Different ways of being educator?
A sociocultural exploration of professional identity and development of educators in a system of nontraditional flexible schooling

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Abstract
For some young Australians engagement in traditional schooling is untenable, due to complex social, emotional and intellectual needs and past experiences of failure and exclusion. A system of nontraditional, flexible schooling in Queensland is providing an alternative. In this setting, educators may include registered teachers, educational support workers, youth workers, social workers and a range of other workers. Educational provision that meets the complex needs of young people, who participate in nontraditional flexible schooling, requires research on the ways of being an educator; research that is not commonly associated with traditional schooling. This chapter outlines a research proposal. It situates educators in nontraditional schooling sites within a discussion context that explores current literature, proposes research questions, delineates a possible research methodology consistent with a sociocultural theoretical lens and considers potential tools of data analysis. Possible implications of this kind of research for understanding educator professional identity and development in this context will be considered.

Features of nontraditional flexible schooling
Nontraditional flexible schooling offers education for some of those young people who experience multiple disadvantage (Aron, 2003; McGinty & Brader, 2005) and who cannot, for a range of complex social, emotional and intellectual needs and past experiences of failure and exclusion, engage in traditional schooling. Currently, nontraditional education provision, also referred to as alternative education programs has not acquired a nationally or internationally recognised terminology (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006) and the research literature is not extensive. Within the literature from countries such as the USA, New Zealand and Australia, which have a western conception of schooling, a number of common features of nontraditional flexible schooling have been identified. Although specific names of features have varied, they include notions listed in Table 1.

Terminology for Disenfranchised Young People
Insofar as education has been understood as a right for all children (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989), western societies have made inadequate provision to include those excluded from mainstream education for a variety of complex reasons. The term disenfranchised young people will be used in the proposed study to highlight the definition of to “disenfranchise”, which is to “deprive (a person) of rights as a citizen or
of a franchise held” (Oxford English Reference Dictionary, 2002, p.406) Disenfranchising of young people has acknowledged that there are “structures, processes and actions that are major contributors to exclusion” (Saunders, Naidoo & Griffiths, 2007, p. 2).

Table 1: Common Features of Nontraditional Flexible Schooling

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Features</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>An holistic approach to education catering to the young person’s social, emotional and intellectual needs</td>
<td>de Jong, 2005; de Jong &amp; Griffiths, 2006; DEETYA, 2001; Lange &amp; Sletten, 2002; O'Brien, Thesing &amp; Herbert, 2001; Tobin &amp; Sprague, 2000.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High quality staff including those from non-teaching backgrounds</td>
<td>Aron, 2003; de Jong &amp; Griffiths, 2006; DEETYA, 2001; O'Brien et al., 2001; Tobin &amp; Sprague, 1999.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The terminology used in the literature for young people who experience multiple disadvantage, also has been as problematic as the language of nontraditional schooling. No concise definition of ‘disengaged youth’ is articulated in the literature (McGinty & Brader, 2005). Terms commonly used to describe such young people include at-risk youth; disaffected youth; disadvantaged youth; disenfranchised youth; NEET (Not Engaged in Education, Employment or Training) and marginalised youth (Aron, 2003; Brader, 2004; McGinty & Brader, 2005; te Riele, 2007).

Nontraditional schooling as an expression of inclusive education

Inclusive education is a significant international educational movement, highlighted through the 1994 Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) and more recently by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006). Principles of inclusive education are increasingly influencing educational policies both nationally and internationally (Armstrong, 2006; Education Queensland, 2005; te Riele, 2006; UNESCO, 2000). Inclusive education is not only for those with physical or intellectual disabilities (Heath, McLean-Heywood, Rousseau, Petrakos, Finn & Karagiannakis, 2006; UNESCO, 2000). Australian legislation around inclusive education through the Disabilities Discrimination Act (1992) has required mandatory provision “for the range of ‘disabilities’ that impede young people's engagement in education and other community activities...[including] challenging behaviours such as mental health and learning difficulties” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p.30). Although the term ‘alternative’ seems inconsistent with the idea of inclusive education (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006), nontraditional schooling or alternative education programs offer educational inclusion for some young people “who are unlikely or unable to access mainstream education programs for a number of reasons and often as a result of a combination of factors” (de Jong & Griffiths, 2006, p. 30). Risk factors for young people are complex and in a review of international literature, Brader and McGinty (2005) identified common risk factors linked to family, school and community, not just education, training, and employment.

