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Supporting the professional development of 'hybrid' teacher educators in the Further Education sector

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Abstract
Teacher educators are crucial for the quality of the teaching workforce and therefore to the outcomes of learners. However, teachers frequently become teacher educators with little or no professional development to support them in these roles. In this paper we report on a professional development programme which aimed to address this gap in provision for practitioners operating in the dual role of teacher and teacher educator in the Further Education and Skills sector in England.

Using evaluative data from interviews and questionnaires, we found that the programme was successful in supporting a diverse group of participants to reflect on and develop their practice. It increased participants' confidence in their roles as teacher educators, by supporting learning about the practice of teacher education. Participants valued a sense of belonging to a community of learning. Reflecting participants' dual roles as teachers and teacher educators, they applied learning to their practice in multiple ways with colleagues, beginning teachers and with students.

Our findings contribute to understanding the ways in which practitioners in 'hybrid' roles as teacher and teacher educators can be supported, and offer a model through which this can be provided, across all phases of education.

Keywords
Teacher; teacher educator; further education; hybrid; second order; professional development.

Introduction
In England, recent years have seen a policy-driven shift towards school-led initial teacher education (White, 2014; Dengerink, et al., 2015; Mutton, et al., 2017). This has led to greater numbers of practitioners operating in 'hybrid' roles (Margolis, 2012) as both teachers and teacher educators. There are, however, few formal models of preparation or development for these practitioners (White, 2014). In the Further Education and Skills (sometimes referred to as the Post-16 or post-compulsory) sector in England, this lack of support is particularly acute, meaning that practitioners may work in isolation, lack opportunities to collaboratively share and develop practice, and lack access to evidence about their practice (Harkin, et al., 2008; Noel, 2006; Orr, 2008; Lucas & Nasta, 2010).

In this article we explore the impact of a programme of professional development for teacher educators operating in the Further Education and Skills sector in England. In particular, we focus on 'hybrid' teacher educators, those with roles as practising teachers and teacher educators (Margolis, 2012). We take as our definition for teacher educators those practitioners whose work includes the support and/or mentoring of student teachers. While some participants in this study reported that they also had roles as leaders or facilitators of professional development and so might have had professional learning needs relating to these other roles (Perry & Boylan, 2018), the programme and this study focus only on their professional development as teacher educators.

We describe the programme's content and delivery model, setting this in the context of the diversity of the sector, and evaluate its impact. The evaluation showed that the professional development programme was successful in its intentions to support participants' learning about their practice as

initial teacher educators. It also fulfilled a need for a feeling of community and provided ideas for use in a 'first order' (Murray & Male, 2005) context with post-16 learners as well as with beginning teachers. In exploring these issues we demonstrate the need for professional development for teacher educators, especially those who lack access to other opportunities to build connections with peers such as those in hybrid roles, and offer a model through which such processional development can be provided.

Background
The context of this study is a professional development programme for initial teacher educators working in the Further Education and Skills sector in England. This brings together three areas of focus: professional development for initial teacher educators, the Further Education and Skills sector itself and the roles of 'hybrid' practitioners who work with both students and teachers (Margolis, 2012). In this section we explore each of these areas in turn, setting the study within its context and drawing out some of its underpinning themes.

In the literature teacher educator is used to cover a range of professional activities and roles including mentoring new and experienced teachers, facilitation and leadership of professional development and working with groups of student teachers (Perry & Boylan, 2018; White, 2014). In this study, we focus exclusively on this last group, while acknowledging that some of the participants in the study may also operate in some of these other roles. Formal development opportunities for teacher educators, especially those still working as classroom practitioners, are rare, with most focussed around induction and training as a mentor (Dengerink, et al., 2015; Smith, 2003). Previous research has theorised the knowledge required for teacher education in various ways including, as two examples: subject knowledge, knowledge of how to teach, and knowledge of how to teach others how to teach (Field, 2012); and content (what is learned), exemplification (how it is learned) and meta-cognising (critical reflection) (Philpott, 2014). New teacher educators' knowledge is often tacit, based on experience rather than theory (McKeon & Harrison, 2010), and so there is a need to develop and trial models of professional development. Potentially valuable approaches include self-study and professional inquiry to support teacher educators to build understanding of their practice and share this with colleagues and peers (Boei, et al., 2015; Philpott, 2014; Exley & Ovenden-Hope, 2013; Lunenberg & Willemse, 2006).

