

Who am I and how did I get here? The development of professional identity through incidental learning for trainee teachers in UK Further Education

Amanda Turner, University of Bolton

Email: A.Turner@bolton.ac.uk

Abstract

It has been argued that teacher identity is shaped by their experiences while on training placement (Avalos, 2011; Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009). Through negotiation, collaboration and consolidation trainee teachers can navigate through the challenges that exists in the Further Education and Skills sector (Orr, 2012) and learn from these experiences. This is incidental learning and has been defined as unplanned and internally constructed through a process prompted when an unexpected, serendipitous moment is experienced by an individual, often during a non-routine experience (Marsick and Watkins, 1992; Kerka, 2000; Polly, 2007). When this disjuncture occurs, trainee teachers need to be prepared to view these experiences as learning experiences through reflection and sharing, preferably in a community of practice to form a teaching identity. This paper explores ideas around trainee teachers' professional identity development through the findings of a longitudinal study. A theoretical framework is presented and evaluated in using data generated from a range of qualitative research methods. These results challenge the idea of criteria-based professionalism, arguing instead for a more holistic development using a framework of professional identity which includes incidental learning. Initial teacher educators can use this framework to review and develop the existing formal learning provision by identifying ways to supplement the development of their professional identity. Trainee teachers will be able to reflect on their own professional identity, professional relationships and form self-evaluation strategies to engage with disjuncture in a way that will lead to improvement in their practice.

Keywords

incidental learning, communities of practice, identity, professionalism, teacher education, further education, teacher training

Introduction

When an individual is engaged in an activity in the context of a particular domain of knowledge or skills development and something unexpected happens in terms of their understanding of that domain, then incidental learning can happen. This distinctive feature of incidental learning posits that incidental learning occurs in relation to something else (Marsick and Watkins, 1992) and via disjuncture; something unplanned, and therefore unexpected, creates incidental learning. However, they also argue that this type of learning often remains hidden and as such, lacks systematic evaluation or interrogation by the individual. “Incidental learning ... is largely unintentional, unexamined and embedded in people's closely held belief systems” (Marsick and Watkins, 1992: 288). Although this type of learning can happen in any context it remains the by-product of another activity (Hunter, 2010; Kerka, 2000). It is the embodiment of incidental learning which is of interest and relevance when exploring the development of professional identity for trainee teachers.

Incidental learning is highly personal, and consequently can be difficult to capture. Existing theoretical frameworks for incidental learning suggest certain key factors need to be in place to provide a structure for incidental learning to make sense. These structures can enable individuals to draw meaning from incidental learning by providing support during the learning experience, such as a more able other (Brasher et al., 2012), or by preparing learners to see all experiences as having the potential for learning, by explicitly having the intention to learn (Polly, 2007). Although frameworks can provide a learning structure, they are not specific to the particular needs of trainee teachers. Therefore, this paper presents a new framework for consideration which is linked specifically to the development of a teacher on placement in the Further Education (FE) sector.

I also argue that incidental learning can lead to a professional identity being developed in a way where it is embodied by the individual as it is born from personal experience. The theoretical framework in this article can be used to structure the placement experience so that trainee teachers experience the professional standards in further education teaching (ETF, 2014) as an integral part of the programme rather than imposed as a criteria-based necessity.

Incidental learning therefore occurs when faced with disjuncture and is more likely to lead to further development of professional identity when related to practice and supported through critical reflection, either in a community of practice or individually. A trainee teacher will continue to develop a strong professional identity through a continual cyclical development fostered through supported incidental learning.

The development of professional identity for trainee teachers

The journey trainee teachers experience on their way to becoming professional teachers is of great importance, often shaping the sort of teacher they become (Avalos, 2011; Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009). Time spent in a teaching environment provides rich opportunities for incidental learning to occur, potentially bridging the gap between formal knowledge acquisition, theory building and practical application. However, the quality of their learning as a trainee is dependent upon the trainee, their pre-existing professional identity and the relationships within the work-based experience (Velzan et al., 2011). Close collaboration and structured reflection are essential as a way to enable individuals to move beyond their current ability. Harford and MacRuic (2008) argue that “a community of practice can be understood in terms of the practices, values and beliefs that emerge from working in collaboration” (: 3).

Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) define the FE sector as a “deficit model of provision, reacting to new economic and industrial imperatives, broadly to do with bringing about economic growth and social cohesion” (: 967). Additional pressure from quality measures such as criteria-based observations, attainment measures etc. result in a dynamic environment where teachers develop a better idea of ‘self’ as they are forced to become “...responsive to the wider context and an interpretation of the social processes inside their classrooms” (: 971). This results in challenging placements for trainee teachers which according to Consuegra et al. (2014) may have a negative impact. They argue that “...confrontation with the complexities and responsibilities of a classroom can lead to dramatic experiences and counterproductive learning for novice teachers” (: 80).

The social processes that Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) discuss are not limited to the learning environment, such as the classroom, but happen within a community of practice too (Beijaard, Mejer and Verloop, 2003). When confronted with a new

situation, Jarvis (2010) suggests individuals imitate the subculture of the (teachers) group they find themselves in. With reflection and discussion this is replaced with a more interactive, and in turn, meaningful learning experience, creating new behaviours which are then associated with that situation, creating learning. Learning with peers is an opportunity to extend and develop knowledge creation. However, consequent actions are heavily influenced by social conventions, cultural norms and power dynamics and can distort the way an individual understands events (Jarvis, 2010).

