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### **Abstract**

In this chapter, I draw on an empirical study to discuss how teachers inhabiting different stages of their career trajectories chose to engage with master's level professional development (PD) and masterliness (LaVelle, 2012). I argue that performative agendas in schools have increasingly led to two types of masterly professional development - the Institutional (IPD) and the personal (PPD). I maintain that IPD engagers choose an overt and career focussed model of masterliness and with it the mantra of tools such as Random Controlled Trials. This is in contrast to PPD engagers who saw masterliness as a self reflective, and potentially covert, process and those informants - master's non-engagers (MNE) - who turned their backs on masterliness completely. I maintain that an examination such as this has implications for the PD practice of teachers, school leaders and policy makers.

## Introduction

Schools in England are held accountable, through inspections by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED), for outcomes which range from test and examination results to punctuality and exclusions. Through acknowledging such an inspection facing climate, I explore masterliness against a backdrop of performativity in English schools (Lyotard, 1977; Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2009; Clapham, 2014a, 2014b). For La Velle (2012, 7), masterliness is a 'state of advanced professional critical thinking linked to action and informed by research and evidence'. Whilst not uncontested, for the purpose of this chapter I use La Velle's definition to describe the key informants' engagement with master's PD whilst working at the 'coal face' of challenging inner-city English secondary schools as well as highlighting the broader discussion regarding PD and education professionals.

Using the data generated as part of a small scale research project, I explore master's level study and with it masterliness in the professional lives of 10 teachers working in 5 English secondary schools. The contexts of the 5 schools used as the settings for the project are important to map out at the beginning of this chapter. All 5 schools are located in areas of socio-economic deprivation in English cities. At the time of writing all 5 schools had recently been inspected by OfSTED, with 3 being highlighted as requiring improvement and 2 ranked as inadequate and placed in the serious weaknesses category. Even for those not familiar with the English education systems these categories

spell out that these schools are facing challenging circumstances and, in some cases, are fighting for survival<sup>1</sup>.

In this chapter, I present an overview of how the key informants felt about masterliness and why some did, and others did not, 'bother' with master's PD. To do so, I examine some of the macro-level structures, such as neo-liberalism and performativity, which appear to impinge on teachers' engagement with masterliness and which shape the methodological and philosophical choices made by those who do decide that master's study is for them.

### Masterliness and the performative school

In order to understand masterliness, it is necessary to consider the performative environment in which the teachers in this study worked<sup>2</sup>. Performativity engenders a universal production of designated outcomes concerned with productivity and effectiveness, imposed from within and outside organisations, which frame the activities of that organisation and beyond (Lyotard, 1979). Performativity has been described as the prominent policy technology mediating changes to the English education system and the conditions in which teachers work giving rise to what Ball (2003) calls post-professionalism. For Ball, teachers have to demonstrate 'success' by conforming to the ways in which others - inspectors, governors, government, and the market - define their work.

Central to performativity is the 'legitimation of knowledge' (Lyotard, 1979, 27) and the 'transmission of learning' (48). For Lyotard, performativity mediates what constitutes knowledge, what knowledge is of worth and whose knowledge has legitimacy. Similarly the decisions regarding how, and what, knowledge is 'transmitted' are also mediated through performative parameters. Lyotard claims that 'scientific knowledge' (25) - attained through the production, storage and analysis of easily quantifiable forms of data - is replacing 'narrative knowledge' (27). In doing so, knowledge is increasingly made legitimate through the epistemological boundaries of science and technology with the result that non-scientific narrative knowledge, based on experiences, values and beliefs, is increasingly marginalised. For Lyotard (46-47), the upshot of the legitimation of scientific knowledge is the commodification of knowledge and with it a 'context of control'.