The Further Education (FE) and Skills sector in England supports learners above the age of 16. The sector is diverse, covering colleges of Further Education, Sixth Form colleges, offender learning and the prison sector, and workplace learning in public and private sector organisations and charities. Compared to the schools sector, the FE and Skills sector is relatively under-researched, especially in relation to teacher education (Noel, 2006; Thurston, 2010; Crawley, 2013; Springbett, 2018). The diversity and size of the sector mean that opportunities for formalised professional learning can be infrequent and often focus on organisational policies rather than reflection and improvement (Orr, 2008). In contrast to school-based initial teacher education, in the FE sector, teacher education programmes are not typically organised according to subject or age phase. Consequently, in FE, teacher educators operate in different types of educational organisations and with a broad range of trainees and subjects, each bringing their own professional needs (Bathmaker & Avis, 2005; Crawley, 2013; Springbett, 2018).

For practitioners operating in hybrid roles, whose responsibilities include both teaching and leading teachers (Margolis, 2012), the anxiety of building a new professional identity may be exacerbated as practitioners are required to continually and repeatedly cross the boundary between teacher and teacher educator (Margolis & Doring, 2012; O'Dwyer & Atlı, 2015). Hybrid teacher educators often come to their role 'by accident' on the strength of their reputations as good teachers (Simmons & Thompson, 2007; Lunenberg & Willemse, 2006; Noel, 2006; Crawley, 2013). The assumption is that if they know their subject, they can teach others how to teach it (Exley & Ovenden-Hope, 2013). But this is to ignore the complexity and challenge of being a teacher educator alongside being a teacher and

the significance of the personal journey as practitioners assume the role (Crawley, 2013). Support is therefore needed for hybrid teacher educators to understand how their roles function together (White, 2014).

Bringing these issues together highlights a particular need for studies which explore how to support practitioners operating within the FE sector's diverse range of contexts to build their practice as teacher educators. This study aims to contribute to filling this knowledge gap.

The professional development programme
The programme described here was developed and facilitated by staff from Sheffield Hallam University, working with partners from local Further Education organisations. It was funded by the Education & Training Foundation, a government-supported charitable organisation, as part of their long-term commitment to supporting teachers, leaders and businesses to help them deliver excellent further and vocational education and training (Education & Training Foundation, 2019). The programme team was led by Sarah, one of the authors of this paper. Participants' involvement was supported by their employers and managers. Honorarium payments were offered to participants' organisations, with financial support provided by the Education and Training Foundation, which provided a level of credibility and authority to the programme.

The overall aim of the programme was for participants to gain and share expertise to support their 'second order' (Murray & Male, 2005) practice as teacher educators. The design of the programme was underpinned by principles of effective professional development (for example, Desimone, 2009) including: explicit modelling of effective practice; active, collaborative learning; embedded evidence from research; critical reflection drawing on participants' existing expertise; flexible, ongoing support; and embedded formative evaluation. Following these principles, participants were engaged over a number of weeks in varied face-to-face and online activities (Table 1).

Most face-to-face sessions took place on a Saturday, to facilitate ease of participation, while being aware that this choice raises issues of organisational responsibility and support for professional development. Sessions took place in the university, and participant travel costs were refunded where appropriate.

Table 1. Programme content and structure.

Session	Content	Delivery mode
1	From teacher to teacher educator Developing observation skills	Face-to-face
2	Working with mentors	Online
3	Designing an initial teacher education curriculum Developing English and mathematics skills within the initial teacher education curriculum	Face-to-face
4	Using technology to enhance learning	Online
5	Making feedback and feedforward effective Safeguarding within initial teacher education	Face-to-face
6	Reflection for action Becoming a practitioner researcher	Face-to-face

Data collection and analysis

The evaluation of the programme was based on a synthesis of characteristics of effective professional development and models for its evaluation (Guskey, 2000; Desimone, 2009; Cordingley, et al., 2015). Using interviews and surveys, we explored participants' experiences of the programme, their reasons for participation, their learning, changes to their practice and sharing with their colleagues. We also explored participants' perceptions of the pedagogical strategies used by the programme's facilitators; our findings in relation to this are beyond the scope of this paper and will be reported elsewhere. By the end of the programme's pilot phase, three cohorts of participants had completed the programme. Data used in this study was collected from the first two cohorts, totalling 34 participants. Data was collected using surveys and interviews (Table 2). Pre- and post-programme surveys were completed on paper. Interviews took place 4-6 weeks after the programme had ended, either over the telephone or face-to-face, and were audio recorded and transcribed. Descriptive statistics were derived from the pre- and post-programme surveys. Interviews were analysed through an inductive process of theming (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) in order to identify participants' experiences of the programme, what they felt they had learned and any changes to practice they had made.