Professional identity does not therefore develop in isolation from the trainee's own pre-existing values. A trainee may experience a culture and set of values which conflicts with their own set of values. This is navigated through a continual cycle of interpreting and re-interpreting their information and skills development while continually developing their sense of identity (Schepens and Vlerick, 2009). This internal conflict, or 'practice shock' is what Orr (2012) describes as the disjuncture a trainee experiences, when their expectation of the placement experience can be significantly different to the reality.

The Professional Standards for Further Education and Skills sector came into existence in 2014 from the Education and Training Foundation (ETF). These are based on a measurable outcomes model and were created by the Department for Business Information and Skills (BIS, 2014) with a focus on planning, delivery and assessment in order to drive up standards. The twenty standards can be over simplistic and fall short of measuring the complexities of professionalism and professional identity. Not only are they mechanistic, but they lack differentiation and so do not take into account individual profiles and variables within this wide and diverse sector. The ETF have clear expectations for trainee teachers to have access to professional subject-specific mentors so they are able to observe professional behaviours. However, the de-regulation of the sector in 2014 has resulted in differing levels of qualified teachers and subsequently differing levels of professionalism.

Through incidental learning it is possible for trainee teachers to develop a professional identity shaped within the contextual setting where they are placed. In particular, a trainee will learn about the expectations within a particular FE setting in order to work successfully within the institution's structure and where this is supportive, discursive and reflective, it may form a community of practice. The placement provides a realistic

experience of the sector which can result in a professional identity shaped by individual or group values rather than simply adhering to the professional standards (Jephcote and Salisbury, 2009). Professional identity is a dynamic and active embodiment of practice and ideals which is not fixed as a particular set of prescribed standards (Diamond, 1991). Professional learning according to Rytivarra and Kershner (2012), is not superficial acquisition of information, but deep learning that happens when connections are made resulting in transformation, or “seeking meaning through understanding” (: 1000). This can be seen by changes in the individual adopting such practices. Research conducted by James and Unwin (2016) suggests teacher training programmes should prepare teachers to acquire social, communication and management skills so they are equipped to manage these challenging concepts, but they can be difficult to teach and learn.

A definition of incidental learning

Incidental learning was defined as early as 1942 by McGeouch, as the unplanned learning which takes place without specified formal instruction, motive or specific given material within a formal learning environment. Although this describes the unexpected characteristics of incidental learning it has been restricted by the formal context within which it occurs. This echoes the value placed on formal learning at the time, and a lack of esteem placed on other forms of learning. Marsick and Watkins (1990) recognised the limitation in the theory presented by McGeouch, thus developing the idea to include all types of learning that occurs in an unstructured way. They argue that even if it is a derivative of another activity, this does not have to be in a formal learning context.

Historically, incidental learning is discussed alongside informal learning and at times seen as a component, or subcategory of informal learning (Gilley et al., 2001; Polly, 2007; Hunter, 2014). However, this is a restrictive view of incidental learning because it differs from these other types of learning, is spontaneous in nature and can happen within any type of learning situation serendipitously as part of another activity. It is unplanned and inherently personal to the individual.

Marsick and Watkins (1992) proposed that incidental learning is more likely to take place within an environment which is rife with challenges, such as the workplace,

where activities “such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organisational culture, or trial and error experimentation” (: 7) are more likely to occur. In their later research, Marsick and Watkins (2001) argue that incidental learning is particularly pertinent to the role of a teacher due to the high number of potential unknowns inherent. Differences in learners and group dynamics etc. can often be unpredictable and create the sort of conditions where incidental learning can flourish. In an education system dominated by formal measurement around criteria, incidental learning has been side lined, over looked or ignored. This diminished value has had a detrimental effect, with very little research into this area of learning.

Key factors for incidental learning to happen in a meaningful way

In order to determine what needs to be in place for incidental learning to be meaningful, common key factors have been identified from a systematic literature review. The intention is not to recommend defined criteria about the particular learning that takes place but to recognise that due to its very nature, without certain factors, not all incidental learning will happen in a meaningful way. There is a danger that some incidental learning is not being captured or utilised and is therefore going unrecognised and ultimately lost. Issues exist in terms of potential ‘blind spots’ where a limited interpretation can be arrived at due to an individuals’ own needs, assumptions and values (Kerka, 2000).

‘Disjuncture’ is a concept which describes when we are forced to find new knowledge, new explanations or new ways of doing things because we are not in harmony with the world around us, it is the main factor that triggers incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins, 2001; Polly, 2007; Jarvis, 2010). This unplanned insight, often as a by-product of another experience or activity, is subject to interpretation and is compared by the individual to prior knowledge to form meaning and learning.