Performativity is not separate of social contexts and is the 'policy technology' which mediates neoliberal education systems (Ball, 2007). In England, performative conditions in education emerged from the neo-liberal policies of successive UK governments (Parsons and Welsh, 2006). Neo-liberalism

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> English schools are ranked as 'outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' (OfSTED, 2012, 17).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Masters PD has been considered in terms of performativity (see Bailey and Sorensen, 2012).

encompasses varying degrees of conservative political ideologies and marries these with traditional liberal principles of right of centre economics (see Apple, 2006). Neo-liberalism has situated schools and education firmly within the competitive market through conservative moderniszation (Apple, 2006). Neo-liberals position education at the forefront of national, and indeed international, competitiveness (McGregor, 2009) and therefore in need of evaluation through performative metrics such as *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA).

The link between performativity and neo-liberalism is illustrated in the resonances between Lyotard's work on the legitimation of scientific knowledge and Apple's (2006) examination of the neo-liberal market dictating what type of knowledge is of most worth. Performative tools are employed to measure the performance of schools and teachers, for example through the use of General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE)<sup>3</sup> grades to indicate effectiveness (Nicholl and McLellan, 2008). Performativity as a neo-liberal policy technology also mediate what Rose called 'self-government' (1999, p. 264) where the state's accountability for its citizens is reduced instead putting responsibility on the individual. For its proponents therefore, neo-liberalism highlights the rise of the individual and the reduction of regulation, a point challenged by Jenny Ozga (2009, 150), who argues that neo-liberal and performative strategies such as inspection only mediate the appearance of the deregulation claimed by neo-liberal policy advocates.

#### The study

The five schools in which the key informants worked are located in the Midlands and South East of England<sup>4</sup> and are all state funded secondary schools. Of the informants who volunteered for the study, only one of them was known to me previous to the research. Table 1 outlines data relating to the key informants.

I employed reflexive interviewing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) as the primary data generation tool. This model of interviewing was semi-structured (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009) in so far as master's PD and masterliness were the primary topics of conversation between the informants and me. Prior to each interview, I prepared a script with key points for discussion which had emerged from my grounded theory analysis of previous interviews and the literature base. I was conscious that the script

<sup>3</sup> The end of compulsory schooling in England at Year 11 is signified by many students taking GCSE examinations. The number of A\*-C GCSE grades attained by its students govern the position a school holds in national performance league tables and form part of the data set used by inspectors to rank effectiveness.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> All schools and teachers have been renamed to preserve a level of anonymity.

should not be strictly binding, and there were occasions where the informants' discussion opened up directions not included in the script.

As well as the key informants, interview data and field notes were also generated by a number of other actors. Members of staff would ask me what I was doing, and when I told them I was researching master's PD and masterliness, many would talk through their own thoughts on the subject. Rather than dismiss this data, I used this as a form of triangulation. For Denzin (1970, p. 310), using different methods to generate data indicates 'method triangulation'. I used data generated by actors in the settings as a method of verification, or refutation, of the key informants' claims through drawing on different data sources so as to develop a multi-layered view of the research setting. My analysis employed grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967) and I used open coding (amended from Charmaz, 2005) to yield concepts, which I grouped to make categories.

Informant	School	Completing	Completed	Not	Funding	Career trajectory
		MA	MA	completed		
				MA		
Harry	Winston	٧	х	х	Joint	Beginning - 2 <sup>nd</sup> year Subject Teacher
					funded	
					with school	
Mary	Winston	٧	х	х	School	Veteran - 25 <sup>th</sup> year SLT
					funded	
Sammy	Sprowston	х	х	х	х	Beginning - 2 <sup>nd</sup> year 2 <sup>nd</sup> in
						department
Chris	Sprowston	х	٧	х	School	Middle years - 9 <sup>th</sup> year Head of
					funded	Faculty
Ralph	Newbury	х	х	х	х	Veteran - 24 <sup>th</sup> year Head of Faculty
Asha	Newbury	х	х	х	х	Veteran - 21st year - SLT
Ria	Kings	х	٧	х	Self funded	Middle years - 11 <sup>th</sup> year Subject
						Teacher
Jo	Kings	х	х	х	х	Beginning – 3 <sup>rd</sup> year of teaching
						Head of Faculty
Gill	Woodside	х	х	х	х	Middle years – 16 <sup>th</sup> year Head of
						Year
Iesha	Woodside	х	٧	х	Self funded	Veteran – 25 <sup>th</sup> year Head of Faculty