Table 2. Data collection.

Data	Areas of focus	Number of responses	Analysis
Pre-programme survey	Participant demographics, reasons for participation, expectations and baseline confidence levels	21	Descriptive statistics, thematic coding
Post-programme survey	Experience of programme delivery, changes in confidence levels, impact on practice, sharing with colleagues and recommendations for improvement	14	Descriptive statistics, thematic coding
Interviews	Reasons for participation, learning, impact and recommendations for improvement	9	Thematic coding

Sheffield Hallam University's ethical procedures were followed and approval was gained for the study. In line with these procedures, written consent was received from participants to gather and use their feedback and all data presented below is anonymised.

Findings

Participants had a range of experience levels as initial teacher educators (Table 3). The diversity of participants' subject specialisms and their roles reflected the nature of the FE sector. Not all were engaged in university-accredited teacher education; some were involved in routes to other qualifications and pathways to becoming teachers, such as those for teachers of English as a Second Language (ESOL). The largest group of participants, those from Further Education and sixth form (16-19 years) colleges, held roles which combined teaching of young people or adults with the mentoring or training of university-accredited teacher education students and/or the leadership of staff groups to do this. Those from other organisations held roles which reflected the nature of their organisation, such as the teaching of ESOL alongside support and/or training of ESOL teachers. The amount of time committed to different aspects of their roles varied widely across participants depending on their role in their organisation.

Table 3. Programme participants.

Average participants' experience as a teacher	12 years (range 1-32 years)
Average participants' experience as a teacher educator	6 years (range 0-18 years)
Participants' organisations	Most participants from Further Education or Sixth Form (16-19 years) colleges, one participant from each of: police force development, football club community foundation, voluntary sector organisation
Participants' subject specialisms	Biology, Business, Chemistry, Education, English as a Second Language, English, Film & Media Studies, Foundation Learning, Hairdressing, Music, Nails and Beauty Therapy, Performing Arts, PE/Sport, Psychology, Teacher Education

Participants' reasons for joining the programme were varied. Almost all stated that they wished to learn more about initial teacher education and many hoped to increase their confidence in their role and reflect on their practice. Most linked participation to further development of their current professional role. Interestingly, very few suggested that their participation was part of a wider organisational professional development or improvement strategy; indeed, some of those interviewed were participating without discussion with line managers:

> 'It was kind of really confidence for me… When I read about the programme I thought actually that could give me some grounding in either reinforcing that I do have the skills and knowledge already, or at least supporting me in those'
>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

> 'It was about reconnecting with the academic world that supports my career. Then also around picking up on new thinking… I was hoping it would give me some ideas.'
>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

On the whole, the programme appeared to meet participant expectations. It was received with great positivity and enjoyment and all participants stated that they would recommend the programme to others:

> 'It was action-packed, but practical, which I liked. There were bits of theory as well, but it made sense, so it was all contextualised, it all made sense so you could take something away from each session'
>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

Comparing against key indicators of effective professional development (Guskey, 2000; Cordingley, et al., 2015; Desimone, 2009) such as participant enjoyment, learning, the role of the facilitator and sharing learning with colleagues, the programme showed high markers of perceived quality (Table 4).

Table 4. Participant experiences of the programme (post-programme survey).

Indicator	Agree (%)	Agree strongly (%)	Total agree and agree strongly (%)
The sessions were enjoyable	7	93	100
The sessions were well-planned and organized	7	93	100
The sessions were relevant to my practice	36	64	100
The facilitators displayed a high level of knowledge of FE ITE	7	93	100
The facilitators were responsive to my learning needs	21	79	100
The facilitators used active learning strategies	7	93	100
The facilitators used collaborative learning strategies	7	93	100
This programme has given me opportunities to reflect on my practice	7	93	100
This programme has given me opportunities to plan changes to my practice	43	57	100
I have shared learning from the programme with colleagues in my organisation	57	36	93
I would recommend the programme to others	21	79	100