Due to the often hidden nature of incidental learning, social interaction with peers and more knowledgeable others enable it to become more visible (Jarvis, 2010; Kerka, 2000; Hunter, 2010). Although Marsick and Watkins (1992) argue that incidental learning initially occurs intrinsically on a personal and individual level, it is through critical reflective engagement on the experience and in collaboration with others that meaning can come. They argue that this is part of the continuous and collective

learning that takes place within organisations and that context, be it personal, social, business or cultural is an additional critical aspect of the way in which an individual engages with incidental learning. The context plays a pivotal role in how the individual interprets the learning experience and the actions that they choose to take. This concurs with research by Lave and Wenger (2008), which explores the relationship between the apprentice (trainee teacher) and the opportunity. Their model provides an approach to move knowledge and professional identity forward within a community of practice. Access to a professional culture such as that found in teaching also provides an opportunity to encounter codes of behaviour and technical language which operate within a workplace (Bourdieu, 1998; Polly, 2007; Halliday-Wynes and Beddie, 2009;).

Although disjuncture has been identified by research as the starting point for incidental learning (Marsick and Watkins, 2001; Jarvis, 2001), I propose that the way that an individual chooses to respond to the disjuncture is based on their professional identity. Although critical thinking skills (Brookfield, 1987) are directly linked to the development of identity and the creativity to solve problems, I propose it is identity which determines what the individual chooses to notice as learning in the first instance. Gilley et al. (2001) identify an inherent issue in the way the individual picks the actual problem they choose to 'attack'. An individuals' prior experience and the context that they are operating within determines how they choose to interpret the incident. Hunter (2014) argues for making incidental learning intentional, or in other words, increasing the individuals' awareness of the learning incident and instilling a desire to learn so they are more likely to notice learning opportunities and make incidental learning a key intention. This would mean individuals remain alert and receptive to learning as it might occur providing a holistic approach to learning as 'woven into the fabric' of everyday experiences.

Although the very nature of incidental learning will ultimately be personal and unplanned, this section identifies certain factors that need to be in place for incidental learning to happen in a meaningful way. As disjuncture occurs this triggers experience which brings about meaningful incidental learning when it is critically reflected upon, in a supportive community of practice, or as planned individual activity, during and after the event. When supported by these approaches meaningful learning is more likely to take place, however, in order for an individual to even recognise, capture and

value incidental learning, a clear professional identity needs to be established and subsequently developed.

A theoretical framework for incidental learning

This section outlines the key factors in a theoretical framework for use by teacher educators and trainee teachers as well as researchers in this field.

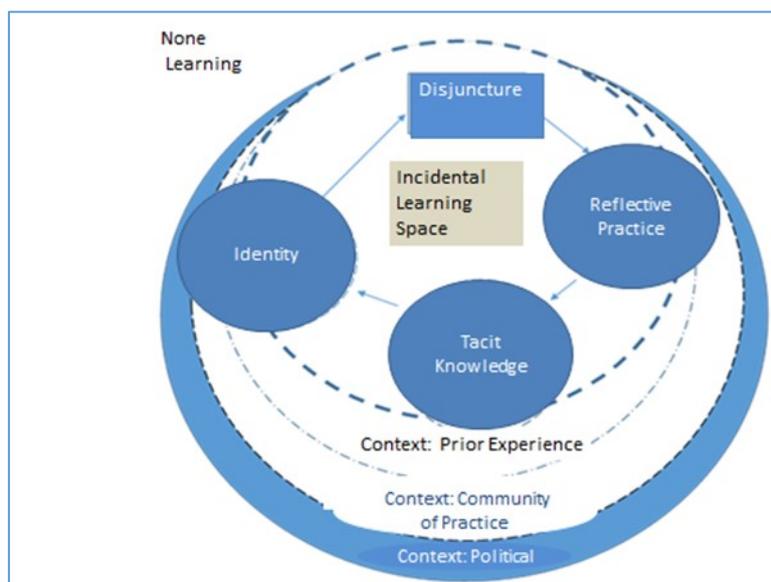


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for Incidental Learning

The framework is shown in Figure 1: Theoretical Framework for Incidental Learning. This is based on a central sphere which is the space where incidental learning occurs. Identity and reflective practice are included in this space, but overlap with context, as these are influenced and ultimately shaped within the context of prior and existing experience. Included within identity are different elements such as desire to learn, self-efficacy, noticing and creativity in solving problems. Identity determines the way an individual engages with disjuncture, either in a confident and well-informed manner, or not at all. The experience of the disjuncture has an impact on professional identity, leading to further development of identity.

After the disjuncture has happened, the individual spends time reflecting back on the incident and the incidental learning becomes more meaningful. It is in this period of reflection and engagement in an established community of practice or planned personal development framework, that the learner can see all aspects of the

experience and critically examine the incident for learning and placed in the context of prior knowledge and experiences.

It seems likely that the more an individual experiences and reflects, the more skilled they become at the act of reflection. Therefore, the symbiotic relationship between reflective practice and disjuncture determines the perception and engagement with both. Alongside this, professional identity develops further through the act of reflective practice which builds tacit knowledge. Ultimately, this leads to changes in practice through strategic critical thinking.

Incidental learning through social interaction is also determined by context. Existing knowledge and prior experience an individual has through work or life impacts on the way they engage with every factor within this framework. In addition, political context has an impact on the experience for the individual. By making this political context explicit to trainee teachers they are able to recognise potential limiting factors that impact on the way they engage with the key factors in the framework to support incidental learning. In doing so, incidental learning is more likely to lead to meaningful learning and impact on the development of each key factor and result in change to practice.