Exploring the Nature of Professional Identity and Development

In a general sense, how professionals perceive themselves as professionals and the factors that influence this perception, is referred to as professional identity (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 2000). There are many facets to understand in relation to professional identity and the construct is not defined or understood consistently in the literature (Sachs, 2001). Within this research proposal, professional identity is understood from a sociocultural perspective taking into account the social, cultural and historical aspects of identity formation. Identity formation is ongoing as identity is not a fixed construct (Sachs, 2001). It is constantly negotiated in relationship with others (Gee, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Through the narratives of ‘being’ that people communicate (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 16), and through their engagement with ‘Discourses’, which capture and convey the meaning attributed to social practices (Gee, 1992, p. 20), people are recognised as a certain ‘kind of person’ (Gee, 2001, p. 99). Identity formation is therefore not passive. Human beings exercise agency, or the ability to act on the world around them (Lasky, 2005), as they negotiate and form their social and individual identities (Sfard & Prusak, 2005). In this research proposal, professional identity is
understood in terms of how it is formed in relationship with others and how it is enacted through individual agency and engagement with discourses. The social, cultural and historical aspects of identity formation will be taken into account and therefore this approach to professional identity could be described as sociocultural, in keeping with the sociocultural theoretical paradigm being adopted throughout the research project.

Wenger’s perspective that professional identity is clearly linked to practice (1998, p. 149) highlights his notion of ‘communities of practice’ as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 4). According to Wenger, “the experience of identity in practice is a way of being [my emphasis] in the world” (1998, p. 151). In this research proposal I am influenced by Wenger’s ideas that professional identity and practice are intrinsically connected, and am therefore interested in the professional development or learning that occurs within a particular community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002). Wenger et al. (2002) contend that “communities of practice create value by connecting the personal development and professional identities of practitioners to the strategies of the organization” (p. 17). The organisational strategies of interest to me in this research proposal are those that promote and foster the dimension of values. Values relate to judgments about what is important within an organisation, the ideals or principles that underpin the different ways of being educator, within the research context. Expression of particular values, along with “ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing and of acting” (Gee, 1991, p. 143) can be understood as ways to denote membership in a particular social group or social network, and comprise what Gee refers to as a Discourse. An awareness of educator discourse may inform the exploration of professional identity and development within the research context.

The Educational Research Context

This research proposal is situated within a system of nontraditional, flexible schools located across Queensland (to be referred to as the network). The network promotes an approach to education that is consistent with the features of nontraditional flexible schooling outlined in Table 1.

Consisting of five school sites, the network supports early school leavers between the ages of 12 and 20, who have decided to reengage with schooling. A school site consists of between 50 and 85 young people and is staffed by a multidisciplinary team. These teams may include a combination of educators from a range of disciplines including registered teachers, educational support workers, youth workers, social workers, health workers, counsellors, community development workers, job placement workers, chaplains and administrative support staff.

Four of the five school sites have one or more outreaches connected to them. An outreach consists of up to 15 young people between the ages of 12 -15 working with a youth worker and a teacher. The outreaches offer a very high degree of flexibility: they are mobile, operating with a van, working within community spaces including community centres, parks and libraries. At times outreaches visit and interact with the main school community for whole school activities or to access specific learning spaces, (e.g. art, music or manual arts). The outreach students are enrolled at the main school
site, but operate as a smaller, mobile learning group. In many instances young people in
outreaches have been absent from formal schooling for long periods and the outreach
context provides an opportunity for safe and flexible reengagement and transition.
Students may transition to the main school site for the senior phase of learning, to
training or employment, or, in some instances, return to mainstream schooling.

**Why this research? A Review of the Literature**

Four key areas of the literature review will be discussed in relation to the research
proposal in the network context. First, the national Australian educational context, with
a particular emphasis on disenfranchised young people and the impact of government
policies and trends around learning and earning, was considered. Second, the notion of
teacher professional identity (TPI) was explored. Multidisciplinary practice and
informal education was the third area of the literature review examined. Finally,
consideration of values frameworks and the notion of lifelong learning were
highlighted. These four areas covered in the literature review have influenced the
formation of the specific research questions.