In relation to the delivery model, there was a notable enthusiasm for the face-to-face sessions in comparison to the online activities. Further, the choice to schedule face-to-face sessions on Saturdays was received favourably. In part this was undoubtedly because scheduling outside the standard working week meant no financial or time commitment was required from participants' organisations. In addition, though, attending on a Saturday appeared to result in an unanticipated level of participant commitment, compared to a weekday or an online activity:

> 'On a Saturday you have to have a certain amount of commitment to want to go yourself and give up your time… Everybody that was there wanted to invest their time in being there'
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

This commitment may have contributed to the strength of community feeling, an aspect of the programme which many participants commented on:

> 'You could walk in and think, 'Oh I'll go and sit with Michelle today,' or whatever… I sat in a completely different table with a completely different group of people because I thought I've got to know everybody, I'm comfortable to do that'
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

> 'We were all equals. Everybody's opinion counted and mattered and you were free to speak and give ideas'
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

The programme's facilitators played a crucial role in building this community of learning, which worked alongside other pedagogical choices, such as the use of active learning strategies, to build

participants' positivity about the programme. The facilitators' practices, knowledge and skills are the focus of a separate study, so we note only briefly here the importance of their role in the perceived success of the programme, highlighting in particular the value of modelling practice. Explicit modelling is a key practice for teacher educators (Smith, 2005; Korthagen, et al., 2006; Thurston, 2010; Crawley, 2013), and when the facilitators did this, it was noticed with approval by participants:

> 'When we were doing a collaborative activity and we had to get up, she might just say, 'Can you move round the room anti-clockwise?... because it was so simple that it was so clever. At the end she said, 'Did we embed maths?' and we were, like, yes, we did actually. I know that I can easily slip those into some of my activities'
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

> 'They were modelling what we would do with our trainee teachers and with other practitioners, to just point out and make explicit the strategies we would use and why… There was a lot of modelling all the time and we always had conversations about why they had done something in a certain way'
>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

Responses to the post-programme survey indicated that a majority of participants reported feeling increased confidence against most programme content areas (Figure 1). The content areas where lower numbers of participants reported increased confidence appeared to relate to areas where some participants already had considerable experience. Linked to this, a few participants felt that the programme could have been improved by more individualised planning, in order to better build on previous experience.

> 'I think if the facilitators had known our prior experience they could have perhaps paired us differently so that that worked more smoothly and we were perhaps supporting each other. Similarly they could have asked us what we wanted to get out of this session and what were our concerns, what did we want to work on'
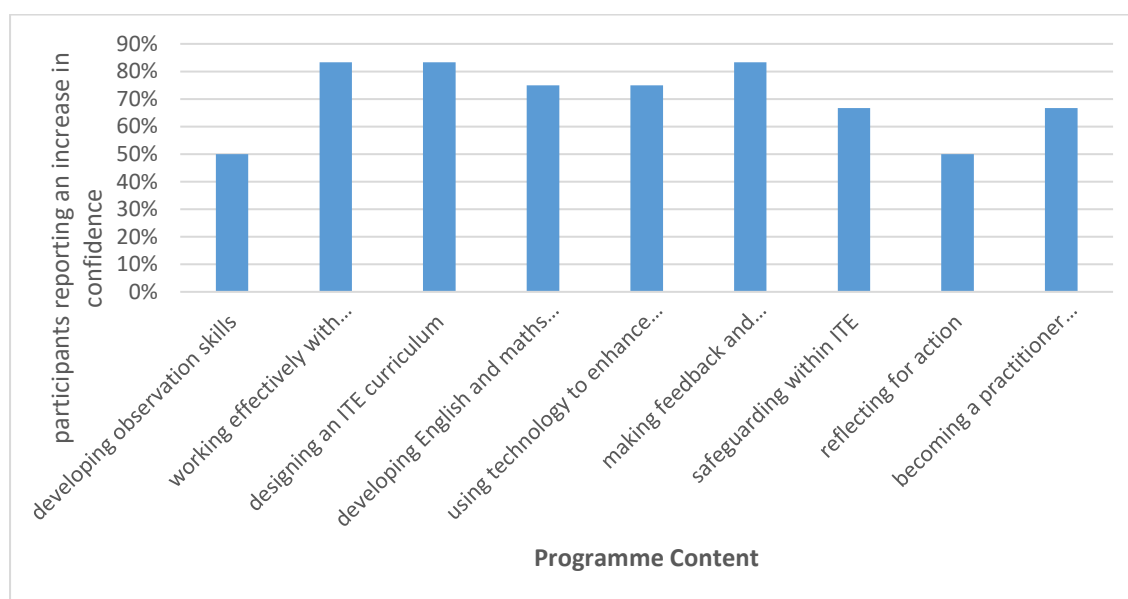>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

Figure 1. Participants reporting increased confidence against programme content.