Method

The purpose of the research was to explore the way that incidental learning impacts on the development of professional identity for trainee teachers based in the post-14 education and training sector. The study sought to examine the nature of disjuncture experienced from the trainee's own perspective, using focus groups, individual semi-structured interviews and online journal posts. Through analysis of the findings the study sought to examine the incidental learning that occurred and the impact that this had on the development of professional identity. This was in line with other research in the field (Marsick and Watkins, 2001; Jarvis, 2001; Polly, 2007; Hunter, 2014).

For the purpose of this study, I focussed on six trainee teachers who were placed in different settings across the Further Education sector. They ranged in age and experience, but all shared the same creative practice vocational subject area. The research was undertaken over a nine month period which provided evidence on a longitudinal basis. A focus group was held at the start of the study and interviews were

held at the mid and end point. Questions asked aimed to allow the trainees an opportunity to explore the concepts of incidental learning without using technical language which could act as a barrier (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). The semi-structured nature of the interviews encouraged the trainees to raise ideas, concerns and explore issues that they felt were of importance, rather than pre-determined by the researcher or prior secondary research. The focus group was managed in a fluid and organic way as themes were explored, with prompt questions being provided to explore some of the emerging ideas throughout. Three online journal posts were collected which provided a narrative account. The study was approved by the University Ethics committee. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect the identity of the trainees. All the data underwent a thematic analysis (Yin, 2003). Emerging themes around the nature of disjuncture experienced and the role of incidental learning on the development of professional identity will be explored in the following sections, in conjunction with the theoretical framework.

Findings

Disjuncture

A variety of different types of disjuncture were experienced throughout the placement are shown in the table in Table 1.

Disjuncture	Action	Incidental Learning	Impact	Evidence
Negative learner behaviour	Conduct research into different strategies Seek advice from colleagues and peers Trial and error	Developed teaching strategies, informed from experience and theory	Professional identity developed through action research and support	Karen Devshi Joanne Sarah Ben
Lack of confidence and feeling incompetent	Seek support and reassurance from mentor Take on board feedback from assessors	Increased confidence Better understanding about own identity Ability to seek positive support	identity developed through experience and feedback/ affirmation	Karen Devshi Joanne

Lack of time for the role	To prioritise work load and manage expectations of the role	Better understanding of the role Better informed about future progression within the sector	Altered perception of the role Increased ability to manage high volumes of workload Developed resilience	Devshi Ben Sarah
Unprofessional behaviours of existing teachers within the team	Internalise own identity in order to reconcile this with the culture of the team	Locality impacts on learner motivation Limited funding impacts on the quality of provision and staff morale	Professional identity is strengthened Clearer idea of future progression	Karen Ben Sarah
Language used within the team	Seek support from outside the team Take a non-obtrusive role within the team until a stronger identity was shaped	Better understanding about the unwritten codes that are used within teams	Clearer more defined perception of the role Increased confidence	Devshi Ben Cameron
Pressure of the job and heightened sense of responsibility	To prioritise work load to manage expectations of the role	Reconcile preconceived views about the role	Clearer understanding that the role denotes high levels of responsibility and that teachers are measured by data and this creates additional pressure	Cameron Sarah Joanne
Curriculum offer insufficient for learner needs	To develop workshops and additional activities to engage learners	How to plan and deliver own sessions	Reaffirmed and strengthened identity as an inspirational teacher	Karen Sarah Cameron Ben Joanne

Table 1: Disjuncture which led to incidental learning

Initially, the trainees focussed on the disjuncture they experienced in the learning environments such as poor behaviour and their own lack of confidence when teaching a group of students. This caused anxiety due to the unexpected level and challenges this presented. This was particularly profound when it challenged their starting aspiration to be an inspirational teacher. Their expectation about the motivation level

of the learners was different to what they encountered and this disjuncture created heightened stress as they were forced to adapt their own identity in order to manage the situation.

Most of the trainees felt that they were not supported as much as they expected or would have liked. There was an unrealistic expectation about the way that the placement was going to be structured and the amount of time that they would have with the mentor. The trainees expressed disappointment about the type of support given as it was not as focussed on teaching strategies as they were expecting. This resulted in less critical reflection around the topic of pedagogy and teaching strategies. The trainees who expressed high aspirations in terms of their development at the start of the course were expecting high levels of quality feedback, even when the sessions were successful but this was often not possible.

With a growth in confidence during the later stages of the placement, professional identity was strengthened and the disjuncture being noticed was around wider themes such as the culture of the team and the pressures of the teaching role. This led to a better understanding about the role, which altered their perception and shaped future decisions about working within the sector. By managing unexpected pressures and high volumes of workload the trainees developed time management strategies and resilience. This led to a strengthened professional identity. The disjuncture experienced around unprofessional behaviours led to some trainees being more determined to be the inspirational teacher that they initially aspired to be. With a strengthened identity, some trainees were able to notice disjuncture in terms of the curriculum being offered. I felt this demonstrated a sense of empowerment and confidence towards the end of the placement where they were able to critically evaluate the curriculum provision.

The Role of Incidental Learning in the Development of Professional Identity

The diverse placement settings experienced by the trainees helped them to develop new ways of doing things such as exert authority, comply with processes or challenge conventions. By being initially prepared and subsequently supported through their settings and training to manage such dynamic environments there was less potential

stress. Through this process of reconciliation, professional identity developed, hence incidental learning became evident.

