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### 3. Working with Multiple Identities: supporting new teacher education tutors in Higher Education.

Peter Boyd; Lily Baker; Kim Harris; Chris Kynch; Emma McVittie: St Martin's College, Lancaster

#### Summary

This paper reports on an Escalate funded project which is investigating the journey of school teachers as they are appointed to become university based teacher educators. The findings suggest that a very varied range of experiences exists during transition to their new role even within one case study education faculty. The study identifies tensions between the 'professional' and 'academic' systems in the teacher education partnership which make it a particularly challenging workplace for new teacher educators.

#### Keywords

Teacher educator / Professional learning / Activity theory / Boundary-crossing

#### Context

This paper reports on investigation of the experiences of new teacher educators within one education faculty. The case study is based on a large and successful education faculty with high employability rates for graduating student teachers and excellent external inspection reports. However, most observers would agree that teacher educators in England carry heavy workloads and deal with multiple roles and responsibilities and that is the context in which new teacher educators in this study are working and learning.

#### Purpose

The project aims to understand the structures and processes which contribute effectively to the professional learning of new teacher educators as they make the transition from school teacher to become Higher Education (HE) based teacher educators, that is 'lecturers' in Initial Teacher Education. The focus is on the basic academic unit (Dill, 1999), which includes subject and programme teams but is extended here to also include non-formal networks. The workplace learning of new teacher educators is viewed as social practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Eraut, 2000) operating within formal and non-formal structures and processes, referred to as 'learning architecture' by Dill (1999). The aim is to inform practice locally but also to contribute to the theoretical understanding of induction for new teacher educators (Trowler & Knight, 2000).

The key questions include:

1. What are the perspectives of new teacher educators regarding their professional learning as they become HE based teacher educators?
2. How do structures and processes within the education faculty, including formal and non formal teams or communities of practice, support the professional learning of new teacher educators?

3. To what extent do their main communities of practice provide new teacher educators with induction and support for development of a pedagogy for teaching adults in HE and for development of scholarly and research activity?

#### Theoretical frameworks

The concept of community of practice within situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) provides a framework for understanding professional workplace learning by new teacher educators within the case study education faculty. Fuller et al. (2005) provide a useful critique in the application of situated learning to complex educational settings and emphasise the importance of power relationships and the potential of formal experiences to contribute to workplace learning.

Important previous work on new teacher educator induction informed this project in highlighting the twin challenges of becoming research active and developing a pedagogy for teaching adults (Murray & Male, 2005). Previous work had identified the danger of new teacher educators becoming 'semi-academic' (Macguire, 2000; Ducharme, 1993; Hatton, 1997), in this scenario the teacher educator maintains the core of their identity as that of a school teacher.

Murray and Male (2005) develop a useful and relevant framework which views new teacher educators as moving from first order practitioners (school teacher) to second order (teacher educators). They apply a perspective of occupational change developed by Southworth (1995) which focuses on the tension between situational self, 'developed from interaction with others', and substantial self, based on 'a core of self defining beliefs relatively impervious to change' (p.2). These are seen as wide apart, especially in the first year of appointment of a teacher educator, and career

transition is considered to be complete when the situational and substantial selves are back in close alignment.

A central conceptual code emerging from the qualitative analysis focused on 'transfer of teaching' from school to Higher Education. The workplace of the new teacher educators appears to be primarily the 'university and academic' system which we define here as the professional world of the academic. However, the Education Faculty works in partnership with a large number of schools which provide work placements for student teachers. The new teacher educators visit schools to support the teachers in their work with students and to observe students teaching. In this way the workplace of the new teacher educators continues to include the 'schools and professional' system which we define as the professional world of school teaching. The teacher educators thus expressed within the interview data a view of their workplace as including two separate but inter-related activity systems. The two systems have some elements in common but they also have clear differences including language, rules and purposes.

Our analysis suggests that the struggles of new teacher educators during transition into their new role appears to be due to structural contradictions within the subject discipline and the teacher education partnership which exacerbate the barriers to alignment of situational and substantial selves. In discussing academic identity, Kogan (2000) looks beyond the university to consider connection of academics with the external environment and suggests that an 'exchange relationship' is a more useful metaphor than that of a 'community' (p.215). Wilson (2004) uses activity theory to analyse teacher education partnership as a single activity system but our analysis points towards the potential of Engestrom's work (2001) on networks of interacting activity systems. This perspective views the university – school Initial Teacher Education partnership as two separate but inter-related activity systems with tensions or contradictions within and between the two systems which generate efforts by individuals and groups to bring about change.