Table 1: Key informant data

It is important to be 'up-front' with regard to some of the challenges facing this project. Indeed, a project such as this, which focussed on a single researcher and a small number of key informants,

requires acknowledgment of my subjectivity and reflexivity. My mobilisation of reflexivity is that it acknowledges 'past experiences and prior knowledge' (Wellington, 2000, 44) and challenges the notion that data can be 'free' from researcher influence. Consequently, my data analysis and interpretations were shared with the key informants for verification and to support the reflexive process.

#### The personal and the institutional

A focus of the chapter is how masterliness is considered by teachers at different points in their career trajectories. Day and Gu (2010) describe teachers as inhabiting 3 distinct phases of their career trajectories - beginning teachers, middle years teachers and veteran teachers<sup>5</sup>. I mobilised these three trajectory stages as 'filters' for the project as I wanted to explore associations, if any, between teachers at different point in their career and masterliness. What emerged from the data was that as much as links between master's PD and career trajectory, there was a distinction in the 'type' of master's PD engagement which I have called Personal Professional Development (PPD) and Institutional Professional Development (IPD). PPD is illustrated by informants who not only self-funded their masters but did not inform their schools of their studies. IPD can be seen in those informants who engaged in master's PD with the full knowledge of their schools, with some funding support from their schools and with regard to specific points which emerged from inspection reports and action plans.

I have used PPD and IPD in this chapter as a means of categorising, and understanding, what masterliness meant for the key informants. As Harry told me:

I'm doing my MA a bit for me 'cause I want to run my own school, but mostly because I want to really do something for this school...I've had to sell why I'm doing this [the MA] to SLT [Senior Management Team] and that means it has to address the school's action plan...and that's fair. There might be things that I'm interested in, but it's about the school really. (Harry, interview)

For Harry, integral to masterliness was that it was part of the corporate structure of the school. Harry was completing an MA joint funded by himself and his school and he clearly saw the MA as both contributing to the school's strategic plan as well as a vehicle for his career progression. Harry's thoughts were in stark contrast to lesha who had self-funded her MA over 18 years ago:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Day and Gu (2010) suggest that there are two phases in each of the 3 categories of teachers' lives - beginning 0-3 and 4-7 years; middle year teachers 8-15 and 16-23 years; veteran teachers 24-30 and +31 years.

I did my MA about something I passionately believed in. I did it as an action researcher but as a real action researcher...I mean that I wanted my research to change the school. I wasn't interested in the party line. I paid for it all myself and the Head didn't even know I was doing it. (Iesha, Field note)

It was from reflecting on Harry and lesha's comments that it struck me the differences in the motivation for, and the audiences, these two teachers had in mind in relation to their masterliness engagement. Harry was clear that although he might want to do research into an area of his own interest, this was not the route he was going to pursue. For Harry masterliness was about contributing to his school's action plan and was therefore shaped by his school's, rather than his personal, priorities. Iesha on the other hand, saw masterliness as a way of engaging with what she saw as a broken system and as she said "shaking it up". For Iesha, masterliness was an empowering of herself as a practitioner rather than as a career move or corporate commitment.

From analysing this data it seemed that here were two distinct ends of a masterliness continuum. Harry inhabited the institutional end and lesha the personal. What cannot be ignored here is that these two teachers are at different stages of their career trajectories and also participated in their Masters during very different times for education. It was just this type of nuance that the project was designed to explore.