The research revealed that starting to form a teacher identity was based on a number of different factors. For some of the trainees, their initial identity was based on a set of ideals born from their previous experience of inspirational teachers who were pivotal to their own development. The trainees placed a lot of value on this prior experience and strived to emulate this when working with their own learners. Some viewed this as the driving force behind their decision to become a teacher. They were driven by the desire to inspire their own learners, seeing that as central to the role (Karen, Devshi, Sarah, Ben). "I want my future learners to believe in me and not see me as the nine to five teacher aiming to rush home and looking forward to the weeks salary." (Devshi, online entry 1)

This also correlates with findings presented by Jephcote and Salisbury (2009) who argued that professional identity is not only shaped by cultural factors, but the trainee's own values which have been shaped by prior learning experiences. They argue that "professional identities embodied a strong commitment to the notion that FE provided opportunities for their students to compensate for the shortcomings of their previous educational experiences." (: 970)

This aspiration resulted in anxiety as the trainees quickly discovered that this was a challenging ideal which as a new teacher was rather unrealistic (Devshi, Karen). Lortie (1975) recognised the dilemma for trainee teachers who underestimate the challenges of the role, as they enter the profession with fixed "ideas about the nature of the role." (: 65) However, when this aspiration was coupled with a willingness to expect challenges and remain open to support, then this became a realistic and achievable goal. Both Devshi and Karen demonstrated continual high levels of enthusiasm, positivity, as well as an ability to remain adaptable and flexible from the beginning of the placement.

The trainees, who were prepared to take risks within their teaching, for example adjusting pre-set lessons, seemed to create the potential for disjuncture. Through this they felt they were able to develop their practice, provided this was coupled with guided reflection (Devshi, Karen, Joanne) and incidental learning occurred. Where risk was taken, but support limited, a negative experience resulted (Ben).

The trainees recognised the high volume of work associated with the role which they had not previously appreciated or realised. This disjuncture led to further incidental learning as their perceptions about the teaching role shifted. This also supports the findings by Orr and Simons (2011) who presented the notion of ‘practice shock’, when a trainee teacher experiences something different in the placement to what they expected.

Discussion

Analysing the Framework: The factors that enabled incidental learning to be effective

A critical factor in the development of professional identity was structured guidance and support, including formal induction to the processes and procedures of the organisation, as well as clear expectations about working practice. Where strong support, including reassurance and regular feedback was evident, the trainees developed confidence and autonomy more quickly. See Figure 2: Incidental learning when suitable support is in place.

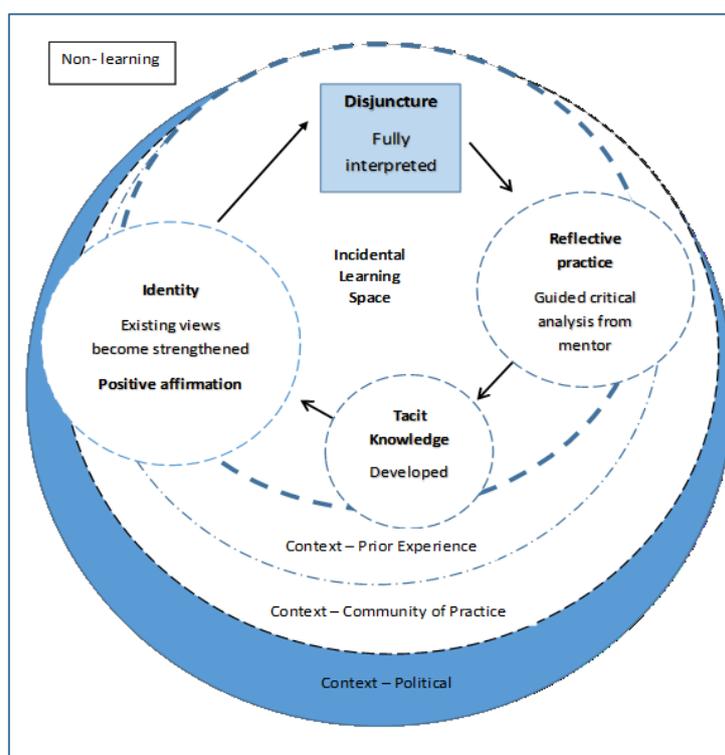


Figure 2: Incidental learning when suitable support is in place

Joanne, in her first interview said “They’ve welcomed me. They treat me not just as a student trainee, you know, teacher. They kind of treat me as one of them.” Karen also recognised the importance of support, both formal and informal, in her first interview.

“Without him (Mentor Teacher) then I wouldn’t be progressing as well as I am... After I’ve always taught a session he’ll always give me a bit of verbal feedback on it even if it’s not an observation, erm, just so I can improve next time.”

The effect of the praise was heightened when expressed in a public domain, particularly in front of influential people within the community of practice, such as a Head of Department. (Devshi, Joanne).

At the beginning of the placement, some trainees found it difficult to notice and therefore interpret disjuncture due to the overwhelming amount being experienced, resulting in missed opportunities. Karen disclosed how she only realised she had to develop her communication skills when this was brought to her attention by the mentor. One of the difficulties that pre-service trainee teachers face is the lack of professional vision which allows them to notice and interpret teaching experiences (Seidel and Sturmer, 2014). This makes the role of the mentor and subsequent wider team all the more critical.

