotiated, fluid, and multiple, rather than achieved, unitary, or consistent. These identities occur at the intersection of the individual with different contexts (workplace environments) and communities (professionals). This has significance for understanding WBL as the locus of professional identity formation and development. '[T]o learn in any community means to become a particular person (i.e., select a particular pattern of participation) with respect to the possibilities enabled by that community' (*ibid*: 187).

For students on placement this means they have the opportunity of practising a particular identity in a particular context. They may, therefore, 'try on' identities to see how they 'fit' in terms of perceptions of self (who they are), perceptions of the profession (who they want to be), and inclusion within the respective community of

practice (professional identity). This is ultimately a negotiated process of membership - receiving, revising or rejecting perceived expectations. How students respond depends on what they view as relevant and acceptable; decisions that are dependent upon biographical factors, such as past experiences and personal backgrounds. What is desirable to a profession may not necessarily have been experienced as 'good' by its recipients. A teacher's normative practice of organising pupils by 'ability' may serve practical teacher-orientated purposes of classroom management but may equally have deleterious effects on the pupils concerned. In this way, a student's ability to negotiate their learning-in-practice may ultimately constrain or nurture their professional identity formation for which the university and the placement must be considered accountable.

Thus, in summary, the literature suggests the workplace offers a complex arena for student learning and highlights the different ecologies of a student in the workplace. Learning in this context is multifaceted and multi dimension, not necessarily following a linear progression. Understanding that learning takes place at the boundaries or intersections of learning environments encountered by students will provide a useful insight into their personal, professional and career identity formation as well as throwing light on how they navigate these different and often competing boundaries.

Findings

The study set out to establish the answers to two research questions:

1. How do students use the placement experience to navigate the complex boundaries between 'university' and 'work' as sites of learning and professional identity formation?
2. To what extent does the placement experience contribute to student personal, professional and career choice/development.

The responses from the two groups of students - those who identified themselves as prospective teachers (T1-5) and those looking for other forms of professional education careers (PE1-5) suggested that they used the placement opportunity in a number of ways to enhance their theoretical and practical knowledge, as well as to test and explore their career preferences and professional identities. The role of

social interactions, both within the university and amongst networks of professional was a contributing factor.

1. Navigating complex boundaries

Opportunities for reflection on/in/for

Students referred to a tension between the discipline demands of the core Education Studies module within which the placement experience is located and the learner-centred model where the choice of placement is determined by personal (career) aims rather than meeting the academic requirements of the placement for the module assignment.

“I go into placement focussing on what I want for the future and can pull out things for the essay” (T1).

Participants were very clear about what type of placement they sought. For those intending primary teaching as a career this was narrowed down further to the particular key stage or year group so as to build on or extend previous knowledge and experience. Of the students intent on other education related professions, the specificity of the request was determined by clarity for the individual of their intended career and ranged from ‘anywhere other than school’ to a specific department and course at a specified HE institution. The placement was seen to provide students with ‘an opportunity to see what is out there and give it a go’, and the ability to ‘test the waters’.

“Having choice of placement, non-school or school was really good. It made me think what else is out there beyond schools and teaching - a very positive experience” (EP2).

Once out on placement a common response to the real-life nature of the placement experience was that it was an ‘eye-opener’ - this from both teaching and non-teaching career respondents. The placement afforded “hands-on experience that no amount of reading can teach you” and allowed students to reflect on their skills and competencies, identifying for themselves areas for personal and professional development such as looking for or creating opportunities to build confidence or move out of their ‘comfort zone’.

There was a strong sense of the placement either facilitating, framing or constraining individual student identity formation and their ability to deal with disruption (the tension between a perceived identity standard and 'reality'). The placement was "shocking", "an eye-opener" or affirming: "I can do this".

"It's about adapting life-style to job rather than money. I am prepared to take less money in order to be happy. My value system has changed - I am more comfortable in my own skin" (EP1).

Contributors to professional identity

The core module provides students with opportunities for reflection in/on/for learning. Prior to the placement presentations are made from the careers service followed up by designated seminar sessions whereby students are actively encouraged to reflect upon personal attributes, skills and previous experiences. Learning how they are perceived by their peers is an important part of this process:

"I always liked working with children. I have a Childcare Diploma and a sibling with SEN. I worked as a support worker with a child with ADHD."

"My own schooling had been very positive and contributed to my career choice. I see this as idealistic now."

The personal narratives closely associated students' perceptions of their technical and transferable skills with their sense of professional identity. Those skills or aptitudes considered relevant to the intended career were highlighted: communication and listening skills, empathy, problem-solving and team-working with creativity, self-motivation and adaptability featured amongst those on non-school placements.

Students in non-school placements generally had more to say about their aims for the experience. Inevitably this was job/role specific and there were concerns about 'fitting in' to a totally new environment, taking opportunities for networking and seeking 'understanding' about the specific sector, career choices of the professionals involved and potential impact on students' self-identity. All students articulated concerns about levels of confidence in moving from familiar to unfamiliar territories

and the tensions between multiple identities as a student, learner and pre-professional/professional in context. This was not necessarily negatively perceived:

“I feel less of a student and more of a teacher. I completely change on placement – in my use of language for example so pupils understand. I’m a role model to pupils. A definite TA when there, with responsibility – not just a student observing. A teacher in the making, reading to whole class – I would not have done that a few years ago” (T2).