## **IPD Engagers**

Along with Harry, my analysis positions Mary and Chris also as IPD engagers. Chris was particularly vociferous in his thoughts as to what master's PD masterliness was and was not. For Chris, masterliness was all about impact:

I don't see the point of doing research if you can't say what's actually happened. I understand that qualitative research is part of the social sciences...but I need to be able to tell my Head teacher that I have found *this* out. That's why I want to do RCTs [Random Control Trials]. These are a way of saying this was happening before, then we did this, and then we measured the difference. I have to talk about impact all the time...so research should be about impact. (Chris, interview)

What emerged from my interviews with Harry, Mary and Chris was that that PD should be developmental for the individual, but that the main drivers for such development were school wide objectives. Mary suggested that when a member of staff came to her asking about master's PD one of her first questions would be along the lines of "what's in it for the school"? For Mary, the justification for master's PD that was fully or part funded by the school was that there was a pay back in relation to action plan targets. Indeed, a criterion for master's level research at her school was that the measurable impact of an intervention was at the heart of any project.

This was not to say that Mary, Harry or Chris had a particular criticism of qualitative research in certain contexts. However, for these informants the ability to demonstrate impact was more readily afforded through the 'hard' data of quantitative methodologies. From interviews with these teachers there appeared an explicit assumption that any master's level research would draw heavily on data informed approaches:

Doing a master's has to be about finding something out. I do the research methods bit and then I look at management and then I do the dissertation where I research something. But I've got to find something useful out...otherwise what's the point? (Harry, interview)

The key informant's whether IPD, PPD or masters non-engagers (MNE, see Table 1), all reported similarities in what constituted data. For these teachers data was very much part of the process of evidencing their practice as part of inspection processes. Where master's PD and masterliness sat in this was an important consideration for these teachers. Chris, having completed his masters, was clear that master's PD must inform the institution. Indeed, if master's PD was not institution focussed then it was, if not pointless, of questionable worth:

I learnt a lot from my masters. I really enjoyed doing it. But if I were to do it now it would be completely different....of course I'm different, but the climate in schools has changed even over the last seven years. I wouldn't be happy doing my own little project. I would have to make sure that what I did was beneficial to the school as a whole. (Chris, interview)

All three IPD engagers described some of the issues which their schools were facing and where they felt masterliness fitted in to them. For these teachers their concerns were:

- Inspection
- Examination results
- Progress/attainment
- Data
- Behaviour
- Attendance

Mary was concerned that the contents of this list, and her experiences of masterliness, did not necessarily match. She identified the importance of theory and practice and did not see delineation between the two. Nonetheless, for Mary there was a mismatch between what master's PD meant in the confines of her university and what it meant in the highly pressured environment of her school.

For all three IPD informants, masterliness was about applying the latest research based evidence to the issues that their schools faced:

I want to learn stuff that's going to help with kids' learning, behaviour, and attendance so that ultimately they [the students] get the best exam they can. In my school we do have an issue with some kid's behaviour...so I want to learn what research says about behaviour. (Mary, interview)

Ultimately, all three teachers wanted the best for their students and their school, were passionate about their subject, and wanted to be the best possible teacher that they could. What these key informants wanted from all PD and particularly master's PD and masterliness were strategies, leanings and understandings that they could take back and crucially *apply* to their school. For these teachers theory was to be applied to context, research was a tool for finding things out and masterliness was fundamentally about making them, and their school, better.

### **PPD Engagers**

PPD engagers approached masterliness from a different perspective from Harry, Mary and Chris. Ria and Iesha saw their masters as a tool for self reflection and informing their own practice. This is not to say they did not have a commitment toward their school as an organisation, but for these teachers masterliness was about them being the best teacher they could possibly be rather than addressing the school's action plans:

I'm still a classrooms teacher and that suits me fine. I've no interest in running departments or being on SLT. What I want to do is be as good as I can be. I read around education, I watch documentaries I follow education tweets...teaching's such a mystery. My master's was about being a bit better equipped to try to make some sort of sense of it. (Iesha, interview)

Masterliness was located within a strong affinity PPD engagers had with specific issues which were close to them. Ria was passionate about special and inclusive education, for lesha her passion was working with students at risk of permanent exclusion. Although both of these foci resonated with their school's action plans they were not high priority. Indeed, it was the lack of priority given to her area of interest that motivated Ria to enrol in masters level learning.