**The National Australian Educational Context**

The rates of school completion in Australia were reported in 2007 as being at a level of
80% with no shift in these figures for the last 15 years (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007).
One aspect of concern in these figures is that of the 20% who do not finish high school
or its equivalent, there is an over-representation of students from disadvantaged
backgrounds (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007; 2008; McGaw, 2008). Many young
people without school completion or equivalent qualification face long-term
disadvantages in the labour market (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007; 2008; te Riele,
2007).

Unemployment is higher for young people than in the rest of the population, and
underemployment is an issue for 1 in 4 young people since the mid-1990s (Young
Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing, 2007). There is a decline in the number of
fulltime jobs available to young people, which can further heighten the risk of
marginalisation in the workforce (How Young People are Faring ’08, 2008; Young
Australians: Their Health and Wellbeing, 2007). The current global recession is more
than likely to exacerbate youth unemployment and underemployment. The youth
unemployment rate in February 2009 was 23.9 %, the highest it has been since February
2002 (The Monthly Statistical Bulletin, 2009). However, despite the recent economic
crisis, unemployment and non-completion of schooling for young people have been
issues of concern for a number of years. Although school completion lessens the
likelihood of unemployment, traditional schools are not viable for some young people.
For those young people who have been disenfranchised from traditional schooling,
some other way of reengaging in education or training is necessary.

**Education Training Reform Agenda: Learning or Earning**

Changes in education requirements for young people have been in effect in Queensland
from January 2006.

Young people are required to remain at school until they have completed
Year 10 or turned 16, whichever comes first. Then they are required to
participate in further education, training or work until they achieve a Certificate III qualification or above, a Certificate of Education or turn 17. (Education Queensland, 2003, p. 8)

This Queensland policy has now become a Federal Government policy direction. While potentially positive for the majority of young Australians, this policy direction will undoubtedly have further impact on those already disenfranchised from traditional schooling. The Melbourne Declaration reflects this policy direction (MCEETYA, 2008). Australian Education Ministers have recognised the need for significant improvement in three areas: first, for Indigenous Australians; second, for young Australians from low socioeconomic backgrounds who are “under-represented among high achievers and over-represented among low-achievers”; and third, improvement in the national rate of Year 12 completion or equivalent (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5).

The recent national Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) and the Jobs and Training Compact for young Australians (COAG, 2009) may provide a broader national platform for change and reform that potentially could be more inclusive of disenfranchised young people. However, there are serious concerns around the narrow conception of education as “utilitarian and economist” in vision and not inclusive of broader notions of “health and wellbeing” and life long learning (Wyn, 2008, p. 5-6). This may mean that the reform agenda is still linked to an outmoded industrial model of education that does not meet the complex changing needs of young people in the 21st century (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Smyth & Hattam, 2004; Wyn, 2008).

From the research literature, it has been established that the ways educators work in nontraditional flexible schooling provide a different educational experience for many disenfranchised young people than what was previously encountered in mainstream schooling. Contemporary economic, social and cultural shifts require that new ways of understanding and providing education are vital and overdue (Wyn, 2008), particularly for those who are disenfranchised, if they are to experience social inclusion (Dusseldorf Skills Forum, 2008; MCEETYA, 2008).

**Teacher Professional Identity (TPI)**

Whilst the term ‘educator professional identity’ is more appropriate for this research proposal due to the multidisciplinary context of the research context, the term ‘teacher professional identity’ will be used in this section as a way of reflecting the literature more accurately. How teachers perceive themselves as teachers and what factors influence this perception is referred to as ‘teacher professional identity’ (TPI) (Beijaard et al., 2000). The experiences of teachers, their biographies and personal histories (Day & Sachs, 2005; Flores & Day, 2006) and the influence of particular contexts in which they teach (Beijaard et al., 2000; Ben-Peretz, Mendelson, & Kron, 2003; Friesen, Finney, & Krentz, 1999; Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006; Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; van Huizen, van Oers, & Wubbels, 2005), have been found to be significant factors in addition to ‘subjects taught, relationships with students and the teacher’s role or role conception’ (Beijaard, 1995). TPI is also linked to their sense of agency or capacity to act on the world around them (Lasky, 2005).

In reading the literature on TPI, five key focal points have been identified:

1. **Defining TPI**
What exactly is it?