Our analysis leads us then to adopt a position in which the nature of the subject discipline of teacher education and of the teacher education partnership provide dominant contextual elements which frame and help to explain the challenges faced by new teacher educators. Activity theory enables us to express a perspective of teacher education partnership, and, to a lesser extent, of the subject discipline, as placing teacher educators and their students, in a boundary-crossing context. The contradictions and tensions within that context provide the key explanations for the experiences of new teacher educators. Activity theory considers the development and learning of individual teacher educators as relatively independent but they are viewed as 'subordinate units of

analysis' which may only be understood within the context of whole activity systems. It provides a useful theoretical approach to analysis of the case study education faculty as a 'collective, artifact-mediated and object-oriented activity system' (Engestrom, 2001:136).

### Methodology

The project adopts a practitioner research approach as the research team is investigating social practice within our own faculty and four of the research team are relatively new teacher educators themselves. It is informed by a practitioner research approach (Robson, 2002) and to some extent took the form of a self study of teacher education practice (Berry and Loughran, 2002). However, the level of collaboration possible beyond the core research team was limited by the workload and time constraints of colleagues.

A sample of 18 new teacher educators were interviewed, they had between one and four years experience in Higher Education. The sample included teacher educators from both Primary and Secondary age phases and covered a range of school curriculum subject specialisms. Their roles within school and prior experience in school teaching differed considerably, but they had all made a major shift from teaching in schools to working in Higher Education.

In England, Initial Teacher Education programmes operate in partnerships between Higher Education institutions and schools. Schools at the very least provide work placements for students, and school teachers take on the role of school-based teacher educator and act as mentor to the students. Teacher educators based in Higher Education institutions manage the links with schools for purposes of quality assurance and visit schools to support school-based tutors as they work with the students. Many of the new HE teacher educators in this study had gained some experience of being a school-based teacher educator acting as mentor to student teachers.

Semi-structured interviews were used with an emphasis on gaining spontaneous description from the interviewees of their journey into Higher Education. In addition, four heads of department were interviewed to gain their perspective on the induction of new teacher educators. Four follow-up interviews were also conducted in order to test the emerging findings of the analysis carried out by the research team. The qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts was informed by a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin 1998). The days spent by the research team on collaborative data analysis allowed us to explore our own identities and conceptions of being a teacher educator. We were influenced by the use of situated learning and activity theory frameworks as applied to new academics

by Trowler and Knight (2000).

The collaborative process enabled us to respond to the emerging analysis and to move into a more speculative mode which allowed us to express a view of teacher education partnership from an activity theory perspective (Engestrom, 2001). It is important to note that the element of this paper informed by Engestrom's work and presented in figure 1 was stimulated by the data analysis but goes beyond it. The diagram in figure 1 is a tentative and emergent attempt to express our shared perspective as practitioner educators of the teacher education partnership as a workplace.

### Findings

In order to provide a concise report for the purposes of this paper the reporting of our analysis of the interview transcripts will not include quotes. The responses reveal both surface level contextual issues surrounding the initial uncertainties of the procedures in Higher Education, and also the deeper level issues relating to the professional learning which is fundamental to this case study.

### Contextual issues

Findings in this category related predominantly to the problems and feelings of disorientation encountered by the new teacher educators on moving into a large institution and familiarising themselves with the complex administrative systems. The need to know how to deal with practical problems such as claiming travel expenses, ordering resources and confirming room bookings was compounded by frustration in not knowing who to ask and in some cases a reluctance to ask for help.

A gap was identified in the organisational learning of new teacher educators in terms of acquiring an understanding of the political processes and change mechanisms within a large institution and within the faculty, the departments and the teaching teams. A feeling of being a 'small fish' illustrates the perceived lack of influence felt by many of the new teacher educators. This was particularly disconcerting for those who had previously held leadership roles within schools. Some new teacher educators expressed a feeling of isolation and difficulty in developing a sense of belonging.

A key strand permeating new teacher educator perspectives related to time management issues. Personal management of time was cited as a problem, particularly when combined with a lack of understanding of the overall workload throughout the academic year. Finding time for reflection, to attend courses, or to engage fully with induction needs was seen as a problem because of workload.