I was working with lots of SEN kids and I wanted to find out more about what this meant. I wasn't an SEN teacher or anything...and I didn't want to change to working in the SEN department! I just wanted to find out more. (Ria, interview)

What emerged from my conversations with these teachers was that both had self-funded their masters and, perhaps more importantly, had completed them covertly. I was intrigued by this notion

of covert study and spent some time trying to unpick what this meant. Both informants felt that their school had not shown sufficient interest in these areas. Iesha had completed her MA in 2009 and Ria in 2012. Both teachers reported that the climate in their schools had detrimentally changed over their time working there, from one which might value their areas of interest, instead to focussing on an inspection facing model of school effectiveness.

The performative environment in English schools has wide ranging implications for teachers' work (see Ball, 2003; Perryman, 2009; Clapham, 2014a). What was clear from the data for this project was that for all the informants the pressures facing schools and teachers were such that all PD, and with it masterliness, was located firmly within a 'impact' culture. Ria spoke about how she could not reconcile what she felt masterliness was for her and the need to demonstrate measurable outcomes:

Measuring impact with SEN kids is so much against what I believe in. Getting some of these kids to school at all considering the chaotic and dysfunctional backgrounds some of them come from is a huge achievement. But a kid might still only have 40% attendance which in OfSTED speak is unsatisfactory. My MA was about trying to find out how we could support some of these kids...not measuring how much their attainment improves. (Ria, interview)

As the climate at their schools was not one which these teachers felt supported the direction of their professional development they took the decision to complete it independent of their school. I asked how this worked in relation to ethical clearance. Both teachers reported that they completed the necessary ethical procedures and that members of their schools SLT were aware that they were doing a masters but that they were, as lesha put it, "left to get on with it".

My categorisation of IPD and PPD engagers raises a whole raft of questions regarding the direction of travel of masterliness and masters PD. On one hand there is Chris, who embraced the notion of PD being about a corporate commitment to improving the greater organisation, and his strident adoption of impact measuring methodology such as RCTs. On the other hand is lesha, who embarked on covert study rather than compromise her beliefs as to what her masters was about which, for her, was not measuring impact but exploring what might be the case.

# Masters non-engagers (MNE)

When I defined teachers as masters non-engagers it is important to stress this does not mean *masterliness* non-engagers. What was apparent from this cohort of key informants that simply not having completed, or currently completing, masters level PD did not preclude them from engaging with the concepts which LaVelle (2012) uses to define masterliness (that is, critical thinking linked to action and informed by research). Jo, Gill, Ash and Ralph represented teachers representing all of Day

and Gu's (2010) trajectory locations. What these informants shared were a common set of themes as to why a masters was not part of their PD agendas:

- Work pressures stemming from inspection
- Funding
- Time

All four of these teachers reported that the primary reason for not completing masters PD was directly linked to the performative and inspection facing cultures at their schools. The pressures the informants described were related to the omnipresence of the inspector (see Foucault, 1977) and how this drove almost all of their work. The upshot of this culture was a lack of emotional and intellectual space with which to engage with meta-level educational issues beyond the next set of assessment checks.

Significantly, it was the lack of emotional space - what Gill called "head space" - which all the MNE informants felt was necessary to do masters PD justice, which was of particular concern:

I've thought about doing a masters...it really interests me...but I just don't see how I could get the space to think about the things I would need to think about. (Asha, interview)

The emotional and intellectual pressures of working in their schools left little space for these teachers to think about the constituent elements - such as research methodologies - of master's PD. Despite this, research was something which all four MNE informants reported really interested them. These teachers were intrigued by their practices and wanted to find out more about their work and they saw research as a valuable tool for helping with this. Unfortunately, what they could not resolve was how they would change their professional, and home, practices so as to fit in the work necessary to become a master's level researcher.

