



# **Educational Innovation: Transforming Teacher education in England**

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This article offers a personal insight into the rapidly evolving area of teacher education in England over the last few years from 2010. In particular has been the significant move to a ‘school led’ system which provides opportunities for “a larger proportion of trainees to learn on the job by improving and expanding the best of current school-based routes into teaching....Our strongest schools will take the lead and trainees will be able to develop their skills, learning from our best teachers” (Gove, 2010 p.23).



## Introduction

The change offered by the newly formed Conservative and Liberal UK coalition government and new secretary of state for education (Michael Gove) was however building upon a strong University and School partnership model that already existed. The prevailing arrangements being that trainee teachers<sup>1</sup> had a requirement to spend 120 days of their training to be a teacher to take place in a school or college to develop their school and teaching experiences, whilst a further requirement that an additional 60 days of their teacher training course was focussed on ‘training’ – usually in an academic setting. A useful starting point in this discussion therefore is to reflect upon previous research (Spendlove, et al., 2010) which focussed upon the traditional partnership arrangements that existed between schools and a Higher Education Institution (HEI) as part of an Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Programme. From this research we concluded that whilst the concept of a school and university partnerships had considerable strengths significant tensions existed between the interface of the higher education and school based elements of the ITE programme. We suggested that some of these tensions reflected the situated contexts of what can be conceptualised as two contrasting communities of practice (Wenger 1999), subject departments in schools and subject tutor groups in the university, brought together in a transient, ill-conceived activity system which attempted to prepare new teachers within the constraints of a one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education<sup>2</sup> (PGCE) programme. A significant issue within this context was that trainee teachers occupied very different positions on the boundaries of the two communities of practice where they had to operate using ‘concepts of critical and reflective pedagogy that are treated very differently in the two contexts’ (Spendlove, *et al.*, p. 74).

Our overall conclusions were that we needed to ‘find ways to make these tensions the subject of discussion and debate within our partnerships, considering the wider context of cultural, institutional and historical situations within which these activities are mediated’ (*ibid.* p.76). For this to happen required mentors<sup>3</sup> and university tutors to be able to create and contribute to forums where the different perspectives and positions ‘could be explored without polarisation of judgement in order to bring out their value and to nurture a reflexive, autonomous and sustainable pedagogical discourse within the context of initial teacher training’ (*ibid.* p.76).

The research discussed encapsulated the position at the time in that a dualism existed between the different roles that were often presented as a theory and practice divide which legitimised

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<sup>1</sup> Trainee teachers is the common name used for Pre Service teachers undertaking training

<sup>2</sup> The majority of the 40,000 teacher trained each year will follow a one year Post Graduate Certificate in Education course.

<sup>3</sup> Mentors are teachers in schools who take additional responsibility for trainee teachers through offering coaching, guidance and support.

both partners occupying different ‘spaces’ and requiring the trainee teacher to ‘flip-flop’ between an academic and practice state. These tensions that we refer to have been labelled by Atkinson (2000) as a condition of ‘critical schizophrenia’ brought about by attempting to deliver government policies while simultaneously engendering a culture of critical reflection with trainee teachers. As indicated trainee teacher dispositions whilst also dualistic also tended to be orientated towards three central tests. Firstly, *operational*, which necessitated their coming to terms with the rules, routines and regulations that govern schools (so as to operate with competence in that environment). Secondly focussing on *production* of documentary evidence of their abilities to demonstrate their ability to become a teacher through meeting the Standards (DfE 2011). Finally *immersion* into a new educational discourse and criticality associated with the academic and awarding requirements of becoming a teacher. In conceptualising this it can be seen (figure 1) that the trainee operates in two distinct spaces.