### Pedagogy for Higher Education

A central conceptual theme arising from the qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts was termed 'transfer of teaching'. It related to the perception by new teacher educators that they were able to bring some of their teaching practices from school and apply them in the HE setting; this important theme included three dimensions.

Firstly new teacher educators felt that they had many of the practical skills required to plan and deliver taught sessions. However many did report a tendency to use didactic lecture based approaches in the early stages. This was partly related to their perceived expectations of Higher Education but also that it seemed 'safer' to lecture when dealing with very recently acquired propositional knowledge.

Secondly new teacher educators placed a high priority on maintaining their credibility as a school teacher; they saw this as critical to their relationships with student teachers and with partnership colleagues in schools. It was also related to their felt need to maintain the ability to move back into working in schools if they were not successful or happy in Higher Education. These findings highlight tensions between the 'school and professional' and the 'university and academic' activity systems.

The third dimension of teaching transfer concerned the layered nature of teacher education, teaching about how to teach, and raises the complex issue of 'modelling' within Initial Teacher Education (Loughran and Berry, 2005). This was interpreted in many different ways by new teacher educators and is a contested area worthy of further research, again it suggests tension between the 'school and professional' and 'university and academic' activity systems. Many new teacher educators described an 'academic bump' as they realised that not all of their student teachers were highly motivated and independent learners. They were surprised by the need to address motivation within their emerging pedagogy for teaching adults and the 'academic bump' often became a stimulus for moving away from a didactic approach.

New teacher educators felt they had a significant gap in their professional knowledge focused around assessment processes in Higher Education. This was a strong and significant finding which caused anxiety and took up considerable time for new teacher educators. Their induction needs in this area appeared to be only partly met by formal and non formal activities and support within their departments was particularly valued.

### Learning architecture

In considering the learning architecture of the faculty we consider the distinction between formal and non-formal structures and processes to be at best a fuzzy and

overlapping categorisation.

The new teacher educators tend to belong to multiple teams; this is especially true for those working on Primary age phase programmes. This transition from working intensively as part of a clearly defined team in school to working in the much larger organisation of Higher Education with less easily identifiable teams was perceived as leading to fragmented professional learning. The findings indicate that many new teacher educators relied heavily on 'significant individuals' for their induction, in only a minority of instances were these individuals also the officially appointed mentor. Geography plays its part in the significant networks reported by the new teacher educators. Local colleagues, on the same site, corridor or shared office were seen as significant even if they were in different teams. Above all, the initial findings indicate new teacher educators have very varied experiences in terms of their membership of significant communities of practice.

Formal departmental workshop sessions within subject disciplines were valued because they were seen as relevant and usually offered at a point of need. New teacher educators also cited non-formal meetings such as second marking and moderation meetings as valuable learning opportunities.

The formal institutional induction was not viewed as particularly useful, and there was a perceived need by the new teacher educators to develop a 'professional' induction with emphasis on their new role as an academic in Higher Education.

New teacher educators, particularly those working in the Primary phase, felt they only slowly and partially became aware of the overall student experience and they did not feel that personal tutoring of students in HE replaced their previous pastoral role in school. Teacher educators who had adopted a post of responsibility, such as a year group leader with pastoral responsibilities, claimed that this did lead to learning about institutional structures and processes and provided the 'big picture' of the student experience.

Some new teacher educators were studying on or had completed accredited courses including a PgC in learning and teaching in HE and a range of MA programmes. New teacher educators valued these as they were perceived as offering a holistic experience of learning, development of research skills and time for reflection.

### **An Activity Theory perspective**

Emerging from our collaborative work on the grounded analysis was a tentative but important finding that new

teacher educators were not making a 'clean break' from the 'schools and professional' activity system to the 'university and academic' activity system. Rather than viewing the teacher education partnership as a single activity system (for example Wilson, 2004) the nature of the partnership and of the subject discipline of teacher education suggests a view to us of the partnership as including two activity systems and the interaction between them (Engestrom, 2001; Fanghanel, 2004) as expressed in figure 1. Within the Initial Teacher Education partnership the 'schools and professional' activity system interacts with the 'university and academic' activity system. This interaction forms a complex and challenging boundary-crossing context in which new teacher educators must survive and develop.