Allied to this concern, was that what these teachers might learn from masters PD might actually undermine even more the sometimes strained relationship between them and the direction of travel of their profession. This was an enthralling point. These teachers reported that the overriding mantra in their schools was 'inspection, inspection, inspection', a direction all were struggling to resolve. In many ways, being empowered to critique their schools through masters PD was a disconcerting prospect:

I don't bury my head in the sand. I really can't stand what's happening to schools. But... I really still love my job...I don't want to get angry and ill when I think about the madness of inspection and testing and league tables. I think that a masters would just highlight to me even more what's wrong with it all. (Jo, field note)

What emerged here was that the MNE informants felt that the intellectual rigour of masters PD might highlight to them the large scale challenges to their own professional identity and with it their feelings of disempowerment. This of course raises fundamental questions of power and power relationships which are outside of the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, the tensions between what these teachers saw as their working environment, and the masters learning which might empower them to critique that environment, appeared to be a major player in their decision to be MNE.

Funding was also discussed by all four MNE informants with regard to their non-engagement. For their schools to contribute toward any masters PD, these teachers felt that they would be expected to produce deliverable outcomes which they might necessarily be interested in. There were two strands to this concern (a) the economic climate at the time of writing meant that schools were having their funding cut and (b) this resulted in 'measurable impact' on their school's action plans being a significant element of any funding that was available.

Paying for master's PD was seen as a large financial commitment by all the informants in this study. For those teachers, particularly part-funded IPD engagers, this commitment was part of buying into the cooperate requirements of their school's action plans first and then their own interests second. For PPD engagers, these teachers seemed to be both financially secure enough to make the self-funded commitment toward their own master's PD, and saw this as a worthwhile process primarily for their own development and then that of their schools. MNE informants seemed to be caught between the two. They saw the worth of master's PD but felt that they were not in a position to use what they might learn to empower themselves and their schools so they questioned the efficacy of making such a large financial outlay.

Integral to all of the MNE informants concerns regarding the feasibility of completing masters PD was time. All the informants in the study claimed they were time poor. Those in relationships and with children found finding time for masters PD particularly challenging. This was not just a case of finding time to complete assignments – although this was a major concern – it was as much a case of finding time to think:

When I've got non-contact time I've found this little office, well a cupboard with no windows, and that's where I go to work and to think. No one knows about it and I've got a key!! I sit in there with the light off and do my work because I know I won't be disturbed. (Gill, interview)

Despite their misgivings, all the MNE informants shared one final theme – they were interested in completing master's PD if circumstances were conducive. Of course, this could be a case of telling me what they think I wanted to hear. However, from the conversations I had with these informants all

talked passionately about their work, how much they loved what they did, and how they would relish the opportunity to understand more about their profession.

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has been a whistle stop tour of a small scale research project. I am not making grand claims for what I have discussed. Having said that, the key informants I have spoken to have reported issues related to their master's PD which reflected challenges facing education systems at the macrolevel. Foremost amongst these is how performativity, and performative tools such as inspection, are shaping the work of teachers and the environments they work in at fundamental levels. From the prevalence of 'impact' to teachers' disempowerment, this examination of why and how teachers engage with master's PD and masterliness has revealed some of the deep seated challenges facing teachers way beyond the realm of professional development.

It seems to me that masterliness is ingrained in those teachers who are interested in what they do and want to find out more. This might seem and over reduction of a complex set of themes and agendas. However, I argue that this chapter demonstrates some of the tensions and pressures facing teachers working in challenging schools and how these shaped their engagement with master's PD. In doing so, I suggest that performativity has had detrimental effects on how teachers chose to engage, or disengage, with master's PD. Space does not allow me to examine in the detail necessary some of the issues raised here. Having said that, that point of this book is to generate debate and thinking which I hope this chapter has done. However, I invite the reader to not just read. What I hope has come from this chapter is to spark interest in others to think, read or research in the field of materliness and master's PD.

To finish, I return to La Velle's (2012, 7) definition of masterliness as a 'state of advanced professional critical thinking linked to action and informed by research and evidence'. In reflecting upon LaVelle's definition and with consideration of the data presented on this chapter, I maintain that if we are to develop our practice as educators then Master's PD and masterliness should be a concern for students, parents, managers and policy makers alike. If it is not, then I suggest that the profession will become nothing but a performativity driven production line where masterliness, and indeed critical and informed thinking in general, is relegated to a snatched activity carried out in dark windowless cupboards.

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