Some participants reported feeling increased confidence about their roles more generally, with this sometimes being about reinforcing previous experience instead of new learning:

> 'I feel like I've got a few more strategies to deal with some of those things now… That's helped me feel a bit more confident in my own practice I think('
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

> 'It's actually made me go with my instincts a bit more… it's made me a little bit more confident in what I'm doing'
>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

In relation to learning, many participants felt that they had gained an improved understanding of the breadth and complexity of teacher education as a practice. In addition, the programme appeared to support participants' learning about a range of specific aspects of practice.

> 'I've learned that teacher training is massive, wow. There are so many areas that people can specialise in and I think it's a massive undertaking'
>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

> 'I think the session… planning the curriculum and thinking about the different components of it and where it would run, and all the things that you have to consider when you're planning a programme, I found that really interesting… because that got me thinking conceptually about what does a new teacher need at the start and how each component fits together.'
>
> (Cohort 1 participant interview).

Whether this learning led to changes in practice is difficult to say, given the timescale of data collection which took place soon after the end of the programme. However, most participants suggested that they were or would be making changes to their practice, often adopting pedagogical strategies which had been modelled by the facilitators:

> 'I really enjoyed the reflection session… that's something that I've taken away from and started to build in to our training programme, because it just made me really aware that… we weren't giving them any reflection tools to improve on their teaching practice. It seems obvious now, but we didn't used to do it that way'
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

In addition to changing their practice as teacher educators, a few participants discussed applying learning to their practice with students and/or colleagues. These changes reflect the participants' hybrid roles (Margolis, 2012) and illustrate the individualised, non-linear nature of professional learning (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002), which can sometimes leads to unanticipated (by the programme's facilitators) change:

> 'I line manage a group of staff and the things that we went through helped me in line managing them better and making them better teachers'
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

> 'I just had that little light bulb moment of, I think when I'm giving feedback to my learners, I'm probably not actually following the same methodology as I would feedback for a student teacher'
>
> (Cohort 2 participant interview).

In summary, the professional development programme described here was successful in engaging participants in a community of learning through which they reflected on current practice and shared ideas for improvement. Participants learned about pedagogical strategies and the context and content of teacher education and their confidence increased against a range of areas of practice. Some participants made changes to a variety of aspects of their practice (or planned to), with beginning teachers, with students and with colleagues, and overall the programme had high perceived value against key indicators of quality professional development.

Discussion

The professional development programme at the centre of this study enabled participants to learn about the practice of teacher education. This 'content', that is the knowledge and skills necessary for effective practice (Philpott, 2014), largely appeared to meet participants' expectations. There were some reservations about the depth and flexibility of some activities which appeared to relate to participants' differing career stages and their experience levels (Dengerink, et al., 2015) and reflected the diversity of the Further Education sector in which the participants worked (Orr, 2008).

Indeed, the diversity of the FE and Skills sector raises a challenge of contextualisation. Evidence from studies of professional development suggests that contextualising content in participants' specific classroom experiences is likely to contribute to more effective professional development than generic content (Cordingley, et al., 2015). For 'hybrid' (Margolis, 2012) teacher educators working in schools, content might be contextualised in the classroom environment of initial teacher education leading to government accreditation. However, in the FE sector, teacher educators work in different types of organisations with varied roles and qualifications and so their contexts are very varied. In the programme described here, contextualisation was provided by enabling individual participants to reflect on their own practice. This might be sufficient, but future programmes operating in this field may have greater impact if targeted at particular specific groups within the sector.

Programme content was balanced by sessions supporting critical reflection and shared planning. An important aspect of the pedagogical delivery of the programme appeared to be the explicit modelling of practice by the programme facilitators which provided opportunities for participants to expand their knowledge of the 'how' of teacher education (Philpott, 2014). As intended, some of these approaches were later used by participants in their roles as teacher educators. In addition, though, some were also adopted in their first order roles as teachers. This suggests that participants identified some pedagogical strategies modelled by the facilitators as being appropriate for both teaching and teaching others how to teach, providing an example of the multi-layered, complex nature of teacher education, which encompasses overlapping knowledges of subject, teaching and teaching others how to teach (Field, 2012).