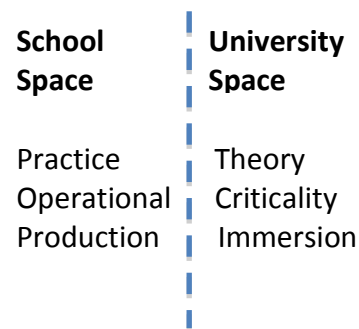


Figure 1: trainee spaces

Despite the prevailing discourse that even though significant progress had been made in ‘partnership’ arrangements since the introduction in 1992 of a higher proportion of time being spent in schools, a divide remained in the trainee experience. The partnership arrangement was however from crumbling. Ofsted, the official body for inspecting and grading teacher training, had rated 94% of all university led provision as being ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’. Whilst the annual survey of newly qualified teachers (a response rate of over 11,000 NQTs) in July 2011 had a 90% rating of good or very good for the quality of the training they had received. Finally the newly appointed (2010) Secretary of State for Education, as part of a new coalition government stated “I believe we have the best generation of teachers ever in our schools” (2010) followed by “I have been struck by the dedication and commitment in schools and universities alike to play their part in the recruitment and training of new teachers” (DfE, 2011, p.3).

By 2012 however there appeared to be a contradiction emerging in that whilst by all accounts the teacher training system in England appeared to be very successful and healthy, there appeared to be an ideological and political shift emerging aiming to disrupt the ‘monopoly’ of



higher education institutions in teacher training by placing greater emphasis on developing a 'school led' system. A significant part of this transformation was the outlined in the government White Paper 'The Importance of Teaching' (DfE, 2010) which identified the introduction and development of a national network of 'Teaching schools' introduced as a means to 'take a leading responsibility for providing and quality assuring initial teacher training in their area' (section 2.24). Within this context the Government Education Select Committee as part of its enquiry into 'Great teachers: attracting, training and retaining the best' (2012) identified:

We welcome the creation of Teaching Schools, and note that they will be expected to work with universities, which we strongly support: we believe that a diminution of universities' role in teacher training could bring considerable demerits, and would caution against it. We have seen substantial evidence in favour of universities' continuing role in ITT, and recommend that school-centred and employment-based providers continue to work closely with universities, just as universities should make real efforts to involve schools in the design and content of their own courses. The evidence has left us in little doubt that partnership between schools and universities is likely to provide the highest-quality initial teacher education, the content of which will involve significant school experience but include theoretical and research elements as well, as in the best systems internationally and in much provision here. (Paragraph 78 Select committee).

### **Recent Reform of Teacher Education in England (2010-2013)**

Despite the government select committee emphasising that partnerships between universities and schools were likely to provide the highest quality training, emphasis is increasingly being placed on pursuing school led system in England. Whilst the Department for Education had further emphasised that "We expect universities to continue to be involved in most teacher training, responding to the demands of schools for high quality training to supplement school-based practical experience" (DfE 2011, p.16), the government has pursued a radical approach through the introduction of a new 'School Direct' system with the aim to significantly increase the 'number of School Direct places offered in 2014/15 by encouraging new schools to work in partnerships led by outstanding schools, Teaching Schools or through academy chains' (DfE, 2013), with over 50% of teacher training to delivered this way by 2015.

As indicated previously, existing models of initial teacher training (ITT) in England include the requirement for substantial elements of school-based experience and typically this accounts for two thirds of the trainee experience. Whilst models of training existed which were predominantly school based (such as the employment based Graduate Teacher Programme (GTP) and Teach First Programme) the most popular route remains the Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). This route, for those already awarded a degree, requires that trainee teachers spend 120 days of their one-year preparation on placement in