“I never really understood properly why, but, the team at Thorn Cross and the class seemed to think a lot of me and the work I had done with them over my time there. To me all I was doing was, what I love best, and I was happy getting creative day in day out.” (Joanne, interview2)

Identity could be seen to develop over a period of time, as the trainees transitioned from trainee to teacher. At the beginning they expressed discomfort in the teaching role. “pretend I’m like a teacher with my (laughs) badge on, with my staff badge on.” (Devshi, interview1).

The trainees were able to engage in a more critically reflective manner with disjuncture as their identity strengthened. The relationship with the mentor was pivotal in affirming this identity shift. This was particularly evident when the relationship was symbiotic and the mentor openly demonstrated their willingness to learn from the trainee (Devshi, Karen). Although the trainees found this unexpected it was viewed as a

positive disjuncture and increased their confidence further. “In fact I feel like she needs my support because there’s a lot of skills that I’ve got that she doesn’t... I feel like I’m the boss then.” (Devshi, interview 1). However, where support was not in place or the support being provided did not meet the expectations or needs of the trainee, then incidental learning from disjuncture was restricted or non-learning. Figure 3 gives a diagrammatical representation showing where support isn’t evident for trainees and how this affects the incidental learning framework.

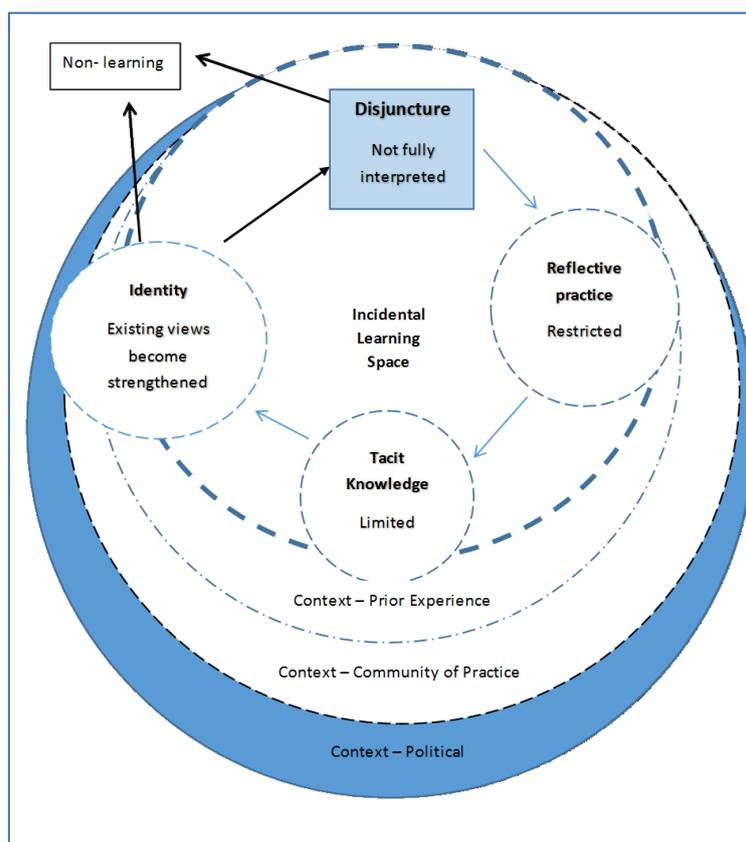


Figure 3: The impact of incidental learning where support is limited or non-existent

“I really don’t know. I need feedback and that’s what I am lacking.” (Ben, interview 1).

The trainee also needs to be receptive to the feedback being provided. Where this was not the case, the disjuncture was not fully interpreted or at times, not recognised (Sarah, Cameron). The subsequent incidental learning that could be assimilated with prior knowledge was restricted, or at worse misguided (Sarah, Cameron). Where there was a lack of support or guidance then the trainees tended to remain self-reliant. The initial lack of confidence remained because of the isolation being experienced. Even

by the second interview, Sarah remained un-supported in her placement and was experiencing an under-developed sense of teacher identity. "I think I need to work on confidence." (Sarah, interview 2). This resulted in a less developed ability to notice and subsequently learn from disjuncture. Additional feedback from formal observations was of particular value. This feedback further affirmed their abilities which led to an increase in confidence and consequently a strengthened teacher identity. This was particularly true during the graded observations according to Devshi and Karen. However, not all the trainees took on board the feedback, demonstrating a lack of professional vision (Cameron, Sarah).

Initially, the trainees worked solely with the mentor who provided support and guidance (Ben, Devshi, Karen, Sarah, Cameron, Joanne). Where this relationship proved sufficient, the trainee did not immediately look to other sources for additional support. Where additional support was used, this was from a variety of places and not always from the wider team within the context of the placement, even though the wider team offered an opportunity to access an established Community of Practice. However, some of the trainees did not feel comfortable within this context and declined to use the staff room, thus removing themselves from the opportunity of access to the community and associated benefits. Ben in interview 1 discussed his early placement experiences "I wouldn't know where to put myself (in the staffroom)." While Devshi said "Everyone had their allocated little seats and I thought if I'd sit in their seats that I'd offend anyone there, kind of thing." This was particularly evident for younger trainees, who expressed a fear of using the staff room. This could be due to a lack of previous experience of a similar workplace setting. Alternatively, it could be the way that the wider team and the facilities in the staff room were introduced and the trainees subsequently supported. This is an area that would benefit from further research.

