Bridging two worlds: From industry to school

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Focus of research

- What are the effects of an industry background on the orientation to teaching and learning of mature career change teachers?
- Is the conception these teachers have of students, the curriculum and the culture of secondary schools different from that of other teachers?
- Are these new teachers operating as agents or signifiers of change, or are they ‘made safe’, socialised into the existing context of the schools?
The journey

Industry → tertiary study → schools
Lortie (1975) was a major influence on this study, particularly how he aimed to understand the way teachers ascribed meanings to their "professional" lives. Lortie described his approach as:

“a stance which combines naivété with scepticism -- a questioning approach toward what is commonly said about teaching and teachers” (p ix).
Starting points from the literature

- ‘Career change’ teachers
- Workplace learning (Billett, 2010)
- Motivation to choose teaching as a second career
- VET in Schools
- Support during early career – issues for mature beginners
- Teacher identity formation
Identified gaps in the literature

- Insights from new teachers whose content knowledge is based on industry and experience – not an undergraduate degree
- Shared alternative pathway for selected cohort with similar backgrounds
- Opportunity to examine “the subjective world of second career teachers and the way they understand themselves as mature age teachers” (Etherington, 2009, p. 41)
Methodology

- Qualitative interpretive paradigm—focus on voices of teachers
- *Inscription* by the researcher (Yates, 2003) – interpretive and member checked (all transcripts and drafts sent to participants)
- Crystallisation – metaphor (Richardson, 2000; Ellingson (2011) -experiences can be viewed from different vantage point to develop further insights and questions
- Discourse analysis (Gee, 2005, 2010)
Limitations

- Research role as teacher educator – possible ‘halo effect’
- Small sample – not generalisable
- Adaptation to new roles comparable across cases – similar experiences in teacher preparation and background
- Interviewed other teachers and principals to add to data set
A word of caution

“The point of dealing with small numbers of subjects in a lot of detail is to see specificity and context in some fine grain; the problem of dealing with small numbers is the potential over-reading we bring to it, either in what we make of these individual stories, or in the claims we make from them about our big issues” (Yates, 2003,p.224).

The authority to make interpretive claims from small number longitudinal qualitative studies, such as this one, rests on the researcher’s persistence and reflexivity in interpretation of such data.
Data gathering

- Formal and informal telephone interviews
- Emails – transcripts returned for checking
- Biography / life history
- Visits at each participant’s school – observations and field notes
- Interviews with ‘other teachers’ selected by participants
- Interviews with Principals
- Conversations with participants before, during and after data gathering period
The longitudinal study – twelve cases

12 Participants

Conversations

Interviews

Emails

Site visits
Participants

- Chefs – ‘Martha’ & ‘Liam’
- Computer services – ‘Steve’
- Clerical / admin – ‘Claire’
- Electricians – ‘Tom’ & ‘Paul’
- Mechanics – ‘Myron’ (+ IT) & ‘Walter’
- Farmer / agriculture – ‘Tess’
- Electrical / mechanic – ‘Lauder’ & ‘Ralph’
- Horticulturist – ‘Mick’
Some comments from the data

‘I think my past experience and age gives me the confidence to question the system, and hopefully the skills and diplomacy required to actually do something about it’

Myron
From a remote school – mainly indigenous students

“I think the kids are fantastic and have given me a new perspective on Aboriginal Education. Some weeks I am my harshest critic and it is easy to bag yourself out for having done this or that or not managed to engage kids in your subject but the days it does click (ie they stay in the classroom) it is fantastic. The biggest thrill I have ever had in my working life was when a kid casually worked out 3 times 36 in his head. That was huge considering he had to count on his fingers and couldn’t add up 10 + 30 at start of the year”

Paul
‘Other teacher’ comment

“A lot of people think teaching is just part and extension from school. Not Lauder. It’s very much I’m preparing these students for a ... a workplace – and I think that’s underlying with all his work – he’s not just here to fill in the gap --- to fill in the (time) .... in our school you have to be able to teach a bit of woodwork, metal work, science, maths, whatever and Lauder has been able to do that – he does – he teaches cooking!”
“If I work with teachers who have come straight from university, I find they do have a classroom mentality, you know – they’re the boss and you do what I tell you to do – but when I’ve dealt with and worked with ex-tradespeople, it’s more like we do with (Tom) – it’s more of a work program and is more laid back and as long as the kids are learning skills we require them to learn and are building something they enjoy building, we feel like we have done our job”

“Wally” about “Tom”
Findings:

- Identity and approach strongly aligned with prior career, life and work experience prior to teaching
- the participants see themselves as very different from teachers who have followed the traditional pathways of school, university or college then back to school
- the different background, combined with accelerated teacher education program, can result in a lack of confidence interacting with other teachers
- Some were critical of the cynicism of more experienced teachers
Attitudes

- ‘if they didn’t learn, I didn’t teach them’ Paul
- Emphasis on literacy - significant effort teaching students basic literacy and numeracy embedded in technology and VET subject areas
- Identified clear links between literacy, absenteeism and behaviour management
- Practicality, relevance, authenticity and encouraging positive attitudes most important aspects of planning and programming to meet student needs
- Workplace learning pedagogy combined with a constructivist approach
Responses to research questions

- Pedagogy related to workplace / vocational learning
- School as preparation for life (rather than further study)
- Different attitude to students – part of workshop team with teacher as team leader and expert
- Spent much time with students outside class – gave high priority to developing relationships with students – attributed lack of discipline issues to this
Identity and issues

Need for appropriate mentoring to assist in socialisation

Creation of workplace environment and approach

Working class teachers - teacher voice and style