two different schools, with the remaining 60 days are spent on ‘training’, usually in a higher education institution (HEI). As a consequence, since the introduction of this model in the 1990s (DfE, 1993), HEIs have established collaborative partnerships with local schools in which university tutors work in a formalised partnership with experienced classroom teachers (mentors) who have responsibility for the daily training and assessment of trainee teachers during their school placements. The shift to a more school led system through the introduction of Teaching Schools is however to be driven by market forces by significantly reducing the existing supply route of new teachers (namely from traditional PGCE routes) following the introduction of ‘School Direct’. Through School Direct the annual allocation of the number of teachers to trained (allocated and distributed by a government agency), instead of being given directly to the accredited teacher training provider (normally a University provider) increasingly will be given directly to schools who would then choose their provider who they want to train their future teacher as the school will be ‘expected’ to employ their future trainee teacher. For example a school knows they will have a vacancy for an English teacher in 18months time (either due to the general turnover of staff or a retirement, etc.) therefore instead of recruiting a trained teacher in 18 months time they recruit a trainee teacher 18 months before they need the teacher. They then decide which Teacher Training provider (typically a university) who they wish to train their teacher and negotiate the type of training their future teacher will receive. Collectively the provider and school will then select the trainee and train the teacher over the course of the year for a very that specific school (or group of schools). Whilst this is a reduced version of what actually happens it gives an insight into the school perspective.

From a University teacher training provider perspective who previously may have been given an allocation to train 30 English teachers a year would in future potentially be in a new situation where the 30 training places were allocated out to 30 different schools who had each requested one English teacher each. Those 30 schools then have the option of choosing which provider of teacher training they want their teacher trained with, how they each wanted their future English teacher trained and they each would also have a say in the selection of the trainee teacher. This new model of School Direct is radical as inevitably driven by market forces and means that the provider has to operate in a very different way in order to be successful in recruiting the 30 schools to train their future English teachers for them.

Such market forces present interesting challenges for the future delivery of initial teacher education in England however they also provide a unique opportunity to reconceptualise the nature of becoming a teacher and how that training is delivered. Equally a different discourse has to emerge as rather than schools being passive receivers of teachers they become much more involved as co-constructors of the their future teaching workforce in a new shared space.

### **Different, Shared and 3<sup>rd</sup> Spaces**

No institution can expect to be in the privileged position to go unchallenged and to maintain a

monopoly over its provision. Therefore whilst much of what has happened to teacher-training providers in England has been difficult to conceptualise in relation to shifting political and educational ideologies, new opportunities have arisen which allow fresh conversations to take place in different spaces. Most notably the concept of ‘third space’ has emerged as a way of conceptualizing a new emergent space where a new discourse of teacher training is required. Hybridity theory is central to third space developments and recognizes that ‘individuals draw on multiple discourses to make sense of the world’ and as such involves a rejection of the binaries of theory and practice and academic and practitioner. Therefore a new way of viewing a third space is shown in figure 2 as a contrast to the binary of figure 1.

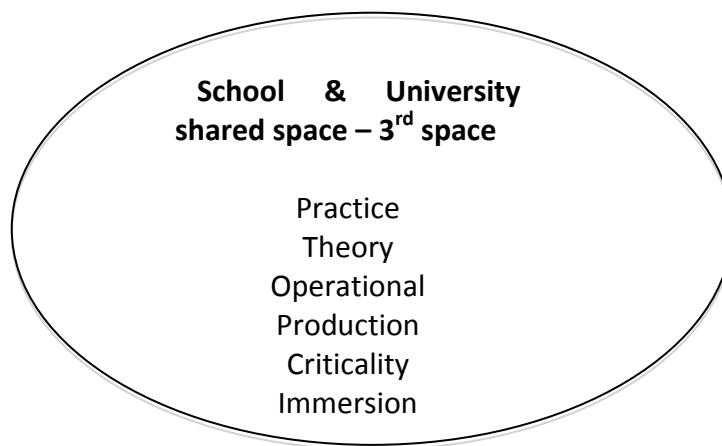


Fig 2: Third ‘shared’ space

Within the third space (Bhabba, 1990) the concept of a shared discourse within a less hierarchical but collective physical and conceptual space is central. Inside this space mediated learning (Ponte, 2010) is central as it locates academic knowledge together with reflection and experience in order to ‘transcend the immediate context’ creating new knowledge that can be applied elsewhere. Therefore theory mutually operates alongside practice, whilst being operational in the space is accompanied by a space to be critically reflective. In this new space collaborative professional learning takes place across boundaries involving academics, teachers, and students. However new identities emerge as the traditional roles involved in training teachers also become challenged as new hybrid roles emerge. Therefore the learning environment creates a boundary-crossing competence (Walker, 2007) and enables an ‘epistemology of teacher education’ (Zeichner, 2010) where different aspects of expertise that exist in schools and educational communities are brought into teacher education to coexist in a more purposeful way. Such boundary crossing transitions between two communities of practice exploring contested and congested space is far from easy as any form of transition is often complex, messy, energy and time consuming and difficult to