2. Formation of TPI
   What are the key influences that form it?

3. Particular educational contexts and TPI
   What is the influence of context on TPI?

4. The emotional dimension of TPI: Teacher as Carer
   What is the role of emotion in TPI?

5. The impact of Educational Reform Agendas on TPI
   Who decides what aspects of TPI are privileged and what constitutes learning?

Whilst all of these points of focus contribute to an understanding of TPI, the last three concerning influence of context, teacher as carer, and impact of reform agendas will be highlighted in this proposal. They address a particular gap in the literature related to TPI in educational contexts specifically developed for disenfranchised young people.

**TPI and the Influence of Context**

Although some of the studies exploring teacher professional identity were involved with teachers who were working with at-risk and low achieving students (Ben-Peretz et al., 2003; Friesen et al., 1999; Lasky, 2005), they were conducted in mainstream contexts. The Canadian research study of Friesen et al. (1999) featured stories of teachers detailing the complexities of working with at-risk students. Whereas the proportion of students in the Canadian study who were at-risk, was higher than in schools where other studies on TPI have been conducted, the school was still a traditional school not specifically established to cater for the complex needs of disenfranchised young people. Locating educational problems primarily with young people was a source of frustration for the teachers in the Canadian study as they talked about their sense of identity and agency. They expressed frustration at the inability of the system to provide support structures that would enable them to fulfil what they saw as the very important aspect of their teaching identity, that of advocate for at-risk students (Friesen et al., 1999).

A gap in the literature occurs with regard to the development of teacher professional identity in educational contexts specifically developed for disenfranchised young people. Although some research has been conducted in contexts specifically developed for these young people, it has been largely conducted from a general perspective describing features of best practice (de Jong, 2005; de Jong & Griffiths, 2006; DEETYA, 2001) or from the perspective of young people and their experiences (Fraser, Davis, & Singh, 1997; Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006). Research conducted from the perspective of teachers, which encompasses aspects of their sense of professional identity, is rare. Specific research on educator professional identity in nontraditional flexible schooling contexts has not been identified.

**TPI and the Emotional Dimension – Teacher as Carer**

The next area of interest within the literature for this proposal is the aspect of teacher identity related to emotion and the sense of caring. How teachers perceive learners is connected to the notion of teacher as carer. This is especially pertinent when
considering low achieving students who are more at risk of becoming early school leavers (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Fraser et al., 1997; Hodgson, 2007; Kroninger & Lee, 2001; Smyth et al., 2004). Very often the problem or blame for poor outcomes is located with the students themselves rather than being explored through an interrogation of the “educational provision” (Deschenes et al., 2001; Hodgson, 2007; Smyth et al., 2004; te Riele, 2007, p. 56). Some studies clearly argue that the development of caring teacher/student relationships forms the basis for reengagement (Fraser et al., 1997; Friesen et al., 1999; Hirst & Vadeboncoeur, 2006; Lasky, 2005). In a study on TPI by Lasky (2005, p. 907) teachers believed their role with students included

... helping in their social and emotional development, along with delivering the academic skills; they also found that openness was central to developing robust relationships with students, which they linked directly with student learning.

However, the study by Ben-Peretz et al. (2003) suggested that if teachers prioritise the caring role, a deficit in the capacity of these teachers to engage students in academic learning often occurs. In other words, the implication of this study was that the students would be missing the qualities of “teachers who are committed to and responsible for the cognitive growth of their students” if their teachers were too caring (p. 284). Alternatively, other research suggested that these two aspects of educators’ professional identity can be held in balance and integrated (Lasky, 2005; O'Connor, 2008).

**TPI and the Impact of Educational Reform Agendas**

A crisis or place of struggle for teachers in general, as they attempt to come to terms with the demands of change and reform, was identified in the literature. Negative impact on teachers’ workload and sense of agency increased as they felt challenged to meet the needs of students who face “moral, social, and emotional dilemmas”, in the midst of uncertainty and significant social change (Beijaard et al., 2000, p. 751).

Struggles were also experienced by teachers in contexts in which expectations of increasing demands for compliance were greater (Lasky, 2005). These demands were often in conflict with teachers’ own views of what education should be about. This trend appeared to be both a national and international phenomenon, particularly in wealthy western countries (Day & Sachs, 2005; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Sachs, 1997, 2001, 2003; Smyth et al., 2004). Questions around what constitutes learning and who decides this are other aspects of this debate that impacts TPI.

