

Subject Specialist Pedagogy and Teacher Education



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*How should teacher educators in
Further Education relate to subject
specialist pedagogy?*

The FE curriculum is exceptionally diverse:

“it is the very diversity of the FE curriculum offer that simplifies the life of school sixth forms and universities by enabling them to keep their more focused missions”

(Stanton, Morris and Norrington, 2015, 69)

Policy flux

“In the FE sector, since the 1980s there have been 28 major pieces of legislation, 48 secretaries of state with relevant responsibilities, and no organisation has survived longer than a decade. In the industrial strategy space, there have been at least two industrial strategies in the last decade alone – and we are now moving onto a third.”

(Institute for Government 2017, p5)

ITE in English Further Education (FE): a few highlights



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- Prior to 2001: no requirement at all for ITE
- From 2001: statutory requirement for Further Education National Training Organisation (FENTO) accredited ITE qualification for all new staff in FE
- From 2007: statutory requirement for all staff to acquire an accredited qualification
- From 2013: again no requirement at all for ITE
- *Most FE colleges still, however, require an ITE qualification*

Policy expectations

FE teachers are asked to do a great deal for economic development through enhancing skills and to social mobility through widening participation.

The average salary for FE teachers in 2015-16 was £30,288. It was £37,400 for school teachers.

(ETF 2017, p30)

Ofsted survey of ITT in FE (2003)

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Office for Standards
in Education

The initial training of further education teachers



A survey

HMI 1762

The trouble with subject-specialism...

“While the tuition that trainees receive on the taught elements of their courses is generally good, few opportunities are provided for trainees to learn how to teach their specialist subjects, and there is a lack of systematic mentoring and support in the workplace”

(Ofsted 2003: 2)



Standards Unit

Equipping our Teachers for the Future:

Reforming Initial Teacher Training for the Learning and Skills Sector



department for
education and skills

successforall



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Equipping our Teachers for the Future (2004)

The trouble with subject-specialism...

“an essential aim of the training is that teachers should have the skills of teaching in their own specialist or curriculum area.” (DfES 2004: 8)

This was to be achieved with subject mentoring, which remains in place today.

What this approach may overlook:

- The diversity of the FE curriculum
- The multi-disciplinary nature of many FE courses.
- The varying types and levels of subject knowledge among FE teachers and mentors.
- Ideas about teaching derive from broader society and often are generic, not specific to a subject

The fundamental trouble with subject-specialism...

“Teachers in the education and training sector often have subject qualifications below degree level, and a significant proportion have only Level 3 qualifications; although they may be expert vocational practitioners, their expertise may be held tacitly rather than in terms of codified knowledge, providing challenges to their development of teaching strategies.”

(Thompson 2014: 33)

(Thompson 2014: 41)

Distinctiveness of subject-specific pedagogical knowledge (SPK)

Strong ← → Weak

Subject-specificity of delivery	Strong	Distinctive SPK is made available in the ITE curriculum and is developed through discrete provision for the subject. (Mode A)	Distinctive SPK is not made available in the ITE curriculum, but generic pedagogical knowledge is developed through discrete provision for the subject. (Mode C)
	Weak	Distinctive SPK is made available in the ITE curriculum but is developed through generic provision. (Mode B)	Distinctive SPK is not made available in the ITE curriculum, and generic pedagogical knowledge is developed through generic provision. (Mode D)

Our project, funded by Gatsby Charitable Foundation



- ***To develop, implement and evaluate an intervention to enhance subject-specialist pedagogy in ITE for SET teachers***
- We analysed modules on the largest ITE courses.
- Our approach moves from abstraction to application; not tips for teachers.
- Initially we worked directly with trainee teachers and we have also worked with teacher educators.



Our concepts

- **What is pedagogy?**
- Pedagogy describes how teachers explain the decisions they make in relation to a particular curriculum or body of knowledge and in relation to a particular group of students.
- It is not 'just what teachers do'. It has to be articulated.