Within activity systems theory, the 'subject' refers to the individual or subgroup whose agency is chosen as the point of view in the analysis' (Engestrom, 1993:67). Whilst the purpose of this investigation means that the New Teacher Educator should be positioned as the subject of the activity system, this does not, in our view, represent the context sufficiently. Therefore the activity system of the university education faculty has been set out with three identified subjects whilst the activity system of the partnership schools has four subjects.

Within activity systems theory, Engestrom defines the object as:

the 'raw material' or 'problem space' at which the activity is directed and which is moulded or transformed into outcomes with the help of physical and symbolic, external and internal tools (mediating instruments and signs). (1993:67)

The focus of this study is the professional learning and identity development of new university-based teacher educators, and this is therefore in the foreground of figure 1, but that is not the prime object of the school system or of the university. It is, however, an element within the contested and multi-voiced objects within both activity systems as together they form a partnership in teacher education. Therefore figure 1 includes multiple objects of the school activity system and the university activity system but with the professional development of teacher educators in the foreground. To some extent then figure 1 represents an activity theory perspective of the case study teacher partnership which was stimulated by the emerging data analysis, but it also includes a significant element of the prior professional experience, perceptions and values of members of the research team. The perspective was developed here as such rather than as an empirically based finding.

The perspective offered by figure 1 provides a framework for further explanation of the perceptions and experiences of new teacher educators by making the contradictions within the teacher education partnership

