



## Academic work and proletarianisation: A study of higher education-based teacher educators



Viv Ellis <sup>a,\*</sup>, Jane McNicholl <sup>b</sup>, Allan Blake <sup>c</sup>, Jim McNally <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Education, Brunel University, Kingston Lane, Uxbridge UB8 3PH, UK

<sup>b</sup> University of Oxford, UK

<sup>c</sup> University of Strathclyde, UK

### H I G H L I G H T S

- We studied the labour of 13 higher education-based teacher educators.
- 'Relationship maintenance' was the defining characteristic of their work.
- Academic capitalism describes the social/exchange relations within which they work.
- Within these relations, teacher educators are vulnerable to proletarianisation.

### A R T I C L E I N F O

#### Article history:

Received 7 April 2013

Received in revised form

20 January 2014

Accepted 22 January 2014

#### Keywords:

Teacher educators

Academic work

Academic capitalism

Proletarianisation

### A B S T R A C T

This article reports on a one year, mixed methods study of 13 teacher educators at work in English and Scottish higher education institutions. Framed by cultural–historical activity theory, itself a development of a Marxian analysis of political economy, the research shows how, under conditions of academic capitalism, these teacher educators were denied opportunities to accumulate capital (e.g. research publications, grants) and were proletarianised. The reasons for this stratification were complex but two factors were significant: first, the importance of maintaining relationships with schools in the name of 'partnership' teacher education; and, second, the historical cultures of teacher education in HE.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

This article reports on a year-long, mixed methods study of the work of 13 higher education (HE) – based teacher educators in England and Scotland – their activities, social organisation and material conditions, as well as the teacher educators' own accounts of their work. Our research shows how, under conditions of academic capitalism (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004), these teacher educators were denied opportunities to accumulate capital (e.g. research publications, grants, etc.) and were instead subject to a form of proletarianisation, turning them into a highly flexible population of workers, responsive to market pressures, and deprived of the capacity to appropriate surplus value from their labour. The reasons for this stratification among academic workers were complex and structural but, in our analysis, we suggest that

the importance of maintaining relationships with schools, and between schools and student teachers, in the name of 'partnership' teacher education was highly significant but also that the historical cultures of teacher education as an HE activity must be considered. Further, with reference to the international research literature, we suggest that the phenomenon is not unique to the UK. We conclude with a discussion of teacher education as a form of academic work and argue for renewed attention to the role of HE teacher educators in the complex, hybrid activity required for the transformation of teaching in schools.

## 2. Academic work, academic capitalism and teacher education

In the UK, Tight (2004) has identified the interest in academic work – 'what lecturers and other members of staff actually do, and how this is changing' – as one of the key themes in higher education research. Internationally, Martin (1997) earlier argued that it wasn't a surprise that 'the further industrialisation of education has

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +44 01895 265159.

E-mail address: [viv.ellis@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:viv.ellis@brunel.ac.uk) (V. Ellis).

led to the heightened awareness that what goes on at the university is work – and a highly organised division of labour at that' (p. 4). Marginson (2010), from an Australian perspective, and many others (e.g. Aronowitz, 2000; Schuster & Finkelstein, 2008) have shown how changing patterns of academic activity and employment relations are related to the neoliberal marketisation and financialisation of higher education. One study of academic employment contracts and working conditions across Europe (Enders, 2000) found that 'the concept of a single academic profession might be an illusion' (p. 7). More recently, financial crises have forced academic workers in most countries to face casualisation, redundancy, furloughs and cuts in retirement benefits as well as salary.

While there has been some recent, specific attention to teacher education as academic work, the research literature is still developing. In Canada, Acker and Dillabough (2007; Dillabough & Acker, 2002) studied teacher education as 'women's work', subject to a 'gendered division of labour' that positions them as the 'good citizens' and 'nurturers' of university Education departments (2007: 300–301). Maguire (2000, 1993), in England, has shown how 'the job of educating teachers' falls disproportionately onto women who have been more subject to regulation by new regimes of HE funding as well as to historical forms of social control. Liston's (1995) analysis of teacher education work in US schools of education concluded that it constituted the 'domestic labour' of such institutions and, as such, was an effect of systemic segregation that had 'created a "classed" system of labour in schools of education that harms, not hinders, the education of teachers' (p. 91). Other notable research includes Tierney's and colleagues (Tierney, 2001) who, through an analysis of large US data sets, have provided evidence of the tension between teaching quality and research productivity that, while relevant across HE as a whole, is particularly apparent in Education departments (c.f. Clifford & Guthrie, 1988; Cuban, 1999).