**Multidisciplinary practice and Informal Education**

As previously mentioned, a characteristic of nontraditional flexible schooling is a multidisciplinary focus that draws on the expertise of teachers and other professionals including, youth, community and health workers (de Jong, 2005; O'Brien et al., 2001). The principles of youth work are consistent with many of the ideas found in ‘informal education’, a way of working with young people that privileges natural conversation, relationships, the needs and interests of young people within locations where young people “hang out” and that “fosters learning” (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, p. 41; Smith, 1997, 2005). Informal education also “fosters democracy and association” (Jeffs & Smith,
which, in turn, promotes positive relationships. With its origins in Christian youth groups in the UK in the 1960s and 70s, informal education emphasised “fellowship” or a quality of relationships that fostered “companionship of people on friendly and equal terms” (Jeffs & Smith, 2005, p. 42). The notion of fellowship was linked to a sense of social cohesion and the promotion of citizenship in a democracy of equality (Jeffs & Smith, 2005; Smith, 1997, 2005).

The features of nontraditional flexible schooling outlined at the beginning of this chapter, resonate with the philosophy of informal education, which embraces opportunities for open and honest dialogue, nonhierarchical structures and opportunities for participation by all (Jeffs & Smith, 2005; Smith, 1997, 2005). In order for students to understand democracy as an expression of equality and active participation, they need to experience it through the structures and processes of their educational context.

To become active and productive citizens in a just and democratic society, students need to experience democracy in classrooms and in school organisation. Education through democratic processes is as important as education about democracy. (Education Queensland, 2005, p. 5)

The value of informal settings is acknowledged by Edwards and Mackenzie (2005, p. 290) when they state that “more informal settings are more likely to be less regulated and provide more open learning opportunities”. Through their research they explored how an informal education setting which privileged relationships, contributed to the creation of a social learning context or “relational version” of Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development as individuals interacted with others and explored options for their own agency (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005, p. 291). The way that individuals access and give support, as portrayed in the research context, was also referred to as relational agency, a supportive and protective capacity which promotes resilience against the factors that have contributed to people being at-risk (Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005, p. 291). According to Edwards and Mackenzie (2005, p. 291) the development of relational agency supports participation in learning opportunities “in both formal and informal environments”. Relational agency is also recognised as a necessary skill for those who work with people at-risk, particularly in the growing domain of multidisciplinary work contexts (Edwards, 2004, 2005).

Within the literature it appears that work with disenfranchised young people has continued to require working across professional disciplines with a broad community focus that fosters an holistic approach to young people, their families and carers, in order to meet their complex needs (Axford & Little, 2006; Case & Haines, 2004; Edwards, 2004; Edwards & Mackenzie, 2005; Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2004).

**Alignment with Values Frameworks and Lifelong Learning**

The final key area of the literature review for the research proposal was values frameworks and lifelong learning. This research is part of a broader Australian Research Council project entitled *The Development of a Values Approach to School Renewal*. An exploration of values also underpins my research proposal. In a paper entitled *A Vygotskian Perspective on Teacher Education*, Van Huizen et al. (2005) propose a sociocultural theoretical framework for teacher education programs in which meaning
making, a Vygotskian concept associated with the process of learning, is integrated into the development of teacher professional identity. New teachers or “apprentices”, “have to orient themselves towards the meaning of teaching informing the practice in which they become participants” (van Huizen et al., 2005, p. 276). Meaning making is directly associated with values, aims, “school ethos” and “organisational climate” (van Huizen et al., 2005, p. 276). The network has clearly stated values that underpin its philosophy of education. These values are influenced by a particular system, within a specific space and time. A range of other values frameworks will also be considered in relation to the stated values of the research context. This may assist in further exploration of different ways of being educator, drawing on the wider literature of values education.