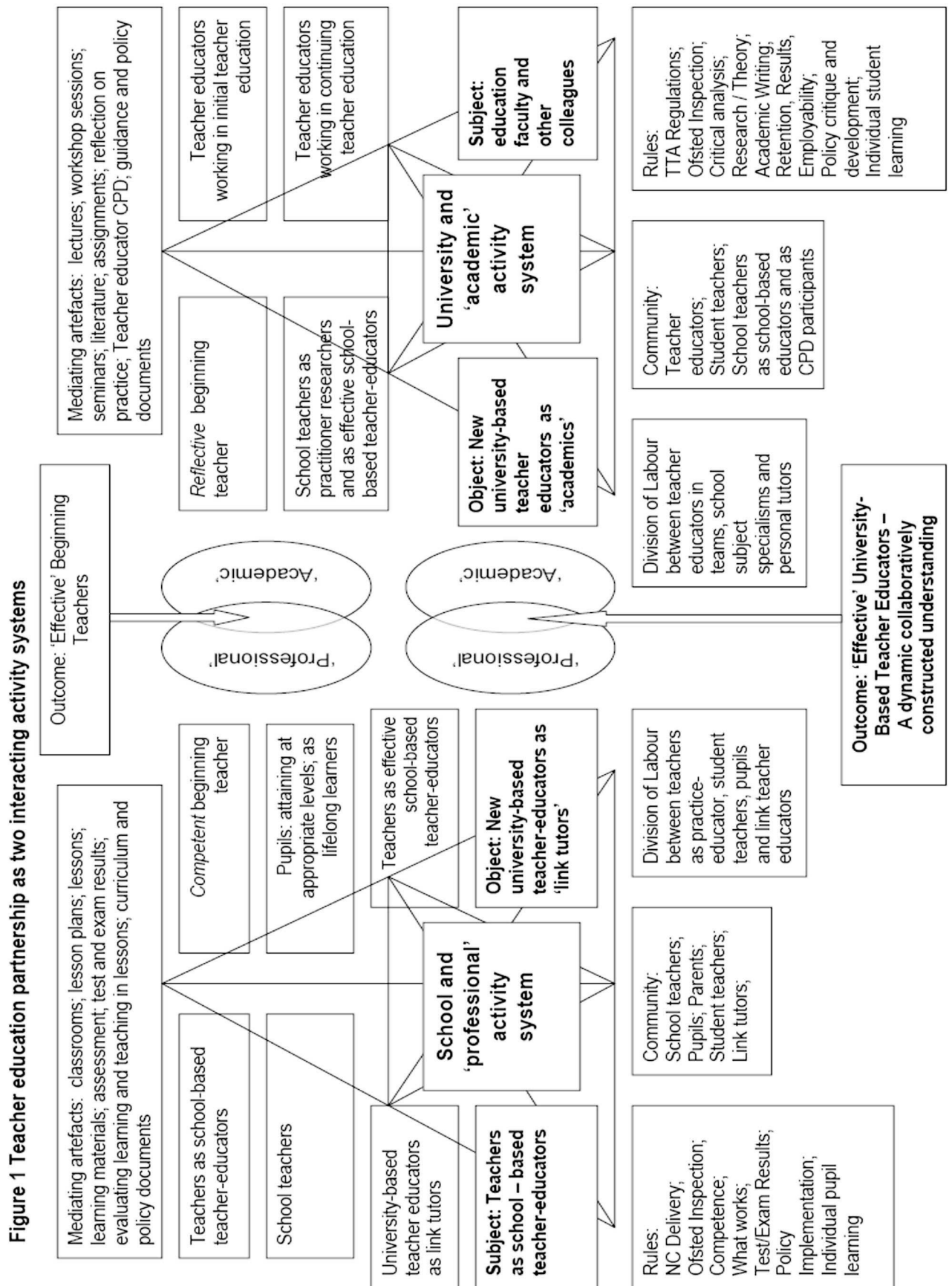


Figure 1. Teacher education partnership as two interacting activity systems

and the subject discipline of teacher education more explicit.

- The tension over what constitutes theory and creation of new knowledge within the partnership and subject discipline may be expressed by such questions as 'what is the contribution of the school activity system to theory and creation of new knowledge?' This provides further explanation for the search for teaching transfer by new teacher educators and for their desire to hold onto and emphasise credibility as a schoolteacher.
- The tension around pedagogy may be expressed by such questions as 'what are the similarities and differences between pedagogic approaches suitable for school pupils and for adult learners in Higher Education?' This provides a framework for understanding the transfer of teaching skills and strategies reported by new teacher educators and for their developing conceptions of learning and teaching in Higher Education.
- The tension around modelling of teaching may be expressed by such questions as 'what is the role of the school system in providing modelling of teaching and how should the university system be involved in such activity?' This provides an explanatory background to the confusion surrounding modelling as reported by new teacher educators.

Overall we propose that the exploratory application of activity theory as set out in figure 1 provides a tentative but potentially useful framework for further research and development work within teacher education.

### Implications

We propose that using and further developing an activity systems theoretical view of teacher education partnership would usefully support further research into teacher educator professional development and teacher education as a subject discipline. Practitioner change / research projects in local contexts in Education departments might be in the form of formative / developmental experiment approaches as proposed by Engstrom (1999). By making the tensions within teacher education partnerships explicit and by working through them in terms of developing structures and social practices, it should be possible to improve the experience of both new teacher educators and student teachers within them.

The findings suggest that there is a need to critically review the structures and processes within the education faculty or departments in order to ensure that all new teacher educators are able to join and contribute fully to formal and non formal academic communities of practice.

There is a need to deliberately design the work of new teacher educators with their professional induction and development in mind so they are able to participate in a meaningful way with at least one teaching team rather than having superficial membership of several.

There appears to be a need, as part of induction, to address the changed role of the new teacher educators based in Higher Education when they are working in partnership schools.

New teacher educators identified a grieving process for the pastoral element of their old role as a schoolteacher. There is a need to review the personal and academic tutor role which does not appear to replace this.

Realistic expectations of scholarly and research activity of new teacher educators need to be established by Education departments and their institutions. There is a need to critically review the contribution of formal accredited teacher education for new teacher educators because, in many Higher Education institutions, they are not required to complete such training. It would also be useful to consider how courses in teaching in HE might be better integrated into departmental or teaching team activity and how they might contribute explicitly to developing research skills and activity.

The subject discipline of teacher education needs to be critically considered, the teacher education community needs to debate and develop the significance of abstract theory and practice based theory. In addition the role of modelling within teacher education pedagogy needs to be debated and clarified.

This paper has presented an argument which gives some potential direction to those interested in improving the practice of professional learning within teacher education and possibly in other professional subject disciplines. We assert that the boundary-crossing context of teacher education requires specific attention within the induction of new teacher educators and also considerable further research and development within the teacher education community of practice. The layered nature of the subject discipline, involving teaching about teaching, means that improvements in new teacher educator induction and research on teacher education practices have particularly strong potential to impact on and enhance the experience of student teachers within Higher Education.

### Biographical notes

Lily Baker, Peter Boyd, Emma McVittie and Kim Harris all taught for a number of years in Primary or Secondary schools before moving to Higher Education to become teacher educators between one and seven years ago. Chris Kynch is a research fellow within the Education Faculty.

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