Where the community of practice was accessed from the beginning of the placement the experience was initially hindered by their understanding of the conventions within the staffroom (Cameron, Karen, Joanne). As the placement progressed, they moved from periphery participation, where they were initially an outsider, to a more internal position as their confidence developed. However, in order to gain access, the trainees had to develop a greater sense of their own identity which only happens over a period of time, and with support (Velzan et al, 2011).

“...moving toward full participation in practice involves not just greater commitment of time, intensified effort, more and broader responsibilities within the community, and more difficult and risky tasks, but, more significantly, an increasing sense of identity as a master practitioner.” (Lave and Wenger, 2008: 111)

Once the trainees gained more confidence and subsequently became involved in the community of practice, they had an opportunity to access the codes that operated within that community. This included the language used, the hierarchy that operated and unwritten rules. Until these conventions were better understood, the trainees found this context intimidating.

“It’s actually quite funny cos some of their conversations I hear in the staffroom as well, it’s very informal, err, and it’s like everyone’s just letting their rage out...I like to listen but I don’t like to give my opinion on something unless I kind of understand what’s going on.” (Devshi, Interview2)

However, what some of the trainees observed and reflected on were behaviours which they deemed unprofessional (Devshi, Karen, Cameron). These included negative comments about students, swearing, lateness, stress and teachers being unplanned and disorganised. This challenged their previous perception about the teacher identity and professionalism. This disjuncture caused the trainees to reflect on their previous perception and adjust their view of professional identity based on this incidental learning. The impact of this could be seen in terms of how they chose to respond to this experience while they reconciled this with their existing ethos and beliefs.

“I was expecting pressure, but not that much pressure...The pressure is coming from trying to get students to hit targets.” (Devshi, interview 2).

This also caused conflict for some who felt the desire to challenge the behaviours but felt unable to do so due to their ‘apprentice’ status. In addition, the mentor was viewed as a lifeline, which hindered their ability to challenge what they considered unprofessional practice. Ben said:

“my mentor ultimately decides things... we’re going to have a very difficult conversation at some point if she comes in and sees we’re doing it my way. She’s going to wonder what’s going on and I just couldn’t be bothered with

the hassle... in that place if I need anything, I have to go through my mentor.”

When the trainees experienced acute disjuncture, for example when observing poor or unprofessional practice in the staffroom, I felt even this added to further their future professional identity as they appeared to feel confident enough to reject the ‘norm’ being modelled by the community of practice. “It’s given me the push to be that inspirational teacher.” Karen said in her second interview. Beijaard, Mejer and Verloop (2003) recognise that the placement can be cause for anxiety and conflict for a trainee teacher. This demonstrates the dynamic way that identity is developed within the fluid and unpredictable context that teaching operates within. This correlates the findings by Avis and Bathmaker (2004), whose research highlighted that structuring factors such as quality measures and other restrictions placed upon the trainees encouraged them to develop different identities to what they had envisaged initially. This also concurs with findings by Jarvis (2010) who presented the notion of dynamic identity development. He argued that “every new experience is interpreted by the mind and has a personal meaning given to it, which is then integrated into the meanings of past experiences already stored in the brain, which gives us a greater understanding of how we, as individuals, can behave and learn.” (:7) Through a process of critical interpretation and re-interpretation, the trainees developed a more holistic professional identity (Schepens, et al., 2009).

According to Baxter Magolda (2003), the interrelationship between theory and experience is a characteristic of a more developed way of knowing, developed holistically. This ultimately leads to a developed identity and creates a “...cultivating a ‘capacity to respond’ requires self-reflection on one's identity and relations with others.” (: 231) Critical reflection, whether individually or with others, is something that the theoretical framework includes. However, in order to interpret, analyse and evaluate an incidental learning experience it is important that the trainee also reflects on their own idea of self-identity (Gilar, et al., 2007). “I feel I have been able to portray the type of teacher I always felt I would be.” (KH, Journal 3).

Conclusion

Incidental learning is by its very nature unplanned, unstructured and unexpected, but this does not mean that it holds no relevance or importance. Through the application of a theoretical framework, strategies can be adopted by trainee teachers so that all serendipitous, incidental learning can be recognised, captured as and when it occurs, regardless of setting or context. This paper presents the argument that incidental learning can fill gaps in formal knowledge enabling the development of a holistic professional identity, rather than simply satisfying the professional standards (Tickle, 2000). This personalised professional identity enables critical judgement about situations, through self-development, which is born from experience (Eraut, 1994). The research findings provide examples where tacit knowledge has been constructed over a period of time through a variety of experiences. The successful interpretation of experience relies on reflection, guided in part by a mentor who has remained current in their own practice and through a shared language. This transformative model of professional knowledge only took place over duration of time (Eraut, 1994). Incidental learning also relies on the process of repetition in order for the experience to lead to generalisations so that future experiences are able to be interpreted and acted upon.

The professional standards, although not intended to be prescriptive, are expected to be used to map and judge a trainee teachers' professionalism. There lies a contradiction between the professional standards, professionalism and professional identity. The dichotomy between these is an area that would benefit from further research. By using the suggested theoretical framework, it becomes possible for a community of practice to foster the development of professional identity for trainee teachers. This can either be via disjuncture within the learning environment or through reconciliation that happens while working in a professional team. What this research has illustrated is the element of uncertainty and stress which is created when sufficient levels of support are not in place. Until more time and resources are allocated to the support provided to trainee teachers, this is something that will continue in the near future.