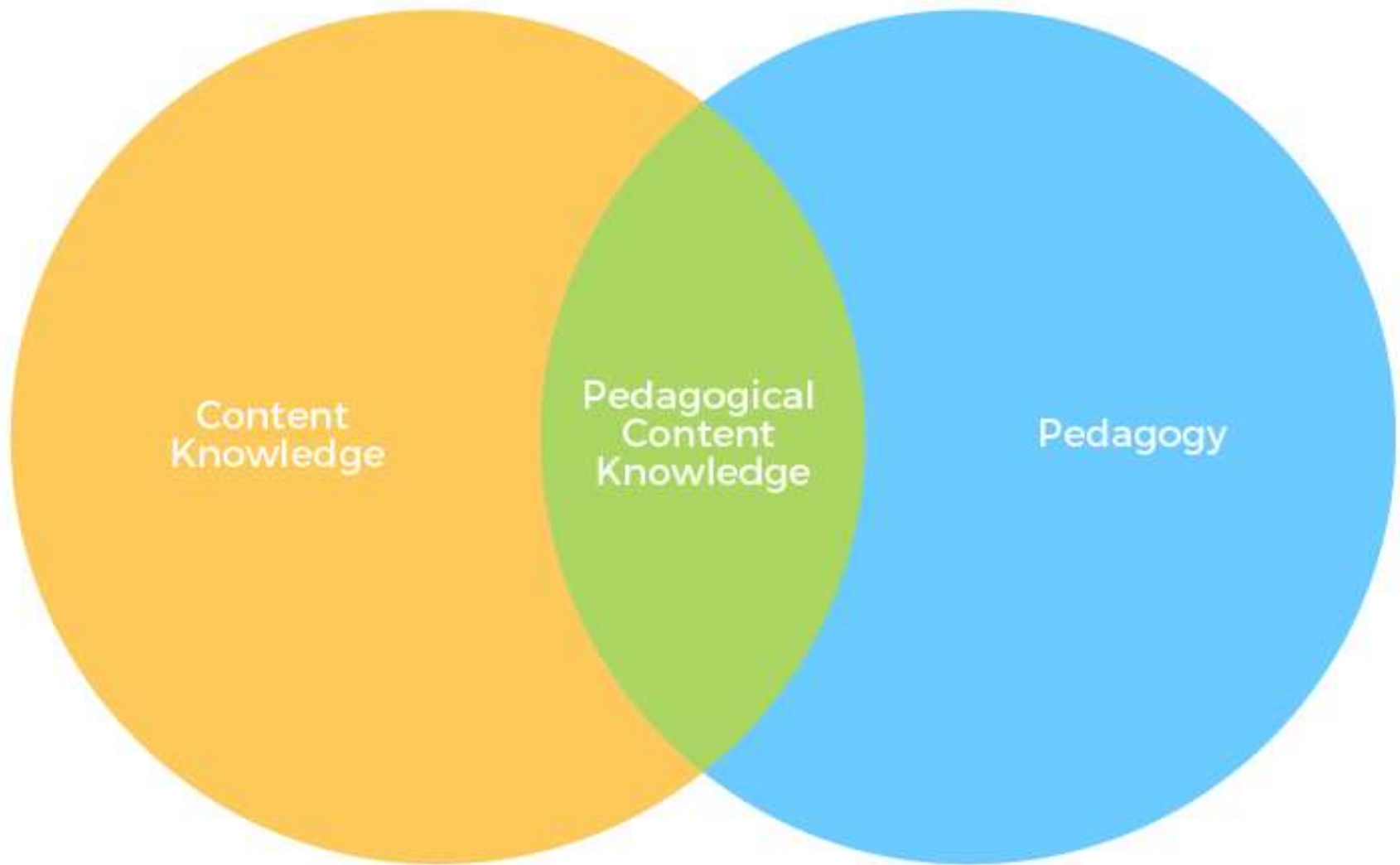
Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

- Intersection of content and pedagogical knowledge
- Part of an overall model of teacher knowledge (Shulman 1986, 1987)
- Distinct from subject knowledge per se, which subject specialists who are not teachers also have

Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK)

“that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding ... the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems or issues are organised, represented and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners”

(Shulman 1987, p.8)



Content
Knowledge

Pedagogical
Content
Knowledge

Pedagogy

“The best vocational teaching and learning combines theoretical knowledge from the underpinning disciplines ... with the occupational knowledge of practice ... teachers, trainers and learners have to **recontextualise** theoretical and occupational knowledge to suit specific situations.”

(CAVTL 2013, p.15)

“Pedagogic discourse is constructed by a recontextualising principle which selectively appropriates, relocates, refocuses and relates other discourses to constitute its own order”
(Bernstein 2000, p.33)

- Teachers need to engage with the recontextualising principles underlying a vocational curriculum.
- Recontextualisation also draws attention to the reproduction of inequalities of class, gender, ethnicity



Occupational identity

- Learning as becoming, or learning as a change of identity (into a professional engineer, for example)
- Occupational cultures and expectations (benign and otherwise)
- Maintaining connections with workplaces
- Using Labour Market Information to inform teaching.

Other issues and dilemmas

- An intervention big enough to make a difference but small enough not to demand too much time...
- What form should the intervention take?
- How many participants will we need?*
- How will we evaluate the effect of the intervention, if any?



Online resources

- Improving Technical Education:
Developing pedagogy

How do we know if any of this makes any difference?

- Evaluating any pedagogical intervention is difficult.
- Sample sizes can be rather small.
- Liking it is not the same as being informed by it.
- Self-reported rise in confidence is no proxy for improvement in practice.
- So, we are surveying and interviewing participants to analyse the language they use to explain their decisions.

- Analysis of the language used by the participants allows us to make inference about influence on their decision-making.
- We also report on other relevant factors including support in the workplace, previous experience and level of education.

Participants

- 1540 trainees between the four universities in 2014-15 (including full-time) (Zaidi et al 2017).
- We identified a very small population of SET trainee teachers, around 50.
- So, we diversified our intervention to reach more participants, including teacher educators.

But why so few possible and actual participants?

Early findings from our research on engineering recruitment

Research funded by Education and Training
Foundation (ETF)

Responses from 24 of 50 largest colleges by turnover.

- There is still student demand for SET courses.
- Recruitment of teachers is acutely difficult nationally.
- New applicants are required to do teacher education courses.
- There is a lot of effort put into the recruitment and retention of staff.



“In all the time I have been here, so two years and four months, there are always vacancies and [the engineering department] are always desperate for people.”

“...it is to do with the fact that people can earn more in industry than they can in teaching.”

FE College Human Resource manager (Northern town)



What have we learned to date?

- England does not have enough trainee teachers of SET subjects.
- Pedagogy is a controversial term in technical education.
- Through valuing their subject specialist knowledge we have engaged a wide range of participants in discussion of pedagogy.

Why promote subject-specialist approaches?

- Subject specialist pedagogy (SSP) explicitly values the expert knowledge of the teacher.
- SSP may allow discussion of learning and how that is promoted by well-informed teaching.
- Emphasising informed expertise may challenge reductive understandings of technical skills.
- A conceptual framework to inform decision-making is a productive means to improve SET teaching.