The programme achieved its aims in increasing the confidence of the participants as teacher educators as well as teachers, thereby supporting a move towards a more secure professional identity in their 'second order' roles (Crawley, 2013; Murray & Male, 2005). For the more experienced practitioners, the programme also acted as reassurance, a reminder of existing effective practice and an opportunity to engage with current research. This suggests that the programme moved beyond a simple 're-tooling' of new pedagogical practices towards an arguably more profound model of 'revitalisation' (Sachs, 2011).

Contributing to the idea of professional development as revitalisation, a feeling of being part of a community appeared to be very important to participants' engagement. Indeed, other research has also shown that joining a community of practice can be an effective model of professional development for teacher educators, forming an important step in building a professional identity in the role (Willemse, et al., 2016; Boei, et al., 2015). The importance of the community suggests that it was providing something to the participants which was unavailable in their working practices. This highlights the isolation often experienced by practitioners in the Further Education and Skills sector, who, even if they work in large organisations, may be the only practitioners operating in a particular

subject area or with a particular group of learners (Orr, 2012). Practitioners may therefore have limited opportunities to share practice with peers outside immediate organisational structures and take longer to build a secure identity as a teacher educator.

Finally, this commitment to being part of a community appeared to be enhanced by the programme's delivery outside normal working hours. This delivery model may enable some to participate who might be otherwise excluded by organisational restrictions. However, in turn this raises issues of professional responsibility in a sector where teachers often have limited influence over their professional development (Orr, 2008; Harkin, et al., 2008). Professional development which takes place outside working hours and does not require organisational commitment may lack organisational recognition and thereby limit support for increased professionalism in the workforce.

Conclusion

In this study a programme of professional development for teacher educators in the Further Education and Skills sector was developed and delivered, in response to a need for professional development for teacher educators across education (Loughran, 2014), and for professional development in the FE sector more generally (Harkin, et al., 2008). The positive response to the programme described here suggests that this professional development need is felt by practitioners in the sector as well as by researchers.

The programme's content was relevant to participants' practice, developing their understanding of the breadth and complexity of teacher education. Improvements to future programmes might include closer tailoring to the previous experience of participants during the planning stage. Participants' confidence in their 'hybrid' (Margolis, 2012) roles as teacher and teacher educator increased, particularly where the programme confirmed and reinforced existing knowledge and experience. This shows that a programme which provides access to the 'what' and the 'how' of teacher education (Philpott, 2014) can support hybrid practitioners to better understand, develop and feel confident in their roles.

The delivery model, taking place outside normal working hours and blending face-to-face with online support, facilitated participants' access. This resulted in high levels of participant commitment. In some cases this resulted in high levels of commitment. Linked to this, the feeling of being part of a community in which they had the opportunity to share, reflect on and review their practices was a key benefit of the programme. This highlights the importance of community building as a way of enhancing professional learning, and supports those studies which show that collaboration is a key aspect of professional development (Cordingley, et al., 2015).

In conclusion, the professional development programme described here fulfilled a need for those working in the FE sector as hybrid teacher-teacher educators. We have shown that it achieved some key outcomes of effective professional development including increases in confidence, knowledge of practice and changes to pedagogical approaches, and led to a feeling of positivity derived from being part of a community of learning. We end by considering the main implications of this study for those involved in the development, facilitation and research of similar programmes, whether operating in the FE sector or in other areas of education. Firstly, this programme contributes further evidence to the body of research which indicates a need for professional development opportunities for teacher educators, particularly those operating in hybrid roles. Secondly, further research could generate understanding of how professional development can be used to build a sense of community. In this programme, a feeling of community was achieved in part unexpectedly, through delivery of the programme outside normal working hours. However other factors were also involved in this, including the role of programme facilitators in drawing participants together; additional research to understand how different factors can work together to achieve community-building would be valuable for all those involved in professional development. Finally, the programme illustrates the value of professional development which explores the 'how' of practice as well as the 'what', so that

participants are given opportunities to go beyond learning new content (such as subject or pedagogies) to reflect on its meaning, philosophies and implications for their own practice.

Acknowledgements

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