The values frameworks may include

a) UNESCO Education for the 21st Century - Four Pillars of Education (Delors, 1999);
b) Peace Education Framework (Toh, 2004); and
c) Global Education Framework and Global Education Statement (Quittner & Sturak, 2008; Wang, 2002)
d) National framework for values education in Australian schools (Commonwealth of Australia, 2005)

**Lifelong learning – Four Pillars of Education for the Twenty-First Century**

A specific example of a values framework from the literature that may inform the research project is found in the UNESCO Four Pillars of Education for the Twenty-first Century: “learning to know; learning to do; learning to be; and learning to live together” (Delors, 1999, p. 14). This educational philosophy emphasizes lifelong learning and encapsulates the features of nontraditional flexible schools previously outlined in this chapter (see Table 1). In commenting on the four pillars Delors highlights that for many years learning to know and learning to do have been foundational in traditional education. The other two pillars have not been emphasized as much. The third pillar, learning to be, recognises the capacity to cope with change and develop one’s potential and the “attainment of common goals”; and the final pillar, learning to live together, encompasses the community aspect of life, the capacity to communicate and negotiate with others and to ensure equal opportunity for all (Delors, 1996, p. 3; 1999).

According to Delors, these qualities are essential for responding to life in the twenty-first century. Consideration of lifelong learning and all of the four pillars of education for the twenty-first century (Delors, 1996; 1999), will provide a philosophical underpinning and a values perspective for the exploration of different ways of being educator that are possible in the research context.

**The Research Issue: Different Ways of Being Educator?**

Within the literature on nontraditional schooling and alternative education programs, the locus of change has been educational provision (Deschenes et al., 2001; Hodgson, 2007; Miller, 2005; te Riele, 2007, p.56; Wyn, 2008). Much of the literature has identified as being problematic the source of noncompletion of schooling, which can become a difficulty and block for those choosing to reengage in education (Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; Smyth et al., 2004). Because the system of mainstream education has struggled to renew and update to pedagogies that are student centred and responsive to the changing needs
of young people in contemporary society (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005; Smyth, 2003), problematising young people has been recognized as a limitation of the system rather than as an effective way to characterise these learners who failed to perform within the system (Kalantzis & Cope, 2005; Miller, 2005; Smyth, 2003; Wyn, 2008). Focusing on educational provision (te Reile, 2007, p. 56) which meets the complex needs of young people who participate in nontraditional flexible schooling requires ways of being educator different from those commonly experienced in traditional schooling. These different ways of being an educator require research, research that is not generally associated with traditional schooling.

Although the features of nontraditional flexible schooling have been broadly outlined in the literature, the professional identity and development of educators in this context have not been explored in depth. Within the literature, workers in nontraditional schooling have ways of being educator that are characterized as engaging in discourses described in Table 2.

**Table 2: Characteristics of Educator Discourses in Nontraditional Schooling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Educator Discourses</th>
<th>Sources</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive of the efforts of young people to re-engage</td>
<td>Aron, 2003; de Jong, 2005; de Jong &amp; Griffiths, 2006; Lange &amp; Sletten, 2002; O'Brien et al., 2001.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-judgemental, non-controlling, non-didactic</td>
<td>de Jong, 2005; de Jong &amp; Griffiths, 2006; O'Brien et al., 2001.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Investigating the professional identity and development of educators in the proposed research context, as they encounter and explore different ways of being educator, is a focus of this research proposal. Three specific research questions will be addressed.

**Research Questions**

1. How does the multidisciplinary context of nontraditional, flexible schooling in the network influence ways of being educator?
2. How does professional development within the network context of nontraditional flexible schooling influence ways of being educator?

3. How do the ways of valuing, privileged within the network influence ways of being educator?

**A Sociocultural Approach to Theory**

In this research proposal a sociocultural approach to theory will be utilized to further understand how the research context influences educator professional identity. These contextual influences are cultural, institutional, and historical, and they are in relationship with the actions of those who inhabit the context (Wertsch, 1998). As a researcher my interest lies with the interplay of educators’ “individual functioning and development and the sociocultural practices in which individuals take part” (van Huizen et al., 2005, p. 271). This “neo-Vygotskian perspective” forms the theoretical basis of the research (van Huizen et al., 2005, p.271).