Generally, however, research into teacher educators as academic workers has focused on questions of identity (e.g. Murray, Czerniawski, & Barber, 2011; Murray & Kosnik, 2011; Murray & Male, 2005; Loughran, 2011; Swennen, Jones, & Volman, 2010; Swennen & van der Klink, 2009), professional lives and career transitions (e.g. Carrillo & Baguley, 2011; Ducharme, 1993; Harrison & McKeon, 2008) and induction and professional development needs, most especially concerned with research development (e.g. Boyd & Harris, 2010; Griffiths, Hryniewicz, & Thompson, 2009; Murray, 2005; Schuck, Aubusson, & Buchanan, 2008). Studies that have treated teacher education as work have often made gender a central focus of their analysis or have regarded labour mainly as an institutional concept, through which individual workers add value to institutional assets (Dinkelmann, 2011; Kosnik & Beck, 2008). Elsewhere in the HE literature, however, a line of research over the last fifteen years has situated academic work within a set of social relations described as 'academic capitalism'.

## 2.1. Academic capitalism and higher education

Slaughter and Leslie (1997) defined academic capitalism, in the US context, as 'the pursuit of market and market-like activities' (p. 17), a process they saw reflected in inter-institutional competition over tuition fees, competition over grant income, and the commercial significance of intellectual property rights. Rhoades and Slaughter (1997) also suggested that 'individual academic workers are invited to become "capitalist entrepreneurs" in order to survive or thrive within the system' (p. 33). Based on their success in accumulating academic capital (grants, patents, prizes, endowments, etc.), Rhoades and Slaughter argued, they are 'differentially invested in' (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997) by the institution in a way that mirrors the privatisation and deregulation

of the HE system. According to Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), academic capitalism had led to a 'blurring of boundaries among markets, states and higher education', their earlier analysis of intellectual property extended to all the 'core academic functions', including teaching and research (p. 11). Developments in HE in England have led to similar analyses (e.g. Holmwood, 2011), including comparisons with the US (Tuchman, 2009).

### 2.1.1. Capital accumulation and proletarianisation

Eagleton (2011) reminds us that 'it is to Marxism that we owe the concept of different historical forms of capital' (p. 2). Capital, for Marx, was not a thing; capital was *value* and it was the means of production of value that was key. Capitalism was the social relations within which commodities achieve value and Marx saw this as an antagonistic struggle: 'as capital is accumulated by the bourgeoisie, labourers are proletarianised' (Marx & Engels, 1888/2008: 9). Within this process, commodities are seen to have two different kinds of value: use value and exchange value. Marx's particular interest was in exchange values as these helped him reveal the capitalist relations of production and consumption (Harvey, 2010). Moreover, exchange value in commodities is 'congealed' human labour (Marx, 1887/1992: 142). In other words, it is not merely a specific type of labour than can congeal value in a commodity but a specific type of *social relations* – exchange relations, in which the value achieved by labour and materialised in the commodity can be capitalised.

Although arising from an analysis of urban, manufacturing society in the mid-19th century, and the far-reaching consequences of the industrial revolution, Marx's two-sided process of capital accumulation and proletarianisation, and antagonistic relations between the bourgeoisie and wage-labourers, were never confined to top-hat wearing entrepreneurs and industrialists, factory workers and peasants. In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels had already noted that the bourgeoisie 'has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its wage labourers' (Marx & Engels, 1888/2008: 6). Debord noted 'the extension of the logic of the factory labour to a large extension of "services" and intellectual professions' (Debord, 1977: §114). Harvey has recently pointed to 'an insidious process of proletarianisation' of the medical workforce and in higher education (Harvey, 2010: 279). In other words, academics as a category of HE worker are at risk of proletarianisation even while some might survive or thrive.

Guillory, in a ground-breaking study of academic work in the humanities, refers to academic staff situated within a 'theoretical torsion' between alternatives of capitalisation and proletarianisation:

... the torque embodied in intellectual labour can be released in [either] direction.... This is to say that knowledge, like money, is only capital when it is capitalised, when it produces the effect of *embourgeoisement*; and conversely, that knowledge can be devalued in such a way that its possessors become indistinguishable from wage-labour – a process of proletarianisation.

Guillory, 1994: 125

This torsion revolves around the kinds of work that are valued and those that are devalued. Under conditions of contemporary academic capitalism, work that produces research publications and grant income can be capitalised in the market-place for promotion, salary increases, release from teaching and other effects of academic *embourgeoisement*. Work that doesn't achieve surplus value leaves the worker vulnerable to downward social mobility, the 'vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market' (Marx & Engels, 1888/2008: 9). We will argue that the teacher

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6851130>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6851130>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)