

Reconceptualising and Repositioning the Role of the University in Initial Teacher Education in an English University

Sue Cronin Education Faculty,
Liverpool Hope University
Email correspondence: cronins@hope.ac.uk

Abstract

Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in England is the site of great contestation and change. The pace of political reform is exponential and will force unparalleled and abrupt cultural and organisational changes by Universities and schools. The new coalition government's drive to shift the focus of control of teacher education into schools by reforming the current system has significant and not yet fully understood implications for HE (McNamara & Menter, 2011). Placing greater emphasis on the workplace and employment based routes will require Universities to reconsider and reposition themselves within the field. Justifying critically the unique and valuable learning space created for the beginning teacher by the University is an important step forward towards a new vision of professional learning. This paper sets forward one university's response to this and how it looks to develop hybrid spaces (Zeichner, 2010) to offer new ways of working with schools to support beginning teachers.

Introduction

Context and Background

It can be argued that many University ITE courses have become complacent and existed in a cosy, mutually convenient partnership relationship with schools. Furlong et al (2000) reported on a research project into Modes of Teacher Education (MOTE) in which they identified the most common models of partnership between university and schools (Furlong et al 2006 p33). The models Furlong et al (2000) defined were that of a *collaborative* partnership, a *cooperative* partnership and a *HEI-led* partnership. In all three the balance of managerial power and influence lay to varying degrees with the universities, reflecting where, up until the present day, the English government has located the funding. Although many espoused a collaborative model in which schools and university worked closely together to ensure learning experiences integrate theoretical and practical knowledge in a meaningful way for the student teachers, Furlong et al's (2000) research suggested this was not the reality. The HEI- model was the prevailing mode of partnership with the university taking control of the documentation, management and organisation of learning and the school providing the site of practical professional learning. This form of partnership has largely suited schools as it causes minimum disruption to the main focus on pupil progress (Goodlad, 1990). Fewer demands are placed on schools and mentors with this model. Well established roles and responsibilities are backed up by a wealth of HEI developed documentation to scaffold the learning experience in schools, detailing the expectations and gradation of learning experience. However, this led, as Edwards and Mutton (2007) noted, to a limited understanding of professional learning which is based on 'the kind of dyadic relationships which characterise apprenticeship' (p505).

The recent coalition government's new schools White Paper '*The Importance of Teaching*' (DFE, 2010) signals a move towards a new partnership model, that of *school – led* partnerships (Brooks, 2006). It reflects the current political desire to marginalise of the role of universities in initial teacher education, emphasising the importance of practical teaching skills developed in school settings, indicating "*too little teacher training takes place on the*

job” (DFE, 2010 para 2.4). The White Paper signals a desire by the present government to shift towards a partnership in which the balance of influence is moved into the schools’ arena. This begs the question what is and should be the role of the university in the future management and development of Initial Teacher Education (ITE)? With the disturbance of the existing status quo come real threats to the roles and remits of universities. Universities will be required to review and evaluate their responsibilities and contributions to Initial Teacher Education very carefully. It will undoubtedly prove to be a painful process. However, it will also prove to be cathartic; critical review and reassessment can and is resulting in some innovative emerging practices.

Hybrid Learning spaces and resulting pedagogies

The opportunity to revisit and revision partnership has been taken advantage of to the full in the author’s university. The senior managers were already questioning the existing practice and model of HEI led partnership (Hathaway & Rush, 2010). Linked to this inquiry was the belief that this model limited the identity formation of the student teacher (Fisher & Rush, 2008). Thus the conditions for a radical change in partnership were auspiciously disposed for review and have resulted in a new emerging vision of partnership, consisting of “the methodologies and activities; and the shared beliefs and values of the learners.” (Hathaway & Rush, 2011:1). The change in the model of partnership between the university and its schools is one essentially about a change in values and culture. The new vision is one of transformational professional learning. The vision reflects a growing recognition of the student teacher as a self-determining learner, self-motivated in respect of their initial, early, and subsequent continuing professional development (Hathaway & Rush, 2011). This view affords an opportunity to develop more meaningful ways of being with the pupils in the schools.

Zeichner (2010) defines a hybrid space as a space where “academic and practitioner knowledge and knowledge that exists in communities come together in new less hierarchical ways” (p89). In keeping with this new vision of partnership, the author has been exploring new ways of working more closely with a school using a cohort of PGCE mathematics student teachers as co enquirers. The project is called a Saturated Learning Project (*SLP*), and involves crossing boundaries between the ‘academic’ learning situated in the university and the ‘professional’ learning situated in the school setting. The project creates a new hybrid space in which academic and professional practice are brought closer together by moving one of the weekly university sessions into the partner school and involving the mathematics department more closely in the content and purpose of the sessions. The design of the *SLP* facilitates the formation of small communities of enquiry as the school teachers, student teachers and university tutor work collectively with the pupils. The experience provides the opportunity to develop practices which are not the same as those practiced in the students’ individual placement schools and affords knowledge of a different practical and pedagogical nature to reflect on and against. Wilson (2005) notes that one of the dangers of the university – school model, is that as student teachers spend 2/3 of their time in school where there is often limited opportunity to discuss with anyone the emerging practice on a practical level. She argues that this “may severely limit the novice teachers’ capacity to be critically reflective of their own practice” (p375). The *SLP* creates a reflective space which allowed time to consider some of these important practical issues with peers teachers and tutor.

In England educators face a time of uncertainty with a new political agenda which significantly increases the role of schools yet to be fully articulated. It is in this liminal space that universities must establish a new epistemology and take the initiative to establish new ways of working with schools. The *SLP* project sits within a bigger picture of professional

learning opportunities the university is striving to offer to its student teachers and schools. It offers one small element of what will be an expansive portfolio of learning offered to schools and student teachers in a new vision of partnership learning.

Bibliography

- Department for Education (2010) 'White Paper: The Importance of Teaching.', vol. London: HMSO.
- Edwards, A. and Mutton, T. (2007) 'Looking forward : rethinking professional learning through partnership arrangements in Initial Teacher Education', *Oxford Review of Education*, vol. 33, no. 4, pp. 503-519.
- Fisher, A. and Rush, L. (2008) 'Conceptions of learning and pedagogy: developing trainee teachers' epistemological understandings. ', *The Curriculum Journal*, vol. 19, no. 8, pp. 221-238.
- Furlong, J., Campbell, A., Howson, J., Lewis, S. and McNamara, O. (2006) 'Partnership in English Initial Teacher Education: Changing Times, Changing Definitions- Evidence from the Teacher Training Agency National Partnership Project', *Scottish Educational Review*, vol. 37, 32.
- Glazer, E. and Hannafin, M. (2006) *The collaborative apprenticeship model: Situated professional development within school settings.*, Teaching and Teacher Education.
- Hathaway, T. and Rush, L. (2011) 'Exploring the pedagogy associated with Transformational Learning in the Initial Teacher Education Context', International Conference in Education, Samos.
- McNamara, O. and Menter, I. (2011) 'Interesting Times' in UK Teacher Education', *Research Intelligence*, no. 116, pp. 9-10.
- Schulman, L. (2005) 'Signature pedagogies in the professions', *Daedalus*, vol. 134, summer, pp. 52-59.
- Wilson, E. (2005) 'Pedagogical strategies in Initial education', *Teachers and Teaching : Theory and practice.*, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 359-378.
- Zeichner, K. (2010) 'Rethinking the connections between Campus Courses and Field Experiences in College- and University based Teacher Education. ', *Journal of Teacher Education*, vol. 61, pp. 61-89.