manage. However the benefits are clear in that a mediated overcoming of a theory practice divide grounded in an authentic context offers opportunities to shift identities and develop new productive discourses.

### Third Space Invaders

Third space developments and opportunities within my own institution have been accelerated by the significant reforms that have been described above and at present there is a commitment to seize the moment to overcome what we have described previously as two distinct communities of practice. The vehicle for this change has been through the establishment of University Training Departments (UTDs) which are a response to the changing nature of Initial Teacher Training outlined in Training Our Next Generation of Outstanding Teachers (2011). In particular University Training Departments address and extend the required changes by maintaining a focus on four key priorities in relation to providing:

- a positive impact upon pupils
- a positive impact upon trainee teachers
- a positive impact upon teachers
- a clear connection between theory and practice

As such, UTDs are located in selected partnership schools where there is a commitment to these principles and where there is a focus on continued improvement for all. As indicated previously, a central feature to the development of UTDs is the commitment to a shared discourse by drawing theory and practice together in order to broker new practices from what have previously been independent 'communities of practice'. UTDs also provide opportunities to move towards 'clinical practice' models of professional learner preparation that have academic content and professional learner development interwoven with a focus on shared dialogue, understanding and reflection upon practice in order to have impact upon teachers (this includes university tutors), pupils and trainee teachers.

Clearly such approaches have to be approached in a carefully and managed way and to achieve this we have implemented three levels of UTD which are exemplified below:

**Level one (highest) UTD** might include: Joint appointments, Teaching schools, School Direct, higher concentration of trainees with weekly tutor involvement across the practice, clinical practice models, hub activities.

In relation to a level one approach and building upon an existing and well-established partnership, as part of a response to the Teaching School initiative a new arrangement was developed with one school partner that we hope can be replicated with other potential Teaching Schools. The initiative has created an opportunity to make a joint mathematics



appointment between the University and a local school. The appointment is based both within the University and within the school with a dedicated role of delivering and coordinating the training of 10 trainee teachers in a school based environment with a particular focus upon developing teaching and learning with high ability pupils. The tutor both teaches in the school and lectures in the University, often both in the same day and also develops CPD and conferences for ITT partnership schools, trainees and the Teaching Schools own partnership schools as part of their own network.

As the tutor is situated in the school she has been able to bring a much more critically reflective perspective to her hybrid position and extend the discourse of teaching and learning within the school. One particular example of this is through the focus upon 'lesson study' used as an important and effective means of professional development. By using lesson study a systematic and collaborative approach to lesson design, planning, implementation and review is used to promote student engagement and learning as well as teacher effectiveness.

Within this particular UTD the lesson study emphasis is placed upon learner engagement with mathematics through questioning and dialogue. Care was taken to ensure that this colleague remained a member of the group and did not take a lead and video recordings were used as a basis of discussion about enhancing dialogue in the classroom and represented a significant shift in teachers and trainee teachers thinking which was often focussed upon aspects of teacher and pupil performativity. On reflection the teachers and trainees indicated that that they had gained from working collectively, from having a focus on questioning and dialogue, and from reflecting on their own practice, in a non-threatening way. Such productive discourses can only emerge from strong and reciprocal relationships built through trust and pursuit of a common goal.

**Level two UTDs** include joint delivery of subject and pedagogical knowledge in school/college base, higher concentration of trainees, clinical practice models, and hub activities.

