

**Series: Further Education Teacher Educators**  
**Article 2: Discovering the Professional Identities of Teacher Educators**

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***Introduction***

This is the second article, which is based on the monograph, *Professional Development of Teacher Educators in Further Education* (Loo, 2020)<sup>1</sup>. The topic is the identity of these educators.

***Relevant literature sources***

A review of these relevant sources provides this topic with a way into thinking and framing the FE teacher educators' identities. Identities are not stable but fluid and dynamic and are socially and culturally constructed and re-constructed.

The first theme, 'being a professional' uses communities of practice and situated learning to unpick identity. Identity is used to justify and make sense of themselves as teacher educators (McKeon and Harrison, 2010), where personal history is relevant. A collegiate sense of identity is developed through conversations and collaborations with peers (Williams and Ritter, 2010). Tensions such as 'lower status' felt by novice educators in universities also serve as a facilitator to identity formation (Boyd and Harris, 2010). Regarding the second theme, the educators' values of putting their trainees first (Boyd et al., 2010), modelling good practice, involvement in research activities (Boyd and Harris, 2010), retaining their ex-school pedagogic experiences, 'second-order practice' (i.e. as educators and not teachers) (Murray et al., 2011) are identifiable factors. Concerning the 'emotional connection' theme, emotional ecology is used to imagine the identity of FE teachers regarding their pedagogic, life, and occupational experiences (Loo, 2019) and found that FE teacher educators put their trainees first. Pereira et al. (2015) provide a psychosocial slant where helping and caring are emotional constructs between educators and trainees. The fourth theme relates to contextual issues. They are issues of accountability (e.g. Ofsted), political influences (e.g. Lingfield Report), contested quality assurance and the role of educators in FE institutions (Springbett, 2018).

***Findings and discussion***

The first theme, 'being a professional', the participants see themselves as wearing several hats in their roles, and they consider themselves as a bridge between several

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<sup>1</sup> Findings of 33 participants, drawn from FE colleges, higher education institutions and private providers, who were or had been educators in the sector, were used. The data was captured from the survey, semi-structured interviews and Talking Heads (unstructured audio recordings). The eight researchers involved in this English project were Gordon Ade-Ojo, Heather Booth-Martin, John Bostock, Jim Crawley, Baiba Eberte, Sai Loo (Principal Investigator), Nicola Sowe and Sonia Spencer. In the book, issues of the educators such as teacher professionalism; profiles of the participants; pathways, initial disciplines and current titles of the participants; teacher educators' knowledge; professional identities; professional education; and supporting case studies were investigated.

communities. Tensions exist concerning the lack of professional recognition and where the mandatory requirement to become qualified teachers was no longer in place.

Teacher educators could be seen as ‘connected professionals’ – the idea that you are a lot more things including connecting to the community (Teacher Educator (TE) 9)

Regarding attributes, characteristics and education, vision, values, and seeing the sector as offering further learning opportunities to all who want to pursue education are significant factors in themselves. TE18 exemplifies these perspectives:

Values and visions are about being the best teacher you can be: making a difference to your learners, taking pride in your work and being professional at all times, and acknowledging that you can have a negative and positive impact.

The abiding theme on ‘emotional connection’ relates to a strong connection with their learners, and as caring and nurturing educators. This is exemplified by TE17:

I see myself as a teacher whether I’m teaching holistic therapy, counseling or teacher training. I’m just working as a facilitator, and I’m trying to get the people there to have the best experience they can and make the most of their time. I don’t really see myself as a teacher but a hand holding facilitator ... a companion.

With the final theme on contextual issues, the significant ones indicated by the participants were a non-mandatory requirement of a teaching qualification, the imposition of tuition fees, the resource constraints by institutions, and the performative culture of accountability. These factors added to the constant battering of the educators’ values and identities. The statement exemplifies this concern:

What is happening is a concern as doing things by the letter constricts and reduces the chance to think outside the box. This can limit teacher educators being autonomous, informed self-reflecting professionals.(TE25)

Despite these tensions, 86 per cent of the participants from the questionnaire felt positive about their professional identities as educators. These educators held onto their firm values. The small percentage of dissenting voices appeared to offer a more balanced viewpoint of acknowledging the emotional connections with their trainees on the one hand and understanding the systemic lack of professional status and the negative contextual issues on the other.

### ***Summary***

These four identified themes have an impact on these educators’ professional identities. It is by acknowledging the positive and negative aspects of the educators’ selves that they can move on. Also, managers and policymakers need to understand the factors affecting these educators and their relevance to training effective deliverers that these stakeholders can offer their support.

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### **Short bio**

Sai Loo (PhD, MA, BSc, FHEA, ACA, FETC) has taught in FE and worked in industry as a Chartered Accountant. Sai has published over 120 articles, conference papers and keynotes (84 per cent are single-authored) including six research monographs with Routledge. His research area is 'occupational education' across teaching, learning and work settings from pre-university to professional education.