The intersection of multiple identities became clear to students through the placement. “The values in youth work are the same as my personal values - hence my career choice”, but those identities needed to be both personally and socially legitimated. Students felt they were clearer about what works and what doesn’t work “for me”.

“Being a parent and being a teaching professional is very different” (T3).

“The experience taught me a whole new set of skills. I really enjoyed it and found I was good at it. I was not expecting that at all” (EP2).

2. The role of the placement in personal professional and career choice development

The Significance of Context

The placement experience meant that students were actively faced with negotiating the complex intersections (boundaries) of applying their academic critical engagement to the issues they identified through the module and understanding the personal and (pre) professional assumptions emerging from the situations they encountered. There were discussions, for example, about job security and pay, with those moving into broader education careers being less sanguine about job security.

“I thought a job in HE would be safe and secure. I’m not sure it is now. I see I will need to get my PhD” (EP3).

“The charity sector is dependent on charity funding and that changes from year to year” (EP1).

“Job security in teaching is dependent on professionalism and meeting requirements - the pressure of getting pupils to where they are meant to be” (T1).

“You can earn more in other careers - the best teachers are those with the passion for the job” (T3).

Concepts about self and/or career were also challenged through this process. Dealing with such ‘disturbances’ meant students were faced with monitoring and regulating their responses when identities or expectations were challenged. Not being allowed to enter a staff room because of student status was viewed negatively. They felt it undermined rather than nurtured professional identity and limited the observation of professionalism in all aspects of the setting. However, the response was to deal with this pragmatically: the student ‘banked’ the experience as ‘what I will not do to students in the future’ and looked for other ways of gaining the information they required. Students spoke of learning how to adapt their specific beliefs and values to the expectations of the setting, noting there was a difference for example, between staff room and classroom or pupil responses to different teachers. Students referred to the need to adapt to different types of professional relationship, for example with teachers, pupil and parents. In this way, the placement afforded opportunities to acquire or apply knowledge, skills and feelings in an immediate and relevant setting.

“I was mentored at placement but I also learnt from the teachers” [in the Pupil Referral Unit] (EP5).

“Observations indicated that the same group of children worked well with one teacher and not another” (T4).

What practitioners and professionals said about the students had significance, particularly where this was measured by students in terms of levels or trust or being given new responsibilities, suggesting that how students were treated was as important as any verbal feedback given. Perceptions of self and professional identity were also affirmed by clients or pupils. Confidence gained in this way facilitated students in taking greater ownership of their personal self-management and self-direction - moving out of known comfort zones and looking for, or creating,

opportunities for development, a process which started pre-placement. This allowed for the trying on or trying out of skills sets as well as identities and points to both the horizontal and vertical nature of identity processes. Messages received from university were often set in tension with the lived experience of the setting. University norms about teaching or classroom practice were cited as contributing to the decision not to move into teaching as a career. Similarly, for the students, being on placement only once a week made it obvious to clients or pupils that they were not 'real' professionals, even on that one day, leading to some sense of having to adapt and monitor behaviours and expectations when at university and again on placement.

Social interactions

Social interactions across the contexts of university and placement therefore were significant to student career and professional identity formation, often leading to greater confidence and a sense of building on prior experience, even if those experiences at the time had appeared negative. Informal discussions with peers and more formal seminar discussions facilitated this. Affirmation by professionals (both in the university and setting) over student performance in the setting particularly led to greater confidence. Similarly, belonging to a peer group at university that was linked to a specific career (teaching) was important, in that these students could share experiences that would be understandable to their peers. Overall the social interactions afforded by the placement experience led to greater clarity in terms of career identity.

"The placement has helped me to articulate what it is to be a creative writer. This was assisted by my own research based on the placement.
(EP2).

Conclusion

This paper's objective was to explore undergraduate Education Studies students' conceptualisation of their work-based placement experiences and perceptions of their professional identity formation, in particular drawing a comparison between the placement experiences of students in school-based and non-school settings. It was evident that both sets of students were aware of the boundaries between university

and the work-place and these were articulated particularly in terms of perceptions of self and professional behaviours and expectations. There was also some sense of these boundaries shifting over time as students looked for new challenges or set goals in terms of confidence-building, trying on new identities or aligning workplace and personal values and expectations. Those aiming for non-teaching careers stressed their creativity, self-motivation and adaptability skills in this regard.

Certainly, WBL as part of the core module facilitated student personal reflection in terms of their identity and career formation, supported by involvement from the careers service. Opportunities to 'try out' and 'try on' different career identities were valued, particularly so by those looking for alternative education careers where there was a sense of greater urgency to become identified with a particular career.

Social interactions were key to both groups, both at university and in the workplace. However, it was noticeable that students intent on a career in teaching were part of a readily accessible and identifiable peer group at university that facilitated professional identity formation through informal contact and formal discussions in seminars. The role of the university in widening these students' access to networks of other types of professionals seems important. Furthermore, the core module could include more narrative examples in course materials of broader, informal education settings such that this becomes 'normal' rather than 'exceptional' in seminar discussions and lectures.

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