A recent example of a level two UTD was through developing a school based learning programme that built upon university provision. Traditionally at the start of their teacher training, trainee teachers would spend a concentrated induction period within a university setting. As part of the changes identified two pilots projects were established where during the trainee induction weeks two of their five university days would be based as a group (approximately 10-15 trainees) in a school with one of these days accompanied by a university tutor.

This meant that within three days of starting their training to be a teacher the trainees were spending time in schools *participating* (in practices), *constructing* (of knowledges) and *becoming* (professionals) (Fenwick, 2009). A teacher in the school, who was given a broader





school based teacher educator role in developing trainee subject knowledge and pedagogy in an authentic context, would support one of these days. The second day consisted of the trainees, the teachers and the university tutor working collaboratively towards a common aim. Examples of this have been through developing lesson study strategies (as explained above), exploring common misconceptions in authentic settings, or developing aspects of microteaching in an authentic context.

The central feature of this is that whereas these topics could be explored in a university lecture room, they were taking place in a shared 'authentic' space where the teacher, tutor and trainees were learning and reflecting together. Evaluations from the pilots have shown that trainees felt more informed about school life, more prepared to start taking responsibility for their teaching, had a better understanding of planning and a greater understanding of learners and the school environment.

**Level three UTDs** include a higher concentration of trainees, shared practice, clinical practice models, usually for single days.

A level three UTD experience normally takes place across the year often for a single day with a specific focus and with a high concentration of trainees supported by tutors and teachers in a school setting. An example of this has been with 80+ Science trainee teachers hosted in four different UTDs. The theme of the day was 'Misconceptions and Asking Questions' with in the morning groups of 4/5 trainees, tutors and teachers spending time in different classrooms gently eliciting pupils' understanding and misconceptions of their next topic using a range of previously discussed strategies and interventions. In the afternoon they presented their findings, in school, to each other and to the teachers in the department. They also prepared a document for the school detailing their findings, which will be of value to the teachers in signposting the pupils transition to the next topic. In this form of UTD it is recognised that all are learning together and trainees are developing very professional and insightful specific skills in identifying learners misconceptions and all the teachers, tutors and trainees have gained a great deal from these days. Other days have focussed upon group work, pupil talk, Issues in practical assessment in science and enquiry based learning.

## Conclusions

The starting point of this article was in identifying the tensions that existed between two communities of practice where a dualism existed between theory and practice. At that point it was felt we needed to 'find ways to make these tensions the subject of discussion and debate within our partnerships'. At that time however we didn't anticipate the significant changes that we were about to be faced with as a new coalition government set about transforming teacher education.

In this new landscape we have seized the opportunity to transform our existing practice to engage in new discourses within what we feel are best described as third spaces. The vehicle for the transformations has been through labelling the location of such practice as University



Training Departments, which have a clear focus on learning for all which includes pupils, teachers, trainees and tutors and at the heart of this is research and enquiry informed practice and critical reflection.

The processes of building new practices in new spaces are historically and socially complex, messy, and fraught with power differentials (Gutiérrez, 2008). However they have also been the source of some of the most powerful and constructive interactions between all involved. Continual re-mediation is however an important feature of such interactions in order to achieve a shared vision. However at times it has felt like we are ‘third space invaders’ as sometimes the pragmatic issues that drive schools curtail our own and their aspirations.

The transformation of teacher education in England in such a short period of time has been a difficult one. Equally the transformation is also far from complete and the implications of the introduction of a market led approach to teacher training and the development of a localised teaching work force has not developed sufficiently for decisions to be made about its effectiveness. However the rapid changes that have occurred in Teacher Education and teacher reform in England from 2010 to 2013 are quite spectacular. Regardless of which ‘side of the fence’ you may stand the political, ideological and educational transformation of what was already regarded as a successful activity has been both highly disruptive and disorientating, but from which new opportunities and ways of operating in new shared spaces has occurred. Removing the political idioms from the discussions the transformations whilst causing significant disruption has created exciting new opportunities for a new and richer discourse of teacher education.

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