**Methodology – A Design Experiment**

One way of examining the research questions around educator identity and development, is through Design Experiment methodology. It is relevant to this proposal for two reasons: first, consonance with sociocultural theory; and second, improvement of educational practice. There is recognition that design research occurs within a complex social context with multiple variables that are not able to be controlled or predetermined (Collins, Joseph, & Bielaczyc, 2004). This recognition of the social dynamics of educational contexts therefore, is consonant with sociocultural theory. All learning is located within a context of social interactions, and emphasizes the importance of a sociocultural setting in the shaping of mental functioning through the use of various cultural tools (van Huizen et al., 2005; Vygotsky, 1962, 1978; Wertsch, 1998; Wertsch, Del Rio & Alvarez, 1995). A design researcher must be attentive and responsive to these various social dynamics in order to continue the process of “progressive refinement” of the design in order to “better address the goals and principles” of the design researchers (Collins et al., 2004, p. 18). The responsiveness of researchers to multiple variables and unpredictable interactions of the social context highlight the consonance of this methodology with sociocultural theory.

The second reason for using design experiment methodology is its capacity to improve educational practice (Collins et al., 2004). Design researchers pay particular attention to the specific details of each phase of the design process for the sake of improving educational interventions. A design experiment provides scope for the exploration of professional identity of educators in the network through a number of data gathering and analysis phases, which will then be used to design an intervention around new staff induction. The methodology of a design experiment has the potential to promote reflective practice as well as collaboration amongst participants as they design an intervention and subsequent cycles of refinement to improve educational outcomes, which in this proposal focuses on staff induction and professional development. Table 3 provides a summary of the four phases of the proposed design experiment.
Table 3: Four Phases of Proposed Design Experiment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Research Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>General Survey of Network Staff</td>
<td>To provide a snapshot of demographics of network educators, how they see themselves what is important in their work, ways of working with colleagues and what supports them in their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Interviews with current educators in the network</td>
<td>To explore the professional identity of educators, what supports them in their work, ways of working with colleagues, what is valued as well as perceptions of what is needed for new staff induction/professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>Focus Group – using data from phase one and two</td>
<td>Collaborative Design of intervention around new staff induction to be implemented in following year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>Interviews and informal observations with new staff in their first year of induction as educators with the revised induction program</td>
<td>To explore whether there are changes in their perceptions of their own professional identity and development as an educator throughout the year long induction process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Data Analysis

Possible tools of analysis will include descriptive statistics (Babbie, 2004), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2005), and identification and analysis of “voice” (Bakhtin, 1981; Wertsch, 1998; Wertsch, et al, 1995). In some instances, several methods of data analysis will be applied to the same data set in order to “uncover the full meaning of the data” (Simons, Lathlean, & Squire, 2008, p. 120) and to comprehensively address the research questions. The selection of analysis tools will depend on the instruments used for collecting data. For analysis of the survey, descriptive statistics and thematic analysis will be used. Analysis of the interviews will be done using thematic analysis in the first instance, followed by identification and analysis of voice. Finally, thematic analysis will be applied to the transcript of the focus group discussions. This data may provide general trends and key concepts and ideas of relevance for recommendations for new staff induction and professional development in the light of multidisciplinary practice.

Possible Implications of Research

Exploring educator professional identity in the network context and making aspects of professional practice explicit may provide an opportunity to increase the level of understanding of professional identity. Drawing on the perspective that professional identity is clearly linked to practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 149) supports the use of design experiment methodology with a view to collaboratively plan an intervention around new staff induction processes within the network. Educators who come to this context may be supported more effectively as they encounter and explore the different ways of being educator that characterise the perspective of practice.
A second implication of the research may be to disrupt a social discourse around being an educator of disenfranchised young people, allowing the composition of “other stories of themselves, to change the stories they live by” in order to transform “social, cultural and institutional narratives” (Clandinin, 2006, p. 51-52). The social narratives around educating disenfranchised young people in schools may continue to be challenged within the network community of practice. Educators become more aware of their professional identity and how it is linked to practice, and the need to change educational provision is highlighted. Also, a narrative around broader issues of educational provision may be further explored, addressing “the possibility of common concerns across all or most youth, and of problems in the mainstream as well as strengths in the minority” (Cieslik & Pollock, 2002; Dwyer & Wyn, 2001; te Riele, 2007, p.64). Exploring different ways of being educator in the specific research context of this proposal, may lead to further research opportunities in other educational contexts. Responsiveness to the changing educational needs of young people in a variety of contexts, impacted by twenty-first century opportunities and complexities, remains a research priority.

References