Ethics Statement

This research was conducted with the approval of the University of Bolton Ethics Committee and followed the rules regulations and processes as outlined in the University Regulations and Guidelines.

References

Avalos, B. (2011) Teacher professional development in Teaching and teacher education over ten years. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 27, pp. 10-20.

Avis, J. and Bathmaker, A. M. (2004) "How do I cope with that?" The development of 'schooling identities' amongst trainee FE lecturers. In: *British Educational Research Association Annual Conference*. Manchester.

Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. and Verloop, N. (2003) Reconsidering research on teachers' professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 20, pp. 107-128.

BIS (2014) *The Government's Strategy to Support Workforce Excellence in Further Education*. London: BIS.

Bordieu, P. F. (1998) *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action*. California: Stanford University Press.

Brasher, A., Dunwell, I., Akiki, O. and Gaved, M. (2012) *Incidental Learning Framework*. Available at: <http://oro.open.ac.uk/39698/> [Accessed 22 Jan. 2018].

Brinkmann, S. Kvale, S. (2015) *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.

Brookfield, S. D. (1987) *Developing Critical Thinkers: Challenging Adults to Explore Alternative Ways of Thinking and Acting*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Consuegra, E., Engels, N. and Struyven, K. (2014) Beginning teachers' experience of the workplace learning environment in alternative teacher certification programs: A mixed methods approach. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol 42, pp. 79-88.

Education and Training Foundation (2014) *Professional Standards for teachers and trainers in education and training – England*. Available at: <http://www.et-foundation.co.uk>. [Accessed 6 Jul. 2015].

Eraut, M. (1994) *Developing professional knowledge and competence*. London: Falmer Press.

Gilar, R., Ruiz, M. and Costa, J. (2007) Diary-based strategy assessment and its relationship to performance in a group of trainee teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 23, pp. 1334-1344.

Gilley, J. W., Dean, P. and Bierema, L. (2001) *Philosophy and practice of organisational learning, performance and change*. Cambridge: Perseus Books Group.

Halliday-Wynes, S. and Beddie, F. (2009) *Informal Learning at a Glance*. Available at: <http://www.ncver.edu.org/>. [Accessed 12 Jun. 2015].

Harford, J. and MacRuairc, G. (2008) Engaging student teachers in meaningful reflective practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 24, pp. 1884-1892.

Hunter, C. (2010) Ways of learning in the pharmaceutical sales industry. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 22(7), pp. 451-462.

Hunter, C. (2014) Perspectives in AE—Intentional incidental learning in the workplace: Implications for adult learning. *New horizons in adult education and human resource development*, Vol.26 (2), pp. 49-53.

James, P. and Unwin, L. (2016) *Fostering High Quality Vocational Further Education in Wales*. HMSO. Available at: <http://ppiwi.org.uk/files/2016/01/PPIW-Report-Fostering-High-Quality-Further-Education-in-Wales.pdf>. [Accessed 21 Mar. 2017].

Jarvis, P (2010) *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. Theory and Practice*. 4th ed. London: Routledge.

Jephcote, M. and Salisbury, J. (2009) Further education teachers' accounts of their professional identities. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 25, pp. 966-972.

Kerka, S. (2000) *Incidental Learning. Trends and issues*. No18. ERIC clearing house on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education. Available at: <http://www.ericacve.org/fulltext.asp>. [Accessed 21 Jun 2018].

Lave, J. and Wenger, E. (2008) *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Lortie, D. (1975) *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Marsick, V. and Watkins, K. (1992) Towards a theory of informal and incidental learning in organisations. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*. Vol.11(4), pp. 287-300.
- Marsick, V. and Watkins, K. (2001) Informal and incidental learning. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Vol. 89, pp. 25-34.
- McGeough, J. A. (1942) *The Psychology of Human Learning, an Introduction*. Longmans Green and Co.
- Orr, K. and Simmons, R. (2011) Restrictive Practice: The Work-Based Learning Experience of Trainee Teachers in English Further Education Colleges. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, Vol. 23(4), pp. 243-257.
- Orr, K. (2012) Coping, Confidence and Alienation: the early experience of trainee teachers in English FE. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, Vol. 38(1). pp. 51-65.
- Polly, S. (2007) *An epistemology of incidental learning*. PhD. Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University.
- Rytivaara, A. and Kershner, R. (2012) Co-teaching as a context for teachers' professional learning and joint knowledge construction. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol. 28, pp. 999-1008.
- Schepens, A., Aelterman, A. and Vlerick, P. (2009) Student Teachers' Professional Identity Formation: Between being born as a teacher and becoming one. *Educational Studies*, Vol. 35(4), pp. 361-378.
- Seidel, T. and Sturner, K. (2014) Modelling and Measuring the structure of professional vision for preservice teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*. Vol. 51(4), pp. 739-771.
- Tickle, L. (2000) *Teacher induction: The way ahead*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Velzen, C., Volman, M., Brekelmans, M. and White, S. (2012) Guided work-based learning: sharing practical teaching knowledge with student teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Vol 28, pp. 229-239.

Yin, R, K (2003) *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. 3rd ed. London: Sage.